ETHICAL THEORY

The Idea of a Pure & 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

- Christine M. Korsgaard, "Introduction to Kant's Groundwork".
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, "Preface" & "First Section: Transition From Common to Philosophical Moral Rational Cognition".

The text does not number the paragraphs, so you will need to number them yourself. These are paragraphs 1–14 from Korsgaard's "Introduction", paragraphs 1–14 from Kant's "Preface", and paragraphs 1–8 from Kant's "First Section".

Questions

1. Kant begins (in "Preface", paragraphs 1–8) by distinguishing between logic, physics, and ethics. What is the difference?
2. When discussing why a metaphysics of morals is necessary (in the "Preface", paragraph 9), Kant gives us a hint about what it means for an action to be morally good. Is it about following rules, the action's consequences, or something else entirely? Is this reasonable?
3. Kant claims (in "Preface", paragraph 10) 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 and 2) 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?
5. Kant also maintains (in "First Section", paragraph 3) that the good will is not good because of the effects it accomplishes. Why is that? What then makes it good?
6. Kant finally concludes (in "First Section", paragraphs 5–7) that happiness cannot be the end of a being, like humans, constituted with reason and a will. Why not? What exactly does Kant mean by happiness? That is, which theory of well-being (from Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, "Well-Being") does Kant seem to label as "happiness"? What does Kant think the purpose of reason is as a practical faculty (i.e., as something geared towards action and not merely contemplation)?