# *Groundwork's Search* forthe Supreme Principal of Morality

## (Daniel—Lecture Outline)

## Purpose of the Book: What is the Supreme Principle of Morality? (4.392.)

#### Why do we need a Supreme Moral Principle?

(1) Moral questions are to be determined by reason.

(2) Reason always seeks unity under principles and ultimately systematic unity under the fewest possible number of principles.

(3) That where systematicity is being given to empirical data, this may result in an irreducible plurality of principles. But the fact that moral questions are to be decided by reason gives us grounds for thinking that here there must be only a single principle.

(4) For this we must suppose that there is an objective answer to them, an answer valid for all possible rational agents and inquirers. (4.442)

#### Consequences of having no such single principle:

(1) There would be no objectively correct answer to moral questions whenever opposing answers could be made to rest each on its own ultimate, incommensurable principle.

(2) It is not even clear that we could consider the different conflicting answers to the same question,

(3) We cannot ask any determinate moral questions.

(4) Nor can we consider there to be a specifically *moral* point of view.

(5) Nor can there even be any determinate *moral* questions at all.

(6) Since each of the irreducibly plural principles would define a distinct practical viewpoint and a distinct set of practical questions

(7) No communication would be possible between these points of view concerning what, in the end, we *ought to do* or how we *ought to live.*

(8)This would spell the end of all moral objectivity, perhaps even of all morality, period

#### That there is a supreme moral principle does not mean that:

(1) there cannot be moral principles that are difficult to decide on in practice

(2) there will be no moral conflicts or dilemmas

(3) moral decisions are typically made by referring them directly to the Supreme Moral Principle (See 4.403).

## First formulation of the Supreme Principle of Morality

### The Principle of Universal Law (PUL):

"I ought never to conduct myself except so that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law" (Groundwork, 4:402).

### The Principle of Universal Law (PUL)—A Restatement:

"Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" [Groundwork, 4:421; p.31, 2nd para).

The term "universal law," as used in PUL, appears also to carry a normative force. [Groundwork, 4:403). In other words, PUL invites us to consider which maxims we can will **to be morally permissible** for all, and commands us to restrict ourselves only to those maxims.

### The Principle of the Law of Nature (PLN)—An Intuitive Variant of PUL:

"So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature" [Groundwork, 4:421; p.31, 4th para).

## Second formulation of the Supreme Principle of Morality

### The Principle of Humanity as an end in itself (PH):

"Act so that you use humanity, whether in your own person as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" [Groundwork, 4:429).

## Third formulation of the Supreme Principle of Morality

### and the Principle of the Kingdom of Ends (PKE)

The ground of all practical lawgiving (in accordance with the first principle) *objectively in the rule* and the form of universality, which makes fit to be a law (at least a law of nature); but *subjectively*, however, it lies in the *end*; but the subject of all ends is every rational being as an end in itself (in accordance with the second principle); from this there follows now the third practical principle of the will, as the supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, the idea *of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law.* [Groundwork, 4:431; p.39)

### The Principle of Autonomy (PA)

(1) "Choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choice are also included as universal law in the same volition" [Groundwork, 4:440; p.47).

Or again:

(2) "Act in accordance with maxims have as their object themselves as universal laws of nature for their object" [Groundwork, 4:437; p. 44).

### The Principle of the Kingdom of Ends (PKE)—Intuitive variant of (PA)

"Act in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends" [Groundwork, 4:439; p.46).

### First principle:

PUL The Formula of Universal Law: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you at the same time can will that it become a **universal law**" [Groundwork, 4:421; cf. 4:402);

with its more "intuitive" variant,

PLN *The Formula of the Law of Nature:* "So act, as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a **universal law of nature"** *[Groundwork,* 4:421; cf. 4:436).

### Second principle:

FH The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself: "So act that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means" [Groundwork, 4:429; cf. 4:436).

### Third principle:

FA *Formula of Autonomy:* "...the idea *of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law" [Groundwork,* 4:431; cf. 4:432) or "Not to choose otherwise than so that the maxims of one's choice are at the same time comprehended with it in the same volition as universal law" *[Groundwork,* 4:440; cf. 4:432, 434, 438);

with its more "intuitive" variant,

FRE *The Formula of the Realm of Ends:* "Act in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends" *[Groundwork,* 4:439; cf. 4:433, 437, 438).