

## GOOD WILL

Kant, a great influence for Rawls, similarly applies a lot of procedural practice within the practical application of *The Categorical Imperative*, however, this is indeed not based solely on 'fairness'.

Kant's Theory promotes acting out of Duty - acting for the Summum Bonum for him, *The Good Will* - and in fact encourages Judgement, too.

It's common to think of ethical behavior as requiring the product of good results, but a focus on results is not sufficient. In addition to producing more good than evil, we should also strive to *want* to do good — in other words, our general will or attitude must be good as well. [<http://atheism.about.com/b/2006/06/01/good-will-and-ethics.htm>]

Paul Kurtz writes in the April/May 2005 issue of [Free Inquiry](#):

*Being of good will means that we are not mean-spirited or surly, despairing or nihilistic, vindictive or hateful. We should try to be affirmative about what life offers, not fearful or defensive; we should be hopeful, not cynical or nasty; we should exude some realistic optimism that we can influence or mitigate evil and improve human affairs. We should strive to resolve our problems and overcome adversity. We should try to select courses of action in the light of both reason and good will.*

*Indeed, this positive attitude is a fundamental principle to which, I submit, we each need to be committed—even if, at times, we are defeated or suffer tragic reversals. By a good will, I mean that we should strive whenever we can to do good. Surely, this includes an obligation to assist those who are in need, including children, the infirm, the destitute—those who suffer and need help. But more than that, we should develop a generalized attitude of sympathy, benevolence, and affection toward others.*

It's not too difficult to imagine that, even if our ethical decision making were oriented toward producing the most good and least evil, we might not get very far without good will. If we tried, then our ethical decision making would become an impersonal process, devoid of any passionate engagement with the issues. Lacking such personal engagement, it would be very difficult to understand the experiences of others and thereby realize when our actions are ultimately producing good vs. evil.

Having a "good will," though, means having a positive attitude towards life and towards others. It means wishing for the good and acting for the good just as a general principle, even when no particular ethical dilemmas are under scrutiny. This, in turn, should have positive results when we are faced with making ethical decisions. Just as we should develop a "habit of reasonableness" in which we apply skepticism and critical thinking as a matter of course, we should also develop a habit of "good will" in which we apply affirmative and positive attitudes as a matter of course.

Developing a good will is not, however, merely something that applies in our relationships with others — it's also something that is important in how we deal with our own lives:

*Good will not only applies to our relationships with others, but to ourselves. By this, I mean that each of us should try to develop a positive attitude toward his or her own life; we should hope for the best, not the worst. This means that we need to believe in our own powers, to have some confidence in our abilities to achieve some measure of what we want. Thus, each person should recognize that he or she has but one life to live and that he or she should strive mightily to make that life worth living. If we are to lead significant lives, we need to make moral choices and take responsibility for our actions....*

*We should avoid hedonophobia, that is, we should not fear to enjoy life or believe that we are not entitled to do so. We should likewise avoid destructive pessimism, the view that nothing will work out in the end. This is the refuge of bitter people, the haven of the sourpusses of the world. We need a friendly attitude, some wit and humor, laughter, and fun.*

*We should accept the fact that we are not perfect but still able to overcome our errors and misdeeds and move on to a new plateau of experience. No doubt, we need to work hard if we are to attain our goals, but we also need to take time to smell the lilacs and perfume, to taste honey and nectar. Unlike some moralists, overwhelmed by their sense of duty, I affirm that the pursuit of happiness — exuberance — is morally justifiable and personally enriching.*

There are many religious moralizers who deny that life is good (at least, outside of their religion) and should be valued for what it is. Given such a state, it's hard to see how they can manage to do much good in the world around them — if you are going to start out with such a negative attitude, it will infuse all that you do. By the same token, though, starting out with a positive attitude towards life itself should infuse your actions in a positive way.

In many ways, life is what you make of it. If you approach it as something to be denigrated, something dirty, and something that has fallen from some previous state of perfection, then you will never be very happy or satisfied with what life offers. At best you might find solace in the hope that some better will come along after this life. If, however, you approach life as something with many opportunities for learning and experiencing, then you have a chance at being happy. The key is to want to be happy and to want to enjoy life — to have a good will about life generally and your life in particular.