Introduction

Any introduction to a new book on Kant must surely make a defense, even a plea, to its reader. The recent proliferation of books on Kant, and in particular on his practical thought, may leave one wondering if, indeed, anything more could be said. This proliferation should be understood first and foremost, however, as arising from the utterly inexhaustible wellspring that is provided by Kant's own thought. Like all great thinkers, Kant's work continually occasions new meanings and interpretations, and there can be no doubt that what sustains Kant studies so richly is the depth and expansiveness of Kant's philosophy. The depth of insight, intricate complexities, and nuanced treatment of such a broad range of issues Kant offers for our philosophical investigation and self-understanding cannot be overstated. It is because of this, perhaps, that recent trends in commentary on Kant's practical writings have moved happily away from the vision of Kant's moral theory as austere, cold, and even empty. As scholarship in the anglophone world focuses less narrowly on the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and more inclusively on other works in Kant's opus, we have found that his ethical and political theories are more compelling for us than ever.

The broadening trend in the scholarship has a number of discernable main lines. Each of these main lines, though, can be seen as a manifestation of a more profound sensibility. This sensibility seems to be that Kant's practical thought must be taken account of as a whole, perhaps even as a *unity*. The main lines in current work on Kant's practical philosophy all recognize, to some extent either implicitly or explicitly, that the different aspects of Kant's practical philosophy are of a piece. For example, one main line in the secondary literature can be seen in the shift toward emphasizing value and autonomy as key moral concepts that also come to bear on his political thought. This is exemplified by a whole host of scholars – Christine Korsgaard, Paul Guyer, Allen Wood, Nancy Sherman,

Marcia Baron, Barbara Herman, and Thomas Hill to name a few – and arises from their consideration not only of Kant's insistence on duty and law in the *Groundwork* but also of discussions in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Metaphysics of Morals*, and his other practical writings. Another main line in the literature is the role of what can be called, broadly, the anthropological aspect of Kant's thought, that is, that which may be said to be empirical in his practical philosophy. In this vein, authors such as Robert Louden, Felicitas Munzel, Sharon Anderson-Gold, and Patrick Frierson seek to develop a vision of Kant's practical thought that takes the empirical aspect at the very least to inform his ethical and political systems and at most to condition them. These new directions in Kant scholarship have brought into question the received individualistic account of Kant's moral theory and have widened the scope of morality proper to include in some way the more communal components of Kant's theory.

The implicit trends in the recent literature point to a larger question – is Kant a unified thinker? With this, can we see a coherence to moral life in Kant's work? Many scholars, Hannah Arendt perhaps first among them, have faulted Kant for presenting a schism between the different aspects of moral life.[1] While Arendt's specific criticism focuses on a perceived fissure between what we are morally obliged to do and what is required of us as political subjects, readers of Kant may also find a general lack of expressed unity amongst the different aspects of practical life. This comes out in the scholarship most forcefully perhaps in a seeming tension – or outright contradiction – between what are called the 'deontological' and the 'teleological' commitments in Kant's ethical theory. Kant himself never used such terms to characterize his views, and this way of categorizing ethical theories is a relatively contemporary phenomenon. The modern identification of Kant as a deontological thinker has its roots in C. D. Broad's 1930 book *Five Types of Ethical Theory*.[2] In the Conclusion of that text, Broad develops the categories that have become popular today for analyzing ethical theories. There he associates deontology and Kant with being characterized primarily by "concepts of obligation," which stand in contrast with "concepts of value" or teleological ethical theories.[3]

[1] Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). Arendt criticizes Kant for separating our roles as judgers of an event (like the French Revolution) from our participation in an event.

[2] Tom L. Beauchamp notes the contemporary origin of the term 'deontology' in his *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Morality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 109. However, the first use of the word appears to have been in Jeremy Bentham's *Deontology; or, the Science of Morality*, ed. John Bowering (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Browne, Green, and Longman, 1834).

[3] C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930), 277ff.

Such categorization, though, has unfortunately taken the lead in many approaches to Kant and has come to shape our interpretations of his project. In any case, these two categories represent, broadly, Kant's insistence on acting from *duty* to a moral law and his contention that there are *ends* we are obliged to pursue, respectively. We may be led to ask, for instance, how the moral law and the happiness of others are related. Or, we may seek to know to what extent we have a duty to go to church, as Kant believes that an ethical community under the auspices of religion is something we must establish in the world. Kant, unfortunately, does not unfold his practical philosophy with the systematic presentation of someone like Hegel, whose *Philosophy of Right* is meant to demonstrate how the various aspects of practical life are the concrete development of the concept of freedom. Nevertheless, as this book seeks to establish, I believe that Kant does present a unity in the diverse elements of his thought even though he may not explicitly exhibit it as such.

It is true that Kant's practical philosophy contains elements of the so-called 'deontological' and 'teleological' approaches to ethics. So much emphasis has been placed on the deontological commitments, however, that Kant is often held as the quintessential example of this approach to thinking about morality. This is not completely unwarranted insofar as Kant certainly highlights duty and the rule-bound character of morally good action as a key grounding feature of moral goodness. This dimension of moral life takes center stage in the *Groundwork*, whose purpose Kant states as nothing other than "the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality" (G 4:392), though it also features prominently in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant never abandons the ideas in the *Groundwork* that establish a person's motivation as the foundational mark of morality; they remain integral to his theory that human beings, in their efforts to be good and to do good, must be moved to act through nothing but the thought of the good itself.

The centrality of duty and the moral law in Kant's account of moral goodness has received its fair share of criticism, too. Kant's emphasis on duty and the moral law arises from his basic commitment to the rationality of human beings. Duty is nothing other than acting in accord with our reason – being moved by what is rational – and the moral law at which duty aims and which must give shape to our actions highlights the principled character of our reason. A standard critique of his position on this score is oft-repeated; Kant's emphasis on the rationality required to be morally good leaves moral life devoid of any genuine human feeling: it is too strict, abstract, austere, and cold. Another familiar criticism of

Kant's view on this score is that the emphasis on motivation and lawfulness means that moral goodness is unconcerned with the effects that our actions have in the world. The thrust of this reading of Kant relies, though, on thinking of Kant exclusively as a 'deontologist,' whereas as the scope of practical life for him is much broader and more dynamic than this allows.

Characterizing Kant solely as a 'deontologist' has done a disservice to our interpretation of his thought as it neglects or deflates other aspects of practical life that are just as integral to his vision of moral goodness. Kant has a robust account of virtue that is central to practical life and which he understands as the strength of character required to be good. A number of scholars have taken up the task of explicating Kant's notion of virtue, with much success. We can think here in particular of Anne Margaret Baxley and Munzel.[4] Yet he is rarely, if ever, named as a 'virtue ethicist,' or even considered as offering a distinctive articulation of what the place of virtue is in practical life. The depth of this oversight comes to the fore when we are reminded that he devotes almost as much space to his description of virtue and its essential role in practical life as he does to duty and the moral law combined. Even more, the very titles of his works indicate their place; the two texts in which he most fully examines duty and the moral law – namely the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* – are explicitly propaedeutics for his further discussions of moral life in which virtue, citizenship, religion, and ends generally are highlighted. The *Groundwork* is the foundation upon which the *Metaphysics of Moral* is ultimately constructed, and which Kant spent years announcing and developing; the *Critique of Practical Reason* clears the critical path and provides signposts for the latter work, as well as for *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and other writings in the practical opus. This is not to say that as propaedeutics they are merely preparatory and thus overcome or left behind in the later writings. Rather, all that I mean to suggest is that Kant's own articulation of what he was doing does not lend itself to privileging the 'deontological' component over and above, and certainly not to the exclusion of, other elements. In the theoretical domain we may privilege the first *Critique* over the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in part because Kant is clear that there is

[4] Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue: The Value of Autocracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character: The "Critical" Link of Morality, Anthropology and Reflective Judgment* (University of Chicago Press, 1998). Stephen Engstrom and Nancy Sherman have also made significant contributions to this area of Kant scholarship.

little – perhaps even nothing – left for us in terms of traditional metaphysical inquiry. Practically speaking, however, he believes that there is still much to be done, so much so that his vision of what philosophers must do is oriented by moral education.

Kant also places an emphasis on ends in descriptions of moral goodness and, therefore, there is an undeniably 'teleological' aspect to his practical thought. Kant's belief that there are ends we must pursue in order to attain moral goodness comes out forcefully in his discussion of what he calls the highest good, which he takes to be the complete form that the whole of our particular, concrete ends must take. Ends are also what is at stake in the Doctrine of Virtue, where Kant defines ethics as "the system of the ends of pure practical reason" (MS 6:381), and in which he elucidates virtue with reference to the ends that are necessary to realize it. These ends are nothing other than the duties that are imposed by the moral law on finite, rational beings such as ourselves. This element of his thought has certainly not gone unnoticed or unexplored in the scholarship, but it has too often been the case that it is put forth as an alternative, counterweight, or a mere supplement to the perceived shortcomings of the 'deontological' aspect. Some have also discerned a shift in Kant's thinking, with the *Metaphysics of Morals* marking a departure from the rule-oriented approach of the *Groundwork*, and thus seeking to rescue Kant from the austere portrait others find in that work. In any case, Kant's various points of focus have inspired scholars to leave one of his obvious commitments behind, or at the very least to privilege one over the other. A key feature of this book will be to highlight and describe the ends that reason must pursue. Rather than couching this as an alternative to the 'deontological' approach, I hope to show how in affirming the rule-oriented character of moral goodness we can nevertheless discern how these rules prescribe the ends that Kant details for the use of reason.

Beyond the elements already mentioned – duty, the moral law, virtue – Kant's practical philosophy includes careful attention to the state and civil society, international relations, religion, culture, and even history. In Kant scholarship, I think it is fair to say that despite a recent trend to treat these areas with great seriousness, they have long been relegated to a kind of secondary status. This is despite Kant's own continual and consistent commitment to examining them and associating them with the deepest, most fundamental features of his moral theory. Moreover, even though the influence of this aspect of his thought has been far reaching – one need only think of the contributions to political thought made by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, who are both heavily influenced by Kantian

ideals – Kant's appeal in this regard is underwhelming. Otfried Höffe opens his recent work on this aspect of Kant's thought by noting that Kant's Doctrine of Right is not taken to belong to "that narrow canon of political philosophy."[5] While Kant's theory of law, right, and the state shares much with conventional social contract theories and traditional republicanism, he grounds his theory on a moral imperative. It is this same moral imperative that ultimately leads to what is perhaps most novel in his political theory, namely, his examination of and prescription for a universal cosmopolitan world order that aims at bringing about peace. On this front, Kant was an original contributor to the notion of universal human rights rooted in an inherent human dignity. Yet, despite Kant's clear insistence on moral freedom as the possibility and limit of what is properly political, little work has been done to articulate the thoroughgoing connection between his political and moral theories.

If Kant's discussions of political theory have been somewhat remaindered considered from the point of view of his moral theory, then his account of the role of religion and culture in practical life has been even more so. As in his political theory, both religion and culture are cast in the context of the necessary rule of reason in moral life. Religion, for Kant, must be subject to and purified through reason; religion must become 'rational religion,' unbound from superstition, affect, and ideology. Kant also believes, though, that religion provides a context for a kind of moral education for us, as well as enacts an ethical community that fulfills our moral vocation. Culture, too, has our rational ends as its aim. Culture serves to promote our moral vocation in preparing our will to be governed wholly by reason instead of our natural desires. Both religion and culture make distinct and important contributions to the attainment of moral goodness; they are not mere afterthoughts or appendages to Kant's vision of practical life.

Lastly, though certainly not least, Kant's treatment of history and our approach to it has been largely neglected in the anglophone scholarship on Kant's ethics until very recently (and even then its role in moral life is rarely the focus). Kant's discussions of history and its vital role in practical life were of great importance to thinkers like Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and others who are influenced by what we call the German Idealist tradition. The idea that human history can be thought as the site of reason's development and its realization is first formulated in Kant. Kant also first

[5] Otfried Höffe, *Kant's Cosmopolitan Theory of Law and Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

introduces the idea that we must be concerned with our interpretation of history in order to further our efforts to bring about a world that is most fit for human life. Crucially, Kant believes that our concern with history is guided by a moral imperative, and thus it should also be seen as an integral part of his ethics.

Few attempts have been made to treat systematically the wide scope of Kant's practical philosophy. One notable exception is Allen Wood's book *Kant's Ethical Thought*, which, I believe, marks a first attempt of contemporary anglophone scholarship to render Kant's thought as a unified vision. In his Introduction Wood notes the impossibility of such an inclusive and ranging task, submitting that the "entire plan is too ambitious for any single book."[6] Few others, if any, have ventured to contribute to the enterprise on this score. The result has been, on the one hand, a proliferation of excellent books on the various aspects of Kant's thought, especially in the areas that have been long overlooked. On the other hand, we are left without a sense of how it all hangs together. Even more than this Wood draws our attention to what a lack of unified interpretation might mean; he suggests that Kant's "writings on ethics, politics, and religion, which also make important contributions to our understanding of his ethical thought, are equally dependent on the foundational writings but are also important for the proper interpretation of them."[7] Without such an integrative approach to the different elements of Kant's thought, we not only miss much but also perceive problems and issues that may be resolved when viewed from the perspective of Kant's broader endeavor. (Wood's explication of the various formulations of the moral law highlights the latter point.) In any case, we can see both that the recent scholarship is developing in a direction that expands the topics to be taken seriously, and that with this we are in need of a way to think the relation of the parts to one another. This book makes a suggestion of and offers a framework for how we might do that, but expands the question to thinking the relation of the parts to the whole practical opus.

The purpose of this book is to articulate, in broad strokes, Kant's comprehensive vision of practical life, and to do so with reference to what grounds it. As such it argues for the unity of Kant's diverse practical writings and the different dimensions of human life as it is lived: morality, citizenship, church, community, culture. To accomplish this, I take my point of departure from what Kant conceives of as the animating desire

[6] Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.
[7] *Ibid.*

of reason for the unconditioned, understood in the practical context as human freedom. The demand that reason has for the unconditioned, I contend, animates, authors, governs, and organizes the various aspects of his practical thought. From the perspective of the demand for the unconditioned as grounding the practical philosophy, we can see that the unity amongst its plural elements is one that is *constitutive*. That is to say, it is not only that different trajectories of his philosophy share principles or even an absolute value (say, of freedom); rather, duty, virtue, the highest good, the state, religion, culture, and history can be seen to be related as necessary and mutually dependent moments of the unfolding of reason's striving for satisfaction in what it demands of us. These aspects are related not through an external concept, but genetically as kin, descendants of the same ancestor, consanguine.

Kant defines the characteristic feature of reason as its striving for the unconditioned; this striving is the source of the 'ought' that reason places on us to be good and to make the world better. The demand for the unconditioned animates different moments of Kant's practical philosophy in different ways, but there are two basic components to it: reason's striving for the unconditioned demands, first, an unconditioned or *free* causality and second, the totality of this free causality with the whole of what it causes. What reason demands is nothing less than what Kant calls the unconditioned whole: "**Reason demands this in accordance with the principle: If the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned is also given**" (KrV A409/B436). These two aspects of practical reason's demand take shape (respectively) first in duty, the good will, and virtue, and second in a moral *world* "in conformity with all moral laws" (KrV A808/B836). The fullest expression of reason's demand for the unconditioned whole in the practical context is manifest in the call for each of us to produce and promote the *highest good* for human life, a totality of ends in the world that arises from the activity of human freedom. In this, the highest good stands as the keystone and centerpiece of Kant's practical philosophy.

The turn to the unconditioned as a guiding thread highlights not only the importance of the highest good and its centrality in Kant's practical philosophy; it also sheds new light on the presentation and formulations of the moral law. Crucially, it also works to clarify Kant's often misunderstood insistence that the moral law itself commands us to pursue the highest good. From the perspective of the demand for the unconditioned, we are better able then to discern the unity of the 'deontological' aspects and 'teleological' aspects of Kant's ethical thought. Said another way, the

demand for the unconditioned allows us to see how it is that duty, the moral law, and the ends we must pursue are related organically – reciprocally conditioning and producing one another with reference to the whole of the demand. The dynamism of the movement of reason towards a totality highlights for us the unity between the duty required in individual acts, the totality of ends required in the highest good, and the moral world in which these are realized. Moreover, in the moral world that we are called to promote, we see the movement of reason out beyond our individual ends, requiring the externalization of reason with reference to something larger than ourselves. Moral goodness thus depends on participation in and advancement of the ends of the state and of the church.

Our interpretation and understanding of Kant's practical philosophy as well as our own self-understanding in the realm of ethical life has been diminished by our lack of attention to this unity in Kant's work. Perhaps the broadest insight gained from addressing the unity of Kant's practical philosophy from the perspective of the unconditioned is a re-envisioning of the relationship between individual moral goodness and the state, religion, and history, namely, *community*. What emerges in the treatments of the different aspects of Kant's practical philosophy that follow is that the realization of individual freedom requires that we set for ourselves and pursue a whole constellation of social, political, and communal ends. Each aspect – from the presentation of the moral law and the concept of duty to moral progress in history – is a moment in the unfolding of reason's demand for the unconditioned. Far from being individualistic, even solipsistic, the demand that reason places on individuals to 'be good' is a command to produce the *universal* exercise of reason; this necessitates not only that we pursue ends that take us out beyond ourselves but also that we do so in community with others. The task of what follows is to treat the varied aspects of Kant's practical philosophy from the perspective of asking "what should I do?" That is, the book maps how, given reason's demand for the unconditioned, doing our duty encompasses joining and promoting a state, participating in an ethical community, and taking ourselves as part of a larger cultural and historical trajectory.

This vision of the relationship between the individual and the community has strong sympathies with some recent scholarship. One can think of Anderson-Gold's book *Unnecessary Evil*, which turns on the thesis that since radical evil is a product of sociality, the moral goodness that overcomes it must also be predicated on the social; Allen Wood's piece "Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil" develops along the same lines. And certainly Wood's book *Kant's Ethical Thought* seeks to articulate the idea that the

social conditions an individual's moral goodness. I would submit, however, that under the rubric I am advocating, the communal ends that we must pursue are not simply means that allow for individual freedom to be attained, but are the very ends in which reason finds its satisfaction. The individual's task of moral goodness is nothing other than the taking up of these ends. The form of what reason strives for necessitates pursuing communal ends as what constitutes individual moral goodness, rather than imposing any empirical, external, or material condition.

This is not to say, of course, that reason's demand for the unconditioned unfolds in a vacuum. Quite the contrary is the case. In fact, reason's relation to nature will form a main thread in the discussions that follow. We must take seriously, I contend, Kant's claims in his theoretical philosophy that reason's demand for the unconditioned arises always already in relation to a given conditioned, i.e., nature. Thus it is not simply that the empirical condition of human beings simply must be taken into account, but that the very imperative that reason commands takes shape only against a given nature. Reason is not only related to and in some sense dependent on a given nature but the demand reason makes is a demand for a different, rational nature. Striving for the unconditioned is always done in and through nature. This is to say that what may be considered empirical can be seen also as determinative for the tasks of practical life.

This necessary relatedness and even dependence on a given nature occasions what will emerge as another theme in the following chapters – the intractable finitude that characterizes practical life for Kant. From this perspective we come to see not only Kant's sensitivity to human finitude but also his complex treatment of the issue. Kant's work can be seen to harbor deep ambivalences about human finitude and the limits of practical reason's ability to remake the world and attain its ends. On the one hand, Kant's practical philosophy preserves our finitude, and on the other, it perpetually encourages us to think its dissolution. Kant's acknowledgment of our finitude is thoroughgoing: at every turn we must note a kind of tragic fatedness to practical life; the very demand that reason has for us to 'be good' is always already made in relation to a given nature that precludes its full attainment. Thus the possibility of achieving our ends – in virtue, in a moral world, in a perfect state – is a possibility that is always deferred, never realized. At the same time, this aspect of Kant's approach to our finitude may be seen to be unique in the history of philosophy and, indeed, may offer a portrait of Kant that runs counter to a perceived – and much maligned – antagonism toward the natural aspect of our being. Kant takes seriously the fact of finitude; he neither turns from our finitude