

Book Review

Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism, by David Enoch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. ix + 295. H/b £40.00.

One of the more delightful features of philosophy is that the field can take the most unexpected turns. Take meta-ethics as an example. Fifteen years ago, most philosophers considered moral non-naturalism beneath serious consideration. Today non-naturalism is perhaps the dominant position in the field. David Enoch's new book gives one a sense why. It presents a highly sophisticated case for non-naturalism, brimming with philosophical imagination. Three features distinguish it from other recent defences of the view.

First, Enoch steers clear of themes, arguments, and positions often associated with non-naturalism. Unlike other non-naturalists, Enoch shows no interest in reviving intuitionist epistemologies or unearthing the deep insight in the Open Question Argument. Rather, he advances a series of novel arguments for non-naturalism, which push the case for it in new directions. To be sure, these new arguments sometimes have Moorean moments—witness Enoch's case against both naturalism and the error theory in chapter five. But they are not simply attempts to pour old Moorean wine into new realist wineskins.

Second, in the course of arguing for non-naturalism, Enoch makes no attempt to soften the view's hard edges. Unlike some non-naturalists, for example, Enoch is not particularly concerned to explore the ways in which his view is continuous with naturalist views. Indeed, he seems to revel in the fact that his position is decidedly not naturalist. And unlike other non-naturalists, Enoch is not shy about his view's ontological commitments. There is no attempt to fashion non-naturalism as a view that at once affirms the existence of non-natural moral truths but denies that they have any ontological implications.

Third, Enoch is considerably more explicit about the philosophical methodology he employs than many other philosophers, non-naturalist and naturalist alike. The methodology Enoch favors is comparative. All the major meta-ethical positions, Enoch acknowledges, have their virtues and vices; non-naturalism is no exception. Indeed, Enoch is refreshingly frank about what non-naturalism's costs are. The task is to determine whether a position's cost is, on the whole, less than its competitors. The main aim of

Enoch's book is to argue that, despite what many have alleged, non-naturalism's costs are considerably lower than those of its main rivals.

Enoch's case for this last claim has both a positive and a negative phase. The positive phase is a two-part argument for robust meta-ethical realism. The first argument is for the existence of objective moral truths. The Objectivity Argument, as we might call it, turns on the truth of the following (albeit roughly stated) normative principle: in an interpersonal conflict that is due to conflicting preferences, parties to the conflict should step back from these preferences and settle for an impartial solution to the conflict (p. 19). It is a striking feature of many moral disagreements, however, that we ought not to conform to this principle. Suppose, for example, someone were seriously to deny your claim that torture is almost always wrong. In this situation, you should stand your ground. If you should, then we should also reject meta-ethical positions, such as various versions of subjectivism and expressivism, which maintain that fundamental normative principles are determined by our preferences, desires, or the like. For if these views were true, then moral disagreement would consist in a clash of preferences. These views imply, then, that we should conform to the normative principle stated above, which is false. This argument has the interesting implication that the division between normative and meta-ethics is permeable: normative truths may have significant meta-ethical implications, which are unfriendly to various sorts of moral anti-realism.

The second part of Enoch's positive argument is for the truth of meta-normative (as opposed to meta-*ethical*) realism. The argument Enoch offers for this conclusion, which I will call the Deliberative Argument, turns on a pair of claims: first, practical deliberation is for all intents and purposes unavoidable and, second, that when engaging in such deliberation, we must commit ourselves to there being irreducible (i.e. non-natural) normative truths about what we have most reason to do (these truths need not be moral). For example, suppose a person were to deliberate about whether it makes most sense for her to attend medical school. When she does, she assumes that often there are true answers to the questions she poses to herself about this matter. From her perspective, she is not merely engaged in picking one option as opposed to another; she is searching for correct answers about what it makes sense to do. In Enoch's terminology, committing oneself to normative truths is instrumentally indispensable (since we cannot deliberate without making such commitments) to the intrinsically indispensable project of practical deliberation (which is rationally unavoidable for beings like us). But if it is, Enoch claims, then we are epistemically justified in accepting the existence of normative truths.

Enoch then combines the Objectivity and Deliberative Arguments, arguing that they provide strong reason to accept not simply their respective conclusions but also the truth of robust meta-ethical realism. The claim is that none of the motivations for accepting an alternative to meta-ethical realism

survives the acceptance of Enoch's two arguments: if you accept the latter, then it is very difficult to see why you should reject meta-ethical realism. As it stands, this last argument requires augmentation. Enoch does so by engaging with three alternatives to robust meta-ethical realism: naturalism, fictionalism/error theory, and quietism, arguing that none survives scrutiny. The engagement with naturalism hinges on the idea that, despite the considerable ingenuity of moral naturalists, paradigmatic natural facts are just too different from paradigmatic normative ones. The engagement with fictionalism/error theory concedes that the error theory is the non-naturalist's most respectable opponent. Still, error theorists maintain that first-order normative claims, such as *torturing is almost always wrong*, are false. That, says Enoch, is too high a price to pay. The engagement with quietism turns on the claim that, to the extent that there is a coherent quietist position, it veers very close to fictionalism, the problem with this last view being that it lacks the resources to privilege one fiction over another (p. 112).

Having completed the positive phase of his project, Enoch dedicates the next four chapters to its negative phase. In these chapters, Enoch defends his view from a series of challenges that concern the metaphysics of normative facts, the epistemology of normative knowledge, the significance of ethical disagreement, and the character of moral motivation. There is a lot of excellent philosophy packed into these chapters. One almost never has the sense of revisiting well-trodden ground. Instead, Enoch pushes each of these debates into new and surprising territories. For example, Enoch untangles several importantly different versions of the supervenience argument, specifies how the epistemological challenge to non-naturalism should be understood and addressed, and does a superb job of addressing various concerns that philosophers might have about the compatibility of realism and a plausible account of motivation. Enoch's discussion of this last topic, for example, nicely distinguishes three types of reasons: normative reasons (those considerations that favor acting in a particular way), motivational reasons (those considerations that motivate an agent to act), and the agent's reasons (those considerations in light of which an agent acts). Having made these distinctions, Enoch argues, we can cut through various objections to realism which charge that realists cannot make sense of the fact that agents act for reasons.

This summary of Enoch's book will have indicated that I greatly admire it. The book beautifully blends philosophical creativity, boldness, and craftsmanship, all the while being appropriately modest about the force of its arguments. Meta-ethics is presently flourishing because of work such as this.

In closing, I want to engage critically with the Deliberative Argument, which is central to Enoch's project. This argument, recall, states that we are justified in believing that normative truths exist since a commitment to them is instrumentally indispensable to practical deliberation (we cannot deliberate without committing ourselves to them), which is an intrinsically indispensable project (that is, a project that is not rationally optional).

In his development of this argument, Enoch sets for himself two tasks. The first is to distinguish two types of indispensability—explanatory and deliberative—arguing that either can justify ontological commitment. This is important since Enoch claims his is an argument from not explanatory but deliberative indispensability. The second task is to argue that indispensability (of either sort) does indeed justify ontological commitment.

I have misgivings about Enoch's treatment of these tasks. With regard to the first task, I worry that Enoch makes his job more difficult than it has to be. Enoch claims that there are (at least) two types of indispensability: explanatory and deliberative. All instances of Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE), Enoch further claims, are cases of the former (but not the latter). This requires Enoch to argue that not only explanatory but also deliberative indispensability justifies ontological commitment. I doubt, however, that there are two types of indispensability, as Enoch claims. It seems to me, moreover, that the Deliberative Argument is a straightforward application of an IBE. If it is, then Enoch need only rely on the claim that IBE justifies ontological commitment.

Why does Enoch think that he must defend the claim that there are different sorts of indispensability? And why does he think the Deliberative Argument is not a case of IBE? An argument from explanatory indispensability that is an IBE, according to Enoch, is such that it commits us to entities that are explanatorily indispensable to some 'explanatory project', such as physics (p. 55). I do not see, however, why instances of IBE must be connected with explanatory projects in the way that Enoch says. Take the project of making inferences, for example. When we make inferences, we need not be attempting to explain anything. We might be simply trying to discover the truth (likewise with observation and perception). Suppose someone were to argue, for example, that we could not engage in inferences of certain kinds without committing ourselves to propositions, so we are epistemically justified in believing that propositions exist. Would that be a case of an IBE? I would think so. There are not, as far as I can tell, special types of indispensability—indispensability for inference, indispensability for perception, indispensability for observation—each being different from that sort of indispensability operative in standard cases of IBE.

If this is so, then IBEs need not be arguments from explanatory indispensability in Enoch's restricted sense, as they need not be connected in the way Enoch claims with explanatory projects. More importantly, there is good reason to believe that the Deliberative Argument is simply a case of an IBE. For, arguably, the thrust of Enoch's argument is that deliberation is close enough to other respectable explananda, such as inference, observation, and perception, to itself be a respectable explanandum and, hence, the explanandum of an IBE. Admittedly, certain things that Enoch says indicate that he believes that IBE applies only to those explananda that do not make

essential reference to the first-person perspective, such as deliberation (p. 79). I find no argument in Enoch's discussion, however, for this claim. And there are reasons to be suspicious of it. It would imply, for example, that one could not, using IBE, appeal to various features of conscious experience, such as qualia, to argue for a position in the philosophy of mind, such as dualism. That, however, must be mistaken.

Second, Enoch is worried about the objection that indispensability is not a reliable guide to what there is (p. 56). Rather than simply assume that it is, he proffers a justification for the claim that it is. His case rests on this principle: A thinker T is *prima facie* epistemically justified in employing a belief-forming method M as basic if there is for T a rationally non-optional project P such that it is (pragmatically-relevantly) possible for T to succeed in engaging in P using M, and it is (pragmatically-relevantly) impossible for T to succeed in engaging in P without using M (pp. 63–4, italics removed). This principle, he claims, allows us to determine which belief-forming methods we are justified in employing as basic and those we are not (p. 59). Take *modus ponens*, for example. Reasoning is not rationally optional. We can succeed in it only if we employ *modus ponens*. We cannot succeed in it, moreover, if we do not. So, we are epistemically justified in taking it to be a basic belief-forming method. Likewise, Enoch claims, for IBE.

Enoch claims that, if this vindication of IBE (and other 'practical' indispensability arguments) is correct, 'the relation between epistemic justification and truth is not as straightforward as may be thought' (p. 65). I do not see how that follows. That a belief-forming method is vindicated on broadly pragmatic grounds has no implications, as far as I can see, for whether the beliefs that are produced by employing that method are epistemically justified (or the character of epistemic justification itself).

I worry, moreover, that the principle articulated above is too lax. Take, for example, the project of having a positive self-image. This is an important project since it is crucial to our engaging in effective practical deliberation and succeeding in important and demanding tasks. Indeed, we can well imagine creatures for which having and maintaining such an image is not rationally optional, since a failure to do so would make them much less likely to succeed at worthwhile and demanding activities. We can also imagine these creatures being such that they can succeed in having and maintaining such an image only by engaging in some measure of self-deception. Only by holding that they have qualities such as being smarter, faster, stronger, and better-looking than they in fact are do they achieve any measure of success in fashioning and maintaining a positive self-image and, hence, succeeding in worthwhile and demanding tasks. According to the criterion above, it follows that these creatures are *prima facie* epistemically justified in employing self-deception as a basic belief-forming method. That, however, is false. Of course it does not follow from this that we have no reason to believe that

indispensability is a reliable guide to what there is. It follows only that we need another reason to believe it than the broadly pragmatic one that Enoch offers.

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