Ethics of Leadership

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Duty & Respect for the Moral Law

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?

2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Immanuel Kant, "Transition from Common to Philosophical Moral Rational Cognition" (PDF on webpage).
- Joanne Ciulla, "Is a Lie Always a Lie?", p. 118.

Background

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant attempts to provide a foundation for morality that is completely divorced from the consequences of our actions. Instead, Kant argues that the moral worth of an action comes solely from the agent's intention in carrying out that action. In particular, Kant holds that acting from a sense of duty is the morally right intension; that is, acting from a sense of duty is the intension of what Kant calls a "good will". In this excerpt from the *Groundwork*, Kant's strategy is to use our commonsense intuitions about duty to discover why acting for the sake of duty has its moral value. The case study from Joanne Ciulla provides an opportunity to apply Kant's application of his theory to lying.

Questions

1. Immanuel Kant opens up the first section by arguing that the only thing that is good without limitation is the good will. He lists a whole bunch of things commonly taken to be good, like happiness, and argues that they are *not* good without limitation. What exactly is Kant's conception of happiness? What is his argument against happiness and those other things being good without limitation?

2. Kant claims the good will is not good because of the effects it accomplishes. Why is that? What then makes it good?

3. Starting on page 12, Kant presents a series of examples: one about a shopkeeper, one about preserving your life, and one about being beneficent. What is each example supposed to reveal about acting from duty? (This allows us to better understand Kant's unstated first proposition concerning duty and its connection to the good will.)

4. Kant's "second proposition" (on page 15) claims that the moral worth of an action comes from the maxim on which it is done. What is a maxim? Why does this give an action its moral value?

5. Kant's "third proposition" says that actions done for the sake of duty show respect for the moral law. What does this mean? (Kant's lengthy footnote on page 17 may help.)

6. Putting these three propositions together, Kant believes he has isolated what makes the good will something that is good without limitation: it is the will to adhere to the principle that "I ought to never proceed except in such a way *that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law*". Use Kant's example of the false promise and Joanna Ciulla's example about lying to help your boss to explain what this principle means, and how it involves a form of reasoning that is different from prudence. Do you agree with Kant's analysis of lying and its application to Ciulla's example?