

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

Liam B. Murphy *Moral Demands in a Nonideal Theory*. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. viii + 168. £30.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 19 507976 0.

Despite repeated attempts to discredit its rationale, utilitarianism and its many variations continue to dominate modern moral philosophy. Traditionally, utilitarians have thought that there is no limit to a person's responsibility to promote the happiness or the wellbeing of others, either directly or else by means of social institutions. Many critics of utilitarianism have urged that this claim imposes an unacceptable demand upon the moral lives of individuals, and that as a consequence of this, utilitarianism is an unworkable moral theory whenever it is judged by the standards of ordinary moral practice. Liam Murphy argues that this charge is unfounded and rests upon an affirmation of the moral and political status quo. He is clearly convinced that the philosophical force of utilitarian and consequentialist thinking lies in its ability to 'reform' our ordinary moral thoughts and practices, thereby offering us the prospect of genuine progress in the domains of private and public morality. Murphy's book aims to show that while there is no problem concerning the extent of the demands placed upon us by utilitarian reasoning, there is a pressing need for utilitarians to acknowledge that our actual practices may occasion some adjustments to more ideal forms of utilitarian reasoning. Murphy's book does not display a great deal of effort or patience in arguing for the claim that utilitarianism can 'reform' our ordinary moral intuitions and practices, and for this reason it will fail to impress those who do not share his starting points and allegiances. That said, those who choose to plough the same furrow as Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick, will no doubt find several of Murphy's conclusions congenial and innovative. The book is clearly written and well produced.

[M.W.F.S.]

Manfred Kuehn *Kant: A Biography*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Pp. xxii + 544. £30.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 521 49704 3.

This delightful and engaging book is the first full-length biography on Kant for more than fifty years. It is well known that Kant spent his entire life in an isolated part of Prussia, living the life of an officious and punctilious university professor. These bare facts have given rise to the view that Kant was a pure philosopher, lost to abstract thought, with no real life of his own. In a gripping narrative that is attentive to both philosophical ideas and historical context, Kuehn debunks this myth once and for all. The figure who emerges from these pages is an attractive, gregarious, and interesting individual whose life spanned almost a century, and whose philosophical career coincided with some of the most significant events in modern history. Kuehn shows in vivid detail that Kant's intellectual life was played out against the background of the most significant political, scientific, and philosophical developments of the period, from the literary movements of the German *Aufklärung*, to the American and French Revolutions. Mindful of the most recent scholarship, yet forthright in his own views, Kuehn permits the reader to follow the same journey that Kant himself took: from being a narrowly focused scholar of Newtonian science to an enlightened citizen of the world. The scholar, as well as the recreational reader, will learn a great deal from this book. It is a significant contribution to Kantian scholarship and to the newly emerging genre of philosophical biography.

[M.W.F.S.]

Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.) *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives*. (London: Routledge, 2001). Pp. xiii + 346. £15.00 (Pbk). ISBN 0 415 24206.

This innovative anthology presents a series of historical reflections on the nature and existence of evil. Marginally philosophical in aim and scope, *The Many Faces of Evil* is a welcome contribution to the history of ideas. Rorty's volume traces the transformation in Western conceptions of evil by collecting together texts and works by theologians, philosophers, historians, political theorists, poets, novelists, as well as psychologists and legal theorists. The topics considered include: evil as disobedience and disorder; evil as sin and vice; evil as wilfulness; evil as cruelty; evil as irrationality; the romanticization of evil; the banality of evil, and evil and immorality. Given the eloquence, pertinence, and suggestiveness of the extracts included in this volume, it is unsurprising that Rorty's book succeeds, first and foremost, in engaging the readers' imagination and broadening their erudition. There is much to consider and learn from in this volume. However, the book is not so successful when viewed from the perspective of an anthology that one could recommend to teachers in the philosophy of religion. A lack of theoretical precision in some of the extracts, especially those deriving from literary sources, ensures that the volume does not provide detailed instruction in those conceptual issues relevant to the historical and contemporary debate on the so-called 'problem of evil'. Should it be used in the classroom, the extracts on offer would need to be supplemented by existing philosophical anthologies such as M. Adams and R. Adams (eds), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Despite these shortcomings, Rorty's volume provides its reader with an urbane, comprehensive, and informative tour of the history of Western reflections about the 'Dark side'. It is a welcome addition to the literature.

[M.W.F.S.]