

Section One: Transition from the Common Rational Moral Cognition to the Philosophical Moral Cognition [restate: Deriving from the ordinary pre-philosophical consciousness already possessed by normal human beings the philosophical formulation of the fundamental or supreme principle of morality]

55: good will (a will that aims with all of its power to do the right thing purely because it is right) is the only thing in the world good in itself, good without condition or qualification. All other human attributes are good only on the condition that they are accompanied by a good will.

What makes the good will good is not what effects it brings about but only the underlying principle that motivates it (reiterated on p. 61). [Kant thinks everyone already believes this even if they have not exactly formulated it to themselves.]

56-58: another argument for the claim that the good will is the only thing good in itself: nature implants our different faculties in us to serve particular purposes. The purpose of reason cannot be to bring about our happiness because it is very unreliable in doing that. Therefore, the purpose of reason must be to guide the will purely on its own. 58: "reason recognizes the establishment of a good will as its highest practical vocation." [[note that Kant is assuming here that a good will is the same as a will governed by pure (practical) reason. In later chapters he gives more explicit arguments for this.]]

[The above was covered, though only briefly, in our Feb 5 class]

58: But what is a good will? [We have to know this since this is the "ordinary rational moral consciousness from which he wants to derive the supreme principle of morality]. We answer that by focusing on the idea of duty. Duty is a good will that must operate in a context in which inclinations may oppose it. This is the human context. (A God would have good will but no sense of duty since he/she would possess no inclinations that ever opposed the good will.)

58-61: Duty

some background: "Duty" can refer to a "dutiful **act**"—an act that we are morally required to perform or to refrain from (like telling the truth, not cheating, not stealing). This is "*action in accordance with duty.*"

Duty-as-act can be performed from different **motives**. You can do the right thing because you think it will benefit you, not because it is right. The example of the merchant on p. 59, top, illustrates this. However, Kant thinks we are capable of acting in accordance with duty **from duty**—that is, the mere fact that an act is right (or dutiful) is enough to motivate us to do it, even if we have to go against our self-interest or our inclinations in order to do so. (He isn't saying that we *always* do this, of course; and later he will argue that we cannot even be sure that we *ever* do it. But here the point he is making is that we are *capable of* doing it.) So "duty" can refer to a motive—which he later spells out more fully as *respect for the moral law*. So sometimes he uses "duty" to refer to an act, sometimes to a motive ("*from duty*"). It's easy to confuse, but you have to keep them straight.

Kant develops the idea of duty-as-act and duty-as-motive by considering **4 examples** (It is important to understand what he is doing with each of these example):

1. 59, top: *prudent merchant*: doesn't overcharge inexperienced customers because better for him in the long run if he charges everyone the same.

2. 59, middle: *suicide*: people normally have powerful self-interested motive not to commit suicide, so no moral worth in that. But imagine someone who has lost that motive

3. 59-60: *sympathetic soul* enjoys inner gratification in helping others, so immediate inclination to do so. But suppose loses that because of own troubles.

4. 60: duty to secure own happiness.

This discussion aims to make two other general points: (A) To show that moral worth attaches only to duty-as-motive (good will), not any other motive. (B) In relation to A, implicitly presents a basic theory of motives.

61-62: *Respect*

Respect (for the moral law) may seem like a feeling, but Kant thinks feelings are not moral motives (cf. discussion of sympathetic soul). Says respect is produced by an (intellectual, so to speak) recognition that the moral law has an authority over us, that we are subject to it; so it has emotional character, but is a product of reason. (See useful footnote 2, p. 62).

63: What can the law be that can determine the will independent of effects? Must simply be form of universal law. I.e., can the principle on which I plan to act (my "maxim," explained in Section Two), be universalized to apply to all persons? [This whole idea is the main subject of the first part of Section Two and we will consider it in much more detail then.] This is in fact the principle the ordinary moral person uses to decide what is right.

E.g. can we make a promise with no intention to keep it? 2 different questions here: Is it *prudent* to do this (i.e. in accordance with my long-term self-interest), and Is it *right* to do it? We recognize that these are two very different questions.

64, bottom par: I can know what it is right or dutiful to do without being experienced in the ways of the world or prepared for its contingencies. I can know my volition is morally good without this.

65: So we have arrived at the basic moral principle yet staying within ordinary moral consciousness. So we don't need philosophy or science to tell us how to be wise and good, which is "within the reach of every human being, even the commonest."

So practical reason has advantage over theoretical reason. Latter gets in trouble when it leaves the realm of the a posteriori, of experience; but the former gets it right when it abstracts away from all empirical incentives of the will.

65-66: discussion of how philosophy relates to morality, how it helps or doesn't help the ordinary person to be moral.

On the one hand, the ordinary consciousness already possesses the principle of morality; philosophy can actually confuse the matter by bringing in extraneous stuff. [Later in book, he makes clear all the ways he thinks other philosophers have gone wrong in their attempt to state the basic principle of morality.]

On the other hand, morality is quite often opposed by the desire for happiness; and philosophy can help keep us on the right path by keeping us focused on the moral principle, and by keeping us honest, as it were, when we try to rationalize doing immoral things by pretending that what we want and what is moral (duty-as-act) actually align with one another when they don't.