

The centrality of practical reason: Dworkin and Kant

In one of his latest books *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011) Ronald Dworkin presents a thorough critique of contemporary ethical discourse. Explicitly his arguments mostly seek to undermine the main premises of metaethics, especially, the assumption that it is possible to think and talk about ethics from a neutral Archimedian position and to find its grounding in scientific or metaphysical facts. Moreover, he aims to present his own position as a specific revolution – a position which questions all the ways of approaching ethics that dominate or influence the field of moral philosophy since modern times, namely Descartes.

There have been many attempts to criticize, question and evaluate this critique, its accuracy and extent.¹ However, much less effort have been made to properly and comprehensively evaluate the constructive and potential side of Dworkin's position. The main question that his critique of contemporary ethical discourse raises is 'How should we approach ethical questions and problems?' or 'How should we do moral philosophy?' Such questions are essential for the discourse itself. They should determine not only the shape and methods, but also the future and *raison d'être* of ethical theory as such.

Dworkin himself takes Hume to be the inspiration for his revolution. According to Dworkin, Hume's distinction between fact and value gives us a clear guidance as to how we should proceed in ethical discourse. Dworkin develops this distinction as his main argument that ethics is an independent domain of thought.

However, my paper argues, that despite Dworkin's appeal of Hume, his position cannot be seen as Humean and is much more akin to Kant as there are several substantial conformities between their theories and premises. These conformities allow to see Dworkin as developing Kantian approach to morality which rests on moral autonomy and the conception of practical reason. On the other hand, Dworkin's affinity to Kant also put the conception of practical reason as such in the spotlight. Dworkin refuses any metaphysical or transcendental grounding of practical reason, but claims its underlying importance for ethics. His position encourages the discussion about the structure, functioning and potentialities of practical reason as well as about its possible conceptions in contemporary discourse.

My arguments in this paper are developed as follows:

- 1) Dworkin's position cannot be seen as Humean despite the fact that Dworkin uses Hume's fact-value distinction to justify his own position. Dworkin significantly transforms the content of this philosophical distinction. Since Hume takes the fact-value distinction to mean a difference between passions and reason, it leads him to scepticism criticized by Dworkin. Dworkin takes this fact-value distinction to mean a difference

¹ We can mention such cases as Russ Shafer-Landau (*Truth and metaethics. The possibility of metaethics* 2010), Michael Smith (*Dworkin on external skepticism* 2010), Daniel Star (*Moral skepticism for foxes* 2010), Mark Eli Kalderon (*Does metaethics rest on a mistake?* 2013), Sarah McGrath (*Relax? Don't Do It! Why Moral Realism Won't Come Cheap* 2014) and many others.

between two distinct domains of thought or rationality, speculative and practical. Therefore, this distinction allows him to justify his own position.

- 2) Dworkin's position should be regarded as a Kantian one despite his explicit sympathy for Hume and critical arguments against Kant. Kant's moral philosophy keeps and develops the main idea of the fact-value distinction. His moral philosophy rests on the assumption that no values can arise directly from facts, there is a sharp distinction between theoretical and practical reason. However, Kant goes further than Hume and explains the distinction not as a distinction between reason and passions, but as a distinction between two forms of rationality – theoretical and practical. Dworkin criticises Kant for his transcendentalism and possible tendency to metaphysics. However, he does not take seriously enough the practical character of Kant's conception of practical reason. A closer examination reveals that Kant's endeavour to defend moral autonomy while showing it as a separate and independent domain of thought and rationality are extremely akin to Dworkin's revolutionary project.
- 3) Dworkin's position can be seen as proceeding a turn to exceptionally practical understanding of morality and ethics that was already made by Kant. At the same time, it is a position, which develops Kant's conception of practical reason in various ways to accommodate to contemporary world and ethical discourse. There are three main principles that links Dworkin to Kant. First, both thinkers relate practical reason to the possibility of self-determination. Second, despite the fact that Kant develops a transcendental argument which is criticized by Dworkin, both thinkers emphasize the importance of individual personality. Decisions and actions made by moral subject reveal who she or he is. Moral subjects decide and act as personalities, not as causally determined objects. Third, both thinkers emphasize the possibility of moral knowledge and objectivity, but distinguish it from scientific knowledge and objectivity. It is an attempt to define a specific way of knowing in ethics that would be independent from ways of knowing in other fields, especially science or metaphysics. In a way, it is also an attempt to separate scientific and metaphysical epistemology from ethics.

To sum up, this paper argues that after the extensive critique of contemporary ethical discourse Dworkin directs his constructive arguments to developing a position which is grounded on a specific conception of practical rationality. Despite the fact that Dworkin himself explicitly demonstrates his sympathy for Hume's fact-value distinction, his position cannot be treated as a Humean one, but rather as more akin to Kant. Revealing the substantial conformities between Dworkin and Kant and identifying Dworkin as a thinker who develops a Kantian approach to ethics and morality, allow to rethink the arguments for the centrality of practical reason in ethics as well as the ways of defining practical rationality as such.