Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness

Kant is often portrayed as the author of a rigid system of ethics in which adherence to a formal and universal principle of morality – the famous categorical imperative – is an end itself, and any concern for human goals and happiness a strictly secondary and subordinate matter. Such a theory seems to suit perfectly rational beings but not human beings.

The twelve essays in this collection by one of the world’s preeminent Kant scholars argue for a radically different account of Kant’s ethics. They explore an interpretation of his moral philosophy according to which freedom is the fundamental end of human action, but an end that can only be preserved and promoted by adherence to moral law. Moreover, Paul Guyer shows that while Kant did not view moral laws as simply prudential rules for the maximization of human happiness, he did hold that an interpersonal system of happiness should result from the free choices of individual human beings if made with due respect for the freedom of all other humans to choose their own ends and ways of life as well.

The essays are structured to reveal the emergence of this conception of the fundamental value of freedom in Kant’s early work, to explore its systematic presentation in his central philosophical works, and to demonstrate its application in his liberal political philosophy and his theory of personal virtue.

Any new study of Kant by Paul Guyer is virtually mandatory reading for all Kant scholars. The potential appeal of this volume, though, is considerably greater than that constituency. By radically revising the traditional interpretation of Kant’s moral and political philosophy and by showing how Kant’s coherent liberalism can guide us in current debates, Paul Guyer will find an audience across moral and political philosophy, intellectual history, and political science.

Paul Guyer is Professor of Philosophy and Florence R. C. Murray Professor in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to being the author of three major books on Kant (published by Cambridge), he is the coeditor of The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, the coeditor and cotranslator in that edition of the recent groundbreaking translation of Critique of Pure Reason, and the editor of The Cambridge Companion to Kant.
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Acknowledgments

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Baruch College of the City University of New York; it was then published in the *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 353–85. Chapter 6, “The Strategy of Kant’s Groundwork,” was written at the invitation of Marcelo Stamm for the Festschrift that he edited in honor of Dieter Henrich, *Philosophie in synthetischer Absicht* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998), pp. 271–98; the paper was also presented at the Second Brazilian Kant Congress (1997) at the invitation of Valerio Roden, Guido de Antônio Almeida, and Vera Cristina Bueno de Andrade. Chapter 7, “Kantian Foundations for Liberalism,” was written at the invitation of Sharon Byrd, Joachim Hruschka, and Jan Joerden for a bicentennial conference on Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* held at Smith College in 1996, and was then published under their editorship in *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik/Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 5 (1997): 121–40. Chapter 8, “Life, Liberty, and Property: Rawls and Kant,” was written for a 1992 conference at the Philipps Universität, Marburg, organized by Burkhard Tuschling, and then published in the volume edited by Dieter Hüning and Tuschling, *Recht, Staat und Völkerrecht bei Immanuel Kant* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1998), pp. 273–91. Chapter 9, “Moral Worth, Virtue, and Merit,” was written especially for this volume and appears here for the first time; I thank my longtime editor and friend Terence Moore for the encouragement to write this essay. Chapter 10, “From a Practical Point of View,” was given as a lecture in 1995 at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, the Georg-August Universität, Göttingen, and the Ludwig Maximilians Universität, Munich, and then published at the invitation of Wilhelm Vossenkuhl in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 104 (1997): 1–18. The paper appeared there in an abbreviated German translation, under the title “In praktischer Absicht: Kants Begriff eines Postulates der reinen praktischen Vernunft,” which I prepared with help from Katerina Kaiser and Rolf-Peter Horstmann; this is its first appearance in English. Chapter 11, “Nature, Freedom, and Happiness: The Third Proposition of Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History,*” is to appear in a French translation in *L’’Idee d’une histoire universelle du point de vue cosmopolitique* de Kant, edited by Jean-Christophe Merle (Paris: Ophrys, forthcoming); this will be its first appearance in English. Finally, Chapter 12, “Nature, Morality, and the Possibility of Peace,” was presented in 1995 at the
Acknowledgments

Eighth International Kant Congress in Memphis, at the invitation of the organizing committee, and published in the Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress, edited by Hoke Robinson (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), volume I, part 1, pp. 51–69; this chapter has been somewhat revised for this volume. Minor corrections and stylistic improvements have been silently made throughout; more significant departures from the previously printed versions of these chapters have been noted. I thank all of these editors and publishers for their original invitations as well as their permission to reprint these essays.

I hope that these chapters reflect the benefits I have received not only from the published works but also from the personal friendship and encouragement of such devoted and accomplished students of Kant and Kantian ethics as Henry Allison, Karl Ameriks, the late Lewis White Beck, Frederick C. Beiser, the late Mary Gregor, Dieter Henrich, Barbara Herman, Thomas E. Hill Jr., Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Christine Korsgaard, Onora O’Neill, Nelson Potter, John Rawls, J. B. Schneewind, Nancy Sherman, the late Manley Thompson, Allen Wood, and many, many others. These essays have also benefited from conversations with Samuel Freeman, R. Jay Wallace, and Juliet Floyd as well as the superb students who have worked on Kant’s ethics with me in recent years, including Frederick Rauscher, Curtis Bowman, Josefine Nauckhoff, Jennifer Uleman, Cynthia Schossberger, Lucas Thorpe, and Julian Wuerth.

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Note on Translations and Citations

All quotations from and references to passages in Kant’s works are located by parenthetical citations of the volume and page number in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer et al., later Walter de Gruyter, 1900-), except for citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which are located by the customary use of the pagination of its first (“A”) and second (“B”) editions. Translations are based on the text of this edition, the so-called *Akademie* edition, unless otherwise indicated. The source of the translations in each chapter is indicated in a note in that chapter; most translations are my own, but where I have followed an existing translation, I have noted that. When I have cited the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I have not usually used any abbreviation for it, since the use of the “A” and “B” pagination will make the source clear. For other works, I have used the following abbreviations:

CJ Critique of Judgment
CPPracR Critique of Practical Reason
G Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals
IUH Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View
JäL Jäsche Logic
MM Metaphysics of Morals
MM, DR Metaphysics of Morals, Part I, “Doctrine of Right”
MM, DV Metaphysics of Morals, Part II, “Doctrine of Virtue”
**Note on Translations and Citations**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>OPP</td>
<td>Only Possible Basis for a Proof of the Existence of God</td>
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<td>OQ</td>
<td>An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing? (The Conflict of the Faculties, Part II)</td>
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<td>PP</td>
<td>Toward Perpetual Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td><em>Reflexionen</em>, that is, the notes and fragments in Kant’s <em>Handschriftliche Nachlässe</em> (“handwritten remains”), collected in volumes 14–19 of the <em>Akademie</em> edition.</td>
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<td>Rel</td>
<td>Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</td>
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