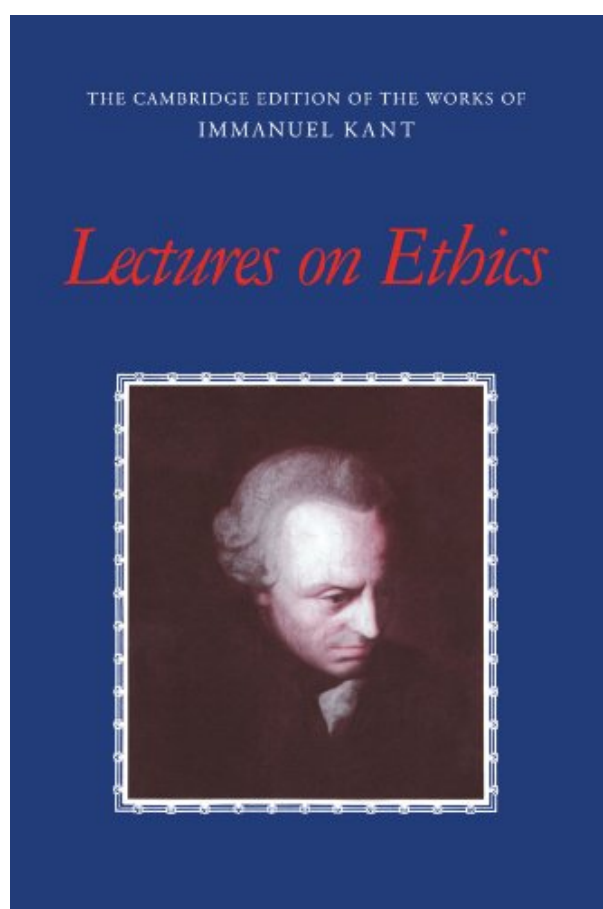


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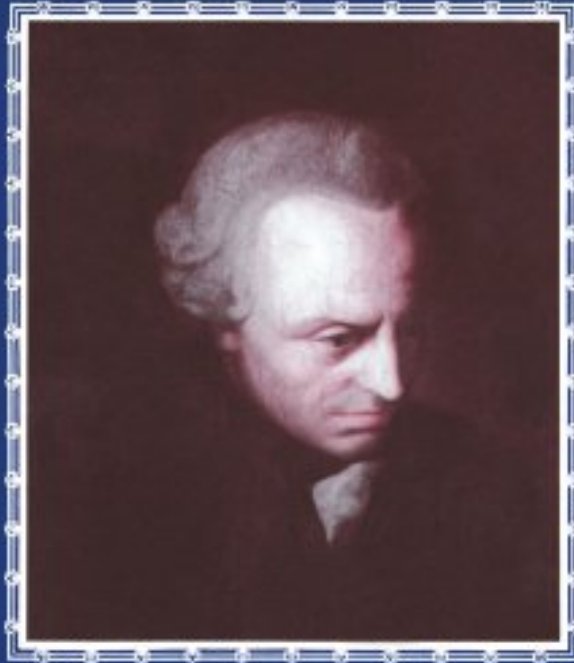


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This volume contains four versions of the lecture notes taken by Kant's students of his university courses in ethics given regularly over a period of some thirty years. The notes are very complete and expound not only Kant's views on ethics but many of his opinions on life and human nature. Much of this material has never before been translated into English. As with other volumes in the series, there are copious linguistic and explanatory notes and a glossary of key terms.

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KANT'S "PRE-CRITICAL" LECTURES TO STUDENTS ON VARIOUS ETHICAL SUBJECTS

By Steven H Propp

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher who is perhaps the founder of "modern" philosophy, with his focus on epistemology (theory of knowledge); he wrote many books, such as Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, Critique of Judgement, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, On History, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, etc.

These lectures---delivered probably in the 1775-1780 period, before he published the Critique of Pure Reason in 1781---are based on the notes taken by his students.

He states in the first lecture, "Philosophy is either theoretical or practical. The one concerns itself with knowledge, the other with the conduct of beings possessed of a free will. The one has Theory, the other Practice for its object---and it is the object which differentiates them. There is another distinction of philosophy into speculative and practical... the difference is not one of form, but of the object... The object of practical philosophy is conduct; that of theoretical cognition. Practical philosophy... is thus the philosophy which provides rules for the proper use of our freedom, irrespective of particular applications of it." (Pg. 1-2)

He observes, "If... the reason why I ought not to lie were that God had forbidden it, because it pleased Him to do so, then it would follow that He might have refrained from forbidding it, had He so willed... I ought not to lie, not because God has forbidden it, but because lying is evil in itself. All morality rests on this, that we do what we do on account of the inner character of the act itself. Consequently what gives rise to morality is not the act, but the disposition from which its performance springs." (Pg. 22)

He suggests, "To honour God is to obey His commandments with a willing heart, not to sing songs of praises to Him. An upright man who strives from an inner impulse to give expression to the moral law on account of the inner goodness of such action, who keeps God's commandments with a willing heart, such a one honours God." (Pg. 41)

He states, "It is not happiness, therefore, which is the chief ground of impulse to all duties; and accordingly, to try to make another happy against his will is to do him wrong. It is an act of violence to force another to be happy in one's own way, though that is a pretext used, for example, by the upper classes in their dealings with their dependents." (Pg. 51)

He argues, "The outstanding characteristic of natural religion is its simplicity. Its theology is such that the least intelligent among us can grasp it as completely as the most thoughtful and speculative... Religion and morality must go hand in hand. The philosophers of old did not appreciate this... The basis of religion must, therefore, be morality." (Pg. 81) He adds, "Religion stands in no need of any speculative study of God." (Pg. 82) And "Our entire conduct is religious if every one of our activities is accompanied by religion. Inner religion thus constitutes the whole of religion." (Pg. 82)

He observes, "prayers are not to be regarded as a special way of serving God, but only as a means of awakening within us the spirit of devotion. We do not serve God with words, ceremonies and gestures; we serve Him only by actions which reflect our devotion to Him. Prayer trains us to act aright... We must divest

it of all practical goodness to arrive at the purest concept of prayer, which is then seen to be good as a means. If, then, prayer has no higher value than that of a means to an end, it cannot be regarded as a peculiar service of God and intrinsically good.” (Pg. 100-101)

He says, “God has placed us on the stage of this world, provided us with all the materials for our welfare and with freedom to use them as we please, and everything depends on how men divide these benefits among themselves. Of this task men doubtless make a sorry mess. Let us then accept the benefits of life as we have received them, let us be satisfied with God’s universal wisdom and care and not allow misery and misfortune to weigh upon us.” (Pg. 145-146)

He explains, “Rights are determined in law. Now law indicates what actions are necessary from authority or compulsion, while ethics is concerned with actions necessitated by the inner obligation which springs from the rights of others in so far as they are not compulsory.” (Pg. 211)

He contends, “so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man. We can ask, ‘Why do animals exist?’ But to ask, ‘Why does man exist?’ is a meaningless question. Our duties towards animals are merely indirect duties towards humanity.” (Pg. 239)

He concludes in the last lecture, “The ultimate destiny of the human race is the greatest moral perfection, provided that it is achieved through human freedom, whereby alone man is capable of the greatest happiness. God might have made men perfect and given to each his portion of happiness. But happiness would not then have been derived from the inner principle of the world, for the inner principle of the world is freedom.” (Pg. 252)

To those who know Kant primarily as a “heavyweight” philosophy of epistemology, these lectures may seem revelatory. They are certainly vastly illuminating for anyone studying Kant’s philosophy and its development.

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