

Asa Hunte

Alliance University

Intro to Philosophy

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Paper 2 Ethics

For my paper I am choosing to focus on Kantianism. Kantianism is an ethical philosophy penned by Immanuel Kant and focuses on having a good will which means to have a proper driving force for all that one sets out to do, holding oneself to a standard in which the person will never act in a way that could not be attributed universally, and having respect for other human beings so that they are not treated as a means but rather an end. This basically means that if one follows this philosophy, they must treat other human beings as actual human beings and not as tools. One could say that this would just be someone being a decent human being but there is more to it than this. It is possible for someone to treat others as a means not intentionally but rather, out of hurriedness or absentmindedness. Paying proper attention to the human beings who are around us and who we interact with lines up with the points of Kantianism which is to have a good will as well as not acting in a way one would think right for others to act. This can be found on page 511 where Kant states; "Persons, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value for us-, they are objective ends - that is, things whose existence is in itself an end,"(page 511, Western Philosophy). From here, I will now discuss the second point here which is acting in a way that the person would be fine with other people behaving as such also. I think this point matches with a Bible verse that comes to my mind that speaks about doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. The meaning

for this verse can be interpreted in a different way than the second point of Kantianism but the main idea for both at their cores is to manage oneself carefully to not come off as a hypocrite. As for the first point of Kantianism which is to act out of a good will, requires one to act with good intentions without any outside influence or internal hope for a reward after doing said action. I would say this point is the closest to scripture as Immanuel Kant himself references scripture here when he says, "It is doubtless in this sense, that we should understand too the passages from Scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbour and even our enemy. For love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty - although no inclination impels us, and even although natural and unconquerable disinclination stands in our way - is practical, and not pathological, love, residing in the will and not in the propensions of feeling, in principles of action and not of melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone which can be an object of command." (Pg 509, Western Philosophy.) Being able to act with a good will is in the very essence of what it means to be a Christian. We as Christians are called to love one another as Kant states in the above reference but can someone truly act out of a good will without loving others? It's impossible to act out of good will if the person is acting out of anything but love. If someone is helped because they were told to do so by another, it becomes outside coercion. If they do it because they feel guilty because perhaps, they were responsible for the thing they are helping the person with, they are simply cleaning up their own mess and no will of value is able to be found here. If they act in hopes of receiving a reward for their assistance, this is acting out of self interest or dare I say it, selfishness. It is impossible for one to act simply out of a good will without love and it is even harder to act out of love for a stranger if one is not Christian. Although I say this, I must recognize that there exist people who are Christians in name only

which means they refer to themselves as a Christian to others and put on an act of going to church and praying but when it comes to acting out their faith, they come up short. They may be able to fool others for a time but the fruit they bear will show the true nature of their heart.

Here's an example of this. Suppose there is a student who is leaving school for the day and he sees a fellow student completing the chores for the classroom but they are struggling. This can go either of two ways. He can either stay back to help the other student causing him to miss his prior engagement which he was heading to after school, he can pretend he didn't see anything and hurry to his destination, or he can even let the janitor or a faculty member still at school know about the other student's predicament. Only the first choice would be done out of a good will because the student is choosing to sacrifice his time to help his fellow struggling student. The second choice is obviously selfish, and the third choice would just be him making a compromise with himself by letting someone else know about the situation but still choosing not to do anything himself. I believe that the Kantian principle of a good will can only be born out of love and like the first choice I gave for the student, love is self-sacrifice. You would be hard pressed to find someone like this who is not a Christian or has Christian beliefs. The only way I can see someone having a good will like this outside of a Christian belief system is probably by having a very Christian upbringing even if they have not decided to believe yet themselves. The seed has been sown within them and their actions reflect their upbringing but the main point I want to make here is, A good will stems from having a heart willing to love strangers and I feel this can only consistently be found among Christianity so if one wants to follow the philosophy of Kantianism, I feel the most essential component is having a relationship with God as a Christian so that as we love others from him loving us, we can have a good will in all that we do.

