cause it significantly lessens Israel's critique of the existing explanations. Marxists did not deny that radical literature flourished prior to the revolution; they just interpreted it as "superstructure" and held the subsequent events to be better explained by the increasing price of bread.

Israel is probably right that there is a gap in the literature on the emergence of modern democratic values, but filling it requires sensitivity to the complexity of political thinkers rather than a straitjacketing of them into a bi-party system reminiscent of an American election. It also requires a more sustained exploration of how these thinkers influenced political agents. Perhaps Israel himself will tell us more about that in the final volume of the trilogy on the Enlightenment.

Reidar Maliks
Harvard University

Voorhoeve, Alex. 2009. Conversations on Ethics. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 272. ISBN: 978-0-19-921537-9

Alex Voorhoeve's book of interviews will prove an excellent document of the prevailing attitudes and standards that ruled moral philosophy at the beginning of the new Millennium. A number of eminent figures in Anglo-American philosophy, along with a few leading psychologists and economists with contributions that are particularly relevant to the field of ethics, are challenged to have "a frank discussion of some of the strengths and weaknesses of their ideas", in terms that are relatively "accessible to a non-specialist audience" (vii). Having in mind Socrates' warning from *Phaedrus* about the "orphan" nature of any written discourse, the author of these interviews is not only focusing on their main ideas and decisive arguments, but also tries to give us "a real sense of the human beings behind the writings", as Jonathan Wolff put it, addressing to the influential thinkers that are interviewed provocative questions about their intellectual development and the reasons that drove them into moral philosophy. Every discussion is preceded by a concise and accessible presentation of the central theoretical preoccupations of the approached thinker and it is followed by key bibliographical references regarding the conversation that took place. Explanatory footnotes about the more technical expressions used in the conversation, along with short explanations of some intricate thesis, are also inserted. We could say that Voorhoeve has a real gift for detecting the vulnerable parts in any thinker's argumentation and exposing them in a manner that forces the philosopher to produce a more comprehensive account of her or his views.

The conversations focus on three main puzzles that have troubled the philosophers' minds since ancient times. First, is the question regarding the reliability of "moral intuitions", our so-called "everyday moral sense" that prompts us in making moral judgments carrying strong feelings, despite the lack of sound rational justifications. Second, there is the old puzzle about the "objectivity" of our moral judgments: it appears that using the same "impersonal criteria", different rational agents seemingly well-intended may very well arrive at different ethical conclusions. In Voorhoeve's words, "we must decide how to respond to disagreements between good, though imperfect, enquirers" (4). Third, there is the difficult problem of moral motivation and the fact that moral reasons prevail in various concrete life-situations, without us being able to clearly indicate what these reasons are. The aim of this book is "to provide insight into contrasting answers

to these three puzzles" (5). Given the fact that almost every thinker interviewed has something relevant to say on each of the three topics mentioned above, the structure of the book, divided into five parts, is determined by the intention of bringing together "interviews that are most directly relevant to each other" (6).

The first section contrasts two philosophers and a psychologist with extremely different views regarding the status of our moral intuitions. While Frances Kamm claims that a moral philosopher should strive to bring into light and understand our intuitive moral judgments, our spontaneous reactions to various moral cases being in fact an expression of a deeper "structure of morality", the leading utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer reaffirms his suspicions about these intuitive judgments derived from "untrustworthy sources". From Singer's point of view, these "intuitions" are usually nothing more than remnants of "religious systems" that for centuries have shaped people's way of seeing the world and are deeply rooted into our social practices and habits of thinking because of our education. There is also a large amount of cultural prejudice regarding the permissibility of gender, race or species discrimination still governing our everyday "intuitions", as well as an inculcated easiness in accepting "social conventions that lack moral justification". Finally, some of our moral judgments (as the ones stemming from the importance we spontaneously bestow upon the idea of reciprocity) "may have biological origins but also lack any deep justification" (50). Starting from here, Singer tries to explain some of his most controversial ethical views, openly acknowledging the lack of strength that moral reasons often have on us and our incapacity of always assuming the impartial point of view. For the renowned psychologist and Nobel Prize winner in Economics Daniel Kahneman, the area of moral intuitive judgments has proven to be a fascinating field of research. But he is challenging Kamm's views, claiming that there are scientific proofs supporting the idea that "the mental operation of making sense of our intuitive judgments is a very different cognitive activity from having these intuitions" (75). If this is true, the entire case-based method in moral philosophy risks being merely a way of inventing rational justifications for what is driving our intuitive judgments in the first place. More than this, Kahneman argues that there is a methodological limitation of moral philosophy: it always has to deal with two or more cases at the same time because it is trying to establish general principles, but this stance prevents the philosopher from grasping the *real* intuitions that people might have when confronted with different cases one at a time. Finally, Kahneman holds that even if our intuitions "are indeed malleable to some extent" by means of reflection, we will always have "powerful but profoundly inconsistent intuitions", which makes the task of achieving some "fully satisfactory reflective equilibrium" (82) an impossible one.

The second section of the book is dedicated to conversations with two philosophers who are famous for their commitment to virtue ethics. Philippa Foot and Alasdair MacIntyre share the reference points in their intellectual development and explain some of their guiding ideas. Referring to her book *Natural Goodness*, Voorhoeve emphasizes that for Foot, the objectivity of our moral judgments is assured by this fact: the way we assign moral virtues and vices is nothing but an "instance" of some general kind of evaluation of all living things "as defective or sound members of their species" (7). Moral goodness and badness are only particular expressions of the natural goodness and badness, having to do with a human will which is "either defective or as it should be". Foot strongly believes that in spite of all the important cultural differences, we can still trace "a universal need for certain character traits and for certain rules of conduct"

(101). The conversation with Alasdair MacIntyre, author of one of the most incisive and influent books on moral philosophy in the 20th century, *After Virtue*, is divided into two parts. First, there is a short recollection of MacIntyre's fascinating intellectual journey, which led him from engaging in debates on Marxism, Christianity, and psychoanalysis, to a powerful criticism of all the modern moral theories and the proposal of a neo-Aristotelian conception of morality. In his view, as Voorhoeve shows, the virtues must regain their central place as "excellences of character that are both instrumentally useful" for attaining the goal of human "well-being" and also "an essential part of its attainment, their possession being itself a constituent of the good life" (114). The discussion then focuses on the differences between Aristotle's original account and MacIntyre's elaborations from *Dependent Rational Animals*, where he argues that only by realizing "our vulnerability to physical and mental illness and the nature of our dependence on others' assistance" (123) can we get rid of the "illusions of self-sufficiency" and also rectify our common opinions on justice: understanding that justice in the family originally requires a "non-calculating way" of generosity, we will be able to see that in society as well, "a certain generosity beyond justice is required if justice is to be done" (125).

This virtue of generosity conceived as an asymmetrical relation to others would seem only an accidental trait of some members of our species in Ken Binmore's vision, mathematician, famous economist and for some time a leading figure in the developing of what is known as the evolutionary theory of strategic interaction. In one of the most provocative interviews in the book, Binmore is taking on traditional moral philosophy, arguing that the starting question "How ought we to live?" is rather "nonsensical", at least when its answer is supposed to be some categorical imperative, imposing upon us a particular way of conduct "irrespective of our actual preferences and plans". "One must ask instead *how and why these* [moral] *rules survive*" (139), adds Binmore, explaining his naturalist and reductionist conception of morality as nothing more than an adaptation, "a device which evolved along with the human species" (140) because it was helpful for our ancestors to coordinate their actions "in mutually advantageous ways". It would follow that our moral intuitions are basically biological fairness norms dependent on the particular circumstances under which human beings evolved: hominids lived together in small groups where reciprocity and some kind of "mutual insurance" proved vital for survival. In order to explain how we manage to solve everyday coordination problems by finding an "efficient equilibrium", Binmore appeals to a modified version of Rawls's "original position", grounded on the assumption that we possess a capacity for "empathetic preferences" that "is written into our genes" (146). But when it comes down to the benefits that a descriptive science of morals could provide, Binmore is extremely cautious: it is not a question of imposing on us an egalitarian ideal of fairness, but simply of drawing attention to the fact that the "original position" is the *natural* device, the one that our intuitions "are keened to" (151). Allan Gibbard, the other thinker interviewed in the section about *Ethics and Evolution*, is somehow more optimistic than the Humean Binmore regarding our deliberative capacities and the way we are able to shape our behavior according to shared principles. Since "we are, in a sense, 'designed' by evolution for living together in complex social groups" (162), "we have been shaped by evolutionary forces to be persuadable" (163), capable of reaching agreement by accepting other people's norms after joint discussions. The moment we break one of these shared norms, we normally feel guilt, derived from our belief that "others would rightly feel angry – resentful or outraged – at us for our actions" (169). That's what morality,

narrowly conceived, is all about. So feelings like moral anger and guilt prove to be "relatively cost-effective ways" of policing shared norms and restoring cooperation.

The fourth part of Voorhoeve's book focuses on the possibility of producing a unified account of morality. The Harvard philosopher Thomas Scanlon believes that this rationale is to be found in the justifiability to others of our own actions. From Scanlon's contractualist perspective, acting morally means acting on principles that you think others could not reasonably reject. It is interesting that according to this view, as Voorhoeves shows, "each person wields a veto in the imaginary gathering in which principles for conduct are agreed upon" (181); this "requirement of unanimity" is for Scanlon "the way to explain the authority of deontological or rights-based principles" over the utilitarian demand of maximizing the sum of well-being. More than this, adopting such conception of morality enables us to realize that there is a strong reason to be moral: it is "the only way of standing in a very appealing relation to other people" (190), avoiding estrangement. But what counts as a "reasonable rejection"? Is there "a criterion for what someone can't reasonably reject"? "*That* is the question we should be asking" (204), replies Bernard Williams, undoubtedly one of the most influent moral thinkers of our times. In an interview given only a few months before his death, Williams explains that the attempt to provide a single fundamental reason for moral behavior and the search "for a system of ethical and political ideas that is best from a point of view that is as free as possible from contingent historical perspective" (199) are not the right manners of approaching moral and political philosophy. He focuses instead on the ways in which history and genealogy can help us "make *some* sense of the ethical" (203). For instance, we cannot fully understand our modern concept of liberty if we fail to grasp how this concept is linked to the fact that "competition is central to modern commercial society's functioning" or if we don't realize that it is only "because our legitimation stories start with less than other outlooks that liberty is more important to us" (200).

The final section of the book deals mainly with the possible relationship between moral reasons and "the reasons of love". For Harry Frankfurt, the question "How should one live?" should not be answered by imposing on us some kind of moral requirements, but rather by finding out what are the things that we really love in life, "by uncovering the desires we have and want most fervently to maintain and act on", as Voorhoeve explains. "We love something, Frankfurt says, when we *cannot help* wanting to desire and pursue it" (9). But this is "a misguided view of love" in David Velleman's conception. We have to distinguish love – which is "a capacity to *really see* another", as Iris Murdoch used to say – from the feeling of being *in* love, involving "misperception" or "transference" in a Freudian sense. So Velleman argues that both love and respect are synonyms of "an arresting awareness of a person's value as an end". Love goes beyond respect because it "disarms our emotional defences", but these two remain kindred attitudes. It follows that "love and moral respect for people are actually supportive of one another. The experience of love is an experience that develops the moral sensibility" (252), educating us in becoming aware of the "incommensurable value" that *each* person holds.

There is a fundamental question underlying all these conversations, that Voorhoeve openly addresses in the *Introduction*: what can we "reasonably hope to gain from discourse on ethics"? He confesses that the experience of making these interviews left him rather "optimistic about the prospect of finding at least partial solutions to some of our ethical puzzles" (11). Even if such a thing remains to be decided by each reader of this book on her or his own, I think that on a more general level, Voorhoeve's pres-

ent work proves to be an excellent illustration of the two desiderata that have inspired philosophical inquiry since the time of Socrates. On the one hand, there is a special ability for critical thinking that we gain from doing philosophy, which would explain, using Frances Kamm's words, why we can take it for a fact that "people who are trained in philosophy… are much better able to judge the validity of positions other than their own" (20). (And what a salutary training this may be, if it is true, as Foucault once said, that "taking distance on oneself" or "thinking otherwise than before" should be considered "the ethic of an intellectual in our day"! On the other hand, a demand for honesty and authenticity will always play an essential part in judging philosophers' claims, ruining the credibility of those "who don't live up" (21) to their moral principles.

Cristian Iftode
University of Bucharest

Cohen, G. A. 2008. Rescuing Justice and Equality. Cambridge, MA: Harvard. Pp. 430. ISBN: 978-0-674-03076-3. 430 pp.

As this review was being written, the news of G. A. Cohen's death at the age of 68 was announced by his colleagues at Oxford. Although he had recently retired from full-time teaching, no one believed that *Rescuing Justice and Equality* would the last book published during his lifetime. However, his recent book has unwittingly become an important final work, not least because it highlights the many concerns that occupied the last twenty years of Cohen's career, but also because it is a brilliantly argued attack on the almost *laissez-faire* liberalism that speaks as the dominant representative of Rawls' philosophical ideas.

In *Rescuing Justice and Equality*, Cohen attacks the dominance of one part of Rawls' theory of justice: the belief that, so long as the well-being of the worst off members of society is not made worse, any arrangement that increases the well-being of better-off members of society is morally acceptable. Following not in the foot-steps of his earliest work (for instance, the Marxist-thought epitomized in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. 1978. Princeton: Princeton University Press), Cohen instead adopts what might be termed a robust defence of his previous arguments with John Rawls. In particular, Cohen attacks what he sees as an artificial separation between people's attitudes and social structure themselves, much as he did in his *If You Are an Egalitarian, Why are you so Rich?* (2001. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

However, Cohen's new book is not an attack on Rawls *per se* but rather an attack on a certain strand of liberal thought that emerges from *A Theory of Justice*. Cohen has great respect for the Rawls and describes him as the writer of a work of philosophy that is eclipsed by at most only two others books of political philosophy: *The Republic* and *The Leviathan*. In a Hegelian moment, he calls Rawls a thinker who captured the spirit of his age with his *A Theory of Justice* (the import of this compliment depends, I suppose, on what one happens to think of late-capitalist society).

Traditionally, it has been possible to level at least two leftist critiques against Rawls, both of which spring from the same intuition: that Rawls has smuggled more into the initial position then he lets on. First, he can very specifically be accused of adopting a Western normative framework – viz., abstracting from Western norms to arrive at the fundamental rights ascribed to the individual. This is the approach that Akeel Bilgrami takes in "Secular Liberalism and the Moral Psychology of Identity," (in R. Bhargava