

# Reviews

## *Agency and Autonomy in Kant's Moral Theory*, by Andrews Reath.

Andrews Reath's book is a rich collection of nine essays, each shedding light on some aspects of Kant's conception of rational agency and autonomy. Although only two of them are completely new, the others have become standard texts and appear here in a revised version, with important appendices. One of the main interests of the book is that it integrates all these pieces into a coherent whole and thereby provides an overall view of Reath's distinctive understanding of Kant's moral psychology and theory.

Kant's conception of *rational agency* is mainly addressed in the first three chapters. Reath's central thesis is that moral and non-moral considerations motivate in the same way, namely, through an agent taking them to provide good and sufficient reasons for action. Chapter 1 is motivated by a desire to clarify Kant's theory of 'moral sensibility', and in particular, the role of moral feeling in moral motivation. Reath argues that whether an agent chooses to act on inclinations or in accordance with the moral law is not a matter of some incentives exerting greater affective force on his will, but is a matter of some incentives being regarded by him as sources of reasons. All rational actions stem ultimately from a choice made on the basis of considerations that an agent regards as having normative force not only for himself but also for others; they therefore all carry an implicit claim to justification. In chapter 2, Reath arrives at a similar conclusion, but through a different route. One of his purposes here is to refute the claim that we find in Kant a 'hedonistic psychology of non-moral choice'. According to him, when Kant says that feelings of pleasure are the 'determining ground of choice' of non-moral actions, what he means is not that pleasure is the end at which these actions are directed, but that pleasure is the principle from which the agent acts. That is, the fact that an action will produce satisfaction is regarded by the agent as being a good reason for choosing to perform it, without feelings of satisfaction being his aim. This chapter lets us see that the idea of all rational choice being guided by what the agent takes to provide a good reason for action does not entail that moral and non-moral choices share the same structure. When acting on the principle of happiness, the agent assigns value to an action by looking to the satisfaction that he may expect from it; when acting on the principle of morality, he does so by asking whether his reasons for performing it are sufficient to justify his action fully to anyone. Finally, chapter 3 draws on the idea that in Kant the transition from the concept of practical reason to the outline of a substantive moral conception is made possible by the fact that some substantive moral ideals are embedded in the concept of practical reason from the start. In particular, moral choice is to be understood as the most complete realization of an ideal of practical rationality found in all forms

of choice. Again, Reath suggests a continuity between moral and non-moral choices: they do not differ with respect to the abilities that the agent needs, but only with respect to the reasons from which the agent acts. Only in moral choice are these reasons fully justified and have therefore the status of a practical law.

At the heart of chapters 4, 5 and 6 is the suggestion that in Kant autonomy should be understood as a kind of legislative power – namely, as a power to give law through one's own will – and the formula of universal law as setting out a kind of legislative procedure enabling rational agents to exercise this legislative power. According to Reath, such an interpretation would allow one to explain why there need not be any contradiction in Kant between autonomy and subjection to universal law. As he elaborates in chapter 6, the idea that the laws created by one's will are subject to the condition of universal validity does not limit autonomy, but reveals its social dimension. The identification of autonomy with a capacity to engage in deliberation through which one creates authoritative normative principles for others means that it is exercised by willing principles that can gain the agreement of all other rational agents. This entails that autonomy cannot be exercised on one's own, but presupposes a community of agents possessing the rational capacities required of a legislator, namely, capacities to engage in deliberation, to respond appropriately and to confer value.

Chapter 7 elaborates on a theme that was already addressed in chapter 3, namely, the transition from form to content. Reath argues that Kant's formula of universal law can have substantive implications only because it builds upon a conception of persons as 'rational agents with autonomy'. On his account, only maxims whose universal adoption does not undermine the conditions of autonomous willing are morally permissible. This provides an original and appealing reconstruction of the contradiction in conception test: the reason why some maxims cannot coherently be thought, and *a fortiori* be willed, as universal laws is not that their universalisation would undermine their very purpose (cf. Korsgaard), but that it would undermine a presupposition of their adoption, namely, the idea that agents are the source of their actions and, as such, separate spheres of agency. Maxims of deception, coercion or manipulation are morally prohibited because rational agents with autonomy cannot coherently will states of affairs in which they are free to intervene in, and to exert control over, the agency of one another in order to advance their own interests.

The last two chapters have a relatively independent status, although they are informed by ideas developed in the previous chapters. So, chapter 8 aims to show that there is no incoherence in notions like 'duties to oneself' or 'self-legislation', while chapter 9 focuses on the principle of responsibility for consequences which is at stake in Kant's essay 'On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy'. Reath recognizes the problematic character of Kant's conclusions in this essay, but he locates their source not in Kant's principle of imputation itself (according to which all the consequences of an action contrary to strict duty may be imputed to the agent), but in the lack of consideration for particular circumstances and possible consequences with which he determines what one is required to do in a specific situation. While Reath assumes that Kant's principle of imputation can generally be accounted for in terms of this action being 'freely' done, that is, under the agent's 'own authority' (rather than under the authority of the moral

law), he also believes that in some cases limits should be set to what is imputable to an agent who violated a strict duty.

This book is recommended to Kant scholars as well as to those interested in general moral philosophy, Kantian or not. While Reath's purpose remains for a large part interpretative – it is in the first place an attempt to resolve alleged contradictions or puzzling features in Kant – the arguments that he develops deserve serious attention in their own right. It cannot be denied that the issues discussed are complicated and require thorough and painstaking examination; however, Reath does valuable work in rendering intelligible their normative significance.

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*International Library of Essays in the History of Social and Political Thought: Immanuel Kant*, edited by Arthur Ripstein. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Pp. xxiv + 556. ISBN 978-0-7546-2788-3. £115.

This volume on Kant's legal, political and social thought reprints three papers from collections, a chapter from a book, and nineteen articles from journals in law, philosophy and politics. The contributors include many of the leading writers in the field. (For detailed contents see the publisher's website.) The great majority of the items appeared over the last two decades. Only four of the twenty-three, I believe, have been reprinted previously. The volume is paginated continuously, but in addition – most importantly – the original pagination of each piece is included. There is a succinct editor's introduction, and a substantial selected bibliography of articles. There is a basic name index.

All the central topics of Kant's legal and political writings are covered, with one exception. There are discussions of the general features of Kant's moral philosophy and his legal philosophy, and the (disputed) relation between them; of private law, particularly property, contract and status; of public law, and the liberal state (the largest section); and of international right and cosmopolitan right. The exception is punishment: Ripstein excludes this (apart from a section on the topic in his bibliography) 'due to considerations of space and the fact that much of the best writing on the subject has been collected in the volume *Kant and Law*' (p. xvii). This bold editorial decision is understandable. Its effect is that *Kant and Law*, edited by B. Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka and published by Ashgate in 2006, should be regarded as a companion volume, since as well as material on criminal law and punishment it contains a great deal more on Kant's legal philosophy generally, on private and public law, and on the international dimension, with only two pieces appearing in both collections (again, for detailed contents see the publisher's website).

Given the recent surge of interest in Kant's legal and political writings, Ripstein had an extensive and rich literature to choose from. His aim was 'to help bring Kant's own contributions to political philosophy out of the shadows' (p. xviii), by selecting authors who take Kant seriously in his own terms, and whose work accordingly enables us to see what is distinctive in his political philosophy. Perhaps the main claim that Ripstein wants to impress on us is that