

Kant's Ethics

A Discussion of Morality

Good Will

- Kant writes that as rational beings who can use reason behind our actions, we can choose to be moral or immoral. (Autonomy)
- However, it is intentions, not consequences, that determine whether a person is moral.
- Even if the consequences of a person's action are bad, as long as his or her intentions were good the person remains moral.
- Kant states that this is because that we have no control over consequences, only our intentions.

Good Will?

- Kant believes that a truly moral act is done without any self-inclination.
- To save someone's life in hope of a reward would not be considered a moral act by Kant.
- Also, simply abiding by standard laws of morality does not make a person moral.
- To not steal, to not murder, or to not kick your grandmother in the shins is not enough for Kant. One must go above and beyond to be truly moral.

The Categorical Imperative

- Kant describes a “Categorical Imperative,” a guide to evaluate whether a person’s action is moral.
- The categorical imperative describes a set of moral laws which cannot, under any circumstances, be broken.

Categorical Imperative?

- Kant explains three versions which can determine whether an action follows the categorical imperative.
- They are Universal Law, the Formula of the End Itself, and the Kingdom of the Ends.

Universal Law

- Universal Law advocates that one should consider if everyone were to have the same intentions that he or she does.
- For example, if I were to lie, I should think, “What if everyone were to lie?”

But Will...isn't that awfully similar to the Golden Rule?

- The Golden Rule (do unto others as you would wish done unto you) deals with consequences.
- Thus if one were to be a masochist (one who enjoys being beaten), it would be okay for that person to beat someone. Not cool.

The Formula of the End in Itself

- States that one should never use another person as a means to get something.
- Kant describes a “person” as something with his definition dignity.

The Kingdom of the Ends

- In the Kingdom of the Ends, morality can be achieved by furthering the ends (hopes and desires) of others, not for one's own benefit, but strictly for the benefit of others.

Whuddya' Think?

- Is the categorical imperative feasible?
- To what extent might consequences actually matter?
- Can the ends ever justify the means?