

AGENCY AND MORAL REALISM

Abstract

by

Christian B. Miller

Much of the literature in contemporary analytic metaethics has grown rather stale – the range of possible positions seems to have been exhaustively delineated, and most of the important arguments on all sides have been clearly articulated and evaluated. In order to advance discussion in this area, I examine more fundamental issues about the nature of agency.

In my view, the heart of what it is to exhibit intentional agency in the world is to *identify* with the relevant components of practical reasoning from the first person perspective. Chapter one attempts to arrive at sufficient conditions for desire identification by examining the structure of instrumental practical reasoning. But it turns out that this story about identification cannot be told until we first have available a separate account of norm identification. The best way of developing this latter account is by understanding the phenomenon of first person volitional impossibility.

With the resources in hand from the first two chapters, we can articulate sufficient conditions in chapter three for desire, norm, and action identification, as well as critically evaluate rival hierarchical views. Finally, chapter four is devoted to a preliminary consideration of our sense of our own wills as free.

Given these results from the first half of the dissertation, we can turn in the second half to a critical examination of the most prominent argument against moral realism, namely the Motivation Argument:

- (1) Motivational internalism is true.
- (2) The Humean theory of motivation is true.
- (3) Therefore moral cognitivism is false.
- (4) Moral realism entails moral cognitivism.
- (5) Therefore moral realism is false.

Chapter five begins by considering the conditions of realism in general, and then provides a plausible formulation of moral realism which also implies that (4) is false. In the sixth chapter we take up the Humean theory of motivation, and there develop a novel trilemma for the view. Finally chapter seven uses our earlier discussion of volitional impossibility in order to argue that the most prominent formulations of motivational internalism are false.

It turns out that the moral realist has very little to worry about from the Motivation Argument.