

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM-103)

KANT'S ETHICS I: THE GOOD WILL

LECTURE BY RIAZ P KHAN



Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- ❖ Prussian German philosopher born and lived in Königsberg, East Prussia (present-day Kaliningrad, Russia)
- ❖ Major modern philosopher and key figure of the European Age of Enlightenment
- ❖ Philosopher of modernity and enlightenment
- ❖ Kant and the profession of philosophy
- ❖ Moral theories published in the 1780s/90s



Kant's Ethical Approach in Comparison to the Others

- ❖ Ancients versus Moderns

- ❖ Ancient ethical approaches: What makes a person good?
- ❖ Modern ethical approaches: What makes an action good?

- ❖ Modern Ethical Theories

- ❖ *Consequentialists*: Focus on the outcome of an action
- ❖ *Kantian Deontology*: Focus on the motivations or intentions of an action

- ❖ According to Kant, there are two kinds of intentions

- ❖ *Egoist*: Motivated by self-interest
- ❖ *Kantian Deontology*: Motivated by (moral) duty



Kant's Criticism of Virtue and Happiness

- ❖ Aristotle's distinction between intrinsic good and instrumental good
- ❖ Kant's distinctions: Qualified good and Good Without Qualification
- ❖ Are intellectual virtues and moral virtues good without qualification?
- ❖ “Moderation, self-control, and sober reflection ... lack much in order to be declared good without limitation”
- ❖ Even happiness or living well can lead to pride, arrogance, sloth

“[A] rational impartial spectator can never take satisfaction even in the sight of the uninterrupted welfare of a being [happiness] , if it is adorned with no trait of a pure and good will; and so the good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of the worthiness to be happy.”

(Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals)



A Good Will

“There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a good will.” (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*)

- ❖ A *Good Will* is the only good without qualification
- ❖ A *will* is the faculty in us which chooses or motivates us to do something. We regard the will in terms of whether the choices we face are determined (by some external source), or whether you have non-determined control over your acts
- ❖ A *good will* is having the kind of motivation derived from (moral) duty
- ❖ So, a *good action* is motivated by one's moral duties, and a *good person* is one who has the *good will* – i.e., actions determined by duty
- ❖ A good will is something that would act on the basis of universal consideration, and would not be influenced by subjective, particular determination

“If some impartial rational spectator is looking down at the world, the good will would shine like a jewel”



Deontology and Rationality

- ❖ 'Deontology' – derived from the Greek terms '*deon*' ('duty' or 'obligation') and '*logos*' ('logic' or 'reason')
- ❖ *Moral duty* – produced by law which is necessary, universal, and binding on all (rational) beings at all times
- ❖ *Moral law* – a law of nature that governs the universe; based on logical reasoning
- ❖ Central role of *logic* and *reason* in Kant's ethical approach
- ❖ This sense of rationality is the foundation of duty and morality
 - ❖ Logic of reasoning and contradiction
 - ❖ Principles that are necessarily and universally true
 - ❖ Lays claim on all rational beings
 - ❖ Even “outside” of this world



Duty Versus Self-Interest

- ❖ Two kinds of motivation
 - ❖ Motivated by recognition of moral duty (Kantian *deontology*)
 - ❖ Motivated by “self-serving aim” (*Egoist* or *Hedonist*)
- ❖ Example of two merchants
 - ❖ Arbitrariness of self-interested acts even if for benefit of others
 - ❖ Accidental or contingent; depending on circumstances
 - ❖ Contrasted with Kant’s fascination with ‘pull’ of duty
 - ❖ The hold of morality over people



Duty Versus Consequences

“The good will is good not through what it effects or accomplishes, not through its efficacy for attaining any intended end, but only through its willing, i.e., good in itself ... Utility or fruitlessness can neither add to nor subtract anything from this worth” (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*)

- ❖ *Consequentialists*: Value of an action depends entirely on its consequences
- ❖ Kant's *deontological* approach: Moral quality of an action is judged entirely by the person's intentions (*maxims*)
- ❖ Examples
 - ❖ An action can be morally good even if consequences turn out to be bad
 - ❖ An action can be morally bad even if consequences turn out to be good
 - ❖ Accidental or circumstantial nature of consequences
 - ❖ Contrasted with the universal precepts of moral duty



What are these Duties?

- ❖ Duties are generated by laws
- ❖ Moral Duties are generated by moral laws
- ❖ Moral Laws as ‘Categorical Imperatives’
- ❖ Three formulations of the categorical imperative
- ❖ Perfect and Imperfect Duties
- ❖ Kant’s Examples:
 - Keeping Promises
 - Suicide
 - Developing Talent
 - Charity

