

Philosophy in Review

Comptes rendus philosophiques

February • février 1997

■ Volume XVII, No.1

Philosophy in Review/Comptes rendus philosophiques

formerly

Canadian Philosophical Reviews

Revue Canadienne de Comptes rendus en Philosophie

Editors • Directeurs

Roger A. Shiner
Department of Philosophy
4-108 Humanities Centre
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T6G 2E5

E-Mail: roger.a.shiner@ualberta.ca

Alain Voizard
Département de philosophie
Université du Québec à Montréal
C.P. 8888, Succursale Centre-Ville
Montréal, QC
Canada H3C 3P8

E-Mail: voizard.alain@uqam.ca

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Les abonnements peuvent être pris chez l'éditeur:

Academic Printing & Publishing

P.O. Box 4218, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6E 4T2
Tel: (403) 435-5898 Fax: (403) 435-5852
E-mail: app@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 5550

ISSN 1206-5269
© 1997 Academic Printing & Publishing

Published six times a year

Volume XVII, No. 1

February • février 1997

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Raymond A. Belliotti

Seeking Identity: Individualism versus Community in an Ethnic Context.

Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 1995.

Pp. xviii + 262.

US\$35.00 (cloth: ISBN 0-7006-0729-3);

US\$17.95 (paper: ISBN 0-7006-0730-7).

This interesting book addresses several issues concerning the epistemic and ethical adequacy of various sorts of group identity. Belliotti writes as a third-generation Italian-American who values his ethnic identity yet realizes that there is an 'individual-community continuum' that branches out in several, often opposing, directions. Individuals confront family, ethnic group, gender, race, country, and the international order, and these different communities often make conflicting claims on an individual. Belliotti hopes to shed light on the status of these claims by focusing on a specific set of issues: the ethics of family relations, feminist epistemology, the authority of the state, the moral status of pacifism, and the proper characterization of ethnicity. In each instance, he brings the Italian-American immigrant experience to bear on the general questions at issue.

Chapter 1 is an investigation of the relationship between individuals, their families, and the wider society. Belliotti outlines the southern Italian immigrants' unwritten system of moral rules, a set of prescriptions that defined proper relations among family members and between family members and outsiders. This account leads into a discussion of the partiality-impartiality debate in ethics, the dispute between defenders of special obligations to those close to us (partialists) and those who would deny that we can defend such obligations at any ground level (impartialists). I think this way of framing the dispute is misleading since, with a few famous exceptions (e.g., Godwin, Kagan), it misrepresents the impartialists' position. Belliotti defends a plausible version of partialism based on noncontractual obligations, but the impartialist opponent here is something of a straw man. Impartialists do not argue that we should treat every person in precisely the same way when deciding what to do in any specific context of action. Rather, they concern themselves with justifying action-guiding principles that can be defended impartially to everyone on a footing of equality. In that case, the resulting recommendations would likely include a significant degree of partiality of concern at the first-order level (though not enough to warrant favouritism for intimates in respect of their non-vital interests when strangers lack protection for their vital interests).

In Chapter 2, Belliotti investigates the confrontation between the gendered self and the family. After introducing three images of Italian immigrant women, he plunges into debates in contemporary feminist epistemology, and considers the acceptability and coherence of the idea of a 'woman's perspective'. Chapter 3 contains outlines of various forms of anarchism, and here Belliotti offers an extended critique of Roberto Unger's views.

que posséder un concept. Cette définition, que la philosophie tente de rendre explicite, n'est assurément pas quelque chose que l'on peut déterminer empiriquement. Il soutient toutefois que des propositions comme celles de Peacocke qui décrivent la possession de concepts indépendamment de la possession du langage, permettent de concevoir une division du travail entre philosophie et psychologie, que ne permettaient pas des théories comme celles de Quine ou Davidson.

Le livre s'achève par une réflexion sur le projet d'une épistémologie naturalisée. Rejetant d'emblée le programme quinién parce qu'il met l'épistémologie «au chômage» et considérant les insuffisances de l'analyse a prioriste traditionnelle de l'épistémologie analytique, l'auteur se tourne vers le fiabilisme de Goldman. Le problème avec le fiabilisme, comme le montre Engel, c'est que, contrairement à ce que Goldman prétend, l'explication de la justification ne semble pouvoir faire l'économie de concepts normatifs, comme de la croyance dans le fait que notre environnement est celui dans lequel nos processus sont fiables, c'est-à-dire qu'il doit être considéré comme l'environnement normal de ceux-ci. Ce genre de critique, qui montre qu'il est impossible de tirer la norme du fait, devrait tempérer l'enthousiasme des naturalistes tous azimuts, sans toutefois conforter les «philosophistes» dans leur position.

En résumé, malgré le fait que ce livre n'apprendra probablement pas grand chose aux spécialistes et que les propositions positives concernant le monde «2 1/2» sont souvent plus programmatiques qu'autre chose, il constitue néanmoins une excellente introduction au débat psychologisme/antipsychologisme. L'ouvrage, écrit dans un style clair et compréhensif, permet au lecteur de redécouvrir certaines affinités profondes entre la philosophie analytique et la phénoménologie (avant le schisme), de comprendre la logique qui a menée au rejet de la psychologie et surtout d'en évaluer la pertinence à la lumière de la philosophie et psychologie contemporaine. Pour ces raisons, je ne saurais trop en recommander la lecture.

Luc Faucher

Université du Québec à Montréal

Dwight Furrow

Against Theory: Continental and Analytic Challenges in Moral Philosophy.

New York: Routledge 1995.

Pp. xx + 224.

US\$59.95 (cloth: ISBN 0-415-91097-X);

US\$17.95 (paper: ISBN 0-415-91080-3).

Hegel is reputed to have put the finishing touches on his *Phenomenology of Spirit* to an accompaniment of cannon-fire as Napoleon's troops entered Jena. Thus began an antagonism, practically definitive of modernity, between a French Enlightenment universalism that soured into imperialist imposition, and a German counter-assertion of particularism that soured into closure and intolerance. In moral philosophy, the rationalism of universal ethical theories runs the risk of ignoring the essentially local contexts of ethical dilemmas. But often the response, by valorizing just those local contexts, runs the equal risk of not according full moral status to those on the outside of one's local grouping. Both suffer, in a phrase that Furrow uses repeatedly, from 'moral blindness.'

Furrow's aim is to break the deadlock of this antagonism by developing a third option: a non-theoretical, non-rationalist ethical universalism. On the way, he also paints a nuanced picture of the relations between Anglo-American historicists and French post-modernists, detecting an important fault line that corresponds to the distinction between a pure particularism and his goal of context-sensitivity compatible with universalism.

The book takes its shape from this confrontation: the first part devoted to the historicists, and the second to the post-modernists. (There is also a slightly awkward 'Thematic Summary' that rehearses the whole argument at some length, and smacks of editorial intervention.) Furrow does not spend too much time defending the cogency of the anti-theory position; but his own claim that the book is merely 'tracing the implications' (xiii) of the position is belied by its consistent argumentative depth. His characterization, for instance, of the misplaced motivations of moral theorizing is full of insight. If, as Furrow argues, the human condition is shot through with vulnerability to the contingent, then *theorizing* morality misses the point. Fleeing to the fortress-like certitudes of reason is a *denial* of this vulnerability, and what is needed is an ethics that responds to contingency rather than attempting to annihilate it. (Furrow argues further that non-foundational modes of theorizing, such as reflective equilibrium, are in the same position as regular theorizing: *any* appeal to abstract principles cleaves ethics from its essential conditions.)

It is of course the historicists who provide the traditional response, introducing what Furrow terms, with a nod to Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, a 'concrete ethics' (200 note 10). Furrow covers three historicists in his account: MacIntyre, Nussbaum and Rorty. Each, in Furrow's view, is alert to the relativist problem of particularism; but ultimately none have the internal resources to

contest it and therefore to generate any kind of universalism. MacIntyre's solution is that criteria interior to tradition can, in certain circumstances, warrant a radical break with that tradition under the external impetus of an alien tradition. Nussbaum's solution is to defend a classical literary sensibility whereby one does not seek to defuse ethical conflict of goods (what she calls tragedy), but accepts that one will inevitably do evil in choosing. Rorty suggests that we must support our own traditions publicly, but that in private we may be lucid about the lack of ground for such support and temper it with irony.

Furrow argues that the constitutive or transcendental efficacy of local tradition is in considerable tension with the historical contingency of any particular tradition. Because our moral and social identities as well as our life-worlds (populated by morally salient properties) are constructed from historically local materials, we would be giving up both ourselves and our worlds if we changed; such a mutation would in effect be a form of collective social suicide.

He also offers a diagnosis of this situation: it is because identity and the moral-perceptual world are constituted contrastively or divisively (i.e., against what they are not) that conflict is made necessary. Furrow therefore sees Nussbaum's tragic outlook not really as a solution, but as a *reductio*: if we continue to conceive ethical commitments contrastively, then irrecoverable tragedy is the result. If the premise is false, then what is the alternative? This is where Furrow appeals to French thinkers, and in particular, Levinas and Lyotard. Both have emerged from a phenomenological neo-Kantianism that avoids the inconsistencies of trying (as the historicists do) to give transcendental weight to the empirical vagaries of history.

The axiom of this phenomenological work is that the transcendental conditions of representation are not capable of cognitive representation; in Heidegger's *argot*, making present is not itself something present. Transcendental research therefore reveals something that is universally shared by all humans (as representing creatures), but which is not a theoretical principle or a contrastive principle of identity. In the abstract this fits the bill for Furrow's third alternative. This argument is bolstered because both Levinas and Lyotard follow the structure of Kant's work closely in thinking that what is not accessible to cognition (but nevertheless transcendently implicated by it) is the ethical. Levinas' quasi-phenomenologies locate this dimension in an infinite obligation to the Other (person) revealed in the face; and Lyotard's analysis in *The Differend*, shows (in Furrow's summary on p. 182) that 'bearing witness to the impossibility of presenting the unrepresentable' is 'justice.'

It is, however, not obvious that we are compelled to think absolute alterity as ethics (and Furrow draws attention to this in Levinas' case on p. 153) rather than something else or nothing at all. Indeed, the negative thrust of the arguments suggests that *any* positive characterization will be illegitimate. The universality that Furrow suggests is so thin (it is difficult to imagine one thinner than blank alterity) that it seems almost inevitable that some positive content will be imposed on it, in this case ethics. It is tempting to

wonder if this is the basis of Enlightenment imperialism: the vacuity of universals is just what permits them to be the most insidious missionary vehicles. Perhaps the post-modern French have not completely lost the Napoleonic impulse that troubled Hegel so.

Alistair Welchman
San Antonio, Texas

Don Garrett, ed.

The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza.
New York: Cambridge University Press 1996.
Pp. xiii + 465.
US\$59.95 (cloth: ISBN 0-521-39235-7);
US\$17.95 (paper: ISBN 0-521-39865-7).

The editor of this companion holds that, of the philosophical systems that the seventeenth century produced in such abundance, Spinoza's 'speaks most cogently and persuasively' to our age (2). Even if certain aspects of Spinoza's thought — on the treatment of animals, for example — are unappealing, his work compels admiration for its depth, cohesion, and boldness. Nietzsche was not alone in finding 'a forerunner, and what a forerunner!' (quoted on p.425). The reception of Spinoza — for far longer than that of his contemporaries — has been marked by almost hagiographic admiration on the one hand, and by near-phobic rejection on the other. Like Nietzsche, Spinoza inspires not just exegesis and criticism but advocacy and dismay.

The analytic bent of the *Companion*, while it brings out amply the seriousness and complexity of Spinoza's thought, echoes only in muted tones the passions evoked in earlier times by his work. Some of that is documented in chapters on its historical context: a 'life and works' by W.N.A. Klever (which includes useful recent work by Klever on Spinoza's early years among the radical Cartesians of Amsterdam), and an all-too-brief study of Spinoza's 'reception and influence' by Pierre-François Moreau (translated by Roger Ariew). Of the rest, Alan Gabbey on 'Spinoza's natural science and methodology', Edwin Curley on 'Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan', and Richard Popkin on 'Spinoza and Bible scholarship' stand out for their attention to the intellectual context. The remaining chapters are internalist in manner. Their method is the analysis of conceptions and arguments exemplified by Bennett and Donagan. The influential readings of Deleuze, for example, are given one sentence of Moreau's chapter; Christopher Norris's work on interpretation is not mentioned; even Gueroult's immense study is drawn on only by Gabbey