

Realism, Objectivity, and Evaluation

- *Set-Theoretic Objectivism*: “[The objectivist view] takes as [conceptually] basic some one conception of set, and constructs out of sets so conceived all other mathematical objects...[including], if we want, sets corresponding to other conceptions” [Field 1998, 333].

Benacerraf’s Challenge

- *Field*: “The way to understand Benacerraf’s challenge...is not as the challenge to... *justify* our mathematical beliefs [or to *explain their justification*]...but as a challenge to...*explain the reliability* of [our mathematical] beliefs. We start out by assuming the existence of mathematical entities that obey the standard mathematical theories; we grant also that there may be positive reasons for believing in those entities...But Benacerraf’s challenge...is to...explain how our beliefs about these remote entities can so well reflect the facts about them...[I]f it appears in principle impossible to explain this, then that tends to *undermine* the belief in mathematical entities [that obey standard theories], *despite* whatever reason we might have for believing in them.” [1989: 26, original italics]

The Pluralist Solution

- *Set-Theoretic Pluralism*: “[W]henver you have a consistent [set theory], then there are... objects that satisfy that theory *under a perfectly standard satisfaction relation*...[A]ll the consistent concepts of set and membership are instantiated side by side” [Field 1998, 333].
- *Field*: “[Pluralist views] allow for...knowledge in mathematics, and unlike more standard platonist views, they seem to give an intelligible explanation of it.” [2005, 78]

Clarifying the Challenge

- *Question*: In what sense of “explain the reliability” are all of (a) – (c) true?
 - (a) It appears impossible to explain the reliability of our set-theoretic beliefs, assuming objectivism.
 - (b) It does not appear impossible to explain the reliability of our set-theoretic beliefs, assuming pluralism.
 - (c) If it appears impossible to explain the reliability of our set-theoretic beliefs, then this *undermines* those beliefs (realistically construed).
- *Answer 1 (Connection)*: In order to explain the reliability of our beliefs of a kind, F, it is necessary to show, for any one of them, that P, that there is a *connection* between our (token) belief and the fact that P.

- *Note*: One gets different versions of this proposal by specifying different connections. The relevant kind could be *causal* (Benacerraf [1973], Goldman [1967]), *explanatory* (Faraci [2019]), or *logical* (Joyce [2006]).
- *Problem 1*: It is arguable that underminers (as opposed to rebutters) must be modal (Baras & Clarke-Doane [Forthcoming]). However, if they must be, then (c) is false.
- *Problem 2*: Even if (c) is true, (b) is false if (a) is true.
- *Answer 2 (Sensitivity)*: In order to explain the reliability of our beliefs of a kind, F, it is necessary to show, for any one of them, that P, that had it been the case that $\sim P$, we would not still have believed that P (using the method that we used to determine whether P).
- *Problem 1*: Even if counterpossibles are non-vacuous, (c) is false if general skepticism is.
- *Problem 2*: Even if (c) is true, (b) is false if (a) is true.
- *Best Answer (Safety)*: In order to explain the reliability of our beliefs of a kind, F, it is necessary to show, for any one of them, that P, that we could not have easily had a false belief as to whether P (using the method that we used to determine whether P).
 - *Pudlák*: “Imagine that the Axiom of Determinacy [which is inconsistent with the Axiom of Choice] had been introduced first, and before the Axiom of Choice was stated the nice consequences of determinacy, such as the measurability of all sets, had been proved. Imagine that then someone would come up with the Axiom of Choice and the paradoxical consequences were proved. Wouldn't the situation now be reversed in...that the Axiom of Determinacy would be ‘the true axiom’, while the Axiom of Choice would be just a bizarre alternative? [2013, 221].

Generalizing the Solution

- Although the canonical formulation of the Benacerraf’s Challenge targets mathematical realism, the problem plagues realism about paradigmatically ‘armchair’ areas generally.
 - *Stalnaker*: “It is a familiar objection to...modal realism that if it were true, then it would not be possible to know any of the facts about what is...possible....This epistemological objection...may...parallel...Benacerraf’s dilemma about mathematical...knowledge” [1996, 39–40].
 - *Schechter*: “We are reliable about logic....This is a striking fact about us, one that stands in need of explanation. But it is not at all clear how to explain it....This puzzle is akin to the well-known Benacerraf-Field problem...” [2013, 1].
 - ...

- *Generic F-pluralism*: There are a plurality of F-like concepts, all satisfied, independent of human minds and languages. If F-like reality is sufficiently rich, and the metasemantics of F-like discourse is sufficiently cooperative, then F-pluralism may “solve the [Benacerraf] problem by articulating views on which though [F-facts] are mind-independent, any view we had had of them would have been correct...” [Field 2005, 78].
 - *Beall*: “[Pluralism]...solve[s] the problem by expanding [F-like reality] to such a degree that one's cognitive faculties can't miss it (as it were)” [1999, 323].
 - *Examples*: Modal, (meta)logical, essence, and grounding pluralism.

Normative Pluralism

- *Question*: What about *moral*, and more generally, normative pluralism?
 - *Huemer*: “The challenge for the moral realist...is to explain how it would be anything more than chance if my moral beliefs were true, given that I do not interact with moral properties....Paul Benacerraf originally raised [this problem] as a problem about mathematics” [2005, 99].
- There *are* moral pluralists, however unconscious.
 - *Example (Moral Functionalism)*: “The term ‘fair’ [for example] picks out a descriptive property...by virtue of the place that that property occupies in folk moral theory, and in a manner that requires other moral terms simultaneously to pick out complementary descriptive properties” [Jackson & Pettit 1995, 25].¹
- *Problem*: Moral pluralism predicts that we fail to disagree when we really do.
 - *Moral Twin Earth*: Suppose “that...human uses of ‘good’...are regulated by certain functional properties; and that, as a matter of empirical fact, these are consequentialist...whose functional essence is captured by some specific consequentialist normative theory; call this theory Tc....Now consider Moral Twin Earth [where] Moral Twin Earthlings have a vocabulary that works much like human moral vocabulary....The properties tracked by twin English moral terms are...non-consequentialist moral properties, whose functional essence is captured by some specific deontological theory, call this...Td....[The problem is that m]oral and twin-moral terms do not [seem to] differ in meaning or reference,

¹ Similarly, Boyd writes of Cornell Realism, that, while it is *pluralist* in the present sense, it “is only in a relatively uninteresting sense non-realistic. The dependence of the truth of moral propositions upon moral beliefs envisioned [in a scenario where different properties causally regulate “good” in different communities] would be...an ordinary case of causal dependence and not the sort of logical dependence required by a constructivist conception of morals analogous to a Kuhnian neo-Kantian conception of the dependence of scientific truth on the adoption of theories or paradigms. The subject matter of moral inquiry in each of the relevant communities would be theory-and-belief-independent in the sense relevant to the dispute between realists and social constructionists” [1988, 225f].

and hence...any apparent moral disagreements that might arise between Earthlings and Twin Earthlings [are] genuine...-- i.e., disagreements in moral belief and in normative moral theory, rather than disagreements in meaning” [1992, 460].

- *Note*: Although Horgan and Timmons target *naturalist* positions, a similar problem plagues any formulation of moral pluralism, whether naturalist or non-naturalist.
 - *Enoch*: “[Imagine] another discourse...what may be called the counter-normative discourse....Those engaged in that discourse treat counter-reasons much as we treat reasons....But their judgments about counter-reasons would sound very weird to us.... [C]ounter-reasons, Scanlon seems committed to concluding, are as ontologically respectable as reasons are. Of course, they are not as *normatively* respectable as reasons are. And so those acting on them are to be criticized for not acting on the reasons that apply to them. But then again, reasons aren’t as *counter-normatively* respectable as counter-reasons are, and we may be counter-criticizable for failing to act on the counter-reasons that apply to us” [2011, 121].
- *Upshot*: Moral realists cannot solve the Benacerraf Problem in the way that realists about descriptive armchair areas can solve it. They cannot solve it by being moral pluralists.

Moore’s Open Question Revisited

- *Deeper Problem*: Whatever the right semantics of ‘good’, the question arises whether to regulate our behavior by consulting the semantic values that we actually consult with moral terms. However, *this question cannot be that of whether we ought to on pain of triviality*. So, the question of what to do is not settled by the facts, even the moral facts.
- *Argument from Weakening*: Suppose that, e.g., we ought to kill the one to save the five. Let us *stipulatively introduce* an ought-like concept, “ought_{Twin}”, according to which we ought_{Twin} not kill the one to save the five. If knowledge that we ought to kill the one to save the five *settles* the practical question of whether to on its own, then it does so in tandem with knowledge that we ought_{Twin} not. But it does not (since now the question arises whether to do what we ought or ought_{Twin} to do). Consequently, knowledge that we ought to kill the one to save the five does not settle the practical question on its own.
 - *Idea*: There is a gap between what what to do and what we ought to do, just as Moore argued that there is between what is F, for descriptive, F, and what is good.
- *Response 1*: The argument just shows that *motivation externalism* is true.
- *Rejoinder*: The conclusion is that our *deliberation as to whether* to kill the one to save the five is not settled by knowledge that we ought to, whatever action we may go on to take.
- *Response 2 (Das [2019])*: The argument just shows that morality is not *overriding*.

- *Rejoinder*: If the argument works, it works for *any normative concept*, whether moral, epistemological, prudential, aesthetic, or “all-things-considered”.
- *Response 3 (Enoch and McPherson [2017])*: The argument just shows that we need to settle a question of metaphysics in order to settle our deliberation -- namely, which of ought or ought_{Twin} is *metaphysically privileged* in roughly the sense of Sider [2011].
- *Rejoinder*: Either the question of whether ought is metaphysically privileged is itself normative, or it is not. If it is not, then Moore’s original Open Question Argument applies.² If it is, then the present argument can be re-run. Even if ought is not privileged, it is privileged_{Twin}, for an alternative privileged-like concept, and the *practical* question remains whether to theorize with privileged or privileged_{Twin} concepts (Dasgupta [2018]).
- *Response 4*: The argument just shows that the question of what to do is not settled by *mind-independent* facts (Street [2006]). Such facts would “waft by” (Korsgaard [1996]).
- *Rejoinder*: If the argument works, it works equally to show that knowledge of the normative facts *constructivistically construed* fails to settle practical deliberation.
 - *Example*: Just as we can wonder whether to do what we ought as opposed to ought_{Twin}, we can wonder whether to be an agent or a shmagent (Enoch [2006])!
- *Upshot (Blackburn)*: “[I]f we supposed that belief, denial, and so on were simply discussions of a way the world is, we would still face the open question. Even if that belief were settled, there would still be issues of what importance to give it, what to do, and all the rest....For any fact, there is a question of what to do about it” [1998, 70].

Realism and Objectivity

- I have argued for the following:
 - There is *epistemological* pressure for armchair realists to be pluralists.
 - There is *deliberative* pressure for practical objectivists to be non-cognitivists
- *Upshot*: Since pluralism is anti-objectivist, and non-cognitivism is anti-realist, the concepts of realism and objectivity, which are widely identified, are in tension.

² See Eklund [2017, 30] for a related point.

Bibliography

- Baras, Dan and Justin Clarke-Doane [Forthcoming] "Modal Security". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Beall, JC. [1999] "From Full-Blooded Platonism to Really Full-Blooded Platonism." *Philosophia Mathematica*. Vol. 7. 322—327.
- and Greg Restall. [2006] *Logical Pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Benacerraf, Paul. [1973] "Mathematical Truth." *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 70. 661-679.
- Blackburn, Simon. [1998] *Ruling Passions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Boyd, Richard. [1988] "How to Be a Moral Realist." in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (ed.), *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 181-228.
- Clarke-Doane, Justin. [2015] "Objectivity in Ethics and Mathematics. Ben Colburn (ed.), *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, The Virtual Issue, No. 3 (Methods in Ethics)*.
- [Forthcoming] *Morality and Mathematics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Das, Ramon. [2019] "Moral Pluralism and Companions in Guilt." Christopher Cowie and Richard Rowland (eds.), *Companions in Guilt Arguments in Metaethics*. Routledge.
- Dasgupta, Shamik. [2018] "Realism and the Absence of Value." *Philosophical Review*. Vol. 127. 279-322.
- Eklund, Matti. [2017] *Choosing Normative Concepts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Enoch, David. [2006] "Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What Is Constitutive of Action." *Philosophical Review*. Vol. 115. 169-198.
- [2011] *Taking Morality Seriously*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Faraci, David. [2019] "Groundwork for an Explanationist Account of Epistemic Coincidence." *Philosophers' Imprint*. Vol. 19. 1-26.
- Field, Hartry. [1989] *Realism, Mathematics, and Modality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [1998] "Which Mathematical Undecidables Have Determinate Truth-Values?" reprinted in *Truth and the Absence of Fact*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [2005] "Recent Debates about the A Priori." in Gendler, Tamar and John Hawthorne (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 69 – 88.
- Goldman, Alvin. [1967] "A Causal Theory of Knowing." *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 64. 257-372.
- Hamkins, Joel David. [2011] "The Set-Theoretic Multiverse". arXiv. Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1108.4223>
- Horgans, Terence and Mark Timmons. [1992] "Troubles on Moral Twin Earth: Moral Queerness Revived." *Synthese*. Vol. 92. 221-260.
- Huemer, Michael. [2005] *Ethical Intuitionism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jackson, Frank and Philip Pettit. [1995] "Moral Functionalism and Moral Motivation." *Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 45. 20-40.
- Joyce, Richard. [2006] *The Evolution of Morality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- McPherson, Tristram.. [2017] "What do you mean 'This isn't the Question?'" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 47. 820-840.
- Korsgaard, Christine. [1996] *The Sources of Normativity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pudlák, Pavel. [2013] *Logical Foundations of Mathematics and Computational Complexity Theory: A Gentle Introduction*. New York: Springer
- Scanlon, Thomas. [2014] *Being Realistic about Reasons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schechter, Joshua. [2013] "Could Evolution Explain our Reliability about Logic?" in Hawthorne, John and Tamar Szabò (eds.). *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, Vol. 4. 214–239. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sider, Ted. [2011] *Writing the Book of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Holly. [2018] *Making Morality Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stalnaker, Robert. [1996] "On What Possible Worlds Could Not Be." in *Ways a World Might Be: Metaphysical and Anti-Metaphysical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 40–54.
- Street, Sharon. [2006] "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 127. 109-166.