

can be misused, or can be lamented. Even happiness is not admirable, if it is the happiness of a villain. Benevolence may lead us astray, letting other people enjoy what they have no right to enjoy, for example. And 'the very coolness of a scoundrel makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes than we would have taken him to be without it'.

The only thing good in itself, then, is a good will. Even if the agent with the good will is handicapped, 'by a special disfavour of destiny or by the niggardly endowment of stepmotherly nature', from actually doing much good in the world, still, if he has a good will, it will 'shine like a jewel for its own sake'.

But what is a good will? Kant considers cases of people doing good things, things that might even be their duty, not, however, from a sense of duty, but from other inclinations, such as self-interest, or even benevolence, or a sense of vanity. A salient example is a shopkeeper who does not overcharge an inexperienced customer, but only because his self-interest is served by not doing so. Perhaps he calculates that the customer is more likely to return, or that his shop will profit from a good reputation. The shopkeeper behaves honestly enough, but not because he has the right feeling that he *ought* to do so. There is no jewel shining by itself here. This is not the good will in operation. So what is?

The shape of the answer becomes clear from such examples. The good will is one acting from a particular good motive. It is one acting out of a sense of law or duty. 'Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law.' We are able to represent laws of action in ourselves, and a good will is one that acts in accordance with that representation. The core of morality, then, lies not in what we do, but in our motives in doing it: 'When moral worth is at issue, what counts is not actions, which one sees, but those inner principles of action that one does not see.'

This is all very well, we might say. Kant seems to be praising up the

conscientious agent, or the agent of principle or righteousness or rectitude. This is a person who, once he thinks 'Such-and-such is a duty' is strong-minded or principled enough not to be deflected from doing it. This is in some respects an admirable psychology, although it is also one that can do a lot of harm, since people's consciences can be as perverted as anything else. One wonders why righteousness in this sense is exempt from the criticism levelled at benevolence and the rest, that it can be a Bad Thing.

Some writers also remind us that in many of life's situations, rectitude is not what we want. We often want people to act out of love or gratitude, not out of duty. Good parents take their child to an entertainment because they enjoy the child's pleasure; a parent who takes the child out of a sense of duty is to that extent lacking. A lover who kisses out of a sense of duty is due for the boot. But this is not a fundamental criticism of Kant. He can, and does, allow dimensions in which the good-hearted parent or lover or benefactor scores highly. It is just that these are not, for him, the *moral* dimensions. Moral excellence is found only in the strength of the sense of duty.

There is a more fundamental difficulty. Kant's answer seems to demand that certain things got onto a list of duties *in the first place*. It is no good saying 'Act from a sense of duty' if when asked the question 'And what is my duty?', the only reply is 'To act from a sense of duty!'

We have to break out of the circle somewhere, and so far we do not know how. So how is it all going to get us nearer to the foundations Kant promises? His move is breathtaking, both in its speed and its result:

*But what kind of law can that be, the representation of which must determine the will, even without regard for the effect expected from it, in order for the will to be called good absolutely and without limitation? Since I have deprived the will of every impulse that*