E. Valentine Daniel

#### From Good Will to the Categorical Imperative

The following is the outline of Wednesday’s Lecture on Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. My aim here is to show that although the nature of the moral law has not been sufficiently explained when its formulation is introduced in Section I, and although certain aspects of it have not been explained, we can established the fact that a “maxim of a good will” will always have already had the character of universalizability. Please study it along with your text and try to understand it before coming to class tomorrow evening:

Proposition 1: Only a good will has absolute worth. (p.7)  
(i) What is a "good will"?  
(ii) What is "absolute worth"?

“ 1.1: Moral value always outweighs any other kind of value.

Proposition 2: A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes.  
(G, 394; 8)

Proposition 3: KANT’S PROPOSITION I  
A human action is morally good if and only if it is done from duty. (Sum of 397-399)

Proposition 4: KANT’S PROPOSITION II:   
To act from duty is to act, not with regard to the purpose to be attained by our action, but with regard only to the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon. (G, 399; p.13).

“ 4a: The moral value of an action is a quality of its maxim.

“ 4b: Action from duty is action done on the basis of a maxim that we have adopted, not because its adoption will fulfill desires of ours, but because of its form.

Proposition 5: This formal principle of volition (i.e., the principle of the adoption of maxims in virtue of their form) is simply the requirement that my action conform to universal law as such. (Basically a summary of “Since I have deprived . . . before its eyes.”—pp.14-15)

Proposition 6: The essence of law is its universality. (This is obtained by an analysis of the concept of law, in Kant's view.)

Proposition 7: Hence the moral law commands nothing but that I always act in such a way that I can will my maxim should become a universal law.

*(A Restatement)*: **Kant’s 1st Formulation of the Supreme Principle of Morality (PUL):** "I ought never to conduct myself except so that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law" (Groundwork, 4:402).

Proposition 8: *[Obtained by putting together (4b), and (5) through (7)]*  
To act for the sake of duty is to act only on that maxim which can at the same time be willed as a universal law. (This is

Proposition 9: *[Conclusion drawn from (1) through (3) and from (8)]*  
A good will is a will which always acts only on that maxim which can at the same time be willed as a universal law. And this is also the

*(Restatement):* **THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE:**   
A GOOD WILL IS A WILL WHICH ALWAYS ACTS ONLY ON THAT MAXIM WHICH CAN AT THE SAME TIME BE WILLED AS A UNIVERSAL LAW. (Which he will explicitly work out in Section II [G. 4.421; p.31])

This shows that there is a continuous argument from the concept of a “good will” to the first formulation of the “categorical imperative”, and it is also apparent that Kant thought that there was. Thus we may say that although the nature of the moral law has not been sufficiently explained when its formulation is introduced in Section I, and although certain aspects of it have not been explained, at least the fact that a maxim of a good will would always have the character of universalizability has been sufficiently established in the Section I, and is taken by Kant to- have been so established, through an analysis of concepts to be found in "ordinary rational knowledge of morality."