Missed class notes

I think the reason that Kant’s view of morality being about good will falls flat for me. I don’t think the whole idea is rubbish, of course. But Kant set out to write something of the stature of the Principia Mathematica, and while his views are still discussed today, I think he failed in his goal of creating a scientific system of ethics.

1. Morality is about good will (judge the decisions. Or you could argue that this is about autonomy. YOU must make the decision with a reasonable maxim)
2. Actions only have moral worth if taken out of respect for morality (Judge the intent and reasoning)
3. Morality is a categorical imperative (it applies to everyone equally and has little respect for context outside of the maxim that should be used)

I hear this described by my wife’s father as “act like the best person you know or would want to know and you will be acting morally”. I was wondering if you thought that made sense or missed the mark?

Universalizability: only follow maxims that you can will to be universal/ Act on Maxims you can will to be universal laws

Kant’s principle of humanity: Always treat humanity (yourself and others. Creatures with reasoning beyond instinct) as an end in itself, never as a means.

As a nascent consequentialist, I find the idea that intent matters more than end result, a little strange. Maybe it’s because the internal logic of others is so often puzzling to me, but I hardly ever care *why* someone did what they did. In the shopkeeper example, I don’t care why the shopkeeper gave the right change to the small ignorant child, only that he did. Sure, if I knew the logic of every person or it was always accessible then I think it would be important. But people’s reasoning (outside of Ethicists) is hardly ever clear to others and often not clear to the person acting.

If the shopkeeper’s plan was to make many small honest transactions, they would all be morally correct to me, even if the plan was to gain the community’s trust to then rip somebody off who was making a large transaction. Then that action would be immoral. I think morality is a shifting morass that changes depending on circumstance.

Even Genocide. What if white men (a safe target) were proven to be without a doubt the reason economic disparity, famine and war existed and their obliteration, which would be painless and done without malice, could usher the world into a utopia? Would genocide be ok then? Kant would say that it violates both his principles and should never be considered. It is universally applicable and takes away the autonomy of the many who will be killed. I on the other hand would maybe want to consider it, even if as a person of mixed descent, whose neck might be on the chopping block. I just generally refute absolutism.