Robert Kane, *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 287 pp. ISBN 9780521199933 (hbk.) $85.00

Robert Kane's book is ambitious, bold and merits careful study. In less than 300 pages Kane develops a sustained argument for a meta-ethical and normative theory that contains (1) a theory of right action and a theory of the good life, (2) a unified conception of practical and theoretical reasoning, (3) a survey of the main theories in normative ethics and (4) an account of the applications of his theory in political philosophy, applied ethics, philosophy of law, feminist ethics, and moral education. Kane's ethical theory synthesizes elements of Ancient eudaimonism, Kant's moral theory and Mill's classical liberalism.

Kane maintains that there are two features of Modernity that cast doubt upon the Ancient philosophical ideal of aspiring for wisdom: pluralism and uncertainty. Kane wants to avoid the temptation to embrace relativism that is prompted by pluralism and uncertainty. Kane regards pluralism and uncertainty as inescapable features of contemporary life that do not prevent us from aspiring for the kind of wisdom that was the goal of the Ancient philosophers' quest for wisdom. The philosophical quest for wisdom is characterized as an aspiration for understanding *objective reality* and *objective worth*. The main thesis of the book is that this philosophical quest for wisdom is the basis for ethical principles that can serve as the basis for a theory of the right and the good. In this regard Kane's book is in the same spirit as Talbot Brewer's *The Revival of Ethics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009].

Kane's book can be divided into four main parts. The first part (Chapter 1) introduces us to the worries about uncertainty and pluralism that lead many thinkers to fall into the trap of relativism. The second part (Chapters 2-4) presents the framework for a theory of right action. The third part (Chapters 5-14) presents a theory of the nature and goals of wisdom. This part of the book formulates a theory of objective value and it provides an account of the task of philosophy. The fourth part (Chapters 15-18) compares and contrasts Kane's ethical theory with other prominent theories in normative ethics and it provides a wide range of applications to other domains of practical, social and applied ethics. I shall discuss the second and third parts of the book in what follows.

In setting up the theory of right action, Kane argues that in order to undertake the journey for wisdom in the contemporary landscape, one must adopt an attitude of *openness*, which involves a persistent striving to overcome the narrowness of one's own perspective on the world. This attitude of openness and the aspiration for understanding objective reality and objective worth are essential to the attitude of openness that is the basis for the Moral Sphere Theory (MST). Kane's theory of right action is, at bottom, a commitment to negative liberty (i.e., liberty as non-interference). MST holds that persons have a moral sphere in which they can pursue their ends and purposes in life without interference. Kane defends the "Ends Principle," which is an interpretation of Kant's "Formula of Humanity." The Ends Principle gives an account of what it is to treat someone as an end in themselves (and to treat someone merely as a means) in terms of treating them with openness and respecting their *moral sphere*. One important difference between Kant's Formula of Humanity and Kane's Ends Principle is that the Ends Principle is a hypothetical imperative, which holds that *if* you are embarked on the quest for wisdom, then you are committed to MST. Kane emphasizes that MST and the Ends Principle are justified by the

quest for wisdom and they are not requirements of rationality or reason. Kane also uses MST to give an account of the difference between ideal theory and non-ideal theory. The former is concerned with situations in which there is not a moral sphere breakdown. The latter is concerned with cases of moral sphere breakdown and is focused on finding ways to restore the integrity of the moral sphere.

The discussion of ideal theory and non-ideal theory is particularly illuminating. I have two main concerns with Kane's argument for MST. First, Kane rejects Kant's moral rationalism, because he does not want to utilize *a priori* reasons (or judgments that are certain) to justify his theory. Although misplaced certainty is bad, it does not follow that all certainty is bad or unwarranted. Modernity does not require us to abandon the certainty of arithmetic. In a similar fashion, some moral judgments (e.g., the judgment that the recreational torture of children is wrong) are certain. Kane's argument would rest on stronger ground if he considered some standard objections to empirical/pragmatist fallibilism in epistemology (e.g., worries that the theory is either self-defeating or not justified by empirical observation) and rebutted them. The appeal to our historical circumstances in Modernity is not convincing. Second, Kane's argument for the claim that the quest for wisdom requires adopting MST seems to rest upon an *a priori* intuition. In discussing why persons who are embarked upon the quest for wisdom must respect the moral sphere of others (and thereby affirm a commitment to classical liberalism), Kane writes, "after some reflection, they realize how they must reply. 'To believe as we do that we have the right to forcibly intervene *only* when the moral sphere has broken down and only to restore and preserve it, is to believe that the only thing that gives persons the right to impose their wills on others is that *they have tried their hardest not to* do so.'" (p.32-33) The *realization* that they *must* give this reply seems to either assume that all persons aspiring to achieve wisdom are classical liberals (which is question-begging) or it rests upon some kind of *a priori* modal intuition. It would be interesting to know whether Kane's libertarianism about free will might also be implicitly supporting this commitment to noninterference, which would suggest that the norms of the philosophical quest for wisdom may be grounded in a metaphysical theory of freedom.

In the third part of the book (Chapters 5-14), Kane maintains that the domain of the right is a subset of the domain of the good. Kane's value theory contains four dimensions of human value. Each dimension of value builds upon the earlier ones, in a manner similar to the way that the four dimensions of space are related—three dimensional space contains points and planes but it does not contain the fourth dimension. (pp. 61-62) The higher dimensions of value may override/defeat the lower dimensions of value, but the lower ones may not override/defeat the higher ones. Also, within each dimension of value there is a *plurality* of values. The higher dimensions of value "include" the lower dimensions. (p. 75) The first-dimension of value is the domain of *experiential value*. First-dimension values have prima facia value and they are agent-relative—they are good (or bad) *for* the person that experiences them. (p.67) Kane distinguishes experiences that are *intrinsically* valuable (their very nature as pleasurable experiences makes them valuable) and experiences that are *all things considered* valuable: the latter are first-dimension values that are not *overridden* by higher-dimension values. (pp. 72-73) The second-dimension of value involves actions and practical engagements with the world. This domain of value also involves *activities* that are pursued by agents and the *attachments* for the things we care deeply about. Second-dimension values depend upon how activities and undertakings turn out—they depend upon whether they succeed or fail in fulfilling the agent's purposes and

interests. (76) The third-dimension of value includes the pursuit of those virtues and excellences that are necessary for human flourishing and our involvement in practices and forms of life. The activities and experiences that are involved in third-dimensional values are characterized by their role in defining who we are. (p.86) Fourth-dimensional value involves non-relative value and universal worth—value that is worthy of being recognized by all persons, from every point of view.

I have two main concerns with Kane's value theory. First, I could not find a compelling argument for Kane's claim that value in the higher dimensions may override/defeat the lower ones, but the lower ones *cannot* override/defeat the higher ones. It seems like there could be some situations in which a first-dimension value might override a second or third-dimension value. For instance, the value of a friendship (which may have value in both the second and third dimensions) could be defeated by the pain that the relationship causes (which is a first-dimension value). In general, this problem emerges when one considers cases in which there is a first-dimension value that is intense and strong that comes into conflict with a second or third-dimension value that is important but not of top priority. Second, it is unclear exactly how MST is related to the fourth dimension of value. Could there be considerations of objective worth that override the dictates of MST? If so, what kinds of objective values could outweigh the morally right course of action?

Readers of Kane's earlier work in moral philosophy, *Through the Moral Maze: Searching for Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World* [Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe Publishers, 1994], will find much that is familiar. About half of the content of *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom* was presented in the previous work, but those earlier arguments have been clarified and expanded in many important ways.

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