

Marlon DeCaul

Kant and Mill Reading Questions Week 6

Kant, "Duty and Reason as the Ultimate Principle" - pp. 506-512

1. Explain why Kant thinks the only thing truly good "in itself" is goodwill.

Kant argues that goodwill is valuable in itself because it is the only thing that is completely under our control. We cannot control our natural abilities or situations, but we can control our will and our actions. Goodwill is the source of all other moral virtues, such as honesty, fairness, and compassion. These virtues are only good when they are motivated by a goodwill.

2. What does Kant mean by doing our actions "from the motive of duty"? How is this different from acting out of self-interest, or out of natural inclination, or even just in "conformity" with duty?

- a) Kant argued that doing our actions "from the motive of duty" means that we act out of a sense of obligation to follow moral principles, regardless of whether we feel inclined to do so or not. He believed that moral principles are universal and apply to everyone, and we all have a duty to obey them because they are based on reason.
- b) For example, if someone acting out of self-interest helps an elderly neighbor carry groceries up the stairs it is because they hope to receive something in return, such as a thank you or a favor in the future, then their action is not morally right according to Kant's philosophy. However, if the same person helps their neighbor simply because it is the right thing to do, and they feel a sense of obligation to help others, then their action is morally right because it is motivated by duty.

3. What does it mean for an action to have moral worth based on its principle, not based on the end it achieves?

Moral worth of an action is based on the reason behind it rather than its consequences. Kant believed that actions are done solely because they are the right thing to do, regardless of the outcome.

4. Explain in your own words Kant's two formulations of the Categorical Imperative, on 510 and 511-512:

a) I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law

In other words, we should imagine a world where everyone follows the same principle as you and ask ourselves whether this would be the best option universally.

b) 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

I believe Kant is saying that using other people as means to achieve our own ends is morally wrong because it treats them as objects rather than as independent beings with their own goals and desires.

Mill, "Happiness as the Foundation of Morality" pp. 512-517

1. Write out and explain Mill's "Greatest Happiness Principle".

The Greatest Happiness Principle promotes the idea that actions and policies should be evaluated based on their ability to promote the overall well-being and happiness of society rather than any individual's interest or pleasure.

2. What does Mill mean when he writes, "Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied"?

Mill is saying that a life of curiosity, and the pursuit of knowledge and truth, even if it leads to some unhappiness or dissatisfaction, is better and more fulfilling than a life of ignorance and superficial desires.

3. How does Mill discuss quality and kinds of happiness in contrast to calculating the quantity of happiness?

4. What role does all of previous human history and the experience of wise and competent people play in figuring out what will bring the most happiness in our actions?

When we take into account the lessons of the past and the insights of experts, we can make more informed decisions about the actions and behaviors that are most likely to promote our own happiness and the human race flourishing.