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Kant: The Formula of Humanity

The Formula of Humanity

“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” (429)

What does the formula of humanity require?

1. In the case of *oneself*: to preserve and cultivate one’s own rationality, and not merely as a means to something else.
2. In the case of *others*:
 - to preserve and cultivate *their* rationality?
 - Is this even possible?
 - Instead: to *respect* their rationality, and not merely as a means to something else.
 - But what does this involve?

Lying promise case:

I violate the F of H, because “he whom I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him, and so himself contain the end of this action” (430).

What does this mean?

- That he does not *actually* consent? Seems too strong. It is morally permissible to punish criminals, for example.
- That he *cannot possibly* consent? This is what Kant actually writes. This would rule out deception, for example. But it seems too strong. Sometimes it is not wrong to deceive people.
- That he *cannot rationally* consent? But what does this involve?
 - (i) That it is in *their interest* that I act on the maxim? Then, in many cases, whatever I do will be wrong.
 - (ii) That my maxim satisfies the formula of universal law?

Assistance case:

Satisfying the formula of humanity requires that, as far as I can, I “further the ends of others. For, the ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also my ends, if that representation is to have its *full effect in me*” (430).

- I ought to further *not* his rationality,
- but instead *his happiness*, what he wills, *his* ends.
- This is how I respect him as a being capable of having ends.

The argument for the formula of humanity

The appeal to the good will:

1. Consider the following list of candidates for ends-in-themselves: persons, things that we will as ends because we are inclined for them, and other things.
2. Things that we will as ends because we are inclined for them are (normative) ends only conditionally.
 - For one thing, our willing them because we are inclined for them is *necessary* to make them ends.
 - Moreover our willing them because we are inclined for them is not even *sufficient* to make them ends, since our achieving them is only good if we do so compatibly with a good will.
3. Other things are at most means.
4. The only thing that is an end unconditionally is a good will.
5. Rationality is (a capacity for?) a good will.
6. If X is an *unconditional* end, then there is a *categorical imperative* to treat X as an end.
7. Therefore, there is a categorical imperative to treat rationality as an end.

Comments:

- 1–3 are simply prefatory remarks. The argument could start at 4.
- In the text, there is no explicit reference to the earlier argument that the only thing good unconditionally is a good will.
- This argument is controversial. (Lok-Chun made this point.)
- This explains why we further *our own rationality*.
- Why then do we promote *others' happiness*? Maybe this just is what it is to treat another's rationality as an end?

Other readers of Kant believe that the main argument is in this later passage:

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 rational being also represents his existence in this way consequent on just the same rational ground that 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 of the laws of the will.

Appeal to the need to value one's ends

1. Every rational being must treat what she wills as a (normative) end for *her because she wills it*.
 - I.e., setting aside the question *whether it really is* an end for her (whatever this might mean), she *cannot help but* view it as an end for her.
 - Perhaps we need to restrict this claim to *permissible* ends?
 - Is this true? What about *akratic* willing?
2. Therefore, every rational being must treat what she wills as being a (normative) end for her because *a rational being* wills it.
 - Why does this follow?
3. Therefore, every rational being must treat what *any rational being* wills as ends for her.

Comments:

- Is there an equivocation on “must”?
- This explains why we should promote others’ happiness.
- But it *also* implies that we should promote *our own* happiness.
- And it seems *not* to show that we ought to *further our own rationality*.

Some commentators suggest that 1 also entails:

4. Every rational being must treat her will *as an end*.
 - Why does this follow? Why must something that *makes* something else an end *be* itself an end?

Appeal to the need to value one's rationality

1. In deliberation, every rational being must treat her own rationality as *valuable*.
 - Why else deliberate, exercise one’s rationality?
2. Therefore, in deliberation, every rational being must treat her own rationality as *an end*.
 - Why not simply as a *valuable means*?
 - This gives us the result that we ought to *further our own rationality*.
 - How do we get the result that we ought to further others’, and only others’, happiness?
3. Therefore, in deliberation, every rational being must treat *anyone's* rationality as an end.
 - Why does this follow?
4. Treating *another's* rationality as an end consists in *promoting her happiness*.
 - Why does this follow?
5. Therefore, in deliberation, every rational being must *promote others' happiness*.
 - The equivocation on “must” again?