PHILOSOPHY 151: Moral Philosophy

KANT: The Critique of Practical Reason

Summary

1. Practical Reason
   1. Practical reason is nothing separate from theoretical reason
      1. The capacity to act according to representations of laws is also called the will
      2. Practical reason is simply the capacity to will
      3. The will is nothing irrational, but reason with respect to action
      4. Practical reason is independent of all empirical conditions and completely self-sufficient
   2. All moral concepts have their seat and origin in reason completely *a priori*
   3. Kant sets four tasks for himself in the justification of ethics:
      1. He specifies the concept of morality and applies it to the situation of finite rational beings
      2. This application leads to the categorical imperative
      3. He shows further that morality originates in the autonomy of the will
      4. Seeks finally to prove the reality of morality by drawing upon the fact of reason
2. Personal Morality
   1. Whatever is good without qualification is not good in any relative sense but good absolutely
      1. Morality cannot denote the functional suitability of actions for given purposes
      2. The concept of unqualified goodness appears as the necessary and sufficient condition for an investigation of the good
   2. Kant’s notion of absolute goodness, reminiscent of the ontological notion of a most perfect being, is not automatically restricted to certain aspects of action
   3. Two basic forms of morality:
      1. Personal morality
      2. Rational concept of political justice as morality in the social sense
   4. The *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* seeks to restrict morality to the personal side of action
   5. “Duty” and “good will” do not have the same extensions
      1. Good will implies duty only under condition of “certain subjective limitations and obstacles”
      2. Duty is morality in the form of imperative
         1. This form of morality makes sense only for those subjects whose will is not good in and of itself
         2. It is irrelevant for purely rational beings
   6. Three ways of fulfilling moral duties:
      1. One can perform his duty while being ultimately guided by self-interest
      2. One can act in accordance with duty due to an inclination toward the duty
      3. One can accept his duty purely “out of duty”
   7. Morality does not consist in mere compliance to duty
   8. Critics of Kant often object that an ethic of personal morality and of the good will reduces morality to the pure subjectivity of good convictions
3. Categorical Imperative
   1. The concept of the categorical imperative
      1. As an imperative, it is an “ought”
      2. In its shortest form, it could hence say, “Act morally”
      3. The categorical imperative follows directly from the notion of morality as absolute goodness
      4. Kant shows that the basic question as to what I ought to do can be understood in three ways:
         1. Technical imperatives of skill
         2. Pragmatic imperatives of cleverness
         3. The categorical or moral imperative
   2. In its basic form, its says: “*Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”*
      1. In addition, Kant recognizes “three ways of representing the principle of morality:
         1. “*Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature*”
         2. “*Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other. Never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end*”
         3. “*All maxims proceeding from our own making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature*”
      2. Maxims
         1. Subjective principles of action
         2. Has several practical rules under them:
            1. They differ from individual to individual (*subjective* principle)
            2. They do not designate formal types attributed to the agent by an objective observer (determinations of the *will*)
            3. Maxims denote the manner in which one leads his life as a whole (as *principles*)
   3. Ethic of maxims is frequently proposed as the appropriate form for moral philosophy
   4. The universality present in every maxim is a subjective universality and not objective
      1. Test of universalizability has two forms:
         1. Whether or not a maxim can even be *conceived* as a universal law
         2. Whether or not one can without contradiction *will* a maxim as a universal law
   5. Kant has been accused of moral rigorism
4. The Autonomy of the Will
   1. Moral subjectivity lies in the ability to determine oneself by one’s own principles
   2. Kant’s argument plays upon the content and the form of desire
   3. Kant says that every limited rational being necessarily wants happiness
   4. Kant considers the highest good in the context of an ethic of the will, while Aristotle views it from a standpoint of an ethic of aims
   5. Morality originates in freedom in the strictest, transcendental sense
   6. Morality always has imperative significance
   7. With the principle of autonomy, Kant places philosophical ethics upon a new foundation
5. The Fact of Reason
   1. Kant mentions the problem of the reality of morality rather incidentally
      1. Due in part to the imbalance between the substantive significance and the actual treatment of this problem
      2. “With the phrase fact of reason,” Kant wishes to point out that morality actually exists
      3. Kant designate consciousness of the moral law as the fact of reason
   2. The fact of reason is supposed to prove the objective reality of morality and to refute skepticism
   3. Kant considers the fact of reason undeniable
   4. Fact of reason consists in the freedom of the will
   5. An appropriate philosophical ethics constitutes a complex task
      1. It is crucial to form an appropriate concept of morality and to specify it in accord with Kant as unqualified goodness
      2. The concept of unqualified goodness is applied to the situation of finite rational beings
      3. Transcendental reduction leads to the freedom of the will as the principle of moral subjectivity
      4. Show the foregoing argument deals with a reality rather than a fiction
   6. A creative examination of the idea of morality as unqualified goodness, together with the categorical imperative and autonomy as its underlying principles, would have a very good chance of overcoming the problems of naturalism and of the is-ought fallacy