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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, *despite* whatever reason we might have for believing in them." [1989: 26, italics in original]

The Pluralist Solution

- *Set-Theoretic Pluralism*: "[W]henever 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) plausible?

    (a) It appears impossible to explain the reliability of our set-theoretic beliefs, assuming objectivism (anti-pluralism).

    (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 the connection. It could be *causal* (Benacerraf [1973]), *explanatory* (Faraci [2019]), or *logical* (Joyce [2006]).

- *Problem 1:* It is arguable that underminers (as opposed to rebutters) must be modal (Baras & Clarke-Doane [Manuscript]). 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 ~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) were 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).

    - *Hamkins*: "Imagine…that…the powerset size axiom [(PSA) that for any x and y, $(|x| < |y|) \rightarrow (2^x < 2^y)$] had been considered at the very beginning of set theory…and was subsequently added to the standard list of axioms. In this case, perhaps we would now look upon models of ~PSA as strange in some fundamental way, violating a basic intuitive principle of sets concerning the relative sizes of power sets; perhaps our reaction to these models would be like the current reaction some mathematicians (not all) have to models of ZF+¬AC or to models of Aczel's anti-foundation axiom AFA, namely, the view that the models may be interesting mathematically and useful for a purpose, but ultimately they violate a basic principle of sets" [2011, 19].

Generalizing the Solution

- Although the canonical formulation of the Benacerraf's Challenge targets mathematical realism, the problem plagues realism about all manner of areas of philosophical interest.

    - *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].

- *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…. [T]his problem is not specific to moral knowledge….Paul Benacerraf originally raised it as a problem about mathematics [2005, 99].

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- *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[s] 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].

  - *Examples*: Modal pluralism (Clarke-Doane [2017]), (meta)logical pluralism (Beall & Restall [2006], Shapiro [2014]), essence pluralism (Dasgupta [2018]), and grounding pluralism (Clarke-Doane [Forthcoming B, Conclusion]).

  - *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). (If you're having trouble hitting the target, then just make your target bigger!...)" [1999, 323].

- *Question*: What about moral, and more generally, normative pluralism?

Normative Pluralism

- 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]

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[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

- But, unlike set-theoretic pluralism, moral pluralism is widely supposed to be problematic.

  - *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, 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, naturalist or non-naturalist.

    - *Scanlon*: "[A]s long as some way of talking [is] well defined, internally coherent, and *[does] not have any presuppositions or implications that might conflict with those of other domains*, such as science" such talk is true" [2014, 27, emphasis in original].

    - *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].

- *Problem*: Morality, or at least normative theory, is supposed to tell us *what to do*. However, whereas we can *believe* apparently conflicting theories ("of" different subjects), we can only *do* one thing. Knowledge that we ought$_1$ kill the one to save the five but ought$_2$ not leaves the key *practical* question as open as ever -- whether to.

Moore's Open Question Revisited

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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].

- It is widely assumed that Problem just shows that, unlike realists about "descriptive" subjects, like mathematics or modality, normative realists must be objectivists. But Problem can be used to argue against *practical cognitivism* (Clarke-Doane 2015).

  - *Observation*: If Problem *did* show this, then normative realism would turn out to be on worse epistemological footing than realism about non-normative subjects.

- *Argument from Weakening*: Suppose that, e.g., we ought to kill the one to save the five. Now let us stipulatively introduce to ought-like concept, ought*, according to which we ought* 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 *a fortiori* it does so in tandem with knowledge that we ought* not. But it does not. So, knowledge that we ought to kill the one to save the five does not settle the practical question on its own.

  - *Note*: The conclusion is not *motivation externalism*. It that our *deliberation as to whether* to kill the one is not settled by knowledge that we ought to kill the one.

  - *Note*: It does not matter whether ought* is actually satisfied (though, contra Enoch, it is hard to see how one could deny this, assuming that ought itself is satisfied). What matters is what follows *under the assumption* that it is satisfied.

- *Response 1 (Das [Forthcoming])*: 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 2 (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* is *metaphysically privileged* in something like the sense of Sider [2011].

- *Rejoinder*: Either the question of whether ought is metaphysically privileged is normative, or it is not. If it is not, then Moore's original Open Question Argument applies. If it is, then the present argument can be re-run. Even if ought is not privileged, it is privileged*, for some alternative privileged-like concept, and the *practical* question remains whether to theorize with privileged or privileged* concepts (Dasgupta [2019]).

- *Response 3*: The argument just shows that normative facts must depend on our interests (Street [2006, Sec. 7]). Otherwise those facts would "waft by" (Korsgaard [1996]).

- *Rejoinder*: If the argument works, it works equally to show that knowledge of the normative facts *constructivistically construed* fail to settle practical deliberation.

  - *Example*: Just as we can wonder whether to do what we ought as opposed to ought*, 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

- *Summary*: Mathematical, (meta)logical, modal, and moral realists face Benacerraf's challenge. Pluralism affords an answer to it, understood as the challenge to show that our beliefs are safe. This answer is peculiarly problematic in the moral, and more generally normative, case. The reason is that practical questions are not settled by the facts.

- Since there is epistemological pressure for "descriptive" realists to be pluralists, and since there is practical pressure for normative objectivists to be non-cognitivists, the concepts of realism and objectivity, which have been widely identified, are actually in tension.

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