

having its own intrinsic, non-relational nature, and second, that knowledge is a relation between a subject and an object. These imply nothing about the nature of existing things or the source and extent of knowledge, and would seem acceptable to all theories of knowledge. Kant's aim is to draw the right lines concerning what we can know based on an accurate appraisal of our subjective capacities. Despite my antecedent agreement with Allais, I learned a great deal from her analysis. Especially illuminating are her account of appearances as 'essentially manifest', and her explanation of the relations between Kant's idealism and his defence of metaphysics. While there may be minor points of contention, she has succeeded in presenting a strong, coherent and well-argued defence of Kant's idealism.

Jill Vance Buroker

California State University, San Bernardino

email: jburoker@csusb.edu

Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf M. Bader (eds), *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*

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1. Introduction

In the introduction to their collection, Aufderheide and Bader explain that the concept of a highest good, a concept once central to ethical theorizing, has during the past few centuries been given too little attention. They see this as due, on the one hand, to a general movement away from teleological and theological ethics. They also see it as collateral effect of Aristotelian and Kantian dismissals of consequentialist concerns. That is, the volume's editors contend that Aristotelian and Kantian ethicists have forgotten that the ultimate point of moral striving is not the moral betterment of the agent, but rather the betterment of the world. They thus have assembled this anthology in order to draw contemporary Aristotelians and Kantians back to the Highest Good as *the* guiding principle for ethical theorizing.

The ten chapters that comprise this collection include four that are specific to Aristotle's treatment of the Highest Good, four that focus

on Kant, and two that provide comparative studies of the two philosophers. Given the venue for this review as well as space constraints, only those chapters that deal with both Aristotle and Kant (chapters 5, 6) or Kant alone (chapters 7–10) will here be discussed. Apologies to the authors of the first four chapters.

2. Aristotle and Kant

Robert Louden authors the first of the collection's two comparative chapters. He focuses on two key points of similarity between Aristotle's and Kant's treatments of the Highest Good. The first point is what Louden calls a 'Rational Life Plan' (p. 114). As he explains, both philosophers present the Highest Good 'as a way of bringing order and coherence to our practical lives' (p. 115). Although their respective arguments for positing a Highest Good are quite different, they are nevertheless in agreement that there is such a highest principle, and that this principle is a constitutive feature of rational agency (p. 116).

Second, Louden presses that, for both Kant and Aristotle, the Highest Good is not to be taken as underlying the moral law, as if it were a more fundamental criterion for determining right action. This point, of course, is quite clear in Kant (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5: 108, *Religion* 6: 4),¹ though it is far less so in the case of Aristotle. This point of comparison is important to Louden's chapter (as well as Engstrom's), not so much because it offers insight into the Highest Good, but rather because it rebuts the claim that Aristotle uses *eudaimonia* as the criterion for the good.

The remaining third of the chapter turns to some of the controversies associated with the so-called 'theological conception' of the Highest Good. In contrast to Andrews Reath's well-known 'Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant' (Reath 1988), Louden argues that the second of these two conceptions, the so-called 'secular conception', is without meaningful textual support – and thus only the theological conception should be accepted as representative of Kant's actual views. Nevertheless, despite this textual point, Louden does not think that this conception has much philosophical merit. He challenges it, arguing first that Kant has not made his case for why the Highest Good should be conceived of as happiness distributed in proportion to moral worth (I henceforth will refer to the principle of proportionate distribution as PPD). Second, he argues that if Kant's Highest Good is only possible through God's agency, then it 'has the effect of cancelling out human being's duty' (p. 126).

I will bypass the first claim, but would like to briefly address the second. It has long been maintained that our duty to promote the Highest Good (hereafter, HGd) is a duty to do our part distributing happiness in accordance

with the moral law. In fact, one of the reasons why so many Kantians dismiss the doctrine, or at least its theological elements, is because it hardly makes sense for us to be given this responsibility if God is posited as the agent who really does most of it. Louden is thus correct that, with our duty so described, the theological conception shows as terribly flawed. As other chapters in this collection likewise associate HGd with PPD, I will return to this issue below.

Steven Engstrom offers us a second comparative discussion. Like Louden, he also develops the claim that, behind the apparent differences between Kant's and Aristotle's ethical theories, there are deeper similarities. In particular, he too holds that Aristotle ultimately grounds value not in some 'Eudaimonic naturalism' but rather in 'the soul's practical activity in accordance with reason' (p. 133).

Given the limited space, let me leave to one side an assessment of the internal merits of Engstrom's contribution and instead consider its relationship to the collection as a whole. In particular, I fear that this collection does not serve as the right venue for this chapter. It has too little to say about the Highest Good itself, focusing overwhelmingly on the 'supreme good' rather than the 'complete good'. Further, when Engstrom does discuss the latter, he dismisses Kant's overt characterizations of it, considering them a 'distracting assemblage of ideas' (p. 139). That is, akin to Paul Guyer's well-known comment that Kant's Highest Good has nothing to do with reward and punishment (Guyer 2005: 289n.), there is here a blunt dismissal of anything that resembles 'Christian Eschatology'. Such, Engstrom insists, 'form[s] no part of Kant's exposition of the concept of the highest good' (p. 139). There is no role for God or immortality in Kant's Highest Good. The Kantian 'complete good' is instead something realized by us through a 'practical knowledge' whereby happiness is gained via 'good choice and conduct' (p. 156).

3. Kant

The remaining four papers of this collection (chapters 7–10) deal solely with Kant's treatment of the Highest Good. In the spirit of the collection's introduction, they also give relatively more attention to the theological conception of the doctrine compared to what is typical in the literature. Overall, though, the results are mixed. While some chapters offer assistance to this besieged and beleaguered version of the doctrine, others perpetuate the interpretative mistakes that have so dogged it over the years.

For example, in chapter 7, 'The Inner Voice: Kant on Conditionality and God as Cause', Rachel Barney repeats the standard rendering of HGd in terms of PPD. Thus when describing a 'division of labor between the human moral agent and God' (p. 173), she has both God and humanity involved in

the ‘administering [of] proportionality’ (p. 167). We just do it ‘locally’ while God does it ‘globally’.

Such an overlap between our charge and God’s has been the target of considerable criticism. In addition to Loudon’s objection that it ‘has the effect of cancelling out human being’s duty’ (p. 126), many have argued that since we lack the capacity to judge moral worthiness, we cannot even begin to act on HGd insofar as we are to proportion happiness in accordance with moral worth (see e.g. Anderson-Gold 2001: 31).

Clearly, interpreting HGd in terms of PPD brings with it numerous difficulties, difficulties that, for many, justify the outright rejection of the theological conception. Yet these difficulties, and thus the weaknesses of the theological conception, are more artefacts of the secondary literature than ones for which Kant is genuinely responsible – for the standard treatment of HGd in terms of PPD does not in fact represent Kant’s actual views.

Early Anglophone interpreters, as they struggled to determine what HGd prescribes, assumed that since Kant presents the Highest Good, as an ideal state of affairs, in terms of PPD, it must therefore be that he intended HGd to be our duty to do our part in this proportioning. Yet this assumption, one that has continued to shape our understanding of the Highest Good ever since, is in error. While Barney is quite right that Kant proposed a division of labour between ourselves and God, her account of this division depicts just differing degrees of contribution towards the same task rather than the more fundamental division that Kant in fact proposes.

For example, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, when explaining the ‘practical task’ of realizing the Highest Good, Kant distinguishes between his postulation of immortality for the sake of our role, which is ‘the first and principal part of the highest good, morality’, versus the postulation of God for the sake of the ‘second element of the highest good, namely, happiness proportioned to that morality’ (5: 124). Likewise, in the Theory/Practice essay, he makes clear that only the first part of the Highest Good, i.e. morality, is in our control, whereas ‘both taken together’ require a moral ruler of the world (8: 279). Then, in the *Religion*, he writes that (a) HGd as a realized ideal is ‘a work whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but only from God himself’ and yet (b) ‘human beings are not permitted on this account to remain idle in the undertaking’ (6: 100). This is because we have a duty only we and not God can fulfil.² This ‘*sui generis* duty . . . of the human race toward itself’ (6: 97) is, in short, to become corporately worthy of the happiness that God – within the ‘Ethical Community’ – then distributes in accordance with moral worth.³

Turning to Bader’s chapter, which is perhaps the most philosophically disciplined of the collection, we find a reconstruction of the second *Critique*’s argument for the Highest Good. Of note in his analysis (a point found as well in

Barney) is the recognition that the distribution of happiness in accordance with moral worth cannot be by chance, good fortune or a principle that only contingently relates the two. The need for a necessary connection (5: 124–5) is thus key to Bader's account of why Kant must postulate God (p. 201). Although we human beings can *guess* as to the moral worth of one another, and also have the power to effect *some* proportionate happiness, neither our natures nor the causal order of the physical world provide a principle that can guarantee proportionality. Bader then offers essentially the same corrective as I have proposed, for he recognizes that God alone is responsible for the proportioning while it is up to us to become worthy of the happiness granted by God.

In David Sussman's chapter, we return to some global doubts about the Highest Good's relevance to Kantian ethics. Underlying his concern is the sense that Kant's commitment to the doctrine is not simply pre-Critical but pre-philosophical. Rather than the doctrine rising out of his ethical theory, it seems more that Kant already had an interest in it and wanted to find some place for it. This impression is all the more substantiated as we consider how much his arguments for the doctrine change through each of the *Critiques* and then into the *Religion*. Sussman then turns to the *Religion's* treatment of the doctrine, particularly as it is discussed towards the opening of part III. Where Kant there uses the Highest Good as the foundation for his ecclesiology, and thus links our duty to the role the church is to have in addressing our social vices, Sussman suggests that he underestimates the power of love. Hence, in contrast to the *Religion's* thesis that 'morality inevitably leads to religion' (6: 7n.), Sussman maintains that love can drive our corporate commitment to the moral worthiness of the species, without need for the religious framework that Kant proposes (pp. 226–8).

Jens Timmerman rounds out the collection with a significant, albeit limited, discussion of the religious significance of transcendental idealism. Although Kant is routinely taken to be anti-religious, there is a growing trend in contemporary scholarship which sees this view as mistaken, as a failure to understand that his critique of metaphysical approaches to theology was actually meant to defend faith against rationalist presumptions. Hence, in contrast to those who want to leverage into Kant's practical philosophy some special access to metaphysical knowledge, Timmerman makes it abundantly clear that the positive side of his philosophy of religion develops instead out of a conception of faith. That is, we see here an exploration of what (or at least part of what) lies behind Kant's statement in the first *Critique's* B-Preface that he sought out the limits to knowledge in order to 'make room for faith' (Bxxx).

While I agree with Timmerman's general approach to the faith/knowledge divide, one reservation I have is that he discusses why Kant rejects religious knowledge without also exploring his positive arguments for

faith. Overall, Timmerman's chapter is limited to Kant's contention that were we to have knowledge of what awaits us in the afterlife, self-interested concerns would then swamp all other motives for moral conduct. But this could have been balanced against Kant's various discussions regarding the positive significance of faith. Such discussions include, of course, the need to believe in the Postulates in order to commit to the Highest Good. But Kant also has much to say about the greater voluntarism of faith, how it engages the will in a way that gives the assent moral significance (5: 142–6), as well as the relevance of faith for what in the *Religion* he calls the 'Change of Heart'.

4. Conclusion

As claimed by Aufderheide and Bader in their introduction, the Highest Good remains among the most poorly understood elements of Kant's critical philosophy. Their collection is thus a valuable opportunity for scholars to reflect on this complicated and controversial doctrine.

Lawrence Pasternack

Oklahoma State University

e-mail: L.Pasternack@okstate.edu

Notes

- 1 Kant's works are cited by abbreviation and volume and page number from the Akademie editions of Kant's works; translations are taken from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.
- 2 See my discussion of these passages in Pasternack 2014 (chs 1 and 5), and also Pasternack (forthcoming).
- 3 Many interpreters have taken licence with Kant's term 'Ethical Community'. Despite how it has been popularly used to refer to a utopian society of justice and welfare, his actual use refers, first, to an eschatological ideal 'whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but only from God himself' (6: 100); second, to the 'union' Kant describes in the *Religion* which 'has for its end the prevention of this [principle of] evil and the promotion of the good in the human being' (6: 94). As discussed in my recent commentary on the *Religion*, the latter is the vehicle through which we are to promote our corporate duty. Its end is the moral worthiness of the species, not worldly happiness.

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