

Introduction to Philosophy (PHIL104)

Handout 11

Kant IV

END IN ITSELF. Kant has already made clear that an action of good will must be free from the influence of inclination. It must be performed solely on the basis of reason. So in 544 (425) the search is on for the end that the person can achieve by acting on the law of reason. But since the moral law (expressed in the categorical imperative) is unconditionally valid, the end must also be good intrinsically, in itself.

What could be this intrinsically good end? Kant rejects three candidates. One is objects of desire (inclination). They are good only for a particular purpose—the satisfaction of desire. Desire itself cannot be good intrinsically, since it carries no value once it is satisfied. Finally, animals are equally devoid of intrinsic goodness, as they do not invoke reverence.

The intrinsically good end is found in humanity. The latter is not to be understood biologically: humans are not intrinsically good by virtue of belonging to a certain species. It is rather the rational nature in actual humans that constitutes that intrinsically good end.

As such, it has dignity, rather than price, and it is able to inspire reverence. What, however, possesses all these qualities is not a whole man, so to speak, but only the rational nature in that man.

RESPECT. What are the properties of rational nature that marks it out from things and makes it worthy of respect? It cannot be just the mere presence of a brain (or nervous system). Elsewhere Kant suggests that its essential characteristic is the ability of *setting ends for itself*. Are animals, even fairly primitive biological organisms, not capable of setting ends for themselves? Some argue that they are, and that therefore they do not qualify as mere things. But perhaps animals do not *themselves* set the ends—inclinations do that for them.



Some other commentators locate the essential property of rational nature elsewhere. What makes it worthy of respect is the ability to act morally. What does this ability consist in? It seems that it should consist in the freedom from inclination and thus in the very fundamental ability to act freely. Only under such assumption, moreover, actions can be attributed to a *person*, rather than to an aggregate of psychic, physiological, biological forces acting inside him.

On the second view, animals or retarded people are denied rationality in this technical sense. Thus they are to be classified as things. Should we, therefore, treat them as we please? Perhaps not. Perhaps all that has been established is that we have no duties to *them*. Yet actions towards them may still be constrained by the duties towards ourselves.

Question 1. Consider works of art. Are they to be respected as ends in themselves, or could they be used as we please? What about various property items?

FORMULA OF HUMANITY. After establishing that humanity is an end in itself, Kant proceeds to derive the formula of categorical imperative. It has the following steps:

1. I represent myself as end in itself.
2. Therefore, this representation is always a subjective ground of action (i.e. it is presupposed in any of my maxims).
3. But other human beings also represent themselves as ends in themselves.
4. Therefore, this must serve as an objective ground of action.
5. Consequently, the principle of will must be such that I ought to always act towards myself, as well as towards others, as an end in itself.

FH ‘Act in such a way that you treat humaninty, whether in your own person or in other persons, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.’

NOT MERELY AS MEANS. It is essential for Kant to include in FH the provision ‘merely’. Of course we often do use people as means. There should be nothing wrong with this, as long as we also use them as ends. But what does this mean?

To use people as ends is to respect them. This does not mean to shower them with signs of respect, or to form a positive view of them. Presumably it means to respect their rational nature, and that in turn means to respect the ends set by that nature. So on the first approximation, we say that FH urges us, in our interactions with persons, not to ignore the ends set by these persons.

YSB