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Kant on Evil, Self-Deception, and Moral Reform by Laura
Papish (review)

Francey Russell

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pessimistic. He writes: “the assistance of religion fails to save Kant’s pure ethics . . . because it cannot appropriately bridge the distance between natural inclinations and the good—it can only cultivate courage in the moral struggle” (148). That suggests that the problem is not that we are not naturally disposed towards the moral good, but that moral education and religious belief (at least as Kant construes them) cannot achieve the moral revolution that Kant hoped they could achieve. But then, Vanden Auweele’s central claim is not that Kant *is* a pessimist, but perhaps that he *should be* a pessimist, especially if he believed, as Vanden Auweele believes, that “when religions are emptied of their supernatural and irrational elements, they can no longer achieve their particular [practical] function” (185). Unfortunately, this lack of clarity in the main argument of the book makes it difficult to follow the thread that runs through the detailed analyses of Kant’s views. As it stands, the book reads like an extended commentary on Kant’s ethics and philosophy of religion, without clear indication of how individual chapters support the author’s claim about Kantian pessimism.

KARIN NISENBAUM

Boston College

Laura Papish. *Kant on Evil, Self-Deception, and Moral Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xvii + 257. Cloth, \$85.00

Iris Murdoch wrote that we should always ask about any philosopher: “what are they afraid of?” (*The Sovereignty of Good*, 71. London: Routledge, 1970). One of Kant’s most acute anxieties is the human tendency to motivated illusion and self-deception. For Kant, not only is it the case that “the depths of the human heart are unfathomable” (6:447), but we human beings *actively* undermine our own efforts to know it, we “throw dust in our own eyes” (6:38). In her book, Laura Papish offers a rich, holistic account of the Kantian person—not just the “agent”—in order to provide a textually-based, philosophically-defensible analysis of the relationship between self-deception and evil in Kant’s philosophy.

The main questions that animate Papish’s investigation are: What is self-deception, according to Kant? In what way does self-deception operate as a condition for evil? And how does recourse to the phenomenon of self-deception provide Kant with further explanatory resources when it comes to making sense of evil? Throughout the book, Papish also raises interesting methodological questions. These are not pursued at length, since they are in some sense beyond the purview of her immediate focus; and yet, as Papish recognizes, when it comes to a Kantian analysis of evil and self-deception—that is, his non-ideal moral psychology—questions of method arise immediately, since it seems that neither a strictly a priori analysis nor an ordinary empirical investigation is appropriate. So, we need to ask: in his analyses of phenomena like self-deception, self-conceit, our unsocial sociability, and our radical evil, exactly what kinds of claims is Kant making, what kinds of claims *can* he make, and what kinds of claims can we accept as defensible?

After providing a fascinating analysis of what could be called Kant’s hedonism for humans (chapter 1) and a new interpretation of evil as motivational overdetermination (chapter 2), Papish turns directly to self-deception. Her first task is to explain what self-deception is. She argues that because the self-deceiving person is partly cognizant of epistemic norms, self-deception should be understood as a form of *rationalization*, the routing of attention away from some undesirable cognition and towards another, preferable cognition that distracts from the first (75). (Papish’s discussion of Kant’s “doxastic flexibility” and the space in his system for permissible moral illusions is extremely illuminating.)

In chapter 4, Papish turns to the question of why self-deception should be necessary for evil. Can human beings not knowingly act without moral justification, or against their best judgment, without needing to deceive themselves? Papish argues that self-deception need not involve radical self-ignorance. Rather, “what is decisive regarding self-deception in a Kantian framework is not whether an agent has cognition of what is true but whether she

vigorously attends to the truth" (99). Notice, though, that self-deception as rationalization sets the bar very low. If we are self-deceived whenever we do not "vigorously attend" to the truth, then human beings will turn out to be self-deceived much of the time, and non-self-deceived agency will be quite demanding (99). If Papish is fine with all this, it would be worthwhile to discuss the costs and benefits of this expansive conception.

In chapter 5, Papish addresses Kant's claim that evil "belongs to the human being universally (and hence to the character of the species)" (6:29). How, and on what basis, can Kant make such a universal claim? Papish's proposal for how to understand Kant's argument for radical evil is original, creative, and compelling. One of its productive novelties is its focus on Kant's claims about the human species (*Gattung*), and specifically the idea that a defect belongs to our species as such. Papish notes how "deeply weird" it is for Kant to suggest that there could be a species defect (121). It is deeply weird indeed, and this idea raises interesting and difficult philosophical-methodological questions. Developing Kant's suggestion that *dissimulation* "belongs to the original composition of a human creature and to the concept of his species" (144), Papish argues that dissimulation is an ineradicable feature of human agency, hence belongs to the species universally, and yet, insofar as each of us actively engages this propensity, it is something for which we are each responsible. To get responsibility in the picture, Papish points out that a species-characteristic should be understood as internal to agency, not some given material condition, like our physiology, with regards to which we are passive. As she writes, "species characteristics are universally shared, [but] this does not make them any less mine . . . [I cannot] be indifferent to them or rationally disassociate myself from it" (141). Unlike body-characteristics discovered through empirical research, I can identify with my human species-characteristics. They are *mine* (each of ours), in a way that my digestive system is not. This is also "deeply weird" and requires further analysis: how is this kind of mineness different from the way my own personal commitments are *mine*? What kind of responsibility follows? Do I know my species-characteristics in the same way I know my commitments, practically and first-personally?

There is much to recommend in Papish's book. It is exciting and rewarding to read, philosophically deep and humane, and exhibits deep knowledge and appreciation of Kant's corpus.

FRANCEY RUSSELL

Barnard College, Columbia University

Maria Borges. *Emotion, Reason and Action in Kant*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. x + 209. Cloth, £85.00.

Despite the fact that emotions have become an important part of Kant scholarship in the last thirty years and counting, few books are devoted to the topic. Borges's book remedies this lacuna. Kant scholars who are familiar with her work will be happy to see her account of emotions connected to other discussions of Kantian moral psychology.

The book begins with a general account of actions, reasons, and causes (chapter 1). Given this background, Borges then raises the question: what role do emotions play in this framework? Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explain how emotions function in Kant's moral psychology. One of the main theses is that Kant has "a very colorful, wide range of emotions, which cannot be captured by one model type" (87). Borges makes it clear, however, that she wishes to defend a broadly intellectualist account of emotions (40–41). On the intellectualist reading, emotions do not and should not play a role in moral motivation (59–60). In chapters 5, 6, and 7, Borges presents an alternative account of the role emotions can play. Kant was clear that moral philosophy contains an empirical dimension, and Borges suggests that this is where emotions belong. She argues that Kant accepts several basic assumptions from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physiology, which provides the starting point for his views (109–113). According to Borges, Kant advocates for controlling our emotions and that this is one of the primary tasks for virtue (136–37). Borges argues that the intellectualist