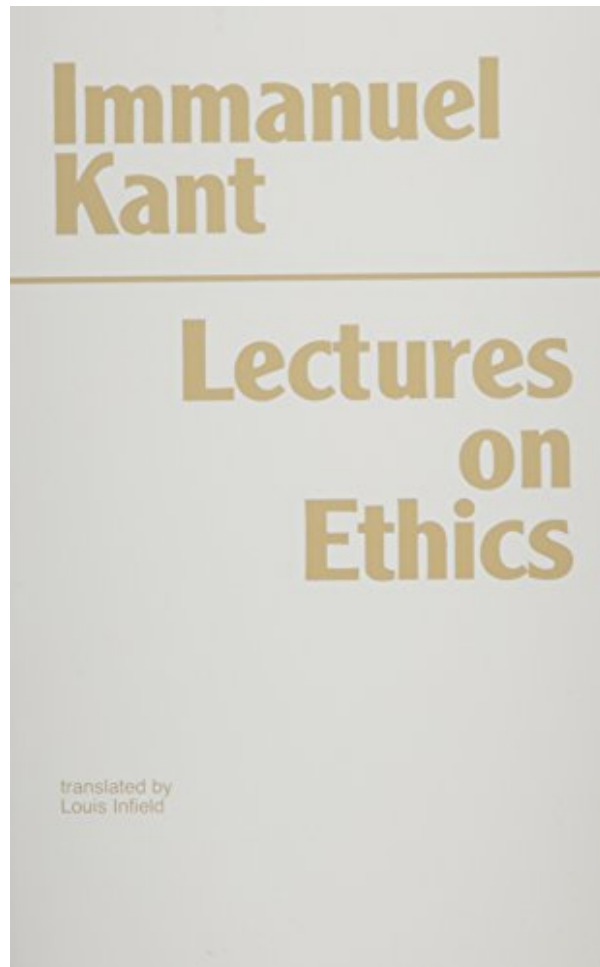


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Language Notes

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Original Language: German

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Copublished in the U.K. by Routledge.

These lively essays, transcribed by Kant's students during his lectures on ethics at Konigsberg in the years 1775-1780, are celebrated not only for their insight into Kant's polished and often witty lecture style but also as a key to understanding the development of his moral thought. As Lewis White Beck points out in the Foreword to this edition, those who know Kant only from his rigorous and abstract intellectual critiques may be surprised by the accessibility of these essays, which put flesh on the bones of the critical ethics, while revealing Kant as a practical moralist, greatly concerned with the nuances of human conduct and the social effects of his moral teaching. The sharply focused discussions and definitions strengthen an interpretation of Kant's more mature speculative works and remain the richest document we have for understanding the history of the preeminent ethical theory of modern times.

- Sales Rank: #823929 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Hackett Pub Co
- Published on: 1980-12-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.75" h x 5.50" w x .75" l, .70 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 269 pages

Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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This is a great book on Kant's deontological ethics

By JR

This is a great book on Kant's deontological ethics; it is sectioned by topic thus making it an easy read and a book in which you don't have to read from start to finish, in order; one can pick subjects and dive on into Kant's ethics.

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

This is the best introduction to Kant's ethics.

By Max M. Thomas (critique@umich.edu)

I have used this book as a freshman-level text in my Introduction to Ethics course for years. Unlike many of Kant's books, this one is quite easy to read and understand. It is a translation of his students' notes taken from his lectures on ethics, so it is in the language of undergraduate students. (There is some minor debate as to its accuracy, since it is composed by his students, but I find nothing contrary to books written by the master's own hand.)

This volume should not be read from the first page to the last. Rather, you should browse through it. The table of contents lists specific topics, such as sex, suicide, prayer, and rights. The novice will enjoy selecting topics of particular interest from that table. As one becomes more familiar with the easier issues of interest, the more challenging sections are less difficult. (The one drawback is the lack of an index.)

Everyone interested in any moral issue should carefully read this vital work in classical ethics.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

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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