UNDERSTANDING MORAL OBLIGATION

In many histories of modern ethics, Kant is supposed to have ushered in an anti-realist or constructivist turn by holding that unless we ourselves ‘author’ or lay down moral norms and values for ourselves, our autonomy as agents will be threatened. In this book, Robert Stern challenges the cogency of this ‘argument from autonomy’, and claims that Kant never subscribed to it. Rather, it is not value realism but the apparent obligatoriness of morality that really poses a challenge to our autonomy: how can this be accounted for without taking away our freedom? The debate the book focuses on therefore concerns whether this obligatoriness should be located in ourselves (Kant), in others (Hegel) or in God (Kierkegaard). Stern traces the historical dialectic that drove the development of these respective theories, and clearly and sympathetically considers their merits and disadvantages; he concludes by arguing that the choice between them remains open.

UNDERSTANDING MORAL OBLIGATION

Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard

ROBERT STERN

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Ode to Duty
William Wordsworth

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love,
Who art a Light to guide, a Rod
To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou, who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

Kind Of An Ode To Duty
Ogden Nash

O Duty,
Why hast thou not the visage of a sweetie or a cutie?
Why displayest thou the countenance of the kind of conscien-
tious organizing spinster
That the minute you see her you are aginster?
Why glitter thy spectacles so ominously?
Why art thou clad so abominously?
Why are thou so different from Venus
And why do thou and I have so few interests mutually
in common between us?
Why art thou fifty per cent martyr
And fifty-one per cent Tartar?
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REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

In general, I have used the author–date system of referencing. However, in the case of frequently cited authors – Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Schiller – I have used a system of abbreviations (see below), where details of the works are given in the Bibliography. Also, for pre-Kantian texts where there is no standard edition or translation to refer to, as well as giving page numbers, I have included information on where in the work the reference occurs (e.g. chapter or section numbers), where the work is structured in such a way as to make this helpful. The hope is that this will enable readers with different editions to find the reference reasonably easily.

Works by Aristotle

References are given using the standard ‘Bekker numbers’, and to the book, section, and page numbers in the following translations:


Works by Hegel

References are given first to the volume and page number of the Theorie Werkausgabe edition of Hegel’s works (Hegel 1969–71), except in the case of some references to Hegel’s lectures on the history of philosophy, which are given to Hegel 1986 and Hegel 1989, and in the case of references to Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion, which are given
to Hegel 1984. Where appropriate, references are also given to section numbers (where ‘Z’ indicates a reference to a ‘Zusatz’ or student note). References are then given to one of the following translations:

**DFS**
‘The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy’, translated by H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf, in Hegel 1977a

**EL**
*Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, in Hegel 1991b

**EN**
*Philosophy of Nature: Part II of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, translated by M. J. Petry, in Hegel 1970

**LA**
*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T. M. Knox, in Hegel 1975

**LHP**
*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, translated by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, in Hegel 1892–96

**LHPiI**

**LHPiII**

**LPRiI**

**PR**
*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H. B. Nisbet, in Hegel 1991a

**PS**
*Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller, in Hegel 1977b

**SC**

**SL**
*Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller, in Hegel 1969

Works by Kant

References are given first to the volume and page number of the Akademie edition of Kant’s works (Kant 1900–), except for references to *CPR*, which are given to the pagination of the first (A) and second (B) editions in the standard manner. References are then given to one of the following translations:
LIST OF REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

CF  The Conflict of the Faculties, translated by Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor, in Kant 1996b: 233–327
CJ  Critique of the Power of Judgment, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, in Kant 2000
CPrR Critique of Practical Reason, translated by Mary J. Gregor, in Kant 1996a: 133–272
LE Lectures on Ethics, translated by Peter Heath, in Kant 1997
NM ‘Notes on Moral Philosophy’, translated by Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer and Frederick Rauscher, in Kant 2005: 405–78
PE ‘Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality’ [the ‘Prize Essay’], translated by David Walford, in Kant 2002a: 243–86
Relig Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, translated by George di Giovanni, in Kant 1996b: 39–216
TSP ‘On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy’, translated by Henry Allison, in Kant 2002b: 429–45

Works by Kierkegaard

For Kierkegaard’s published writings, references are given first to the volume and page number of Søren Kierkegaard’s Samlede Værker (Kierkegaard 1901–06), and then to one of the following translations:

CUP Concluding Unscientific Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments’, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, in Kierkegaard 1992
EO Either/Or, Part II, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, in Kierkegaard 1987
FT Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric, translated by Sylvia Walsh, in Kierkegaard 2006
PC Practice in Christianity, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, in Kierkegaard 1991
List of References and Abbreviations

SLW  Stages on Life’s Way, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, in Kierkegaard 1988

WL  Works of Love, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, in Kierkegaard 1995

For Kierkegaard’s journals and papers, references are given first to the volume and page number of Søren Kierkegaard’s Papirer (Kierkegaard 1909–78), and then to the following translation:


Works by Schiller

References are given first to the volume and page number of Schiller’s Werke: Nationalausgabe (Schiller 1943–), and then to one of the following translations:


GD  On Grace and Dignity, translated by Jane V. Curran, in Schiller 2005

KL  ‘Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner’, translated by Stefan Bird-Pollan, in Schiller 2003


NLBF  ‘On the Necessary Limitations in the Use of Beautiful Forms’, translated anonymously, in Schiller 2006: 168–84