PHILOSOPHY 151: Moral Philosophy

KANT: Duty and Reason

Summary

1. Context
   1. Immanuel Kant lived a life singularly without incident
      1. He lived by routine
      2. He never married, and never ventured more than forty miles from Königsberg, East Prussia, the city of his birth and death
      3. Kant family belonged to the lower middle class and was devoutly religious
      4. Kant was a popular and successful teacher
   2. Kant’s inner life was dramatic as his outer life was drab
   3. His concern is with nature and morality
   4. Kant demonstrates by an analysis of knowledge that the necessity and universality of scientific knowledge are guaranteed by the laws through which the categories (concepts) of the mind become effective.
2. Good Will
   1. Represents the effort of rational beings to do what they ought to do
   2. A good will is good
      1. Not because of what it performs or effects
      2. But simply by virtue of the volition
   3. Reason is not intended to produce happiness but to produce good will
   4. Good will is one that acts for the sake of duty
      1. Only respect for duty gives an action inner moral worth
         1. Actions that result from inclination or self-interest have no inner worth
         2. Altruistic actions deserve praise but cannot be classified as possessing strictly moral value
      2. An act done from duty derives its moral value from the principle by which it is determined
      3. Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law
3. Categorical Imperative
   1. The supreme principle that the good person must follow
   2. An unconditional directive
      1. It prescribes actions to be done because of the moral worth of the maxim
      2. Different from hypothethical imperative
         1. It is a conditional directive
         2. Advises what ought to be done if a desired good is to be achieved
   3. The formula of the command is called an imperative
      1. All imperatives are expressed by the word *ought*
      2. All imperatives command wither *hypothethically* or *categorically*
   4. The essence of morality lies in acting on the basis of an impersonal principle that is valid for everyone
   5. There is only one categorical imperative
      1. That is, “act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law”
      2. The imperative of duty is thus, “act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a Universal Law of Nature”
   6. Kant conceives categorical imperative as a twofold test
      1. Maxims for moral action can be universalized without logical contradiction
      2. They may be universal directives for action that do not bring the will into disharmony with itself by requiring it to will one thing for itself and another thing for others
   7. Social implications of categorical imperative
      1. Treat all human beings as ends in themselves
      2. Never treat them as merely means to ends
      3. Respect all human beings impartially and avoid exploiting anyone
         1. A being, that is, an end in itself could be a source of definite laws
         2. Worth of any object which is to be *acquired* is always conditional
         3. Rational nature exists as an and in itself
   8. Basic identity of the first and second formulations of the categorical imperative
   9. Philosophy has to be firmly fixed
      1. It has nothing to support it either in heaven or earth
      2. Every empirical element is highly prejudicial to the purity of morals
      3. To behold virtue is to contemplate morality stripped of all admixture of sensible things and of every spurious ornament of reward