

DOCTORAL THESIS

The roles of the moral and the political in the philosophies of Kant and Rawls

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Date of Award:
2018

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Abstract

The primary focus of this dissertation is the problem of the roles of the moral and the political in political philosophy as exemplified in the philosophies of Kant and Rawls. The research question which intrigues me in the subject matter is whether and to what extent morality has a role in political philosophy. As I argue in this dissertation, while Kant's political philosophy is grounded by his moral philosophy, Rawls holds the opposite view that a political conception of justice should not be derived from any specific moral doctrine. Their contrasting views are further complicated by the fact that Rawls is often regarded as a Kantian due to his partial assimilation of Kant in his theory of justice. A comparative study of their views on the roles of the moral and the political in philosophy is thus particularly instructive in answering the above research question. This dissertation therefore approaches the subject matter from four different angles. In the first chapter, I start with a holistic interpretive account of Kant's moral and political philosophy that is quite different from those in the current literature. Not only do I argue that Kant's moral philosophy is unmistakably an indispensable ground of his political philosophy, but I also argue for a positive duty in politics that is moral by nature. In the second chapter, I shift my focus to Rawls and examine his understanding of morality as reflected in his moral conception of the person in his political philosophy. I argue that the conception is the result of an intended reformulation of Kant's notion of autonomy that is in turn based on an unintended misreading of the same. I go on to relate several weaknesses in Rawls's theory to his understanding of morality and argue that their resolutions require an accurate understanding of the relationship between the moral and the political. The third

chapter is a Kantian appraisal of the four roles of political philosophy proposed by Rawls. It is relevant to the subject of this dissertation because the four roles are designed with a strict separation between the political and the moral in mind. If the four roles turn out to be defensible, it would amount to an important defense for such a separation. The fourth chapter offers an alternative for those who are more accustomed to the political than to the moral by proposing a new interpretive approach to Kant's philosophy starting from the political and ending with the moral. By ending this dissertation with this alternative, I hope my research is not merely a comparative study but can also offer a new perspective for a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the moral and the political in philosophy.

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