

GETTING TO KNOW KANT

If you're looking for a model for how to live your life, the eighteenth-century Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant may not seem like an obvious choice. He lived his entire seventy-nine years quietly and uneventfully in the university town of Königsberg. The son of a harness maker, Kant worked his way up to the intellectual heights of a professorship. His days were spent reading, giving lectures, engaging in (mostly) friendly philosophical discussions, and writing what is often nearly impenetrable prose. And yet this seemingly ordinary man shook up the Western philosophical world in ways that few others have managed to do. With exceptional intelligence and creativity, Kant built a strikingly original philosophical system. Central to that system is his understanding of what it means to live a morally good life.

For Kant, a morally good life is a life lived according to reason. On his view, such a life is difficult to achieve, but it is a profoundly worthwhile undertaking. To live according to reason is, for Kant, to live in accordance with our fundamental natures as free, rational beings. Kant's emphasis on rationality is both essential to his theory and distinctive of it. Other moral theorists writing at the time believed that morality had its source in our feelings, or in what was often thought of as our innate moral sense. Kant is skeptical that

our natural feelings, emotions, and intuitions could ever serve as a firm enough foundation for morality. His own theory reflects both that skepticism and his confidence that reason should be our ultimate guide when we're seeking to lead a good life.

Although Kant has tremendous faith in human rationality, he is not under the illusion that our rational powers are limitless. Reason, however powerful it might be, cannot tell us everything we might want or need to know. For instance, Kant does not believe that we can know whether we have free will, or whether there's a God. (He does, however, argue that we can rationally act as though we have free will, and that we can have rational hope in God's existence. More on that later.) He also realizes that human beings do not always do what reason directs us to do. We waste hours on social media, we eat more sugar than is good for us, we buy things we can't afford, we get irritated at inanimate objects. We do all kinds of irrational things on a regular basis.

And yet, we're capable of something more. Often, it's perfectly obvious to me that I'm spending too much time on Instagram or eating too much sugar. I *know* that what I'm doing is bad for me, and that a more rational, self-controlled version of myself would be settling down to work with a bowl of edamame, not scrolling through Instagram eating Cap'n Crunch. It's true that I'm not being that more disciplined person right now, but for Kant, the key point is that it's in my power to be that person. We are always able to do what our reason tells us to do, even when we're choosing to ignore its voice.

It's crucial to Kant's theory that the voice of morality comes from within us, and not from outside forces, like society or religion. Kant is not interested in preaching to people about morality,

He does not see morality as a matter of coming up with a bunch of rules, and his ethical works are not reference books for looking up answers to moral dilemmas. In fact, Kant is adamant that we do not need outside guides that will tell us how to live. (He might even have been skeptical about your decision to buy this book.) Not only are we each capable of understanding morality for ourselves but basing our moral decisions on someone else's set of rules would be a major mistake. Morality is something we have to determine for ourselves, much as Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz had to figure out for herself how to get home to Kansas.

Now this does *not* mean that Kant is a moral relativist, or someone who thinks that there is nothing more to morality than each person's opinion. He is actually about as far from a moral relativist as you can get. Not only does he believe in moral truths, but he believes that moral principles are principles of rationality, and that they are objective, universal, and unchanging. On Kant's view, denying that killing innocent people is wrong is not all that different from denying that $2+2 = 4$.¹ If someone were to insist that $2+2 = 5$, we'd regard them as irrational and perhaps in need of some medical help. As we'll see, Kant holds that all rational beings, thinking rationally, will converge on the same fundamental moral principle. That principle serves as the basis for all of morality. This is an ambitious position to take, and possibly a surprising one, given that it flies in the face of our ordinary experience. People have very deep moral disagreements on a variety of topics, and it doesn't seem that we can easily settle them by way of appealing to a single moral principle.

Kant recognizes that working out moral disagreements is much more challenging than working out disagreements about obvious

mathematical claims like $2+2 = 4$. Of course, most mathematical claims aren't that obvious, but that doesn't mean the rest of math is just a matter of opinion. Math is based in reason, although the rationality of a given theorem may not be evident to the untrained eye. For Kant, morality is also based in reason. We don't need to spend years in school to understand it, but we do have to be willing to stop and engage in rational reflection about what morality is and what it requires of us. If we do, then we can use reason to figure out how to be a good person, just as we can use it to calculate the area of a triangle.

So, a good life in Kantian terms will be a life lived in accordance with rational moral principles. There's a catch, though. To say that a reason-driven life is a good life doesn't necessarily mean that it will be a happy life in the usual sense. As we all know, some deeply immoral people seem to do pretty well for themselves, particularly if they can avoid getting caught. Kant is not suggesting that being a good person will get you everything that you want. He does, however, think that being a good person will make you *deserving* of happiness. That may not seem very satisfying to anyone hoping that moral virtue might come with material rewards. Shouldn't being a good person also get you a good life?

It would certainly be nice if virtue always paid off in terms of helping us achieve our life goals. Kant is just skeptical that this actually happens. We can see from our own experience that being a good person sometimes means you have to sacrifice things you want, and that bad people sometimes get away with murder—literally and figuratively. As far as Kant is concerned, the only one in a position to fix this mess is God, which is why we have reason to hope that God exists. On our own, we have no way of ensuring

that virtue is rewarded with happiness. The best we can do is to try to make ourselves worthy of whatever happiness might come our way.

As Kant sees things, guiding your life according to rational moral principles isn't going to make you rich or famous. But there are other kinds of reasons why we might want to try out a Kantian way of life and why we might find it worthwhile. When we act on rational moral principles, we are *choosing* how to live. We are not simply allowing ourselves to be dragged around by things like Instagram's algorithms. Kant sees tremendous value in living according to principles that we have chosen, rather than just going along with what other people are doing or permitting ourselves to be ruled by outside forces. Now you may be thinking, "Well, don't we sometimes choose bad principles for ourselves?" That is certainly true, and we'll be returning to this issue later. The key point here is that if my life is going to go well in Kantian terms, I have to be behind the wheel, directing my own actions and choices and taking ownership of them. And I will chart a smoother course for myself if I use my reason as my GPS.

This emphasis on the importance of rationality and individual freedom is one of the hallmarks of the Enlightenment, the name given to the intellectual period in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe during which Kant lived and wrote. Indeed, Kant is one of the central philosophical figures of the Enlightenment, and his work has had a profound impact (both positive and negative) on the course of European and American history. This is quite a legacy for the son of a harness maker in a small Prussian town. To see how Kant's ideas took shape, let's take a brief look at his own story. No one writes in a vacuum, not even a brilliant

philosopher like Kant. If we're going to understand him, we must know something about the place and time in which he lived, and the forces and ideas that shaped his philosophical outlook.

Kant was born on April 22, 1724, into what we probably would now describe as a working-class family. His parents and grandparents were tradespeople, not scholars, and likely never expected a world-famous philosopher to emerge from their ranks. But they believed in education and Kant benefited from their efforts to ensure that he had access to a good one. As members of a guild, his parents were never truly poor. They did, however, face financial struggles. Kant's mother died when he was thirteen, and his father when he was twenty-two, leaving behind Kant and four siblings. As the oldest son, Kant took on great deal of responsibility for helping support his brother and sisters. He also received help from others, most notably an uncle who contributed financially to his education. As we'll see in later chapters, Kant has some subtle points to make about the moral complexities of beneficence and gratitude. He may well have been speaking from his own experiences as someone who was both a giver of charitable aid and a recipient of it.

Kant was devoted to his parents, especially his mother, and he clearly had tremendous respect for their commitment to hard work and their principled moral behavior. He saw his parents as having lived honorably and done their very best for their children, despite the hardships they faced. No doubt Kant's parents were very much in his mind as he developed his view of morality, particularly his

conviction that each of us has it within us to be a good person. He believed strongly that no one needs a fancy education to know what's right. His own parents, with their limited opportunity for formal schooling, served as his proof. Good moral principles are available to anyone who cares enough to think through what morality requires from us.

Kant's upbringing was also profoundly influenced by the religious atmosphere in which it took place. His parents were devout adherents of Pietism, a movement within Lutheranism that focused on personal faith and a lived commitment to Christian principles. Kant spent a large part of his youth in a very strict Pietist school. Although Kant fully appreciated the positive effects that religious devotion can have on a person's moral character, he was also keenly aware of its darker, more pernicious elements. Kant did not care for the methods of religious education he experienced at school, believing them to be at odds with the essential task of cultivating individual rationality. Eventually, he largely rejected the Pietist tenets of his youth, but the existence and nature of his own religious commitments are not easy to sort out. No one would describe Kant as a religious man, and yet it isn't quite right to regard him as an atheist or agnostic either. Let's just say that his relationship with religion is complicated. In that sense, he fits right in with many of us in the twenty-first century.

After he finished school, Kant earned his keep mostly through tutoring and giving lectures at the university, for which he was paid on a by-the-student basis. Because he most definitely didn't have a trust fund, it was lucky for Kant that he proved to be an immensely popular lecturer. On top of his other duties, he lectured up to twenty-two hours a week on a range of different subjects.

Although he probably found the schedule exhausting, he was never short on students, who lined up early just to get a seat in his classroom. Despite his growing philosophical reputation, it wasn't until 1770 that he received a full professorship in philosophy at the university where he had spent his entire academic life. From then on, Kant was able to lead a relatively comfortable life, one that enabled him to produce his most famous works.

Kant is often portrayed as a bit of a curmudgeon, particularly for his habit of keeping to an extremely strict schedule. This isn't false, but it's a more accurate representation of the older man, worried about his health and rather set in his ways. The younger Kant was a sought-after dinner guest and companion, known for his conversational skill and his facility with a wide range of subjects. He never married and discussions of his romantic life do not rise much above the level of rumor. He did, however, have many friends and admirers, and he certainly had the respect of his colleagues and students. Kant didn't shy away from conflict or controversy, but he understood the importance of being a good citizen of his university and his city. He was also a dutiful brother and uncle, continuing to provide financial support to his sisters and their families throughout his life. And by the time he died in 1804, at the age of seventy-nine, he had solidified his place as one of the greatest intellects that Western Europe had ever produced.

Of course, Kant was far from perfect. He could be rather caustic in his criticisms of other scholars, and occasionally behaved unpardonably toward people who deserved better from him. (Here's one example: Kant conducted a philosophical correspondence with an intelligent and perceptive young woman named Maria von Herbert, who wrote to ask his advice on whether she needed to

reveal her past relationships to her current suitor. Although Kant started out the correspondence well enough, he seems to have been unable to cope with her pointed challenges to his philosophical worldview. Eventually, he stopped responding to her and instead started using her letters as a warning to other young women about the moral dangers of romantic entanglements.) Kant did appear to hold a number of women in relatively high regard and he generally saw women as rational beings. He did not, however, use his considerable skill and influence to improve their situation or argue for women's political rights. Although it's possible to derive plenty of feminist conclusions from Kant's ethical theory, Kant himself failed to see them and indeed, said quite a few things that conflict with them.

Perhaps even more troubling are Kant's repugnant views about race, views that unfortunately outlived him by many decades. Here especially, Kant's own methods failed him. When it came to understanding people of different races, he relied too heavily on bad sources and engaged in lousy reasoning. The moral theory he developed so carefully over the years clearly points to the wrongness of slavery, and yet Kant himself condoned it until the very end of his life. By his own lights, he should have been open-minded and optimistic about the rational capacities of people of other races, and he should also have seen their oppression and enslavement as a violation of their most basic dignity. Unfortunately, he did not. That a person as smart as Kant was subject to such a profound moral error tells us something about the power of racism and the difficulty of disentangling ourselves from convenient and self-serving world views. As I hope we'll see, Kant's work can help us avoid making at least some of the mistakes that Kant himself made.

For a man who led a fairly ordinary life, Kant managed to have an extraordinary influence on Western philosophy. His analytical prowess, combined with his (usually!) insightful observations of human nature and social life, make him a figure of nearly unparalleled importance in the history of ethics. But Kant's importance is not merely historical. The ethical insights of this eighteenth-century Prussian philosophy professor remain useful for us today. Although it has been more than two hundred years since his death, Immanuel Kant still has something to teach us about how to live.

4 | MORAL COMMITMENT

As is probably clear by now, Kant does not think it's easy to become a good person. We have to fend off the worst impulses of our natures and act in accordance with rational principles that we choose for ourselves. That, for Kant, is the way to exercise our autonomy and live as the free rational beings that we are. Needless to say, this is easier said than done. What exactly do we have to do to make this happen? How do we straighten the crooked wood out of which, alas, we are made?

Kant's answer to this is both very simple and very complicated. The simple version of his answer is that we should commit ourselves to doing what's right. But if you don't find that terribly helpful, that's understandable. How do we know what the right thing is? And once we've determined that, how do we get ourselves to do it, especially when there are so many obstacles in the way?

When Kant is taught in introductory philosophy courses, he is nearly always presented as someone who based morality on principles (well, one principle in particular, which we'll discuss over the next few chapters). Being a good person is just a matter of knowing this principle and acting on it. This picture is certainly not wrong, but it is nowhere near the whole story. In fact, it's not even where he starts. Instead, he begins the *Groundwork* by asking us to reflect

on the concept of a good person. Kant thinks that this is a useful starting place for ethical inquiry in part because he thinks we already know what such a person is like. It's when we reflect on our conception of what it means to be a good person that we can begin to understand what morality is and what it directs us to do. So, we'll start, as Kant does, by thinking about our ordinary concept of a good person.

You undoubtedly know someone who merits the description of being a truly good and decent human being. Take a minute now to think about that person in all their moral glory. What is it about them that makes you describe them as good? Perhaps they are especially compassionate, always thinking about other people and ready to sacrifice for them. Perhaps they are wise in the choices they make in their life, prioritizing things that truly matter over things that don't. Perhaps they've demonstrated exceptional courage or fortitude in overcoming challenges. Perhaps they are the kind of person you can always count on to show up when you need them, or act with integrity in difficult situations.

This last idea, that a good person is someone you can count on, is especially central to Kant's own conception of a good person, or what he calls a person with a good will. For Kant, a person with a good will is *committed* to morality in a way that means that we can always count on them to do the right thing, no matter what temptations they face or what pressures they're under. It's that commitment that distinguishes the truly good person from the rest of us. And this commitment is what Kant means when he talks about having a good will.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant uses some examples to explain what he has in mind by the commitment to morality expressed in a good

will. His examples are controversial, mostly because they are misunderstood. Kant thinks that in many situations, doing the right thing is in our self-interest or coincides with what we want to do in any case. To illustrate this, he gives examples of a shopkeeper who charges fair prices because it's good for business and a person who helps other people because he finds it enjoyable. The shopkeeper acts from self-interest. The sympathetic philanthropist (as he's usually called) acts from his inclinations, which are warm and generous. Kant is often interpreted as saying that the shopkeeper and the sympathetic philanthropist don't have good wills, a view that seems especially implausible in the case of the philanthropist. But that's not quite what he's saying. His point, rather, is that we can't tell from their circumstances whether either of them has a good will or not. They are definitely doing the right thing, but we don't know whether they're doing it because it's right or because of their other motivations. When doing what's right aligns with self-interest or inclination, we can't be sure just how committed a person is to morality. If we want to know what someone is really like, Kant suggests, we should consider how they act when those other motivations are absent. What do people do when the chips are down? That, for Kant, is our best opportunity to understand what it means to have a good will.

And so Kant asks us to imagine the philanthropist in a new set of circumstances, one in which his life has been overtaken by tragedy and troubles. With his mind and heart weighed down, he can no longer take pleasure in helping people the way that he did before. But he still does it. He still gets out of bed and goes to work serving meals at the local soup kitchen or helping refugee families find housing. He doesn't enjoy it the way he did before, but he

keeps going because it's the right thing to do. Now, Kant says, we see his real character shining through. The person with a good will has the kind of commitment to morality that will stand up to the most difficult tests.

Kant describes this person as being motivated by duty and says that only actions done from duty have something he calls moral worth. This way of describing good actions is not one that has won Kant many admirers. For one thing, acting from duty doesn't sound very inspiring or compelling as a description of what motivates a really good person. It also seems odd to say that helping actions like the ones performed by the sympathetic philanthropist lack moral worth. There's much to be said about how we should interpret Kant's remarks, but I'm going to set most of it aside. Although the concept of moral worth takes up a lot of space in discussions of Kant's ethics, Kant himself doesn't really do much with it after that early passage in the *Groundwork*. It is not a central idea in his theory. Nor does he talk much about duty as a motive in later works. As we'll see, he mostly thinks of duties in terms of specific actions. This is all pretty confusing on Kant's part, so I'm going to simplify matters and talk about the person with a good will as a person with a commitment to doing what's right because it's right. The rightness of the action matters to them, and it matters to them enough that they are willing to do what's right even when it's unpopular, or when they don't feel like it, or when they have to sacrifice something else that they want. This is what it means to be a good person in Kant's way of thinking.

A slightly different way to explain this commitment to morality is in terms of our reasons. The person with a good will acts for morally good reasons. Now all of us, whether we have good wills or

not, act for reasons. This doesn't mean that we always act for good reasons; clearly, we don't! But we are always capable of taking some consideration or other *as* a reason for acting. We can choose our reasons. What is characteristic of a person with a good will is that they choose reasons that reflect a commitment to morality.

Some of what we "do" (say, digesting our lunches) is not under our conscious control. We can't just decide to start or stop digesting. Most of the time, we don't even consider such things to be actions at all. They are more like things that happen to us, such as getting a sunburn. We also have inclinations and desires, some of which we fulfill without thinking. If I'm thirsty, I don't usually consider whether I have reason to take a sip of water. I may even do it without thinking at all. But that doesn't mean that it's not an action. I'm still choosing to drink it and I'm choosing it for a reason, like that I am thirsty. While normally being thirsty is a good enough reason for me to drink from a glass of water, that's not always true. Maybe it's *your* water, in which case just grabbing your glass and sipping from it would be rather rude. The key point is that I am capable of pausing and making a choice about whether to drink the water. I can decide whether to follow my desire to drink, whether my thirst alone is a good enough reason to grab the glass or whether other reasons (like the fact that the glass is yours) come into play. This, for Kant, is what it means for us to be free, rational beings. We are capable of choosing our actions and choosing the reasons on which we act. To be a morally good person, I must act for morally good reasons.

So, what are morally good reasons? They can't simply be reasons that seem good to me. Otherwise, you'd have no grounds for complaint when I swipe your water bottle in the middle of our

desert hike. My being thirsty is a reason for me to drink, but it is not always a good enough reason from a moral standpoint. We can see Kant's moral theory in part as an attempt to work out what reasons we should use when we're deciding what to do.

The shopkeeper could be charging fair prices for the reason that he will otherwise get awful reviews on Yelp or for the reason that it's the right thing to do. For Kant, only the second reason counts as a moral reason because it's the one that reflects his underlying commitment to morality. It's the reason in virtue of which we'd say he's a good person. He's not a good person in virtue of the fact that he charges fair prices to maintain high Yelp ratings. He's a good person in virtue of the fact he'd charge fair prices regardless of what happens on Yelp.

This probably seems fairly straightforward in the case of the shopkeeper. The sympathetic philanthropist is a more challenging case, because it looks like his reasons for helping people are pretty good ones. He likes to help them! Isn't that what makes him a good person, that he takes pleasure in helping people? Kant treads carefully here. He does think that the sympathetic philanthropist's inclination to help people is one that should be encouraged and praised. It is not, however, quite what he has in mind by a morally good reason. That's because the philanthropist is still really thinking in terms of what pleases him. I don't mean to say that he's selfish. If helping other people pleases him, he's definitely not selfish. But his reasons for helping are independent of morality, even if they happen to coincide. If he helps people just because he wants to help them, then morality isn't on his radar screen. Does he care who he helps? To borrow an example from contemporary Kantian ethicist Barbara Herman, would he just help

a person carrying a heavy package out of an art museum late at night? Or would he stop and wonder whether helping a potential art thief is actually a good idea? If he's not concerned with whether his helping actions are morally defensible, then he doesn't have a good will.

It turns out that Kant has a definite idea of what it means to be a good person. To be a good person, or to have a good will, is to have a commitment to doing what's right because it's right or alternatively, a commitment to acting on morally good reasons. Of course, I still haven't told you how a person with a good will figures out which actions are right. That will come in the next chapter. (It takes Kant a while to get there too, so I'm in good company.) But before we move on to that, it will be helpful to talk a bit about Kant's conception of virtue. That's because we can also express the commitment to doing what's right in terms of virtue.

To some people's ears, the word "virtue" has rather old-fashioned connotations. It's often associated with sexual mores, particularly concerning the sexual behavior of women. That is not at all what Kant means by virtue. (In fact, it's pretty much never what any philosopher, past or present, means by virtue.) The most famous historical account of virtue is almost certainly Aristotle's. For Aristotle, virtue is an excellence. To be virtuous is to be excellent at being the kind of thing you are. On this understanding, it is a virtue of a golden retriever when she reliably returns things that you have thrown. (My own golden retriever seems not to have gotten this particular Aristotelian memo. Fortunately, she has other virtues.) Because human beings are not retrievers, our excellences lie in a different area, namely activities that require reasoning. This means that for Aristotle, it's a virtue in a human being

when we engage in excellent reasoning of any sort, whether that's excellent reasoning about the stock market or excellent reasoning about how to handle a morally tricky work situation.

Kant is certainly a fan of excellent reasoning, but he thinks of virtue a little differently than Aristotle. As Kant sees it, virtue is mostly a matter of getting ourselves to *do* the right course of action in the face of temptation to do other things, usually easier or more pleasant ones. It is a kind of strength in maintaining your commitment to morality over time. The sorrowing philanthropist, who helps people even when his own life is falling apart, exhibits Kantian virtue. It takes fortitude to do what's right in such circumstances. We cultivate virtue by cultivating that kind of inner strength.

Let's go back to that morally tricky work situation. Suppose that you think that someone in your department may be embezzling money from company accounts. You don't have solid evidence, but you see irregularities that are best explained by some dodgy bookkeeping on the part of your colleague. You're debating whether to tell your boss, who is not the world's nicest person, or whether to keep silent.

Suppose that you decide that you really must tell your boss. It's possible that your boss will react badly, even blaming you. It's also possible that your boss will fire your colleague, depriving everyone in the office of your colleague's amazing salted caramel brownies, which he brings in every Thursday. So, your boss will be mad at you, your other colleagues will be mad at you, and you'll have to spend Thursdays without salted caramel brownies. The temptation to overlook the bookkeeping irregularities may be pretty strong. After all, you don't own the company and you do like brownies.

This experience of knowing what we should do but not wanting to do it is familiar to all of us. If we give in and don't do the right thing, we're in the grip of what the ancient Greeks called *akrasia*, or weakness of will. Virtue is how we fight weakness of will. Some people read Kant as saying that we show virtue only when we succeed in a struggle against temptation. But one mark of success is that we do not find bad courses of action all that tempting. This is a point on which Aristotle and Kant agree. To say, as Kant does, that virtue is strength doesn't mean that a person with a good will is constantly exhibiting that strength in battle. The more virtuous we are, the fewer battles we'll have to fight. But Kant does think that there's no such thing as winning the war against temptation. We're just too human for that. The best we can do is make ourselves as ready as possible to win each skirmish.

Let's summarize where things stand. We've said that a person with a good will has a commitment to doing what's right because it's right, a commitment that takes the form of acting for morally good reasons. Kantian virtue is strength in living up to this commitment. In my examples, I've mostly been taking for granted that we know what the right thing to do is, whether that's charging fair prices or helping people out or stopping embezzlement. Needless to say, it's not always that simple. By this point you may be wondering if I am ever going to explain how the person with a good will knows which actions are right.

Kant's answer is that the person with a good will acts on a particular principle, which he calls the "categorical imperative." That principle will occupy us for the next three chapters. Before we get there, however, it's important to note something about Kant's methodology. Kant thinks that when he presents the categorical

imperative as the principle on which a good person operates, he is simply telling us something we already know about a good person. The principle is already built into our own thinking about morality. We just don't realize it.

In holding this view, Kant is rather unlike Aristotle, for whom moral knowledge is a specialized capacity. For Aristotle, moral judgment requires a virtue called practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is a kind of sound judgment about what to do. The person with practical wisdom can see what is at stake in a given situation and also knows how to value the various goods at stake properly. Thus, the practically wise person will know when it is worth running into a burning building (to save a toddler) and when it is not (to save a Justin Bieber poster). Some decisions are harder than others, which is why practical wisdom is a complex virtue, and one that Aristotle thinks can be acquired only over time and through experience.

Kant takes a different approach, one that more closely resembles the Christian framework in which he was raised. Any religion that holds that we are subject to divine judgment for our actions must also hold that we are capable of knowing which actions are sinful and also capable of avoiding them. Otherwise, that divine judgment would be deeply unfair. As we know, Kant rejects the Pietist religion of his youth, but his claims about our capacities for moral knowledge are consistent with it. We all have the ability to determine what's right and what's wrong. We don't need anyone to tell us the moral principle on which we should be acting. All we need is to shake ourselves free of the desires and inclinations that get in the way, so that we can see it clearly and acknowledge its force.