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Professor Dueck

PHI101: Introduction to Philosophy

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Kant and Mill

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

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

Kant believes that the only thing truly good "in itself" is good will. He says that it is the "willing" part that makes it good. If by our will we try to achieve our moral duty then we are doing good.

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

When Kant says doing our actions "from the motive of duty" he is referring to us feeling compelled to do something that we and the rest of the world would view as morally right. However, if we act in our own self-interest then we are only serving ourselves and not doing our duty at all. Likewise, if our natural behavior is to do something then it is not doing our duty either for it is a "norm" in that regard.

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

What it means for an action to have moral worth based on its principle, is that if doing our duty would be the moral thing to do then it would be seen as right. That is even if doing our duty does not end up giving the desired result. Just the fact that it was done out of duty is the main thought behind this.

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

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

A) This formulation by Kant is stating that if what I will were made to be a universal thing that everyone did, then it should still be able to make sense and not contradict itself. For example, cheating on an exam can not be universally accepted. If it were then cheating in itself would be meaningless and no longer be cheating. It would be a norm. Testing would not be a need.

B) This formulation by Kant states that you should not be self-serving and use someone just for your own goal, but rather use them for their actual purpose. Example being you should not go and kiss random strangers because you want to be kissed or get a kiss. That is self-serving and not their overall purpose. Their overall purpose would be to live as human beings with their own choices and not have your choice forced upon them.

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

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

"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals Utility, or the Greatest Happiness principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness."

If the outcome of something benefits the greater good then it is morally right. If the outcome of something does not benefit the greater good then it is morally wrong.

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

When Mill writes "Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied," he means that it is better to be dissatisfied chasing after higher pursuits, passion, dreams, and overall desires than to be dissatisfied by not having our basic needs met.

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

Mill states that quality is to be considered as well as quantity. The estimation of pleasures would be considered absurd if it were to depend on quantity alone. If two things have the exact same quantity for example, but the quality of one of the two things

is much better or greater than it would be more pleasurable than the one with the lower quality.

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?

The role of all of the previous human history and the experiences of wise and competent people allows us to reflect on our own lives. We get to look over and see why we do things and what has shaped the way we think and structure our life.