

Barbara Herman, *The Moral Habitat*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 272.

Those who love philosophy books that present new, exciting, and complex theories have been given a gift in Barbara Herman's *The Moral Habitat*. In my view, it is also a gift to Kant, since it develops a deeply Kantian account of deliberation as part of showing how perfect and imperfect duties can be seen as working together in a dynamic moral (eco)system of duties of right and of virtue. In the process of doing this, Herman develops a new, intriguing account of imperfect duties and replaces many of Kant's bad examples with good ones, providing an ideal model for how to argue by example, whether one is Kantian or not. Moreover, by her many intriguing and rich examples, Herman makes many of Kant's ideas, as well as her revisionary Kantian ideas, available as resources in our shared philosophical practice. Of course, Kantians and others will disagree with some of her arguments and proposals, but many of these discussions yet to come will themselves become important additions to the existing scholarship. Fortunately, too, for a book that presents a new and complex Kantian theory, it does not get bogged down in specific scholarly disputes on particular topics; instead, it stays focused on developing and communicating the big moves, the big picture. Finally, as with all Herman's brilliant writings, *The Moral Habitat* is beautifully written—with care, wit, and wisdom. It is, in other words, among the best of gifts: a reliable friend to think with about some very complex and difficult topics—philosophical and human—from now on.

The moral habitat is defined as “a made environment, created by and for free and equal persons living together,” and Herman consequently puts “the deliberating and morally active person at the center of a generative moral enterprise” (p. ix). Herman's book is furthermore divided into three parts: “Part One: Three Imperfect Duties”; “Part Two: Kantian Resources”; and “Part Three: Living in the Moral Habitat.” Part One serves to rid readers of some ingrained expectations they are likely to have of Kantian discussions of imperfect duty, such as the expectation that this will mostly be a discussion of beneficence or that it will assume a specific, historically prominent interpretation of motive or incentive. In these ways, Herman helps us to open our philosophical minds and stimulates our philosophical curiosity and imagination. More specifically, after the first chapter, focused on “Framing the Question (What We Can Learn From Imperfect Duties),” Herman provides chapter-length discussions of gratitude, giving, and due care (chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively). Her main strategy throughout these chapters is to develop each idea from the bottom up, working from many rich and intriguing examples to a summary section in each chapter—called “middle work”—where she draws our (philosophically trained minds') attention to her main findings. For example, the main focus of chapter 3 is the puzzle of why giving too much—such as paying too much when repaying a loan or giving too much as a gift—causes damage. In the “middle work” section following these examples, Herman then draws out some meta-normative claims about how permissibility and wrongness relate to one another, with a special focus on her claim throughout this chapter that there is a “possible consistency of *not impermissible* and morally wrong” (p. 43).

Herman's strategy in this first part is effective and productive. It shows us that figuring out what to do in any situation (good deliberation) requires us to pay attention to its complexity—an interpretation of Kant's statement that wisdom requires “judgement sharpened by experience”—and to how many rights, duties, and obligations interweave in specific situations. The examples also help everyone to be ready for the more philosophically sophisticated discussions in the “middle work” sections—and, of course, for the rest of the book. Herman's strategy here also helps rid us of the bad habit of looking for simple solutions to complex questions—whether our preferred simplifying method is to focus on one, allegedly

core, example (of Kant's) or one principle, or one interpretation thereof (such as the so-called categorical imperative procedure). Living life well, on our own and together with others, is much more difficult than this at any given moment and through time (as the circumstances of our lives evolve and change). In these ways—and throughout the book—Herman shows us how to deliberate within the Kantian framework; Aristotle is no longer the only (classical) alternative in town on the topic of good deliberation.

Part Two zooms in on Kantian practical philosophical resources, especially as they are found in, and can be further developed from, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Herman's overall aim here is to "introduce and argue for a revisionary interpretation of Kant's ethics (broadly construed)... [as] guided by two lodestars: that the resulting reading be convincingly *Kant's* ethics, in both letter and spirit, and that the revision justify itself by giving us a better theory, in its own terms and in ours" (p. 73). More specifically, chapter 6 ("The Kantian System of Duties") presents Herman's interpretation of many basic interpretive and philosophical ideas regarding right, including how it is prior to virtue in important regards. For example, until something distinct from us (such as property) really is ours, it is not ours to give (e.g., as a gift). In chapter 7 ("Kantian Imperfect Duties"), she presents her innovative account of imperfect duties. Here a central aim is to explain why we must not conflate "ends and duties" so that we can see how one "single obligatory end gives rise to a number of duties" (p. 123). In addition, a great amount of time is obviously still devoted to the "posterchild" of imperfect duty, beneficence. However, Herman develops the conventional approach here by, among other things, convincingly proposing that we need to clearly distinguish between "relational beneficence" and beneficence involving strangers (including "humanitarian beneficence"). For example, internal to friendships, gifts and help come with the challenge of making sure that they do not undermine our equality. Wisdom in these regards requires us to understand both a lot about ourselves and our friends as well as how the gift fits into our historical and ongoing, dynamic project of living life together as equals. Gifts can bring us closer together or push us apart and Herman interestingly suggests that gratitude functions to maintain a good relationship (of equality) when needed assistance is offered and accepted. Finally, in chapter 8 ("Tracking Value and Extending Duties"), Herman presents her take on certain casuistic puzzles as well as imperfect judicial duties. Here she engages, for instance, some of the problems related to lying and self-defense, arguing, first (as she has before), for the exception to the rule when it comes to lying (when doing so does not undermine the end sustained by the general prohibition on lying) and, second (for the first time), that in a fundamental sense, private individuals do not have a right to self-defense (as only the public authority can use coercion rightfully).

In Part Three, Herman explores some topics central to living in the moral habitat understood as a "dynamic system" (chapter 9) before zooming in on defending a "A Right to Housing" (chapter 10) domestically and internationally (refugees). In short, the chapter on housing illustrates how to realize the general, Kantian idea of rightful external freedom with regard to this particular issue in our current moral habitats. She then turns to more general ideas or challenges involved in being an agent of ongoing and always incomplete moral change in chapter 11 ("Incompleteness and Moral Change"). Her most general claim here is that "we should accept that there is in principle nothing that counts as a complete or ideal system of duties for human beings. That there is no theoretical point of view from which all that ought to be done is fully determinate or determinable" (p. 213). Among other things, here she reflects on the fact that although we have never had good reasons to restrict moral habitat to certain subsections of human animals, we also have good reasons for why it should not be limited to only human animals and thus exclude other animals. Indeed, she proposes, it is quite possible

that in the future we may have reasons also to include robots (Artificial Intelligence) in various ways. The moral habitat is constantly evolving, and the aim is to become better moral agents of change so that our participation in it helps to transform and improve it. Which is not to say that all the bads in the past or present were or are “just so” (p. 216).

In her “Conclusion: Method and Limits,” Herman underscores that the book as a whole emphasizes that “the notion of *innate right* is the appropriate starting point for a system of duties, rights, and obligations suited to the condition of human beings” (p. 228). She also stresses that her central aim has been to show how motive must be thought of as “the internal analogue of procedural value—arriving at the right result the right way.” As such, this “notion of motive ... is a better fit with psychological theories of human development that see the dynamic changes in the value-objects of affects as essential to the emergence of a healthy human self” (p. 230). Finally, she concludes that another overarching aim has been to show how “imperfect duties are central, substantial parts of the moral terrain, sometimes demanding and often open-ended.... They often provide space for us to bring our critical and imaginative faculties to bear on a developing and dynamic moral system that can have both a creative and a regulatory role in our lives” (p. 230).

In the English-speaking world, the topic of imperfect duties has been a core concern for many Kantians in the last few decades, from Onora O’Neill and Thomas E. Hill Jr. to Sarah Holtman and Carol Hay. Similarly, the last couple of decades have seen an explosion in scholarship on Kant’s Doctrine of Right, with libertarian interpretive lines initiated by Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruscka as well as liberal republican interpretive lines initiated by Thomas Pogge, Ernest Weinrib, and Arthur Ripstein dominating the English-language scholarship. *The Moral Habitat* is the first of its kind to present an account of imperfect duties that is deeply complementary to works in the liberal republican interpretive tradition, but there is much for all Kantians and non-Kantians to generatively engage in terms of scholarship and philosophical proposals. *The Moral Habitat* is, as I said at the beginning, a gift to our shared philosophical enterprise; enjoy!

Helga Varden
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign