

Bloomfield, Paul, ed. *Morality and Self-Interest*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

This volume comprises an Introduction by the editor and fourteen essays (including one by the editor) on the topic of the title. While the title's breadth could accommodate several different questions and concerns, the editor's introduction explicates the topical focus of the volume as a certain conceptual framework for understanding morality and theorizing about it. Distilling this to its essential elements, it is that "[t]here are two conceptions of 'morality' currently at play in the philosophical literature" (p. 3), and these are a social conception of morality, which "begins with the question of how one ought to behave toward others" (p. 3), and a "Socratic" conception in which "morality is defined within the terms of self-interest, given that it is assumed that living as well as possible is in an agent's self-interest" (p. 4). The editor points out that the "Socratic" conception is "formally" egoistic but need not be "substantially egoistic if one determines that one must treat others well in order to have a well-lived life" (p. 4). The Introduction concludes with the editor remarking that "[t]he editorial claim is that a justified determination of the relation between morality and self-interest ought to precede normative and (more familiar) metaethical theorizing" (p. 9).

That is an important claim, and it invites a certain sort of formulation of some key issues concerning moral theorizing. In some respects, it almost seems as though some of the essays make a somewhat different point. Contributions such as Julia Annas's "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism" and Joel Kupperman's "Classical and Sour Forms of Virtue," explore important issues of moral psychology in a way that shows those issues to be vitally important to a textured, illuminating conception of morality. The same could be said of T. H. Irwin's "Scotus on the Possibility of Moral Motivation" and Michael Stocker's "Shame and Guilt." These essays are included in sections with headings such as "Morality as Necessary to Self-Interest" and "Morality as Indistinguishable from Self-Interest." Those make good sense, given the aim and the central concern of the volume. But at the same time, some of the essays seem to suggest that perhaps the claim for the priority of the relation between morality and self-interest is somewhat exaggerated. It may be that a number of topics in moral psychology and philosophical anthropology illuminate the morality/self-interest relation in important ways, rather than the latter relation being fundamental.

To be sure, central problems of moral theorizing can analytically be diagnosed in a manner such that a definition of morality without reference to self-interest, on the one hand, is contrasted with a conception of morality to

which an agent's interests are central, on the other. A number of the essays address this concern directly. These include Samuel Scheffler's "Potential Congruence" and Stephen Finlay's "Too Much Morality," for instance. Scheffler critically discusses Joseph Raz's arguments that perhaps it is not the case that either "morality or self-interest is a sufficiently unified concept for there to be any interesting question about the relation between them, or for questions about the rational authority of either to make good sense" (p. 127). Scheffler's notion of potential congruence is intended to show that morally motivated individuals are not thereby hindered from leading "good and fulfilling lives" in terms of their own projects (p. 133). Finlay argues that, "in addressing the normative question, 'Ought we comply with morality or with self-interest?' we are left with the psychological question: 'Which do we care more about, anonymous others' interests or our own?'" (p. 154). He concludes that, "for virtually all of us, most of what we morally ought to do—like what we self-interestedly ought to do—is less important than the pursuit of certain of our *selfish* concerns" (p. 154). Richard Joyce's "Morality, Schmorality" engages with the editor's contribution ("Why It's Bad to Be Bad") in which Bloomfield argues that being immoral is harmful to the immoral agent: "it keeps one from seeing the value of human life, and if one is human, then one is kept from seeing the value of one's own life" (p. 271). Bloomfield's discussion is shaped by Thrasymachus's challenge to the claim that it is bad (for oneself) to be bad. Joyce argues that "moral badness and imprudence are nonidentical" (p. 63). His argument is embedded in a fictionalist interpretation of morality—one that denies "the truth of any moral proposition if pressed in an appropriately serious manner . . . thus deflating a host of well-thumbed philosophical problems concerning the ontology of moral facts and our access to them" (p. 68). In the view Joyce defends, "moral judgments are useful because they influence motivation" (p. 75). Moral discourse can be a "bulwark against various kinds of practical infirmity—for example, weakness of will, discounting future gains, and so on" (p. 73).

The range of the volume and variety of approaches is notable. There is Thomas Nagel's "The Value of Inviolability," which is concerned with the basis for a conception of rights, registering a notion of inviolability, which is "a version of Kant's idea that persons should not be treated merely as means" (p. 105). Mathias Risse's "Nietzsche on Selfishness, Justice, and the Duties of the Higher Men" is a study of the development of some of Nietzsche's thought concerning duties, placing it in relation to some other modern thinkers (e.g., Rousseau and Kant) and exploring its role in his conception of higher men. Michael Stocker's "Shame and Guilt" connects those topics with self-interest and morality through psychoanalytic handling of relevant considerations. The main upshot of Stocker's discussion is to have shown "the inadequacy of various attempted characterizations of shame and guilt and

Reason Papers Vol. 31

especially the differences between them” (p. 301). Stocker presents a textured, critical discussion of several proposals concerning the differences between them, pointing out their defects.

There are some very strong essays in this volume and the strengths are of different sorts. Some of the essays make valuable points concerning the history of moral thought; others make illuminating conceptual distinctions; others are penetrating explorations of issues in moral psychology. David Schmidtz’s “Because It’s Right” has particular strengths of the second kind, exhibited in the course of examining H. A. Prichard’s claim that we keep promises simply because it is right, without reference to why keeping promises is right, which is a place where good reasons have a role. Schmidtz argues that there is a “recognition rule” (which is a notion borrowed from H. L. A. Hart) for right actions, picking them out as “actions for which there are good reasons” (p. 101). In Schmidtz’s view, “there is no mistake in asking whether being moral is prudent” (p. 83) and “we can intelligibly ask whether following categorical imperatives is to our advantage” (p. 101). Such a question has an answer. Christopher Morris’s “The Trouble With Justice” combines analytical argumentation with a good deal of historical reference, and argues that “the norms of justice are *authoritative*; that is, they are *preemptive* reasons (to act or to refrain from acting, to adopt certain attitudes, to assign responsibility, etc.) to all (to whom they apply) on all occasions (when they apply)” (p. 27). His account relies extensively on basically Humean resources. His view takes seriously the question of why we need justice and have reason to be just.

W. D. Falk’s “Morality, Self, and Others” presents a textured diagnosis of the concept of morality and its relation to other types of obligation, and of the role of mores. He argues that “[t]he hard fact is that the rational and autonomous mode of life overlaps, but no longer necessarily coincides, with the moral mode of life as conceived from the point of view of the social interest” (p. 250). “The *moral* and the *definitive* commitments on the mature level need not then coincide” (p. 250). In leading to his conclusion, he argues that “there is one commitment whose ground is intimately personal and which comes before any other personal or social commitment whatsoever: the commitment to the principled mode of life as such” (p. 241). Much of Falk’s discussion is an exploration of the form of the “preservation of oneself as a capable ego” (p. 240) and the relation of this to social obligations. He concludes that the “multiple associations” of the concept of morality, which have developed through its “conceptual evolution” are “a bar to summing it up in any one way” (p. 25).

In “Butler on Virtue, Self-Interest, and Human Nature,” Ralph Wedgwood argues that “there are pressures arising from morality itself to accept something like Butler’s claims about the general harmony between virtue and happiness” (p. 203). However, he adds that “Butler’s arguments for

Reason Papers Vol. 31

the harmony of virtue and self-interest seem to me pure wishful thinking” (p. 203). Wedgwood explores numerous aspects of Butler’s normative claims and moral psychology and concludes that we must “face the hard fact that a virtuous life is the right or proper life for us to lead—even though by living such a life we expose ourselves to various sources of pain and anxiety that the vice of callousness would spare us from” (p. 204).

In some respects, the range of topics and approaches is broader than the focus indicated by the editor. The moral-psychological claims and arguments of some of the essays suggest that the framing formulation (involving the “social” conception of morality and the “Socratic” conception) may be inadequately responsive to the texture of the issues discussed. The contrast may be drawn somewhat too sharply and several of the arguments in various essays suggest that the way that the modern distinction is drawn may say more about some modern philosophers’ formulations than about fundamental, enduring questions concerning values and practical rationality. One could also imagine the volume being organized differently, perhaps with a section on the history of moral philosophy, a section on practical reason, a section on egoism, and a section on metaethics—or some other organization of the essays. This is not to suggest any deficiency in its organization. It is just a point about the multiplicity of important issues addressed by the contributions to the volume. If the two conceptions of morality are meant to supply one crucial dimension of moral theorizing, the rationale for the volume and its organization makes very good sense. If the elements of the contrastive pairs of conceptions are meant to define the core concern of moral theorizing, that seems to me an overstatement—a point one might infer from some of the essays.

The volume has points of contact with many issues in moral theory, moral psychology, and metaethics. In general, the essays are somewhat beyond the reach of most undergraduates except perhaps some in upper-level courses or those writing honors theses or research papers. The contributions presuppose a fluent grasp of several important debates in moral philosophy and a familiarity with the history of philosophy exceeding what could be expected of most undergraduates. Scholars and graduate students will find the volume a valuable resource. Its being a combination of historically informed studies as well as conceptual analysis makes for strength and interest despite the fact that I have raised some critical concerns about the formulation of its rationale. Even if the reader does not find that formulation compelling, the book could be of considerable interest, and it speaks to people working in a number of different areas of moral philosophy.

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