

think does not stand in need of empirical proof.

Notes

1. Beauchamp TL. On common morality as embodied practice: A reply to Kukla. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2014;23:86–93.
2. Strong C. Kukla's argument against common morality as a set of precepts: On stranger tides. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2014;23:93–99.
3. Kukla R. Living with pirates: Common morality and embodied practice. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2014;23:75–85.

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A Few More Comments on Common Morality, Noting Some Points of Agreement

CARSON STRONG

Common morality theory begins with the observation that, despite the many controversies concerning moral matters, there are some moral precepts that virtually all of us accept as being part of morality. Some common morality theorists take “us” to refer to people in most, if not all, societies across time. I have argued that there are problems with the view that common morality is universal in this sense and have defended a conception of common morality that is group specific. I have suggested that countries are examples of groups concerning which it can make sense to say that there is a common morality. I have not observed people in all societies across time, but I have observed the statements and actions of people in my own country. In my commentary I distinguished common morality in the descriptive and normative senses.¹ If a group has a justifiable common morality, it is a common morality in both senses; it not only is accepted by virtually all in the group but also applies to all in the group. This view of common morality that I have

defended is an example of the approach Rebecca Kukla refers to when she says, “The proper, indeed the only viable, place to begin ethical reflection is from within and by way of attention to our shared moral life and commitments.”² I could not agree more. Even so, Kukla attributes to me views that are contrary to this approach, views I have not stated. She claims that my view is that common morality has universal applicability, but I have argued against that. She claims that my views do not take our shared moral life as a starting point, but that is not correct.

Kukla claims that I missed what motivated her discussion of the Pirates' Creed, namely, that she was using it to develop her own view about the nature of common morality. I think it would be difficult to miss that. Let me simply say that, given the space limitations, I chose not to discuss her own view and instead to focus on her rejection of certain views about common morality that Tom Beauchamp and I have expressed. One of these views is that coherentism is mistaken and that a

better theory for the structure of moral justification may be foundationalism, with common morality principles as part of the foundation. Kukla claims that Beauchamp rejects coherentism on the basis of the Pirates' Creed being coherent. She then develops her case that this is not a good argument. She concludes by saying, "And thus there is nothing about pirates that drives us to insist on a body of nonnegotiable moral principles, common or otherwise."³ This seems clearly to be part of her rejection of Beauchamp's view that common morality includes a set of principles that are foundational. My reply was that there *is* something that makes it reasonable to give consideration to foundationalism, with the precepts of common morality as the foundation—namely, the unacceptability of coherentism as it is currently understood.

Kukla finds my complaint against wide reflective equilibrium (WRE) to be peculiar, but this seems to be based on a misunderstanding of my argument. In her response, she claims that "his argument is that we can never be sure, no matter how much reflective equilibrium we engage in, that our practice of adjusting our beliefs isn't infected with bias." I wish to make it clear that that is not my argument. Rather, I pointed out that Norman Daniels's main argument for WRE is

that it removes the bias that can be present in narrow reflective equilibrium. I then pointed out that WRE does not succeed in its goal of removing bias. Thus, I was attacking WRE by showing that the main argument *for* it is unsuccessful. I supplemented this with an argument that WRE is not useful for justifying moral claims. I agree with Kukla that both foundationalism and coherentism are subject to the problem of bias, but my argument against coherentism is not based simply on the possibility of bias.

Concerning the rest of Kukla's response, I have favorable comments. Here Kukla does a nice job of explaining her views about common morality. The question of what common morality consists of is an important one, and Kukla deserves credit for pushing our thinking about this. Critical questions can be raised about her view, but I think these questions are worth pursuing.

Notes

1. Strong C. Kukla's argument against common morality as a set of precepts: On stranger tides. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2014;23:93–99.
2. Kukla R. Response to Strong and Beauchamp: At world's end. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2014;23:99–103.
3. Kukla R. Living with pirates: Common morality and embodied practice. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2014;23:75–85.