spect should be noted. First, a more sustained discussion of ethical naturalism and its relation to virtue ethics would have been welcome. Naturalism plays a central role in many contemporary versions of virtue ethics, to say nothing of its historical importance. Anscombe and Hursthouse both ascribe to a kind of naturalism, and it was the predominant focus of Philippa Foot's later work. Timothy Chappell does address naturalism briefly in his chapter (mainly in order to criticize it). But given the centrality of this issue, a more thorough engagement of these issues—and perhaps a sympathetic representation of the kind of ethical naturalism represented by Hursthouse and Foot—would have been welcome.

The relation of virtue ethics to moral particularism might also have received some attention. It is telling that one of the most important papers in virtue ethics, John McDowell's "Virtue and Reason," is also counted as a founding document of moral particularism. Following McDowell, most virtue ethicists do indeed reject strong forms of codifiability. And yet, both Anscombe and Hursthouse, for example, quite clearly endorse some absolute moral principles. And, of course, virtue theories do ascribe to moral generalities in some sense (e.g., "Do what is kind"; "Avoid what is cowardly"). So the relation of virtue ethics to particularism is in no way simple or straightforward. Thus, some sustained discussion of this important topic would also have been apt.

But it would be highly misleading to end on a negative note. The distinguished contributors to this volume have provided an invaluable resource, and the chapters are of uniformly high quality. The authors are to be thanked for their excellent contribution.

Rebecca Stangl
University of Virginia

Vargas, Manuel. *Building Better Beings: A Theory of Moral Responsibility.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 345. $55.00 (cloth).

Manuel Vargas's *Building Better Beings* is a beast of a book. It is beastly in at least two ways. First, it covers a wide spectrum of issues closely tied to moral responsibility. Vargas describes the two main parts as (i) presenting and defending revisionism and (ii) developing a novel theory of moral responsibility (6). While these two parts are interconnected, they are also independent in that one could accept Vargas's arguments and conclusions for one without having to do the same for the other. Vargas says that part 2 is the heart of the book, and those already familiar with his revisionism will want to focus their attention here. In developing these two parts, *Building Better Beings* also covers matters methodological, epistemological, linguistic, and normative, and the interpenetration of these issues is one of the most distinctive features of the book. Second, it covers these issues in a way that is very detailed, intricate, and nuanced. Every chapter (as well as the appendix) contains arguments that are interesting, novel, and worthy of attention. Because of these two features, this review will necessarily fall short of adequately presenting the scope and depth of Vargas's arguments. My primary goal here is to give you a taste of the book so that you'll be motivated to probe it for yourself—because in my evaluation, this book is a beast that deserves

to be tamed. It what follows, I outline the direction of the volume as a whole, highlighting what I think are some of the most original features of Vargas's project, and briefly consider a number of concerns about his approach.

Part 1 of *Building Better Beings* is a statement and development of a position in the moral responsibility and free will literatures which Vargas calls 'revisionism'. Vargas's primary focus is moral responsibility. He takes free will to be "a term of art that picks out some distinctive power or capacity characteristic of morally responsible agency" (10). In a footnote to this description, he writes that "free will is neither sufficient nor necessary for moral responsibility" (10 n. 3) and explains how the two can come apart. Vargas intends revisionism to be naturalistic, providing a "systematic answer to questions about how we can be both part of the natural, causal order and at the same time deserving of moral praise and blame" (3). Vargas thinks that our web of prereflective intuitions, attitudes, and practices provides initial starting points for our responsibility practices and judgments. But he doesn't think that all of our intuitions and practices form a cohesive and consistent network. Vargas takes seriously "an important strand of how we think about responsibility" but goes on to develop a novel theory of moral responsibility which guides "how we *ought* to understand responsibility in light of the diverse empirical, conceptual, and normative burdens on an adequate theory of responsibility" (6). This disconnect between the diagnostic and prescriptive elements is a hallmark of Vargas's view. Revisionism contrasts with *conventional* accounts, "accounts on which philosophical theorizing does not conflict with our pre- or loosely theorized convictions in some domain" (14). Although he's not always quick to adopt the term, Vargas's view is a form of compatibilism regarding moral responsibility and determinism, given that he thinks the mere truth of determinism doesn't rule out responsible agency. But what differentiates revision from other conventional compatibilisms, from which he is correct in distancing his view, is that it "provides a place for traditional metaphysical concerns without forgoing the normative questions that are obviously important for responsibility" (15). In fact, Vargas suggests in a later chapter that revisionism requires not just a departure from the folk view of responsibility but a conflict with and rejection of parts of that folk view (86).

Vargas undertakes the diagnostic project in chapter 1. Here, he examines intuitions regarding freedom and responsibility. Summarizing various arguments for compatibilism and incompatibilism, as well as work by experimental philosophers, Vargas concludes that we have both compatibilist and incompatibilist intuitions, which suggests that "no theory will accommodate all intuitions" (21). His treatment here is judicious and careful; he argues that there are a number of legitimate sources of incompatibilist intuitions—what he calls 'folk conceptual incompatibilism' (33)—and suggests that they are particularly challenging for traditional compatibilist theories.

Despite this at least partially incompatibilist diagnosis, in chapter 2 Vargas starts developing his prescriptive theory by arguing against libertarian views. Vargas thinks it is a "real shame" that "outside of specialists working on free will and moral responsibility, there is sometimes the impulse to dismiss out of hand any form of libertarianism" (53). Vargas then argues that any acceptable view needs to meet the standard of naturalistic plausibility: "the account requires something that speaks in its favor beyond mere coherence with the known facts and com-

patibility with minimal naturalistic doctrines. We seek a theory that has something to be said for it, in light of what we know about the world" (58). Vargas argues that event-causal views face a worry about their plausibility in this respect, given that the indeterminism must be of the right sort and in the right places and that agent-causal views fair even worse regarding their plausibility.

After giving reasons for looking elsewhere than libertarian prescriptive theories, Vargas argues in chapter 3 that we should prefer revisionist views to incompatibilist views which deny the existence of moral responsibility. Vargas uses the terms 'responsibility nihilism' and 'responsibility eliminativism' interchangeably to refer to these views (73 n. 1). Here we see again Vargas addressing methodological issues. He advocates 'the principle of philosophical conservatism' according to which "we ought to abandon our standing commitments only as a last resort" (73). The commitments he has in mind here are our responsibility practices. Vargas doesn't rule out from the start that we might need to abandon some of our conceptions and practices (see 104), but he thinks that this should be done only when there is a good enough reason to do so. But he also argues that in this case of responsibility we need not eliminate our responsibility practices since we can revise our conception of responsible agency and the associated practices rather than eliminate them. Given the viability of revisionism, eliminativism is "a hasty and unmotivated option" (74). The rest of chapter 3 then distinguishes a number of different varieties of revisionism: diagnostic correction, connotational revision, and denotational revision. In differentiating between these latter two options, Vargas enters into issues in the philosophy of language, particularly whether we take an internalist or externalist approach to how the referent of 'moral responsibility' is determined. What Vargas cares most about here is that there is a property, whether or not it's the property we originally thought it was, that can do the relevant conceptual work in underscoring and grounding our responsibility practices.

Chapter 4 outlines the constraints that Vargas thinks an acceptable revisionist account of responsibility should meet. In addition to the standard of naturalistic plausibility, mentioned above, he focuses on the standard of normative adequacy (102). Vargas's discussion of normative adequacy is, in my view, one of the highlights of the volume and deserves careful interaction not only by both compatibilists and incompatibilists but also by those working in normative ethics. The rest of this chapter focuses on the conceptual work that responsibility-characteristic phenomena do, as well as the various parts of the responsibility system (e.g., holding responsible, responsible agency, exculpation, blame) that form the nexus of the account of moral responsibility developed in part 2. He also tries to distance his own use of these concepts from larger meta- and normative ethical debates (e.g., whether responsibility requires realism, competing theories of normative ethics).

Part 2 of the book focuses on a pair of general questions:

- Is there anything that would, in general, justify our participation in practices of moral praising and blaming?
- Can we explain our patterns of responsibility assessment in ways that make it plausible that they are tracking normatively relevant features of agents and the world? (131)

Part 2 begins by considering two general approaches to responsible agency that have garnered considerable attention in recent years: "the idea that an agent must have some characterological or expressive connection to the action, or alternately, the idea that an agent must be responsive to reasons in some suitable sense" (137). Vargas gives reasons for preferring a reasons-based view (which he admits are "not obviously decisive"; 157), although the case requires tracing, to which he returns in chapter 9 to do some heavy lifting. (Tracing is the idea that a person's being morally responsible for an action at time t might be traced back to an earlier time, $t - 1$, when she satisfies the necessary and sufficient conditions for responsibility.) In the rest of part 2, Vargas departs from what might be called the dominant issues in the free will and responsibility debates. But it also contains some of what strikes me as the most interesting parts of the book.

Chapter 6 seeks to justify our responsibility practices, arguing that there is sufficient reason for holding agents responsible irrespective of whether they are libertarian agents, which provides another reason for preferring revisionism over eliminativism. One might attempt to justify these practices, following Strawson, by appealing to our psychology. Vargas instead adopts a particular version of moral influence theory. In general, these accounts hold that "the justification of our praising and blaming practices derives, at least in part, from their effects on creatures like us" (166). The particular version of moral influence theory Vargas advocates is what he calls the 'agency cultivation model'. At its heart, this view doesn't attempt to justify individual practices or attitudes, instead focusing on the whole interconnected network of norm-structured practices and attitudes. He readily admits that "there might well be cases where praising or blaming is not justified even if in general such acts are" (182).

Chapter 7 tries to show that the requirements of the agency cultivation model are met. Responsible agency requires both self-directed agency as well as free will. The former, on Vargas's view, is the "relatively pedestrian suite of capacities for effective self-directed agency" (200), including the epistemic ability to foresee the likely effects of potential actions. Vargas understands free will to be distinct from self-directed agency, involving those particular capacities that are jointly characteristic of responsible agency. This includes not only the volitional capacity that is responsive to moral considerations but also the epistemic capacity to recognize the relevant moral considerations that one should be responsive to. Vargas thus thinks that there are two distinct epistemic conditions that need to be met. Vargas also rejects both atomism—the view that "free will is a non-relational property of agents, that is, it is characterizable in isolation from broader social and physical contexts" (204)—and monism, the view that "there is only one natural power or arrangement of agential feature that constitutes free will or the control condition on moral responsibility" (205). I think Vargas is right that at least one, and often both, of these is assumed by many involved in the free will and responsibility literatures. Vargas thinks that both of these assumptions are "at odds with the emerging picture of agency in the social, cognitive, and neurosciences" (204). In contrast to atomism, Vargas favors *circumstantialism*, the idea that "the powers that matter for whether an agent is responsible are best characterized non-intrinsically, as functions of agents in circumstances" (3). This is one of the most original parts of the book, and one that I'm confident will lead to further debates. In contrast to mo-

nism, Vargas argues that there are "multiple agential structures or combinations of powers that constitute the control condition required for moral responsibility" (205). His arguments here are quite compelling and worthy of careful attention.

Chapter 8 focuses on blame and desert. Here too Vargas is sensitive to empirical work: "It is clear from both the armchair and experimental evidence that the practice of holding one another responsible is, in various ways, costly for agents who participate in and perpetuate such practices" (241). Unlike some experimental philosophers, Vargas recognizes that "drawing philosophical conclusions from empirical work is always a tricky business" (243), again showing a delicate treatment of the disconnect between the descriptive and the normative that is at the heart of his revisionism. Connected with his circumstantialism, Vargas gives cases that suggest that agents in certain circumstances may find themselves with "diminished capacity to recognize locally salient moral considerations" (244). And connecting back to his rejection of monism, he argues that "distinct forms of acculturation provide agents with differential capacities to recognize and respond to moral considerations in different contexts" (245). Vargas's discussion of what he calls 'moral ecology'—"the circumstances that support and enable exercises of agency in ways that respect and reflect a concern for morality" (246)—and its connection with moral formation is another of the unique features of *Building Better Beings*.

Chapter 9 addresses the importance of an agent's history for responsibility, particularly with an eye toward manipulation cases. Here Vargas argues that history does matter (as we've seen in his earlier work on tracing) but less so than we might think. He argues for a semistructural or 'mixed' account according to which "in some cases structural conditions will be sufficient [for responsibility], but in others there will be some historical requirement" (268). His attempt to find the most plausible view given the totality of our intuitions and theoretical commitments is also on display again, and he admits that his view commits him to discounting some of our existing intuitions. As mentioned above, this disconnect between the diagnostic and prescriptive elements is a defining characteristic of Vargas's revisionism. But he thinks, "Revisionists cannot simply duck any purported counterexample by declaring that they are not beholden to commonsense intuitions. The revisionist about moral responsibility (and, as we'll see, free will) has no license to invoke revisionism about any inconvenient aspect of the theory" (4). The trick, for Vargas, is to spell out exactly where such revisions are acceptable, where they're not, and why. This is a very delicate issue, and I wish Vargas would give more concrete criteria to guide us in this process.

As hopefully the above summary illustrates, I think that *Building Better Beings* is a worthwhile and compelling book. Were I to be a compatibilist, I'd be a compatibilist of roughly Vargas's revisionist stripe. That said, I think that there are a number of places where one might press on his arguments. For one, I worry that once we take seriously the considerations that lead him to revisionism, it is going to be very difficult to justify many of our holding-responsible practices such that his account leads to a substantial revisionism of not only our theory of moral responsibility but the web of practices that he's concerned with. Relatedly, I think he needs to say more about how we determine the work that our responsibility concepts do, given that "disagreement about the work of a concept is obviously both possible and sometimes actual" (106 n. 6). I also worry that his account of the

nature of moral responsibility isn't as neutral with respect to competing normative theories as he hopes to be. For instance, Aristotelian accounts of virtue formation will be more able to accommodate his account of the importance of history than will act-utilitarian accounts, although I suspect that many virtue theorists will think the role he assigns to tracing and history not substantial enough.

It would have been hard for him, however, to address these concerns given the spectrum of issues he already addresses in this already dense volume. Instead, I think it best to think of these criticisms as opportunities for further engagement with Vargas's good work.

KEVIN TIMPE
Northwest Nazarene University