

Book Reviews

Lawrence Jost and Julian Wuerth (eds), *Perfecting Virtue: New Essays on Kantian Ethics and Virtue Ethics*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011

Pp. xiv+308

ISBN 978-0-521-51525-2 (hbk) US\$90

doi:10.1017/S1369415411000379

One clear sign of virtue ethics's impact on contemporary ethical theory is that increasing numbers of authors who do not regard themselves as virtue ethicists are nevertheless writing more and more articles and books on virtue-theoretic themes such as moral character and agency, the positive role of emotions in ethics, and the limitations of rule-based models of moral choice. Virtue ethics has shifted the focus of discussion, and this trend is nowhere clearer than in the field of Kantian ethics. Beginning in the early 1980s, Anglophone philosophers began to seriously explore the role of virtue in Kant's ethics,¹ and this literature has matured to the point where we now have entire monographs and anthologies devoted to the topic.²

Perfecting Virtue: New Essays on Kantian Ethics and Virtue Ethics is a collection of twelve commissioned essays, five of which were first presented at a conference held at the University of Cincinnati in 2005 entitled 'Virtue Ethics and Kantian Ethics'. The volume includes a short Introduction, a Bibliography of works cited, and an Index. As is often the case with anthologies of invited essays, the result is a bit eclectic, but in the following remarks I will offer some brief comments on each contribution, devoting somewhat more space to issues that may be of special interest to readers of this journal.

Marcia Baron, in 'Virtue Ethics in Relation to Kantian Ethics: An Opinionated Overview and Commentary', examines the ongoing debate between virtue ethics and Kantian ethics from a Kantian perspective. On her view (which, she notes, has changed over the years), attempts to show that Kantian ethics is compatible with virtue ethics are 'unnecessarily combative' (32). But since when is politeness expected in philosophical writing? (See e.g. Baron's own combative remarks about Rosalind Hursthouse's work on pp. 18–27.) A second reason for her reticence to deal with the compatibility question is that virtue ethics is a late twentieth-century concept that did not exist in Kant's day. This is true, but the point applies to many of the conceptual boxes that philosophers try to place their predecessors

in; including, in this case, ‘deontology’, a term that did not yet exist when Kant wrote the *Groundwork*.³ Granted, greater awareness of the history of philosophical concepts is needed, but at bottom it seems that we can only talk about the past by means of *our* concepts, language, and concerns. People who think otherwise are fooling themselves.

Rosalind Hursthouse, in ‘What does the Aristotelian *Phronimos* Know?’ is the only contributor not to mention ‘Kant’ or ‘Kantian’ once in her essay. She defends a particularist interpretation of *phronēsis*, arguing that it is ‘not susceptible of codification in rules’ (48) but rather something that ‘can be acquired only by habitual engagement in virtuous action’ (53). Philosophers who lack virtue are thus in a poor position to give advice about how to live and act. Some of what Hursthouse rightly draws attention to regarding the *phronimos* can also be found in Kant’s frequent remarks that judgement ‘cannot be *instructed*, but only exercised’—‘it is the understanding that comes only with years, it is based on one’s long experience’ (*Anth.* 7: 199; see also *CPR*, A133/B172). But that of course is another essay.

Allen Wood, in ‘Kant and Agent-Centered Ethics’, argues that ‘Kantian ethics is actually not compatible with any form of what is now called “virtue ethics”’ (59), but when he also remarks on the same page regarding virtue ethics that ‘I am not at all sure that garb would fit him any worse than it does Aristotle’, one begins to wonder. Despite his reluctance to view Kant as a virtue ethicist, Wood is the only contributor to devote much attention to the issue of what Kant actually means by ‘virtue (*Tugend*)’. For those who want a clear text-based overview of Kant’s theory of virtue, pp. 69–78 of his essay are the best section in the anthology to consult. Much of Wood’s animus against virtue ethics is political, and stems from his sense that it is ‘too differential to “culture” itself—that is, to a kind of a society in which morality is closer to mere custom’. Instead, what is needed is a ‘radical ethics of *permanent revolution* with respect to social custom’ (87). This seemingly inherent conservatism is one of several vices of virtue ethics that I also drew attention to when I first began to study the topic,⁴ but I had in mind *polis*-based forms of Aristotelian virtue ethics that are rooted in the practices of a homogeneous community. I am no longer convinced that all varieties of virtue ethics necessarily exhibit this vice. Why must Kantians be the only ones who can lay claim to the banner of a radical ethics of permanent revolution with respect to social custom?

Barbara Herman, in ‘The Difference that Ends Make’, draws connections between virtue ethics and Kantian ethics via the concept of ends. Virtue ethics is ‘end-anchored in a substantive way’ (95), while Kantian ethics is not traditionally viewed as end-anchored. But on Herman’s view, ends are in fact ‘the fulcrum of both the foundational and practical sides’ of

Kant's ethics—Kant's ethics is 'at its core, about ends' (95). The chief end in Kant's ethics is not happiness or human flourishing, but rational nature as an end in itself—an end she dubs 'the gateway concept to Kant's view of moral action and agency' (97). The most radical suggestion in Herman's essay comes at the end, when she recasts Kant's ethics as a proto-romantic ethics of self-realization. The motive of duty, she holds, traditionally understood as 'a psychological state of obedience to a rule', 'is better described in the language of self-expression or self-realization for our kind of rational being' (114).

Talbot Brewer, in 'Two Pictures of Practical Thinking', defends an Aristotelian model of practical thinking against a Kantian one. The latter, he claims, is 'the modern picture of practical reason', and 'has by now been adopted by most contemporary action theorists and ethicists' (123). And what is the Kantian/modern picture of practical thinking? Essentially, it is one that views practical thinking as 'a discrete and occasional process that precedes and initiates action' (116) via the adoption of a maxim. On the contrasting Aristotelian model, practical thinking is 'a continuous activity that accompanies and completes those activities it guides' (116). Brewer is certainly correct to stress the centrality of maxims in Kant's picture of practical thinking, but it is odd that he devotes no analysis to what Kant means by a 'maxim (*Maxime*)'. Many Kant scholars have argued that Kantian maxims are not merely specific intentions for discrete acts, but also underlying intentions to lead a certain sort of life or be a certain sort of person. On this interpretation, the alleged sharp contrast between the Aristotelian and Kantian pictures of practical thinking that Brewer sketches begins to fade.

Julian Wuerth, in 'Moving beyond Kant's Account of Agency in the *Grounding*', offers a text-based survey of Kant's account of agency outside of the *Grundlegung*. Once we go beyond this celebrated work, we encounter a conception of moral agency that is 'far more than pure reason' (162); one that is also 'more continuous with the interests of virtue ethicists' (150). The negative side of Wuerth's analysis is a critique of the 'incomplete and vague' (161) account of agency in the *Grundlegung*. But here we should keep in mind Kant's clear warning to readers in the Preface of this text: 'The present groundwork ... is nothing more than the search for and establishment of *the supreme principle of morality*, which constitutes by itself a business that in its purpose is complete and to be separated from every other moral investigation' (4: 392).

Lara Denis, in 'A Kantian Conception of Human Flourishing', argues—contrary to the received view—that Kant's ethics does contain a distinctive and appealing conception of human flourishing, one rooted in both his discussion of the highest good and his doctrine of duties, especially duties to oneself. The concept of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) is of course central to Aristotelian ethics, and in presenting her argument

Denis is clearly trying to draw Kantian ethics closer to the dominant form of virtue ethics. Kantians too are concerned with ‘the most engaging moral questions’; namely, ‘what sort of person to be and how to live’ (164). At the same time, she appropriately cautions readers that ‘it would be wrong to attribute Aristotelian eudaimonism to Kant’ (170) for several reasons.

Paul Guyer, in ‘Kantian Perfectionism’, focuses not on virtue ethics *per se* (which he claims was ‘not on Kant’s docket’ (194)), but rather on perfectionism; namely, the view that the good is the realization of human excellence, and that right action is that which tends to promote the good. He defends the claim that Kant’s ethics can be understood as a form of perfectionism, albeit a form that rejects the ‘consequentialism, naturalism, and intellectualism’ (200) of Christian Wolff’s perfectionist ethics. In Kant’s ethics, according to Guyer, ‘the moral ideal consists in the perfection of our will’ (213) or ‘virtuousness in the deepest sense’, and thus in the end ‘perhaps it is Kant rather than anyone else who should be regarded as the best model for an ethics of virtue’ (214). But is there a place for strong deontic constraints within perfectionism, and if not, are we still talking about Kant?

Nancy Sherman, in ‘Aristotle, the Stoics, and Kant on Anger’, argues against the Stoics and in agreement with Aristotle that the virtuous person will sometimes express anger. And Kant? While acknowledging that Kant ‘takes many of his cues from the Stoics’ (235), she too tries to move Kant closer to Aristotle by arguing that Kant can allow for appropriate “practical” forms of anger’ (238). Such anger is not pathological or feeling-based, but is rather a reason-generated emotion ‘bound up with an appreciation of our status as moral agents’ (238). Anger ‘comes in many flavors’, and some of its flavours (moral outrage and indignation) ‘are deep expressions of respect for humanity’ (239).

Christine Swanton, in ‘Kant’s Impartial Virtues of Love’, argues, contra many virtue ethicists, that love is a fundamental moral force in Kant’s ethics, and that Kantian love has both ‘impartial and partial dimensions’ (241). The more familiar universal love stressed by Kant is not feeling-based, but it does nevertheless involve ‘adopting the incentive of love’ (249). This incentive, though not constituted by inclination, pleasure, or delight, is incompatible with an attitude of indifference towards others. In the course of presenting her case for love as a primary moral force in Kant’s ethics, Swanton also sheds light on several related virtues and vices such as pride, humility, and forgiveness. Although she concludes by warning that she has ‘not argued that Kant’s ethics can or should be seen as a species of virtue ethics’ (259), her successful effort to demonstrate the central role of love in Kant’s ethics does undermine ‘virtue-theoretic criticism of Kant’s ethics is a variety of ways’ (259).

Michael Slote, in ‘The Problem we All have with Deontology’, argues that deontology (which he confesses he ‘can’t define’, but which entails the

view ‘that it can sometimes be morally right or obligatory *not* to act for the best’ (260)), is extremely difficult to justify. Consequentialists deem it unworthy of justifying, Aristotelian virtue ethicists do not have much to say about it, and even Kantians, at least according to Slote, fail to offer a convincing justification of deontology. Slote himself writes not as a foe but rather as a friend of deontology, and argues (surprise, surprise) that the best prospects for justifying deontology lie in a version of the sentimentalist virtue ethics that he has defended previously—more specifically, in a sentimentalism rooted in empathy (267).

Finally, Timothy Chappell, in ‘Intuition, System, and the “Paradox” of Deontology’, attempts to defuse the paradox of deontology by defending a pluralist account of agency. Agency’s role is not merely productive (as consequentialists assume), but also reactive (e.g. punishing the guilty) and expressive (e.g. acting out of respect for humanity). Once we grant that agency has multiple roles, the paradox of deontology disappears. (Does this also mean that the *problem* of justifying deontology has thereby been solved?) Chappell holds that Kant defends an expressivist account of moral agency (280). (But does Kant hold that moral agents merely express attitudes? Do they also assert truth claims?) However, in the end Chappell writes as antitheorist who sees himself as defending plausibility over systematic purity (288).

While it may not be the case that the contributors to this anthology have fully succeeded in perfecting virtue, *Perfecting Virtue* is certainly an excellent resource for students and scholars of ethical theory; particularly those who are concerned both with distinctions as well as possible intersections between the two traditions of virtue ethics and Kantian ethics.

Robert B. Loudon

Department of Philosophy, University of Southern Maine
email: Loudon@maine.edu

Notes

- 1 See e.g. O’Neill 1984 (repr. in O’Neill 1989) and Loudon 1986 (repr. most recently in Loudon 2011).
- 2 See e.g. Baxley 2010 and Betzler 2008.
- 3 For discussion, see Loudon 1996.
- 4 See Loudon 1984 (repr. in Crisp and Slote 1997).

References

- Baxley, Anne Margaret (2010) *Kant’s Theory of Virtue: The Value of Autocracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Betzler, Monika, ed. (2008) *Kant’s Ethics of Virtue*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Crisp, Roger and Slote, Michael, eds (1997) *Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Louden, Robert B. (1984) 'On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21, 227–36.
- (1986) 'Kant's Virtue Ethics'. *Philosophy*, 61, 473–89.
- (1996) 'Toward a Genealogy of Deontology'. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34, 571–92.
- (2011) *Kant's Human Being: Essays on his Theory of Human Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- O'Neill, Onora (1989) *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1984) 'Kant After Virtue'. *Inquiry*, 26, 387–405.

B. Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka, *Kant's Doctrine of Right: A Commentary*
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010

Pp. 336

ISBN 978-0-521-19664-2 (hbk) £65.00, US\$110.00

doi:10.1017/S1369415411000380

Kant's legal and political philosophy has in recent years enjoyed something of a renaissance. One of the latest contributions in this regard is *Kant's Doctrine of Right: A Commentary* by B. Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka.¹ In line with a growing number of scholars, the authors identify the first part of the *Metaphysics of Morals* as key to his position on the subject and provide a methodical and in-depth analysis of the 1797 work. Their main aim is to explain 'Kant's system of individual rights' presented here, as well as his 'idea of the state which provides the apparatus for ensuring these rights' (2) to show how and why this previously often overlooked work gives us his most coherent deliberations on law and politics. But whereas I am in full agreement with the authors on this important claim, I am—as I later will go on to argue—in some disagreement with quite a few of their interpretations.

As one would expect, the *Commentary* is a thorough investigation of what the authors hold to be the chief constituents of the Doctrine of Right and pays close attention to details during the span of its 300 pages. Bar extensive comparisons to Achenwall, references to past and present scholarly discussions, even to Kant's earlier texts, have been cut to a minimum. The scholar or student interested in a basic introduction to his philosophy of right might want to search elsewhere; the book does not stray far from the original sections and presupposes a fairly good knowledge of the subject beforehand. Appropriately, it demands a lot from the reader as it delves into the minutiae of the work.²

Byrd and Hruschka are at their most convincing when they go into the finer details of the Doctrine of Right to highlight its ingenuity, even as