

The modern Aristotelian, less inclined to discount inferiors and outsiders than Aristotle himself, can fight back. She can say that such cases need sustaining by rationalizations, and these rationalizations will mainly consist in lies the privileged tell themselves. And we already conceded that a life lived amidst lies, or in a fool's paradise, is not a flourishing life. So the ingredients are there to suggest that *real* flourishing or *true* human health implies justice. It implies removing the oppression, and living so that we can look other people, even outsiders, in the eye.

However, this need for rationalizations is itself not a given. Sometimes, as we go our careless ways, we do not even seem to need lies to sustain us. Our generation may flourish by consuming all the world's resources, and letting the future go hang. We do not tell ourselves a story according to which the generations to come are inferior to us and deserve to inherit a deadened world. We just don't think about it. It is only when we have to have a conversation with the dispossessed that we scramble for rationalizations.

Are we being 'unreasonable' as we discount or forget about dispossessed outsiders? We are certainly failing in benevolence, and we may be failing in justice (more on this below). But even if we concede much to the Aristotelian argument, we might remain pessimistic about its effect. Insofar as it works by 'pumping up' what is required for a life of reason or a life of *true* flourishing, we will find people perfectly ready to settle for a good fake. Better to buy the cheap running shoes and not to think too much about how they were made. To unsettle such people we will need, eventually, to look further at the motivation to justice.

18. The categorical imperative

Hume's challenge to Reasons (section 16) was taken up by Immanuel Kant. We can approach Kant's views by thinking of a common gambit in practical discussion. When we try to stop people acting in some way, a good question is often: 'What if

everybody did that?' The test is sometimes called a 'universalization' test. If the answer is that something would go especially wrong if everybody did that, then we are supposed to feel badly about doing it. Perhaps, for instance, we would be claiming an exemption for ourselves that we couldn't allow to people in general.

Kant picked up the universalization test and ran with it. In his hands it became not only a particular argument *within* ethics – a device, as it were, for making people think twice, or feel guilty – but the indispensable basis *for* ethics. It became the foundation stone for ethics, grounding ethics in reason alone. It gives us Reasons, even in the domain of prescriptions or imperatives. He unveils the way this happens in his short masterpiece, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785, a work that has probably inspired more love and hatred, and more passionate commentary, than any other in the history of moral philosophy.

Foundations

The universalization test can sound like a version of the Golden Rule: 'Do as you would be done by' – a rule sometimes claimed by Christianity as its own, but found in some form in almost every ethical tradition, including that of Confucius (551–479 BC). Kant denies that his idea is just that of the Golden Rule. It is supposed to have more meat. He points out, for example, that the Golden Rule can be misapplied. A criminal can throw it at a judge, asking him how he would like it if he were being sentenced – yet the sentence may be just, for all that. A person in good circumstances may gladly agree that others should not benefit him, if he could be excused from benefiting them. He apparently abides by the Golden Rule. So something with more structure is needed.

Kant starts by distinguishing what he wants to talk about from what he calls 'talents of the mind', such as understanding, wit, or judgement, and from advantages of temperament, such as courage or perseverance or even benevolence. He also distinguishes it from gifts of fortune, happiness, and even admirable qualities such as moderation. None of these are 'good in themselves'. For all of them