

Kant's Lectures on Ethics and Baumgarten's Moral Philosophy

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1. "A good analyst"

The notes from Kant's lectures in the various philosophical disciplines cannot be considered self-standing texts, not only because what we are reading was not authored by Kant himself but jotted down by his students, and later sometimes copied and compiled in different ways, but also because Kant's remarks in the lectures are not meant as original treatments of the subject, but as comments on a handbook. A careful comparison with the textbooks is therefore required for a full understanding of the lectures.

For his entire career Kant taught moral philosophy following Baumgarten's *Initia philosophiae practicae primae* (*Elements of Practical First Philosophy*, 1760; hereafter *Initia*) and *Ethica philosophica* (*Philosophical Ethics*, 1740; hereafter *Ethica*).¹ They provide the outline for Kant's moral philosophy lectures.² In the first main part of his classes, he comments on the *Initia*, that present the foundational issues of practical philosophy, then passes on to the *Ethica*, discussing quite in detail most aspects of the doctrine of ethical duties. Thereby, Kant refers to the main division of practical philosophy characteristic of the Wolffian tradition, that is, the distinction between universal practical philosophy and ethics proper: the first one devoted to a preliminary foundational clarification of the general concepts of moral value of actions, of law and obligation, of imputation and conscience, the second one presenting an extended doctrine of ethical duties.³ When Kant refers to universal practical philosophy, in

¹ The indication that Kant would have first taught on Friedrich Christian Baumeister's *Elementa philosophiae* is probably a mistake: cf. Stark 1993: 327, n. 1. Cf. Schwaiger 1999: 34 ff. (Note that the publication dates of the *Initia* in Schneewind 1997: xxi are incorrect).

² See, for instance, the helpful concordance of the Kaehler notes with *Initia* and *Ethica* in Werner Stark's edition, and the comparison of the Vigilantius notes with the *Initia* in Ludwig 1988: 54-56.

³ On the idea of 'universal practical philosophy' see Schwaiger 2005. On the significance of the universal practical philosophy for the development of Kant's project of a metaphysics of morals see Schwaiger 2001 and Bacin 2006.

fact, he mostly has also Baumgarten in mind.⁴ Like in the other disciplines, the only parts of the lecture notes that do not refer to Baumgarten's text are the introductory sections, in which Kant usually gives a general explanation of the difference between theoretical and practical philosophy and what is the subject matter of practical philosophy, along with a summary of the main views of the 'ancients' on the highest good — all themes having no correspondence in the very brief "Prolegomena" of the *Initia*.⁵ Interestingly, Kant's introductions become longer and longer with the years, coming to include a sort of anticipation of the main tenets of his own account (compare, for instance, the Powalski notes with Kaehler or Vigilantius).⁶

Since Kant and his colleagues were required by the government to follow a textbook in their teaching, however, this could raise the suspicion that Baumgarten's works were for Kant little more than a teaching prop, providing only a list of the topics to be presented to the students.⁷ Initially, Kant announced that he would lecture on them only "for the time being" (2:311). Even that eventually he did never substitute them could suggest that their contents were not important enough to bother looking for better textbooks. This seems quite unlikely, though, once we consider some facts. First, Kant drew on Baumgarten's works not only in moral philosophy, but also in his metaphysics classes, and used a work of Baumgarten's student Georg Friedrich Meier for the logic lectures.⁸ If Kant would simply have wanted to teach on a handbook of generic Wolffian inspiration, he could have followed the choice of older philosophy teachers in Königsberg, like the *ordinarius* for practical philosophy Carl Andreas Christiani, who used the (second volume of the) important *Institutiones philosophiae Wolffianae* by Ludwig Philipp Thümmig, recommended by Wolff

⁴ Note that in G 4:391 he speaks of "the authors" of universal practical philosophy, in the plural.

⁵ In this respect, Kant's introductions to his lectures resemble more the introductory sections of the *Allgemeine praktische Weltweisheit* of Baumgarten's student Georg Friedrich Meier: cfr. Meier 1764, §§ 1-23.

⁶ Note, on the other hand, that the comparison of the lecture notes with the textbooks allows to assess the extension of occasional *lacunae* in the notes. This is the case, for instance, with the abrupt beginning of the Herder notes, lacking the first pages. A look at the *Initia* shows that, in spite of the strong presence of sentimentalist vocabulary and of numerous references to Hutcheson, Kant is commenting here on the chapter of obligation passing on to the section on constraint in 27:6. Thus, the notes lack the introductory section and Kant's first remarks on obligation.

⁷ This has been suggested recently by Kuehn 2011: 17.

⁸ Furthermore, Kant did not use in his natural law classes a textbook of either Baumgarten or Meier instead of Achenwall's *Ius naturae* arguably because Baumgarten's *Ius naturae* (1763) was published posthumous and unfinished, and because Meier's *Auszug aus dem Rechte der Natur* came out only in 1769. On Baumgarten's *Ius naturae* see Scattola 2008.

himself.⁹ Baumgarten's books appear to have been a personal choice of Kant's, since other of his colleagues taught moral philosophy on different handbooks, while the only other lecturing on Baumgarten in those years appears to have been Kant's former student and *protégé* Christian Jacob Kraus.¹⁰ Secondly, Kant clearly considered Baumgarten's some of the best philosophical works available at that time. He regarded the *Metaphysica* as "this most useful and thorough of all the handbooks of its type" (1:503), and believed the *Initia* to be "the richest in content, and perhaps his [Baumgarten's] best book" (H 27:16). These works had been then more or less recently published: if the *Ethica* came out in 1740, and was already a work of established reputation as Kant began to teach on it, the *Initia*, published in 1760, were then new in print. As Kant's teaching career began, Baumgarten's works could thus justifiably be considered as state-of-the-art. (Note also that Baumgarten was only ten years older than Kant, and 35 years younger than Wolff.)¹¹ Thirdly, still at the end of his career Kant refers only to Baumgarten's works to vindicate his attitude on such a delicate matter as his respect for Christian religion and the Bible in his teaching.¹² Still in 1796, thus, Kant believed that the choice of his textbooks expressed his philosophical stance.

Kant must thus have had good reasons to choose these works for his classes. The full significance of his use of them could not have been recognized, though, until Baumgarten was considered only another Wolffian philosopher. One mistaken assumption grounding this misconception was that the philosophers working along the lines of Wolff's system built one homogeneous school, without philosophically significant differences from the views of the master. A second assumption is that Baumgarten's originality was limited to the new philosophical discipline of 'aesthetics'. That Baumgarten could be granted with such an innovation has curiously not suggested that an unitarian picture of the Wolffians was probably too simple. A careful study of the *Initia* and the *Ethica* shows, however, that Baumgarten's views exhibit significant differences from the traditional Wolffian, and that in

⁹ Cf. Oberhausen/Pozzo 1999: 302, 326, 360, 388. On the Philosophical Faculty at Königsberg in Kant's times see Kuehn 2001 (on Christiani: 74).

¹⁰ Cf. Oberhausen/Pozzo 1999: 473. Others taught moral philosophy on Feder's *Lehrbuch der praktischen Philosophie* (1770), especially after the prohibition, in 1775, of using Crusius' works in the lectures (cf. Kuehn 2001: 214 f.), that earlier were also employed.

¹¹ For biographical information on Baumgarten see Gawlick/Kreimendahl 2011: ix-xxx.

¹² See *Conflict of the Faculties*, AA 7:7: "As a teacher of youth – that is, I take it, in my academic lectures – I never have and never could have mixed any evaluation of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity into my lectures. The texts of Baumgarten, which are the basis of my lectures and the only thing that could be at all relevant to such a discourse, are sufficient to prove this. For, being purely philosophical, these texts do not and cannot contain a single heading referring to the Bible or to Christianity" (translation slightly modified). Compare with *Ethica, auditori benevolo*, AA 27:738.1-4: "Non equidem is sum, qui nesciat, de diuinis etiam vera dicere tam esse periculosum, vt nec defuerint publicis scriptis asseuerantes, philosophum illico se deridendum praebere, quam primum sacra tangat, et religionis exercendae mentionem iniiciat".

moral philosophy he was as original as in metaphysics and in other parts of philosophy.¹³ In the following, I shall point out some of these differences.

Kant's choice of using Baumgarten's works in his lectures must thus have grounded on an appreciation of their worth and their originality within the Wolffian party, as his preference for Baumgarten and Meier over other Wolffians suggests. Kant wanted to teach on some of the most advanced works trying to develop the Leibnitian-Wolffian approach in an original way. However, as it will soon appear, Kant's attention is almost always combined with criticism. If he had good reason to follow Baumgarten, his remarks in the lectures do not often express agreement with him.¹⁴ Ultimately he does not share the basic tenets of his position. Kant's critical remarks against Baumgarten's statements during the lectures must indeed have been numerous, as appears from the notes.¹⁵ Indeed, many remarks do not even sound like objections to the reader, because they contrast with the textbook, but Kant (or the student taking notes) does not make the contrast explicit. For instance, a comment like: "External religion is a contradiction. All religion is within" (Kaehler 154, C 27:330; cf. Kahler 121, C 27:308) does not appear directed against Baumgarten until we see that it addresses precisely his definition of external religion (cf. *Ethica*, § 115).¹⁶

In one of his notes in his copy of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* Kant writes: "the man was sharp-sighted (in little things) but not far-sighted (in big ones)"; he is "a good analyst, but not an architectonical philosopher", "a Cyclops among metaphysicians, who was missing one eye, namely critique" (AA 18:81 f.).¹⁷ The same remark can express Kant's appreciation of Baumgarten's moral philosophy as well. Also the *Initia* and the *Ethica* are the work of a good analyst, providing an helpful inventory of concepts, but missing their real link with the activity of reason. His account require thus to be profoundly revised. Kant's attempt at these revision is one core aspect in the development of his ethical thought.

¹³ The merit of pointing out the self-standing philosophical profile of Baumgarten belongs most prominently to Clemens Schwaiger, who has been highlighting the many original aspects of his thought, and especially of his practical philosophy, in numerous important publications, most of which are collected in Schwaiger 2011; cf. also Schwaiger 1999: 49 ff. Yet, the significance of Baumgarten's moral philosophy apparently still needs to be stressed, since the entries on Baumgarten in two good recent reference works like the *Dictionary of Eighteenth Century German Philosophers* and the *Continuum Companion to Kant*, oddly enough, do not even mention his practical philosophy, but only his aesthetic and metaphysics.

¹⁴ Schwaiger appropriately defines Kant's relationship with Baumgarten a "negative dependence" (Schwaiger 2011: 126).

¹⁵ See, for instance, V 27:625: "From § 201 on, Baumgarten treats of the *officia erga animam*. Professor Kant censures his plan for the following reasons".

¹⁶ I mention a further example of implicit criticism in § 3.

¹⁷ On Kant's contrast between 'cyclopes' and architectonical philosopher(s) see Ferrarin 2013.

Because Kant closely follows Baumgarten, virtually every topic touched in the lectures could, and should, be traced back to the *Initia* and the *Ethica*. Moreover, in virtue of Kant's long and intensive use of them, the influence of Baumgarten's terminology on Kant's vocabulary is pervasive. A full account of the relationship between Kant's lectures and Baumgarten, thus, would require a thorough commentary, that should cover also Kant's handwritten notes on his copy of the *Initia*.¹⁸ Since this is obviously not possible here, in the following I shall focus rather briefly on a few especially important points, to show how Kant understands, and draws on, Baumgarten's moral philosophy.

2. Obligation as key concept

If the textbooks must not be regarded as merely providing a list of topics to be discussed in class, the order of the topics does matter, as it reflects some substantial thesis. This is the case with the systematic outline of Baumgarten's moral philosophy, that already shows that he cannot be taken to be simply another one of Wolff's many disciples. The *Initia* stand out because of the emphasis on obligation, whose thorough examination builds the beginning of the presentation. Thereby Baumgarten departs from Wolff's pattern, whose treatment of universal practical philosophy begins, in the first, German version, with a chapter on the "fundamental rule of actions" (cf. Wolff 1720, §§ 1-71). Before Baumgarten, Thümmig had already given priority to obligation over law (cf. Thümmig 1726, §§ 18-22), but did not provide a treatment of it comparable with Baumgarten's, whose *Initia* devote to the topic 59 dense sections. Moreover, Baumgarten's examination includes, as a second step, an analysis of the concept of 'constraint' (*coactio*, corresponding to *Zwang* in Kant's German), conspicuously absent both from Wolff's and Thümmig's expositions. Most important, only in Baumgarten the concept of obligation provides the overarching idea embracing the whole practical philosophy. The *Initia* not only open with a chapter on obligation, but all the topics of the second and last chapter are considered as *obligantia*, that is, as elements concurring to obligation. Accordingly, practical philosophy is defined "scientia obligationum hominis sine fide cognoscendarum" (*Initia*, § 1), echoing the definition of philosophy in general as "scientia qualitatum rebus sine fide cognoscendarum" (cf. Baumgarten 1761, § 61; Baumgarten 1770, § 21), and the *Ethica* is analogously presented as "scientia obligationum hominis internarum in statu naturali" (*Ethica*, § 1).¹⁹ In regarding obligation as "the fundamental concept" (PS 2:298, cf. 2:300) of practical philosophy, Kant certainly draws also on Baumgarten, who has not only the merit of giving the concept priority, but also of

¹⁸ See AA 19:5-317. Kant's copy of the *Ethica*, that must have contained numerous notes as well, went missing.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, the reconstruction of the Wolffian views on obligation in Hartung 1998: 148 ff. does not take Baumgarten into account.

showing the unity of the entire practical philosophy as a theory of obligation. Thereby Baumgarten's views and vocabulary took a quasi-judicial overtone, following Heinrich Koehler's *Juris naturalis Exercitationes*.²⁰ If Kant's conception of morality has sometimes been regarded as too close to law, it is also because of his relying on Baumgarten's vocabulary.

Baumgarten's originality within the Wolffian camp stands out even more clearly if we consider that, focusing on obligation, he does not mention two concepts that in Wolff's and in other Wolffians had pride of place, namely happiness and virtue.²¹ In both respects, his account seems thereby to take a turn that Kant must have appreciated.²² According to the outline put forward in the *Philosophia generalis*, Baumgarten did believe that the universal practical philosophy should eventually include, after a theory of laws (*nomologia*), also a theory of virtue (*aretologia*) and a theory of happiness (*eudemonologia*), along with an "universal knowledge of man" (*anthropognosia universalis*).²³ No trace of such a plan was to be found in the published works on moral philosophy, though, where the concept of obligation was clearly predominant. While both Wolff and earlier Wolffians like Thümmig und Gottsched gave virtue some relevance, considering it "readiness [*Fertigkeit*] to direct one's actions according to the law of nature",²⁴ the concept simply does not play a role in the *Initia*. The *Ethica* mentions it immediately in § 1, giving (only in 1763 edition) 'doctrine of virtue' as German equivalent for 'ethics', but does not deal with virtues in any depth in the following.²⁵ Baumgarten did probably share Wolff's basic idea, but, in absence of explicit formulations, what remains is an equation of ethics and doctrine of virtue. The title of the second part of the *Metaphysics of Morals* goes back to this remarks of Baumgarten's,²⁶ and to the idea that virtue is the internal disposition of agents complying with moral demands (cf. P 27:162 f., V 27:631). So understood, a doctrine of virtue clearly stands in no opposition with a doctrine of duties.²⁷ Kant elaborates on this view when he observes that 'virtue' stands primarily for the moral dimension open to finite agents, who cannot aspire to sanctity, since

²⁰ On that see Schwaiger 2011: 116 ff., 130, and Aichele 2005.

²¹ Both are dealt with in the first chapter of the *German Ethics*: Wolff 1720, §§ 52 ff. and § 68 ff.

²² Ameriks 2012: 64 suggests that these points (priority of obligation, imperativism, non-eudaimonism) would be enough to understand why Kant chose Baumgarten's works for his classes.

²³ Baumgarten 1770, § 149: 69. Cf. Schwaiger 2011: 131 f.

²⁴ Wolff 1720, § 64.

²⁵ See the quick remarks in *Ethica*, §§ 317 and 370.

²⁶ Pace Merle 1998, according to whom the term '*Tugendlehre*' was introduced by Kant.

²⁷ See also the preface to the first edition of the *Ethica* (*Auditori benevolo*), in AA 27:737.24 f.: "triplex officiorum genus, cum suis quodlibet virtutibus".

‘virtue’ is the moral dimension of agents constitutively put under obligation and constraint, who have to act in spite of opposite impulses.²⁸

The irrelevance of happiness in Baumgarten’s exposition represents an even more conspicuous departure from the Wolffian pattern.²⁹ While Wolff regarded happiness as the primary goal of practical philosophy (“*finis ethicae est felicitas hominis*”),³⁰ Baumgarten hardly mentions it in the *Initia*,³¹ and only briefly in the *Ethica* (cf. §§ 10, 13). Unlike Wolff and other Wolffians, he carefully avoids confusing perfection with happiness, probably also to overcome Joachim Lange’s accusation of hedonism against Wolff.³² Baumgarten not only focuses on perfection at the expenses of happiness, but also tries to achieve a more precise understanding of what perfection as normative concept should mean. He differentiates thus between perfection as a means and perfection as an end (cf. *Initia*, § 43; *Ethica*, § 10). Kant clearly appreciates Baumgarten’s rectification of Wolffian perfectionism, especially the distinction between perfection and happiness.³³ Thus, if Kant rejects “a perfection which is in turn identical with human happiness”,³⁴ this appears to be something that he borrows from Baumgarten’s version of perfectionism. It is not Kant, but Baumgarten who first untied the link between perfection and happiness that lies at the core of “the perfectionist tradition from Aristotle to the Wolffians”.³⁵

Baumgarten’s careful re-statement of perfectionism thereby suggested the possibility of developing a non-eudaimonist moral philosophy. In fact, Kant does never discuss Lange’s much discussed point as a possible objection to this view, arguably because through Baumgarten he has access to a more advanced state of the debate, that does not require to discuss again the classical eudaimonist reading of perfectionism. The issue at stake is now whether the concept of perfection might be made clear enough through some distinction like Baumgarten’s, and more generally, whether the concept of perfection can provide an effective criterion of moral choice at all, and for all of the ethical obligations. Kant is willing

²⁸ Cf. e.g. H 27:13, P 27:165 and Refl. 6993, 19:222.

²⁹ Cf. Schwaiger 2011: 152.

³⁰ Wolff 1750, § 8; cf. Wolff 1720, § 45.

³¹ Baumgarten only differentiates in *Initia*, § 98 between internal and external happiness”. On Baumgarten’s view on happiness see Schwaiger 2011: 106 ff. and 152.

³² Cf. Schwaiger 2011: 163 ff.

³³ See e.g. Refl. 6487, 19:24, where Kant annotates to “*quaere perfectionem*” (*Initia*, § 43): “not merely *felicitas*”.

³⁴ Guyer 2011: 205.

³⁵ Guyer 2011: 213.

to accept '*perfice te*' as an ethical principle, provided that the meaning of moral perfection is made clear, since Baumgarten, like every Wolffian, had neglected to do that properly.³⁶ However, if the general separation between perfection and happiness was Baumgarten's achievement, Kant's own development brings him to a further restriction of the moral significance of perfection. He reaches quite early the conviction that, if made less vague, the concept of perfection can apply only to the duties to ourselves. A few notes to § 43 of the *Initia*, where Baumgarten states the principle "*quaere perfectionem*", clearly reflect the direction of Kant's reflection on Baumgarten's distinctions: first, Kant remarks: "Seek perfection (*bonitas*), not agreeableness [*annehmlichkeit*]", then "the perfection of the man and the perfection of the condition are to be distinguished", but the outcome is: "One cannot say that the supreme moral rule has regard to the *perfection* of others" (19:125). At the same time, Kant remarks that the obligations to others refer to their happiness.³⁷ The co-ordination of the two objective ends stated later in the *Metaphysics of Morals* can thus also be tracked back to Kant's elaboration on Baumgarten's greater care in separating perfection and happiness and in defining the proper meaning of both.

However, the necessity of a more precise idea of perfection following Baumgarten's example ultimately shows that, if we want to cover through it the entire field of morality, that concept remains nonetheless vague and is therefore not tenable as a general principle.³⁸ Analogously, the other two main commands that, according to Baumgarten should express the fundamental moral obligation are as much as inadequate, in Kant's eyes. Both 'do good' (*fac bonum*) and 'live according to nature' (*vive secundum natura*) cannot serve as moral principles. The mere fact that Baumgarten states more than one principle exhibits a severe weakness of his account, for Kant, since "where there are already many principles in ethics, there is certainly none, for there can be only one true principle" (C 27:266, Kahler 44). Moreover, they are practically unhelpful, as they are mere tautologies expressing empty commands that do not determine *what* is to do.³⁹ Thus, they do not even fulfill the conditions for obligation explained by Baumgarten himself, since tautological principles cannot provide

³⁶ Cf. H 27:16.27f., Kaehler 43. See e.g. 19:298: "The proposition 'make yourself perfect' can be seen as the principle of ethics if it is taken to say simply [*wenn er so viel sagen soll als*]: 'be good, make yourself worthy of happiness, be a good man, not a merely happy one'."

³⁷ Cf. Kaehler 77, C 27:282 and M I 27:1432: "In ethics the laws have a relation to the happiness of others [...]. *Ethice obligans respectu aliorum est felicitas aliorum, juridice obligans respectu aliorum est arbitrium aliorum.*" Note that, as the comparison with Mrongovius and Kaehler shows, Collins' notes (and the English translation accordingly) are deceptively incomplete and miss precisely Kant's point, conflicting with the Latin sentence.

³⁸ See e.g. the distinction between perfection and moral goodness in Kaehler 43, C 27:265 f.

³⁹ Cf. P 27:129 f., Kaehler 41 ff., C 27:264, V 27:517. Against tautological moral principles in general cf. e.g. *Philosophische Enzyklopädie*, AA 29:8.32–38.

motives. They merely to express the imperatival modality of obligation.⁴⁰

The connection of an action with motives was indeed the point of Wolff's and Baumgarten's account of obligation. Elaborating on Wolff's view, Baumgarten describes obligation as connecting a possible action with *causae impulsivae potiores*, with overriding impulsive causes (cf. *Initia*, §§ 12-16).⁴¹ Here, however, Kant is closer to Wolff's formulation. As Kant rephrases it, obligation "is, as it were, the result of the motives" (P 27:114, cf. 27:126). He thereby rejects Baumgarten's inclusion of sensible stimuli as acceptable grounds of obligation. Quite to the contrary, he refers to motives to exclude a determination to act on unreflected grounds, so that the distinction between acting from stimuli and acting on motives becomes a fundamental difference in his view of action (cf. P 27:111, 27:122 f.). The Wolffian-Baumgartenian take on obligation highlights nonetheless the crucial link with an internal determination of the agent's will, in contrast with command-based accounts. Accordingly, one of the most unfortunate weaknesses of universal practical philosophy is the lack of a real clarification of the motives and their difference. This ambivalent appreciation of Baumgarten's view on obligation explains why, if Baumgarten helped Kant to recognize it as "the fundamental concept", Kant at the same time considers it "yet [so little] known" (PS 2:298, cf. 2:300).⁴²

3. The foundation of morality

Except for the introductory sections, Kant's lectures follows Baumgarten's order, so that every part of the lecture notes roughly corresponds to a few sections of the handbooks. This appears not to be the case, though, with a crucial section, present, in longer or shorter form, in all lectures. Between some comment on prohibitive and permissive laws referring to *Initia*, § 68 and brief remarks on the difference between letter and spirit of the law regarding § 74 (or, sometimes, on universal and particular laws in §§ 72-73), we encounter a (usually rather conspicuous) section where Kant does not seem to present Baumgarten's view in any way. Instead of remarks on one or another definition, we find here, often under the heading "Of the supreme principle of morality", a critique of inadequate views on the foundation of

⁴⁰ Note that Kant finds in Baumgarten also the concept of 'imperative': cf. *Initia*, § 39. Cf. Schwaiger 1999: 165 ff.

⁴¹ Cf. Schwaiger 2011: 120. Baumgarten's caveat against a 'chimerical ethics' (on Kant's interest for it, see Thorndike 2008 and Dyck 2012) is a particular case of his general insistence on the necessity of linking obligations with subjectively possible motivation (cf. *Initia*, § 27).

⁴² Cf. Schwaiger 1999: 39 f., 43 ff.

morality that becomes a sort of description *per oppositionem* of the requisites of its principle.⁴³ These remarks, thus, appear to be, along with the introductory sections, the main genuine addition to Baumgarten in the lectures.⁴⁴

In spite of appearances, however, also those pages refer to Baumgarten. Since here Kant reaches the most significant point of disagreement with him, he does not limit himself to pointing out the weaknesses of his definitions, but addresses the general issue of the origin of moral laws (cf. e.g. the formulation in P 27:135.21).⁴⁵ In §§ 69-71 of the *Initia*, Baumgarten maintains that the natural law grounding moral obligations is, at the same time, a divine law.⁴⁶ For him, there is simply no difference between the natural law and God's will about the free determinations of the human will: "A lege naturali ad voluntatem dei circa liberas hominum determinationes, et a voluntate dei circa liberas hominum determinationes ad legem naturalem valet consequentia" (*Initia*, § 69). In this important respect, Baumgarten's view differs from the classical version of moral rationalism, in holding that God's will, and not simply his reason, is to be considered as the ultimate ground of the moral laws.

Baumgarten does not accept the "impossible hypothesis" of God's non-existence put forward by Grotius (and by Gregory of Rimini before him), even though it had been endorsed also by Leibniz and Wolff: "*Neque tamen hoc posito admittitur: 1) ius naturae late dictum s. philosophia practica esset, existeretve, etiam si non daretur deus, 2) prorsus est independens a deo, 3) ex voluntate dei nulla ratione omnino derivari potest, 4) aequae bene cognosci potest ab atheo, ac ab agnoscente divinam existentiam*" (*Initia*, § 71). This position contrasts with Wolff's, who maintained that, "because this rule is a law because it obligates, and the obligation comes from nature, the law of nature is validated by nature itself and would hold even if man had no superior who could obligate him to it. In fact it would hold even if there were no God" (Wolff 1720, § 20; cf. § 24 and § 38).⁴⁷ On the contrary, Baumgarten's view entails that, while an atheist can recognize the natural law as to its content, he cannot reach the same grasp of its full meaning that is open to the believer, as

⁴³ Cf. H 27:9 ff., P 27:135 ff. ("Of the moral law"), C 27:274-278, Kaehler 55-73, M II 29:620.38-629.

⁴⁴ This has been suggested by Reich 2001, 387.

⁴⁵ Note that, as Reich observes (*ibidem*), the title "Of the supreme principle of morality", that does not stem from the *Initia*, anticipates Kant's formulation of the central aim of the *Groundwork*: "the identification and corroboration of the supreme principle of morality" (G 4:392).

⁴⁶ A similar view was already held by Koehler: Cf. Koehler 1738, § 330: "Deus per naturam humanam certa motiva connexuit cum actibus hominum liberis, adeoque per eandem nos obligat ad actiones per se bonas exequendas. Obligatio proinde naturalis est etiam divina. Hinc *vox natura vox Dei* audit." On Koehler's equation of the 'voice of nature' with God's voice (see again § 359) and its relation to Baumgarten's view, see Aichele 2004.

⁴⁷ For Wolff's relation to Grotius, see also e.g. Wolff 1718, II.viii.

Baumgarten quite sharply formulates: “*ius naturae athei s. philosophia practica, quam in suo errore perseverans cognoscere potest, destituitur ea 1) latitudine et copia, 2) dignitate materiae, 3) veritate, 4) luce, 5) certitudine, 6) vita, cuius capax est ius naturae late dictum s. philosophia practica existentiam divinam admittentis*” (*Initia*, § 71). When he mentions the hypothesis “*etiamsi non daretur deus*”, Baumgarten refers to the bold assertion of § 824 of the *Metaphysica*: “*Si deus non actualis esset, falsum esset principium contradictionis*”. Later on, Baumgarten accordingly explains that God is both author and lawgiver of the moral laws: “*deus est auctor naturae universae [...], et omnium inde evenientium realium [...], obligationes autem naturales sunt reale quid et positivum [...] et in eadem rationem sufficientem habent deus est auctor obligationum, adeoque et legum naturalium*” (*Initia*, §100; cf. Meier 1764, § 140). On Baumgarten’s view, thus, practical philosophy is not a self-standing discipline, not only because, like every part of philosophy, it borrows concepts from metaphysics,⁴⁸ but also for the more important reason that practical philosophy cannot embrace its own foundation, since its ground is provided only within natural theology.⁴⁹ Thereby, Baumgarten adds to the core of Wolff’s ethics a particular accentuation on God’s role in the foundation of morality, probably also motivated by the project of bringing closer Wolffian philosophy and Lutheran orthodoxy, under the influence of his elder brother Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten, not only one of the most prominent German theologians at that time, but also who introduced Wolff’s philosophy to Alexander Gottlieb.⁵⁰

The various lectures notes show that Kant never accepted this position. When he observes that in his times many moral philosophers endorse “the divine principle” (cf. Kaehler 61, M II 29:622),⁵¹ he does not only mean the traditional divine command theorists, but also Baumgarten, who ultimately refer the origin of morality back to the creator of the universe. This fundamental disagreement with him becomes explicit only in the *Vigilantius* lecture: “*Crusius found this necessitating person in God, and Baumgarten likewise in the divine will, albeit known through reason, and not positively, and on this principle a particular moral system has been erected*” (V 27:510). However, Kant has always denied that morality and its laws can be referred back to an act of creation. In his eyes, Baumgarten’s explanation of the foundation of morality does not build a satisfying alternative to traditional voluntarist accounts and amounts to a “theological morality, namely, a morality in which the concept of

⁴⁸ Cf. *Initia*, § 87: “*sola metaphysica habet principium obiectivum absolute primum domesticum*”.

⁴⁹ On the dependence of practical philosophy and natural law on natural theology, in Baumgarten’s account, see Scattola 2008: 24 f.

⁵⁰ Cf. Meier 1763: 12 ff. On Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten see Sorkin 2003.

⁵¹ Similarly, in KpV 5:40 Kant attributes a theological account to “*Crusius and other theological moralists*”. For a recent discussion of Kant’s rejection of divine command theories see Stern 2012: 53 ff.

obligation presupposes the concept of God”, the main weakness of such a view being that it “has no principle; or if it does have one, this is nothing but the fact that the will of God has been revealed and discovered” (28:1002 f.). Drawing on a standard objection against voluntarism, Kant argues that, to attribute to God justice or goodness, we have to presuppose the validity and meaning of moral predicates. Therefore, he maintains the moral laws are not derived from God’s will, but the other way around: they represent our only access to God (cf. e.g. P 27:136). While Baumgarten ultimately has to refer back to natural theology to ground morality, Kant maintains that “morality [...] must not be grounded on theology, but must have in itself the principle which is to be the ground of our good conduct” (28:1003) and that “religion is nothing but morality that is applied to theology” (P 27:169).

Against this view, Kant elaborates on three points found in Baumgarten himself. First, he reaffirms the idea of objective morality. A remark like “If we divide morality into objective and subjective, that is utterly absurd” is a further implicit criticism of Baumgarten, who in § 36 of the *Initia* makes precisely that distinction.⁵² Kant holds to a stronger understanding of objective morality: “for all morality is objective, and only the condition for applying it can be subjective” (Kaehler 41; cf. C 27:264). Second, he draws on the Wolffian-Baumgartenian idea that obligation grounds on motives to argue that its ground cannot be external, like God’s will, but must be internal to the will of the agent (cf. Kaehler 37 ff., C 27:262). Kant thus takes Baumgarten’s view on the foundation of morality to be in contrast with his account of obligation in terms of internal constraint, and sets the goal of combining this thought with an account of the self-standing objectivity of morality. Third, Kant borrows Baumgarten’s distinction between author of the law and lawgiver as author of the obligation to distinguish, against Baumgarten, a role that God can play from one that he cannot play.⁵³ For Kant, God cannot be regarded as the author of the moral laws, because they have no author at all (cf. P 27:145). Along the lines of classical rationalism, God does not originate them, “just as God is no originator of the fact that a triangle has three corners”.⁵⁴ Against Baumgarten, moreover, Kant understands the distinction between natural and positive laws

⁵² Baumgarten probably borrows the distinction between objective and subjective morality from Koehler 1738, § 327. Compare with the passages on objective morality in Wolff listed in Schwaiger 2011: 149, n. 457.

⁵³ On this distinction see Kain 2004. On Kant’s use of the author/lawgiver distinction see also Reath 2006: 145-146; Irwin 2004: 151 ff.; Irwin 2009: 156 f.

⁵⁴ C 27:283, Kaehler 79. Cf. P 27:137; M II 29:634, V 27:547.

as exclusive.⁵⁵ If God cannot be author of the moral laws, Kant suggests, at least until 1785, that God can be nonetheless regarded as the author of moral obligation (cf. H 27:10, P 27:146, C 27:77 f., 27:283, Kaehler 61 f., 79). Interestingly, along with the difference between authorship of the law and lawgiving, Kant's distinction between principle of evaluation (*principium diiudicationis*) and principle of execution (*principium executionis*) surfaces in the lectures.⁵⁶ The former corresponds to the cognition of the content of moral demands as natural laws (to the 'objective morality'), that has to be possible without any further assumption.⁵⁷ The latter regards the drive to act according those demands, for which is necessary to assume a legislator who enforces the moral laws. Accordingly, Kant sometimes observes that acting from duty, and not from coercion, is what God demands (cf. Kaehler 51 f., 79; C 27:272, 27:283).⁵⁸

The story of the development of Kant's views on the foundation of morality, on the relationship between moral judgment and motivation and between morality and religion cannot be told here, even if only with regard to the lectures.⁵⁹ What is relevant, here, is that this development begins when Kant departs from Baumgarten's position, not simply rejecting all of his results, but mostly elaborating on materials that he finds in Baumgarten himself,⁶⁰ as is the case even in the one section of the lectures that would appear not to comment on him.

4. The structure of the system of ethical obligations

Compared to Kant's critical discussion of Baumgarten's foundations of practical philosophy in the *Initia*, on which I have focused so far, the parts of the lectures commenting on the *Ethica* are less innovative, as they show a more pronounced continuity in the development of Kant's thought. Even substantial parts of the *Metaphysics of Morals* are rather close to earlier

⁵⁵ Cf. *Initia*, § 66: "Lex tamen et ius positiva, tam divina, quam humana, possunt simul esse naturalia, si et quatenus possunt simul ex natura actionis agentisque cognosci, sicut lex et ius naturalia, possunt etiam positiva esse, tum divina, tum humana, si et quatenus eadem ex arbitrio dei hominumve libero sufficienter cognosci possunt".

⁵⁶ Cf. Kaehler 55 f., 62; C 27:274, 277 f.

⁵⁷ Cf. already H 27:9.20f.

⁵⁸ I am not implying, however, that this should be considered the only source of Kant's distinction between *diiudicatio* and *executio bonitatis*. See Schwaiger 1999: 92 ff. and Schwaiger 2011: 127 for another suggestion.

⁵⁹ See the relevant chapters in this volume.

⁶⁰ See also Kant's notes on *Initia*, § 71 in AA 19:150.

treatments of the same topics in the lectures.⁶¹ This does not go so much on Baumgarten's account, as on Kant's own, whose ethical thought developed having in focus first and foremost the foundational issues. More importantly, this must not be taken to entail either that Kant's views on specific ethical duties did not evolve at all, or that he limits himself to giving a more detailed exposition of Baumgarten's views, like Meier did in his *Philosophische Sittenlehre*. On the contrary, Kant devotes the same critical attention to the structure and the contents of the doctrine of ethical duties. That ethics was understood as a doctrine of duties, divided in duties to oneself, to the others and to God, cannot surprise, since both Baumgarten and Kant here follow a pattern influentially advocated by Pufendorf and mostly accepted at that time.⁶² What opinions diverged on was not the tripartite division of duties, but the ranking of the kinds of obligations. On this, Baumgarten had an original position, in comparison to Wolff and other Wolffians, but Kant rejects significant aspects of it. I shall briefly mention two relevant examples.

The most apparent feature of Baumgarten's *Ethica* is the priority that Baumgarten, unlike Wolff, gives to the duties to God, and the lengthy exposition devoted to them (§§ 11-149).⁶³ Wolff had instead maintained that duties to oneself have a priority and override the others in case of conflicting obligations (cf. Wolff 1718, II.vi, § 26 ff.). This difference is notably the main point for which Baumgarten feels to owe an explanation in the preface of the *Ethica*. In spite of his intellectual debt to Wolff, the duties to God had to be placed before the others, he argues, simply because they "contain the most sacred bonds of the other obligations [*quia reliquarum obligationum augustissima vincula continent*]"⁶⁴ and make easier to comply with them (cf. *Ethica*, § 21). Baumgarten is committed to such a position because of his view on the foundation of morality. In fact, regarding the duties to God as most fundamental and primary is a characteristic feature of the expositions of authors holding voluntarist accounts.⁶⁵ If the moral demands ultimately ground on God's lawgiving, the connection to God must be the first constitutive element in the structure of morality. This is precisely Baumgarten's position, and applies, on his view, even if the obligations presented in the

⁶¹ Cf. Kuehn 2011: 18 f.

⁶² I therefore do not agree with Manfred Kuehn's suggestion that the tripartite division of ethical duties "had a lasting effect on Kant" and would be the most clear example of Baumgarten's influence on him, so that "even the subdivisions of these two broad divisions are clearly indebted to the *Ethica*" (Kuehn 2011: 17 f.). Analogously, that "Kant would follow Wolff" in the division of duties (Guyer 2011: 200) must not be misunderstood for a direct influence.

⁶³ See Schwaiger 2011: 140 and 154 n. Cf. Meier 1763, 35: "Er hat die Pflichten gegen Gott viel besser abgehandelt, als andere."

⁶⁴ *Ethica*, AA 27:737.32 f. Therefore I disagree with Schneewind's remark that the order of Baumgarten's discussion of the ethical duties was "commonplace" (Schneewind 1997: xxvii, n. 28).

⁶⁵ Cf. e.g. Crusius 1744, §§ 317 ff., and Heineccius 1738, I, chap. V.

Ethica are to be known *sine fide*, without assuming faith. Here his intention of bringing Wolffian ethics closer to religious orthodoxy and pietism surfaces again, and Kant's rejection of the aspects of Baumgarten's moral philosophy most closely tied with this project shows that he did not share this aim.⁶⁶

This unwolffian feature of Baumgarten's *Ethica* explains why Kant's lectures begin the exposition of ethics proper with a longer part on religion, after Kant had already discussed much the same issues in the first main part, commenting on Baumgarten's sections on God's authorship of moral laws.⁶⁷ However, Kant follows Baumgarten's order, but rejects the underlying idea. In the lectures of the mid-1770s, he even begins the comment on this part with another implicit, but very clear criticism to his author: "natural religion should properly furnish the conclusion to ethics, and set the seal on morality" (Kaehler 115; cf. C 27:305), instead of being considered as the beginning and foundation of it. If that was not clear enough, Kant quite early maintained: "we have *two* duties of virtue. One duty of virtue to ourselves, and the second towards others)" (P 27:163), anticipating the later position of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (cf. 6:487 f.). Not only Baumgarten's priority of duties to God, but even the widely accepted idea that there are such duties, are thereby rejected.

Baumgarten's understanding of the duties to God relates also to a second major point of disagreement between Kant and him, since it entails, in Kant's eyes, an inadequate understanding of the duties to oneself. In general, Kant's remarks on the unfortunate lack of clarity on the grounds of self-regarding obligations (cf. 27:187 f., Kaehler 169 f., C 27:340), directed against the general state of the discussion, clearly apply also to Baumgarten. Unlike Wolff, he does not ground the duties to oneself on the goal of personal happiness (cf. Kaehler 171, 175; C 27:340 f., 343), but his approach still focuses simply on the goal of perfection. The duties to oneself refer to various aspects of the perfecting of our faculties and aim at "strengthening the reality" of our soul, our body and our external state.⁶⁸ Baumgarten seems to aim more at the general improvement of reality than of the agent as such (some formulations almost sound like anticipating Fichte's rephrasing the duties to oneself as duties *toward* oneself, and not for the sake of oneself).⁶⁹ Thus, if Baumgarten does not take the eudaimonist path, he still does not acknowledge what Kant takes to be crucial,

⁶⁶ On Kant's relation with pietism see Kuehn 2001. Note that Siegmund Jacob's main moral work, *Unterricht vom rechtmäßigen Verhalten eines Christen oder Theologische Moral* (1738), was composed in Halle while Alexander Gottlieb lived there, working on his *Ethica*: see Meier 1763, 12 f.; Gawlick/Kreimendahl 2011: xxiv.

⁶⁷ See e.g. P 27:168 ff. after 27:135 f., Kaehler 115 ff. after 61 ff.

⁶⁸ *Ethica*, § 150: „Officia erga te ipsum sunt, quorum ratio perfectionis determinans est in te ipso ponenda realitas, sive propius animae, sive corporis, sive status externi realitates augeat“.

⁶⁹ Cf. Fichte 1798, 246.

that is, the status of moral subjects (cf. Kaehler 171 f., 175; C 27:340 f., 27:343, V 27:603).⁷⁰ The apparently innocent remark that self-mastery “is the condition under which we can comply with all duties” (P 27:201; cf. Kaehler 203, C 27:360) rejects in fact Baumgarten’s entire account, that confines the issue to a rather marginal observation (cf. *Ethica*, § 200).⁷¹ As the comparison between the Powalski and the Kaehler-Collins notes shows, starting from this very point Kant develops the core of his new understanding of the duties to oneself as demanding “esteem for one’s person” (Kaehler 203, C 27:360; cf. C 27:347).

Among the various aspects of Baumgarten’s account that Kant rejects in virtue of his turn to a different understanding of the duties to oneself, I shall mention two examples. First, Kant is bound to reject the traditional subdivision in duties concerning different faculties of the soul and the body. While in the Powalski notes Kant still seems to accept this organisation (cf. P 27:202), the later lectures are unanimous in arguing against it, because the distinction between body and soul misses precisely “that which must be determined through duty” (V 27:607, 27:625). Second, Kant repeatedly revises Baumgarten’s subdivisions also arguing that some obligations that the tradition understands as other-regarding are in fact self-regarding, since the compliance or non-compliance with them affects the required “esteem for one’s person” more directly than the state of another person. Two prominent examples for this are lying and flattery.⁷² Here again, thus, if Baumgarten’s non-eudaimonist revision of perfectionism is certainly helpful, his account of the duties to oneself does not really provide a lead for Kant’s view, neither in the overall systematic, nor in the specific normative contents.

5. Final remarks

An investigation of Baumgarten’s significance for the Kant’s moral philosophy cannot show any deep continuity between their views. Baumgarten does highlight some themes that become crucial in Kant’s ethical thought, especially obligation and the related concept of necessitation, along with the necessity of a non-eudaimonist understanding of perfectionism. Still, their agreement on fundamental issues in moral philosophy is confined to very specific points. Furthermore, every one of these shared points is combined with serious objections of Kant’s against Baumgarten.

Indeed, Kant’s treatment of his author is mostly quite critical, as I have shown in a few significant examples. The carefulness and the philosophical significance of Kant’s criticisms of Baumgarten, however, should show how seriously he takes him. It should be clear that

⁷⁰ Cf. e.g. also Refl. 6590, 19:98.

⁷¹ See further, more explicit critical remarks against § 200 of the *Ethica* in V 27:625.

⁷² On this see Bacin 2013.

Kant's comments on his statements are a substantial part of the development of his practical philosophy. Decades before Humboldt's program, Kant's lectures are in fact a prominent case of unity of research and teaching. He is clearly convinced of the philosophical worth of "his author", and takes his views as seriously as those of Wolff and Crusius, Hutcheson and Rousseau. The critical dialogue that Kant entertains with Baumgarten is not of a different kind than the one with these other authors, only closer and more thorough, if anything. Baumgarten's role in the making of Kant's critical ethics is clearly more pervasive than theirs, since he provides Kant with a general outline and countless terminological details for the elaboration of a comprehensive moral philosophy. In the first phase of its development, Kant's ethical thought can even be described as the attempt of combine the structure of universal practical philosophy with the crucial innovations of Hutcheson and other authors.⁷³ On Kant's view, Baumgarten does not provide solutions, but a clear outline of the subject and a valuable preliminary analysis of the basic concepts, helping to see what are the main issues to be discussed.

If Baumgarten does provide rich conceptual analysis, though, this is not always precise enough, in Kant's eyes, nor is ultimately consistent or points in the right direction. In his view, a consideration of the common use of reason in moral matters would have prevented Baumgarten from ultimately giving up a full objectivity of morality, or from forcing the ethical duties in a ranking and in distinctions that do not reflect the basic aspects of moral determination. Baumgarten proves indeed to be a one-eyed 'technician of reason' in moral philosophy as well as in metaphysics, according to Kant's judgment that I mentioned earlier. Their views amount to two fundamentally different conceptions of morality, where the foundation of moral demands, God's role and the moral status of human beings are among the most significant points of disagreement.

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⁷³ Cf. PS 2:298 ff. For a reconstruction of Kant's project in ethics in the 1760s see Bacin 2006, chap. I.

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