

## Lecture Notes 3 : The Formula of Humanity

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***Groundwork 2*****From FUL to FH**

Kant writes:

All maxims have, namely,

- 1) a form, which consists in universality, and in this respect the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus: that maxims must be chosen as if they were to hold as universal laws of nature;
- 2) a matter, namely an end, and in this respect the formula says that a rational being, as an end by its nature and hence as an end in itself must in every maxim serve as the limiting condition of all merely relative and arbitrary ends;
- 3) a complete determination of all maxims by means of that formula, namely that all maxims from one's lawgiving are to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature. (*Groundwork 4:436*)

It follows from this that the FUL is only a preliminary, 'formal' version of the moral law.

**Humanity as an End in Itself**

A common anti-Kant argument goes as follows:

- (1) Actions conforming to categorical imperatives do not have antecedent inclinations as ends to be produced.

∴ (2) Such actions have no ends (other than law itself).

Kant asserts (1). If this inference was valid, or if Kant affirmed the conclusion, then we would be stuck with a very implausible account of human motivation.

But (2) does not follow from (1), and Kant does not assert (2)—at least in his more sober moments. Humanity is the end of all CI-conforming action.

**The Formula of Humanity (FH)**

The 'predisposition to humanity' and to 'personality'

Kant claims that rational nature is a 'self-standing' end that warrants respect.

FH: So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. (*Groundwork 4: 429*)

## The argument for FH

...rational nature exists as an end in itself. The human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far it is thus a subjective principle of human actions. But every other human being also represents his existence in this way, consequent on just the same rational ground that also holds for me; thus it is at the same time an objective principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will. The practical imperative will therefore be [the FH] (*Groundwork* 4: 429)

The argument:

- (3) I must necessarily represent my own existence as an end in itself (on a rational ground).
- (4) Every human being represents himself that way.
- ∴ (5) The principle [that rational nature exists as an end in itself] is universal and objective.
- ∴ (6) The principle gives rise to a universal practical imperative, which is [the FH].

The crucial premise here is (3). How is it to be interpreted?

- (7) If  $x$  has value, and  $x$  has value in virtue of  $y$ , then  $y$  has ultimate and unconditional value.
- (8) Our projects have value in virtue of our capacity to choose and prioritize ends, i.e. our rational nature.
- ∴ (9) Rational nature has ultimate and unconditional value (and therefore must necessarily be represented as such).

But (7) is clearly false: a merited apology has value, but only in virtue of the fact that I did something wrong (i.e. something without any value) that merits an apology.

An alternative: perhaps all Kant provides (and needs) is an *inference to the best explanation*: we must necessarily represent rational nature as having ultimate and unconditional value because that is the best way to account for our evaluative and valuing practices.

## Study questions

What is the relationship between the FUL and the FH?  
 What is Kant's view of our duties to nonrational nature?

## Suggested Reading

*Groundwork*, sections 1 and 2.  
 Korsgaard (1996), chapter 4.  
 Wood (1999), chapter 4.