

PHILOSOPHICAL BOOKS

Book Symposium

DEPARTING FROM FREGE, by Mark Sainsbury

Sainsbury's Programme

Max Kölbel 187

Reconstructing Frege

Mark Textor 197

Reply: Sameness and Difference of Sense

Mark Sainsbury 209

Critical Notices

Concealment and Exposure, by Thomas Nagel

John Shand 218

Thinking about Consciousness, by David Papineau

Valerie Gray Hardcastle 223

Reviews 228



Alexander Miller has written a fine book that captures the state of the debate in contemporary meta-ethics. His book is marked by four features. It is, first, a book of considerable scope that considers virtually all the major competitors in contemporary meta-ethics. Second, given its scope, the book is remarkably thorough. Miller's discussions of various positions manage to explore their intricacies without losing sight of the major issues. Moreover, these discussions often move beyond simply rehearsing standard objections to familiar positions, as Miller marshals novel lines of defence and objection to these views. Third, while the book puts ethical naturalism in a more positive light vis-à-vis ethical non-naturalism, its treatment of the standard positions is even-handed. Indeed, one comes away from Miller's discussion appreciating that nearly all of the major positions have considerable resources to meet the objections that are raised against them. And, finally, the book manages to make some very difficult material digestible. A case in point is Miller's treatment of the so-called problem of embedded contexts. Miller arguably offers the most accessible treatment of the forbiddingly complex literature on this topic, and in doing so allows the reader to see clearly what moves expressivists have made in response to this problem and why. In short, I heartily recommend this book. Since it is, to my knowledge, the only one of its kind, I believe advanced undergraduates, and especially graduate students, and their teachers will find it of great use.

Miller's book unfolds as follows. After briefly addressing the question of what meta-ethics is, Miller considers Moore's attack on ethical naturalism. The thrust of this chapter (Ch. 2) is that the Open-Question Argument—both in the form Moore presented it and in some of its more contemporary forms—is deeply flawed. This discussion, though brief, is important. It sets the stage for Miller's later criticism of David Wiggins's objections to ethical naturalism, which Miller takes to contain the same mistakes as Moore's.

The next three chapters are a detailed discussion of expressivism. Miller traces the evolution of expressivism by beginning with Ayer's crude version of it (Ch. 3) and then moving on to consider Simon Blackburn's quasi-realist view (Ch. 4) and Allan Gibbard's norm-expressivist position (Ch. 5). Miller's overall verdict is that the problem of embedded contexts is potentially serious, but that the expressivist responses have more to recommend them than many cognitivists have thought. Having given expressivism its hearing, Miller considers Mackie's error-theory account of morality (Ch. 6) and response-dependent accounts of moral qualities (Ch. 7). These two chapters are brief and not, I believe, the book's best. For example, I found Miller's choice to focus almost exclusively on Crispin Wright's objection to error-theories odd, as there seem to be considerably more damaging objections to such views that the reader would have benefited from considering.

Following these chapters is a very sophisticated discussion of two forms of ethical naturalism. The chapter on 'Cornell-realism' (Ch. 8) offers a penetrating

discussion of the debate between Gilbert Harman and Nicholas Sturgeon on moral explanations, while the chapter on reductionism (Ch. 9) puts Peter Railton's view through the paces, defending it from a wide range of criticisms including those offered by David Sobel, David Wiggins, and Michael Smith. The book concludes (Ch. 10) with a critical investigation of John McDowell's influential, but difficult to understand version of moral non-naturalism.

I wish to raise two concerns about Miller's discussion. First, while Miller's book succeeds in canvassing a wide range of conceptual territory, it doesn't fare nearly so well in providing an overarching narrative that tells the reader in what ways the various positions in meta-ethics are responding to the same problems, responding to one another, or for that matter, emphasising very different issues. Indeed, the book's discussion often appears to be a patchwork: extended discussion of the problem of embedding is followed by a discussion of response-dependent properties, which is followed by a treatment of moral explanations, which is followed by a discussion of full-information accounts of the good, and so on, with no unifying thread being offered.

Second, I worry that Miller doesn't give Moore or the non-naturalist tradition its due. After rightly emphasising problems with Moore's own formulation of the Open-Question Argument, Miller considers two contemporary versions of it and finds them lacking because they assume a version of motivational internalism. But it seems to me that the real insight in Moore concerns not the relation between goodness and motivation, but the relation between goodness and *reasons*. Goodness, as we might put it, is 'ought-entailing'. If this is right, however, then Moore's argument may have more bite against naturalism than Miller allows. For if there is a conceptual connection between goodness and reasons, any position that identifies goodness with some naturalistic property but fails to honour this conceptual connection is suspect. And the case can plausibly be made, I believe, that some naturalistic views are suspect precisely because of this failure.

Still, these concerns do not keep me from recommending Miller's book as a welcome contribution to contemporary meta-ethics.

CALVIN COLLEGE

TERENCE CUNEO