

PHI 202 | Precept on lectures 11 and 12

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READINGS:

Kant, I. (1786/2012). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press.

Nagel, T. (1979). Moral Luck. In his *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge University Press.

A BRIEF COMMENT ON KANT'S PROJECT

In the *Groundwork*, Kant aims to build a moral theory from the ground up: starting with as few assumptions as possible. In a nutshell, he thinks that we can derive judgments about what we should and shouldn't do by reflecting on what has unconditional value, and in particular on what it is to be a truly good person. How exactly this derivation proceeds is interesting, but complicated and contested. Let's focus just on the starting and the ending point.

(Explain)

UNCONDITIONAL VALUE

(1) Kant is looking for something that is valuable unconditionally. He rejects a number of candidates including happiness or well-being, intelligence, and courage. Why?

(Whole group)

(2) Kant goes on to consider the idea that being a truly good person is valuable unconditionally. But what does being a truly good person consist in? According to Kant, it isn't just a matter of acting *in conformity* with duty, but rather acting *from* duty. What's the difference? How does Kant argue for this claim? What examples does he consider?

(Whole group)

(3) *Kevin C.*: "I felt that intuitively an action that you have a direct inclination to do because you want to do it holds more moral worth than an action you do just because you feel you are required to do." —Do you agree with Kevin or with Kant?

(Breakout rooms)

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

(4) What is the Categorical Imperative? Does it tell us what we should do in every situation?

(Whole group)

(5) What does the Categorical Imperative tell us about the following actions: (i) false promising, (ii) free riding on public transport, (iii) pollution?

(Breakout rooms)

(6) *Liam*: "Wouldn't it be better to build a Kantian view around the idea of personhood rather than humanity? ... "after all, humanity seems to be more of a biological trait than one which should necessarily extend to encompassing morality, and it is foreseeable that non-human entities could still exhibit traits which would make us view them as persons (imagine a genetically engineered cat who could exhibit empathy, consciousness, and all other traits we associate with personhood to a much greater degree than any human)".

(Whole group)

MORAL LUCK

(7) According to Nagel, there are four types of moral luck: (i) outcome luck, (ii) circumstantial luck, (iii) constitutive luck, (iv) causal luck. Can you give an example of each?

(Whole group)

(8) *Kevin H.*: "I have a question about the idea of constitutive luck. If moral assessment should substantially depend on the kind of person you are, wouldn't that excuse a lot of behaviours that are generally considered bad? For example, if someone is a pathological liar, does that make it okay for them to lie? Similarly, would it be acceptable for sadists to torture people?"

(Whole group)

(9) *Griffen*: Suppose the drunk driver that did not kill anyone was aware of the risks, while the driver that killed someone was not aware of the risks. Who is more blameworthy?