

Lara Denis, ed.

Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide.

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Lara Denis' anthology on Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* brings together a number of critical essays by well-established and respected Kant scholars. This collection is not only an important contribution to Kant scholarship; it can also serve as an excellent companion piece to upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses that feature Kant's practical philosophy.

The twelve assembled essays touch upon a wide variety of topics related to Kant's often overlooked *Metaphysics of Morals*. Unlike Kant's earlier works in ethics, the central focus of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* "is not rational beings as such, but human beings in particular, and the duties, rights, and morally practical relations that obtain among us" (1). Part I of Kant's text, his "Doctrine of Right" [*Rechtstlehre*], sets forth coercively enforceable principles of conduct and presents us with notions for the peaceful co-existence of nation states. In Part II, his "Doctrine of Virtue" [*Tugendlehre*], Kant offers us his conception of virtue and an account of the particular ethical duties that are binding upon human beings. Any serious reader of Kant must eventually turn to the labyrinthine thickets of the applied and fundamental topics that these later Kantian writings present. As such, this anthology is a welcome addition for anyone looking to navigate and deepen their critical understanding of the various positions and arguments that Kant's practical philosophy advances.

This anthology is roughly split into two halves. After an opening essay in which Manfred Kuehn expertly situates the *Metaphysics of Morals* within the broader context of Kant's philosophical development, the rest of the essays in the first half focus on interpretive questions that are primarily raised by Part I of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. In order: Stephen Engstrom carefully examines Kant's conception of the will as it relates to reason and the desiderative economy of human life. Katrin Flikschuh's essay, "Justice Without Virtue," defends the increasingly recognized view that Kant's *Rechtstlehre* is distinctively separate from his moral philosophy; she draws out the questions this raises for any form of liberalism inspired by Kant. In chapter four, Otfried Höffe considers how Kant's conception of human rights is derived from and operates within his political philosophy. Sharon Byrd continues this exploration of Kant's political philosophy by examining how Kant's notion of possession fundamentally motivates his account of the transition from state of nature to civil society. Meanwhile, Allen Wood's essay on Kant's theory of punishment closes out the first half of the anthology by considering whether or not Kant's own reasoning about punishment ultimately leads him to a conclusion that conflicts with the one that he explicitly endorsed.

The second half of the collection focuses more specially upon Part II of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's "Doctrine of Virtue." Paul Guyer traces the complex and intriguing development of Kant's views on the relationship between feeling and moral motivation. In chapter eight, Jeanine Grenberg considers the seeming ambiguity of whether the ultimate

obstacle to Kantian virtue is the corruption of human reason or our inclinations. Lara Denis' own contribution draws upon some of Kant's lecture notes and considers them in connection with Kant's striking claim in the *Tugendlehre* that perfect duties to oneself are more fundamental than other kinds of duties. Robert Johnson's essay addresses the topic of Kantian duties towards others and considers certain interpretive puzzles regarding the distinction between duties *to* others and duties *regarding* others. Patrick Kain sheds new light upon Kant's account of "duties regarding non-human animals" by examining a broad array of little studied Kant sources that reveal the ethical significance of Kant's commitments in biology. And Thomas Hill Jr.'s essay closes out the collection with a wide-ranging discussion on the viability of reading Kant's *Tugendlehre* as his normative ethics.

There is scarcely a false note within any of the essays. Wood's treatment of Kant's account of punishment especially stands out for the facility of its precision and for the interesting interpretive questions that it raises about Kant's own, sometimes peculiar, application of his moral principles to matters of social concern. Questions such as the following inevitably arise for Kant readers: if Kant adopted positions that do not follow from his own principles, then who is the "Kant" in Kant's (or Kantian) ethics? That is, should we associate Kant with the principles he advanced or with the positions he adopted? Kuehn's essay also stands out in this collection. Not only does his essay carefully lay out the complex history surrounding Kant's repeated deferrals in publishing a "Metaphysics of Morals," he moreover showcases the interpretive significance that these deferrals represent for understanding the "final form" of Kant's practical philosophy. Most readers typically assume that Kant's later publication simply applied the principles that followed from his earlier works, but Kuehn shows how and why this assumption is uninformed and requires correction. By drawing upon sources such as Kant's lecture notes during the period of these deferrals, Kuehn shows how Kant's later work is offering new perspectives on notions as basic as the categorical imperative. For instance, Kant's discussion of "ends that are also duties" was presumably intended to amplify the merely "negative principle" that the categorical imperative represented in the *Groundwork* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kuehn does not shy away from criticizing the later Kant for appearing to presuppose, rather than justify, Baumgarten's broad division of dutiful ends, but Kant's seeming motivation for presenting these ends certainly bears our careful notice and attention. Kuehn's essay is therefore particularly valuable for students and scholars who are trying to understand the role and significance of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* within his overall practical philosophy. In many ways this essay alone justifies the need for collections such as the one that Denis has here assembled.

One very small quibble is that certain themes and issues from Kant's later work are nowhere touched upon. For instance, since the *Metaphysics of Morals* offers us some of Kant's more substantive discussions on notions such as moral happiness and the cheerful disposition [*frölichen Gemuts*] that supposedly "accompanies" virtuous action, readers that were hoping to find critical discussion of such notions will find that they have to look elsewhere. Denis' collection should hardly be faulted, however, for not touching upon every topic that this immense Kantian text offers. There is certainly enough here to satisfy Kant readers of all types and stripes.

Denis has assembled an outstanding collection of essays that are dedicated to critically exploring Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*. This is an invaluable guide for reading a crucial text within the Kantian corpus.

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