

RAUSCHER, F. *Naturalism and realism in Kant's ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Professor Rauscher's book has two main goals: first, to show that Kant's ethics is compatible with metaphysical naturalism, that is, with the philosophical thesis that no entity outside empirically real nature in space and time is needed; second, to determine the extent to which Kant is a moral realist. As can be seen, Professor Rauscher is not concerned with producing just an exegetical work, and he even recognizes that Kant's writings are sometimes inconsistent with elements of his interpretation. This is one of the reasons why this is a much welcome book, not only for scholars of Kant, but, more importantly, for philosophers in general.

The book is divided into three main parts. Part One, "Laying the Ground," sets the stage by providing definitions of metaphysical naturalism and moral realism and by analyzing how ethics fits into Kant's philosophical project as a whole, arguing that Kant is a moral idealist after all. Part Two, "Reason in Nature," focuses on practical reason to show that it can exist within nature and within the empirical minds of empirical moral agents. Part Three, "Morality Beyond Nature?" looks at God, free choice, and absolute value, which are shown to be heuristic reflecting reason's ordering of nature only with no ontological commitments.

Taking the three parts together, Rauscher's main conclusion is that a metaphysically naturalistic Kantian ethics would hold that nothing beyond entities in space and time, physical and mental, is needed for morality. Moreover (and somehow connected), by defining realism in terms of the independence of moral principles, properties, or objects from the moral agent, Professor Rauscher holds that in light of the priority of the practical point of view as an agent-perspective rational ordering of nature, Kant is best seen as an empirical moral idealist.

Every single part of *Naturalism and realism in Kant's ethics* deserves careful scrutiny and philosophical debate. Professor Rauscher makes many stimulating points and there is no space to discuss all of them here. For this reason, I would like to select one to show how thought-provoking his book is. In his last chapter, Professor Rauscher emphatically rejects the possibility of any non-natural, intrinsic value property and tries to show that the value of humanity as an end in itself is nothing more than the highest rank in order of ends that reason imposes on nature through the categorical imperative. I

will argue that this is not well established by Professor Rauscher, so neither is the naturalist and idealist reading of Kant's ethics.

In the last few years, Professor Rauscher and I have been discussing the meta-ethical basis of Kant's moral philosophy, and this is well documented both in our papers and in the book itself. Thus, I will not reconstruct this debate in detail here, but I would like to say that I have basically argued that Kant's transcendental philosophy is neither a pure idealist (someone who denies the existence of external objects of sense) nor a pure realist one (someone who regards space and time as things given as proprieties of the thing in themselves independently of our sensibility). In fact, a transcendental philosophy is in some way both: the contents are subject-independent; the form is put by the subject. This applies certainly to the theoretical domain, but I believe that similar remarks apply to Kant's practical philosophy: if we read the *Groundwork* (GMS 4: 437) carefully, we will realize that there is a *formal* (e.g., universality) and a *material* element (the existence of rational beings as ends in themselves) in every single maxim of human action, which can be transformed into a moral law. Therefore, Kant is neither a pure realist nor an idealist in meta-ethics.

If we take this point seriously, then we must recognize that a Kantian ethics cannot rely only on an idealist meta-ethics. In his postscript, "Kant's naturalist moral idealism," Professor Rauscher defines moral idealism as the view which holds that "the moral principles, properties, or objects of the world are dependent upon the transcendental or empirical moral agent." I believe that this view contradicts relevant passages of Kant's work such as "Nun sage ich: der Mensch, und überhaupt jedes vernünftige Wesen, existiert als Zweck an sich selbst, nicht bloss als Mittel zum beliebigen Gebrauche für diesen oder jenen Willen ..." (Now I say that the human being and in general every rational being *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will at its discretion; ...) (GMS, 4: 428). Professor Rauscher could reply that he is not much concerned with reproducing the historical Kant, but I then would like to ask whether it still makes sense to qualify an ethics as *Kantian* purely based on agency and not on the intrinsic value (*innern Wert*) of the person, which is an unconditional, incomparable value (*unbedingten, unvergleichbaren Wert*).

We must conclude, then, that an idealist meta-ethical interpretation of Kant's Moral Philosophy, with a naturalist background, is not capable of making sense of some

contents of morality, especially of the intrinsic value of rational beings, the *noumenic* dignity of a person etc., which is a fundamental Kantian principle of modern ethics. For this reason, I remain skeptical that Professor Rauscher has shown us once and for all that Kant's ethics is fully compatible with metaphysical naturalism. This does not diminish the quality of the exceptional book. On the contrary, I hope to have motivated people to read it by briefly discussing one point. As for myself, I am eager to analyze further one of the best findings of Rauscher's book, namely the thesis that a Kantian transcendental moral idealism is also an empirical realism. Thus, Professor Rauscher seems to be on his way to dissolving some of the realist/constructivist controversy. This would be a real achievement. For this reason, there is no doubt that Rauscher's book is one of the most important recently-published philosophical works in meta-ethics.

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