

Understanding Kant's Ethics

Kant's ethical thought remains one of the most influential, yet notoriously challenging, systems in the history of philosophy. This volume provides a sympathetic but critical reconstruction of the main strands of Kant's ethics, focusing on the most commonly read of Kant's ethical works, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Part I outlines Kant's arguments in defense of his Categorical Imperative, as well as elaborating Kant's understanding of dignity and human freedom. Part II addresses the most common objections to Kant's ethics, including challenges to the Formula of Universal Law; Kant's controversial ethical stances on suicide, sex and marriage, and non-human animals; and the place of reason, sentiment, and happiness in Kant's ethics. For scholars and specialists alike, the volume offers a clear and accessible account of what Kantian morality both offers us and asks of us.

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*For my wife and children,
my Kingdom of Ends in miniature*

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Preface

Many others had a hand in making *Understanding Kant's Ethics* possible. A special debt is owed to those who had the patience and courage to try to teach me about Kant's ethics: Richard Eldridge, Kathleen Wright, Talbot Brewer, and, most especially, John Marshall. His encouragement during my graduate studies was invaluable in persuading me that I had a contribution to make to the world's understanding of Kant's ethics. David Kaspar, Chris Naticchia, and Rivka Weinberg read and provided extensive comments upon drafts of this work. Many colleagues have served as my interlocutors regarding Kant's ethics over the years. These include David Adams, Matthew Altman, Carl Cranor, John Davis, Paul Hurley, Robert Johnson, Sharon Lloyd, James Mahon, Herbert Morris, Stephen Munzer, and Maura Priest. No doubt I have inadvertently omitted some, for which I apologize. My wife, Wendy, offered a crucial non-philosopher's perspective throughout the writing of this book. Some of the claims defended here were first developed as part of a project sponsored by the Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities program at the California State University. Thanks lastly to all those students to whom I've had the pleasure of teaching Kant's ethics; you helped me see the need for this book and motivated me to bring it to fruition.

Abbreviations

A note regarding references to Kant’s works: because there are many editions and printings of Kant’s writings, as well as many translations, the philosophical community now employs a standardized reference system for Kant’s works. In this reference system, volume and page references refer to the German edition of Kant’s works, Kant’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal German Academy of Sciences (Berlin: deGruyter, 1900–). In this book, I have used parenthetical references with abbreviations referring to Kant’s specific works, followed by the volume and page references to Royal German Academy text. So, for instance, G 4:424 refers to Kant’s Groundwork, found in volume 4 of the Royal German Academy text, p. 424. The list of abbreviations I have used are as follows:

C2	<u>Critique of Practical Reason</u> (aka, the ‘second Critique’)
G	<u>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</u>
LE	<u>Lectures on Ethics</u>
MM	<u>Metaphysics of Morals</u>
R	<u>Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone</u>
SRL	“On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy”
TP	“On the Common Saying, ‘That May Be True in Theory but Is of No Use in Practice’”

All English translations are by Mary Gregor, printed in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge, 1996).