One of the most heartening philosophical developments of the last twenty years is the emergence of Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics must be distinguished from Kant’s ethics. Kant’s ethics is the metaphysically robust and sometimes rigoristic moral philosophy found in Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) and *Lectures on Ethics*. Kantian ethics, by contrast, is the metaphysically cautious but user-friendly adaptation and extension of some central parts of Kant’s ethics, mainly by John Rawls and his former students—especially Thomas E. Hill, Christine Korsgaard and Onora O’Neill.

Hill’s latest book, *Human Welfare and Moral Worth*, continues to work out the Kantian ethicist project pursued in his earlier books *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (1991), *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Moral Theory* (1992) and *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice* (2000). *Human Welfare and Moral Worth* is a collection of twelve essays originally produced for various conferences, journals and edited collections. Despite their varied provenance, however, the essays centrally and coherently focus on some basic Kantian methodological and substantive themes (part I), and then on how Kantian ethics applies to fundamental issues of self-interest and regard for others (part II) and the moral assessment of ourselves and others (part III). The Introduction provides a careful summary of each of the essays, and ties the various topics together as tightly as possible.

Hill is a brilliantly clear expositor of Kant’s ethics, and also an original contributor to the Kantian ethics movement. But what, more precisely, is Kantian ethics as opposed to other normative ethical theories? What sets it apart from other theories is twofold: first, a special normative method, and second, a special set of substantive theoretical commitments.

The special normative method is ‘Kantian moral constructivism’. Kantian moral constructivism emphasizes a procedural construal of the categorical imperative, and also the rational activity of generating specific moral principles. But there are two distinct versions. In its specifically Rawlsian version—which Hill accepts (pp. 74, 369)—it says that all moral principles including the categorical imperative are the ‘universal principles all persons “could” or “would” endorse if they were thinking rationally and in a position specified as appropriate’ (p. 62), where this is an idealized rational choice situation analogous to the ‘original position’ scenario developed by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*. By contrast, according to the alternative version
developed by O’Neill (see particularly her *Constructions of Reason* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], ch. 11), Kantian moral constructivism says (1) that the categorical imperative in its various formulations is an *a priori* procedural meta-principle like the principle of non-contradiction in logic, and (2) that all the more specific, concrete, lower-order moral principles are neither innate contents of the mind, nor platonically real ‘eternal’ moral codes, nor empirical facts, but instead are generated *a priori* as the outcome of applying the categorical imperative in actual social contexts to real human desires, intentions, volitions, actions and values. One philosophical advantage of construing Kantian moral constructivism in O’Neill’s way is that it then closely resembles the general shape of Kant’s transcendental theory of human cognition, with its appeal to innate *a priori* faculties and their formal procedural rules of mental processing applied in actual spatiotemporal contexts to causal-informational inputs given through the senses.

In essay 12, Hill spells out what he takes to be the main substantive theoretical commitments of Kantian ethics:

1. ‘Kantian ethics is primarily *addressed to concerns we have as rational moral agents*, as we deliberate conscientiously about what we ought to do’.
2. ‘Moral “oughts” purport to express categorical imperatives or judgments based on these... [and] these express *rational constraints on choice* that are not grounded in either the need to take necessary means to one’s particular contingent ends or one’s general desire for happiness’.
3. ‘Categorical imperatives and the moral judgments derived from them express rational prescriptions in a vocabulary of constraint (“must”, “bound”, “obligatory”, “duty”, “Do it!”) that reflects how recognizing a rational moral requirement is experienced by those (“imperfect wills”) who know that they can satisfy the requirement but also know that they can and might violate the requirement and choose instead to pursue some conflicting desire-based end’.
4. ‘Moral “oughts” express a deep, self-identifying, and inescapable disposition of moral agents, who have reason and autonomy of will, to acknowledge certain considerations as overridingly authoritative and so internally binding’.
5. ‘It is a fundamental moral principle that humanity in each person is to be regarded as an end in itself’.
6. ‘We can think of the policies and acts that would be acceptable for everyone, in the relevant sense, as just those policies and acts that would conform to the “universal laws” that moral legislators would accept if trying to work out a reasonable system of moral principles under certain ideal conditions (“the kingdom/realm of ends”)’.
7. ‘These general principles are supposed to establish a strong presumption against willful deception and manipulation’.
8. ‘When thinking from a practical moral perspective rather than an empirical scientific perspective, we conceive typical human actions as done intentionally—for reasons—by agents presumed capable of choosing to act differently’.
9. ‘In human beings, practical judgments and feelings are not usually separable’.

(pp. 367-70, numbering slightly altered)

Within this general framework, in *Human Welfare and Moral Worth*, Hill particularly emphasizes and defends the need for an *a priori* method in moral philosophy,