Response Paper

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Moral Reasoning 22: Justice

October 28, 2002

> A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, nor because of its fitness
> to attain some proposed end; it is only good through its willing, i.e., it is good in itself.

This line from the *Grounding* demonstrates Kant's interpretation of morality as being an intrinsic part of actions, setting him apart from the followers of utilitarianism who claimed that morality was a property of the state of the world without regard to the reason behind actions. I will explain this through the use of discrete logic, which will provide a highly precise description of the differing philosophies and emphasize the contrast between them.

Let's first consider the utilitarian point of view on actions. Let A be the set of all actions that may be taken, and $A_m \subset A$ the set of those actions which are "moral." The utilitarian would claim that the morally relevant aspect of an action is dependent on its effects. In other words, let S be the set of all possible states of the world. Every action causes a change to the state of the world, producing a new state; therefore, all members of A (that is, all actions), may be represented as an ordered pair of states of the world. An action may be defined as a transition between an initial and a final state of the world:

$$A = \{(s_i, s_f) \colon s_i, s_f \in S\}.$$

The utilitarians also claim that there is an objective evaluation of every state of the world, so that two states may be compared and one determined more "morally acceptable" than others. We may define a single objective function $f \colon S \to \mathbb{R}$ which maps states of the world to numeric values representing their utility.[1] Then we may determine the set of moral actions:

$$A_m = \{(s_i, s_f) \colon s_i, s_f \in S, f(s_f) > f(s_i)\}.$$

Let P be the set of all persons. To utilitarianism, the morally relevant aspect of that person is the actions he/she takes, so a person p may be "defined" sufficiently by a subset of actions taken by that person $A_p \subseteq A$. This person p is thus morally good if and only if $A_p \subseteq A_m$.

In the quote above, Kant argues that this representation of actions is mistaken. The means-ends reasoning of utilitarianism is not satisfactory. Later in the chapter Kant explains this further, claiming

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[1]This is based on Bentham's version of utilitarianism; this is fair to use since Kant was Bentham's contemporary, as discussed in lecture.

that an action "has its moral worth, not in the purpose that is to attained by it, but in the maxim according to which the action is determined." In other words, the morally relevant aspect of an action is the maxim, or reason, for its being executed.

Let M be the set of all such maxims. Then there exists a subset $M_m \subset M$ of those maxims that are moral (to Kant, those that correspond with *duty*). A person's will may be described as a function that, given a state of the world and an action actually taken in that state of the world (that is, not a hypothetical action but the one the will actually executes), produces a maxim for that action; that is, a function $w \colon A \to M$.[2] In other words, when some person performs some action, he/she does so with some principle, or maxim, backing that action. Every person has a unique will; let W be the set of all these "will functions" w.

Thus Kant claims that a person $p \in P$ is defined not merely by a set of actions but also by a will; that is, $P = \{(w, A_p) : w \in W, A_p \subseteq A\}$. This will provides the "intrinsic" nature of actions that can make them good or bad in and of themselves. A morally good person, then, is one whose maxims behind actions taken are moral maxims. So a person $p \in P$ is morally good if and only if:

$$p = (w, A_p), \ \forall \, a \in A_p : w(a) \in M_m.$$

The morality of a person depends on their will, and not on the results of the actions taken. Therefore, to Kant, morality is an intrinsic property of a person's will, and not dependent on the states of the world produced by that person's actions.

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[2] Since the state of the world when the action was taken is a part of the action itself, the function need not consider the state of the world in which the action was taken.