

Summaries for the Workshop on Agency and Norms

1) Ulrike Heuer

The aim of the project is to outline a capacity-based account of intentional agency. On its basis, I will explain what it is to act for a reason as well as work out a capacity-based account of the scope and limits of responsibility.

Chapters:

1. Acting Intentionally. This chapter defends a view of intentional agency starting with a criticism of Davidsonian approaches, and then developing an account of intentional agency which takes Anscombe's seminal book as a starting point. The main task is to explain how skills and knowing how (hence capacities of various kinds) are involved in the explanation of intentional agency. [This may become two chapters: a more historical, stage-setting one, and a positive account.]

2. Acting for a reason. This part is going to break down into three sub-chapters: (i) A defence of a value-based account of reasons; (ii) Acting for a reason - what it is not (on the role of desire); (iii) Acting for a reason: the capacity-based view.

3. The limits of responsibility. Assuming that what we are responsible for is not just what we do intentionally, what are the limits? I will give an account, focusing mainly on cases of failure (i.e. on what a person does when she sets out to do something, but fails: when and why is she responsible for her failed action?). I will also discuss cases of recklessness and negligence here.

2) Erasmus Mayr

The project tries to connect two important developments in metaethics and the free will debate in the last 25 years. On the one hand, the attempt to spell out the conditions for moral responsibility via the conditions for adequately holding someone morally responsible (in particular, for adequate moral blame). On the other hand, the (neo-Kantian) attempt to account for the obligatory force of moral norms by taking them to be constitutive norms for core rational activities an agent cannot avoid engaging in, such as the activity of practical deliberation.

In the first part, I explore how to best spell out the conditions for moral responsibility via the conditions for adequate blame. In particular, I argue that, in doing so, we must take into account the fact that moral blame is only adequate when the moral norms for whose non-compliance the agent is blamed are obligatory for her in the way that is characteristic for moral norms. Otherwise, there is the risk of conflating blame with other, non-moral forms of criticism. As a result, in order to answer the question of when an agent is morally responsible for what she has done, we have to determine how and why moral norms are binding onto her. The second part pursues the implications of this idea for a particular understanding of the obligatory nature of moral norms and its grounds, namely a Kantian one. According to this understanding, moral norms are categorical imperatives which are unconditionally binding on the agent qua rational deliberator. A constitutivist model for giving substance to this latter idea (i.e. for showing why basic moral norms are binding on a rational agent on pain of practical inconsistency) is developed. In the concluding part, the implications of this understanding of the nature and grounds of moral obligation for the conditions for moral responsibility are investigated.