

tric ethic to one that encompasses nonhuman entities. Svoboda has provided a strong argument for how developing a virtuous disposition, aiming for moral perfection, demands that we do not harm such entities. Because Kant's ethics is, arguably, more other regarding than other ethical theories, it is able to answer a common charge against environmental virtue ethics that it is ultimately concerned with human moral development and flourishing.

A successful environmental virtue ethic must also consider what virtues and vices are relevant. Will the virtues and vices that we find in standard accounts of virtue ethics suffice, or are there special environmental virtues and vices? Svoboda defends a "generalist" notion of virtues and vices, that is, they are not distinctively environmental—concerned only with our interactions with nonhuman organisms—but "can have both environmental and non-environmental orientations," such as benevolence (138). It seems to me that this is more pragmatic and flexible when it comes to practice, promising to be more easily grasped by various moral agents for whom the environment is not their first concern.

The concluding chapter outlines the various strengths of a Kantian environmental virtue ethic and situates this new approach with respect to other theories of environmental ethics. Svoboda is to be congratulated for so adeptly drawing on Kant, a neglected figure in environmental ethics, and bringing his work into useful conversation with environmental virtue ethics. The latter has enjoyed much support, especially in serving as a key alternative, alongside environmental pragmatism, to the kinds of intrinsic value-oriented approaches which have dominated the history of environmental ethics.

Duties Regarding Nature is an excellent book that ought to have appeal across a range of philosophical debates. It is well informed and clearly written, carving out a significant and realistic place for Kant's thought within environmental ethics, in close dialogue with Kant scholarship. It provides a rigorous and persuasive defense of Kantian ethics beyond human exceptionalism. Importantly, the book also contributes to extending discussions about the role of the virtues in Kant, and more generally to studies which seek to provide a richer picture of his moral philosophy.

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Wood, Allen W. *Fichte's Ethical Thought*.
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Fichte is "the most influential single figure in the entire tradition of continental European philosophy in the last two centuries." This is stated and to some extent defended in the preface to Allen Wood's latest book, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*. Wood expects the claim to be dismissed as exaggeration, this having been the response to his earlier published remarks on the historical significance of Fichte's philosophy (ix). Evidently seeking to obviate the same response to his present book, Wood challenges his readers, again in the preface, to find a major continental thinker since Kant who was not profoundly influenced by Fichte. In turn, Wood assures his readers that he can show that Fichte's philosophy has played an inex-

tricable, central role in the historical evolution of continental philosophy. As it turns out, this is a task that Wood indeed sets for himself in this book: throughout the book, wherever appropriate, he gives himself space to point out the ways in which Fichte's ethical thought, and his philosophy more generally, could be interpreted as paving the way for the major movements in continental philosophy, such as German Romanticism, Marxist socialism, existentialism, and phenomenology (292). To provide a more precise account of Fichte's influence on continental philosophy, Wood highlights (among others) three contributions that Fichte made to this tradition.

One relates to the definition of the "proper aims" of philosophy (32). Philosophy hitherto had been seen as speculation on the nature of mind-independent reality and, relatedly, on the ability of human beings to represent such reality. Fichte, by contrast, argued that these traditional concerns of philosophy cannot be properly addressed without first grasping what makes human cognition, or, more generally, human mindedness as such, possible. Fichte thus called for a move away from metaphysics and for a focus, instead, on the basic elements and effects of human subjectivity. The centerpiece of Fichte's own theory of subjectivity is the claim that the absolutely free mental activity of "self-positing" underlies, accompanies, and makes possible every conscious state of human beings. On Fichte's account, this means that the spontaneous activity of "self-positing" is a "transcendental condition" of the possibility for human beings to think, represent, will, or intend anything. Wood contends that Fichte's rejection of metaphysics in favor of transcendental inquiry anticipates many of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century attacks on metaphysics, including those of Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle positivists (33). Further, Wood suggests that Fichte's emphasis on the human mind and its determinations laid the foundation for the existentialist philosophies of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and others (39).

Wood also calls attention to Fichte's separation of transcendental philosophy from ordinary, nonphilosophical human consciousness, that is, the "common sense" (30). In Wood's view, the purpose of this distinction is not to "undermine or discredit the standpoint of common sense," but rather to indicate the necessity of thinking beyond ordinary consciousness to account for its ability to engage in theoretical and practical activities. So transcendental inquiry, as Fichte has it, is intimately linked to common sense insofar as the former "explains" and "vindicates" the activities of the latter (31). In so defining the relationship between philosophy and the common sense, Wood argues, Fichte also anticipated Husserl and the phenomenological tradition (33).

For Wood, a third contribution that Fichte made to continental philosophy involves his transcendental proof concerning the existence of other rational beings (86). As per this proof, Fichte held not only that self-consciousness depends on the existence of other selves but also that coercion-free dialogue among human beings is essential to determining the "content" of their ethical duties (217). In so doing, Wood argues, Fichte both proved to be "fundamentally anti-Cartesian, anti-Lockean, even anti-Humean" (49) and provided "the ultimate inspiration" for twentieth-century theories of "discourse ethics," such as those of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas (212).

It is not possible here to report on the full extent of Wood's rich discussion of the mark that Fichte's philosophy left on continental philosophy. In any case,

Wood's remarks on this topic, on the whole, would not be entirely unfamiliar or unexpected for historically minded commentators on Fichte's philosophy, since, after all, these remarks often draw on the growing body of secondary literature on the topic, to which Wood has already made some notable contributions. It is safe to presume, though, that the particular details of Wood's discussion will stimulate Fichte scholars to reconsider their own related judgments and, in so doing, to engage variously with this book.

What may be even more stimulating for Fichte scholarship is the series of comments Wood makes throughout the book spelling out Fichte's ideas in relation to some recent debates in analytical philosophy, especially in moral philosophy. This aspect of Wood's book is perhaps its most provocative, as it compels its readers, including those hitherto unfamiliar with Fichte's thought, to move beyond the historical context in response to which Fichte fashioned his philosophy and decide whether—and if so, how—it could indeed speak to contemporary philosophy. Today the writings of classical figures in German philosophy, such as Kant, Hegel, and Marx, are frequently treated by contemporary philosophers as fertile grounds for philosophical reflection, as exemplified by John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, and Charles Taylor, to name a few. Wood is now demanding, rightly in my view, the same treatment for Fichte's philosophy, and he offers two reasons for it. The first is that many of the "famous ideas" associated with Kant and Hegel "were founded quite directly on Fichtean models" (xii); these ideas include those of the dialectical method, situation ethics, communicative ethics, and recognition. Wood's advice here is that contemporary philosophers who take these ideas seriously would benefit from direct study of Fichte's works. Secondly, Wood believes that Fichte is "an important philosopher for our own time" in his own right (xii). As far as I can tell, he provides two justifications for the latter claim. First, he takes Fichte to be a rare type of secular philosopher who offered a moral philosophy that takes into account the future of humanity, a kind of philosophy much needed in our time (xii). The other justification Wood provides is that, given Fichte's commitment to both individualism and collectivism, his political philosophy could serve as a suitable basis for identifying the problems of contemporary global capitalism without subscribing to the illiberal policies employed by some twentieth-century socialist states (287–89).

Be that as it may, much of what Wood has to say about the relevance of Fichte's thought for contemporary philosophical debates leads to the conclusion that it cannot easily be integrated into such debates. For instance, Wood at one point endeavors to identify the position that Fichte would take on the question, frequently addressed by contemporary philosophers, of the metaethical status of moral concepts, and in particular whether he would be realist or antirealist with respect to such concepts. Wood believes that Fichte's position here would be "*neither* realist *nor* anti-realist" (131). Fichte cannot be cast as a realist, Wood argues, because he holds that ethical concepts are "self-legislated," meaning that they are constituted by mental activity. This does not mean, however, that Fichte sees morality as a mere expression of subjective attitudes. According to Fichte, morality arises from the way in which human subjects necessarily think of themselves and their deeds in the external world. In this regard, Wood contends, Fichte's morality can be said to have "a real or objective ground" (133). Wood follows a

similar line of thought when speculating on Fichte's possible stance on evidentialism in ethics. Wood believes that Fichte cannot support evidentialism, "if evidentialism is the position that our beliefs must be grounded solely on *epistemic* grounds, not on practical interests" (195). Yet nor can Fichte be an anti-evidentialist, since his ethical thought revolves around the rational "faith in the freedom of the will," which may not contradict "the pure interest in truth." Wood also reports that the transcendental arguments Fichte uses to deduce the principle of morality, that is, the absolute ought, are "epistemic in nature" (196). So, Fichte's ethical thought could lend itself to both views under discussion; at the same time, however, it cannot be exclusively identified with either.

Wood's speculations on the positions that Fichte might take in some other debates in moral philosophy, such as those between foundationalists and coherentists and those between compatibilists and incompatibilists, have the same inconclusive structure. This may be in part because of Wood's portrayal of these debates as confrontations between two incompatible sides, which makes it hard to find a common ground. At any rate, it is clear that Wood's interest in putting these speculations on record does not stem from a Jonathan Bennettian assumption that Fichte can simply be treated as our contemporary. Rather, Wood is calling attention here to the distinctiveness of Fichte's ideas and to the distinctive transformative effect they may have on current debates in philosophy (131). One clear indication of this is the contrast that Wood sees between Fichte's ethical thought and some contemporary Kantian theories of morality (104, 192). These theories, Wood observes, often take morality to consist "only of demands made on us by others"; thus, at the heart of such theories lie "side-constraints," that is, moral limitations on what one may do to, or expect from, others (104). In Wood's view, "Fichte opposes this entire way of thinking," since his ethics is "a first-person ethics, not a second-person ethics" (200). In other words, morality for Fichte is a "demand we make on ourselves even where this demand has a strong social content" (192). This follows, Wood argues, from the fact that Fichte's moral theory is rooted in "the claims of our own freedom," not in claims of entities external to us.

This last point is central to Wood's reconstruction of the substance of Fichte's ethics. In line with many other commentators, Wood divides Fichte's ethics into two parts: the standpoint of transcendental philosophy, and the ordinary moral standpoint (115). The former involves a series of abstract arguments that purport to deduce the principle of morality, that is, the categorical ought, which can take on different formulations (such as, "always act according to your best conviction concerning your duty"), and which moral agents ought to pursue in all situations. Fichte's deduction of this principle amounts to showing that this requirement directly follows from the intellect's necessary thought that it ought to determine itself according to its own essential nature, which is self-sufficiency or "self-positing." On Wood's reading, this is equivalent to saying that the moral law and freedom are "the very same thought" (121). Wood takes care to note, however, that both the categorical imperative and the idea of self-sufficiency are "purely formal," so nothing can be inferred from these notions about what we specifically and concretely ought to do; hence, the applicability of these abstract ethical notions "has to be deduced separately" (102).

In a chapter titled "Conscience," Wood states the following on the applicability of those notions: "absolute self-sufficiency is merely a way we conceptualize in general terms the striving directed solely at freedom for its own sake" (150). The idea here is that, given the indeterminacy of the end of self-sufficiency and so of the content of the categorical imperative, moral actions can only be understood "*recursively*, as the continuation of a series of finite actions, each with its own determinate end within the limited range of what it can accomplish, but then each also leading to a next member of the series" (180). This provides an image of a moral agency that constantly and repeatedly strives to overcome the limitations it sets for itself. This image of moral agency is what leads Wood to call Fichte an early proponent of situation ethics (151).

Wood devotes two sections of his book to defending this image of Fichtean moral agency against Michelle Kosch, who in several recent papers presented Fichte's ethics as a "non-welfarist consequentialist" theory (148). Kosch claims that Fichte's idea of self-sufficiency in fact has a determinate content, which is "material independence from external limitations of all kinds," including not only the non-agreed-upon societal rules but also the constraints that nature imposes on us. In setting this as the final end of all moral conduct, Kosch argues, Fichte's ethical theory in effect takes on a consequentialist character, as it thus requires moral agents to maximize in thought and in deed the realization of the final end specified. It is not hard to understand why Wood feels the need to respond to Kosch, since her version of Fichte's ethics contradicts his classification of Fichte's ethical theory as "deontological." For Wood, what Kosch's interpretation misses is that on Fichte's ethical theory, "the end does not determine the commandment, but the commandment determines the end" (149). Wood also argues, contrary to Kosch, that Fichte's conception of self-sufficiency is not sufficiently determinate "to enable us to calculate which particular actions would serve to maximize this end" (175).

One question that suggests itself here is whether Wood exaggerates the difference between his account of Fichte's ethical thought and Kosch's. As indicated earlier, Wood makes much of Fichte's statement that moral law and freedom are the very same thought, which leaves room for claiming that moral agents ought to act on the categorical imperative not simply because it is a duty, but because this duty articulates or reflects moral agents' deepest commitment to the pursuit of the end of self-sufficiency. This would mean that there can be no hierarchy between the commandments of morality and the pursuit of the final end, for they are necessarily co-instantiated. A further yet related question that arises here is whether the indeterminateness that Wood sees in Fichte's idea of self-sufficiency as the final end of all moral conduct rules out the possibility of judging moral actions in terms of the extent to which they promote self-sufficiency in the situations in which they are executed. Such second-order judgments could be made by ordinary moral agents as well as by transcendental philosophers. The suggestion here is that the present sense that one may have of oneself as a free, responsible moral agent does not rule out knowing what it means or takes to be even freer, although one may never know what absolute self-sufficiency ultimately entails. It seems that this suggestion is not only compatible with but also demanded by Wood's assertion that "each action has its own specific or 'finite' end, but it also has as its 'final end' the absolute independence or self-sufficiency of *reason*" (175).

Wood's remarks on the "application" of transcendental ethical ideas suggest that he could indeed concede this last point. With respect to the idea of self-sufficiency, Wood writes, "This final end so far has been conceived as the self-sufficiency of the individual rational being; we will see . . . that . . . this eventually becomes instead the self-sufficiency of *reason*, or (as Fichte will argue) of the entire community of rational beings" (174). To provide a clearer picture of what the pursuit of "the self-sufficiency of the entire community of rational beings" may involve, Wood states that "we must seek to bring about, or at least approximate, actual unanimity, through a process of rational communication with others" (206). It seems that here Wood not only recognizes the possibility of moral progress in Fichte's ethics but also is open to seeing the realization of the end of self-sufficiency as a matter of degree.

Interestingly, Wood submits that the actions and interactions among rational beings, who ought to pursue the self-sufficiency of their society, are in need of coordination (226). This is because, Wood explains, Fichte's idea of the rational society allows for the "diversity of ends, characters, ways of finding a meaningful life" (226). And the problem of coordinating diverse ways of life for Fichte must not be settled by violence, by manipulation, or "on terms of domination and subjection," but through "rational conversation." The chief moral duty of the members of such a society, then, is to reach, or at least seek, by coercion-free dialogue, a convergence on "the general terms of human interaction that are mutually acceptable and allow everyone an acceptable way of life" (226). However, this way of applying Fichte's idea of self-sufficiency generates a problem of consistency for Wood's portrayal of Fichte's ethics as "a first-person ethics, not a second-person ethics." Wood acknowledges this problem by presenting it as a discontinuity in Fichte's ethical thought rather than in his own reconstruction of it; he writes, "Although the theme of intersubjectivity apparently arrives surprisingly late in the System of Ethics, when it does arrive it transforms the entire spirit of Fichte's ethics from that point onward. Not in its *motivation* but in its *application*, we will see that Fichte's ethics is a second-person ethics" (200). Does this mean that Wood is thus conceding that the application of Fichte's ethical thought involves "side-constraints"? If so, would those constraints be agent centered or victim centered? I suspect that these or similar questions will be raised by the readers of Wood's book who are especially interested in the application of Fichte's ethics. Perhaps the first and hardest challenge facing these readers is to determine whether Wood is right about when and how intersubjectivity enters Fichte's ethical thought.

Wood deals with Fichte's theory of right and its relation to his ethical theory in the last chapter of his book. In line with the general consensus among scholars, Wood argues that Fichte is committed to the separation of right from ethics and that he came to this view soon after moving to Jena in 1794 (256). A welcome aspect of Wood's analysis of Fichte's separation is that it addresses Fichte's later social and political writings as well as his much-studied writings during the Jena Period (1794–99). On Wood's reading, right and ethics for Fichte are "not only separate in their foundations, but also wholly separate as *philosophical systems*" (256). Part of what Wood means by this is that, for Fichte, right entails a "non-ethical" species of normativity that is "generated solely by mutual understanding," where "each recognizes the other as a rational being only in the sense that each understands the other to have formal freedom in the sense relating to right"

(260). According to Wood, this means that the Fichtean system of right can be considered “as a theoretical rather than practical system” (256). Presumably from these observations, Wood draws the conclusion that “there are no *duties* or *obligations* of right” and “in *right* there is only just coercion” (257). This conclusion is reminiscent of a claim advocated typically by legal positivists, such as John Austin, that laws embody the commands of the sovereign political authority. In any event, I do not think that this conclusion is warranted. This is, first, because Wood does not explain how there can be “norms” of right or of “just coercion” in a society without there being duties of right incumbent on the members of that society. Second, and more importantly, it is not clear how Wood’s conclusion could be reconciled with the passages from Fichte’s *Foundations of Natural Right*, where Fichte talks about an “absolute civic duty” that citizens owe one another (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 218–20). So, while there is no doubt that, on Fichte’s account, right neither requires nor generates “moral” duties, it is not the case that right is inimical to the very notion of duty.

Whatever reservations one may have about Wood’s book on Fichte’s ethics, it is certain that this book will serve as a rich and stimulating resource not only for Fichte scholarship but also for moral philosophers who are open to learning from past thinkers.

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