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PREFACE

Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, written in German and published in 1785, is widely regarded as one of the most influential works in the history of moral philosophy. Indeed, any student of ethics will soon encounter a translation of the book, although trying to read it is likely to cause bewilderment. What, one may ask, is Kant trying to say?

Certain terms appear frequently in the text: the good will, happiness, duty, hypothetical and categorical imperatives, universal law, ends in themselves, and autonomy. But what do these concepts mean?

If a teacher cannot provide clear answers, students are likely to become frustrated, even dispirited. I even knew of a case in which wrestling unsuccessfully with Kant led a student to give up philosophy altogether.

How can effective instructors explain the central Kantian ideas? This book provides the answers. Here seven highly regarded teachers and scholars of Kant's ethics offer remarkably clear explanations of the most important concepts in the *Groundwork*.

To provide such clarity requires not only philosophical understanding but also pedagogical skill. After all, knowing a subject and knowing how to teach it effectively are quite different. And if the students are beginners, finding ways to lead them to grasp complex subject matter while arousing appreciation for it is never easy. Yet as philosopher Tamar Szabó Gendler, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science at Yale University, once remarked to me, any subject can be clearly explained if you know how. These seven professors have met this challenge in their

classrooms and here offer accounts of key ideas that have helped their students understand the essence of Kant's powerful vision.

I am most grateful to these leading scholars for their participation. I also thank Mary Ann McHugh for her expert polishing of all the essays and the staff at Hackett Publishing Company for the care they always take in producing their books. All citations are from James Ellington's translation titled *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett).

I began working with William H. Y. Hackett in the mid-1970s, soon after he founded the company that bears his name, and I believe he would have been greatly pleased with the high level of publishing his successors have maintained. I dedicate this book to his memory and that of his dear wife and editorial partner, Frances Hackett.