

## Concern, Respect, and Cooperation, by Garrett Cullity

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Cullity, Garrett, *Concern, Respect, and Cooperation* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. ix + 311, £50 (hardback).

The title of this book refers to what Garrett Cullity claims are the three foundations of interpersonal morality. In positing multiple foundations for morality, Cullity is proposing a form of pluralism, explicitly modelled on that of W.D. Ross. In fact, Cullity aligns himself with Ross by affirming the two principles that he says are definitive of Rossian pluralism: first, ‘there is a plurality of fundamental ... moral norms’, and, second, ‘there is no single substantive master-principle governing the contributions made by those norms to the determination of overall moral quality’ such as rightness and wrongness [29].

Cullity actually gives fundamental principles for not just three but four attitudes: concern, respect, cooperation, and reverence for what is precious. I will clarify the role of this last concept after quoting his four main principles:

(W) Others’ welfare calls for promotion, protection, sensitivity, sympathy, and solidarity, unless the fitness of those responses is undermined [45].

(S) Others’ self-expression calls for non-interference, listening, holding accountable, reactive attitudes, and address, unless the fitness of those responses is undermined [51].

(C+) Worthwhile collective action calls for acting to initiate it, joining in, collective thinking, sharing responsibility, pride, and advocacy [56].

(There is also a principle (C-), prescribing negative responses to badly directed collective actions [57].)

(P) Precious objects call for protection, appreciation, and the communication of that appreciation [58].

Cullity writes that it is natural to think of morality as being concerned with other-regarding reasons, but that this notion is open to two different conceptions. On one conception, morality is concerned with ‘the reasons generated by the relationships in which we, the possessors of those reasons, stand to *each other*’ [59]. On the other conception, morality is concerned with ‘any reasons generated by a relationship in which I stand to anyone or anything other than myself, where the reason is independent of the bearing that the relationship has on my own welfare’ [59]. Whether we include, among the foundations of morality, reverence for what is precious turns on whether we think of the other-regarding character of morality in terms of the second conception or in terms of the first. For most of his book, Cullity opts for the narrower conception—hence the three (rather than four) nouns in the book’s title.

In the principles quoted above, to say that something ‘calls for’ a certain response is to say that that response is fitting [36]. For example, (W) implies that if someone falls, it would be fitting to help them get up. (S) implies that if someone expresses an opinion, it would be fitting to listen to them. Similarly, if someone is lying in the sun, it would be fitting to leave them alone rather than to shield them

with an umbrella if doing so would be against their wishes [47]. Hence, Cullity intends the term ‘self-expression’, which is the focus of principle (S), to be interpreted broadly; he acknowledges that ‘this involves a departure from ordinary usage’ [49]. Finally, (C+) implies that it is fitting to join in worthwhile collective endeavours such as running a food bank or organizing a neighbourhood party.

(W) and (S) express norms of merely *presumptive* fitness, because they allow for undermining. For example, it is presumptively fitting, according to (W), to provide a person with what they enjoy. But if, in a particular case, a person is thinking of providing a sadist with the opportunity to inflict pain on others, then the presumption is undermined by the content of what the sadist would enjoy [89]. When such content-related undermining is absent, the presumption of fitness holds, and fitness actually obtains.

If a particular response to a situation is fitting, the next question is that of whether a particular person has a reason to make that response. Here, Cullity distinguishes between three factors that might interfere. First, the person might lack the capacity to make that response: it might be fitting for you to bestow a particular benefit on someone, but if you lack the ability to do so, ‘that will deprive you of reasons to’ do so [35]. Second, ‘reasons must also satisfy a condition of personal relevance’: it might be fitting for you to praise a skilled attorney who lives thousands of miles away, but if you have never heard of that person, that can keep you from having a reason to praise them [35]. Third, another kind of undermining might occur, related to context rather than content (as above). For example, it might be fitting (not just presumptively fitting) for a person to financially benefit their own family. But if, in a particular case, a person is thinking of using their position as the trustee of a large estate to financially benefit their own family, context-related undermining occurs: the context of the trustee role ‘deprives [them] of a reason’ for acting in that way [111]. When capacity and personal relevance are present, and context-related undermining is absent, the fittingness of a particular response translates into a reason for the person to make that response [130].

If, according to Cullity’s theory, a person has a reason to make a particular response to a situation, the obvious question is that of whether the person ought to make that response. The answer is definitely ‘not necessarily’, since Cullity’s theory can license the derivation of reasons for incompatible responses to a situation, such as when promoting someone’s welfare precludes joining a worthwhile collective action, or vice versa. Cullity writes that ‘getting from a reason to do something to the conclusion that I ought to do it depends on all of my other reasons’ [54]. This last point raises the familiar spectre of the indeterminacy that often besets pluralistic moral theories, and I will expand on this point below.

Before doing that, however, let me acknowledge the main strength of Cullity’s theory, which is that its positing of three foundations for interpersonal morality leads to a broad range of implications on various topics that any monistic theory would struggle to match. To give just one example, it is well known that utilitarian theories struggle to explain why an individual has a reason to join a collective activity when their participation will not make any difference to the outcome. This is no problem for Cullity’s theory, since principle (C+) merely requires that the activity be worthwhile, not that the individual’s participation make a difference [52].

At the same time, principle (W) implies that people generally have reasons to do the things that utilitarian theories say they should do.

Let me turn to a couple of caveats that prospective readers might wish to bear in mind. First, a mundane practical matter: although the main text is not overly long (approximately 120,000 words, by my estimate), a conscientious reader might find their progress through the book slowed by the presence of more than 500 end-notes, enough of which are substantive elaborations of the main text that such a reader might feel reluctant to just ignore them altogether.

Second, let me expand on my remark about the indeterminacy of Cullity's theory. Here it makes sense to start by describing his own anticipation of an objection that might arise regarding the rich array of principles, derivation schemata, and other materials that he presents for generating moral judgments. Regarding this complex machinery, he writes the following [81]:

One worry it provokes is this: these categories are so general that most *false* moral views can be derived from the foundational norms I have described, along with the true ones. Honour codes that require avenging disrespectful treatment can be given a ... derivation from the morality of respect. The claims made on behalf of perniciously exclusive forms of aggressive group loyalty have often amounted to asserting a ... derivation from the morality of cooperation. ... And barbarous eugenic policies have seemed to some to have [a] derivation from the morality of concern—as conditions for promoting the welfare of those who are exempted from them.

Cullity's main response to this worry is that, in each of these cases, the putative derivation must be fleshed out with arguments that satisfy conditions that Cullity has built into his machinery. Thus, not just any old concern-, respect-, or cooperation-based rationale for some practice suffices to justify it, in Cullity's theory [81–2]. This is certainly a fair point for him to make.

My concern relates to this worry but goes farther. In applying Cullity's theory to some moral question, one must address a series of other moral questions that the theory itself does not answer, regarding at least the following matters: the scope of the foundational concepts of the theory, when content-related undermining occurs, when the relevance condition is satisfied, when context-related undermining occurs, and how to weigh the relative merits of various reasons that may point in incompatible directions. Because one is thrown upon the resources of one's own moral thinking in answering these other moral questions, any application of the theory seems likely to reflect the moral sensibilities of the person applying it more than the substance of the theory itself. And since different people obviously have widely varying moral sensibilities, the spectre of indeterminacy seems to pose a very real threat.

In fairness to Cullity, I should acknowledge that I might be holding him to a standard that he rejects. Indeed, as I mentioned above, the Rossian roots of his approach mean that he does not aim to provide a master principle that enables a pluralistic theory to have the kind of determinacy that monistic theories do. Instead, according to a principle that he calls 'Ross's Principle' (which, naturally, he endorses), 'The goal of a moral theory should be to identify the elements that support moral verdicts, and explain how they interact to support them, rather than to supply principles that summarize the content of those verdicts' [2; see also 154]. On this principle, the way that different moral sensibilities will yield different

moral verdicts might just be an illustration of the success of Cullity's theory rather than an objection to it.

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Marshall, Colin, *Compassionate Moral Realism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. xiii + 265, £45 (hardback).

'Why be moral?', asks the opening chapter of *Compassionate Moral Realism*, and by its end the book has provided an attractive answer: 'because that is how people in touch with reality act.' In between, Marshall explains step-by-step how he arrived there by thinking about 'being in touch with reality', and particularly being 'in touch with' other minds. The result is a meta-ethics that is naturalistic (the only entities needed are mental states), realist (moral claims are literally true and stance-independent), and resolutely about what, intuitively, it should be about—other people and how our actions affect them.

Let's walk through how the book proceeds. The first two chapters present some historical views (from Plato, Wollaston, Schopenhauer, and Locke), which have various affinities with Marshall's, particularly in trying to ground morality in epistemology. Although this discussion does an excellent job of contextualising Marshall's project historically, it can be challenging for a reader, since all of these views differ from Marshall's in major respects, so that it feels a bit like climbing a series of ladders, each of which is then kicked away.

A similar feeling attends chapters 3 and 4, which present the key notion of 'being in touch'. Marshall's central idea is that there is something valuable about experiences that both 'present' a real object and 'reveal' the nature of its properties, and that compassionate experiences are uniquely able to do this with the mental lives of others. To show that being in touch is not an *ad hoc* invention, but something with broad application, Marshall presents a sequence of examples where someone is, intuitively, in touch with something and is epistemically better-off for this.

The awkward thing is how many of these examples are ones in which, on the views of many or most philosophers, this intuitive sense of being in touch is mistaken. While these examples may illustrate what it *would* mean to be in touch, none provide clear cases where anyone actually *is* in touch. For instance, we are invited to intuit that Mary, famously seeing colour for the first time, has an epistemic good during that experience that she never had before. We are also invited to intuit that if Locke is right that spatial properties resemble our ideas of them but colours don't, then spatial perception puts us in touch with reality but colour-perception does not. But if Locke is right, our intuition about Mary is false, and it might seem that if Einstein is right then our Lockean intuition is false, too.