Book Section:

British Idealism

Robert Stern

In his recent magnum opus on the history of ethics, Terence Irwin gives the thought of the British Idealists, and particularly T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley, an unusually prominent role, as in many ways representing the high-point of moral philosophy in modern times. This is surprising, because most contemporary ethicists have probably never read their work, and would certainly hesitate to rank them above figures such as J. S. Mill, Henry Sidgwick, G. E. Moore and John Rawls, for example. However, when one realizes where Irwin's own concerns lie, then this is less surprising. For, Irwin is interested in the Aristotelian tradition within ethics, and its subsequent development, and thus how it has fared in relation to its critics, of which perhaps none is more prominent than Kant. Irwin believes, however, that much of this Kantian critique is misplaced, and that in fact when properly developed, Kant's own thinking turns out to need some appeal to Aristotelian insights, and thus that these apparently divergent traditions can be brought together, to the mutual benefit of each.[1]

However, if Irwin's approach does the British Idealists the great favour of rescuing them from historical obscurity, it also immediately highlights what may be seen as problematic with their views: namely, that by attempting to combine Aristotelianism with Kantianism, they end up with an incoherent position that can only be dialectically unstable. Clearly, then, even if Irwin is right about what the British Idealists were trying to achieve, their impact can only prove to be lasting if they managed to succeed, and so create some sort of genuine synthesis rather than an inconsistent ethical system.

In this chapter, therefore, I want to use Irwin's suggestion as the background to my account of the British Idealists, and to explore it further. I will claim that Irwin's way of locating them within the history of ethics is indeed helpful, while also allowing us to bring out the difficulties in their position. Broadly speaking, I will argue, this position can be understood as a form of 'post-Kantian perfectionism':[2] that is, an ethics that is based on claims about how the moral life relates to human self-realization, but while at the same time taking into account Kant's well-known critique

---

[1] Cf. Irwin 2007: 5. The main discussion of Green and Bradley can be found in Irwin 2009, in chapters 85 and 84 respectively.

[2] I borrow this helpful phrase from Douglas Moggach: see e.g. Moggach 2011.

of any such view. After Kant, it may have appeared that such perfectionism was a 'dead duck'; but the interest of Green and Bradley, however, is that they self-consciously attempt to show how this response was premature, while nonetheless taking such Kantian concerns seriously. The result, therefore, is a new take on this traditional ethical position, which in their hands is reshaped in unexpected ways.

I will begin by sketching the Kantian critique of perfectionism, before examining how Green and Bradley[3] responded in different ways to that critique, in their attempts to revive what they took to be valuable in the approach that Kant had attempted to surpass.

1. The Kantian critique of perfectionism

The core ideas behind the approach that Kant took himself to be attacking are helpfully captured in Irwin's summary of Aristotle's position:

> [Aristotle] defends an account of the human good as happiness (eudaimonia), consisting in the fulfilment of human nature, expressed in the various human virtues. His position is teleological, in so far as it seeks the best guide for action in an ultimate end, eudaimonist, in so far as it identifies the ultimate end with happiness, and naturalist, in so far as it identifies virtue and happiness in a life that fulfils the nature and capacities of rational human nature.[4]

While a position of this sort can be called eudaimonist, it can also be called perfectionist, because it takes such happiness to consist in the development of our distinctive capacities, rather than simply pleasure or desire-satisfaction. On the other hand, it may be distinguished from a more narrow form of perfectionism, which takes this development to be a good in itself, rather than as an aspect of the well-being of the individual.

Within the ethical thinking of his time, and when combined with certain theological themes concerning the purposes of God's creation, this outlook may be

---

[3] In what follows, I will be focusing just on Green and Bradley, as these are by common consent the most significant ethicists in the British Idealist tradition. For discussion of other figures such as Edward Caird and Henry Jones, see Mander 2011.
[4] Irwin 2007: 4.

taken to be the dominant viewpoint of Kant's contemporaries, where its most influential spokesperson was Christian Wolff. Thus, when Kant came to propose that the much sought-after 'supreme principle of morality' should be 'to never proceed except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim could become universal law',[5] one prominent alternative candidate amongst others that he sought to discredit was the perfectionist principle: 'Seek perfection as much as you can'. Consequently, when Kant sets out to distinguish his account of the supreme principle of morality from all those so far put forward, perfectionism is one of the options he rejects, for several related reasons: it is heteronomous; it collapses morality into a system of merely hypothetical imperatives; it makes morality empirical rather than a priori; it puts the good prior to the right; and it is unable to provide any contentful guidance on how we should act. Let us briefly consider each of these points in turn.

According to Kant, all prior attempts to arrive at a supreme principle of morality, including those made by the perfectionist, are misguided because they are based on a heteronomous conception of the will: namely, that the ends of the will are set by desire or inclination, to which reason then determines the means. The consequence, however, is that 'the will does not give itself the law, but the object by its relation to the will gives the law to it',[6] and thus autonomy is undermined as reason becomes the slave of the passions. Thus, in the case of perfectionism, Kant argues that the link between perfection and well-being is foundational, where it is then the desire for the latter that is seen to motivate agents in following the principle of perfecting themselves, given the satisfactions that acting in accordance with it will bring. The result, however, is to make practical reason subservient to desire, in a heteronomous manner. Moreover, as a consequence of this connection between perfectionism and well-being, Kant argues, the perfectionist can only treat the imperatives of morality as hypothetical and not categorical: that is, they hold only because we have a sufficiently strong inclination towards the end of happiness to which perfecting ourselves and our capacities is the means. Furthermore, the position is a consequentialist and hence empirical one, for the rightness of an act is determined by how far it increases perfection, and this can be determined only on the basis of experience, whereas for Kant moral judgements should be possible a priori.[7]

---

[5] Kant 2012 4:402.
[6] Kant 2012 4:441.
[7] For helpful further discussion of some of these themes, see Guyer 2011.

As well as these mistakes, Kant also accuses perfectionism of making a fundamental but tempting methodological error in conducting its inquiry into the supreme principle of morality: namely, of starting from a conception of what is good, and from that trying to arrive at an account of the moral law, whereas for Kant we must proceed the other way round if we are not to be led into error. For, Kant argues, if we try to conceive of the good unconstrained by some prior conception of the moral law, we will inevitably think of the good in terms of happiness and pleasure, and thus end up with the sort of heteronomous and hypothetical view of morality that one finds in perfectionism, amongst other moral systems.[8] Kant allows that perhaps the perfectionist might respond to a worry of this sort by accepting Kant's point and so holding that attributes are not perfections because they make us happy, but because they make us morally good; but then, Kant argues, the perfectionist principle is an empty one, because we now need to know what it is to be morally good before we can assess which attributes to cultivate and which capacities to realize, so the position is hopelessly circular, and cannot help us decide how to act.[9]

We have therefore seen the problems that Kant raised for the perfectionist tradition, which may seem to leave it fatally damaged. Nonetheless, of course, Kant's own position is far from unproblematic, so that once this became apparent, it was perhaps inevitable that the attempt would be made to see if in fact these two approaches can be brought together somehow to the mutual advantage of both, rather than beings set at odds with one another. As Irwin has argued, the British Idealists may be seen as adopting this strategy, and thus as developing perfectionism in a post-Kantian form, which takes aspects of Kant's critique on board, and modifies the position accordingly, thereby giving it a new lease of life.

2. Two forms of perfectionism: capacity-based and holistic

Before we turn to the discussion of the work of Green and Bradley, however, it is useful to draw out a distinction within the perfectionist approach which (I will claim) underlies an important difference in their respective approaches, and thus in the way that each tries to deal with the Kantian challenge. This is the distinction between a perfectionism which sees the ideal self as one that has fully developed its capacities or

---

[8] Kant 1996 5:58; cf. also 5:64-5.
[9] Cf. Kant 2012 4:443: '[Perfectionism] has an unavoidable propensity to revolve around in a circle, and covertly to presuppose the morality it is supposed to explain'.

capabilities, and a perfectionism which sees the ideal self as a unified or harmonious whole.

This difference may be traced back to the origins of this tradition in Plato and in Aristotle. Thus, for Plato, goodness is taken to be a proper balance or order among parts in a holistic manner,[10] whilst for Aristotle the focus is more on how far certain potentialities or capacities are realized and successfully developed. In general, it might be argued, Aristotle's approach is the predominant one, and can be found for example in Aquinas when he contrasts the imperfection of potentiality with the perfection of actuality.[11] However, Plato's outlook also remains embedded in the perfectionist tradition. Thus, for example, while his position also contains Aristotelian elements, Wolff argues that 'The harmony [Zusammenstimmung] of the manifold constitutes the perfection of things',[12] so that the perfection of the will consists in 'the harmony of all and every volition with one another, none running contrary to the rest'.[13]

Now of course, both forms of perfectionism can easily be put together, in the thought that in order to realize our capacities, we must do so in a harmonious manner, without each being at odds with the others; or, it could be argued that some capacities can only themselves be properly actualized in a unified and coherent way. This convergence between the two views explains why they are often run together and the difference is not usually highlighted or held to be significant. Nonetheless, they are still conceptually distinct; and, I will now suggest, when it comes to Green and Bradley, they do indeed come apart, under the pressure of finding an adequate perfectionist response to Kant's critique.

3. Green's capacity-based perfectionism

In his Prolegomena to Ethics, Green prefaces his theory of morality with an important discussion of the will in Book II. He starts by offering an account of action, where he argues that what guides the will it not some specific want or desire, but a conception

---

[10] Cf. Kraut 1992: 322: '[T]he goodness of Forms consists in the fact that they possess a kind of harmony, balance, or proportion; and their superiority to all other things consists in the fact that the kind of order they possess gives them a higher degree of harmony than any other type of object'. In support of this reading, Kraut cites Philebus 23c-d and 64d-e.
[11] Aquinas 1920: 1-2 question 3 article 2.
[12] Wolff 1751: §152. Cf. Baumgarten 1779: §94.
[13] Wolff 1751: §907.

of the agent's own greatest good – hence, he claims, the agent in acting aims at 'self-satisfaction'.[14] For Green, therefore, when it comes to making a choice, there is no selection between competing desires made by the will; rather, the choice is made in determining which of the desires, if satisfied, would constitute the agent's greatest good, and on the basis of this decision the will then comes to act, with the other desires having been silenced.[15]

Green recognizes, however, that this picture leaves an important question unanswered when it comes to ethics: namely, what is it that distinguishes a morally good will from a morally bad one? Of course, on some accounts, this difference is marked by a distinction between the good agent who has no concern for their own well-being, and a bad one who is so concerned: but Green cannot take this option, given his account of action outlined above where such self-concern is present in all agents – so where does the difference lie? Green's answer is that the difference comes from the different conceptions of self-satisfaction that agents can have, and thus in 'the character of that in which self-satisfaction is sought, ranging from sensual pleasure to the fulfilment of a vocation conceived as given by God'.[16] Green's position depends, therefore, on making out some grounds on which to distinguish good and bad conceptions of self-satisfaction that might be held by different agents, where this explains the basis on which we might make a moral distinction between them.

For Green, then, the difference between the good and the bad person lies in their different conceptions of where and in what manner they can find self-satisfaction, and what this consist in.[17] But Green recognizes a difficulty: namely, that there is a circle here, as we seem to have to already know what moral goodness consists in before we can characterize an agent as moral and thus what the self-satisfaction of such an agent will involve; and on the other hand, if we do already know what such moral goodness amounts to, we wouldn't have to characterize it as what brings satisfaction to the moral agent, but must be able to grasp it independently in a prior manner, or not at all.[18] Faced with this difficulty, Green refers back to the metaphysical theorizing that he had developed in Book I of the Prolegomena, before

---

[14] Cf. Green 2003: §95.
[15] Cf. §104 and §§145-6.
[16] §154.
[17] Cf. §171.
[18] Cf. §172.

he turned to the will and ethics as such, which argued that the world is the realization of a self-developing eternal mind;[19] and from this, he thinks we are entitled to infer that what leads to the fulfilling of our capacities and thus our self-satisfaction is also what is morally good, and vice versa.[20]

We have seen, then, that Green holds that the good agent aims at the realization of his or her capacities, where he now argues that this 'will keep before him an object, which he presents to himself as absolutely desirable, but which is other than any particular object of desire'.[21] In the case of such particular objects, he will take these to have value only in so far as they satisfy some desire of his; but in the case of his self-realization, '[i]t will be an interest as in an object conceived to be of unconditional value; one of which the value does not depend on any desire that the individual may at any time feel for it or for anything else, or on any pleasure that, either in its pursuit or in its attainment or as its result, he may experience'.[22] In other words, Green claims that while the agent may see the value of everything else in terms of his wants and their attendant pleasures, he does not see the realization of his capacities in this way, as these constitute the end against which such wants and pleasures are themselves measured.[23]

However, we still have the problem of specifying what this unconditional good of self-realization consists in, where if we say that it is what the good will is directed towards, we will just be 'moving in a circle', because we have no independent conception of the good will, while the complete realization of human capacities has not yet been achieved.[24] Nonetheless, Green thinks, we can turn to the history of ethics to provide us with an important clue, where the key here (he argues) has been the central 'moral ideal' of the common good, in which individuals find their good to be bound up with that of others. At an earlier stage, in Greek ethics, these 'others' just comprised one's immediate community or polis; but in Christian ethics, this is widened to include all individuals. As a result of this conception of self-realization, Green argues that the distinction between 'benevolence' and 'self-love', and thus Sidgwick's famous 'dualism of practical reason', collapses and is shown to

---

[19] Cf. §67.
[20] Cf. §181.
[21] §193.
[22] §193.
[23] Cf. §193.
[24] Cf. §194.

be a 'fiction',[25] insofar as no clear distinction can be drawn between the good of the individual and that of the society of which he or she is part, as the former good depends on the latter. Green therefore writes that '[t]he opposition of self and others does not enter into the consideration of a well-being so constituted'.[26] Thus, Green argues, the agent will come to treat others not merely as means, but also as ends, in so far as he will be 'living for an object common to himself and all rational beings and consisting in the perfection of the rational nature', not just in himself but also in others.[27]

Finally, in Book IV, Green considers how far his account can help in providing us with guidance for conduct. Here he admits that superficially, at least, a theory like utilitarianism may appear to be in a better position, in seeming to give us a more concrete criterion of right action. On the other hand, he argues, in practice the calculation of consequences in utilitarian terms is in fact virtually impossible, while the very search for a simple solution to cases of moral perplexity is itself wrong-headed. Thus, Green argues, while it may not be easy to use perfection to tell us how to act, it is perhaps no worse off than any other moral theory is or should be.

Taken as whole, therefore, it is easy to see why Green's student D. G. Ritchie should have characterized his view as having 'corrected Kant by Aristotle and Aristotle by Kant';[28] for, while returning to something like Aristotle's eudaimonism, this also takes a 'post-Kantian' form, and is importantly shaped by Kant's critique of the perfectionist tradition. So, in response to the charge of heteronomy, Green argues that our conception of the good is not merely set for us by desires and their satisfaction in a subjectivist manner, but involves the use of reason to determine where our proper self-satisfaction lies.[29] Thus, he argues, moral requirements can be based on the good of self-realization but still be categorical imperatives, as this goodness is independent of contingent inclinations and interests.[30] Green also shows himself to be sensitive to Kantian concerns regarding the priority of the moral law over the good, where the claim is that we must use the former to determine the latter;

---

[25] §232.
[26] §235. Cf. also §232: 'His own permanent well-being he thus necessarily presents for himself as a social well-being'.
[27] Green 1911: §118.
[28] Ritchie 1891: 139.
[29] But cf. Skorupski 2006: 57-8.
[30] Cf. Green 2003: §193.

Green responds to this concern by using the history of ethics as a guide to the nature of self-realization, and so does not first try to offer an account of the good that does not take the principles of morality into account. Moreover, Green tries to deal with Kant's objection that the criterion of perfection is circular or morally empty – or at least, is no more so that Kant's own criterion of universalizability, or the utilitarian criterion of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. At the same time, Green may claim to have 'corrected Kant by Aristotle', in offering a theory of action and motivation that gives a more central and plausible role to the conative side of the self, and hence shows how some of Kant's notorious dichotomies can be overcome, for example between duty and inclination, reason and desire. Finally, the sense in which Green is a 'post-Kantian perfectionist' may be underlined by the way in which he connects self-realization not only with flourishing but also with freedom as a form of autonomy, in a way that gives a distinctively Kantian slant to his perfectionism.

At the same time, however, Green's way of trying to accommodate Kant's concerns may seem to reveal the weakness of his capacity-based view of perfectionism. For example, he is required to appeal to a 'divine principle' to justify his claim that we will find proper self-realization in a morally good end and vice versa, which then allows him to use the history of ethics as a guide to what human self-realization involves. This enables him to avoid the essentialist or biologistic claims of the Aristotelian regarding what our capacities consist in that then need to be exercised in order to attain flourishing; but he does so at the price of having to rely on his idealist metaphysics. Moreover, the Kantian may object to Green's attempt to show how, by starting off with a concern for our own self-realization, we will end up with a concern for that of others, based on his claim that an individual's good requires him or her to promote a common good, i.e. a good in which others also share. There are two worries here. First, the bridge Green tries to build from the individual's good to the common good may seem shaky, for it seems plausible to argue (as Sidgwick does, for example)[31] that my self-realization, conceived of as the development of my capacities, will not always mean that it is best served through contributing to the good of others; or at least, Green's account of what self-realization involves seems too vague to assert this connection with any great confidence,[32] where it could plausibly be argued that some aspects of my good requires not co-operation with others, but

---

[31] Cf. Sidgwick 1902: 47-8 and 64.
[32] Ibid., pp. 55-6.

competition against them. Second, even if this connection could be assumed, the Kantian may still argue that while on Green's picture there is a categorical imperative to realize in me a certain kind of character, and while that character may be one that takes an interest in the good of others as well as myself, nonetheless ultimately this interest is still not properly impartial, as my reason to have this attitude is that I will then have the right conception of my own good, in a way that is ultimately concerns the benefits it brings to me in terms of self-satisfaction, and so is egoistic and not properly ethical.[33] In this way, Kant may think, his claims about morality as involving an impartial concern with the significance of others are still not properly accommodated within Green's perfectionism, and that his attempts to revive Aristotelianism in this post-Kantian form have failed.

We will now consider Bradley's approach, which involves a rather different view of the perfectionist position, in a way that may allow us to see how some of these concerns might be addressed.

4. *Bradley's holistic perfectionism*

In the second 'essay' or chapter of Ethical Studies, Bradley appears to show himself to be sensitive to the some of the concerns that have been raised above regarding Green's position, and to echo Kantian worries over the attempt to offer a perfectionist answer to the question of 'why should I be moral?'. For, Bradley observes (in ways that came to be associated with H. A. Pritchard some decades later),[34] unless this is itself a moral question (in which case the answer is obvious), it will make being moral into the means to a non-moral end, as concerning the interests of the individual, where 'to take virtue as a mere means to an ulterior end is in direct antagonism to the voice of the moral consciousness'.[35] Bradley may thus seem to be more alert than Green to the dangers of approaching morality in a perfectionist spirit, and hoping to find in it a response to the question of 'why be moral?'.

However, despite this, Bradley still thinks that the question can be given some meaning that will not lead us astray: for instead of asking if some prior end gives us a sufficient reason or motive to be moral, we can still ask what the relation is between acting morally and achieving our ultimate end qua human being and thus our good,

---

[33] Cf. Dewey 1873: 51. Cf. also Pritchard 1928: 43.
[34] Pritchard 1912.
[35] Bradley 1927: 61.

even when we do not think of the former as the means to the latter, where the question then becomes: 'Is morality the same as the end for man, so that the two are convertible; or is morality one side, or aspect, or element of some end which is larger than itself? Is it the whole end from all points of view, or is it one view of the whole?'.[36] Now, to answer this question, of course, requires us to specify what 'the end for man' is, which Bradley says is self-realization. He admits at once, however, that it is hard for him to prove this claim, as to do so would require 'something like a system of metaphysics',[37] which he cannot hope to provide here; nonetheless, he thinks it can be made plausible if we think about the nature of action, where again like Green he emphasizes that on a variety of different accounts, actions only occur if and when we 'feel ourselves asserted or affirmed in them',[38] and so take ourselves to realize ourselves in so acting.

At this point, therefore, Bradley thinks he is entitled to ask about the relation between morality and self-realization;[39] but now of course he needs to tell us something about self-realization and what this amount to. It is here that his holistic perfectionism begins to emerge, where he argues that what the individual is trying to realize cannot be a 'mere one' or a 'mere many', but rather a 'one in many, or a many in one' – namely, 'the self as a whole, which is not merely the sum of its parts, nor yet some other particular beside them'. Thus Bradley asks rhetorically, 'must we not say that to realize self is always to realize a whole, and that the question in morals is to find the true whole, realizing which will practically realize the true self?'.[40] This, then, gives the focus for the rest of Ethical Studies, as we can now ask, of various ethical systems, whether on their accounts morality as they conceive it would coincide with self-realization taken in this way, and thus how it would relate to 'the end for man'.

On this basis, therefore, Bradley argues that a morality of 'pleasure for pleasure's sake' or of 'duty for duty's sake' (which roughly correspond to utilitarianism and Kantianism respectively) cannot be satisfactory, as in neither can the self realize itself as a whole, as each position takes a one-sided view of this totality: the former views the self as a collection of particular interests, while the latter

---

[36] Bradley 1927: 64.
[37] Bradley 1927: 65.
[38] Bradley 1927: 68.
[39] Cf. Bradley 1927: 214 and 228.
[40] Bradley 1927: 68-9.

views it as a pure will operating at an abstractly universal level standing above all such differentiation.[41] Moving in a dialectical manner, Bradley then introduces a third option of 'my station and its duties', that seems to resolve the one-sided opposition between these earlier alternatives, and thus arrive at a moral outlook that can do justice to the unity-in-difference of the self, by balancing the plurality of particularity with the oneness of universality.

What this requires, Bradley argues, is that morality comes from the ethical life of the community, in which there is room for both particularity and universality, as the individual carries out the specific and concrete social role that they occupy, while that role fits into a wider and more universal totality of which the individual is a part.[42] Earlier in Ethical Studies, Bradley had adapted a saying of Goethe's to write: 'You can not be a whole, unless you join a whole',[43] where it is thus in the unity of the community with its ethics of 'my station and its duties' that the self can be realized in this holistic sense.

However, despite arguing with considerable rhetorical force for this position,[44] Bradley also recognizes its limitations, including the worry that the individual may live within an imperfect state and so find no self-realization in ethical life, or may find such self-realization elsewhere, outside the moral life of the community altogether, for example in scientific inquiry or aesthetic production. Thus, in his search for a view of morality that coincides more fully with self-realization, Bradley moves to what he calls 'ideal morality', where the moral is seen as including more than the social relations of 'my station and its duties', and so as involving both demands that may be made on us beyond those required by any actual society, and also the kinds of duties to oneself that make the life of the artist or theorist moral in this broader sense.[45] Once broadened in this way, Bradley observes, it may be tempting to answer his original question in the affirmative.[46]

---

[41] Bradley 1927: 142.

[42] The influence of the Hegelian notion of Sittlichkeit is clearly very strong at this point in the text.

[43] Bradley 1927: 79.

[44] Bradley admits 'perhaps we have heated ourselves a little' in presenting the outlook of 'my station and its duties' (Bradley 1927: 202).

[45] Cf. Bradley 1927: 222-3. Green also raises this kind of case as a concern for his social ethics, but did not develop a response to it: see Green 2003: §§289-90.

[46] Cf. Bradley 1927: 228.

However, despite this seemingly optimistic result of his inquiries so far, Bradley still raises a difficulty: for morality, he thinks, involves what ought to be, not what is, and this always incorporates a gap between our actual existence and our full and final self-realization, so that for morality to make sense at all, the two can never coincide completely.[47] It is this tension, Bradley holds, that in thinking about self-realization takes us beyond morality altogether, and into religion, where Ethical Studies closes.

Before it does so, however, Bradley interposes a chapter on 'Selfishness and Self-Sacrifice', in which inter alia he considers how far a theory like his might be accused of doing away with morality and reducing it to self-interest, in so far as he holds that 'there is self-realization in all action; witness the feeling of pleasure'.[48] He argues, however, that while pleasure does indeed come from self-realization, this does not make pleasure the motive for the action, or our reason for it, and the same is true of self-realization itself; he therefore rejects the charge of selfishness that might be raised against his perfectionist ethics.[49]

We can again see, therefore, how far Bradley's form of perfectionism attempts to offer a 'post-Kantian' variant on this tradition, by attempting to respond to or avoid Kant's criticisms of this position in ethics. Bradley in a sense concedes a good deal of ground to those criticisms, for example by allowing that perfectionism cannot and should not provide an answer to the moral sceptic, or set itself up as offering guidance as a 'supreme principle of morality'. On the other hand, he argues that the former goal is inappropriate, while we can still intelligibly ask questions regarding the relation between morality and self-realization, and whether in acting morally we do realize ourselves, even while allowing that we do not act morally in order to do so in an instrumental fashion; and as regards the latter, Bradley argues that this is also not the business of moral theory, and that Kant himself is no more successful than other moralists in providing us with such a 'supreme principle'.[50] In this sense, his strategy is more sophisticated than Green's, who is generally not so self-conscious about the limitations of his project, and the justifications for such limitations.

---

[47] Bradley 1927: 234-5.
[48] Bradley 1927: 84.
[49] Cf. Bradley 1927: 62 note. Green makes a similar point: see Green 2003: §158.
[50] Cf. Bradley 1927: 193.

Equally, perhaps, Bradley's holistic perfectionism helps him avoid the difficulties that Green had in having to employ his metaphysics to show why the capacities we have can best be realized in the moral life. Bradley's answer, by contrast, depends on his account of the structure of the will and its possible harmony,[51] rather than appealing to the 'divine principle' in man to ensure that self-realization and morality will coincide. While of course not without its problems, this would seem to give perfectionism a basis that is likeliest to be persuasive to the contemporary mind, and thus of the two idealist thinkers, to offer us the more powerful insight into a perfectionism that takes this post-Kantian form. At the very least, it should now perhaps be clear that as a result of the Kantian critique, perfectionism came to take two rather different forms in the hands of its idealist proponents, so what had formerly been inseparable aspects of this tradition – the capacity view and the holistic view – here come apart, with Green emphasizing one aspect, and Bradley the other.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

An asterisk denotes secondary literature especially suitable for further reading.

Aquinas, Thomas 1920. Summa Theologica.

Baumgarten, Alexander 1779. Metaphysica, 7th edition, reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1962

Bradley, F. H. 1927. Ethical Studies, 2nd edition. Oxford University Press

Brink, David O. Perfectionism and the Common Good: Themes from the Philosophy of T. H. Green, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003*

Candlish, Stewart, 'Bradley on My Station and Its Duties', Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 56 (1978), 155-70*

Dewey, John 1873. "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal," reprinted in The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898, volume 4: 1893-1894, Early Essays and The Study of Ethics, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008

Green, T. H. 1911. Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant, in Works of Thomas Hill Green, edited by R. L. Nettleship, vol II. New York: Longman, Green & Co.

--- 2003. Prolegomena to Ethics, edited by David O. Brink. Oxford University Press

---

[51] Cf. Bradley 1927: 71-3.

Guyer, Paul 2011. "Kantian Perfectionism", in Jost, Lawrence and Wuerth, Julian (eds.) 2011. Perfecting Virtue. Cambridge University Press, pp. 194-214

Irwin, Terence 2007. The Development of Ethics, Volume I. Oxford University Press

--- 2009. The Development of Ethics, Volume III. Oxford University Press

Kant, Immanuel 1996. Critique of Practical Reason, in Practical Philosophy, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge University Press

--- 2012. Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, translated and edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge University Press

Kraut, Richard 1992. "In Defense of Justice in Plato's Republic," in Kraut, Richard (ed), The Cambridge Companion to Plato. Cambridge University Press, pp. 311-37

Mander, W. J. 2011. British Idealism: A History. Oxford University Press

--- 2016. Idealist Ethics. Oxford: Oxford University Press*

Moggach, Douglas 2011. "Post-Kantian Perfectionism," in Moggach, Douglas (ed.) 2011. Politics, Religion, and Art: Hegelian Debates. Northwestern University Press, pp. 179-202

Pritchard, H. A. 1912. "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", reprinted in Moral Writings, edited by Jim MacAdam. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 7-20

--- 1928. "Duty and Interest,"' reprinted in Moral Writings, edited by Jim MacAdam. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 21-49

Ritchie, D. G. 1891. The Principles of State Interference. London: Swan Sonnenschein

Sidgwick, Henry 1902. Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, Mr Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau. London: Macmillan

Skorupksi, John 2006. "Green and the Idealist Conception of a Person's Good", in Dimova-Cookson, Maria and Mander, W. J. (eds), T. H. Green: Ethics, Metaphysics, and Political Philosophy. Oxford University Press, pp. 47-75

Wolff, Christian 1751. Vernünftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, reprinted Ann Arbor: UMI, 2005