

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Status of Morality* by Thomas L. Carson

Review by: Mark Timmons and Michael Gorr

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Stevenson remarked in *Ethics and Language* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1944, p. 231, n. 6), "logical relations are wholly unaffected." (If I am a negro, then logically I am a nigger—for that is analytically the same thing.) Second, emotive meaning may reflect attitudes which determine the descriptive meaning and, together with it, the application of the term. Here there is no entailment from neutral to emotive terms, but the only questions of fact are about the extensions of neutral descriptions; the rest is a matter of attitude, not belief. Third, emotive meaning may be a kind of descriptive meaning, if there are properties of things (e.g., values) that are intrinsically motivating and facts that cannot be grasped dispassionately. I find it impossible to resolve which kind of emotivism Satris is ascribing to Stevenson and recommending to us. He appears to endorse Stevenson's claim about logical relations, though with a distinction between "logically imply" and "actually establish" (pp. 140–41) which, not being that between validity and soundness, defeats me. He endorses the second kind when he writes of "the fundamental distinction between attitudes and beliefs (emotion and cognition) that underlies the emotivist distinction between disagreement in attitude and disagreement in belief" (p. 26). He relates this "fundamental distinction" to a contrast in onus of match (familiar to us since Anscombe, but already explicit in Montague, as we learn on p. 31, in 1909) that he states as follows: "Beliefs measure up to the facts (or not), and the facts measure up to desires (or not)" (p. 46). And yet it is my third kind of emotivism that is implicit in an antiscientific picture of the world, alien (it seems to me) to the prehistory of emotivism as told here, that Satris finds true to Stevenson's "fundamental position and conceptual framework" (p. 171). Take these two passages together: "Objects (including persons, actions, features of situations, etc.) presented to us in experience normally appear in various lights, as having this or that bearing on a situation, or as calling for this or that treatment or response. We see objects as healthy, noble, cruel, out of place, natural . . . , etc., and we can see them immediately under these characterizations" (p. 121); and "It is the world as experienced and as the object of our ordinary language that is the touchstone for Stevenson, and not a constructed, theorized or hypothesized world" (p. 96).

I believe myself that only some view in this area, and so in a sense emotivist, can do justice to what it is about values that makes them *values*: the valuableness of values could never be captured by what Stevenson calls "detached descriptions" (*Ethics and Language*, p. 4). But, if Satris is being faithful to Stevenson, fair play toward *Ethics and Language* will not take us far toward avoiding confusion and resolving disagreement.

A. W. PRICE
University of York

Carson, Thomas L. *The Status of Morality*.

Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1984. Pp. xxiii+203. \$34.50 (cloth).

Thomas Carson has written an exceptionally clear and well-argued book in which he tackles the perennial metaethical question: "In what sense (if any) can moral judgments be said to be correct or incorrect, true or false?" In the end, Carson's inquiry leads him to deny that there are any (or very many) issues concerning which moral judgments are strongly objective in the sense of being correct or

true for everyone, but he attempts to avoid nihilism by arguing that such judgments, appropriately relativized, do admit of being correct in a weaker sense.

In chapter 1 Carson defends a Brentanist analysis of moral judgments according to which such judgments are analyzed as assertions about the correctness of attitudes. The judgment that something is right or good means, on this analysis, that it is correct for everyone to have a favorable attitude toward that thing; the judgment that something is wrong or bad means that it is correct for everyone to have an unfavorable attitude toward that thing; while to judge that something is morally indifferent is to assert that any sort of attitude (favorable, unfavorable, or neutral) is correct to have toward the object of evaluation. Carson defends this analysis by arguing that it combines the virtues of standard cognitivist and noncognitivist accounts while avoiding their defects. In particular, like standard cognitivist views, the analysis accounts for the fact that moral judgments purport to be objectively correct (correct for everyone), and yet, like standard noncognitivist views, the view accounts for the practical, reason-giving force of moral judgments.

In chapter 2, Carson begins by arguing that, given the Brentanist analysis, it is unlikely that there are any attitude-independent moral facts of the sort defended by realists and that we must accept some version of an ideal observer theory (IOT) as providing the standards of correctness for moral judgments. Most of this chapter is spent detailing the essential features of an ideal observer (IO) and exploring the implications of an IOT, understood as an account of the objective correctness of moral judgments, for the issue of moral objectivity. According to the version of IOT Carson proposes, the objective correctness of moral judgments depends upon the attitudes of all IOs toward the objects of moral evaluation. Thus, for example, a favorable moral judgment about x is correct if and only if all IOs would have a favorable attitude toward x . However, Carson argues that since it is unlikely that the essential features of an IO would insure that all IOs would have the same attitude about very many (if any) objects of moral evaluation, he concludes that “most moral judgments are mistaken or false. Moral judgments presuppose that attitudes about things are correct in a sense in which they aren’t” (p. 103).

Because most moral judgments are mistaken, this means that they cannot perform certain typical functions they are ordinarily taken to perform. In chapter 3, Carson attempts to determine whether his conclusion about the objectivity of moral judgments commits him to nihilism—the view that talk of the correctness of moral judgments makes no sense whatsoever. He argues that nihilism can be avoided by moving to a relativized version of the IOT according to which the correctness of moral judgments is dependent upon the attitudes of individual judges. On this version, a favorable moral judgment about x is correct for S if and only if S would have a favorable attitude were she an IO. This weak sense of correctness (subjective correctness) allows us to intelligibly assess our own attitudes and those of others and thus escape nihilism.

In the final chapter, Carson considers some logical and psychological connections between metaethical relativism and first-order attitudes and judgments. He argues that because the relativist view he defends allows that moral judgments are in some sense correct, we can make sense of such moral attitudes as guilt and resentment and that accepting such a view need not psychologically undermine one’s first-order moral attitudes and convictions.

Carson’s theory is not, however, free from difficulty. There are, for example, epistemological worries about how much moral knowledge there could be given

the severe constraints Carson places on how the attitudes of IOs are to be formed (see chap. 2, esp. pp. 68–70). And it is unclear how much motivational efficacy correct moral judgments would have for one if (as seems likely) one's ideal counterpart would be so ideal that one would have considerable difficulty identifying with him. On the whole, however, the book's virtues greatly outweigh any of the shortcomings of Carson's view and it can be strongly recommended to anyone with a serious interest in ethical theory. Moreover, its clarity and coverage of a wide range of metaethical territory would make it an excellent choice for a graduate or advanced undergraduate course if it were available in a reasonably priced paperback edition. (Reidel, take note.)

MARK TIMMONS and MICHAEL GORR
Illinois State University

Regan, Tom. *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G. E. Moore and the Development of His Moral Philosophy*.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986. Pp. xix+307. \$29.95 (cloth).

Moore, G. E. *The Early Essays*. Edited by Tom Regan.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986. Pp. x+249. \$34.95 (cloth).

G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* was the culmination of nearly a decade of personal turmoil and philosophical progress. Through the books under review, Tom Regan hopes to force a reconsideration of *Principia Ethica*, and of Moore, by attending to this decade. He should be successful.

This task was begun by Paul Levy in *Moore: G. E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), but Levy is not a philosopher. Regan is a very good philosopher, and he illuminates very many philosophical issues ignored or obscured by Levy. Just as translations are best done by native speakers of the readers' language, so philosophers are best served by biographical work done by other philosophers.

Moore suffered great personal turmoil because of his inability to see religious belief as rational. Regan recounts Moore's pilgrimage from the melancholy of religious unbelief to the sense of meaningfulness gained through belief in the intrinsic value of beauty and friendship. Art and morality provide the consolation of religion without its existential commitments. *Principia Ethica* becomes Moore's defense of the meaningfulness of life.

Moore's philosophical evolution explains the form that his views take in *Principia*. Regan shows how *Principia* is Moore's development of and reaction to Kant's moral philosophy. The nonnatural status of Goodness and the synthetic nature of moral judgments, for example, are accommodations to problems Moore inherited from Kant's notion of transcendental freedom. Unfortunately, Regan says little about how Moore's consequentialism emerges. Here Moore seems most at odds with Kant.

Regan helpfully illuminates the progress of Moore's moral philosophy by extracting six criteria that Moore seems implicitly to be using in evaluating his own, and others', views. In essence, they are: (1) Intrinsic value is an objective quality. (2) Intrinsic value is a diachronically supervenient quality—in the sense