

INTRODUCTION:

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When we proposed a Call for Papers relating to morality and moral norms we had a vague idea as to what kind of papers people might submit to the symposium. However, both the scope of themes and the interest displayed in the topic by authors living in various countries across the world have greatly exceeded our expectations. Therefore we are happy to introduce a relatively rich depiction of morally relevant issues that interest people around the globe and that constitute a shared painting albeit created by diverse strokes.

What seems to be one of the common core issues, although this is not always explicitly stated, is the potential for different ethical systems to mutually coexist. In particular, all the papers, at least implicitly and to some extent, include the relation between the ethic of autonomy, including individual rights, duties and responsibilities, and the ethic of community, where obedience, respect and not challenging authority are all considered virtuous. More apparent basic strands however are those that deal with the topics of religion vs. evolution, deontology vs. consequentialism, positive vs. negative sides of norms, the negative effects of enforcing conformity, racism as a paradigmatic case for immorality, and political vs. personal issues of morality. Readers may acquire a broader overview of the state of the art from different theoretical, political, experimental, and artistic perspectives put together in compact form in this symposium.

The paper “Lest we Forget: Free-thought and the Environment” by Kile Jones analyzes the discussion between theological and free-thought approaches towards morality. It challenges supernatural assumptions and explanations postulating that God and religion are inevitable conditions for morality. Instead, arguments for the validity of non-theological accounts are presented. The attempt to provide naturalistic explanations of morality as well as the inclination towards individual rights, as opposed to (religion) power structures that decrease human responsibilities are defended. A constructive dialogue between theologians and free-thought thinkers is recommended.

Partly as a consequence of linking morality to religion, or at least because of the influence of religion on moral beliefs, making compromises in moral values and moral behaviour has been understood as unacceptable for a long period of time. The article “J. S. Mill and The Art of Compromise” by Rafael Cejudo defends the consequentialist moral approach in political issues. The author stresses that despite the negative connotative

meaning of “compromising and bargaining” in conflict resolution in the moral (as opposed to non-moral) domain, compromises in political domains that concern values seems to be inevitable. He advocates that the meaning of compromise should be “a concession to something harmful or wrong”. Mill’s notion of the negative version of utility in terms of reaching easier agreement on reducing the worst features of the existing political system that lead to suffering (contrary to reaching the best possible outcomes) is underlined. As an example Mill’s suggestions on franchise for women and public political meetings are discussed.

The paper “Moral Judgments, Moral Virtues and Moral Norms” by Miroslav Popper deals with moral judgments and the role of emotions and reasons as well as the conscious and unconscious processes involved in generating them and relations of the judgments to virtues and norms. In contrast to the previous article there is an emphasis on the importance of deontological approaches to morality based on emotionally driven moral judgments. However, this is not a contradiction, since, as is argued here, emotions play the most important role in signaling what is forbidden or required in situations where we can directly influence and prevent serious harm to other people or ourselves, especially when some kind of action must be performed or avoided immediately.

The next article “Social Deviations, Labelling and Normativity” by Jitka Skopalová points to the dangers that may occur when conformity is judged as normal, while any kind of atypical behaviour, including those that do not harm anybody, is considered deviant or immoral. It warns against the negative consequences of the public labelling of pupils in school settings by teachers. Particularly, it explains how negative attitudes towards unconventional or nonconformist behaviour can lead to stigmatization, marginalization and discrimination of pupils and as a reaction cause their secondary deviation.

The paper “Calling Citizens to a Moral Way of Life: A Dutch Example of a Policy Revision of Morality” by Marinus Ossewaarde examines the role of conformity from wider political perspectives. It explores the dynamic of norm revision and ways in which it was realised through three main policy innovations leading to a maximizing of responsibility in the Netherlands in recent years. In a similar vein to the preceding article, it stresses how something unusual, unconventional or exceptional can be discredited and how easily marginalised groups can be labelled as immoral by others.

The next article “Social Conformity and Response Bias Revisited: The Influence of “Others on Japanese Respondents by Chisuzu Kondo et al. scrutinizes the role of conformity in experimental settings. It studies solutions to moral dilemmas in four different experimental conditions. The impact of the majority on individual decision making is shown and explained mainly as a consequence of emotions such as shame and sin, characteristic of the Japanese population, displayed when an individual behaves differently from others.

The article “Racism and its Presuppositions: Towards a Pragmatist Moral Philosophy of Social Change” by Bola Lanre-Abass deals with racism as an exemplary case of immorality leading to individual, as well as societal harm. The moral wrongness of racism is justified mainly by its implicit reference to breaking the ethic of autonomy, through depriving individuals associated with particular races of the basic human rights. Racist attitudes do not respect the fact that these rights are universally valid for every woman and man in the world. On the other hand, emphasis is given to Dewey’s moral pragmatism argument concerning

the impossibility of solving conflict between different (racial) groups unless both insist on their own moral absolute. His advice to overcome the absolutes by searching for common solutions and by engaging in common moral deliberation is both accepted and advocated.

The last article contributed to the symposium, “Personal versus Political Affairs in Churchill’s *This is a Chair*” by Lori Worpel analyzes the drama and shows and discusses how social and individual or political and personal issues are intimately related. Using the less traditional means of fictional stories and characters it searches for an answer to the question of whether jeopardizing moral norms might affect the greater social order.

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