

ETHICS of LEADERSHIP

Duty & The Good Will

As you read the material for our 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 reading:

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Immanuel Kant, "Transition from Common to Philosophical Morals Rational Cognition".

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. Kant uses the idea of a "maxim" (which has the form of "Do *M* for the sake of *E*") to formalize the idea of a person's intention in acting as they do. In particular, Kant holds that the morally right maxims are those that involve acting from a sense of duty, and acting so is embodied by the "good will". In this reading, Kant's strategy is to use our commonsense intuitions about duty to discover why acting for the sake of duty (as opposed to mere conformity with duty) has its moral value.

Questions

1. Kant opens up the first section by arguing that the only thing that is good without limitation is the good will. He lists several things commonly taken to be good (like reason, courage, and happiness) and argues that they are all only good with limitation. What exactly does he mean by all this and what is his argument?
2. Kant also maintains that the good will is not good because of the effects it accomplishes. Why is that? What then makes it good?
3. After that, Kant tries to show how acting *from* duty (as opposed to merely acting in *conformity* with duty) has moral value. He does this by presenting a series of examples:
 - A. Setting fair prices (page 13),
 - B. Preserving your own life (page 13), and
 - C. Being beneficent (pages 13–14).

Kant believes we have a duty to do each of these things, yet these examples are supposed to show a difference between acting *from* duty as opposed to merely *conforming* with it. Explain each of these examples, and what do they reveal about acting from duty? (This claim about duty ends up being 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" (on page 16) states that actions done for the sake of duty show respect for the moral law. What does this mean? (Kant's footnote for paragraph 16 may help.)
6. Putting these three propositions together, Kant believes he has isolated what makes the good will good: 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*" (page 17). Use Kant's example of the false promise (page 18) to explain what this means, and how it involves a form of reasoning that is not prudential.