

this sense. In any event, Kant in a variety of ways poses the question ‘from whence the moral law obligates’ (*GMS*, p. 450), and it is quite complicated to unravel what he has in mind (or rather, what the text means). The problem with Timmermann’s commentary is that there is simply no way to do justice to Kant’s text (and its interpretations suggested so far) without going deep into tiny details. The most striking example for this is the notorious ‘circle’ in section three of *GMS III*. Again, this too is a highly tricky and ramified story. And Timmermann does not even bother to take notice of the fact (at least he does not refer to it) that Kant not only calls this a circle but also an ‘*Erbittung eines Prinzips*’ (*GMS*, p. 453), that is, a *petitio principii*, which, as has been pointed out in the literature, is quite remarkable since for Kant a *petitio principii* is different from a *circulus in probando*. Now what all of this means and implies is hard to say; in any event, simply to ignore it seems not be the right way to comment on a text, and yet that is exactly what Timmermann does. His commentary is full of sweeping assertions that are just this: sweeping assertions, and nothing else.

One more example: Timmermann mentions Kant’s talk of the ‘*Selbsttätigkeit der Vernunft*’ (spontaneity of reason, p. 140). Fair enough, but what does this mean and, most importantly, are we to understand this ‘*Selbsttätigkeit der Vernunft*’ as practical reason? There is nothing about this (there is only a side remark later, on p. 145). But why then bother to read Timmermann’s commentary? A beginner will not be made adequately familiar with the basic ideas and problems; for an advanced reader, there is simply nothing to be learned from it. It is possible to outline the structure and meaning of most difficult texts in a limited number of pages; but that’s only possible if such an outline is based on an intense and careful study of the text itself.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> All translations of the *GMS* are taken from Allen Wood’s translation (Yale University Press, 2002).

*New Essays on the History of Autonomy: A Collection Honouring J. B. Schneewind*, edited by Natalie Brender and Larry Krasnoff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, ISBN 978-0-5218-2835-2.

This book of essays honouring J. B. Schneewind promises ‘a more interesting and even a more appealing Kant’ (p. 3). The nine essays seek to fulfill this promise by embracing Schneewind’s effort to re-contextualize

Kant's enlightened moral philosophy. The immediate historical context of the Kantian project was the Enlightenment's desertion of history and religion to provide morality with a rational basis both stable and secular. Contributors to this volume share Schneewind's view that Kant's secular moral philosophy emerged from theological disputations within the Christian community that pitted voluntarism against intellectualism. Taking leave of history and religion needs to be interpreted as a response internal to Christianity. This is a context 'far removed from what we may understand as Enlightenment rationalism' (p. 3). This aspect of Schneewind's argument is studied in the first part of the book entitled 'Autonomy in context'. The second part, 'Autonomy in practice', explores the implications of a Kant removed from Enlightenment rationalism and 'more sympathetic to our empirical nature' (p. 3). In the concluding and most compelling contribution, Richard Rorty diverts from Schneewind's purposes and seeks to move beyond the Kantian project altogether.

Jennifer Herdt focuses on the modern impasse between theological voluntarists and intellectualists. Voluntarists affirmed the sovereign authority of a transcendent God. Offended by the idea of a divine tyrant, intellectualists assumed that God and humans shared membership in a moral community with no moral gulf separating them. From the Cambridge Platonists to Leibniz, the intellectualist argument 'pressed in the direction of purely formal principles . . . and paved the way for Kant' (p. 35). But the denial of divine sovereign authority undercut divine transcendence, which in turn rendered God irrelevant and advanced the secularization of moral thought. Herdt's main interest lies in an appeal to analogical reasoning as a way to attain a noncontrastative account of transcendence. This account 'avoids both direct contrast and direct identity between God and a created reality' (p. 37), and eliminates the theological motivation which originally led to the impasse between voluntarists and intellectualists. Theodicy is the topic addressed by Mark Larrimore. Theodicy, Leibniz's response to Cartesian and Hobbesian voluntarism, seeks to 'remove doubts about the goodness of God' (p. 70). Leibniz situates the debate about voluntarism in the context of philosophical theology. If moral values depend on God's free choice, if, as Hobbes maintains, *auctoritas non veritas facit legem*, justice and goodness cannot be said to be divine attributes. Voluntarism fosters an attitude of servile obedience with respect to a despotic God's indifferent, arbitrary will. By inspiring fear, and not love, a voluntarist God undermines religion and morality.

Knud Haakonssen examines the moral voluntarism of Hobbes, Pufendorf and Hume, and the separation it brings about between philosophy and religion. This allows focusing on the human will as the 'key explanatory factor' of moral behaviour (p. 96). Haakonssen's main concern is the impact this tradition has had on contemporary individualism and anti-metaphysical conventionalism. In his view, voluntarism 'helped undermine the religious foundations of moral theory and foster empirical study of the moral conventions by which the species lives' (p. 106). Finally, Stephen Darwall discusses voluntarism in the context of contemporary definitions of morality as a system of mutual accountability.

This approach is prefigured in Pufendorf's natural law theory, though in his case morality involves accountability to God. Pufendorf and Suarez elaborate paradigmatic voluntarist conceptions. Their argument is aimed against Thomistic intellectualism and stipulates that eternal laws by themselves cannot be constitutive of morality. Only God's personal commands can impose obligations and generate accountability. Intellectualists like Leibniz and Cudworth object. We are obligated by God's command not because it is God's command but because we acknowledge beforehand our inferiority to superior rule. 'Without its already being true that we should obey God's commands, these cannot obligate us to perform specific actions' (p. 120).

The contributors to the first part of this book share a line of argumentation that remarkably clarifies and enriches Schneewind's *The Invention of Autonomy*. In his wake, they continue to plough the ground where Kant's categorical imperative, Hegel's notion of mutual recognition and Rawls's original position will blossom (p. 126). Only John Cooper's learned and lively contribution on Lipsius and neo-Stoicism strays away from the Schneewindian forward thrust. In his view, Lipsius, though coincidental with the perfectionism espoused by Descartes and Leibniz, 'was not concerned at all with problems of ethical theory' defined in modern terms, and was more interested in a revival of classical practical philosophy (p. 26).

The second part of the book, revolving mainly around Kant, opens with Larry Krasnoff's contribution. His main topic is an assessment of the task Kant assigns to moral philosophy. The standard view attributes only a theoretical task to Kantian moral philosophy – secure a non-empirical space for moral freedom in a mechanically determined world and thus refute the sceptic's annihilation of moral freedom. Against the canon, Krasnoff superposes a practical aim – secure the possibility of progressive reform and transform a 'potentially indifferent world according to a coherent and realizable end' (p. 143). The practical aspect of Kantian morality is also central to Natalie Brender's contribution. Official Kantianism blames the recalcitrance of our passions for failure to realize the ideals dictated by practical reason. Brender sees an additional problem – rational ideals may need to be adjusted to our interpretations of experience if they are to be realized and our moral lives attain coherence and avoid disorientation.

Much like Schneewind, Onora O'Neill wants to shield Kantian autonomy from exclusivist voluntarist interpretations. In her view, these seek to identify autonomy with selfishness and self-centredness, and if Kant were to adopt such a view it would be justified to blame him for shortchanging solidarity (p. 182). At the same time, O'Neill wants to avoid giving pride of place to intellectualist interpretations and the emphasis they assign to antecedently assumed rational standards. She acknowledges the difficulty besetting Kant's formula of autonomy: 'the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal laws' (p. 183). We face the dilemma that rends voluntarism and intellectualism apart: either I make 'my own will the author of my obligations' or I rely on

the antecedent rationality and universality of the laws that bind me (p. 186). O'Neill believes Kant solves it by demanding that I conduct myself 'on the basis of principles on which all others could conduct their lives' (p. 188). Kant sticks up for standards of reason that lack dictatorial authority.

In contrast to the fine Schneewindian balance sought by O'Neill, Rorty interprets Kant as a one-sided intellectualist. He believes that Kantian autonomy betrays the liberal ideal of negative freedom and surrenders to the dictatorial demands of authoritative reason. Like Annette Baier, Rorty finds fault with Kant's notion of unconditional obligations. He thinks that such obligations substitute reason for God (p. 198) and are remnants of an authoritarian tradition. Seen in this context, Kant's affirmation of moral autonomy loses much of its original appeal. From Rorty's own deep-seated anti-authoritarian stance, a Kantian morality of autonomous self-governance reduces to a morality of obedience. Autonomy is read as obedience to the unconditional, authoritative commands of reason. To deconstruct Kantian intellectualism Rorty appeals to what he interprets as Dewey's voluntarism. But by denying appeals to 'something stable and permanent, something whose authority is not subject to empirical test' (p. 203), he moves, to his own detriment, beyond the Deweyian conception. Dewey does not share Rorty's anti-authoritarianism. For him, the real issue concerns the relation, not the separation, of freedom and authority. In his view, freedom and authority, just as stability and change, form an intimate and organic union. Schneewind would agree.

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