A. W. Moore, *Noble in Reason, Infinite in Faculty: Themes and Variations in Kant's Moral and Religious Philosophy.* New York: Routledge, 2003. xx + 249 pp.

This book is mainly about Kant, but its title is from a speech of Hamlet's: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!" For Moore, as for Hamlet, humans are ennobled by their rationality. Reason "distinguishes us from other animals and allows us to direct our own lives rather than just respond to the various imperatives of our biology, creates imperatives of its own, and gives us the means to answer all the most fundamental questions about how to live" (79). This thought motivates Moore's ethical "rationalism"—the view that pure reason can be practical as well as theoretical and that it is capable of developing maxims that effectively guide deliberation and behavior. The main project of the book is to articulate and defend a distinctly *Kantian* version of ethical rationalism, one that makes Kant's controversial metaphysics optional and owns up to a kind of bruteness that Kant tries (perhaps unsuccessfully) to avoid. I'll return to those issues below.

The format of the book is odd: it contains an introduction, three "themes" from Kant, and three "variations" on those themes that are Kantian in flavor. Although it could work in principle, I think the format wobbles here. The "themes" are left underdeveloped in order to make room for the (much longer) "variations," and the book is thus "not intended as a comprehensive study. . . . Nor does it involve any serious exegesis." Moore aims, rather, "to rehearse some of Kant's ideas, then to explore possibilities that they open up and to work around possibilities that they close off" (19). These thematic rehearsals do an effective job of introducing the central ideas, but Kant scholars won't find them extremely illuminating.

The introduction and three "variations," on the other hand, are much more interesting. In these chapters Moore develops a provocative line of thought that can seem almost interrupted by the straight historical work. He begins with a question: "What is it to make sense of things?" By "things" here, Moore means things practical: our lives as self-reflective agents interacting with the world and with other agents. In seeking an answer to this question, Moore thinks we should set "conclusion-directed" (rather than "world-directed") objectivity as our goal. The model is mathematics: it seems queer (for Mackiean reasons) to think that there are mathematical *objects* in the world, Moore says, but it is even queerer to think that there are no genuine arguments, reasons, and mistakes in the region of mathematical discourse. What sustains mathematical practice, then, "is our own capacity, through shared practices and a shared understanding of them, to generate mathematical concepts and *to make shared mathematical sense of things*" (12).

Analogously, Moore rejects attempts to ground ethical objectivity in something about the world, human nature, or our shared "conative states,"

plumping instead for conclusion-directed objectivity. This is supposed to both make sense of the feeling of "discovery" that accompanies ethical thinking and avoid the problems that (supposedly) afflict moral realism. Moore's metaethical theses here are suggestive, but they are merely sketched in the introduction, and many of the important details are left unexplored.

Moore's first main "theme" is morality in general. He expounds two formulations of the categorical imperative—the formula of humanity and the formula of universal law—and raises classic questions regarding whether these imperatives are really what reason delivers and whether Kant's notion of a maxim is coherent. In the "variation" on the first theme, Moore sets out to answer both of these questions. His main thesis is that simply by possessing certain concepts (in some strong sense of "possessing") we acquire defeasible reason to adhere to certain practices. Moore calls these "action-guiding concepts": examples are *blasphemy*, *promise*, or *privacy*. Someone who possesses the concept of blasphemy, for instance, will have a prima facie reason not to blaspheme.

How do we come to possess action-guiding concepts? Moore claims that the complex processes of language learning and enculturation involve the acquisition of concepts in the strong sense—the sense in which we also acquire reason to be guided by them (46). He then defines a lawful maxim as a resolution to observe some practice that is recommended by a concept we possess. An unlawful maxim is a resolution to violate a practice whose observance is required by such a concept (52). The categorical imperative, finally, is the injunction to adopt lawful maxims only (56).

As just noted, Moore's main thesis relies on a very demanding notion of what it is to "possess" a concept. But surely we can possess (in some weaker sense) those same concepts in ways that don't rationally require us (even prima facie) to observe any ethical practices. This renders the main point problematic: if it is possible to possess one of these concepts in some weaker sense (as Moore admits in places), then why *should* we try to possess (in the strong action-guiding sense) one action-guiding concept rather than another? What principles guide the acquisition of new action-guiding concepts? The fundamental normative question has simply been pushed back a step.

Moore's ultimate answer to this question is more Wittgensteinian than Kantian: we find ourselves inhabiting various forms of life, he says, and we must try to clarify the concepts we've inherited and figure out whether they allow us to "make the best sense" of our experience. We are also free ("infinite in faculty") to "make better sense" of the world by extending our action-guiding concepts and generating new ones, thereby altering our forms of life.

Clearly this introduces a "material," teleological component directly into the categorical imperative and thus leads Moore away from Kant's focus on purely formal considerations. Being practically rational is not just about making hypothetical means-ends judgments and formulating consistent max-

ims. Rather, a crucial component of practical rationality for Moore is its "infinite" capacity "to create new concepts; to develop extant concepts; to contemplate different forms of life; to respond to whatever befalls us, both by making sense of it and, correlatively, by making sense in the face of it" (79). Ideally, any resulting maxims will (formally) avoid practical contradiction, but also (materially) include concepts that allow us to make sense of things. This is bald teleology: "we must look for concepts that enable us actively to interpret things rather than passively to undergo them" (85).

This discussion of action-guiding concepts leads Moore to his second main theme—freedom. Here the interpretive puzzle is what to make of Kant's suggestion that we are only free when following the dictates of practical reason. This suggestion implies that an agent is never blameworthy for doing something wrong (irrational) since she won't have done it freely. Moore argues, however, that Kant meant to say that freedom consists merely in being *subject* to the demands of reason, rather than actually adhering to them. This feels implausible to me as interpretation (see Kant, *Groundwork* 4:448, for instance), though it is clearly attractive as a solution to the puzzle.

In his "variation" on this theme, Moore develops a notion of freedom that is not based in Kant's unusual variety of compatibilism and that is more obviously consistent with determination by reasons. That freedom consists in the ability to *think* otherwise—to generate new action-guiding concepts that recommend that we adopt new practices. Moore's proposal thus allows us to retain the idea that true freedom consists in full rationality, provided that the new concept formation always takes place within the "logical space of reasons" (this Sellarsian phrase recurs throughout the book).

But even if this proposal is coherent, the question of why we *should be* or *should want to be* fully rational remains. Here Moore quite frankly turns his spade on what he calls the Basic Idea: namely, "that there is a nisus in all of us, more fundamental than any other, towards rationality" (128). Nothing is nobler than rationality, and no inclination is stronger than the inclination to make rational sense of things. So it seems Moore's rationalism *is* located in a conative state after all: the Basic Idea says that we all *want* to be rational. But how is this claim to be defended, and why doesn't this incline toward world-directed objectivity after all? Moore doesn't say: he simply accepts the Basic Idea as a "surd" (133), more properly an object of "hope" and "faith" than of belief or knowledge.

This last thought is linked to various ideas in Kant: for instance, the attempt in the ethical works to establish the authority of the moral law by describing our consciousness of it as a "feeling" or an indubitable "fact of reason." In the final variation on "religion," Moore also links the Basic Idea to Kant's discussion of nonepistemic, rational attitudes to the postulates of practical reason—attitudes like "faith" (*Glaube*) or "hope." Although not strictly Kantian, Moore's creative use of the notions of faith and practical postula-

tion exhibits the ongoing interest and utility of Kant's religious philosophy (in addition to his ethics).

In sum: although this book won't be of great interest to experts *as Kant scholarship*, it contains a provocative Kantian-Wittgensteinian line of metaethical thinking that merits serious attention.

Andrew Chignell
Cornell University

Philosophical Review, Vol. 115, No. 1, 2006
DOI 10.1215/00318108-2005-008

Christopher Gauker, *Words without Meaning*.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. xxi + 299 pp.

Words without Meaning is an extremely ambitious investigation into the nature of language and thought. It pursues a negative project and a positive project. The negative project is to argue against what Christopher Gauker calls "the received view of linguistic communication." The positive project is to delineate an alternative. Gauker's positive view is an original and intriguing contribution to the existing literature.

As characterized by Gauker, the received view encompasses several distinct doctrines: (1) Various mental states, such as beliefs, possess propositional content. (2) Expressions in a natural language possess meanings. (3) Speakers of the same language share a common understanding of these meanings, and they can thereby employ the language to communicate propositions to one another. (4) "The central function of language is to enable a speaker to reveal his or her thoughts to a hearer." For instance, the primary function of assertion is for "the speaker . . . [to] reveal to the hearer that he or she has a belief with a certain propositional content" (3).

Gauker is surely correct that (1)–(3), or doctrines much like them, constitute some kind of orthodoxy among analytic philosophers both past and present. It is less clear that (4) enjoys anything like the same orthodox status. Many contemporary philosophers would doubtless urge that the primary function of assertion is not to reveal anything about one's own mental states, but rather to describe the subject matter of one's assertion, which typically will be both extra-linguistic and extra-mental.[1]

1. For instance, see John McDowell, "Meaning, Communication, and Knowledge," in *Philosophical Subjects*, ed. Zak van Straaten (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 117–39.