

Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (eds.)

Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. x + 298. ISBN 978-0-19-966977-6.

Bergmann and Kain hope to “offer a taste” (p. 2) of the rich relevance, to their topics, of cross-disciplinary investigation. In a review as brief as this one must be, I can offer no more than a taste of what is offered to the investigation of skepticism by this well-conceived and stimulating book.

Part I focuses on moral and religious disagreement. In “Moral Disagreement among Philosophers,” Ralph Wedgwood argues, in effect, that a patient sentimentalist can defend moral realism against the problem of his title. Human emotional dispositions have not evolved to deal with unusual moral cases. And the search for reflective equilibrium is very challenging and may not be finished anytime soon. Evolution is here seen as helping the moral realist. It might help even more if we thought in terms of evolutionary timescales, which strongly favor Wedgwood’s recommendation of patience.

Surveying a wide range of empirical evidence, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, in “Moral Disagreements with Psychopaths,” argues that there is considerable reason to think that the psychopath really disagrees with us about rape and murder and cannot be shown to be irrational in doing so, and that attempts on our part to resolve the disagreement through reasoning must fail. He proposes a contrastive approach to justification to deal with this problem. According to this approach, we can declare ourselves justified in our moral beliefs out of a limited contrast class excluding psychopaths though not out of an unlimited contrast class including them.

Where Wedgwood suggests that we should wait for more adequate theorizing before expressing confidence, Sinnott-Armstrong suggests we might rather change our understanding of justification for belief. But the latter’s contrastive notion seems unable to do justice to the fact that, when we ask for justification for belief, we want justification to see the relevant proposition as *true, period*. Better, one might think, to change our focus in inquiry from beliefs to *positions* that are treated as true for the sake of inquiry but—in view of our immaturity—without any emphasis on the deeper acquiescence characteristic of belief.

In a wide-ranging and sensitive discussion on “Normative Disagreement as a Challenge to Moral Philosophy and Philosophical Theology,” Robert Audi, somewhat like Wedgwood, defends the view that no blanket judgment of the sort favored by moral skepticism can be sustained. Audi offers a distinction between disagreement *on* reasons and disagreement *in* reasons—that is, in the use of and submission to reasons in practical life. He thinks there is much less

of the latter sort of disagreement than of the former, and that the right attention to our agreement in reasons might aid the resolution of disagreements on reasons.

Audi's distinction appears to have some bite, both because it suggests that skeptical arguments from disagreement ought to be more discriminating, and because it suggests that the moral skeptic—caught up in practical activity redolent of normative concerns like anyone else—is guilty of a certain superficiality of approach unsuited to serious inquiry. And Audi's suggestion that our discussion on reasons may catch up with our agreement in reasons meshes nicely with Wedgwood's suggestion that we give moral philosophy more time.

In "Conciliationism and Religious Disagreement," John Pittard claims that even the best argument for religious skepticism from religious disagreement—a moderately conciliationist argument—fails to justify religious skepticism because many religious traditions propose non-standard and self-favoring theories of epistemic credentials, emphasizing such things as love and desire for God. These theories give the religious no reason to regard their non-religious disputants as equally well qualified, and furthermore prevent even their non-partisan beliefs from generating much reason to think that the qualifications of the non-religious rival their own.

It seems to me difficult, especially as time goes on, to keep standard and non-standard factors apart in the way needed for Pittard's nicely developed approach to work. With cultural evolution, more and more religious believers will display the influence on them of standard criteria in, say, their receptiveness to a conception of the God whom they love and desire that has had its contours shaped by philosophizing rather than prayer. And if a deep desire for truth belongs to the standard criteria, then even religious believers influenced by St. Paul or Kierkegaard, to whom Pittard appeals, should not find the standard criteria alien.

Part II of the book addresses disagreement between religious and non-religious sources of moral belief. John Hare, in "Conscience and the Moral Epistemology of Divine Command Theory," suggests that anthropology provides some support for the idea that god-oriented religion has helped us develop an ear for duty, spoken to us by conscience in something like Kant's authoritative divine voice. And he argues that a divine command approach to morality is quite able to come up with suitable constraints (such as that associated with God's concern for our well being) on what can *count* as a divine command.

But when Hare answers the question why belief in God's love was insufficient to prevent terrorist activity on 9/11, he seems to misunderstand. He apparently takes this as the question why the terrorists were *unpersuaded* by