Immanuel Kant
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Among the most influential philosophers ever. Influential in nearly all areas of philosophy: moral philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and language.

We are looking at his most influential work in moral philosophy, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.
In the first sentence of the first section of the Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Kant (740) writes:

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- What is a good will?
- What does "without qualification" mean?
- How is a good will different from intelligence?
- How is a good will different from happiness?
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- Only a good will is good without qualification.
- A good will is the condition or qualification of all other good things.
- A good will is the highest good.
The Good Will

What is it to have a good will?
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To have a good will is to be a person whose motivation is to do good.

It's not just wishing for good things, but being motivated to do good and thus acting to do good.

(We'll be looking at what goodness is in a bit; for the moment, just remember that a person with a good will is a person whose motivation is to do good.)
Good will = good without qualification

Kant says that a good will is good \textit{without qualification}. This means that a good will is always good, and does not require anything else to be good.

Indeed, we cannot imagine a situation, according to Kant, in which we would disapprove of a good will. This is one of the ways in which we know that a good will is good without qualification.

("unconditionally good" and "good in itself" are two other terms Kant uses for this same idea.)
Good will = good without qualification

Furthermore, the idea that a good will is good without qualification means that *nothing else is relevant to the goodness of a good will*. It does not matter, for example, what the consequences of a good will are: insofar as they are good, all good wills are equally good.
Good will = good without qualification

An example of two good wills with different consequences...

A wealthy man and a poor man both desire to help others as much as they can, and each thus gives as much as he can to those in need. The wealthy man, because he has great wealth, gives much more than the poor man. But both have the same will to do good.

According to Kant, the rich man is no better than the poor man. Poverty does not limit or "qualify" the good will of the poor man, nor does wealth qualify the will of the rich man.

And common sense seems to agree.
Only a good will is unconditionally good

What else is good without qualification?

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Things that are good, if at all, only with qualification:

- Talents of mind (wit, intelligence, cleverness)
- Gifts of fortune (power, riches, reputation)
- Qualities of Temperment (courage, temperance, resolve)
- Happiness
- Everything else at all.
Only a good will is unconditionally good

Consider the contrast with utilitarianism:

As hedonists, utilitarians seem to think that pleasure is simply good, without qualification.

But Kant says this is not so.

Consider the pleasures of a sadist...
Only a good will is unconditionally good

Consider the pleasures of a sadist...

According to the utilitarian, the only thing that's bad about the pleasure of the sadist is that it arises in the context suffering, i.e. it is outweighed by the bad things that always accompany it.

Kant says that the pleasure of the sadist is not good, and this, according to Kant, is not merely because it is outweighed by the suffering that accompanies it. Rather, pleasure that is caused by suffering is itself bad.
Only a good will is unconditionally good

Likewise, many virtues such as courage, temperance, calm deliberation and self-control, are bad when found in wicked people. The villain is all the worse, according to Kant, when he shows these traits of character.
Good will is the condition of goodness

So when are traits of character, fortune, and happiness good?
Good will is the condition of goodness

So when are traits of character, fortune, and happiness good?

Kant's answer is that they derive their goodness (when they have it) from a good will:

- Courage is good when we find it in a person who strives to do good.
- Happiness is deserved and good when it occurs in a person with a good will.

i.e. A good will is the condition or qualification of all other good things.
A good will is the highest good

When Kant says that a good will is the highest good, he means, simply, that nothing is better than a good will. Of all the good things in the world, a good will is the best of them.
Kant's ideas about morality conflict sharply with utilitarianism:

- Kant denies consequentialism: a good will does not need to have good consequences to be good.
- Kant denies hedonism in two ways:
  - Not everything that's good is pleasure.
  - Not all pleasures are good.
Questions for reflection...

If a good will is good without qualification, then it is just as good in a foolish person that causes much harm while meaning to do well as it is in a person that succeeds. Is this correct?

Is a good will really the highest good?
Questions for reflection...

You might think that
If A requires B, then B is at least as good as A.
So, if the goodness of every good thing requires a good will, a
good will is at least as good as every good thing.

But this principle isn't generally correct: a university degree
requires admission to a university. But admission to a university
isn't as good as a university degree (otherwise, we'd spend a
lot more time applying for the degrees and a lot less time
getting them.)
Locating the Good Will

Actions involve a chain that begins with a person, who has a motivation, which gives rise to an action which has an effect.

Where is moral worth, according to Kant?
- The person?
- The motivation?
- The kind of action?
- The effect of the action?
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Simplified answer: The moral worth is in the motivation.
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Where is moral worth, according to Kant?

- The person?
- The motivation?
- The kind of action?
- The effect of the action?

Better answer: The moral worth is in the possession of a good will, which is determined by moral law, and includes a predisposition to act on certain motivations.
Locating the Good Will

For most of the rest of this class, the simplified answer will be good enough. Unless you are specifically told to do so, I won't expect you to use the better answer on exams or anything like that.
Exemplifying a Good Will

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It's not usually easy to see what the motivation of an action is. Consider:

- what was your motivation for going to class today?
- what was your motivation for voting (or not)?
- what was the motivation for the Iraq war?

Motivations are complex things, as these examples show.
Exemplifying a Good Will

To highlight the motivation that is a good will, he begins talking about the concept of duty. When we find a person acting with the motivation of duty, we will know we are considering someone who has a good will.

In the first example, he discusses actions contrary to duty. No action contrary to duty can even begin to have moral worth.
Exemplifying a Good Will

"For example, that a dealer should not overcharge an inexperienced purchaser certainly accords with duty; and where there is much commerce, the prudent merchant does not overcharge but keeps to a fixed price for everyone in general, so that a child may buy from him just as well as everyone else may. Thus customers are honestly served, but this is not nearly enough for making us believe that the merchant acted this way from duty and from principles of honesty; his own advantage required him to do it."

The merchant performs the action of fairly pricing his goods and this has the effect that the child buys at the same rate as everyone.

But the motivation could be prudence: his business will suffer if he is found exploit children in his pricing.
Exemplifying a Good Will

Does the shopkeeper have a good will?

Maybe. But we can't see that he does, for he may well be acting simply from prudence. That's not acting from duty, so we're not sure that duty is his motivation.

Rather than duty, inclination may motivate the shopkeeper.

If prudence is the shopkeepers motivation, his fair pricing has no moral worth.
Exemplifying a Good Will

"To preserve one’s life is a duty; and, furthermore, everyone has also an immediate inclination to do so. But on this account the often anxious care taken by most men for it has no intrinsic worth, and the maxim of their action has no moral content. They preserve their lives, to be sure, in accordance with duty, but not from duty." (398)

Again, the action is in accordance with duty, but that doesn't mean that the motivation is duty.

Preserving one's life has moral worth only if one is motivated by the duty to preserve one's life.
"On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away the taste for life, if an unfortunate man, strong in soul and more indignant at his fate than despondent or dejected, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it—not from inclination or fear, but from duty—then his maxim indeed has moral content." (398)

Ah hah! Now we see the good will shine forth! Here is a person with no immediate inclination with no motive of prudence with no other motive driving him to preserve his life except duty alone.

This, we can be sure, is an act done from a good will. It has moral worth.