

Symposium: Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen's *The Perfectionist Turn*

Metanorms, Metaethics and Metaphor:
Heroic Confusions in *The Perfectionist Turn*¹

By and © Elaine Sternberg
Senior Visiting Fellow, University of Buckingham
Honorary Fellow, University of Leeds IDEA-CETL

1. Introduction

*The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics*² is an important work, which valuably complements the authors' *Norms of Liberty*³. It should be welcomed warmly, especially by everyone who has ever faced shocked disbelief when explaining that Aristotelian ethics is not primarily about relations with other people.

By identifying, characterizing, and contrasting the templates of respect and responsibility, *The Perfectionist Turn* illuminates two radically different approaches to ethics. The authors show that the doctrines dominating modern philosophical ethics—utilitarianism and Kantian deontology—though conventionally considered to be polar opposites, both fall within what they identify as the template of respect. By differentiating that shared template sharply from the template of responsibility, the authors provide support for a neo-Aristotelian, individualistic perfectionist ethics.

¹ This article is a slightly modified version of a paper presented at the American Association for the Philosophic Study of Society at the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association, January 5, 2017, thanks to a travel grant provided by the Charles Koch Foundation.

² Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2016); henceforth *TPT*. All parenthetical citations in the text are to *TPT*, unless otherwise specified.

³ Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

Given the resistance that this worthwhile but unfamiliar message is likely to encounter, it is all the more important that its presentation not hinder understanding. So it's regrettable that in a key section of the book, the narrative is problematic, marred by mistaken or equivocal usages of key terms, and by shifts of focus. Disconcertingly, the same terms are used in ways that variously presuppose and undermine their ordinary and/or their technical meanings; contexts offer little guidance. Such confusions can seriously challenge credibility. They are likely to bemuse or antagonize rather than attract readers who are familiar with the concepts involved, and liable to unsettle even those who are profoundly sympathetic toward the authors' objectives.

The chief offender is Chapter 8, "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero": it sadly disappoints the powerfully suggestive promise of its title. Although it contains much valuable discussion, the chapter's analogical method is flawed, incorporating confusions about the notion of entrepreneur that it calls upon to illuminate practical wisdom (p. 289). It also muddles other concepts—profit, optimization, insight, etc.—that are central to its discussion. Based on a borrowed structure, and misinterpreting some of its sources, "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero" is disturbing and potentially counterproductive. Its confusions invite criticism, and deflect attention from *TPT*'s main argument.

It may be objected that Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen (henceforth D&R) are philosophers writing about metaethics and metaphysics, and that it is unfair to focus on their use of concepts taken mainly from economics. But by introducing such concepts, and making them the focus of a full chapter, D&R invite critical scrutiny. It would also be unfair to criticize authors for not writing a different book. But it is appropriate to indicate ways in which a printed text falls short of the authors' stated objectives. This article will therefore aim to unpack some of the confusions in Chapter 8, with a view both to providing clarification, and to suggesting an exposition that might offer stronger support for the neo-Aristotelian individualistic perfectionism that D&R champion.

2. Titular Titillation

D&R lead in to Chapter 8 by announcing they intend to address "what it means to be a responsible flourisher in practice" (p. 283). That worthwhile objective suggests that Chapter 8 will recall the salient features of flourishing and then explain how each is exemplified by the chosen "model of action" (p. 284). Such a program could have

done much to add credence and clarity to D&R's exposition of individualistic perfectionism (henceforth IP). With the emphasis firmly on IP flourishing as the *analysandum*, illustrations could have been taken from entrepreneurship without disputes about it much mattering. Indeed, the fact that practical wisdom and IP were reflected in explicitly identified different versions might even have been offered as further support for their view.

Unfortunately, however, the focus in Chapter 8 is not on flourishing, or on practical wisdom, but on the entrepreneur. At the start of the chapter, the authors acknowledge (p. 284) that the title "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero" is provocative, and may mislead. To avert misapprehension, they restate their purpose: it is to show "that some of the essential features of market entrepreneurship are also essential components of ethical conduct" (p. 284). While that explanation does deflect attention from heroism, it also indicates a significant reversal of emphasis: from illuminating flourishing to elucidating entrepreneurship. But even that inverted aim is not achieved. What Chapter 8 actually shows, is that various features that different economists consider to be essential⁴ for their diverse understandings of the entrepreneur, are also exhibited in substantially modified form by ethical agents. By shifting the focus to the entrepreneur, D&R make errors and confusions surrounding entrepreneur and associated concepts a correspondingly serious concern.

3. Equivocation on "Entrepreneur"

The opening question in Chapter 8 is: "What general models of action are best suited to the type of moral theory we are advocating?" (p. 284). This suggests that D&R will review possible models, and explain why the titular entrepreneur has been chosen to illustrate the evaluational form of ethical conduct. D&R might have introduced the entrepreneur as the "quintessential individualist"⁵, whose conduct

⁴ "The essential features of a thing are just those that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for it to be that kind of thing and not some other Where X is the subject being defined, the essential definition of X specifies that combination of features that all Xs and only Xs always have."; Elaine Sternberg, "Defining Capitalism", *Economic Affairs* 35, no. 3 (October 2015), p. 382.

⁵ The "quintessential individualist" does get mentioned, but only incidentally, toward the end of the chapter (p. 317).

cannot be accommodated by the juridical model and the template of respect. They might have justified their choice by indicating that entrepreneurial action is crucial both to the ethical justification of profits⁶ and to capitalism's ability to generate wealth⁷. Instead, however, the authors simply assert that "For the evaluational form, the hero is the person who is insightful or, as we shall try to detail below, entrepreneurial . . ." (p. 286). They then organize Chapter 8 around features of entrepreneurship identified in an article by Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman⁸ (henceforth S&V), two professors of business.

Den Uyl and Rasmussen call upon five potentially incompatible notions of entrepreneur without identifying them as such, or indicating which features they themselves consider to be essential. Since the main academic analyses⁹ specify different characteristics as

⁶ Israel M. Kirzner, "Entrepreneurial Discovery and the Competitive Market Process: An Austrian Approach", *Journal of Economic Literature* 35, no. 1 (March 1997), pp. 75-76.

⁷ Although D&R clearly understand this (see p. 287 n. 4). But it only gets stated in the very last sentence of the chapter (p. 319).

⁸ Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman, "The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research", *Academy of Management Review* 25, no.1 (2000), pp. 218-26. As the article's title indicates, its subject is not the entrepreneur as such, but instead the academic study of entrepreneurship. S&V seek to "prod scholars . . . to create a systematic body of information" (ibid., p. 224). For that purpose, it is perhaps less problematic that their approach draws upon "different social science disciplines and applied fields of business" (ibid., p. 217), and that no clear definition of "entrepreneur" is provided. As even S&V acknowledge, their deeply ecumenical framework contains "potentially flawed logical arguments" (ibid.). Unfortunately, it also contains factual errors: e.g., contrary to what is stated, Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* was not published in 1934, but in 1942; the error is duplicated in *TPT* (p. 287 n. 6).

⁹ "Entrepreneur" is a hotly contested concept even—perhaps especially—amongst those who have subjected it to academic investigation: "One of the largest remaining disagreements in the applied academic literature concerns what constitutes entrepreneurship"; Russell S. Sobel, "Entrepreneurship", in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, David R. Henderson, ed. (Liberty Fund, Inc. 2008), Library of Economics and Liberty, accessed online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Entrepreneurship.html>. See, e.g., Nadim Ahmad and Richard G. Seymour, *Defining Entrepreneurial Activity:*

being essentially entrepreneurial, they have different implications for D&R's stated program of comparing the essential features of entrepreneurship with those of ethical conduct. The meaning of "entrepreneur" becomes even more problematical when D&R extend its field of activity beyond the commercial to all of life, and enlarge its extension to include all ethical agents.

As conventionally understood, "entrepreneur" designates an exceptional commercial figure, perhaps plausibly considered heroic when associated with the swashbuckling launcher of a business. But the popular notion of the entrepreneur is extremely vague, variously designating all business founders and different subsets of them.

The conventional model has been refined in different ways by academic economists. For Joseph Schumpeter, the entrepreneur is essentially a creator; his role is distinct from that of manager, risk-taker, and inventor.¹⁰ The pioneering Schumpeterian entrepreneur is relatively rare, essentially innovative, and characteristically disruptive. A quite different understanding of the entrepreneur is offered by the Chicago economist Frank Knight. For Knight, the defining feature of an entrepreneur is not creativity, but acceptance of a particularly unmeasurable kind of risk (also known as "uncertainty"), for which not even probabilities can be calculated¹¹—think of Donald Rumsfeld's infamous "unknown unknowns"¹².

Definitions Supporting Frameworks for Data Collection, OECD Statistics Working Paper, accessed online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1090372>.

¹⁰ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008 [1942]), p. 132.

¹¹ "The only 'risk' which leads to a profit is a unique uncertainty resulting from an exercise of ultimate responsibility which in its very nature cannot be insured nor capitalized nor salaried. Profit arises out of the inherent, absolute unpredictability of things, out of the sheer, brute fact that the results of human activity cannot be anticipated and then only in so far as even a probability calculation in regard to them is impossible and meaningless."; Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston, MA: Hart, Schaffner & Marx, 1921), III.X.33, accessed online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Knight/knRUP9.html#Pt.III.Ch.X>.

¹² Donald Rumsfeld, "Known and Unknown: Author's Note", December 2010, accessed online at: <http://papers.rumsfeld.com/about/page/authors-note>.

Building upon Knight, the Austrian economist Israel Kirzner holds that entrepreneurs are those who perceive and take advantage of previously unsuspected opportunities.¹³ Unlike the Schumpeterian entrepreneur, the Kirznerian entrepreneur primarily discovers rather than creates; unlike the Knight entrepreneur, his characteristic concern is not risk, but opportunity. Far from being restrictive, yet a fourth academic notion of entrepreneur is virtually all inclusive: according to Ludwig von Mises, being an entrepreneur is not just widespread, it is universal. According to von Mises, “In any real and living economy every actor is always an entrepreneur . . .”¹⁴.

Because D&R make the entrepreneur central, and organize the chapter around entrepreneurial features, their failure to isolate the various notions of entrepreneur creates serious confusions. Sometimes they treat the entrepreneur as a commercial figure who is both unusual (e.g., pp. 305, 315, and 318) and identifiable in one or other of the specific ways associated with Schumpeter (e.g., p. 305), Knight (e.g., p. 306), or Kirzner (e.g., p. 300). On other occasions, however, they undercut that association by citing as supporting examples, instances that the economists explicitly reject.¹⁵ Moreover, insofar as ethical

¹³ Israel M. Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, pp. 60-85.

¹⁴ Ludwig Von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 253, or *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1966), 4.XIV.67, accessed online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Mises/HmA/msHmA14.html>.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, the understandings of “discovery”. Referring to it as “a key concept in market entrepreneurship”, D&R explain:

One might, for example, realize that a given output can be more efficiently produced at less cost than is presently the case, thus allowing for the sale of the good at a lower price. Or one might notice that if something is simply offered in a different way, more people are attracted to it, thus increasing sales. (*TPT* p. 300).

But applications of widely known techniques are insufficient for Kirzner: “The earmark of a genuine discovery is that it reveals the existence of something concerning which one had not been merely ignorant, but in fact utterly ignorant (in the sense that one was not even aware of one’s ignorance).” (Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, p. 75).

The usages of “profit” are similarly incompatible. According to D&R,

agents *per se* are considered to be entrepreneurial, simply in virtue of their being human actors, “entrepreneur” loses its distinctive meaning. Unless it indicates something independent of being an ethical agent, it adds nothing to how ethical agents are understood. It also becomes even less plausible that the entrepreneur exemplifies the titular *hero* of the responsibility template. However a hero is understood—as chief protagonist, champion, or prime exemplar—he must be exceptional and distinguishable from the ordinary run of agents. By its very nature, if (following Mises) everyone is an entrepreneur, the entrepreneur as such isn’t a hero.

4. Suboptimal Insight

Even if “entrepreneur” is explicitly linked to one of the academic models outlined above, confusions remain. D&R identify “entrepreneurial” with “insightful” (p. 286), but “insight” is, sadly, yet another term whose several meanings in Chapter 8 are often left unclear by the context.

In ordinary parlance, “insight” refers to an observation or conclusion that is considered particularly astute, and/or to whatever method was used to obtain it. Throughout *TPT*, “insight” is used in that popular sense. It is also used technically, to denote the (Aristotelian) cognitive faculty that enables achievement of both speculative and practical wisdom (p. 51), and/or the outcomes of

As we shall use “profit” here, we are not referring to the monetary result of some entrepreneurial activity. Rather, generally following F. A. Hayek, James Buchanan, and Israel Kirzner, profit refers to the added value that results from a redeployment of resources, as a consequence of an insight into their possible use. (*TPT*, p. 299; no citations offered).

For Kirzner, however, “profit” does refer to the gains from entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, like the discovery on which it depends, “profit” has an extremely limited extension: “entrepreneurial profits emerge only as the wholly discovered gains, which accompany entrepreneurial creation and discovery in the sphere of production.” (Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, p. 76). Knight’s usage is similarly narrow (Knight, “Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit”, p. 121; see note 11 above). Part of the problem comes from an ambiguity concerning “realization”. Most of its occurrences in *TPT* refer to the actualization of a potential. But sometimes, especially in the discussion of entrepreneurs, it shifts and simply refers to understanding or simply noticing a fact. The context does not always clarify which is intended.

employing that faculty. Chapter 8 introduces “entrepreneurial insight”, which variously denotes two quite different things. Sometimes, it refers to any (ordinary or Aristotelian) insight¹⁶ associated with someone independently identified as an entrepreneur. On other occasions, however, it refers to the special kind of alertness that *defines* the Kirznerian entrepreneur. Kirzner is careful to differentiate the entrepreneurial alertness that distinguishes and identifies entrepreneurs from the other sorts of alertness that are involved simply because “action is taken in an open-ended, uncertain world”¹⁷. It is, however, only the latter (ordinary or Aristotelian) insight that is involved in all ethical conduct; the entrepreneurial insight that defines Kirznerian entrepreneurs is relatively rare.

D&R confusingly attempt to clarify ethical insight by rejecting optimizing¹⁸:

[J]ust as it is fundamental not to confuse entrepreneurial insight with an optimization process in a market setting, neither is ethical insight primarily an optimization process. Regarding the former, as Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman note, following Israel Kirzner, optimization in the marketplace involves a more efficient use of already-employed means to ends. Entrepreneurial insight, by contrast, identifies new means to ends. (p. 287)

Unfortunately, following Shane and Venkataraman, D&R’s interpretation of both “optimizing” and Kirzner is misleading.¹⁹

¹⁶ The faculty or its outcome.

¹⁷ Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, p. 72.

¹⁸ “The object in ethics, then, is actually *not* to optimize—at least not with respect to any given good—but, rather, to integrate or synthesize properly” (p. 288). Also, “fittingness . . . should not be understood as an optimization process” (p. 293).

¹⁹ Kirzner does not discuss optimization in either of the articles cited by S&V. Insofar as the Austrian economists reject optimization, their rejection applies to the particular interpretation of it used in mainstream neo-classical economics, in which it is reduced to mathematical maximization calculations. What is rejected is a particular kind of calculation, not optimization as such.

“Optimizing” is normally contrasted with “maximizing”. Maximizing typically involves seeking the *most* that is achievable from operating along a single, linear dimension that is necessarily specified in advance. Optimizing, reflecting its etymology, instead requires achieving the *best* outcome. Achieving the best often requires integrating across multiple dimensions; as such, it typically involves uncharted territory.²⁰ Optimizing can involve identifying new means to familiar ends; it can even identify new ends.

Den Uyl and Rasmussen are correct that entrepreneurial and ethical insight are alike in relation to optimization. But that is only because neither requires a rejection of it.²¹ The appropriate target for criticism is not optimization, but what gets optimized. Insofar as “[t]he object in ethics . . . is . . . to integrate or synthesize properly” (p. 288) over multiple dimensions, optimizing is—despite D&R’s prior denial—precisely and primarily what is needed. Unfortunately, such confusions about optimization matter: they have the potential to repel readers who are sensitive to the etymology, and to obscure what is meant by ethical insight under the template of responsibility.

5. Inopportune Opportunism

Other misunderstandings and errors affect D&R’s discussion of opportunities and opportunism. As part of their exploration of how objectivity is social, D&R state that “third-degree opportunities” (TDOs) are not prevalent (p. 294), and that they are necessarily unethical (p. 294). Both evaluations are false.

According to David Rose, the author who devised the term “third-degree opportunism”, it arises when an agent

takes advantage of the fact that he knows the full set of possible actions while the principal does not, because of the *localization of knowledge*. To be specific, the agent selects an action that the principal will regard as

²⁰ Optimization always operates subject to constraints. Maximization might be interpreted as optimizing along the single dimension of quantity.

²¹ As they later concede, “there is certainly some optimization in the taking of any action . . . ethical action is not primarily about optimization in the form of ‘being all you can be,’ but rather in the form of ‘being all you would be’” (p. 289; see also p. 288 n. 7).

the best one only because the principal is unaware that the agent knows of a better one.²²

Unlike D&R²³, Rose recognizes that third degree opportunities are widespread; no contract can completely describe the actions needed to satisfy it. Moreover, far from being an impediment to progress (p. 294), TDOs are integral to it. The freedom they presuppose is part of the freedom necessary for entrepreneurial discovery to operate.

According to D&R, however, TDOs are morally repellent (pp. 294 and 295). They assert that taking advantage of TDOs

. . . puts the relationship we have with ourselves as a whole in disequilibrium by eroding what we ought to be in our relations with others generally. In other words, what we owe to others should line up with what we owe to ourselves (trustworthiness); and the exercise of third-degree opportunism removes that balance. (p. 295)

Trustworthiness is indeed an important virtue, but need not be violated in exploiting a TDO. Whether it is, depends on what the agents and principal had previously agreed: unless a contract specifies optimization or maximization, taking advantage of a TDO may be compliant.²⁴ But such contractual niceties are ignored by D&R when they consider the ethical status of TDOs. The reason why they consider exploiting TDOs to be necessarily unethical, is simply

²² David C. Rose, *The Moral Foundations of Economic Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 6.

²³ “However poorly a society might progress if third-degree opportunism were prevalent . . .” (p. 294).

²⁴ If the contract specifies maximizing the output of widgets meeting a specified standard, employees who generate a smaller number of widgets or substandard ones will be in breach. Even if the content of “maximum” cannot be known in advance, the obligation to pursue it would be established both contractually and via the agent’s legal duty of loyalty to pursue the principal’s objectives. If, however, as is so often the case, the contract only indicated that employees were to be widget producers, and the company was simply pursuing “general corporate purposes”, employees who merely satisfied would arguably not have breached either contract or duty.

because they conflate TDOs themselves with the “golden opportunities” that TDOs may offer.²⁵ It is not third degree opportunities but “golden opportunities” that necessarily undermine trust when exploited, and do so by their very nature.

“Golden opportunities”²⁶ are situations in which “. . . one is in a position to take advantage of another without detection, by violating or diminishing a trust relationship between them” (p. 294). Exploiting golden opportunities is immoral by definition, since doing so necessarily involves a breach or reduction of trust. Moreover, according to Rose, “Golden opportunities to engage in third-degree opportunism are by definition beyond the reach of institutional mechanisms that work through external incentives.”²⁷ That is because the mechanisms needed are precisely appeals to moral commitment. D&R, however, mistakenly attribute (p. 294) the inapplicability of “external incentives” instead to TDOs. Once again, the misleading narrative is likely to obscure the underlying message.

6. Discrepant Discontinuity

Confusions also affect the understanding of another “. . . key concept . . . frequently mentioned in connection with entrepreneurship in a market context . . . discontinuity” (p. 304). Both the economic and ethical examples of discontinuity offered in Chapter 8 are logically odd. They ignore three basic points. Conceptually, discontinuities can only occur in connection with things that have been or may be continuous; they represent breaks or gaps in a logical, physical or causal sequence. Second, the continuity/discontinuity dichotomy is not exhaustive. And third, only differences between things that can or should be the same count as discrepancies, or can be reconciled: discontinuities don’t qualify.

As a market example of discontinuity, D&R suggest the difference between “prices in one place and those in another for the same good” (p. 304). Such a price differential can genuinely represent an opportunity for arbitrage. But since the prices are by hypothesis in two separate markets, while they are not continuous, nor yet are they

²⁵ Part of the problem comes from D&R’s confusingly referring to both TDOs and golden opportunities as “such opportunities” in a paragraph (pp. 294-95) that starts and ends with explicit references to TDOs.

²⁶ Rose, “Moral Foundations”, p. 6.

²⁷ Ibid.

discontinuous: like many other kinds of differences, they are neither. D&R's ethical example—the difference “between two related, though conflicting desires” (p. 304)—is also not a discontinuity. To describe it as such, is to perplex the reader, as does D&R's conclusion, that “[s]uccessfully integrating values in one's life is no less a reconciliation of discontinuities than is market entrepreneurship” (p. 305). The two are indeed similar, but only because, contrary to what D&R suggest, neither counts as a reconciliation of discontinuities. Unfortunately, the peculiar usage of “discontinuity” may well cast doubt on their language and the argument elsewhere.

7. Worlds of L and E

Other problems include those affecting the lengthy commentary on the worlds of L and E (pp. 311-18). D&R introduce a generic lawyer L and a generic economist E ostensibly to explore characteristic ways of dealing with a concrete problem (p. 311). The exposition is puzzling almost from the outset, insofar as E's method is described as “altering incentives and *allowing* individuals to decide for themselves” (p. 311; italics added). This comes as a surprise. The introductory example seems only to be about a single, concrete situation—“the over-use of a piece of land” (p. 311)—not about managing a world. For handling a single, concrete situation, an economist might have been expected simply to engage in individual (perhaps Coasian) negotiation. The suspicion thus arises that although E was supposed to be a representative economist, E's world is not a world of economics.

Reinforcing this suspicion, D&R state, “. . . the ‘feel’ of the individualist perfectionist (IP) ethical world we have been advocating would be much more like the ‘amoral’ world of E, than it would be like L's juridical order” (p. 312). The characterization of E's world as “amoral” is also odd, especially since its “chief” and “central evil” (leakage) had already been identified (p. 312). The scare-quotation marks around “amoral” might indicate that the assessment is coming from within L's world. But the possibility of capture is only discussed later (p. 313).

Den Uyl and Rasmussen go on to state, “What L and E have in common is that they both have been effectively given, by the example, the authority to organize society according to some specified goal” (p. 313). It is not clear when or how the example conferred that authority. If, however, L and E have indeed each had “the authority to organize society” then, as suspected, neither is acting *qua* economist. Having

the legitimate authority to exercise coercive force in a jurisdiction is exactly what, according to many theorists (including Max Weber, Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand), constitutes government, independent of the purposes to which that force may be applied. The problem is not so much that “both [worlds] are ultimately captured by the juridical” (p. 313), but that in making them both political, D&R seem to have ruled out the distinctively economic response by hypothesis.

They continue: “But suppose we eliminate the common denominator and imagine that there is no specific problem to be solved—not even a mandate to organize society in some way for any particular end—and, instead, only an approach to problems generally” (p. 313). Is the contrast now between two sorts of mandate, or between the presence and the absence of a mandate? Readers might imagine that the intended distinction is between a society that has a substantive purpose, and a society that simply provides a framework in which the associates can pursue their individual purposes²⁸. The latter is indeed the sort of society that seems most compatible with neo-Aristotelian, individualist perfectionism. But the muddled exposition obscures rather than clarifies that conclusion.

It is particularly disappointing that the presentation of L’s and E’s competing worlds is so confusing, because economics might be a “model of action” that works more generally than entrepreneurship to illuminate individualist perfectionism. Though Austrian economists differ among themselves about the essential characteristics of the entrepreneur (and about much else), they mainly agree on the fundamentals of Austrian economics that—unlike mainstream (neo)classical economics—allow room for, and explain the vital role of, the entrepreneur.

The model of human action that underlies Austrian economics is markedly similar to the understanding of human action employed in the template of responsibility and individualist perfectionism. In both, purposively acting individuals are at the core of a dynamic world of particulars and process, in which risk and uncertainty are unavoidable, and competing individuals’ preferences are not fixed but change creatively and interactively. Both recognize the essential importance of localized knowledge, individual judgment, and freedom from coercion. Although Austrian economics is controversial, it is probably

²⁸ This is the distinction between Michael Oakeshott’s “enterprise association” and “civil association”; see Michael Oakeshott, “On the Civil Condition”, in his *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 108-84. The latter resembles the political as understood by D&R in *Norms of Liberty*.

familiar to a considerably larger audience—even of philosophers—than D&R’s version of individualist perfectionism is, and could helpfully be invoked to illuminate it.

8. Conclusion

In summary, *The Perfectionist Turn* is an important book with a worthwhile objective, that of identifying, clarifying, and defending the distinctive features of the template of responsibility and neo-Aristotelian, individualist perfectionism. Precisely because *TPT* is a serious work of philosophy, it is appropriate to demand that it be written with philosophical rigor, and that even its use of borrowed concepts be able to withstand critical scrutiny. It is therefore unfortunate that a chapter meant to illuminate IP flourishing with a model of action requires readers to overcome so many confusions. Though there is valuable material in “The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero”, extracting it requires overlooking errors, infelicities, and ambiguities.

The most instructive parts of “The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero” are those that are independent of—indeed, sometimes in spite of—the entrepreneurial analogies. D&R do occasionally acknowledge (e.g., p. 290 n. 11 and p. 303) that their analogizing is problematical:

Even if we suppose that our foregoing analogy between the entrepreneurial and the ethical agent has been successful, the question remains as to what has been gained by this exercise. It may seem that we have done little to enhance our understanding of either the entrepreneur or the ethical agent. No doubt, there is truth in that objection; but our purpose in using the analogy has been less to understand these respective agents than to gain some insight into the nature of ethics itself. (p. 310)

That worthy project might have been better achieved had Chapter 8 eschewed all reference to heroes and clarified the references to entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, by explicitly identifying the contrasting templates of respect and responsibility, and highlighting the features of IP flourishing, *The Perfectionist Turn* performs an extremely valuable service. Neo-Aristotelian, individualist perfectionism deserves to be better understood.

