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Modern Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to Kant by Stephen Darwall (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

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Modern Moral Philosophy is the first volume in a two-volume project which will extend from Hugo Grotius to late twentieth-century moral philosophy. The first volume traces the development of the metaethics of right and the nature of normative reasons, oughts, and normativity itself (p. 172) from Grotius through natural lawyers and British moralists to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. It is insightful, original, and well-argued – as one would expect. Some of the themes and most of the characters are familiar from Stephen Darwall's much-discussed work in the history of ethics over the past thirty years. But in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, Darwall engages anew with the authors and themes and to his great credit with much new secondary literature which includes criticisms of his earlier positions.

Darwall notes in the 'Acknowledgments' the great influence Jerome Schneewind had on his work. The subtitle of Schneewind's *Invention of Autonomy* (Schneewind 1998) is 'A History of Modern Moral Philosophy', and autonomy plays a central role in organizing an enormous quantity of philosophy from Montaigne to Kant. The works which Darwall engages with are far more restricted: Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, Benedict de Spinoza, G. W. Leibniz, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (very briefly), Immanuel Kant, and a host of British philosophers. One might think that this is a similar but more restricted work. But it is very different.

Sidgwick rather seems to me the central influence on Darwall's approach in *Modern Moral Philosophy*. Sidgwick drew extensively and critically in *The Methods of Ethics* on the distinctively modern concepts he understood to have arisen in the works of Joseph Butler, Richard Price, John Stuart Mill, and many others in hopes of presenting a more defensible philosophical ethics. Darwall notes in the 'Preface' that he undertook a research project on Fichte and Hegel in the late 1990s which simultaneously spurred his much-discussed

work on the second-person standpoint and a long genesis of *Modern Moral Philosophy*. Like *Methods, Modern Moral Philosophy* is both a systematic presentation of methods of ethics and an ongoing historical dialogue. The mutual reinforcement of historical and contemporary considerations is evident throughout. To his credit, Darwall resists the 'ahistorical folly' (p. 231) of pigeonholing his predecessors with one contemporary metaethical view.

The two volumes are framed by what Darwall refers to as 'Sidgwick's Contrast' and 'Anscombe's Challenge'. For Sidgwick, modern moral philosophy is identified with moral theories which have a distinctive place for rightness and have a 'quasi-juridical' form. 'Sidgwick's Contrast' is the claim that 'the deontic concept of moral right or obligation is irreducible to any species of the good' and 'has a normative practical force that is additional to the good (pp. 4–5). 'Anscombe's Challenge' is directed towards the theories which 'Sidgwick's Contrast' highlights. According to Anscombe the modern moral philosopher's moral rightness derives its obligation from laws. But in the absence of a divine legislator to obligate laws, modern moral philosophy is irredeemably confused. Underlying the first volume is Darwall's defence of modern moral philosophy against Anscombe and a tacit argument that deontic theories are coherent and the signal achievement of modern moral philosophy.

The first chapter of *Modern Moral Philosophy* is on Hugo Grotius in clear contrast with T. H. Irwin's *The Development of Ethics,* which opens with an extensive chapter on Suárez followed by a brief discussion of Grotius (Irwin, 2008). To counter the paeons to Grotius as the founder of a new modern approach to ethics, Irwin argues for Grotius' lack of originality in contrast with Suárez. This prioritizing of Suárez anchors Irwin's argument for the continuity of Aristotelian naturalism over the course of the history of ethics. Darwall acknowledges the importance of Suárez but argues that although Suárez identifies the distinctively obliging force of natural law and distinguishes it from moral council, it is as a supplement to an agent's eudaimonist ends. Grotius by contrast identifies morality with the deontic obligations of natural law.

Darwall suggests that for Grotius deontic ethics is rooted in our 'standing to make reasoned claims and demands of one another at all' (p. 38). This goes beyond Grotius' text since standing is not, as far as I can tell, a Grotian concept. But Darwall argues that standing is built into the juridical framework which Grotius draws on insofar as the framework assumes our prior capacity to make claims on one another as well as from natural sociability. Darwall admits, though, that there is little explanation in Grotius of exactly how the deontic

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framework might be filled in. Filling it in is rather the work of his successors.

The chapters which follow treat pairs or groups of philosophers. Darwall focuses on three strands of modern ethicists – naturalists, deontic moralists, and others. By 'naturalism' he means philosophers who to some extent 'desire to account for normativity in fully natural terms, without reliance on supernatural posits and without attributing to reason any powers beyond those involved in empirical inquiry' (Darwall, 1995, p. 14). Thomas Hobbes, Richard Cumberland, John Locke, Francis Hutcheson, and David Hume all qualify as naturalists (although I would not characterize Locke in this way given his deductivist account of moral knowledge). Darwall surprisingly does not discuss two of the most unequivocal ethical naturalists, Bernard Mandeville and Jeremy Bentham, the latter of whom has as much claim to being the paradigmatic modern moral philosopher as Kant. I take it they are not discussed by Darwall because they are less important on his view for the emergence of deontic ethics.

Paralleling the naturalists is an emergent strand of deontic moralists stretching from Grotius, to Pufendorf, to Ralph Cudworth and Lord Shaftesbury, to Butler and Adam Smith, and finally to the British rationalists. They are not united by being non-naturalists since it is not obvious that all of them are. Nor is the internalism/externalism distinction highlighted as in Darwall's earlier book. They are instead united in the way they contribute to the development of deontic concepts such as autonomy, authority, standing, moral accountability, conscience, and binding obligation. I take it they have a dialectical relationship with the naturalists. This dialectic is initiated by Darwall's pairing of the arch-naturalist Thomas Hobbes for whom 'it would seem to follow from his claims about deliberation and desires that the only way considerations of right can enter into practical reasoning is by being translated into terms of the good' (p. 59) and Pufendorf. Pufendorf is often read as a Hobbesian, but Darwall sees Pufendorf as giving central place to right action via the recognition of normative authority which underpins his account of obligation. He furthermore sees Pufendorf, unlike Hobbes, as developing Grotius' conception of sociability as mutual recognition which obligates via agreements through the exercise of our moral powers.

The pairings of Hutcheson with Butler and Hume with Smith offer similar contrasts. In contrast with Hutcheson, with whom he has much in common, Butler argues for 'the independence of the right and the good in a way that could clarify the distinctively metaethical question of the sources of normativity in general, as well

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as that of moral right in particular' (p. 200). In contrast with his friend Hume, Smith focuses on equal dignity and mutual accountability in his discussions of propriety and self-command in a manner which deviates from Hume's naturalism. For Darwall the deontic strand comes to fruition in two great and comparatively understudied moral philosophers: Thomas Reid and particularly Richard Price whose work is a culmination of many themes (p. 256).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the book, though, is Darwall's discussion of Kant building on ideas introduced in *The Second Person Standpoint* (Darwall, 2006). After a very brief presentation of Rousseau, Darwall undertakes extensive analysis of passages from the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* – by far his lengthiest discussion in the book. One might expect, given this, that Kant would be the culmination of the emergence of the independence of the right. But although Darwall shows great admiration for Kant's achievements, like Sidgwick he thinks that the problems Kant's metaethics run into could have been better dealt with by taking Butler and the rationalists more seriously.

Instead, Darwall sees Kant's conception of practical reason and the formal character of obligation as incapable of presenting deontic concepts as central to morality. For Darwall, Kant's stress on the fact that imperatives are for creatures like us who are imperfect, and that God has no such directives, makes the imperatives and their content wholly epiphenomenal even as they are formally comprehended by practical reason (p. 330). Along the way, Darwall offers insightful criticism of constructivist interpretations, which seek to mend the gap between the formal character of practical reason and the deontic concepts we employ *qua* the limited creatures we are.

I read many of these authors drastically differently, but that is neither here nor there in admiring Darwall's achievement of presenting a philosophical synthesis and explication of modern moral philosophy and illuminating what are perhaps its most difficult themes. I do worry about the category of modern moral philosophy itself. In identifying modern moral philosophy with deontic quasi-jural theories it becomes difficult to explain how and that the naturalists are modern moral philosophers – which Darwall seems to want to hold. This comes to the fore with Hutcheson. Darwall admits Hutcheson is neither a jural nor a deontic moralist, but he claims him as a modern moral philosopher nonetheless due to his invoking a distinctive sense of moral (p. 172). For Anscombe the distinctively moral *is* rightness, so it is not enough on her account or on Sidgwick's to identify a non-deontic but special sense of moral as sufficient to modern moral philosophy. It is thus unclear to me exactly how, for

Darwall, naturalists are modern moral philosophers on this account, other than by contributing to the dialectic. This can also be seen in Darwall's deemphasis of the utilitarian strand of modern moral philosophy.

In conclusion, I learned a great deal reading *Modern Moral Philosophy*, as I think all historians of moral philosophy and moral philosophers who read it will. It brings to culmination many of the themes Darwall has argued for over his career so far, but they are pursued in a novel fashion and leading to profound insight about the nature of deontic obligation through its history. I eagerly await the second volume.

Lastly, Cambridge University Press should be praised for the construction and feel of the book. I have written many notes on the excellent thick paper. It also has an excellent index.

Aaron Garrett
garrett@bu.edu

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