IMMANUEL KANT

CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON

EDITED AND TRANSLATED,
WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTIONS BY
LEWIS WHITE BECK

IMMANUEL KANT

FOUNDATIONS OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LEWIS WHITE BECK

CHINA SOCI NG HOUSE
CH).

IMMANUEL KANT

CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON

EDITED AND TRANSLATED,
WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTIONS BY
LEWIS WHITE BECK

总 策 划　严　平　野　夫
项目策划　张自文　任建成

西学基本经典工作委员会

※　※　※　※　※

西学基本经典专家委员会

CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON

FOUNDATIONS OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, published in 1788, is the second of his three *Critiques*, the others being the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment* (1790). It is likewise the second of his three most important writings in moral philosophy, the first being the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), and the third being the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

The relation between the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* is much like that between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena*. For each of the first two *Critiques*, Kant wrote a briefer, less "scholastic," work on the same topics. The shorter works follow the analytical or regressive method; they begin with experience and regress upon its a priori presuppositions or principles without which it would not be possible to have that kind of experience. In these shorter works, starting points are found in mathematical and scientific knowledge (*Prolegomena*) and in "common knowledge of morality" (in the *Foundations*). In each, everything is based "upon something already known as trustworthy, from which we can set out with confidence and ascend to sources as yet unknown."[1] These "sources as yet unknown" are the forms of intuition and categories (in the *Prolegomena*) and the moral law and freedom (in the *Foundations*).

The method of the *Critiques*, on the other hand, is synthetic. That is, they begin with principles and thence proceed to experiences which they organize, conceptualize, and render intelligible. Only by this method can philosophical knowledge "present all its articulations, as the structure of a peculiar cog-

[1] *Prolegomena* §4.

nitive faculty, in their natural combination."[2] The *Critique of Practical Reason*, therefore, begins as it were where the *Foundations* ends, and retraces its steps. For this reason, Kant tells us, the *Critique of Practical Reason* presupposes the *Foundations* only "in so far as that work gives a preliminary acquaintance with the principle of duty and justifies a definite formula of it; otherwise it is an independent work."[3] This definite formula, of course, is the categorical imperative, reached in the second section of the *Foundations* and in §7 of the *Critique*.

To be more specific, the *Foundations*, as the work giving an analysis of ordinary moral consciousness, begins with ordinary moral judgments and the felt constraint of duty. It seeks to bring their basis to light, and does so by formulating the moral law expressed as a categorical imperative and a theory of freedom as the condition for making and realizing the demands of this imperative. The *Critique of Practical Reason*, on the other hand, begins with definitions, and proceeds quickly, in a quasi-deductive manner, to the formula of the moral law and the theory of freedom. The works, therefore, for a considerable distance go along the same path, but in opposite directions.

Nevertheless, the *Critique* contains material which, Kant says, would be out of place in the *Foundations*, for it must show the unity of practical and theoretical reason. The full investigation of this unity constitutes the chief advance made in the *Critique of Practical Reason* beyond Kant's earlier work. This unity was asserted in the first *Critique* and assumed in the *Foundations*: only in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is this assumption "deduced" or justified. Only in the light of this larger and deeper problem of showing that there is no conflict of reason with itself in its claims to knowledge and in its use in practical conduct does Kant deal adequately with many of those most profound philosophical problems concerning the relations among knowing, believing, and acting.

[2]Ibid., Introduction (Macmillan ed., p. 11).

[3]*Critique of Practical Reason*, this edition, p. 8.

II

Even the titles of the works, properly understood, tell much of this story of their intimate connection. There is a whole theory implicit in the very words "metaphysics of morals," "critique," and "practical reason."

"Metaphysics" means two things for Kant. It is presumed speculative knowledge of supersensible and unconditional reality; this is the old metaphysics which the *Critique of Pure Reason* was written to destroy. Then there is the metaphysics Kant attempted to establish, "metaphysics as science," "the inventory of all our possessions through pure reason, systematically arranged,"[4] "a system of a priori knowledge from mere concepts."[5] It has two parts: the metaphysics of nature, consisting of all the a priori principles of our knowledge of what is, and the metaphysics of morals, comprising all the a priori principles of what ought to be.[6] But many philosophers claimed that certain, rational knowledge of God, freedom, and immortality belonged in the storehouse of metaphysics understood as knowledge of ultimate reality. Kant is primarily concerned to deny this, and he does so by showing that such putative knowledge has no valid foundation. Claims to such knowledge are vain and empty or, in Kant's technical terminology, "dialectical."

This brings us to Kant's conception of the function he assigns to "critique." One task of critique is the self-examination of reason for the purpose of discovering and eradicating the dialectical illusions of the older metaphysics. The second task of critique is to rescue those principles that constitute metaphysics "as science" from the ruin threatened by universal empiricism, which not only raised doubts about the possibility of speculative metaphysics but also tended to undermine knowledge even of nature and morals.[7] Critique is negatively an at-

[4] *Critique of Pure Reason*, A xx.

[5] *Metaphysics of Morals*, Introduction, ii.

[6] *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 840 = B 868.

[7] *Critique of Practical Reason*, this edition, p. 12 and the ironical remark at the end of the Preface, p. 14.

tack on pretensions to supersensible knowledge, which appear as metaphysical dogmatism and moral fanaticism;[8] affirmatively it establishes the structure, range, use, and validity of concepts (like that of cause in the first *Critique*, duty in the second) that cannot be objectively valid if derived from experience, but that are essential if science and morals are to "make sense." Without critique having both these affirmative and negative functions, Kant thinks it is not possible to draw a line between legitimate and illegitimate metaphysics, or to defend legitimate knowledge from attacks properly made only on dialectical illusion masquerading as higher wisdom.

So much for the word "critique." And what is "practical reason"? To say, as Kant does, that practical reason is the same as will is instructive only when we understand his theory of reason itself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* there are three cognitive faculties of the mind: sensibility, which is receptivity to sensations under the forms of space and time; understanding, which is the faculty of conceptualizing and synthesizing data into knowledge of objects, the synthesis occurring under rules established by concepts called categories; and reason, which is the faculty of synthesizing knowledge of objects into systems (such as the "realm of nature," the whole system of phenomena under laws). Reason guides the construction of knowledge in its systematic aspect, by directing our search for the absolute conditions of all contingent conditions, which will support the entire edifice of knowledge. This is the ideal of reason in its theoretical aspect; but when its search leads it to make assertions that concern supersensible realities that belong in the realm of the older metaphysics, it produces only philosophical illusions.

Now, Kant tells us, all things in nature, including human beings, behave in accordance with laws. But only a rational being can have and act according to a *conception* of laws. A falling body, for instance, "obeys" Galileo's law in the sense of merely illustrating it; but human beings endowed with con-

[8]Ibid., pp. 88, 143.

sciousness and reason, can govern their behavior by their *conception* of this law. By their knowledge of Galileo's law, they may decide whether it is safe to jump from a certain height, and may thereby overcome their fear of doing so. Such a conception of law is possible only for a rational being; and we say that a man or woman acts voluntarily when his or her conception of a law, and not a momentary impulse, governs his or her behavior. To take another example: a man as a creature of impulse unwittingly instantiates psychological "laws" in sexual behavior; but as a rational being, possessing insight into the causal laws of psychology, he may discern consequences of his possible actions, and thereby modify his behavior and act in ways which in fact thwart his impulses. Such a man, we ordinarily say, has a strong will; he acts rationally, not merely impulsively; rational order and system are introduced into his activities by the governance of reason.

We can thus see that when Kant says the will is nothing but practical reason, what he says is not so very startling, but is implicit even in the common usage of the word "will." "Will" is the name we ordinarily give to the subjective experience of control of impulse by reason, and not to the merely emotional or impulsive aspect of behavior.

The book before us is a critical examination of will understood in this sense, as practical reason, *reason applied in conduct.* And its main thesis is that though practical reason generally has an impulsive component or drive, which it more or less successfully guides by maxims and rules of experience, it is also possible for one's reason to guide one's behavior without any drive springing from variable, subjective impulses directed to the gaining of pleasure. Such reason provides not just long-range control of impulses but, as *pure* practical reason, it can provide the motives and even set the goals of action. The law conceived by reason in this capacity is not an empirical law of nature, not even a law of human nature learned from psychology—no, it is moral law, and the imperative to obey it is a categorical imperative, not hypothetical and contingent upon the actual presence of a given impulse.

Kant tells us, in the opening sentence, that the work is called *Critique of Practical Reason* and not *Critique of Pure Practical Reason* because its task is to show that pure reason can be practical, and it does so by a critical examination of reason's *entire* (both pure and empirical) practical use. This suggests that this *Critique* has only the second, the affirmative, function distinguished above. But this is not correct, for there is a dialectical illusion even in pure practical reason, as we shall see; and this must be resolved. — The lack of parallelism in the titles is unfortunate in another respect: it has led superficial readers and a not insignificant number of philosophical thinkers into believing that Kant established a dichotomy between "pure" and "practical" reason. But if this is believed, it is safe to say that not a single doctrine of his ethical theory has been or can be understood. Kant is trying to show that pure reason can be practical, and must be practical if morality is not an illusion; he is trying to show that it is practical of itself, and not merely as "the slave of the passions" (Hume), or other, nonrational components of personality.[9]

We are now in a position to appreciate the full import of the title of the book, *Critique of Practical Reason.* Affirmatively, the book is to work out the pure a priori laws of conduct, and thus to establish beyond doubt that pure reason can be practical and that the principles of pure reason will constitute a metaphysics of morals understood as rational knowledge of the moral law in all its ramifications. Negatively, it will examine the presuppositions of practical reason to prevent them from being passed off as insight into a supersensible world. These two tasks are carried out, respectively, in the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason and in the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason.

III

The Analytic has as its task the establishment of the possibility of a priori (universal and necessary) practical principles

[9]As held by Aristotle (*Nicomachaean Ethics,* 1139a, 1177b; *On the Soul,* 432b) and most other philosophers and psychologists.

(moral laws), and it accomplishes this in the first two chapters. They give the formula of the moral law (§ 7), its differences from maxims and rules of practice (§§ 1–4), its intimate relation to the autonomy (freedom) of the will as practical reason (§§ 5, 6, 8, and pp. 43–51), and the connection between moral principles and moral concepts (good and evil) (Chapter II). Chapter III of the Analytic is one of the most effective of all of Kant's writings, manifesting on every page his own profound moral commitment and giving a vivid and memorable phenomenology of moral experience. Its purpose is to show the way in which human beings come to be moved by the thought of duty; and this account of reverence for the law as the motive to morality has important implications for Kant's theory of moral education, as given in the Methodology at the end of this *Critique*.

Though the argument is somewhat more formal, elaborate, and rigorous, most of the Analytic will be at least partly familiar to those who have read the *Foundations*, and I shall therefore turn to new material not touched upon, or at most intimated, in the *Foundations* but fully developed in the present work. Most of this material is in the Dialectic.

IV

To understand fully the Dialectic of the second *Critique*, we must recall some of the teachings of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[10] In the Dialectic of that book, Kant was concerned with claims that the human mind inevitably makes (when not forewarned by critical philosophy) — to have knowledge of what is beyond the sphere of possible sense experience. The mind claims to have knowledge from pure reason unrestricted by the

[10]Fortunately, at various places in the second *Critique*, Kant reminds the reader of what he has said in the first. But inasmuch as these passages may appear somewhat cryptic to anyone who has not read the first *Critique*, it is perhaps permissible also for me to try to give a brief summary of this part of his theory of knowledge.

conditions of our senses; such knowledge of the intelligible world is claimed to exist in speculative metaphysics. Now speculative metaphysics, however unwarranted its assertions, is not idle twaddle; reason makes claims to such knowledge not arbitrarily, but for a perfectly sound purpose: as rational beings, who want to know the "reasons" for things, we seek for completeness in knowledge, with no unsupported foundations and no loose ends. Such completeness is not achievable by simply adding empirical facts and more empirical facts to the infinitely expandable store of factual information. Not more knowledge, but a different kind of knowledge, is required if our knowledge is to be seen as a coherent, perfect, and self-supporting whole. No sane man has ever claimed to possess such a perfect omniscience; but some more or less vague ideal of what such knowledge would be like has been effective in the history of science and philosophy from Parmenides to Einstein. What Kant does in the Dialectic of the first *Critique* is to show that this ideal inevitably leads to certain specific metaphysical dogmas. Such systematic organization of our knowledge, he says, would have to include knowledge that there are first causes in the world, that there are permanent substances, and that there is a necessary being. These are the familiar doctrines of classical rationalistic metaphysics: that the will is free, the soul immortal, and God real.

Yet any theoretical argument to show that these are true is dialectical, i.e., fallacious and illusory. The Dialectic of pure theoretical reason is the exposure of the fallacies involved in all such arguments. Kant does not thereby prove that these metaphysical dogmas are false; he merely shows that they cannot be known to be true on grounds of theoretical knowledge, and that reason's speculative need for such truths is bound to go unsatisfied and frustrated—that, in the end, "it embraces not Juno, but a cloud."

Minor details aside, much of Kant's argument as well as his conclusions would be acceptable to many philosophers of today who base their skepticism of metaphysics on quite other considerations; this aspect of Kant's philosophy makes him

one of the most important antecedents of pragmatism and modern positivism. But then Kant goes further, and attempts to show not merely the unattainability of this kind of ideal knowledge but also its undesirability. *If* such knowledge of supersensible reality *were* possible, it would be found to be in conflict with the conceptual foundations of morality.

In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was written while the *Critique of Practical Reason* was taking shape in Kant's mind, he wrote: "I have found it necessary to deny *knowledge* [of supersensible reality] in order to make room for *faith*. The dogmatism of metaphysics [i.e., the belief that there is knowledge of God, freedom, and immortality] is the source of all that unbelief, always very dogmatic, which wars against morality,"[11] the dogmatism of metaphysics being simply an extension of the principles of empirical nature (which principles exclude freedom, God, and immortality) to supersensible reality. But by denying knowledge, he necessarily leaves a "vacant place" at the apex of our pursuit of knowledge.[12] In its negative function, the *Critique of Pure Reason* clips the wings of speculation to keep it from presumptuously trying to fill this (cognitively) empty place with its own unproved Ideas.

We are now ready to examine the Dialectic of the second *Critique*. Assume, for the moment, that morality entails belief in God, freedom, and immortality—why Kant says it does so will be mentioned later. If reason in its practical aspect (as the "organ" of morality) requires that the theoretically empty space in the system of knowledge be filled by assumptions, in default of which the moral experience would be illusory and the moral law invalid; and if these assumptions conflict with no principles that theoretical reason can *establish*; then, says Kant, pure reason in its practical capacity has primacy over pure reason in its speculative (theoretical) capacity. It can therefore legitimately make—indeed, for the sake of morality it must

[11] *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxx.

[12] *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 50, 108.

make—these assumptions. But it makes them not as claims of knowledge but as matters of faith, or as what Kant calls "practical postulates."[13] If we mistook the authority of practical reason and claimed that these postulates gave us any knowledge, we would not only exceed the competence of theoretical reason but would actually threaten the foundations of morals themselves.[14]

The ideas of God, freedom, and immortality are merely possible for speculative reason, not actual. But Kant says that they are necessary for morality. They therefore fit this "empty space" in the system of theoretical knowledge, and acceptance of them is justified by the primacy of practical reason.

We turn now to the final question: how does Kant show that morality requires such postulates? The same answer does not fit all of them. The postulate of freedom differs markedly from the others, and therefore we must briefly discuss each of them separately. Generally speaking, we can say that freedom is required for the establishment of the moral law itself, while the other postulates are required only for the resolution of an antinomy into which practical reason itself falls.

In the Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant de-

[13] *Critique of Practical Reason*, Bk. II, ch. II, sect. 3: "On the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason in its Association with Speculative Reason." This chapter should be carefully compared with the writings of other defenders of the "right" or "will" to believe beyond theoretical evidence, among whom Kant is often counted. But the differences between Kant and, for instance, William James and Kierkegaard are at least as important as the similarities. The chief difference is, in Kantian language, that since they have not shown that pure reason can be practical (which, indeed, they deny), their claim that there is a right to believe beyond the evidence is based on premises having no objective validity, and the resulting belief is therefore irrational and subjective. Kant, on the other hand, claims that the legitimate belief in these postulates is objective and rational, though not cognitive; it is based on demands of pure reason and not on what James called "our passional nature." What is unique in Kant's view is precisely the point that "rational" is not restricted in meaning to "cognitive." See Kant's reply to Thomas Wizenmann, p. 151.

[14] *Critique of Practical Reason*, Bk. II, ch. II, sect. 9: "Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to his Practical Vocation."

velops an antinomy between the concept of freedom and that of natural causation. That is, he gives a proof that the connection of events under the laws of nature is the only necessary connection, and then he gives an equally valid proof that there is a "causality of freedom," i.e., that new causal chains can occur in nature. The first member of such a chain might be an act of will which is not an effect of some earlier natural event. He resolves this antinomy by arguing that both statements are true and that there is no contradiction between them. The first is true, but it concerns events only as phenomena in time. If the empirical events that are the objects of scientific knowledge were events among things in themselves, the principle of natural causation would be absolutely true without restriction, there would be an irresolvable conflict between freedom and causal determinism, and freedom would have to be surrendered. But if the events we observe are only phenomena, i.e., appearances of things in themselves as organized by our own sensibility and understanding, as he believes he has shown, in others parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to be the case, then the causality of freedom might hold of the relation of realities to appearances while mechanical determinism would still hold of the connections among the observed events themselves. The two principles might therefore be true, each in its own context. Thus the *Critique of Pure Reason* shows that freedom is not incompatible with natural necessity and is thus a possible concept. But the first *Critique* does not have the task of showing that it is actual, i.e., that there *is* freedom.[15]

The *Critique of Practical Reason*, however, shows that the moral law, which is given as a "fact of pure reason," reciprocally implies and is implied by the concept of freedom.[16] In as-

[15]This is not quite true in fact, for there are sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that are concerned with moral questions. It would be more accurate to say: a critique restricted to an examination of theoretical and speculative reason would give no grounds for asserting more than the possibility of the Idea of freedom.

[16]*Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 4, 28f., 31.

serting that human beings are morally obligated, Kant is asserting that freedom is real, even though nature, including human nature, can be understood *scientifically* only under the principle of strict causal necessity. Kant's concept of freedom is not equivalent to that according to which free actions have no causes, or to the theory (soft determinism), popular in his time and in ours, that actions are free if they are psychologically determined by one's own settled character and not by momentary stimuli.[17] Kant holds the more daring conception that there is a causality of freedom, or a noumenal and a phenomenal causation; in present-day terminology he holds a theory of *real agency* and compatibilism.[18]

The other two postulates are quite different, and it is generally recognized, even by Kant himself, that the argument for them is less coercive. Pure practical reason has its own antinomy and the exposure and resolution of this antinomy is the negative task of the *Critique of Practical Reason.* It arises in the concept of "the highest good," which is the ideal of moral perfection conjoined with happiness proportionate to the degree of perfection attained. Striving for the highest good is required by the moral law, but the highest good cannot be made real unless the soul is immortal and God exists. The moral law is vain if it commands us to do the impossible; hence either the moral law is invalid, or the highest good is possible. Now since we have the "fact of pure reason"[19] to show that the moral law really does bind us, and since the criticism of speculative reason showed no impossibility in either immortality or God (but only the impossibility of a theoretical proof of them), the assumptions are justified. They are held by rational faith, and not in the form of a claim to metaphysical knowledge of the nature of ourselves and of the being of God.

Hence the *Critique of Practical Reason* performs two func-

[17]Ibid, pp. 97ff.

[18]See Allen W. Wood, "Kant's Compatibilism," in *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 1984).

[19]*Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 31, 43.

tions: affirmatively it defends those concepts without which moral experience would be unintelligible or impossible; negatively it restrains dogmatism and fanaticism that claim on moral grounds to have an insight into ultimate metaphysical realities.

There is a tale, invented by Heinrich Heine, that Kant demolished religious belief, but when he saw how unhappy this made his servant Lampe, the great philosopher showed that he was also a kindly man by writing the *Critique of Practical Reason* to give old Lampe his faith again. This is, of course, a caricature of the doctrine of the primacy of practical reason and its postulates. But if readers will keep this story in mind as they read the Dialectic, so that at the end they can decide whether there is a kernel of truth inside the husk of error in this anecdote, they can rightly feel that they have at least the beginning of real insight into what is perhaps the most important and profound philosophy of morals produced in modern times.