

THE ROAD TO SELF-REALIZATION
IN KANT'S *GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSIC OF MORALS*

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

University of San Carlos

Cebu City, Philippines

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS in PHILOSOPHY

by


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March 2003

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis, entitled, "**THE ROAD TO SELF-REALIZATION IN KANT'S GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSIC OF MORALS**", prepared and submitted by **MARIA MAJORIE R. PURINO**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY**, has been examined and is recommended for acceptance and approval for **ORAL EXAMINATION**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Of all the things that compound this world, it is the consciousness of a *main current* connecting us in a fascinatingly astounding way that still keeps me in awe. It is because of this consciousness that I wish to account all merit to **THE ONE** who has made all conception of reason possible.

I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to those people who have been very instrumental in the making of this thesis:

To my adviser, Bro. Romualdo E. Abulad, SVD, PhD , first for being open, and for patiently helping me realize the dream.

To the members of the panel:

Fr. Heinz Kulueke, SVD, PhD., who is himself, a true and a living example of the good will

Mr Antonio Diluvio, MA, chair and mentor, for always believing in me right from the start

Mr. Orlando Ali Mandane, MA, for his wit, humor, and friendship.

To the CAS Dean, Fr. Florencio Lagura, SVD, PhD., for his encouragement.

To the former Chair, Ms. Virginia Jayme, for her presence.

To my colleagues in the USC Philosophy Department who in spite of their depth and wisdom always make me feel welcome and comfortable – Dr. Amosa Velez, Dr Rosario Espina, Atty. Franco Pagaran Jr., Mr. Alvin Galeon, Mr Ryan Urbano, Mr. Jerry Pescadero, Mr. Bernard Garcia, and Ma'am Myrna Lupian.

To my family, for their unwavering love and support all these years

To all my friends, then and now .. I know I can always share a song with you.

And this piece is also in memory of AMICI; more than just a little coffee shop down the street, it was my house of thought.

“two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me* ”

-Immanuel kant

ABSTRACT

Self-Realization is the most enthralling question that people of all genres are trying to answer. The need to know the reason of one's being, the ultimate goal *to be*, occupies the postmodern man in more ways than one. It is in this regard that Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* is considered as the way to achieve Self-Realization.

Immanuel Kant, in his foundation of morals, states the importance of a good will. The good will is the only thing that is good without qualification and therefore good in itself. The goodness of the good will is not even derived from the goodness of the results it produces, and that even if the intended results are not met, the goodness of the good will remains pure and unblemished.

The comprehension of the good will paves the way to Kant's concept of duty, and that is to do what one ought to do regardless of any personal gains, rewards, or inclinations. Both good will and duty have their essential grounding on Kant's canon of moral law, the categorical imperative, which states – *Act only on that maxim through which you at the same time will that it should become a universal law*. The categorical imperative, then, is the suitable arm that gives an action moral worth. It is by practicing the categorical imperative that puts man abreast with his true rationality.

It is in this light that self-realization is manifested in the Kantian ethics. Although there is still no real and concrete definition of self-realization, the best that this thesis can hope for is to relate self-realization with living a morally meaningful life. Such a prescription is lifted from Kant's *Groundwork*. By contemplating a life of good will, by realizing a life of duty, and by living the categorical imperative, one is led to the road to self-realization.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

“The purpose of morality is to guide people’s actions in such a way as to produce a better world,”¹ says Lawrence M. Hinman, the Director of Values Institute of the University of San Diego. Today, society with all the rules and guidelines created as a means for its regulation has come a long way from the earlier days when man’s only focus was to eat in order to live. What used to be only for survival has now been refined to a better tune, under the guise of community, association and, yes, a better world.

So what is this better world? It is a place where there is harmonious living, where both man and woman compliment each other, a kind of life that easily takes for granted personal interests for the sake of the greater good, where self-absorption and power are downplayed in the name of justice and fairness.

These days, however, it is a luxury to see humanity in all this pristine goodness. What is obvious are the eccentricities that are happening in our midst. We learn everyday in the trimedia the injustices that seem to have been already painfully and shamelessly ingrained in our society. Best-selling books talk about them and top-billed movies use such themes as power, corruption, and addiction. The sick way of

¹Lawrence M. Hinman [10 August 2001] *Basic Insights of Utilitarianism* [on line] Available <http://ethics.acusd.edu/presentations/Theory/Utilitarianism/index_files/3_document.html> [3 August 2002]

the absurd is entangled with reason and morality or, more appropriately, with a “rational agent”² which is not only stunning but revolting as well

It is in this light that the genius of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is here considered. Kant is popular for his “radical and profound contributions to our conceptions of knowledge and truth,”³ as shown by his famous work, *Critique of Pure Reason*. But apart from this overwhelming feat, Kant has a thing or two to say about morality.

Kant’s book, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, primarily speaks of the “good will,”⁴ that which is good without qualification or restriction, something that is good in itself. The study then aims to locate the good will that Kant earnestly speaks about and to use this as the possible key towards self-realization. In a manner of speaking, this writer strongly believes that indeed the goal of a better world is attainable only when there is the evolution of the good will. There is a convincing connection between the human person and morality; change in society is brought about by the same change that occurs in the individual.

It is with utmost urgency, then, that this case is dealt with, for this study assesses the dwindling morals of the contemporary person. We will attempt to dig deeper into the whereabouts of the good will, and thereby re-assert it, so that man

² Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1948), 20.

³ Manuel Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text With Readings* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997), 427.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 485.

may become fully realized

Theoretical Background

“Never has a system of thought so dominated an epoch as the philosophy of Immanuel Kant dominated the thought of the 19th century,” says Will Durant. Our philosopher, in Durant’s opinion, is “like and unlike Jehovah, he speaks through clouds, but with the illumination of the lightning flash”⁵. It is without a doubt that Kant has stimulated the minds of countless of scholars and academicians. Many believe that his works are hard to comprehend and involve much thinking but all are very much challenged by what his writing represents. Kant’s dramatic “rousing from dogmatic slumber”⁶ has been a favorite claim of those who have decided to see through Kant’s light at the end of the proverbial deep tunnel.

The concept of a general normative ethics is the search for reasonable principles of human conduct, including a critical study of the major theories about which qualities and things are good, which acts are right, and which acts are blameworthy. It attempts to determine precisely what moral standards are to be followed and what values are to be cultivated. There are two kinds of such normative theories of right and wrong: teleological and deontological. The former maintains that the morality of an action depends on its results or its consequence, while the latter

⁵ Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc. 1953) 192.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.