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*Abstract*

**“Enlightenment, Critique and Universalism: Kant’s Abiding Insights”**

Universalist moral principles face a wide array of contemporary objections. Before wading into these troubled waters, let me first say that, in contrast to most Anglophone philosophers of the Twentieth Century (C.E.), I use the term ‘moral philosophy’ to designate the genus of practical philosophy, which has two proper, coordinate species: ethics and *ius* or theory of justice. Universalist moral theories have been criticised for rationalising European imperialism, for neglecting the positive character of community and for obscuring the values of friendship. Though various universalist theories may exhibit such faults, I am concerned that a much more subtle and important form of universalist moral theory has been unwittingly shunted aside, an approach obscured by needless divisions within philosophy amongst those who compartmentalise philosophical issues, periods and methodological loyalties. Here I sketch the rudiments of this view to highlight one of its virtues: it identifies and justifies some basic, core moral principles governing our actions and interactions, whilst allowing for many various ways of instantiating or instituting these principles in society and in our behaviour.

The view in question is basically Kant’s version of what I call ‘Natural Law Constructivism’. This designation may sound oxymoronic: most natural law theories require moral realism, whereas most constructivist moral theories reject moral realism. There is, however, an important, distinctive form of moral constructivism which identifies and justifies very basic moral norms, whilst neither invoking nor denying moral realism, by showing that certain moral norms are required for finite rational agents like us to live and to act at all on our globe. The historical development of Natural Law Constructivism coincides with its systematic development: Natural Law Constructivism was inaugurated by Hume, greatly improved by Rousseau, refined by Kant, augmented still further by Hegel – and then obscured by various demands for simplicity and factional loyalty. Especially in moral philosophy we must follow Einstein rather than Quine: Everything should be made as simple as possible, though no simpler.