

Preface

For a long time we have been convinced that the methodology of Kant's transcendental philosophy is that of eliciting the strict requirements of human agential self-understanding and subjecting them to critique. Thus, when Kant says that the categorical imperative is an a priori synthetic proposition, we maintain that he considers acceptance of it to be a strict requirement of human agential self-understanding. However, until relatively recently, we have been puzzled as to what exactly Kant's argument for this contention is. This said, we have never seen good reason not to take him at his word that the argument he presents and relies on for the categorical imperative in *Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR*) is the same argument he presents in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*GMM*) (see *CPrR* AK 5:8). For reasons we will make clear in this volume, we have always found implausible and founded on very shaky grounds the widely accepted view that *CPrR*, by reasoning from the moral law to free will, abandons *GMM*'s claim that the categorical imperative is established by a transcendental deduction. However, we struggled to provide a convincing portrayal of what Kant does in *GMM* and *CPrR* that verifies his concordance claim until we connected his claims about the *sensus communis* to his argument for the categorical imperative while reading *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*CPoJ*) with students on the Research Masters Course in Philosophy in Utrecht in 2012. Once this connection is made, what Kant says about the *sensus communis* provides strong support for the view that the categorical imperative is the maxim of human agential self-understanding (the maxim to render thinking from the viewpoint of the particular agent that one is consistent with thinking of oneself from the viewpoint of an agent *per se*). It also prompts re-evaluation of what Kant is designating when he refers to common human understanding or common human reason in *GMM* and *CPrR*. As soon as we hypothesized that he was, thereby, referring to the *sensus communis* of *CPoJ*, a completely different picture of the commonly accepted structure of the argument of *GMM* emerged. We had assumed along with almost everyone else that, in the first section of *GMM* (*GMM* I), by claiming that the categorical imperative is found in common human understanding, Kant merely claims that

- (1) people very generally think that there is a categorical imperative;
- (2) *GMM* II reveals (by analysis of the concept of a categorical imperative) what those who believe that there is a categorical imperative must accept about it; and
- (3) *GMM* III attempts to show that all human agents must believe that there is a categorical imperative.

But thinking of the common human understanding of *GMM I* as the *sensus communis* of *CPoJ* suggests a different view. When, e.g., Kant says that the categorical imperative is found entirely a priori in common human understanding (*GMM AK 4:406*), he means that it is found in exercising the a priori powers of mind of the *sensus communis* (which he says are powers all who possess humanity in their persons must be thought to have [*CPoJ AK 5:293–294*]). And this gives rise to the thought that he thinks that the categorical imperative is given to human agents as something they must accept by understanding the concept of the *sensus communis* viewed as the concept of human agential self-understanding; indeed, that the categorical imperative is the imperative to act in accord with the strict requirements of agential self-understanding. On this basis, because he maintains that understanding the concept of a categorical imperative requires human agents to think that they are governed both by the universal law of mechanism and that they have free will (which they cannot be in the same aspect), the task for *GMM III* is merely to show that such a conception of what it is to be a human agent is coherent. We then found that thinking about the structure of *GMM* in this way makes sense of some other things that Kant says in *GMM* and *CPrR* that are otherwise very puzzling. Chief amongst these are two things. The first is why Kant thinks that he can establish as undeniable the actual, as against the merely possible, existence of the categorical imperative simply by showing that it is rationally possible (coherent) to consider that one has free will. The second is how he can ground the categorical imperative in pure practical reason (the law of which is the moral law *as such*) by reasoning that is not viciously circular, given that he views the categorical imperative as the moral law as such *in its application to finite heteronomously affected agents*. Above all, thinking about the structure of *GMM* in this way enables us to see that the argument for the categorical imperative in *CPrR* has, as Kant claims, the same logical structure as the argument in *GMM*.

We do not claim that our interpretation of Kant's argument is entirely novel. Indeed, there are many of its distinctive elements in writings, most notably, of Lewis White Beck, Pauline Kleingeld, Onora O'Neill, Klaus Steigleder, Kenneth Westphal, and Michael Wolff. What we think we achieve in this volume is to put these elements together in a more complete and consistent way than other commentators have done by the way in which we link Kant's claims about the common human understanding to his claims about the *sensus communis* of *CPoJ* and the degree of importance we attach to understanding his argument for the categorical imperative in relation to the role it plays in his moral argument for the existence of God.

Numerous colleagues and friends have commented on aspects of this book in earlier drafts and presentations in colloquia and conferences. We owe particular

thanks to Joel Anderson, Patrick Capps, Rutger Claassen, Dascha Düring, Liesbeth Feikema, Joshua Jowitt, Pauline Kleingeld, Cheryl Lancaster, William Lucy, Sem de Maagt, Tim Meijers, Shaun D. Pattinson, Klaus Steigleder, Stuart Toddington, Kenneth Westphal, and Paul Ziche. Henk van Gils helped us in getting an overview over the literature. We have to thank Charlie Blunden, Bram Galenkamp, and Sjaroes Salimian for preparing the index and Nikè van Wijck for proofreading the files. A particular thanks we owe to Jan van Ophuijsen for his enormous work in carefully correcting the files.

Deryck Beyleveld
Marcus Düwell
November 2019

