

Jens Timmermann, ed.

Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide.

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This volume, containing eleven essays on Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, is written by a diverse group of Kant scholars and moral philosophers from the US, Germany, and the UK, at different stages of their careers. As with other Cambridge Critical Guides, this one is aimed primarily at specialists; contributors seek to address questions of strong interest to readers who work on Kant's moral philosophy or who have a high level of familiarity with the *Groundwork*. As the *Groundwork* is the most widely read of Kant's ethical works, and many of the chapters are accessible as well as important, this volume warrants a large readership. Although it does not pretend to be a comprehensive commentary, the collection addresses a varied set of questions raised by all three sections of the *Groundwork*.

Timmermann has produced a collection of essays that is, as a whole, a significant contribution to scholarship on Kant's ethics in general and Kant's *Groundwork* in particular. Most essays contain close readings of relevant parts of the *Groundwork*. Many illuminate Kant's arguments and aims by analyzing Kant's earlier published works, lectures, or reflections, or by considering the philosophical context in which Kant was writing. Manfred Kuehn's 'Ethics and Anthropology in the Development of Kant's Moral Philosophy' (Chapter 1) does all these things. J. B. Schneewind's precise, detailed examination of Kant's arguments in 'Kant Against the "Spurious Principles of Morality"' (Chapter 8) both elucidates the positions and arguments of the peers and predecessors to whom Kant was responding and evaluates Kant's criticisms of them.

Many essays critically engage prominent interpretations in the process of articulating or establishing their own. Timmermann's 'Acting from Duty: Inclination, Reason and Moral Worth' (Chapter 3) defends Kant's much-disputed *Groundwork* I claim that morally good action must be done from duty alone. In doing so, Timmermann rejects an influential line of interpretation (seen for example in the work of Richard Henson) according to which the motive of duty properly functions as a 'back-up motive', sufficient to motivate right action when inclination fails to do so. Timmermann argues that such an interpretation is not only incompatible with Kant's mature view of moral motivation, but also unnecessary to rescuing Kant from common objections to his rigorism.

In 'Dignity and the Formula of Humanity' (Chapter 6), Oliver Sensen's close readings of several key passages in Section II aim to establish that human beings are

(descriptively) ends in themselves in virtue of the freedom of their wills; that we ought (normatively) to treat others as ends in themselves because the Categorical Imperative (i.e., the formula of universal law or 'FUL') requires us to do so by requiring us to universalize our maxims; and that humanity's dignity is the relational property of human beings' elevation above the rest of nature. Sensen thus directly challenges a dominant line of interpretation, aspects of which are exemplified works of Christine Korsgaard and Allen Wood, according to which the requirement to respect humanity is grounded in the non-relational, absolute, or intrinsic value of humanity, to which 'dignity' refers. Katrin Flikschuh's 'Kant's Kingdom of Ends: Metaphysical not Political' (Chapter 7) sets her interpretation of Kant's kingdom of ends against a line of interpretation associated with John Rawls, Andrews Reath, and Christine Korsgaard, according to which Kant's kingdom of ends presents us with 'a normative blueprint for a moral political order' (121). Flikschuh argues that a (quasi-)political reading of the kingdom of ends not only obscures the standing of the kingdom of ends as a metaphysical ideal, but also risks mischaracterizing fundamental aspects of Kant's philosophy of right.

Although many of its essays concern topics one might expect to find in a volume on Kant's *Groundwork*, the book contains some pleasant surprises. For instance, Robert B. Loudon's 'Making the Law Visible: The Role of Examples in Kant's Ethics' (Chapter 4) details Kant's reasons for proscribing certain uses of examples in moral theory and practice, but prescribing others. Loudon reveals a great deal about Kant's views of moral education, human nature, morality, and moral philosophy through what one might initially regard as a peripheral topic. Similarly, given Kant's scant attention to happiness in the *Groundwork*, Allison Hills' 'Happiness in the *Groundwork*' (Chapter 2), which considers Kant's distinctive desire-satisfaction theory of happiness, the kind of end that happiness is, and the status of the imperatives of prudence as assertoric hypothetical imperatives (rather than problematic hypothetical imperatives or categorical imperatives), sheds light on an important topic all too easy to overlook. Also unexpected were features of Kuehn's essay: its attention to Kant's writings and lectures on anthropology; its discussion of Kant's opposition to the work of Johann Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769); and its concern to provide a historically and textually accurate account of the development of Kant's conceptions of moral sense, moral character, maxims, and the good will, all make this a rich, distinctive, and enlightening opening chapter. With respect to method, Frederick Rauscher employs an unusual but fruitful approach in 'Freedom and Reason in *Groundwork* III' (Chapter 11), analyzing Section III in reverse—moving from end to beginning—in order to ascertain what Kant aims to accomplish, how he attempts to do so, and the extent to which he takes himself to succeed.

Interesting questions emerge about the compatibility and the merits of various essays' interpretations. Aspects of the final two chapters most obviously invite comparison. Both Rauscher and Paul Guyer provide careful, perceptive readings of Section III, set against the background of the first *Critique* and situated in relation to pertinent secondary literature. In 'Problems with Freedom: Kant's Argument in

Groundwork III and its Subsequent Emendation' (Chapter 10), Guyer reads Kant as trying to prove that we are free qua noumena, and as invoking transcendental idealism to make a positive, metaphysical assertion about the noumenal self. According to Guyer, Kant seeks to show not simply that we must act under the idea of freedom, but that we are free: 'This metaphysical argument is intended to prove that the moral law is the causal law of the real self' (177). By contrast, in Chapter 11 Rauscher presents what he calls the 'validation of reason' interpretation, according to which 'Kant does not provide a deduction of the objective reality of morality, only of the inescapability of the ascription of this morality to human beings who take themselves to be rational agents' (206). 'The central claim of this interpretation is that in *Groundwork* III Kant invokes the transcendental freedom not of the whole person but only of the faculty of reason as a way of explaining the freedom of the will' (205). 'Freedom of the will as autonomy is not a matter of the causal power of the will itself but of the causal power of reason to determine that will' (207).

For all that is valuable in this collection, it is not without its shortcomings. A couple of essays shed less light than others on Kant's *Groundwork* arguments, or provide less context than one might want from Kant's other works or from secondary literature. In addition, there were topics that I was disappointed not to see made the focal point of an essay: for example, the formula of universal law (FUL) or the formula of universal law of nature (FULN). Robert N. Johnson's 'The Moral Law as a Causal Law' (Chapter 5), which explores the basis of the universality requirement within rational willing, comes closest. Johnson considers Kant's linkage of *rational agency* to *action on universally valid laws* as a 'preliminary step' toward closing a gap in Kant's Section II argument for FUL (82). He argues that we can best understand the universality requirement of rational agency as a consequence of its being *agency* (because the will is a cause, and causality operates according to universally valid laws), rather than its being *rational*. Perhaps so much has been written about FUL and FULN that readers will be relieved that these formulations are not discussed more directly or extensively. Yet Stephen Engstrom's excellent recent book, *The Form of Practical Knowledge: A Study of the Categorical Imperative* (Harvard University Press 2009), demonstrates that there are still fresh, illuminating ways to think about the general form of the categorical imperative and its law of nature variant.

Also desirable would have been a closing, prospective essay to complement Kuehn's retrospective, opening essay. An exploration of the influence of Kant's *Groundwork* account of practical reason, moral motivation, self-legislation, or autonomy; criticisms the *Groundwork* by Kant's contemporaries; or changes in Kant's moral philosophy post-*Groundwork* would have made a satisfying conclusion. Cambridge Critical Guides are generally commissioned so as to allow twelve essays, so a capstone chapter could have been included, even with no alteration to the previous eleven. Alternatively, John Skorupski could have contributed a closing essay exploring (e.g.) Kantian and Millian notions of autonomy, or tracing Kant's influence on later moral

philosophy, instead of the present Chapter 9, ‘Autonomy and Impartiality: *Groundwork* III’, which sits somewhat uncomfortably in the volume. Skorupski argues that Kant can infer impartiality neither from the universality of reasons nor from autonomy, but suggests that an autonomous will may reasonably be thought to contain a disposition impartially to further rational ends. Although ostensibly concerned with Kant’s argument in Section III, Skorupski’s interests—especially in impartiality—seem far broader and less textually-grounded than the title and opening paragraphs suggest. Rauscher and Guyer’s essays explore *Groundwork* III with sufficient depth to render a third essay on this section unnecessary. A ‘big-picture’ topic, well-suited to a closing chapter, might have made better use of Skorupski’s expertise. A reversal of the final two chapters would have been another way to close the volume with a stronger sense of completion. Guyer’s Chapter 10 does much that what one might reasonably want a concluding essay to do. After elucidating Kant’s account of freedom in *Groundwork* III, Guyer raises three potentially devastating problems for it; he then considers how—and how well—Kant addresses these problems within the second *Critique* and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Guyer’s interpretively rich and philosophically acute essay would have made an especially fitting conclusion to this engaging, important collection

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