KARMA, CAUASTION AND RETRIBUTIVE MORALITY
Conceptual Essays in Ethics and Metaethics

Rajendra Prasad

2004
(Reprint)
442 pages
Hard Back
ISBN 81-85636-81-8
Rs 400

This collection of essays provides a conceptual analysis of various aspects of moral philosophy. After giving his strikingly novel answer to the question ‘Does metaethics have any ethical implication?’ Professor Prasad gives his theory of moral language and moral logic, identifying the role of rationality in the moral life. His approach is non-cognitivist, yet neither emotivist nor prescriptivist. He presents an incisive critique of G.E. Moore and concludes that his naturalistic fallacy technique of refuting a theory is unusable. Professor Prasad’s analysis of certain foundational aspects of classical Indian ethics is bold and original. Finally, he discusses some normative issues showing that conceptual analysis is as relevant in their case as it is in the discussion of the logic of morals.

The book will be useful for teachers and students of philosophy and will interest the general readers as well.

Rajendra Prasad (b. 1926) taught Philosophy at Patna University and Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. He has been a Fulbright/Smith-Mundt Fellow, a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation, USA and until very recently a Senior Fellow of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research.
This chapter focuses on the doctrine of karma primarily as a theory of retributive morality. But it questions two of its fundamental presuppositions which, being logically flawed, severely weaken both retributivism and moral force of the doctrine. The first presupposition is (1) the supposed interdependence of its three claims that (a) every action produces some effects, (b) which and only which the agent must experience, because (c) she/he deserves them. The second presupposition is (2) the belief in rebirth and reincarnation as the sine qua non of the doctrine. We argue that assumption (1) is too narrow and does not adequately capture the complexity of the doctrine. The notion that actions have retributive consequences across innumerable lifetimes is ingenuous to the Buddhist and Hindu worldviews. As socially and biologically conditioned agents. This is in part why reductionist interpretations of the doctrine of karma, which seek to telescope the cosmic dimension to a more manageable this-lifetime-only stream of events, have met with all sorts of methodological and theoretical difficulties.