John Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot's Moral Thought* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). ix + 174, price £19.99 pb.

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According to John Hacker-Wright, the two central preoccupations of Philippa Foot's philosophical work were the nature of morality and the question of how morality provides us with reasons to act. One of the tasks he sets himself in this short work is to give an account of the continuing significance of Foot's work. Another is to help a reader who is not immersed in the context of the debates she addresses to access her thought. A third is to evaluate both Foot's views and those of her critics. He succeeds in all three tasks, most admirably in the second.

In a two-page sketch of Foot's "intellectual" biography, Hacker-Wright reminds us that Foot credited her introduction to analytical philosophy to Elizabeth Anscombe: they were colleagues at Somerville College in Oxford where they would talk over philosophical issues after daily lunch. Anscombe's philosophy influenced Foot – they shared the view that the virtues were more significant for moral philosophy than they had been taken to be by their contemporaries. That said, over the course of her philosophical life, Foot changed her mind – several times – on some key issues. One of the chief virtues of Hacker-Wright's account is the identification of those changes. Another attraction lies in Hacker-Wright's explanation of the succession of intellectual contexts within which Foot develops her own moral philosophy. He distinguishes three stages in her work: an early phase in which she defended both the objectivity of moral norms and the rationality of morality (that is to say, the idea that morality gives reasons for action to everyone whether or not a person desires to do what is right), a middle phase in which she changed her mind and (in a celebrated article entitled "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives") attacked such "moral rationalism," and a later phase in which she reversed her thought again and endorsed a revised kind of moral rationalism.

Foot's early defence of the objectivity and rationality of morality is best understood against a background in which non-cognitivism about morality was dominant. Advocates of non-cognitivism – principally Ayer, Stevenson and Hare – had held that moral judgments are distinguished from other judgments not by their subject matter, but because they express attitudes of approval or disapproval (and, according to Hare, are used to foster similar attitudes in others). Ayer had argued that moral

"judgments" express feelings or attitudes of approval or disapproval. Stevenson added that they also carry the rider, "Do so as well!" And Hare built on this expressivist line of thinking by arguing that they are actually imperatives: "good" functions as, and means, "I commend." Against this, Foot argued that this view embodied a "private enterprise theory of moral criteria," one that divorces the meaning of moral terms from the context that gives them moral sense. The relevant context connects moral terms to human good or harm, but an emotivist/prescriptivist view would (she argued) allow us to judge as "good" a man who sincerely affirms the universal prescription that one should clasp and unclasp one's hands and never turn NNE after having turned SSW! An emotivist/prescriptivist view preserves the connection between moral judgment and moral choice, but does so at too great a cost. We cannot deem *anything* to be good or harmful to human beings. What is good for or harmful to human beings is a straightforwardly factual matter. So we can indeed deduce evaluative conclusions from factual premises . . . which premises in her view were not utilitarian but eudaemonist. Good conduct is to be understood in terms of the virtues.

Foot cited the "tight corner" objection as the reason for her change of mind in "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives." (The tight corner objection is the idea that, while it may be beneficial generally to be just or courageous, it is difficult to claim that someone has a reason to be so if (in being so) he or she would incur a great loss.) In that article, she embraced a version of externalism according to which morality provides an agent with a reason to act only in the presence of the agent's desire to be moral. Hacker-Wright thinks the reasons for this change of mind are unclear. Indeed, he suggests that Foot herself may not have realised how truly different from each other were her earlier and her middle-period views. Noting that she herself did not directly address her own earlier arguments, he points out several flaws in externalism, critically evaluates some of the arguments against her "middle period" views and then considers whether Foot was right to disavow the then-contemporary version of virtue ethics (according to which the virtues replace Kantianism and consequentialism) and to endorse a more Aristotelian virtue theory (according to which the virtues augment, support and even fill out moral principles).

The two central ideas of Foot's late period were that moral reasons are one set of reasons among others to which a rational agent must respond and that moral goodness is a form of "natural" goodness. On the first: our standards of rationality derive from our standards of goodness of the will, that is to say, our conception of practical rationality derives from our conception of human good. On the second: grasping that something is an organism requires us to situate it against the background of its species, its

"kind" or "life form," and thus to situate it involves viewing it from a normative standpoint. All living things exhibit, in various ways, an agency. The growth *of* a fern is different from a blighted growth *on* a fern. Discerning such agency requires a conception of how the living thing's life should progress – a normative assessment. Virtue makes human beings good in the same way that blight-free, lush-green flesh in a certain shape makes a cactus good. Of course, it is more complicated with human beings whose ways of living are so diverse that it is questionable whether there is any characteristically human life and thus whether there is any univocal sense of "good human." But Foot argues that our status as rational animals introduces a "sea change" in how we approach describing our species, our reasoning and the application of reasoning to action. "[W]hile [non-human] animals go for the good {thing} that they see, human beings go for what they see as good." Vices, defects in our responsiveness to reasons for action, are natural defects in us, natural defects in our will. Unlike other natural defects, which may be the result of bad luck, we are responsible for our conception of how to act and therefore can answer to rational criticism of that conception.

Hacker-Wright defends this neo-Aristotelian form of ethical naturalism against two things – a misinterpretation of it and the claim that it boxes her into a dilemma – and then offers a Kantian-style strengthening of its implied moral objectivism. It is a misinterpretation of Foot's ethical naturalism to say that it relies on the "empty" standard of good conduct as conduct in accordance with "right reason." Rather than explaining the aim of practical reasoning in terms of promoting survival and reproduction, she explains it in terms of understanding what makes for a good human life and good character in general. Nor, he argues, is Foot's ethical naturalism subject to the criticism that it either yields repugnant results (deeming disabled human beings as defective human beings) or appeals to a normative standard not grounded in natural norms. Although physical defects and moral defects have the same conceptual structure, we are generally not responsible for physical defects but are responsible for the moral defects. Indeed, her ethical naturalism can be strengthened by a Kantian-style defence of full-blooded objectivity according to which the bases of morality are to be found in human rational nature. The acquisition of agency goes hand in hand with the acquisition of reason; the capacity to act on reasons is a norm for anything that conceives of itself as acting, and a conception of oneself as an agent supports what Hacker-Wright calls the virtue of "proto-justice." Finally Hacker-Wright argues that, in her elaboration of ethical naturalism, Foot too swiftly dismisses Nietzsche as an immoralist: averse though she was to some of his conclusions, she in fact shares an affinity with him on others.

Hacker-Wright's book is more than a useful record of the philosophy of Philippa Foot. It is a handy compendium of the background debates in moral philosophy that generated her interest in elaborating, then correcting, her own version of virtue theory. Although there may be better discussions than is found here about the debate, among those who recognise the critical importance of intention in moral philosophy, of how to understand what is commonly called the "doctrine" of double effect, I recommend this book's identification and explanation of Foot's contribution to contemporary moral philosophy.

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