

Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory: Essays in Honour of Philippa Foot.



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Hursthouse, Rosalind; Lawrence, Gavin; and Quinn, Warren, eds. *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory: Essays in Honour of Philippa Foot*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Pp. xii + 350. \$39.95 (cloth).

This volume contains twelve essays by friends, colleagues, and former students of Philippa Foot: Anscombe, Blackburn, Hursthouse, Kenny, Lawrence, McDowell, Quinn, Sachs, Scanlon, Michael Thompson, Wiggins, and Williams.

The essays concern issues relevant to or raised by Foot's work in moral philosophy, only sometimes specifically addressing her views. Unfortunately, there is no contribution by Foot herself, either in the form of replies or a new paper. This certainly lessens the interest of the volume. Perhaps Foot was driven by modesty in not wanting the focus to be on her comments, or by the need to conserve her time for larger ongoing projects. Whatever the explanation, readers would have benefited from the chance to hear her latest thinking on the issues raised in some of these papers (especially those by Blackburn and McDowell).

This volume was apparently a long time in the making, papers originally having been due in 1989. The editors pointed no fingers, though some contributors proclaimed their innocence. The consequence of this delay is that two of the papers had already appeared in other places by the time this book was published. Another contribution, by Anscombe, written in 1974 and published in 1989, was never even intended for this volume.

These facts show some of the difficulties of editing an honorary volume. The editors and subject of the volume want the subject's friends to contribute, yet this desire leaves the editors with no power in controlling the form or content of the papers, or in enforcing deadlines. Thus, we tend to get loose collections of always well-intentioned, but only sometimes new and impressive, papers. (Fortunately, Foot's friends tend to be very good philosophers.)

One consequence of this lack of control by editors is the variable coverage of relevant topics. Though the essays manage to cover the topics of virtue theory, naturalism, rationality, relativism, and acts and omissions, there is little discussion of utilitarianism, and none of moral dilemmas. Another consequence, to be elaborated later, is that the essays are not always in fact (well-) edited.

The collection opens with a paper by Anscombe written for the "Library of Living Philosophers" volume dedicated to von Wright. It is about von Wright's views on practical inference and never mentions Foot. It was included at "Foot's especial request" (p. 1), presumably because Anscombe, who is a close friend of Foot's, was unable to provide a separate paper for this occasion. Despite its apparently slim relevance to the volume, the paper subtly serves an interesting, and probably unintended, purpose of hinting at the importance that Wittgenstein has for understanding and appreciating Foot. Anscombe's paper opens with an epigraph from Wittgenstein, and she is well-known for her association with Wittgenstein.

I was a graduate student at UCLA from 1976–83, during which time Foot was a professor of philosophy and taught a seminar each year, several of which I attended. Only one of these was devoted to Wittgenstein, though she regularly attended Rogers Albritton's seminars on Wittgenstein, and Foot has published only one paper directly about Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, the

influence of Wittgenstein on Foot's ways of thinking in moral philosophy is enormous. This never comes through directly by citations of Wittgenstein, because Foot would never wish the role of Wittgenstein to be that of an authority invoked in defense of one's views. Rather, his ways of thinking about things were found persuasive by Foot and therefore used by her—but needed legitimacy in their own right. However, I think that being on the lookout for parallels between her ways of arguing and Wittgenstein's can help the reader better understand her worldview. No doubt this has been obvious to some readers; I hope my pointing it out will be helpful to others.

Just a few examples: her opposition to any account of morality in terms of personal attitude understood independent of any social context; her opposition to utilitarianism insofar as it assumes a notion of overall good, independent of any particular aims or perspectives, and entails a deviation from moral commonsense; and her opposition to the Categorical Imperative as having some mysterious force independent of the interests of people who apprehend it. Over and over, Wittgenstein's communal naturalism informs Foot's positions—despite the fact that Wittgenstein rarely discussed morality and Foot rarely discusses Wittgenstein. She uses Wittgenstein, or perhaps we could say she absorbs Wittgenstein, but she doesn't appeal to him. For those who see what she is up to, Foot is a better advertisement for the value of Wittgenstein's work than are dozens of Wittgensteinians.

There are impressive papers in this volume by Blackburn, Hursthouse, McDowell, Quinn, Scanlon, and Thompson; and quite adequate papers by Kenny and Williams. Lawrence offers an excessively long (fifty-nine pages) and ramified discussion of Foot's and Aristotle's views of practical rationality. In following out all of the possibilities, some of which are quite interesting, I became lost in a bog of detail. Since Lawrence was one of the editors, apparently the other editor (Quinn having died in 1991) did not feel able actually to edit this piece. Sach's paper on Aristotle's view of justice was not really finished before his death in 1992.

I will comment on the substance of only one paper—that of Michael Thompson. He was one of Foot's students at UCLA, the only such student represented in this volume, and he offers a very substantial paper. The paper is designed to explain and show the importance of what he calls Aristotelian categoricals. The paper takes off from Anscombe's old observation that we can truthfully say that man has thus-and-so many teeth, even if that is not the average number of teeth men have. Thompson shows this cannot be reduced to or understood in terms of other kinds of assertions and illustrates its importance in ordinary language (he is quite fond of Discovery Channel documentaries: "The female bobcat gives birth in the springtime . . .") and for moral philosophy. Apparently this is a direction Foot is taking in her latest work in trying to offer a naturalistic account of the virtues of human beings.

Thompson clearly sees an important connection between Aristotelian categoricals and an understanding of the notion of a life-form. For reasons that I have not fully understood, he spent the first half of his fifty-page paper showing how essentialist definitions of "life" found in biology textbooks are defective. That they are defective would not surprise most philosophers, but Thompson does an impressively thorough job of showing this. It is the second half of his paper which I find most interesting. His illustrations of Aristotelian

categoricals are all drawn from contexts involving living things. The implication seems to be, though it is never explicitly stated, that such categoricals can only hold of living things (perhaps because the notion of living cannot be given an essentialist definition?). This implication seems to be embodied in his terminology—such categoricals are expressed by “*natural-historical judgments.*”

However, I don't see that such categoricals are limited to natural contexts or life-forms at all. Commercial announcers tell us: “The Oldsmobile has two front-seat air bags,” even if your Oldsmobile lacks them due to a manufacturing error or a failure to replace them after a previous use. Perhaps Thompson's (and Foot's) purposes are sufficiently served if Aristotelian categoricals *do* hold of life-forms, even if not *only* of life-forms. But if so, it would have been helpful to have that point clarified. In any case, I found this to be one of the more stimulating papers in the collection.

Finally, Wiggins's paper concerns Kant and Hume on the notion of a categorical requirement. This made for demoralizing reading. At first I assumed this simply verified my shaky grasp on this difficult subject. My reading was so slow-going that I eventually went back to reexamine some passages and then some particular sentences. My puzzlement settled on a sentence that I discovered to be ninety-two words long! After checking a few more sentences, I decided, believe it or not, to determine the length of each sentence in this thirty-four-page article. (I did not count sentences that were either quotations of other writers or citations of other passages.) Wiggins's sentences have a median length of about twenty-five words, and an average length of about thirty words. As surprising as this may seem, it does not give the full impression, because even when long sentences are balanced out by short ones, bringing down the average, the relief is short-lived since the short sentences go by so quickly. More telling is this: one-third of the words in his paper are contained in sentences fifty words or longer. How much longer? Much longer: eighteen sentences are in the 50–59-word range, fourteen are in the 60–69 range, nine are in the 70–79 range, six are in the 80–89 range, two are in the 90–99 range, two are in the 100–109 range, three are in the 110–119 range, and two are longer—120 and, the winner, 121 words long! Regardless of the content of these sentences, I submit that it is irresponsible to expect people to read them. (Even more shocking is the notation at the beginning of the paper that it was once read, with omissions, as a lecture. I hope, for the sake of the listeners, that he omitted the three dozen sentences longer than sixty words.)

If it is irresponsible of Wiggins to write such sentences, it is also irresponsible of so-called editors to allow them to be published. And this is not one of those articles that the editors received at the last minute. It has apparently been around since at least 1990. Readers, and certainly an audience, should not have to be subjected to this sort of writing, or speaking, no matter how profound the thoughts expressed.

I wish to end by expressing sympathy for the task of these editors. Having coedited two volumes myself, I know some of the difficulties involved. One breathes a huge sigh of relief upon finishing the volume simply in virtue of having gotten all the pieces together and off to the publisher. In this case, the difficulties were no doubt compounded by the death of one of the editors

and the failing health of one of the contributors midstream. And there were surely other complications as well. Furthermore, the problems I am highlighting are not by any means limited to this volume.

But this volume displays the problems of editing, and even more, the temptations not to edit, quite clearly. Philippa Foot and her work in moral philosophy are eminently worthy of honor—no living moral philosopher is more worthy of such an honorary volume. Many of these papers contain discussions that do honor to her work by explaining, assessing, and advancing her ideas, or ideas in fields that she has helped to develop. But this is a poorly edited book—and many such books are poorly edited. When contributors are chosen in advance, editors lose all real power to edit: to direct the subject matter of the contributions, to assess the quality of the contributions, to maintain a time schedule, and to improve the prose of the contributors. Editors become collectors who rely on the good intentions of those solicited. But anyone who knows a representative sampling of good philosophers knows that good intentions go only so far.

What could be done? We could try truth in advertising: say that such volumes are organized, not edited—and let the buyers beware. But perhaps publishers would balk at this. Then let publishers insist that editing actually take place. If no one is willing to undertake the onerous tasks of editing in such circumstances, then let there be more honorary conferences and fewer honorary publications. After all, the honor is no more honorable for having been turned into paper.

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Baron, Marcia W. *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology*.

Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 244. \$32.50 (cloth).

In the course of this carefully argued and persuasive limited defense of Kantian ethics, Marcia W. Baron says that she does “not write solely for other Kantians” (p. 188). The minuteness of her review of the secondary literature sometimes makes the reader wonder about this claim; nonetheless, since there is, in fact, much of interest here to any student of ethics, this review will take it seriously.

Baron’s mode of faithful restoration rather than apologetic adaptation makes a refreshing change from much of the recent writing by friends of Kant’s ethics. We have perhaps heard enough by now from Kant’s apologists about how he could—with only a few snips here and grafts there—let flourish the supererogatory, generate flexibly contextual concrete judgments, and allow for the importance of friendship and social ties. It is indeed time for a sharper redelineation of the distinctive features of Kant’s ethics, like them or not. This task is being taken up in various ways in important new books by Christine Korsgaard (*Creating the Kingdom of Ends* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996]) and Nancy Sherman (*Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]). Leading