

Editorial Note

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Since July 2017 our journal has a new team of editors. *Bert Musschenga* and *Robert Heeger* founded and steered the journal as editors-in-chief for 20 years. It's been a fantastic achievement of them and their numerous Associate Editors to turn *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* into one of the leading periodicals in the field. We are extremely grateful to Robert and Bert for initiating the journal, for the enormous work ever since and for entrusting their project to the new team. They were an inspiration for us and we will try to live up to the high standards they established.

The current group of editors are Marcus Düwell, Thomas Schramme (Editors-in-Chief), Magali Bessone, Emanuela Ceva, Lubomira Radoilska, András Szigeti (Associate Editors), Ezio di Nucci and Alexa Zellentin (Review Editors). Editorial changes usually come along with changes regarding the focus or scope of a journal. We believe that such changes are not necessary. On the contrary, the relatively wide scope and the multiple approaches to practical philosophy, which can be found in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, are to our mind an important asset. What we do aim to change, though, is the purpose of the editorial notes. We won't introduce the individual contributions published in the paper issues, but aim to highlight certain topics of philosophical concern. The only papers we want to highlight at this time are the ones by Julia Mosquera and Teemo Toppinen, which stem from the 2016 meeting of the British Society for Ethical Theory. This collaboration is extremely valuable for our journal and we are looking forward to publishing BSET papers in the future.

Obviously, a major concern for editors are the quality and the nature of submissions. Editors can aim at encouraging publications that follow a certain school of thought or methodology. We don't want to do this, as we want the journal to be open to different approaches, to different traditions and to contributions from different parts of the world. The quality of submissions is of course guaranteed by double-blind peer review. We are indebted to our reviewers, who do a marvellous job. We all know that this is an unpaid service to the profession, which adds to the already significant workload of scholars. So the effort cannot be underestimated. Peer review

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usually follows certain explicit and implicit criteria of quality control, which are picked up by junior colleagues during their academic education. Scientific rigour, clarity in writing and originality are just three of these criteria, which today form a kind of customary approach to peer-reviewing and hence publishing. One might actually be able to deduce a template for successful publishing from these criteria. This is, on the one hand, a good thing, for instance because younger scholars, who might be less well-versed in the history of philosophy than senior colleagues, will have an equal chance of getting published, as the main criteria of peer review are formal – they can be applied to any topic.

On the other hand, such a relatively restricted formal template is bound to lead to a constrained style of writing and eventually to a narrow scope of submissions. This has to do with the fact that authors these days are only able to be on top of highly specialised debates. They need to show originality, which again requires to be privy to the relevant philosophical debate. Such prerequisites for getting published force authors to specialise, and the more scholars contribute to a debate the more specialised the debates become. This is not unusual and can be studied in many disciplines. However, in philosophy, which is after all a generalist subject area, publications will become less interesting. In other words, the worry is that scientific journal's processes of quality assurance will eventually lead to papers of disputable philosophical quality.

Surely the quality of philosophical publications is itself a topic for debate. Because of that, formal criteria of assessment will help to weed out bad papers by relatively objective measures. However, philosophy can be bad in numerous other ways than simply being formally bad. Unfortunately the formal aspects that tend to make submissions dry and technical are often accompanied by a tendency to making fancy claims, which somehow stick out from the crowd. Surely, this is again to be expected in a situation of little public interest in academic philosophy, combined with the need to compete with colleagues for scarce jobs. Being “internationally leading” in a debate might simply entail to invent a new debate and maybe to coin a new “ism”. Now, new debates in philosophy are often the ones that nobody wanted to lead in the past because they are dull or simply unwise. Philosophers turn this round and claim novelty to be an asset. They compete for the most outrageous claim, selling this as philosophical cleverness. So we end up with publications on whether we are morally obliged to feed our pets vegetarian food or whether it might be better never to have been.

Setting this aside, a lot of current philosophical publications are bad in the respect that they do not even aim at being true to the phenomena, in the sense of doing justice to the complexity of life. Philosophers try to make sense of the world by imposing their own “isms” instead of deriving these as helpful tools after studying the phenomena itself.

Take, for instance, the philosophical debate on theories of well-being. These days, most scholars start their discussion with a classification of theories of well-being into experience theories, desire-fulfilment theories and objective-list theories. Why? Because Derek Parfit has come up with this classification in an appendix to *Reasons and Persons*. Similarly, political philosophers these days seem to believe the world of justice is divided between three countries called egalitarianism, prioritarianism and sufficientarianism, because Parfit has told us so. In this philosophical debate, hardly anyone includes information regarding existing welfare states, which surely do not follow such a taxonomy. Still, a simple, straightforward territory is easy to navigate for younger scholars and PhD students. They will use their map to explore

more areas in these countries and happily invent new “isms”, such as luck egalitarianism with its numerous provinces. This will increase their chance to get published.

Apparently Parfit is regarded by some philosophers as a kind of god-like figure with the best knives to carve nature by its joints. But philosophical taxonomies are merely vehicles to make sense of and interpret the world, and Parfit’s taxonomies have not always been helpful. If we give theories and “isms” a value in their own right, we won’t achieve much of philosophical worth and lasting significance. Worse, if we believe the world can be explained and interpreted by using taxonomies that have been devised by a method divorced from reality, for instance from the armchair in All Souls College, then we’ll end up in a debate that is of no interest outside academia. This is, of course, the situation we are facing today.

Laying out one’s self-made taxonomy is seductive, because one then doesn’t need to worry much about reality or political and social concerns. It’s a kind of solipsistic exercise in sorting out the world according to your point of view. Surely you will feel at home in such a conceptual landscape. It would normally not cause detrimental effects to philosophy overall if only some philosophers would do this, but unfortunately the template for successful publishing, which was mentioned earlier, is the perfect complement to such thinking: You need to know the landscape to add new territory to the map. And you know the landscape best if you have devised the map according to your own thinking, or at least if you use one that is not overly complex.

In other words, current modes of reviewing and publishing augment a vicious circle, dragging down philosophical substance and leading to unwanted levels of scholasticism. Obviously, not everybody will see this as a problem, and it was already mentioned that the comments on the substantive quality of current philosophical publications will be contested. Those remarks are also not supposed to be targeted against the importance of formal criteria of quality control. Still, the latter are part of the overall problem. By making philosophical problems digestible we lose the more complex, broader picture and eventually tend to forget what the initial problems were, which led us to start a discussion in the first place.

It is for these reasons that we believe it is extremely important for an ethics journal to take the idea of *practical* philosophy seriously and to emphasise that moral philosophy is not only a theoretical enterprise but also aims at a better understanding of normative dimension of concrete practices. Hence *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* is a programmatic title of our journal. This implies that we particularly encourage submissions that engage in normative reasoning with regard to concrete practices; submissions, which are philosophically informed as well as in close connection with other disciplines, and which show a willingness to transcend disciplinary borders and the limitations of existing debates. It would be particular valuable if our journal could continue to be a platform for publications that critically discuss basic concepts and methods of applied ethics and develop them further.

We suppose the way forward is to be more open to different approaches and styles of writing. For instance, less technically polished and occasionally vague papers might still be philosophically interesting and rewarding. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* is already and should insist to be an outlet for a variety of approaches. Being pluralistic in one’s publication strategy does not undermine academic quality but helps to achieve the aim of living up to the complexities of philosophical problems, which are themselves due to the complexities of life.