BOOK REVIEWS

Themes from G.E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics

By Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay

Oxford University Press, 2007. x + 348 pp. £45.00

G.E. Moore's philosophical legacy is ambiguous. On the one hand, Moore has a special place in the hearts of many contemporary analytic philosophers. He is, after all, one of the fathers of the movement, his broadly commonsensical methodology informing how many contemporary analytic philosophers practise their craft. On the other hand, many (if not most) contemporary philosophers keep Moore's own substantive positions at arm's distance. According to many epistemologists, one can find no finer example of how to beg the question than Moore's case against the sceptic. And, according to many moral philosophers, one can find no more vivid case of philosophical extravagance than Moore's non-naturalism. Given this ambiguity, one wonders: How should we assess Moore's legacy in epistemology and ethics – the two areas of philosophy in which Moore did most of his work?

That is the task of this welcome collection of 16 essays. The list of contributors to the book is impressive: Crispin Wright, Ernest Sosa, Ram Neta, William Lycan, C.A.J. Cody, Paul Snowdon, Michael Huemer and Roy Sorenson consider Moore's work in epistemology. Stephen Darwall, Terry Horgan, Mark Timmons, Richard Fumerton, Charles Pigden, Robert Shaver, Joshua Gert, Jonathan Dancy and the editors of the book explore Moore's views in ethics. As one might expect, given this list of contributors, the quality of the essays is very high. Moreover, there is a decidedly constructive tone to many of them. While not willing to overlook Moore's mistakes, many of the essays endeavour to explore what is valuable in Moore's thought, critically engaging with positions that, not too long ago, might have been dismissed without a hearing. My overall assessment is that anyone who has an interest in Moore's own positions and his philosophical legacy will learn much from this book. That said, I should note that the book is likely to appeal to two rather different audiences. Epistemologists will find the first part of the book of most interest, while moral philosophers will be drawn to the second part of the book. There is almost no overlap between these two parts of the volume, which is regrettable, as Moore's own methodology presumably shaped what he had to say about both topics.

Considerations of space prohibit summarizing each of the essays. So, I will focus on two essays in the second part of the book, the first by Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons and the second by Robert Shaver.

'Moorean Moral Phenomenology', by Horgan and Timmons, is one of the finest in the volume. It is an insightful and lucid essay about what it is like to judge that one morally ought to act in a certain way. The authors draw attention to two salient features of moral experience. First, moral experiences are ones in which we

Analysis Reviews Vol 69 | Number 1 | January 2009 | pp. 167–169 doi:10.1093/analys/ann022

experience our environment as calling for or demanding a certain kind of response. Accordingly, the moral demand is experienced not as emanating from the agent himself, but from outside the agent and directed toward him. Second, the judgements involved in such experiences are experienced as beliefs in which we categorize our environment in a certain way, thereby 'coming down' on a verdict of how the world is. If Horgan and Timmons are right, the Open Question Argument has its roots in a phenomenology of this sort, to which they add the point that we should not read too much into the phenomenology. In particular, Horgan and Timmons claim that we should not conclude that their description of moral experience evidentially supports a type of moral cognitivism, according to which moral judgements are beliefs that purport to represent moral reality. At most, it supports a view according to which moral judgements express non-descriptive moral beliefs.

Philosophers such as C.L. Stevenson complained that they did not know what a non-natural property could be. I, by contrast, am fairly sure that I do not understand what a non-descriptive belief could be. Horgan and Timmons write: 'Moral ought-judgments ... are a species of non-descriptive belief – they involve a distinctive sort of commitment directed toward some non-moral descriptive possible state of affairs – an ought-commitment, *vis-à-vis* a way the world might be' (223). But I do not know what this non-descriptive 'ought-commitment' could be. Or at least I do not understand what it could be, given Horgan and Timmons's description of moral experience. For, once again, according to Horgan and Timmons, moral experiences are ones in which I experience my environment as calling for or demanding a response of a certain kind from me. When all goes well, I judge that I ought to act in a certain way, thereupon forming the belief that I ought to act in that way.

But, if that is right, I do not see what else an ought-commitment could be other than a doxastic response to this felt demandingness. If it is a doxastic response to this demandingness, however, then I do not see how it could fail to have moral representational content. That is, I do not see how the content of this belief could at once purport to respond to a felt demand and also fail to purport to represent the world as calling for or demanding a certain kind of response on my part. Two things follow: first, the description of moral experience that Horgan and Timmons provide generates good evidence in favour of moral cognitivism and, second, accepting Horgan and Timmons's account of this phenomenology commits moral antirealists to an error theory of a certain kind.

In his paper, 'Non-Naturalism', Robert Shaver develops the view, also defended by Allan Gibbard in *Thinking How To Live*, that Moorean non-naturalism is best characterized as an account not of moral properties, but of moral concepts. The difference between Shaver and Gibbard is that Gibbard holds that Moore himself did not embrace this view, while Shaver contends that Moore did. In Shaver's view, Moorean moral non-naturalism is a very modest position, which has been opposed by fairly few philosophers. It offers a sensible account of how moral concepts work. And it has no interesting ontological implications. As such, non-naturalism is not vulnerable to objections that it is either epistemologically or ontologically extravagant.

Shaver assembles a wide array of passages from early non-naturalists such as Broad, Moore and Ewing to make his case. While this case is impressive, I find myself not persuaded, for two reasons.

First, to make this case, it would be necessary to discuss in some detail how Moore viewed the relationship between concepts and properties. Shaver dedicates some attention to the matter, maintaining that Moore conflated the two, and that the most charitable interpretation of Moore is that he intends to talk not of properties, but only of concepts. But, as Fumerton contends in his essay (233), there are alternate ways to understand Moore, according to which Moore intended to talk of both concepts and properties and did not conflate them. Roughly put, according to this reading of Moore, to have a concept of a property is to have that property before one's mind in a certain way. If a charitable interpretation aims to identify what an author is trying to get at by making certain claims, I find this interpretation no less charitable than Shaver's.

Second, Shaver appears to indicate that, if Moore's is a view about only moral concepts, then non-naturalists can admit that moral properties are natural (295). I doubt this, however. For suppose that attributive non-natural concepts properly apply to properties of only certain kinds, viz., normative ones. If naturalism implies that moral properties are merely descriptive, however, then moral concepts cannot properly apply to them; they would be of the wrong sort. Oddly enough, in this case, non-naturalism would also imply an error theory, according to which our concepts fail to properly apply to those things to which they purport to apply.

TERENCE CUNEO
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405, USA
Terence.Cuneo@uvm.edu

Truth, Meaning and Realism

By A. C. GRAYLING

CONTINUUM, 2007. X + 174 PP. £16.99 CLOTH, £12.99 PAPER

The ten essays gathered together in this book treat of truth, meaning, (anti-)realism, natural kind terms, and related topics. Almost all began life as invited contributions to conferences. From the Preface we learn that Grayling, in contrast to those colleagues whose perfectionism leads them to publish too little, preferred to 'venture ideas as if they were letters to friends'. (The passage is also quoted on the back cover.) The style could hardly be called epistolary, however; a high level of generality is maintained throughout, and there is much plotting of the relationships between philosophical positions (logical geography). An aesthetic of tentativeness also prevails: at one point, for example, Grayling withdraws his too hasty offer of a sketch of an argument, in favour of 'a sketch of how an argument might look in outline' (31). A sketch of a sketch, perhaps?

Things are not so sketchy that one cannot discern some positive claims. One of these is embodied in what Grayling calls Explicit Speaker Theory, something which he

Analysis Reviews Vol 69 | Number 1 | January 2009 | pp. 169–171 doi:10.1093/analys/ann035