**Onora O'Neill**. *Constructing Authorities: Reason, Politics and Interpretation in Kant's Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press 2015. 262 pp. $89.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781107116313); $32.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781107538252).

In *Constructing Authorities,* Onora O'Neill brings together a collection of her essays from years of work in defense of Kant's arguments on the authority of reason.

O'Neill points out that there is generally a suspicion among philosophers about appeals to authority – yet most philosophers take the authority of reason as a given. She explores some Kantian notions about the *construction* of the authority of reason and finds the vindication of reason to be a central concern for Kant. She identifies two main Kantian threads which 'justify minimal principles' of reasoning: the first is that reasoning is practical and provides '*norms* that thought, action and communication can (but often fail to) meet;' the second is that the norms 'can be used by a *plurality* of agents' (2). This has to do with how agents are able to communicate and share knowledge. Without these minimal principles, O'Neill's claims of Kant's view, we would not have the possibility of the authority of reason.

Reasoning is a process that is used by a group – appealing to, for example, only a fractional group accepts the authority of a church and so is not the authority that Kant appeals to for his *fully public* reason. The reasoning that Kant is interested in, O'Neill claims, does not attempt to construct large metaphysical edifices through pure reasoning – rather, reasoning is an eminently practical activity that cannot be considered solely in the abstract.

Within this understanding of reasoning Kant couches both universal and conditional reasoning: the former relating to reasoning that can be reached by everyone, the latter relating to a subset of people that have shared assumptions.

O'Neill also compares and contrasts how Kant's arguments on reasoning relate to contemporary views. For instance, she investigates how Kant's work fits into the works of writers of social contract theory; she looks at cosmopolitanism theories from Kant to the present day; and she presents various understandings of autonomy which she relates back to Kant. In one essay, she compares Kant's work to John Rawls' constructivism.

In the writings on Kant's views related to theology, O'Neill rightly says that Kant's philosophy of religion has been inscrutable to many (217). Yet she provides a convincing interpretation of his work that gives a clear understanding of both his motivations and his arguments. Kant, she says, centers his religious position on reasoned human hope – the hope for our own ability to shape our world. That hope allows us not to view the religious texts as definitively authoritative; rather, through our hope of shaping the future we can look at the texts with reason. She continues in another essay with the theme of Kant and religion by discussing his view of the interpretation of sacred texts.

Often it is difficult to see the motivations and justifications of certain aspects of Kant's writing. O'Neill has the ability to repeatedly provide convincing interpretations. To take one example, in 'Orientation in thinking: geographical problems, political solutions,' O'Neill discusses Kant's essay *What is Orientation in Thinking?* In this essay Kant uses geographical and political imagery. While others have taken these as unconnected, O'Neill uses the essay to argue that the 'shift from geographical to political imagery … is no superficial matter' (153). She takes this as her starting point to make an argument for Kant's understanding of how to arrive at foundations for reason. Interestingly, I found O'Neill's interpretation to parallel ideas about systems of thoughts for studying sciences, i.e. in science we are not arriving at truths but rather finding out what is false (Popperian falsifiability).

Kant's arguments are against dogmatism and skepticism about the foundations of reason. The dogmatist holds maxims that are unjustified and the skeptic holds that there can be no maxims. The problem with both of these views is that all cannot share them. In other words, there is no authority that all accept as giving a foundation to our reason. This does not mean that anyone may reason to any conclusion she likes, but rather that often the subject's own experiences are important to understand where she begins her investigation. Similar to how our locations in space can help us orient our position, it is our location as a subject that determines the frame of reference for our reason. The fact of our 'subject-ness' justifies rejection of an 'objective' or 'external' standard for maxims of reason (161).

Yet it is not turtles all the way down. There is a way to justify reasoning based on pragmatic ideas about the purpose of reason. We must live in a world that is necessarily inhabited by others. Because of this necessity of relations with people, the maxims we adopt for reasoning should be ones that *can be principles for all* in order to avoid lawlessness in general. This will also avoid the problem of dogmatism and skepticism.

The 'principles for all' approach is reminiscent of the categorical imperative with the idea that we only want maxims that can be universalized. And while it is a good idea in theory, I questioned why one might not suggest everyone could in theory accept a dogmatic principle. How do we decide which principles can be accepted by all? What if one individual does not accept the principle? Could we not force all to a maxim of acceptance that is dogmatic? Is not the 'principles for all' approach in fact itself a principle that Kant is arguing for dogmatically?

Kant holds that the principles agents should adopt when seeking reason must combine lawlike forms with a universal scope to be adequate for a *plurality* of agents (a plurality sounds fairly minimalist to me; could not a dogmatic religious principle be accepted by a plurality?).

There is no 'supreme' principle of reason. In order to decide among our various choices of lawlike and universal principles, a *negative* approach is necessary. Here is the point that reminded me about scientific theorizing: as opposed to accepting one necessary principle, Kant is arguing that we 'reject principles that are unfit to serve as principles at all' (167). Thus we are *not* holding one principle supreme but rather allowing a set variation between those principles we have not yet found to be faulty. This is often held to be the format of scientific inquiry as well. Does science provide an ultimate truth or simply truth as we have found it from our situated exist as of our current time? The latter interpretation of scientific practice seems more appropriate. And Kant's argument here seems analogous to that latter interpretation for reasoning, i.e. we do not have access to some ultimate foundation of reason but we can come to a best foundation given our current understanding of how reason works as a practical tool of interrelatedness. O'Neill's argument for Kant's understanding of reason appealed to me because of my own thoughts on the analogous situation within scientific inquiry.

In conclusion, while *Constructing Authorities* provides a good deal of historical exegesis, O'Neill explains throughout the articles how the Kantian position is applicable to problems we are dealing with now. She also provides unique interpretations of Kant's arguments that give interesting new perspectives. The articles bring together a cohesive understanding of research on Kant's views of reason and how they relate to our contemporary society.

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