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Matt Lutz, Spencer Case, *Is Morality Real? A Debate.*

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The book *Is Morality Real? A Debate* by Matt Lutz and Spencer Case is part of a series of books called *Little Debates About Big Questions*, which emphasizes one particular fundamental philosophical question in each featured work. Examples of such questions include "Do we have free will?", "What is morality?", "What makes life meaningful?", and "What is consciousness?". The books adopt a dialectical format, presenting conflicting theoretical perspectives, which allows for the exposition of both the author's personal perspective and the conventional theoretical frameworks traditionally utilized in addressing these philosophical questions.

In their philosophical debate, Spencer Case contends that objective moral truths exist beyond the realm of scientific inquiry, whereas Matt Lutz challenges this notion, asserting that the absence of compelling evidence precludes the existence of moral facts. The core of metaethics is constituted by such juxtaposing viewpoints. It addresses whether moral facts exist, what they are like, how we can obtain evidence about them, and what constitutes a moral judgment. Prior to presenting their theoretically opposing viewpoints, the authors propose an attempt to define the concept of morality in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of its fundamental aspects, which they consider to be the origin of the initial debate. The authors demonstrate an intuitive ability to distinguish between simple normative and descriptive claims. The terms "ought", "good", "bad", "right", "wrong" and "rational" are considered to be normative terms, which differ from descriptive terms such as "large", "pink", and "shiny" in relation to their linguistic characteristics. Morality is a normative concept that is challenging to define. Rather than providing an account of the actions that are taken or the beliefs that justify those actions, it offers an account of the actions that should be taken. Furthermore, morality represents an authoritative concept, comprising ideas imbued with a moral quality and a sense of morality. This includes the notions of virtue and vice as morally significant states of character, action–guiding rules, and intrinsically valuable things. Their fundamental common ground implies a commitment to the well–being of others. Therefore, the authors assume that morality is predicated on the existence of obligations to others, although it is acknowledged that not all moral obligations are directed towards others. Morality pertains to the normative reasons that inform our obligations towards others.

In terms of this conceptual understanding of morality, moral realism can be defined as the philosophical position that moral judgments reflect a reality that contains moral facts or properties. In other words, moral realism asserts that moral judgments represent a world comprised of objective moral truths. The most significant metaethical disagreements between moral realists revolve around the question of moral naturalism, which proposes that moral properties are, in fact, natural properties. Thus, to argue that moral

properties are natural is to claim that they are of the same kind as other empirically investigable properties. Moral properties may be defined as natural properties. If a moral term, M, can be analyzed in descriptive terms, D, then the pure moral claim "All Ds are M" will be true in virtue of the meanings of D and M. This is known as an analytic claim, as it is a claim that is true in virtue of its meanings. This assumption is common, yet a problematic one. Descriptive terms are "is" terms, which are distinct from normative "ought" terms. Natural properties are those that can be studied by the sciences. These properties are plausibly the ones that can explain our experiences. However, there are plausibly descriptive terms that refer to non–natural or supernatural properties (e.g., "angelic" or "conscious"). When considered collectively, the open–question argument and the causal relativism problem present a significant challenge to the philosophical position of naturalism. The open–question argument precludes the assertion that moral terms can be analyzed in descriptive terms. The causal relativism problem also precludes the assertion that moral terms are unanalyzable and refer to the properties that causally regulate their usage.

Those with a moral non–naturalist viewpoint (such as the author Spencer Case) assert that moral properties are not natural, but rather constitute a distinctive kind of a thing. This theory appears to effectively encapsulate some of our most fundamental conceptual commitments regarding morality by providing "The companions–in–innocence strategy," which aims to demonstrate that a constructive answer must be available, regardless of the current lack of knowledge concerning its specifics:

1. If we can't have knowledge of non–natural moral facts, then we can't have knowledge of X either.
2. But we do have knowledge of X!
3. Therefore, we can have knowledge of non–natural moral facts. (p. 51)

Despite the inability to provide an exact explanation of how moral knowledge is attained, it is reasonable to assume that it is indeed attainable, given that mathematical knowledge can be grasped.

It is challenging to define the nature of the fact that two plus two equals four or to determine how this is a fact that we can know. It is, however, evident that the equation $2 + 2 = 4$ is true, and it is equally evident that we are aware of this fact. Moreover, moral knowledge shares numerous similarities with mathematical knowledge and therefore should not be excluded from this line of reasoning. A moral non–naturalist may also adopt a quietist theoretical stance, whereby they reject the meaningfulness of challenges such as the nature of moral facts. This raises further questions regarding the nature of moral facts and the reliability of the methods used to study them.

On the contrary, those who adopt an anti–realist perspective (as illustrated by the case of error theorist Matt Lutz) respond to these issues in three distinct ways:

1. There are no moral facts at all.
2. There are moral facts, but those facts are all stance–dependent.
3. Moral judgments do not represent the world as containing moral facts. (p. 16)

Error theory maintains that moral judgments describe a moral objective reality and, as such, are capable of being either true or false. The notion that moral properties exist is, at least in part, a philosophical assumption that may be open to question. This raises the possibility that the very foundations of moral thought and language are flawed. In light of these considerations, error theory ultimately leads to the conclusion that there are no definitive moral truths. This perspective has gained significant traction within the analytic tradition of philosophy that currently dominates discourse in the English–speaking philosophical academic realm. It relies primarily on three arguments: the relativity argument, the queer argument, and the categorical normativity argument. The relativity argument is based on the observation that moral practices vary between different cultures and historical periods. The most plausible explanation for this moral diversity is that our moral beliefs and attitudes are shaped by our respective ways of life, rather than by objective moral truths. It thus follows that there is no evidence to suggest the existence of objective moral truths. The queerness argument, which represents a family of arguments, maintains that we must refrain from accepting the existence of moral properties, as such a belief would be considered queer (in the sense of a belief that is perceived as unusual or eccentric). This is concluded in the categorical normativity argument. A claim that something is categorically valuable suggests a commitment to pursue it, while a claim of categorically obligatory status indicates the necessity to act. The notion of "to–be–done–ness" and "to–be–pursued–ness", while seemingly distinctive, can be seen as somewhat unusual characteristics.

The primary argument against it can be summarized as follows: "The worst actions you can think of aren't wrong. The best things you can think of aren't morally good. The best people you can think of aren't virtuous. Hitler wasn't evil, and he did nothing wrong. These conclusions are so repugnant that many philosophers regard error theory as a non–starter." (p. 21) Therefore, it can be seen that error theory and other anti–realist theories, including relativism, Kantian constructivism, non–cognitivist expressivism, and moral skepticism, give rise to a certain degree of counterintuitive moral implications.

Both authors conclude the book with their initial philosophical positions. Lutz argues that the conditions under which a belief is justified can be specified in entirely non–normative terms. Furthermore, he claims that Case's argument for moral encroachment lacks sufficient motivation. Case counterargues that the practical stakes involved, both for others and for the self, are a significant factor in determining whether or not a belief can be considered adequately supported and therefore justified. The question of morality is of significant philosophical importance. Should moral considerations emerge during practical deliberations, they will be given considerable weight.

It is not uncommon for conventional philosophical essays and books to inadvertently neglect to address counterarguments or present opposing viewpoints in an inaccurate manner. In contrast, debates such as this one offer a structured platform where

each participant is afforded an equal opportunity to articulate their stance and broaden the readers' insight into these kinds of theoretical frameworks. Which of these philosophical–metaethical positions is better remains (epistemologically) difficult to determine. Both authors come from opposing, respectable views in terms of their logical, consistent meta–ethical line of argument. They have shown considerable understanding of related or different meta–ethical positions, from which they have adopted what they consider to be undoubtedly the most appropriate meta–ethical position. Therefore, both sides of the debate are given equal (philosophical) weight in a fair manner. If it were necessary to single out a particular part of the book as crucial, it would certainly be the first part of the book, in terms of introducing the context of the meta–ethical theoretical framework and morality itself. Without this basic philosophical understanding, it is not possible to participate philosophically in such meta–ethical conversations and anticipate them properly. In other words, we are addressing (moral) beliefs that we cannot simply dismiss logically or epistemologically. Instead, we are trying to explore the profundity or weight of such a (moral) belief in the hope of arriving at its moral validity or invalidity, if morality is to exist.

The book is written in a modern, accessible, and relatively simple language, yet it presents a profound reflection on the contemporary metaethical philosophical discourse. It is recommended for anyone interested in metaethics, and especially for curious students trying to get into this kind of philosophical discourse. A glossary, simple practical examples from everyday life, and a brief introduction of the most important authors from certain theoretical starting points provide contextual clarification. Those who seek to further their normative ethical cause should also take a look at this book, as they may find metaethical arguments that support their normative claims, or even offer fundamental potential explanations for their particular field of interest (for example, political philosophy which relies heavily on the ought–ness and to–be–done–ness of its normative statements).

Therefore, philosophical progress should be considered in terms of a successful argument as defined by these respectable authors: "An argument can be considered successful if it gives the audience pause, or makes those who disagree with the conclusion a little less confident, or expands intellectual empathy by demonstrating how a position could seem attractive to those who embrace it." (p. 213)

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