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Groundwork, first section



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Groundwork, first section

Sunday, October 11, 2015, 9:09 PM

Kant's project in the first section of the *Groundwork* is, as he puts it, the "transition from common to philosophical moral rational cognition." What this means in other words is that he is trying to start by considering some of our ordinary, commonsense beliefs about morality, and make them more philosophically precise, so that we can see more clearly what morality is.

Importantly, he's not (yet) trying to prove anything about what our moral obligations are.

Instead, he's trying to answer the question "What does morality *in general* look like, such that we can find out whether it exists, and what our obligations are?"

This is a highly abstract philosophical question. Another way to put it is: "Forget for a minute whether we're morally obligated to donate money to strangers, or avoid harming people —*what is morality in the first place, anyway?*"

There are several important concepts Kant mobilizes in the first section of the *Groundwork*, particularly the concepts of **duty**, **principle**, **good will**, **inclination**, and **law**. Your job for this week:

Choose one of these five concepts (duty, principle, good will, inclination, or law), and explain as best you can in your own words what Kant means by it.

You might find that in your explanation of one concept you'll need to use one of the others; that's ok and entirely worth doing.

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Re: *Groundwork*, first section

Tuesday, October 13, 2015, 12:36 PM

Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals illustrates his esteemed opinion of many societal concepts, mental talents and subsequent human temperaments like resoluteness or courage. However, I believe Kant is not particularly keen on the virtue of "goodness" or "happiness" because he believes that despite all circumstances, physical or emotional things that make us happy, without good will nothing is fully sufficient he says "Nothing in the world –or out of it can possibly be conceived that can be called "good" without qualification except good will" (Kant 5). This paper will examine Kant's depiction of the concept of good will. Goodwill can be defined as the attitude or feeling of being helpful sometimes friendly or even cooperative. (Kant 1-53)

(A) | According to Kant the world is encompassed by only one good thing "good will", he gives example that other qualities like intelligence or courage, and wealth or status, can be utilized by individuals in a positive or a negative manner he illustrates this when he says (B)

"Power, riches, honor, even health, and the over-all well-being and contentment with one's condition that we call 'happiness', creates pride, often leading to arrogance, if there isn't a good will to correct their influence on the mind..." (Kant 5)

The argument put forward by Kant concerning good will is viable. While other virtues can be corrupted, good will is impossible to corrupt since it is whole-heartedly depicted in a positive manner with positive intentions.

(C) | He seems to think that living organism have an innate desire to accomplish their required purposes using the most appropriate faculty or organ. Individuals are always keen to avoid reason, with reason viewed as an acute aspect hindering happiness. With humans being keen on attainment of happiness and self-preservation, refined reasoning hinders complete accomplishment of these goals. According to Kant the masses lack reason and are thus envied by individuals with refined reasoning. He believes bringing about good will is the sole purpose of refined reasoning and this is a logical argument since masses are prone to illogical behaviors and mistakes showing the lack of refined reasoning. Good will is an aspect of life that is the most productive and positive, the view on happiness is clouded in the absence of good will or the need to accomplish some good will. (Kant 1-53) (E)

(G) | In his diverse explanation of good will Kant believes that "duties" serve the purpose of accomplishing good will. In this sense we can say any accomplishment of good is primarily illustrated through the accomplishment of actions only to fulfill duty. In addition, good will is served when an individual has a positive principle to accomplish a duty but not by the results that he or she garnered. Kant is of the opinion that good will is the sole concept that controls the other innate or adopted virtues. Any virtue can be tainted without good will. (Kant 1-53) (H)

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GROUNDING FOR THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

Immanuel Kant



Chapter 1



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Summary

(A) The one thing in the world that is unambiguously good is the "good will." Qualities of character (wit, intelligence, courage, etc.) or qualities of good fortune (wealth, status, good health) may be used to either good or bad purposes. By contrast, a good will is intrinsically good—even if its efforts fail to bring about positive results. (B)

(C) It is a principle of the composition of natural organisms that each of their purposes is served by the organ or faculty most appropriate to that purpose. The highest purposes of each individual are presumably self-preservation and the attainment of happiness. Reason does not appear to be as well suited as instinct for these purposes. Indeed, people with a refined capacity for reason are often less happy than the masses. As a result, refined people often envy the masses, while common people view reason with contempt. The fact is that reason serves purposes that are higher than individual survival and private happiness. Reason's function is to bring about a will that is good in itself, as opposed to good for some particular purpose, such as the attainment of happiness. (D)

(E) The specific obligations of a good will are called "duties." We may make three general propositions about duty. First, actions are genuinely good when they are undertaken for the sake of duty alone. People may act in conformity with duty out of some interest or compulsion other than duty. For instance, a grocer has a duty to offer a fair price to all customers, yet grocers abide by this duty not solely out of a sense of duty, but rather because the competition of other grocers compels them to offer the lowest possible price. Similarly, all people have a duty to help others in distress, yet many people may help others not out of a sense of duty, but rather because it gives them pleasure to (H)

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spread happiness to other people. A more genuine example of duty would be a person who feels no philanthropic inclination, but who nonetheless works to help others because he or she recognizes that it is a duty to do so.

①

The second proposition is that actions are judged not according to the purpose they were meant to bring about, but rather by the "maxim" or principle that served as their motivation. This principle is similar to the first. When someone undertakes an action with no other motivation than a sense of duty, they are doing so because they have recognized a moral principle that is valid *a priori*. By contrast, if they undertake an action in order to bring about a particular result, then they have a motivation beyond mere duty.

The third proposition, also related to the first two, is that duties should be undertaken out of "reverence" for "the law." Any organism can act out of instinct. Chance events could bring about positive results. But only a rational being can recognize a general moral law and act out of respect for it. The "reverence" for law that such a being exhibits (this is explained in Kant's footnote) is not an emotional feeling of respect for the greatness of the law. Rather, it is the moral motivation of a person who recognizes that the law is an imperative of reason that transcends all other concerns and interests.

Since particular circumstances and motivations cannot be brought into the consideration of moral principles, the moral "law" cannot be a specific stipulation to do or not do this or that particular action. Rather, the moral law must be applicable in all situations. Thus the law of morality is that we should act in such a way that we could want the maxim (the motivating principle) of our action to become a universal law.

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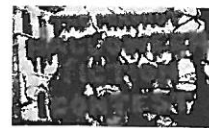


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