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CONTENTS

SYMPOSIUM ON THE ADMISSIBLE CONTENTS OF PERCEPTION

Perception and the Reach of Phenomenal Content	Tim Bayne	385
Seeing Causing and Hearing Gestures	S. Butterfill	405
Experience and Content	Alex Byrne	429
Is Perception a Propositional Attitude?	Tim Crane	452
Conscious Reference	Alva Noë	470
What are the Contents of Experiences?	Adam Pautz	483
Aspect-Switching and Visual Phenomenal Character	Richard Price	508
The Visual Experience of Causation	Susanna Siegel	519
The Admissible Contents of Visual Experience	Michael Tye	541

<u>BOOK REVIEWS</u>		563
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BOOK REVIEWS

Themes from G.E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics. EDITED BY SUSANA NUCETELLI AND GARY SEAY. (Oxford UP, 2007. Pp. 368. Price \$90.00.)

This volume of 16 essays, according to the editors, is motivated by a growing sense that the time has come, fifty years after Moore's death in 1958, to reassess his contributions to philosophy in the light of what now seems to be their conceptual longevity. By 1950, they claim, most of Moore's views had been subjected to fierce criticism; and although his standing in the history of early twentieth-century philosophy was solid and esteemed, his best arguments had been superseded by what they characterize as more 'insightful' positions. More recent developments in epistemology and ethics in the twenty-first century, however, help to show that Moore's characteristic arguments and methods remain unexpectedly steadfast – bloody, perhaps, but as it turns out, unbowed.

Moore's role in the history of philosophy has in some ways been obscured by the coincidence of his proximity to Russell and Wittgenstein. *Principia Ethica* and *The Principles of Mathematics* were both published in 1903. Wittgenstein arrived in Cambridge for the first time in 1911 – the year Moore returned, after seven years with no permanent post in philosophy – and resurfaced to dominate the scene in 1929, ten years before Moore retired. No one could argue that Russell and Wittgenstein's work fails to merit the scholarly attention it has received, and no one would deny that their lives added engrossing detail to their intellectual biographies. The latter admittedly can hardly be said of Moore. But few philosophers today take the propositions of the *Tractatus* as authoritative; fewer still, if any, would claim that the logicist programme of *Principia Mathematica* was a success. *Principia Ethica*, however, is considered the *locus classicus* of contemporary meta-ethics (though Moore himself would not recognize the term). Moore's epistemology (to which he turned in the 1920s and 1930s) tackled such bedrock issues such as scepticism about the external world and the nature of perception; these, along with the nature and viability of methodological common sense, form an enduring part of his reputation.

Much contemporary Moore scholarship tends to compartmentalize Moore's views in ethics and epistemology, and this volume continues the pattern. It may be, however, that such a division does a disservice to the (welcome and laudable) project of re-evaluating Moore's legacy. It is true that there is little in the literature that provides a comprehensive account of the development of Moore's philosophical views as a whole. But the thesis that his work is influential in philosophy today is not exactly news – there is no doubt, after all, that both meta-ethics and epistemology

are flourishing industries. So does this collection truly confirm, as the editors claim (p. 3), that a newly emerging 'revisionist consensus' is afoot, and that Moore's durability is based on the perception that his arguments 'uncovered significant conundrums whose true import we have only begun to understand'?

The topics treated in the essays in part II range from conceptions of epistemic warrant (Wright) to the nature of proof (Sosa and Neta); from Moore's anti-sceptical strategies (Lycan) to the significance of Moore's defence of common sense (Coady) as one of those anti-sceptical strategies. Huemer and Sorensen take on Moore's paradox, Huemer arguing that the paradox illuminates constraints on rational belief, Sorensen that it illuminates constraints on assertion.

A robust connection with Moore's own work on these issues, however, turns out not to be the focal point of some of these essays (Coady's is an exception). Lycan's does address itself to a number of Moore's own papers, but is ultimately a coda to Lycan's own work on scepticism; Snowdon gives a clear enough exposition of Moore's views on perception, but owns (p. 140) that 'Moore has really nothing to say in relation to certain research programmes about perception currently being pursued'. The anti-sceptical arguments discussed in Wright, Sosa and Neta underline (not surprisingly) that the way in which these have developed is a thriving element in contemporary epistemology. Neta, for instance, argues that the views of two prominent 'New Mooreans' (Martin Davies and James Pryor) fail to defeat Wright's thesis that Moore's proof of an external world is not cogent. Wright puts his criticism of the proof in terms of 'rational conviction', but Neta formulates the issue in terms of 'knowledge transmission', because 'Moore never explicitly talks about rational conviction' (p. 67). Neta claims to show there is a link between the issue of knowledge transmission and the issues about which Wright and the New Mooreans are arguing, however, and takes in, along the way, a set of interconnected, detailed and sophisticated positions in the literature. But the result tends to sculpt Moore's view to fit round the terms of the current debate, rather than highlighting any enduring but perhaps underappreciated or overlooked aspect of Moore's own view as directed against the sceptic. Sorensen's contribution, to take another example, engagingly cloaks an attack on Alan Sidelle's view of deferred utterance, by threading some well known basics of Moore's personal and intellectual development into a discussion of the logical form of *post mortem* assertion, which Sorensen claims reveals the significance of Moore's paradox in an unexpected way. But the link he goes on to make between *post mortem* assertion and agnostic atheism is (for no obvious reason) forced onto Moore (p. 161); and there is no further direct discussion of Moore in the rest of the paper, which takes on the job of arguing that *post mortem* assertion is merely anomalous, not seriously problematic, in direct reference theories.

Four papers in part III of the volume discuss familiar features of Moore's ethical views (with some internal overlap): the nature of normativity (Darwall); and moral realism and the open question argument (Horgan and Timmons; Fumerton; Pigden). Three essays examine the relevance of Moore's views to recent developments in debates concerning ethical naturalism (Shaver; Nuccetelli and Seay) and utilitarianism (Gert); Moore's view of organic unities, a somewhat neglected topic in the literature, is revived here in Dancy's contribution.

Again, however, a full-bodied expansion of a Moorean ethical stance from Moore's point of view is not the focal point of a number of these essays. One significant legacy of *Principia Ethica* is a distinction between theories of the good and theories of conduct (the formulation of which Moore takes from Sidgwick). Moore's ethics from 1897 to 1903 grappled with a dilemma: either moral properties were mental entities (and thus incapable of being objective or, as Moore understands the term, properly normative); or they were mind-and-language-independent – but if so, how could they have causal effects on our mental states? Few meta-ethicists today, however, are as willing as Moore was to blunt the dilemma by detaching a theory of (normative) goodness from a theory of conduct. Darwall, taking a familiar line, argues here that Sidgwick's understanding of normativity is more apt than Moore's, because Sidgwick more clearly understood the role of normativity as properly requiring, as Darwall reads him, a bridge to conduct. But 'normativity' for Moore meant something slightly different from its contemporary formulation, and Darwall does not engage with the concept on Moorean grounds. Fumerton, in his discussion of the open question argument and the nature of analysis, does the same, and moreover completely fails to engage Moore's own starkly realist view of the nature of concepts and properties in his discussion of the metaphysics of analysis. Horgan and Timmons argue that a certain kind of moral experience captures the moral realism that is key to Moore's ethical view; but candidly assert (p. 204) that Moore 'might not have endorsed their particular version of it'. Nuccetelli and Seay's 'sympathetic reading' of the open question argument 'neither endorses Moore's moral ontology nor focuses on exegesis', suggesting that direct connection to Moore's own position is not the object here. However, in contrast, Pigden makes good use of historical context in his argument for a two-part analysis of the open question argument to highlight Moore's key non-naturalism, drawing attention to Russell's 1897 Apostles paper 'Is Ethics a Branch of Empirical Psychology?', to claim that (among other things) one of Moore's targets in *Principia Ethica* was Russell's defence of a psychologistic ethics.

The distinction of the contributors to this volume, and the sophistication of their expanded discussions on issues associated with Moore's views, show that a number of puzzles in epistemology and ethics which Moore worked to unravel live on in a variety of ways. But what does not clearly emerge from these essays is that an authentic and modernized Moorean approach to these puzzles, in Moore's own terms, is gathering speed. What we do see is that (1) the contemporary literature has made a series of well documented strides into topics whose specificity might be appreciated by Moore, but which Moore himself did not address; and that (2) if Moore's views had been other than they were, or had been in receipt of contemporary but not necessarily faithful amendment, they might have succeeded in addressing issues which have come to the forefront in the current literature. But that there is room for the project of Moorean revisionism is without doubt. Moore published practically nothing new in ethics after 1912; his pre-1903 papers were ignored for decades, and he did not teach either ethics or epistemology at Cambridge between 1911 and 1939. A comprehensive story of the development of his ethical views and the shift to epistemology needs to be told; the connection between

his moral semantics, moral metaphysics and moral epistemology needs a thorough and systematic working out. Moore scholars will be grateful for the attention which contemporary philosophy concentrates on Moore in this volume – but there is plenty of work yet to be done on the Moorean legacy.

The College of New Jersey

CONSUELO PRETI