

# PHI 202 | Precept on lectures 9 and 10

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## READINGS:

Williams, B. (1973). A Critique of Utilitarianism.

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

## INTEGRITY AND COMMITMENTS

(1) As I see it, Williams presents two related objections to utilitarianism. The first centres on the claim that utilitarianism prevents us from having *genuine commitments* and compromises our *integrity*. How does Williams argue for this claim? Why is this an objection to utilitarianism?

(Whole group)

(2) Do you find Williams's objection compelling? You may consider the following questions. First, is being committed to pacifism necessarily incompatible with killing one to save many or taking a job as a chemist in a military company? Second, are commitments really that important?

(Breakout rooms)

## NEGATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

(3) Williams's second objection against utilitarianism concerns *moral responsibility*. What is moral responsibility? How is it different from judgments about rightness and wrongness of actions?

(Explain)

(4) What is Williams's second objection, in a nutshell?

(Whole group)

(5) *Logan*: "In lecture 9, voluntary intervention was brought up as an alternative to the thesis of negative responsibility. It was also said that the thesis of negative responsibility may overlook the role of what/who created our moral landscapes, while voluntary intervention goes too far in relieving people of responsibility. If both concepts are seen as too extreme, is there a middle ground that was not mentioned which holds agents accountable while also taking into consideration the means by which they got into their predicaments?"

(Breakout rooms)

## QUESTIONS ABOUT KANT

(6) *Amanda*: Is moral worth something different than moral right/wrong?

(7) *Kevin C*: "How does Kant's unconditional value of good will differ from the role of intentions from a few lectures ago? (...)"

(8) *Kevin H*: "I had a question about Kant's idea that good will has unconditional worth. Does that mean that as long as you had genuinely good intentions, your actions are morally justified, regardless of the outcome? What if your actions had severe negative effects? (...)"

(9) *Sofia*: "I would like to talk about the requirements for a principle to be a "universal law." From my understanding, for the principle to be considered a "universal law," it must first come from our moral duty. So, do we all have the same moral duties?"

(10) *Liam*: "It seems to me that a "universal law" doesn't really have any tangible implications behind it. After all, as long as you want your maxim to be the universal law, you can effectively choose any maxim that you want, and, as long as you act in accordance with it, you would be fulfilling Kant's criteria for moral action. How can this then impose any real universal morality?"