

Phil 465: Kant's Moral Philosophy

2nd paper; due November 8. Worth 20% of your final grade.

approximately 1400-1800 words [***Please give a word count, and number your pages.***]

Choose one of the following 2 topics. Be sure to answer or address *every part* of the topic you choose:

A. In section II of the *Groundwork*, Kant provides several different formulations of the categorical imperative. The first one is the “formula of universal law” (FUL). This is stated on p. 81: “Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” Later on that page Kant slightly changes this formulation to include the idea of a “universal law of nature” (which formulation Denis abbreviates as “FUL/N”)

Kant implies that this formulation is meant to give us a way of deciding how to act. That is what a principle of practical reason is supposed to do.

1. Explain how the FUL (or FUL/N) works. That is, (a) give a plausible account of how it guides conduct—how does it tell us what to do and not do—and (b) make sure to explain how Kant sees its operation as exemplifying pure practical rationality.
2. In giving this account, pick at least 3 of Kant's 4 famous examples (pages 81-83) to use in illustrating how FUL (FUL/N) is supposed to work. (If you think Kant is drawing on one of his two formulations more than the other in a particular example, explain this.)
3. Present and examine 2 serious criticisms of FUL. (Several are listed on the “Formulations of the Categorical Imperative” handout.) That is, (a) present the criticism so that it seems like a plausible criticism. (b) Then give a plausible account of how Kant might respond to the criticism, or see the criticism as having misunderstood his view. (c) Finally, give your own view of the strength of the criticism and of the Kantian response to it that you have presented.

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B. Kant's 2nd formulation of the categorical is the “formula of humanity”—“So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, in every case at the same time as an end, never as a means only” (p. 88).

1. Explain what this formula means (according to Kant). What does it mean to treat someone as an “end” as contrasted with treating her/him as a means?
2. In answering 1, use examples 3 and 4 (p. 89) to illustrate Kant's meaning.
3. Explain Christine Korsgaard's view as to what “humanity” means in this formula, in her article, “Kant's Formula of Humanity.” (a) Explain why she thinks her view is a plausible reading of Kant's view, and in particular, (b) how Korsgaard thinks that her view avoids the seeming problem that the formula seems to postulate that humanity has a special kind of value, being the only “end in itself”—but in section I, Kant said that the *good will* was the only unconditionally good thing.

[This question, unlike A, does not ask you to evaluate the arguments you present.]