

Thomas Hill Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ed. David O. Brink (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 632 pp.

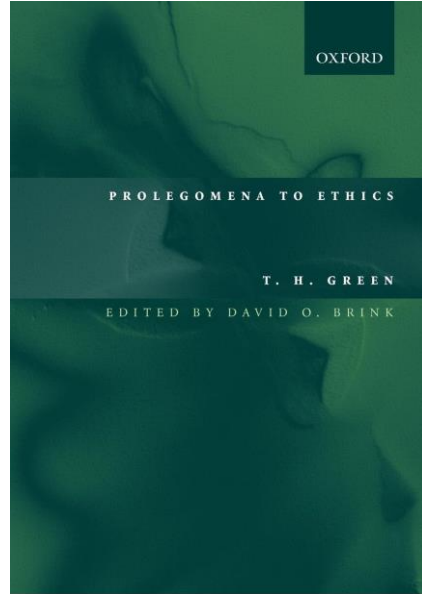
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Book Review

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Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) was an English philosopher and political theorist. Green is among the idealist philosophers who were influential in the second half of the 19th century. He is particularly known for his efforts to establish a link between socialism and liberalism. Apart from idealism and politics, Green's other field of interest and contribution is ethics. Especially in his work called *Prolegomena to Ethics*, he blended his moral theory with his idealist philosophy. The book was compiled and published after Green's death by his student and friend, R. L. Nettleship (1846-1892). It includes Green's lecture notes and articles on moral philosophy. First published in 1883, the work offers an in-depth understanding of Green's moral thoughts. In addition, *Prolegomena to Ethics* is a good example of the profound impact of Green's idealistic views on his metaphysics, epistemology, politics, and morals. Because Green started his work with



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his critiques of empiricist philosophy and completed it by presenting an inclusive perfectionist ethical theory that reflects his idealism.

In this work, Green explains the basis of his moral thoughts by discussing moral values and moral actions. While doing this, he occasionally criticizes, naturalism, hedonism, utilitarian and consequentialist moral theories and tries to reveal their deficiencies. He uses the deficiencies and inadequacies he sees in these theories as a basis for the perfectionist moral theory that he tries to create. According to Green, the common faulty argument these moral theories advocate is that they regard the individual as agents who are incapable of negotiating about their pleasures and who cannot use their practical reason. However, for Green, the moral agent is capable of determining what is good for him.

Although *Prolegomena* is a very important work in terms of moral philosophy, it did not receive the attention it deserves. The fact that Green's political philosophy became more famous caused his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (1885) which includes Green's lecture notes on political theory to come to the fore. In addition, E. H. Bradley's (1846-1924) *Ethical Studies*, (1876) another important name in the British idealist tradition, was one step ahead of *Prolegomena* and was accepted as an important work of British idealist ethics. In this case, it caused *Prolegomena* to stay behind for a while. *Ethical Studies* has a more dialectical and easily understandable language than *Prolegomena*, while *Prolegomena* is much longer, detailed and systematic for the reader. In addition to this, *prolegomena* to ethics also contains some difficulties for the reader. First of all, the author's idealistic language spread throughout the work and complicates the understanding of the subjects. In other words, it can be said that the author expects the reader to be familiar with the idealist terminology. However, this situation is also due to the fact that the idealist discussions were quite up-to-date in the author's period. To avoid this difficulty, David O. Brink (1958) has written an explanatory foreword to the new publication of the book. The second difficulty that

can tire the reader in the work is that the subtitles of the main parts of the work proceed through questions or arguments. In other words, the subheadings of the chapters are actually either a new argument put forward or a response to an existing argument. Behind this situation, there is the fact that the work could not be made ready for printing due to the death of the author and mostly remained in paragraphs. As A. C. Bradley (1851-1935), who was the first editor of the book, stated in the preface of the first edition, the work, which was in the form of lecture notes to be edited, was edited and made ready for printing after the death of the author. Although Bradley did not make any additions to the general content of the work, he wanted to show that Green's main views on morality were included in the third and fourth chapters by forming the table of contents. While doing this, he received help from names such as Professor Edward Caird (1835- 1908) (Glasgow University) and R. L. Nettleship, especially Green's wife. The final difficulty in the book is that at some points the author leaves his argument implicitly or simply by introduction, rather than making his argument clear or responding directly to the argument he opposes. Instead, it will be useful for him to criticize the argument he opposes with a clearer and clearer language and to present his own argument, both for understanding his philosophy and for ensuring the flow of the subject.

Prolegomena to Ethics consists of four main sections. Throughout the book, there is an epistemology and metaphysics created with an idealistic perspective. Accordingly, the author criticizes empiricist epistemology and metaphysics at length in the introduction and the first chapter, and presents his idealist point of view through his criticisms. There is a Kantian point of view in his criticisms. In the second part, which he uses as a transition to moral philosophy, he focuses on the issues of will and freedom. The third and fourth sections are the main sections in which Green forms his perfectionist moral theory. After explaining the concepts of moral good, good ideal, and common good in detail in the third chapter, within the framework of his own philosophical

perspective, in the fourth chapter, which is the last chapter, he discusses the practical value of these concepts and some moral theories. Therefore, Green's perfectionism has a rich content that carries the influence of many theories and concepts in moral philosophy, criticizes these concepts from different angles or brings them together on its own ground.

Throughout the book, Green criticizes naturalist, utilitarian and hedonist morals. According to the author, these theories portray individuals as agents incapable of negotiating their pleasures, unable to use practical morality. Through these criticisms, the author tries to explain which questions and problems his perfectionist morality seeks for solutions in the name of moral philosophy, and which needs it is presented as a response to. According to Green, the first erroneous argument these moral theories defend is that they consider the individual as agents who are incapable of negotiating about their pleasures and who cannot use their practical reason. However, for Green, the moral agent is capable of determining what is good for him. Moreover, according to him, the moral agent's concern for his own good also means that he is concerned with the common good. In this respect, although he has a view close to the line of virtue ethics, he also differs from the Greek tradition in that he articulates a much broader concept of the common good. This perspective leads Green to argue that full self-actualization can occur only when every rational agent sees all other rational agents as ends in themselves on which their happiness depends. According to Green, there will be no competition and conflict of interest regarding the good.

In the introductory and first chapters of his book, Green endeavors to present his idealist metaphysics and his criticisms of empiricist thinkers in detail. This is because his philosophy is a systematic idealism that embraces metaphysics and epistemology, ethical theory, political philosophy, philosophy of history and religion. Therefore, in his work on ethics, he tries to integrate his idealism with moral theory. In this, he put forward a moral theory

based on consciousness in his work. According to him, human consciousness plays an active role in the process of perceiving and understanding the world. Therefore, mind and consciousness are considered essential elements for understanding reality and experiments and experiences are also products of consciousness. He argues that the existence of consciousness is behind the emergence of these experiences. According to his view, knowledge emerges not through experience or perception, as empiricists claim, but through the consciousness that enables it to work in all these abilities. Experience emerges through the relations of objects with consciousness. According to Green, all events and phenomena are relational, but these relations sometimes occur directly and sometimes indirectly. Consciousness is the source of relationships.

Denying that the source of knowledge is experience, Green shows the consciousness that perceives the relation between facts and events as the source. Thus, the formation of knowledge also requires an agent. According to Green, even the simplest experience involves operations involving understanding and relationships with other elements of a self-conscious mind. Self-consciousness is part of the eternal consciousness and distinguishes humans from other beings. Thanks to their self-consciousness, people can distinguish between good and bad, and can control their desires and desires. Thus, they also have a moral responsibility. In other words, people can both obtain knowledge and apply it on a practical basis with their self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, which controls our behavior in the practical field, also represents human development to the extent that it governs the desires and impulses that exist in all beings. As long as man develops his self-consciousness, he takes place in society as a rational agent. These rational agents are also part of the eternal consciousness. Therefore, these agents aim to develop their self-awareness.

Green argues that in societies composed of rational agents aiming to develop self-consciousness, individual well-being is di-

rectly related to social well-being, and therefore there are common good. According to Green, who argues that man is a social being, as long as people interact with others, they develop common interests and relationships. Thus, the common good of a social life emerges. The real good, the common good is the common good of a society and humanity. As the common good develops, the welfare level of the society increases. This is where Green's perfectionism comes from.

To summarize briefly, Green argues that there must be an agent who makes rational evaluations with self-consciousness in order for knowledge and moral actions to occur on practical grounds. It is part of the eternal consciousness of these agents and they develop their self-consciousness in this direction. Thus, a society emerges of agents who develop the common good while pursuing the good individually. In his book, Green first lays the groundwork by explaining his idealist philosophy and then the concepts of consciousness and self-consciousness. Then, by explaining the manifestation of consciousness in the practical field, he puts forward an idealist and perfectionist moral theory.