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Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study.* Vol. 3, *From Kant to Rawls.*
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xxvii +1020 pp.

It is difficult to overestimate the profundity of the third and final volume of Terence Irwin's *The Development of Ethics.* It is now the most significant work on the period in the history of ethics to which it directs its attention. It exhibits a rich and detailed understanding of its principal figures and of the concepts utilized in modern philosophical ethics. It is astute and penetrating. It is not enough to say that it is excellent. For reasons of space, this review will concentrate on registering dissent from some of this work's main arguments.

This volume comprises thirty-one chapters beginning with Kant, to whom seven chapters are devoted, and ending with Rawls, who is covered in two chapters. Of the remaining twenty-two chapters, seventeen discuss influential figures in the Western tradition of ethical thinking, including Hegel, Mill, Sidgwick, Nietzsche, Green, Moore, Ross, and Hare, and five detail specific philosophical movements: logical empiricism and emotivism, existentialism, noncognitivism, objectivism and its discontents, and Aristotelian naturalism.

One of Irwin's aims is to interpret the various philosophers and the movements on which he focuses. He does this with an unparalleled knowledge of the relevant primary texts, their philosophical implications, and the philosophical contexts in which they emerged. He often responds with aplomb to the diversity of interpretations in existence on the matters he discusses. Irwin is not, however, content simply to articulate and defend textual interpretations. His discussions are in every case directed by a commitment to defending the superiority of a set of metaethical and normative ethical doctrines.[1]

In metaethics, Irwin is keen to defend a robust form of normative realism. He holds that there are "objective moral facts and properties" (164; also 829, 865) that are "external to the beliefs and wills of rational agents" (165). These facts are not, it appears, ordinary empirical or natural facts. Instead, they are normative facts about what is essential to "human nature and what is appropriate to it" (197; also 148, 874). These facts, which regard what it is rational for agents to do, may be discovered by a holistic and "dialectical approach to moral beliefs and moral theory" (864; also 148, 489–92).

One assumption of this metaethical view is that moral judgments "express knowledge of objective facts just as much as any other judgments do" (865). Irwin appears, then, to maintain that, like other truths, normative truths are true in virtue of corresponding to the normative facts. He thus accepts a strong connection between cognitivism and realism. But he provides no explicit

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1. For a detailed account of Irwin's aims and orientation in writing *The Development of Ethics*, see Irwin 2007, 1–12.

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defense of this connection, and nothing in his arguments for his metaethical view obviously establishes its truth.

He might have seen the need for a defense of his claim had he paid some attention to the differences that exist among those who are attracted to cognitivism. On Irwin's reading, in metaethics "Sidgwick defends a cognitivist and realist semantics and metaphysics" (897; also 625). He is right that Sidgwick accepts cognitivism (1907, 27 and 33), but wrong that Sidgwick accepts realism. In *Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations*, Sidgwick (1902, 246) rejects the idea that moral judgments are made true by corresponding to normative facts: "True, if we adhere to Common Sense, the fundamental difference remains that the distinction between 'truth' and 'error', in our thought about 'what is', is held to depend essentially on the correspondence or want of correspondence between Thought and Fact; whereas in the case of 'what ought to be', truth and error cannot be conceived to depend on any similar relation."[2]

Irwin no doubt thinks that there is something wrong with decoupling cognitivism from realism, but nothing he says tells us just what that something is. This is important to do, for Sidgwick's view appears no less plausible than Irwin's. It seems equally well placed to deflect worries about special moral faculties and bloated ontologies. Irwin may think that the differences between his position and the more parsimonious one offered by Sidgwick are too slim to matter or are illusory. But he provides no reason to think this, leaving the defense of his metaethical view incomplete.

In normative ethics, Irwin defends "traditional naturalism."[3] This is a version of egoism according to which each ought to aim at his or her happiness or welfare, which is (for him or her) the only ultimate good (69, 128, 131, 269n31). This account of welfare is holistic rather than quantitative (415–18). On the quantitative view, welfare is something "of which we may have more or less" (417; also 391). Hedonism is an example of this view. On the holistic view, welfare has parts that may be chosen for their own sake (72, 405, 884). The parts of individual welfare include both moral and nonmoral virtues, which are determined at least in some measure by what constitutes "the perfection and the fulfillment of our nature and capacities as rational agents" (188; also 128, 948). It is important for Irwin that it is the *full* range of capacities possessed by the practically rational agent that one is required to exercise (554, 561, 882), and that some of the moral virtues involve noninstrumental concern for others (72, 128–32, 597–602, 883, 884–85).

Irwin holds that this view "deserves to be regarded as a viable participant in the prolonged dialectical argument that Socrates began" (891). It is not unreasonable to think that this desert claim rests in part, for Irwin, on the fact that "the most plausible naturalist claims" "can be reconciled with" the "most

2. See also Sidgwick 1907, viii.
3. For an outline of this view, see Irwin 2007, 4–6.

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plausible parts of Kant" (869; also 251) and on the fact that traditional natural-ism avoids the "immoral consequences" of the classical utilitarianism of Bentham and Sidgwick (617).

The reconciliation with Kant is important, since, with the British Ideal-ists Bradley and Green, he is one of Irwin's heroes. He is nevertheless quite selective about the parts of Kant that he thinks worthy of endorsement. He holds that Kant is wrong that there are no categorical requirements of prudence (22ff.), that his criticisms of naturalism rest on a misunderstanding (69ff.): Kant thinks that the happiness of which the view speaks consists in pleasure and that therefore morality is a mere instrument for its production, that he is wrong about the value of certain nonrational motives (54ff.), that he needs traditional naturalism to explain the "rational status of the moral point of view" (130) and to "explain how rational agents regard themselves as ends" (222), and that Kant's appeal to transcendental freedom is not useful for his purposes (77ff.).

Irwin appears to agree with a core part of Kant's normative ethics, name-ly, that rational beings are to be treated as ends in themselves and never as means only. This involves thinking, among other things, that persons ought not to be "sacrificed for anyone's purposes" (623; also 117–18, 577). He goes to great lengths to show that Green's self-realization theory, a version of traditional naturalism, provides a home for this aspect of Kant's view (597ff.).

Irwin rightly points out that acceptance of this aspect of Kant involves the rejection of utilitarianism (215). He does not say whether other normative views are ruled out by this requirement (if any). If Irwin wishes to be in full agreement with Kant, he has to hold that the requirement to treat rational agents as ends and never as means only is absolute. This will put him at odds with Whewell, Price, and Ross, all of whom reject absolutism. The last two think that deontological restrictions may be outweighed by significant sums of aggre-gate good. Price (1991, 181) puts the point effectively: "when the public interest depending is very considerable . . . it may set aside every obligation which would otherwise arise from the common rules of justice, from promises, private inter-est, friendship, gratitude, and all particular attachments and connections."[4]

Irwin is not clear on which view he accepts. He appears sometimes to reject absolutism (421, 483), and his discussion of Ross's view does not involve criticism of Ross's version of Price's point (505n47, 679ff.). If he sides with Kant, he will have to supply reasons to reject the intuitions on which Price and Ross rely. He accepts that it is possible that "even whole classes" of our "initial intuitive convictions" may be "open to revision" (721; also 361). This may be one such case. But this is difficult to swallow. Nonabsolutism has serious intuitive appeal among reasonable people. What else explains its popularity in applied ethics? If Irwin sides with Ross and Price, however, he will have to give up the version of Kant's view that rules out both utilitarianism and the nonabsolutist deontology

4. For Ross's version of the point, see Ross 1930, 18.

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of Price and Ross, putting yet more distance between his position and Kant's. This may leave many to think that the marriage between the two here requires, at the very least, further defense.

Even if Irwin can maintain the marriage, we may still wonder what accepting Kant's position involves. Irwin seems to express some misgivings about Kant's view on lying (51, 823). We may wonder whether it is possible to embrace Kant's version of the principle requiring treatment of rational agents as ends and never as means alone and escape his view on lying. We may also want some clarification of what the principle implies for suicide. Irwin maintains that if I regard myself as an end, "I give myself priority over the achievement of some particular aim or desire" (577; also 623). Does regarding myself as an end imply, in addition, that I give myself priority over the sum of my aims or desires? Suppose all of my aims or desires are frustrated by continuing to live with a disease that causes me to suffer and to be dependent on technology and the care of others. Is it permissible to commit suicide when none of my ends can be achieved by a continued existence that promises only debilitating suffering? Irwin does not say.

A further positive feature of traditional naturalism, in Irwin's mind, is that it avoids the alleged defects of classical utilitarianism. The main discussion of utilitarianism occurs in chapters devoted to Mill and Sidgwick. Irwin argues that Mill does not really offer a defense of utilitarianism. His defense of qualitative hedonism, of the idea that happiness has parts or ingredients, and his friendliness to commonsense morality in moral reasoning make it such that Mill does not really offer a defense of Bentham's brand of utilitarianism and that therefore he "does not really defend utilitarianism" (425).

On Irwin's reckoning, the most plausible defense of classical utilitarianism is found in Sidgwick. Sidgwick rejects Mill's modifications to Bentham's utilitarianism. However, although Sidgwick provides the best defense of utilitarianism, it is insufficient. Utilitarianism's commitment to hedonism and to distribution insensitivity leaves it unpalatable to common sense (461–62, 464, 485ff., 514–16).

Irwin's are powerful (though familiar) criticisms. He does not consider in detail whether some other form of utilitarianism may be able to overcome these criticisms. One such option, mentioned but hastily dismissed, is located in ideal utilitarianism (534–35, 595–97). This view agrees with classical utilitarianism that the right is fixed by the good, but disagrees that the good is confined to pleasure alone. Irwin says it is unclear that we "ought to try" to develop this view (596). He thinks the view is problematic because it cannot accommodate the retrospective concerns found in commonsense morality (534), and it violates the broad utilitarian idea that the good is prior to, and independent from, the right (534n102, 626).

Irwin aims these criticisms at Hastings Rashdall's version of the view. Rashdall (1924, 59) argues that virtue or the will to promote what has non-

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instrumental value (knowledge, for example) is itself noninstrumentally valuable. Irwin thinks that this involves, in effect, denying that the good is prior to the right. This is far from clear. But even if one were to assume the correctness of this criticism, it does not completely impugn ideal utilitarianism, since Rashdall's is but one version of the view.

A different version might say that there are a plurality of noninstrumental goods—knowledge, achievement, promise keeping, pleasure, and equality—and that the right policy, institution, act or whatever is the one that produces a state of affairs that is at least as desirable as any other achievable in the situation. Because this view does not focus exclusively on the consequences of acts—it focuses on the value of the states of affairs that an action or rule or institution realizes—it may be able to accommodate retrospective concerns and it may be able to avoid, through its more expansive view of noninstrumental goods, at least some of the immoral consequences to which classical utilitarianism putatively leads, especially those concerning inequality. It may, of course, transpire that the view lacks the power to remedy all of the problems putatively besetting utilitarianism, but nothing Irwin says here need convince one of this.

True, this view would not possess the kind of definiteness that Sidgwick craved and thought he found in classical utilitarianism (617). But it still appears to capture the guiding ideal of utilitarianism, namely, that it is wrong to do less than the impartial best. Ideal utilitarianism was defended by a number of philosophers writing after Sidgwick, including, in addition to Rashdall, Moore, Russell, Laird, Joseph, and Ewing. Because of its prominence and (perhaps) its philosophical promise, it ought not to have been turned aside so readily. Indeed, the chapter on Ross would have been a good place to deal with it. Ross himself felt it to be a formidable foe, and his engagement with it was fruitful and occasioned changes in his view (which Irwin passes over). The neglect of ideal utilitarianism also leads Irwin to overlook the important contributions made to ethics by its defenders, including Moore's principle of organic unities and his attempt to reconcile utilitarianism with retributivism and Rashdall's development of a conception of virtue that fits within the utilitarian framework.

One of the most interesting chapters in this volume of *The Development of Ethics,* next to the ones on Kant and Green, is on Sidgwick's intuitionist argument for classical utilitarianism and his dualism of practical reason, the view that both utilitarianism and rational egoism are coordinate but conflicting requirements of practical reason. Irwin sheds penetrating light on the nature of the intuitions to which Sidgwick appeals and on the precise role they play in his argument for utilitarianism. Irwin's discussion surpasses everything written on Sidgwick on this topic in terms of raw analytical power. It is now required reading for all Sidgwick scholars.

His account of Sidgwick's dualism is also of merit. He claims that Sidgwick "reaches the dualism of practical reason because he believes that the moral

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point of view is universal, impersonal, and maximizing" (594). He no doubt also reaches it in part because he has a narrow view of an individual's self-interest or welfare. On his view, egoism says that each ought to maximize all and only his or her own greatest surplus pleasure.

Irwin tries to avoid a dualism by rejecting Sidgwick's utilitarianism and by rejecting Sidgwick's hedonism about welfare. Indeed, Irwin appears to reject all forms of subjectivism about welfare. On a number of occasions, he employs (familiar) arguments against preference-fulfillment accounts of welfare (466, 532, 886–87). His main worry is that one's desires, even if improved by exposure to critical scrutiny, may not be good for one to satisfy. Criticism of this kind threatens to impugn all forms of subjectivism about welfare. The remedy for these infelicities appears in Irwin's mind to be found in a perfectionist (and objectivist) conception of welfare that is rather dismissive of what individuals most care about for themselves.

Such a dismissive attitude leads to a difficulty. Irwin's view of welfare appears unable to capture the important intuition—absolutely central to the liberal climate in which we live and to the ethical frameworks that rightly attempt to mirror it—that what is noninstrumentally good for one, what makes one's life go well for one at a time and across time, is at least in large part determined (crucially) by one's (reflectively chosen) schedule of concerns, by one's standards or expectations. Irwin seems not to have much time for this intuition or for the idea that it seems just plain old puritanical to dictate to mature adults what makes them better off. The Aristotelian view of welfare might well be able to capture some of our convictions about welfare and some of our intuitions about the "basis of some duties" (887). Irwin thinks, in particular, that it explains the duty we have to children to "shape their desires in particular ways" (887). But the view seems to conflict with the liberal thought that, except in very rare cases, we ought not to do the same in the case of mature adults. It is hard to see that this is not what is entailed by the view, since it cannot capture the intuition that what is good for me, what makes me better off, depends centrally on what matters to me from my perspective, even when this deviates from what is suggested by the point of view of what is, given my nature, a matter of "health, welfare, normal conditions, and goodness" (890n42; also 891). This may strike some as a compelling reason not to accept traditional naturalism's conception of welfare.

In a work of this scope and of this ambition, it is difficult to be comprehensive. Irwin comes very close. In closing, one oversight does, however, deserve mention. Irwin does not address contributions made by feminist philosophers to the development of ethics. He ends the book with an analysis of Rawls. He could easily have ended it with a chapter on feminist ethics and how the strands of thought within it, for example, the ethics of care, serve to challenge the

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central preoccupations of the philosophers and movements Irwin surveys. This is an especially unfortunate omission not only because feminism (broadly understood) has made distinct and important contributions to the development of ethics. It is lamentable because Irwin is so well suited philosophically to address (and assess) feminism's unique and compelling challenge to the nature, direction, and traditional study of moral philosophy.

This omission is aggravated by the fact that Irwin neglects even to mention Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. He rightly notes that Mill is more conservative than Sidgwick in his treatment of commonsense morality (437). He does not fully absorb Mill's (1969, 224) claim that the utilitarian should adhere to commonsense morality only until he or she "has succeeded in finding better."[5] In *Subjection*, Mill argues that in the case of the social and legal treatment of women, we can find (much) better. He proceeds to attack the "rule of mere force" that keeps women in subjection to men and argues for its replacement by a "moral law" requiring "perfect equality" between the sexes (Mill 1984, 265, 267, 261). He ultimately thinks that this is a requirement of utilitarianism. Irwin could certainly have used a discussion of Mill's attitude to at least outline the various different varieties of feminist thought that some find in his pioneering work. Indeed, this would have made for a positive note in what is a rather hostile treatment of Mill.

This volume of *The Development of Ethics* is a monumental contribution to the history and philosophical study of morality. It is difficult to read it and not have at least some of one's basic convictions challenged. It should be widely read and discussed.

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5. Irwin notes this passage at 412n39.

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John F. Horty, *Reasons as Defaults.*
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Once, deontic logicians toiled over artificially simple formal systems whose
predictions moral philosophers could, in general, safely ignore. But no more.
A focus of contemporary deontic logic is the formal representation of the nu-
ance and complexity of everyday normative reasoning. Horty's work is at the
leading edge of these efforts. In *Reasons as Defaults,* he offers a rigorous formal
treatment of the role of *reasons* in normative reasoning—both practical
(reasons for action) and theoretical (epistemic reasons for belief). It is now a
commonplace of moral philosophy that what an agent ought to do is deter-
mined by how the normative "weights" or "forces" of different reasons combine.
But as Horty complains, these are just metaphors, and we have no systematic
account of how reasons combine to determine what agents ought to do. The
primary aim of his book is to correct this.

Horty seeks to both represent and explain the interaction of reasons
with the resources of default logic, developed by computer scientists (being
himself one of the pioneers) to capture nonmonotonic or defeasible reasoning,
in which adding new information can prompt withdrawal of a previously justi-
fied conclusion. Defaults are defeasible rules that tell us to draw a conclusion/
perform an action C once we've accepted a premise P, which "triggers" the
default. For example, a default rule tells us to conclude that Tweety flies (F)
if we accept the premise that Tweety is a bird (B).

Horty proposes that the premise P of a triggered default is what we mean
by a *reason* for C. These rules can issue conflicting instructions. A different
default rule tells us to conclude that Tweety doesn't fly ($\sim F$) if we accept that
Tweety is a penguin (P); these two defaults are conflicted if both are triggered.
The defeasibility of these defaults consists in their susceptibility to being *defeated*
by other such rules. To account for defeat, Horty introduces the idea of *priorities*