

From the Editor

In the editorial of our previous issue, we discussed some emerging issues in publishing ethics brought about by the rapid development of AI, especially large language models. In this editorial, we would like to say a few words about a much more slowly developing topic in the same field: editorial ethics.

In a recent interview, given in the aftermath of Wiley's mishandling of the editorship of the journal *Political Philosophy*, Robert Goodin gave an exciting characterization of the role of the editor. He characterized the editor's role and function in Hobbesian terms:

If every almost-as-good article were published, the value of publishing in the venue would nosedive, to the chagrin of all authors publishing there. It is a classic collective action problem. In that Tragedy of the Commons, the role of the editor is to be The Enforcer, against both self-serving authors in the blogosphere and self-serving commercial publishers in the share market.¹

Not only does this paint a mainly plausible picture of the editorial process and the incentives that often surround it, but it also points to an essential aspect of the role of the editor: it revolves around exercising a certain kind of power. Now, political philosophy has since Hobbes been concerned with the power of the Leviathan, or the Enforcer, and how to circumscribe it. From this, one might surmise that the editor would also play a prominent role in publishing ethics, but this does not seem to be the case. The focus tends to be on the author. However, there are some exceptions.

The ICMJE, in what is known as the Vancouver Recommendations, has developed guidelines for the editorial work. These recommendations include principles that emphasize the importance of confidentiality and timeliness in the publication process, but also principles on diversity and inclusion in the editorial team and a warning about over-reliance on single metrics in evaluating journal quality. The importance of proper peer review is emphasized. Finally, the principle of Integrity says:

Editorial decisions should be based on the relevance of a manuscript to the journal and on the manuscript's originality, quality, and contribution to evidence about important questions. Those decisions should not be influenced by commercial interests, personal relationships or agendas, or findings that are negative or that credibly challenge accepted wisdom.²

¹ Berndt Rasmussen, Katarina. 2023. "Interview with Robert 'Bob' E. Goodin, Emeritus Distinguished Professor at Australian National University, Editor of The Journal of Political Philosophy." *Tidskrift för politisk filosofi*.
https://www.politiskfilosofi.se/extra/goodin_augusti_2023/tpf_interview_with_robert_bob_e_goodin.pdf p.11

² Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. Updated January 2024. <https://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>

This formulation notably excludes some considerations – money, friendships, and personal agendas – as reasons that should play a role in editorial decisions, but of course, the positive reasons – originality, quality, contribution, and importance – all tend to be contested concepts. Anyone with a career in academia will have at least an anecdote about judgments from editors or reviewer 2 concerning these values that they would have liked to contest. Both the content of and the process of coming to these judgments will tend sometimes to cause controversy.

Indeed, COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) has developed guidelines for developing editorial processes. This points to the importance of having policies in place for the following areas: allegations of misconduct, authorship and contributorship, complaints and appeals, conflicts of interest/Competing interests, data and reproducibility, ethical oversight, intellectual property, journal management, peer review processes, and post-publication discussions and corrections.³ This is a list of important but labor-intensive work to be done for journals and their editorial teams. The list also entails that in order to set up the processes needed to run a journal according to this standard, many judgments concerning the process and its goals must be made. At present, *De Ethica* is working with our publishers, Linköping University Electronic Press, on developing guidelines on such work for the journals publishing with this press. You can expect further updates about this in future issues of *De Ethica*.

But now to the actual publications. In this issue, the power invested in us had been used to bring, to our readership, articles on the age-old question of why one ought to act morally, how value theory can inform discussion on moral rights, the concept of age, and on the issue of how evil relates to a meaningful life.

Per Sundman investigates to questions to the foundational question: why be moral? The first answer is that this is how one acts with respect in the relationship of being God's closest friend. The second answer is that being moral realizes Eudaimonia. Sundman finds both answers lacking. The favoritism inherent in thinking about humanity as God's best friend seems troubling, and the optimism that morally right action necessarily leads to happiness is unwarranted. However, Sundman observes that both these answers to the question of why one ought to be moral seem to presuppose the obligation to act morally right as an inherent force. Reasons for being moral can be understood as internal to the moral domain.

Henrik Andersson argues that new advances in value theory can help interpret the relationships between different human rights. He argues that when it comes to the problem of ranking which human right is more important than others, concepts like "more important" and "equally as important" fail to fully account for the value conflict at hand. Therefore, he introduces the concept of "on a par importance," which is shown to better take account of intuitions in ranking cases.

Age may seem straightforward, but it just concerns the time elapsed from birth or creation to the present. Recently, this view has come under criticism. In his article, William Simulket takes on Joonas Räsänen's position that age instead has to do with the question of one's biology, experiences, and self-conception. However, Simulket argues that such a view comes with a heavy burden in terms of ontology and that it has difficulties handling our intuitions in numerous cases.

³ Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). 2017. *Core Practices*. <https://publicationethics.org/core-practices>

In his article, David Matheson investigates the relationship between evil and the meaningful life. He claims that evil cannot provide meaning in life. Since activities that endow life with meaning cannot be of the worst sort, but evil activity is of the worst sort, then it follows that life is not endowed with meaning by evil activity.

Lars Lindblom, *executive editor*

References

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