

To conclude, *Perpetrator Disgust* is a groundbreaking book. It is a significant contribution to an understudied phenomenon and should be required reading not only for philosophers of emotion but also for genocide scholars, moral psychologists, and those, like me, who study the nexus between dehumanization and atrocity. Although short—only 205 pages, inclusive of the bibliography and index—it is packed with information and thoughtful analysis. It is also clearly written and accessible to the nonspecialist or general reader. Read it!

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Peterson, Martin. *Ethics in the Gray Area: A Gradualist Theory of Right and Wrong*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 227. \$110.00 (cloth).

Martin Peterson's *Ethics in the Gray Area* is a thorough defense of gradualism, the thesis that deontic properties like *right* and *wrong* are gradable. Some acts are entirely right, and some are entirely wrong, but there are some acts that are somewhat right and somewhat wrong. Peterson is careful to distinguish his gradualist thesis from other "gradualisms." Firstly, Peterson's gradualism is not the thesis that some acts are good to some degree and bad to some degree. It's a well-established view that evaluative concepts like "good" and "bad" are gradable in this way (e.g., going to a party is somewhat good, because it's fun, but also somewhat bad, because of the forthcoming hangover). Peterson's gradualism is a thesis about deontic concepts like "right" and "wrong." Secondly, Peterson's gradualism should be distinguished from Hurka's view that some acts may be, for example, more seriously wrong than others, depending on the value at stake (e.g., it's more seriously wrong to commit murder than to commit a traffic violation; see Thomas Hurka, "More Seriously Wrong, More Importantly Right," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5 [2019]: 41–58). Peterson's main foil in the book is the default view in ethics, that is, the binary theory, which states that "every act, if it has any deontic property at all, is either right or wrong" (5), but it is never somewhat right and somewhat wrong. The ambitious task the book undertakes is to argue that we should reject the binary theory in favor of gradualism. The book is superb. It is clearly written, is efficiently structured, and manages a thorough defense of a controversial view. It also neatly builds on Peterson's previous work (see, in particular, Martin Peterson, *The Dimensions of Consequentialism: Ethics, Equality and Risk* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013]).

The first part of the book (chaps. 1–3) is devoted to presenting three arguments in favor of gradualism. In chapter 1, Peterson argues that to find out whether deontic concepts are gradable we can look at whether they are systematically used within the linguistic community as if they were gradable, since use is a guide to meaning. For this purpose, Peterson presents the results of his empirical studies on the use of "right" and "wrong," which show that there are many cases where the vast majority of respondents claim that an act in a presented scenario is "right to some degree, but also wrong to some degree" (27).

Chapter 2 presents the argument from conflicting reasons. Peterson claims that “some moral conflicts are irresolvable, and, in those cases, the deontic properties of acts favored and disfavored by conflicting reasons cannot be accurately captured by binary deontic verdicts” (38). For Peterson, reasons are facts that have “the potential to impact normative verdicts”; they need not be accessible to the agent (to be a reason is not necessarily to be a reason the agent has), and they need not explain the agent’s motivation. More specifically, the argument is concerned with verdictive reasons: facts that impact “the deontic status of an act regardless of what other reasons obtain in a situation” (46). Verdictive reasons are never attenuated or disabled by other reasons. Consider Sartre’s famous example of a man deliberating whether to (a) join the French resistance during World War II or (b) look after his mother. Peterson claims that there are verdictive reasons supporting both options. Even if one of the options produces more value, it does not mean that the reasons favoring the other option are thereby attenuated or disabled. The crux of Peterson’s argument is the claim that a moral verdict should reflect the reasons that impact it. In cases where reasons conflict (as in Sartre’s example), we should conclude that neither option is entirely right and they are all somewhat right and somewhat wrong. According to Peterson, the binary theory cannot allow for such nuance: to say that an act is right is to neglect the reasons that speak against it.

Chapter 3 outlines the argument from conflicting sources of normativity. Peterson argues that there is more than one source of normativity. For instance, we have (moral) reasons to give money to charity, as well as (self-interested) reasons to save money for retirement. Peterson argues, against Sidgwick, that all-things-considered judgments are possible in cases where different sources of normativity clash. Furthermore, he argues against rigid views, which hold that in case of conflict between source *x* and *y*, it’s necessarily the case that “(i) *x* overrides *y* or (ii) *y* overrides *x* or (iii) *x* and *y* yield identical verdicts or (iv) *x* and *y* are incomparable” (62). Consequently, this makes Peterson’s position incompatible with some first-order moral theories, for example, the view that moral considerations always trump self-interest. Basing on the work of Peter Gärdenfors (see Peter Gärdenfors, *Conceptual Spaces: The Geometry of Thought* [Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000]; and Peter Gärdenfors, *The Geometry of Meaning* [Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2014]), Peterson argues that agents reach conclusions about a case where different sources of normativity are in conflict by comparing how similar it is to prototypical cases where only one source is at play (e.g., a case where I can save a child’s life at no cost to myself is a prototypical case where only morality as a source of normativity is at play). The cases where binary judgments are appropriate are the ones where a case is clearly more similar to prototypes of one source than another. The gray area between right and wrong emerges, because there are multiple prototypical cases for each source of normativity, thus not allowing the agent to decide whether a given case is more similar to prototypes for one source or another.

Chapter 4 presents six arguments for the binary theory, which Peterson finds lacking. In chapter 5, Peterson argues that the gradualist analysis is compatible with any of the major views (ontic, epistemic, semantic) on indeterminacy and vagueness. Here Peterson presents his ecumenical view: cases of vagueness and indeterminacy are not always instances of the same kind of phenomenon. There are cases where the epistemic theory best captures the nature of the case, but in other cases

the ontic or semantic theories may give a more adequate analysis. In chapters 6–9, Peterson presents the consequences of adopting the gradualist hypothesis. Chapter 6 develops a version of consequentialism compatible with gradualism. In chapter 7, Peterson shows how to choose between acts that are somewhat right and acts that are somewhat wrong. Here Peterson presents one of the central claims of the book, namely his probabilistic decision strategy:

(Probabilistic Criterion) If act *a* is neither right nor wrong simpliciter, then it is rationally permissible to perform *a* if and only if *a* is chosen randomly with a probability that reflects *a*'s degree of rightness.

If an agent has a choice between ϕ -ing (which is right to degree 0.6) and ψ -ing (which is right to degree 0.4), then the agent should ϕ 60 percent of the time and ψ 40 percent of the time. In the following chapter, Peterson argues that the strategy of choosing randomly should not be extended to the legal domain. When judges have to decide on cases for which it's indeterminate what they ought to do (according to the legal doctrine), then (*a*) they ought to follow precedents so as to make sure that they follow Aristotle's principle that like cases should be treated alike, and (*b*) if there is no precedent, then it's indeterminate what they (practically) ought to do. In the final chapter, Peterson argues that there is instrumental value in accepting gradualism, as there are reasons to think that using gradualist language may decrease political polarization.

One of the main strengths of the book is the care with which Peterson attempts to disarm any knee-jerk worries that a reader accustomed to the default binary theory might have regarding his gradualist proposal. That is not to say that Peterson has proved the truth of his gradualist hypothesis, but he has shown that this hypothesis should be taken seriously. That is no mean feat.

However, there are some worries about Peterson's proposal. First, the argument for gradualism presented throughout the book rests on the claims (*a*) that gradualist deontic judgment allows for a level of nuance that is unavailable to the proponent of the binary theory and (*b*) that we should desire such nuanced judgments from our moral theory. Suppose that in Case A the agent has a choice to save a drowning child and there are no pro tanto reasons against saving the child. In Case B the agent can save a child, but there is some weak pro tanto reason against saving the child (e.g., it would involve using someone as means). According to the binary theory, saving the child in both cases is right. Peterson argues that if we simply say that saving the child is right in both cases, we lose the nuanced difference between them (57). Peterson would want to say that saving the child is right to degree 1 (entirely right) in Case A, whereas in Case B saving the child would be almost entirely right (e.g., 0.99 right), but also it would involve doing some wrong. However, pace Peterson, it seems that the difference between the cases is readily apparent without employing the gradualist vocabulary. When the binary theorist passes verdicts on cases, they might preserve the nuance by noting that in the latter case, but not in the former, there is some (weak) pro tanto reason against saving the child.

Peterson is unsatisfied with such proposals, because he wants the difference between the cases to be reflected in the agent's behavior: "once it has been

established that an act is right, the supplementary judgments make no difference to the agent's behavior. . . . This strikes me as implausible" (57). Clearly, Peterson does not mean to say that we would want agents in Cases A and B to act differently: an agent acting according to the Probabilistic Criterion will save the child 100 percent of the time in Case A and 99 percent of the time in Case B; ergo, there is a 99 percent chance that the agents will save the child in both cases. It's rather that the difference between an entirely right act and an almost entirely right act should be reflected in agents' behavior across many cases. However, the binary theorist can also predict a difference in agents' behavior across cases; for instance, if an agent were to choose between (i) saving a child (with no pro tanto reasons against) and (ii) saving a child (but using someone as means), it would be right for the agent to choose (i). Therefore, it seems that the difference between the options available to the agent in Cases A and B can be articulated using the binary theory.

This is also the strategy that is deployed by theories of vagueness—for example, Williamson's epistemicism—that employ a bivalent notion of "truth" (Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness* [London: Routledge, 1994]). Suppose that Amy has \$N and Betty has \$N+1 and they are both borderline cases of being rich. Even if it turns out that "Amy is rich" and "Betty is rich" are both true (so there is no difference in truth value between them), we can still express the idea that the former is closer to falsehood than the latter by noting that it's definitely the case that if Amy is rich, then so is Betty (but not vice versa). The binary theorist may insist that there is no more need to adopt gradable deontic properties than there is to adopt gradable truth values.

Peterson would be unsatisfied with such an account because it does not allow for applying his favored decision strategy in cases where it's indeterminate what one ought to do. Using the binary theory, we can reproduce merely the ordinal differences between acts (e.g., it allows us to say that in choosing between (i) and (ii), opting for (i) is right). However, we cannot reproduce the cardinal differences between acts, that is, we cannot show by how much one act is "more right" than another. Whether this is relevant depends on what is the correct decision strategy when deciding between acts. Suppose that this is the correct decision strategy:

(Maximizing Criterion) It is rationally permissible to perform act *a* if and only if no alternative is right to a higher degree (145).

If this criterion is adopted, then the fact that the binary theory cannot reflect the cardinal differences between acts will be irrelevant: the agent ought to perform one of the "most right" acts at their disposal (the magnitude of the difference between degrees of rightness of acts will be irrelevant). However, the cardinal differences between acts matter if the Probabilistic Criterion favored by Peterson is adopted, because the difference between the degrees of rightness for acts available to the agent will correspond to the difference in probability that the agent performs these acts. If the Probabilistic Criterion is adopted, then the numerical values representing the degrees of rightness are not mere artifacts of the model but correspond to real properties.

Whether this is a problem for the binary view will depend on whether the Probabilistic Criterion is the correct decision strategy. There are *prima facie* reasons against the Probabilistic Criterion. Suppose that I am offered a choice between two bets on a roll of a six-sided die:

(B1) Win \$1 if I roll 5–6.

(B2) Win \$1 if I roll 1–4.

The expected value of (B1) is $1/3$ dollars, whereas the expected value of (B2) is $2/3$ dollars. If I follow the Probabilistic Criterion and choose randomly between (B1) and (B2), with the probability of my choice matching the expected value of the options, then the expected value of my choice is $5/9$ dollars as opposed to the expected value of $2/3$ dollars when employing the Maximizing Criterion (always choosing (B2)). Peterson claims that the advantages of the Probabilistic Criterion are more apparent when dealing with sequential choice (151). Suppose that we are given a choice between the following options:

(C1) Save a child, but use one person as means.

Degree of rightness = 0.99.

(C2) Save a child, but use two people as means.

Degree of rightness = 0.98.

However, suppose that choosing (C2) allows one to be in a position to choose to save additional children and make the choice between (C1) and (C2) again. Clearly, (C2) is the right choice because it allows one to save more children. Peterson claims that such examples undermine the Maximizing Criterion because it recommends choosing (C1): the degree of rightness in (C1) is greater than that in (C2). However, one might worry that the degrees of rightness that are assigned to (C1) and (C2) are not reflective of the situation. If choosing (C2) allows one to make the choice to save more children, then the well-being of these children should be incorporated as a basis for calculating the degree of rightness of (C1) and (C2); this would be consistent with Peterson's view (126) that every person is a separate source of normativity and should be incorporated into deontic judgments concerning them.

Another worry one might have about the Probabilistic Criterion is that it is inconsistent with the requirement to avoid determinate wrongs. Suppose that Mick is a murderer who went into an Indeterminate Survival Machine, so that it's indeterminate whether the person who came out, Nick, is identical to Mick. It's determinately wrong to punish people who have not committed crimes and determinately wrong to not punish murderers. However, since it's indeterminate whether Nick is Mick, it's indeterminate whether Nick ought to be punished. According to Peterson, indeterminate cases call for gradualist analyses. This means that we should decide to punish Nick (with some nonzero probability) or decide not to punish Nick (also with nonzero probability). Consequently, if we make repeated choices regarding people like Nick, we will inevitably punish some of them and let some of them go unpunished. However, acting in this way guarantees that we determinately do something wrong: if Nick = Mick, then letting Nick (and those

like him) go unpunished is wrong, and if Nick $\neq$ Mick, then punishing Nick (and those like him) is wrong. Choosing randomly guarantees that we determinately do something wrong.

Despite these worries about the Probabilistic Criterion, Peterson's discussion of the strengths and weakness of different decision strategies is one of the highlights of the book. Overall, the book does a great job in presenting a thorough defense of gradualism and is a great addition to the literature on normative ethics, moral vagueness, and indeterminacy, as well as decision-making under indeterminacy.

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Pettit, Philip. *The State*.

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Philip Pettit uses the term 'state' to refer to something other than government per se. Government is the "body of authorities or officials who run its business" (15), whereas the state is "the entity in whose name all such agents and agencies operate" (16).

The state has not been with us forever. Still, today's states are in no danger of withering away, for three reasons. We need states to protect us from other states. No state is powerful enough to appoint itself a world government. And peoples don't trust each other enough for any given state to be salient as a candidate for world government (1).

Thus, the "inescapability of the worldwide state system means that the future and welfare of our species—and perhaps that of others too—depends on how states perform. It is only if we can recruit states individually and collectively to the service of human flourishing that we can hope to deal with climate change, pandemic threat, chronic deprivation, and the eruptions of inhumanity that seem to come with our genes" (2). So we hope, although Pettit hastens to add that the state has a decidedly mixed record (2). Many entities we recognize as states today are failed states (3).

His question is, "Can we really expect [the state] to serve the cause of justice? Is it up to the task?" Yes, Pettit says, provided that rulers are not so powerful that they can afford to ignore their subjects. (Interestingly, this registers more doubt about the will than the ability of states to serve the cause.) Pettit adds that the state must not be powerless either, but this is "a less prominent possibility" (2). After all, the state's power and scope grew by at least an order of magnitude in the twentieth century. But this does not settle that the states around us have the power or will to serve the cause of justice. (Pettit's book recalls themes from Christopher Morris's superb book *An Essay on the Modern State* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], which Pettit cites in a footnote in the first chapter.)

Pettit salutes a realist tradition practiced by Williams and "Leat"—that is, Matt Sleat (3). Pettit says that a theory of the state is "required for developing a relatively realistic picture of what we may expect to be able to achieve by way of justice" (4).