

# Introduction to Philosophy

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## The Nature of Morality: Kantian Moral Theory

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, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

### Background

Immanuel Kant stands as one of the greatest systematic philosophers of Western civilization. In this excerpt, Kant begins by developing the notion of the good will, and defends his claim that nothing else can be unconditionally good, that is, good in every instance, regardless of accompanying circumstances. The good will is simply the commitment to do one's duty for its own sake (rather than, say, because it will promote one's self-interest). But where does one's duty lie? In Book II, Kant introduces the idea of a categorical imperative, a command of reason that authoritative for moral agents regardless of their desires. Kant claims that the rightness or wrongness of an action lies not in the results it brings about, but instead in the principle that guides a person's conduct. Kant calls such a principle a maxim. The categorical imperative states that a person's actions are right if and only if the maxim it is based upon is such that it treats all people as ends in themselves and not merely as means to whatever ends the acting person has.

### Questions

1. Immanuel Kant gives an argument for the conclusion that the only thing that is good without qualification is the good will. What is this argument? In what sense is the good will "good" if not because of its effects or accomplishments? What is the "will" and what is its relationship to "practical reason"? What is the "holy will" and how does it differ from our will?
2. What are "imperatives" and what is their relationship to the will? What are hypothetical imperatives and what is the structure of a hypothetical imperative? What is the relationship between hypothetical imperatives, the pleasant, and happiness? What is a categorical imperative and what is the structure of a categorical imperative? What is the relationship between the categorical imperative and the practical good?
3. Around 4:428 Kant provides an argument to the effect that rational beings are valuable as ends in themselves. What does it mean to be an end, as opposed to a means? Why must rational beings be valued as ends? What is the difference between things and persons, dignity and price? How does this lead to the "humanity as an end formulation" of the categorical imperative?