

Ethical Theory

The Idea of a Pure and Good Will

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.

Readings

- *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, editor's introduction, paragraphs 1–14 (pp. ix–xv), preface, entire (pp. 3–8) & first section, paragraphs 1–7 (pp. 9–12).

The book does not number the paragraphs, so you will need to number them yourself in the page margins. The editor's introduction has 59 paragraphs, the preface has 14, and the first section has 22.

Questions

1. Kant begins (in paragraphs 1–8 of the preface) by distinguishing between logic, physics, and ethics. What denotes each of these?
2. When discussing why a metaphysics of morals is necessary (in paragraph 9 of the preface), Kant gives us a hint about what it means for an action to be morally good. Is it about following rules, the consequences, or something else entirely? What rationale defends this?
3. Kant claims (in paragraph 10 of the preface) that he is doing something entirely new by examining the idea of a pure will. What is a pure will, and why is studying it supposed to be different from psychology?
4. Kant opens up the first section (in paragraphs 1 & 2) 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 and argues that they are not good without limitation. What exactly is his argument?
5. Kant claims (in paragraph 3 of the first section) the good will is not good because of the effects it accomplishes. Why is that? What then makes it good?
6. Kant argues (in paragraphs 5–7 of the first section) that happiness cannot be the end of a being (like humans) constituted with reason and a will. Why not? What is Kant's conception of happiness? What does he think the purpose of reason is as a practical faculty (i.e., as something geared towards action and not merely contemplation)?