

CONSTRUCTIVISM IN ETHICS

Are there such things as moral truths? How do we know what we should do? And does it matter? Constructivism states that moral truths are neither invented nor discovered, but rather are constructed by rational agents in order to solve practical problems. While constructivism has become the focus of many philosophical debates in normative ethics, meta-ethics, and action theory, its importance is still to be fully appreciated. These new essays written by leading scholars define and assess this new approach in ethics, addressing such questions as the nature of constructivism, how constructivism improves our understanding of moral obligations, how it accounts for the development of normative practices, whether moral truths change over time, and many other topics. The volume will be valuable for advanced students and scholars of ethics and all who are interested in questions about the foundation of morality.

CARLA BAGNOLI is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Modena. She has written extensively in ethics and practical reasoning, and is the editor of *Morality and the Emotions* (2011).

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Agency and Metaethics,” co-authored with Matthew Evans (*Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 2012).

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Preface

The idea for this project has a long history. In the spring of 1994 I had the opportunity and the privilege to participate in a graduate seminar on political liberalism held by John Rawls at Harvard University. Even though the course was on political philosophy, I was particularly interested in its implications for meta-ethics. Until then, I had carried out my studies at the Universities of Florence and Milan, and I thought Kant belonged in the history that connects Rousseau to Marx – via Hegel, of course. To conceive of Kantian ethics as providing new resources for contemporary meta-ethics seemed to me both fascinating and challenging. Years later, I find that Kantian constructivism continues to generate the same mixture of interest and perplexity that I felt as a student. Time is ripe for an assessment of the many ways in which constructivism furthers our understanding of moral norms and of ourselves as sensitive to norms.

I should like to thank the many colleagues and friends who have supported this project, even though they have not contributed in writing: Clotilde Calabi, Luca Ferrero, Christine M. Korsgaard, Elijah Millgram, Richard Moran, Massimo Mugnai, Andrews Reath, Marco Santambrogio, Tamar Schapiro, and Gabriele Usberti. And, of course, I am most grateful to the authors of this volume for having agreed to participate in this project with enthusiasm.

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