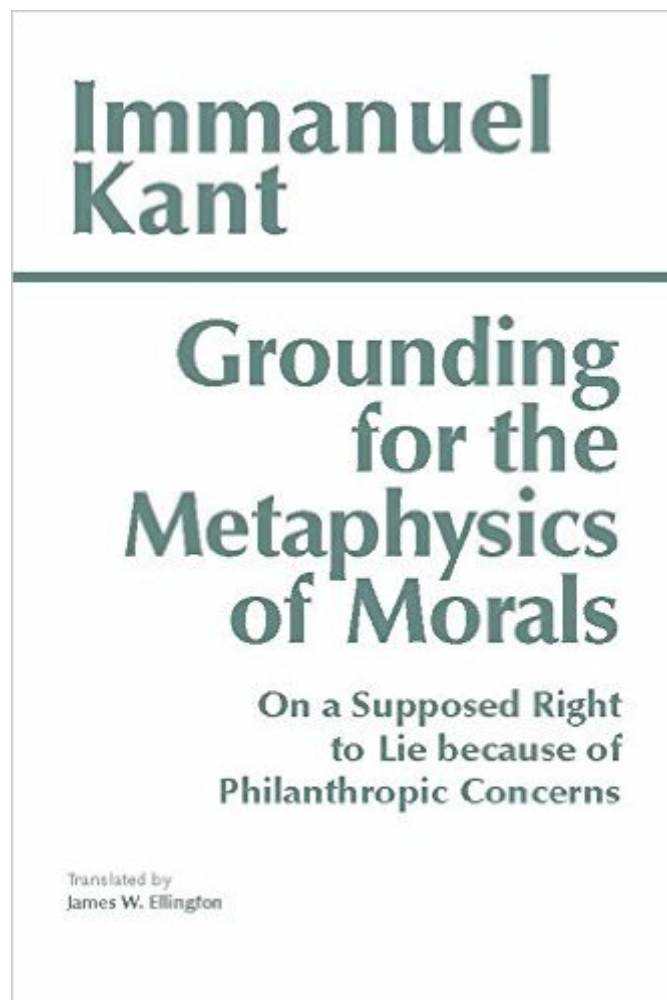


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Grounding For The Metaphysics Of Morals: With On A Supposed Right To Lie Because Of Philanthropic Concerns (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

This expanded edition of James Ellington's preeminent translation includes Ellington's new translation of Kant's essay *Of a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns* in which Kant replies to one of the standard objections to his moral theory as presented in the main text: that it requires us to tell the truth even in the face of disastrous consequences.

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Customer Reviews

Kant's foundational work for his extensive examination of ethics and reason. I picked up a copy in the Harvard book store (no, I was just visiting), perhaps inheriting it from a business or law student who might by now be struggling to ignore whatever he or she once learned of ethics (sorry -- I'm sure that's not the case...). Much as Einstein would one day struggle to establish physical principles independent of observational considerations, Kant undertakes to construct a philosophy of ethics "which does not permit itself to be held back any longer by what is empirical." Kant himself might not have liked the analogy involving special relativity, but clearly science embraces his concept of universal law. Says Kant, "... wisdom -- which consists more in doing and not doing than in knowing -- needs science, not in order to learn from it, but in order that wisdom's precepts may gain acceptance and permanence." Hard to argue with that. Kant sets forward his categorical imperative -- "I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." He proceeds to illustrate and defend the imperative. The writing is extremely dense (by which I mean deliberate and exacting, not ill conceived). He anticipates and answers detracting

arguments, undoubtedly including any that I might offer here. Some of his critics may not recognize that their objections have been dealt with (and Kant seems to anticipate even this). So is Kant right? Yes, or at the least mostly yes. If on some point he may be rebutted, he still wins the war, so to speak. So-called moral relativists will obviously disagree with his central premise, yet Kant remains one of the most influential philosophers of any age.

Kant's *Groundwork* (or *Foundations*) of the *Metaphysics of Morals* is probably the single most influential work of philosophical ethics since Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. While Kant himself considered this a sort of introduction to ethical thinking, it's come to be his most influential and widely read work on ethics. Despite its length--it's less than a hundred pages--this is a work of remarkable depth and intellectual insight. And what makes the *Groundwork* especially interesting is its clear statement of a distinctive Kantian vision of the nature of morality. It's not just that this work includes original and exceptionally insightful philosophizing, but that there's a vision of morality underlying the details, and it's a general conception of morality in which there is something inspiring and awesome. The absolutism, the lack of concern for consequences and for human nature, the emphasis on a sort of radical freedom, the distrust of human feeling, the emphasis on our rationality--all of these are elements of Kant's emphasis on the purity of ethics. (Later works reveal that Kant's thinking about these issues was considerably more complex, but there is something fundamental about the presentation here--even if it doesn't provide a wholly accurate account of all his thinking.) Moral action, he claims, is action in which we act for duty's sake, and acting for duty's sake requires an independence of one's actions from our ordinary concerns, from everyday motives and inclinations, from self-interest, and from nearly all human feeling. And since moral action is free action, understanding moral action in this way requires Kant to carve out a sphere of freedom in which we are the authors of our actions.

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