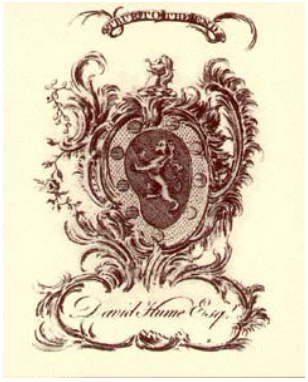

John Rawls. ***Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy***
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JOHN RAWLS. *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Edited by Barbara Herman. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, 2000. Pp. xxii + 348. ISBN 0-674-00422-6, paper, $20.95.

Starting in the mid-seventies down through 1991, John Rawls made Kant the centerpiece of his undergraduate ethics course. Class notes prepared and updated by Rawls or by his assistants were made available privately to students. Barbara Herman has edited and published those notes and added two lectures on Hegel based on Rawls' personal notes. The result is quite suitable for use as a textbook on Kant's ethics.

There is an introductory chapter in which Rawls explains he is concentrating on the historical period 1600–1800, followed by five lectures on Hume's moral theory and two lectures on Leibniz. Half of the text is given to Kant. The Hegel Lectures close the book. There is a very complete index.

Some indication of why Rawls included figures other than Kant comes across in the Leibniz materials. These introduce topics that enhance the main body of lectures by showing off Kantian doctrine in contrast with Leibniz. To a degree the same applies to the lectures on Hume (especially to lecture 4 on "Rational Intuitionism"). In fact, Rawls perpetuates the habit found in certain fanciers of German philosophy of portraying Hume as the brilliant but misguided thinker who set the problem to which Kant furnished the solution. The chief question Rawls poses is whether an account of deliberation such as he attributes to Hume (which he calls "desire-based") yields a theory of *practical reason*; he answers in the negative (unsurprisingly, since he later explains that "desire-based" motives are "like Kant's inclinations and impulses," 150). The argument is of a form typical of neo-Kantians: first, to posit as explanandum some theory-dependent element of Kant's ethics—here principles that are "recognized by the agent to have *authority* . . . of reason" (48)—and then to conclude that the element is absent in the non-Kantian theory; or, as Rawls put it, "Hume does not have a conception of practical reasoning" (50).

But the treatment of Hume is far from bleak overall. In fact the five lectures show Rawls to be an avid reader of the *Treatise* and a student of the secondary literature. It appears, consequently, that with respect to Hume there are *two* Rawls: one the engaging commentator, the other the Kantian polemicist. Time after time he offers illuminating remarks on the text—particularly in the lectures on "Justice as an Artificial Virtue" and on "The Judicious Spectator." (See his remarks on Humean skepticism's moral import, 23; the

persuasiveness of Hume's conventionalist account of justice, 61; how not to read the is/ought text, 83; sentiment as moral epistemology, 80; Hume's and Kant's alike treating the *Why should I be moral question* as a closed one, 99; and the moral force of the concluding section of Book III, 100.)

Although of the ten chapters on Kant the first four are concerned with the *Groundwork,* Rawls draws on Kant's other moral writings wherever helpful. Lecture 5 is on the priority of right and lecture 6 reflects the 1980 Dewey Lectures ("Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory"). The balance of the Kant lectures address themes from the second *Critique* and the *Religion.* Rawls is typical of recent commentators who present Kant's ethics as the most reasonable explanation of the body of our moral judgments. "I have played down," he admits, "the role of the a priori and the formal, and I have given what some may think a flat reading of the categorical imperative" (275). The latter comes across as the CI-procedure, a "selection device . . . like a mathematical function" (251), which of itself cannot generate content (163). Among the "dark subjects" (309) Rawls pushes into the background are the moral postulates, and he even dismisses Kant's infamous dualism as a Manichaean phase (291). The most basic concepts are refitted: *universality* becomes the shareability of judgments (245), *necessitation* is rendered circular—it is just "what is required by the principles of pure practical reason" (248)—and *objectivity* is made over as sameness of conceptions to common recognition. Even the Kingdom of Ends is made mundane (225). Rawls' Kant comes out a liberal social thinker ahead of his time.

Rawls contends that the *fact of reason* doctrine of the second *Critique,* to which he devotes a detailed discussion, is the authentication (a term he prefers, in connection with Kant's ethics, to *justification)* of the moral law and of the reality of freedom as spontaneity. He sees the ultimate vindication of Kant as coherentist, that is, as deriving from the account of the unity of reason—though he cautions his students that this interpretation is not widely shared (273).

In these lectures Rawls works hard to render Kantian ethics clear and accessible to his students. The resulting account is about as persuasive as Kant can be made to appear. The treatments of Leibniz and Hegel are less impressive. And as an introduction to Hume's ethics the book compares poorly to many others. One is led to wish that the author of *A Theory of Justice* had explored how for Hume the rules of justice generate strict *oughts* and *ought nots* and thus bespeak a genuine, if limited, priority of right, or to wonder what Rawls, who in *Political Liberalism* backed away from the ahistorical form of contractarianism, might have had to say if, following David Gauthier, he had traced the conventionalism he admires in the *Treatise* to roots in an historical

(albeit speculative) form of contractarianism.[1] The expression of that admiration came late in the course—the lecture on justice dates from 1991 (the same year that Annette Baier's book, *A Progress of Sentiments* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991], came out). One wonders whether Rawls might have come to realize that his declaring the justice-originating artifice to be "the work of reason" (53) requires he revisit the earlier rejection of Humean practical reason. But still, the main purpose of the *Lectures* is exposition on Kant, and in that regard, fully rigorous and philosophically engaging, the book is commendable.

NOTE

1. David Gauthier, "David Hume: Contractarian," *Philosophical Review* 89 (1979): 3–38.

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