

“Did Kant hold that rational volition is *sub ratione boni*?”

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Abstract

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Did Kant accept a strong “guise of the good” thesis – that rational volition is *sub ratione boni*? In this paper I explore the case for ascribing to Kant a strong thesis to the effect that that rational volition constitutively understands itself to satisfy a condition of universal validity. That is, rational volition is always on maxims that are taken to satisfy a condition of universal validity. As I make clear later in the paper, this is not the claim that rational volition understands itself to satisfy a condition of moral justifiability, and it can allow that some intentional behavior, not being the result of rational volition, does not understand itself to satisfy a condition of universal validity. While I do not think that the texts are decisive, some support for this interpretive claim is provided by Kant’s main remarks about the will. But stronger support is provided by the connection of this thesis with certain key ideas that are central to Kant’s moral conception. I argue that this thesis is required by his doctrine of autonomy, that the will is a law to itself, and that it provides a natural reading of the idea that the moral law is the basic principle of free agency. In particular, it allows Kant to count bad willing as genuine free volition – free because it understands itself to satisfy a condition of universal validity, but bad because based on defective practical reasoning.

Key words: Kant’s practical philosophy, rational volition, will, practical reason, guise of the good