

BOOK REVIEWS

Hill, Thomas E., Jr., ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*.
Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Pp. 277. \$94.95 (cloth).

- q1 *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*, edited by Thomas E. Hill Jr., is a collection of twelve original essays written on Kant's moral philosophy. Each essay represents an area of expertise of each of the contributors, all prominent or increasingly prominent Kant scholars. The aim of the collection is to provide both an introduction and "systematic guide" for "students and general readers to Kant's moral philosophy and to offer new perspectives on texts that have been too often neglected or misunderstood" (1). Although I have some worries with regard to how well the collection functions as a systematic guide for new readers, I do believe it provides a very interesting snapshot of many of the important, recent discussions that have been and are currently taking place in Kant scholarship. In particular, I believe that Hill and the authors have succeeded in dispelling what Hill describes as the "common but unfortunate impression that [Kant's] moral philosophy mainly consists of excessive admiration for acts from duty and over-simple procedures expected to determine decisively how we ought to act in all cases" (3). One source of this common misconception is that the only introduction many students and general readers ever get to Kant's moral theory consists in the arguments presented in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Naturally, for those more well versed in Kant's moral writings, the inadequacy of relying only on the *Groundwork* is old news. Yet few, if any, introductory texts on Kant's philosophy communicate this point as effectively as this collection of papers. Hill's *Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics* makes it impossible rationally to hold onto the old misconceptions about Kant's moral philosophy—and that is a significant and most welcome improvement on the current state of affairs.

As mentioned above, Hill identifies a twofold aim of the papers in the collection. They are to introduce students and general readers to Kant's moral philosophy and to offer "new perspectives" on Kant's often misunderstood or neglected texts. Regarding the second point, I believe that what Hill means is that the papers offer new perspectives relative to prominent, earlier perspectives. Let me therefore start by emphasizing, as Hill does in his excellent introduction to the book, that this is an introductory book on Kant, and hence it is not intended for Kant scholars. Instead, the audience is meant to be students and interested readers who would like to orient themselves in relation to current discussions in the field—either for general, educational purposes or for teaching purposes. And indeed, this is clearly the assumption on which the papers are written, since although they are original, the ideas in them are, on the whole, not original. For example, anyone familiar with Marcia Baron's, Stephen Darwall's, Thomas Pogge's, Arthur Ripstein's, or Allen Wood's published works on

PROOF

2 *Ethics* July 2010

Kant are already familiar with most of the ideas presented in their particular contributions. The ideas are presented in new and sometimes very interesting ways, but the ideas are, on the whole, already familiar to their Kantian colleagues.

The other aim of the edition, as mentioned, is to introduce readers to Kant's moral philosophy by providing them a systematic guide. Here, I have some concerns about the collection's success. The first part—"Basic Themes"—comprises four papers on traditional topics in Kant's *Groundwork*: Robert N. Johnson's "Good Will and the Moral Worth of Acting from Duty," Richard Galvin's "The Universal Law Formula," Richard Dean's "The Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself," and Sarah Holtman's "Autonomy and the Kingdom of Ends." The second part of the collection—"Argument and Critique"—also focuses on issues known to those familiar with the *Groundwork*, namely, the identification and justification of the principle of morality. This section includes Samuel J. Kerstein's "Deriving the Supreme Moral Principle from Common Moral Ideas," which primarily concerns parts I and II of the *Groundwork*, as well as Stephen Darwall's "Why Kant Needs the Second-Person Standpoint," which primarily focuses on the argument found in *Groundwork*, part III.

Given that the collection of papers in this part of the *Blackwell Guide* should provide a systematic guide to contemporary discussion of the *Groundwork*, a reasonable test for success may be whether or not it meets the following three criteria: first, the papers taken as a whole must engage the major themes treated in the *Groundwork*; second, the papers taken as a whole must acquaint readers with the most prominent strains of interpretation available in the secondary literature; and third, the exposition of these various approaches to the classical problems must be presented in a way accessible to non-Kantians. I believe the collection clearly succeeds with regard to the first issue. The various papers engage all the classical themes discussed in relation to the *Groundwork*, such as the good will, the construction of maxims, the complexity raised by the various formulations of the Categorical Imperative, and the derivation of the moral law in part III.

I think, however, that the papers do less well with regard to the other two criteria. Although, as Hill notes in his acknowledgments, it would be impossible to mention all the "astute scholars and critics of Kant's work" in such a systematic guide, I do believe that some of the absences are particularly unfortunate. For example, both Sally Sedgwick and Jens Timmermann have written excellent introductions to the *Groundwork* in recent years—and their work is not mentioned by any of the papers nor in their bibliographies. Another prominent player in these discussions lately, Andrews Reath, is also mentioned nowhere. Though I quite agree that it is impossible to do due justice to all the prominent Kant scholars, I still think it regrettable that some of the more important current work is not made known to the reader. As for the third criterion, although I think Hill's excellent introduction provides very good assistance to the non-Kantian audience, I believe that, with the exception of Richard Galvin's and Stephen Darwall's pieces, there is too little help in the papers themselves to see where the authors' particular contributions fit into the larger picture of Kant scholarship. The papers, in my view, have too strong a tendency to be written for insiders to Kant's thought. In addition, each paper focuses too much on the author's particular way of interpreting Kant without much helpful inclusion of

other interpretations or argumentation why the author's view is better than other prominent ones. Unfortunately, there is often no warning for the reader that this is so, and there is also little to help the reader see how what has been included fits into the larger scheme of scholarship on the issue.

I believe that the next two sections of the edition (part III on the Doctrine of Right and part IV on the Doctrine of Virtue) also have trouble meeting the second and third criteria. Thus, these sections also do not function particularly well as systematic guides to Kant's moral theory. Yet, because the scholarship on these texts is relatively new and limited—and hence someone new to Kant's theory requires less general orientation—it is less of a problem for an introductory collection. For this reason and for reasons of space, I will not go into anymore detail here. Also, for reasons of space, I will not spend time on Arnulf Zweig's "Reflections on the Enduring Value of Kant's Ethics," which is the only essay in the final section (part V) of the book. Instead, I will briefly outline the content in parts III and IV as well as identify some of the discussions in these papers, about which much interesting work is likely to come over the next few years.

As noted by Hill in the introduction, *The Metaphysics of Morals* is a text that historically has received too little attention. Fortunately, this trend is changing, and the third and fourth sections of the collection reflect this new focus in Kant scholarship. In part III—"Justice: Private, Public, and International Right"—we find three papers on Kant's conception of 'right' or justice. In the first piece, we are introduced to Arthur Ripstein's approach in "Kant on Law and Justice"; in the second piece, we meet Nelson Potter's quite different approach to Kant in his discussion of "Kant on Punishment"; and, finally, in the third part, we find Thomas Pogge's piece on "Kant's Vision of a Just World Order."

Since none of these papers explicitly engages the others, or earlier published work of the other authors, it is a little hard for the inexperienced reader to see and appreciate the significant differences between them. Hill provides some useful help in the introduction, however. As he explains there, Pogge and Ripstein—as well as Sarah Holtman, we might add—take what we may call a "nonprudential" approach to Kant's theory of justice. In other words, though their arguments are not identical, they agree that Kant considers the state a nonprudential necessity rather than a prudential necessity in relation to the so-called "inconveniences of the state of nature." In contrast, Potter's interpretation proceeds on the basis of a different, also historically prominent, approach to Kant, namely, that the state is primarily a response to our crooked nature—the state is prudentially necessary to "protect" individuals' rights (183). A second difference between Ripstein's and Potter's interpretations concerns Ripstein's "nonabsolutist" reading of Kant, which is visible if one pays attention to their different interpretations of Kant's claim that one does not have a right to revolution (see 174ff. vs. 183).

Another aspect of Ripstein's view that is particularly interesting given current discussions concerns his interpretation of Kant's account of economic justice. Historically, most Kantians have defended a "libertarian" interpretation of Kant on distributive justice—and indeed a right-wing libertarian account. For example, it seems fair to say that both Thomas Pogge and John Rawls read Kant's text in this libertarian way, and it appears that this is one reason why they have

PROOF

4 *Ethics* July 2010

both sought new ways of providing a Kantian account of economic justice. (See Thomas Pogge's "Kant's Theory of Justice," *Kant-Studien* 79 [1988]: 407–33; see also, for example, John Rawls's discussions of Kant in *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999].) In contrast, Ripstein belongs to a different group of Kantians, according to whom, one of the significant things about Kant is that he challenges the libertarian accounts of economic justice (173–74). (Sarah Holtman is another prominent member in this group of Kantians; see her "Kantian Justice and Poverty Relief," *Kant-Studien* 95 [2004]: 86–106.) On this alternative approach, redistributive measures cannot be justified in terms of private right (in terms of claims individuals have against one another) but must be done in terms of public right (in terms of the claims citizens have on their public institutions). In my view, the discussions surrounding Kant's conception of economic justice have been among the most fruitful and interesting in the last few years—and it is likely to be a discussion that will continue. More generally, since the scholarship surrounding Kant's conception of justice is still in its adolescence, I'd be surprised if we do not see quite a lot of interesting work on Kant's Doctrine of Right in the near future.

I also agree with Hill that Kant's Doctrine of Virtue, which is the second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, is another source of much interesting scholarship to come. The Doctrine of Virtue is the focus of the two papers collected in the fourth part of the *Blackwell Guide*. The first paper, by Marcia Baron and Melissa Seymour Fahmy, is entitled "Beneficence and Other Duties of Love in *The Metaphysics of Morals*." Here, Baron and Fahmy discuss several classical issues regarding Kant's conception of duties of love, such as beneficence, gratitude, and sympathy. They engage Kant's rejection of paternalism, the notoriously multifaceted issue of latitude regarding beneficence, as well as the complexity of feelings, attitudes, and actions involved in gratitude and sympathy. The second paper, Allen Wood's "Duties to Oneself, Duties of Respect to Others," begins with a discussion of three groups of duties to oneself, namely (a) those regarding "our animal nature," which concern suicide, sexuality, gluttony, and drunkenness; (b) those concerning our "moral nature," such as lying, avarice, and servility; and, finally, (c) the "fundamental duty to oneself: conscience." With respect to the imperfect duties to oneself, Wood discusses both "natural" and "moral" perfection. What Baron and Fahmy's and Wood's papers bring to the forefront, in my view, are two things. First, they show that Kant's account of the morality in *Metaphysical of Morals* is more complex than is apparent in his earlier work, and that there is room for much new scholarship here. Second, they show us some of the bits of Kant we want to hold onto as we strive to give improved Kantian accounts of phenomena such as personal love, shame, sexuality, duties to animals, and suicide. If the scholarly engagement with the Doctrine of Right is in its adolescence, the scholarly engagement with the Doctrine of Virtue is in its infancy. The papers by Baron and Fahmy and Wood make it clear that it is a text well worth investigating in depth.

One of the exciting aspects of the *Blackwell Guide's* inclusion of work on both the Doctrine of Right and the Doctrine of Virtue is the clear and collective affirmation that there is more to Kant's theory of morality than what meets the eye from the point of view of the *Groundwork*. Unfortunately, there are no papers in the collection that try to fully address the question concerning how the

Doctrine of Right and the Doctrine of Virtue fit together—and how they, along with the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, form a coherent whole. That is to say, there is no paper that attempts to clarify Kant’s conception of practical reason as such. The main reason for this, I believe, is that this is some of the exciting work yet to be done.

In conclusion, *The Blackwell Guide to Kant’s Ethics* provides a most interesting snapshot of much contemporary Kant scholarship. It does not cover the entire field of prominent players or issues, but it covers an impressive ground. And although I am concerned that many of the papers may not contain quite enough help for the new reader clearly to identify main issues, disagreements, and scholars, it is a collection of papers that most newcomers to the field are likely to enjoy and learn a lot from. The particular virtue of the *Blackwell Guide* is that, once read, it is virtually impossible to adopt or to continue to accept the old, “common but unfortunate” misconceptions of Kant’s work. We also learn that Kant’s moral philosophy is still relatively unmined, with significant gems to be found. Those are indeed impressive accomplishments for an introductory collection of papers on Kant’s moral philosophy.

HELGA VARDEN

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

PROOF

6 *Ethics* July 2010

QUERIES TO THE AUTHOR

1. JO/AU: Added \$94.95 as the price, per Wiley website.
2. JO/AU: Per CMOS 17.131 (15th ed.), “f.” should be avoided in page citations. OK to use “173–74”?