**Kant, *Groundwork*, 89-93**

**Kant on Lying, and Korsgaard on Kant on Lying**

PHIL 230, Fall 2014

**Third form of CI: Formula of autonomy**

The “third practical principle of the will” is “the idea of *the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law”* (90).

Every rational being should be considered as a “universal legislator” (90)

“Thus the will is not merely subject to the law, but subject to it so that it must be regarded *as itself giving the law*, and on this ground only subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author” (90).

Autonomy: self-guidance, not being guided (only) by forces external to oneself but deciding and acting on the basis of reasons that come from one’s own rational thought

-- giving ourselves rules, principles for actions, including the moral law

-- e.g., not being guided only by unreflective instincts or emotional impulses

So we should act as if every rational being has this sort of autonomy

* Treat every rational being as if they are both subjects under the moral law and legislators of it:
* as if they can determine and command the moral law for themselves, rather than requiring someone else to command them to act morally rightly

What does this add to the other two forms?

* Emphasis on ourselves as authorities: “the laws to which [we are] subject are *only those of [our] own giving*, though at the same time they are *universal,* and … [we are] only bound to act in conformity with [our] own will[s]…” (91)
* If moral law comes from some external authority, may feel you need some “interest” (91) to follow it
  + E.g., avoiding punishment or getting reward
  + And you may not follow the law if you don’t have that interest
* Kant states that if we give the law to ourselves, we don’t have this problem—we are directly commanding ourselves

Relation of this form to the first two forms?

*Might they be saying similar things but focusing on different aspects, or from different perspectives?*

1. formula of humanity: act only on maxims that you could will to be universal laws

2. formula of humanity: only act in such a way that you treat rational beings as ends in themselves, never merely as means

3. formula of autonomy: only act on maxims that are compatible with “the will being itself universal legislator” (90)

**An ideal: the “kingdom of ends” (91-93)**

“kingdom”: “By a *kingdom* I understand the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws” (92)

-- we can think of ourselves as united under a set of common laws (moral laws) like we might think of selves united under a set of civil laws

What is a “kingdom of ends”?

* Not any particular political entity; an ideal of what it *would* be like to live with all rational beings who give themselves (and follow) moral laws
  + where all rational beings act acc. to moral laws they legislate for themselves, and work towards their own ends as much as possible (with help from others) w/o restricting the ability of everyone else to also do so
* “…such a kingdom of ends would be actually realized by means of maxims conforming to the canon which the categorical imperative prescribes to all rational beings, *if they were universally followed*” (96, not assigned)
* “It is certainly only an ideal” (92)

Yet, we still have to act according to this ideal, even though we know it’s not in place, is only an ideal

-- still have to follow the moral law in our own actions, even when we know others aren’t doing so (96, not assigned)

This brings up the issue of Kant’s strong stance on lying…

**Kant, *Groundwork*, class 5**

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**Kant on lying to the murderer**

“On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives” (1799)

**To write down and submit (or via email:** [**c.hendricks@ubc.ca**](mailto:c.hendricks@ubc.ca)**)**

Can you think of some way to argue, from Kant’s own view, that it might actually be permissible to lie to the murderer at the door?

Your answers to this question: <http://wiki.ubc.ca/Course:PHIL230-CH/discussions#Notes_from_in-class_writing_on_Kant_and_the_murderer_at_the_door_.28Oct._30.29>

**Groups who don’t have a presenter:**

Discuss the above question, and/or:

1. Would it be allowed (according to Kant) to tell the murderer at the door a misleading truth instead of the lie? Or, could you just not answer or say you don’t want to answer?

2. Would Kant's instance of truth, even if it injures oneself or others be compatible with religious fundamentalism or other ideologies that claim they are upholding the truth? In other words, would a suicide bomber be justified by Kant if they are pursuing the truth as they understand it?

3. Is it possible to universalize the law of lying to a murderer who is intending to injure your friend?

**Kant’s view on lying to the murderer at the door**

Very strong stance against lying in this article

“Truth in utterances that cannot be avoided is the formal duty of a man to everyone, however great the disadvantage that may arise from it to him or any other” (1).

“To be truthful (honest) in all declarations is therefore a sacred unconditional command of reason, and not to be limited by any expediency” (2).

“…the duty of veracity…makes no distinction between persons towards whom we have this duty, and towards whom we may be free from it; but it is an unconditional duty which holds in all circumstances” (3).

Why is lying morally wrong, even to a murderer at the door?

“… although by making a false statement I do not wrong to him who unjustly compels me to speak, yet I do wrong to men in general … [because] so far as in me lies I cause that declarations in general find no credit …” (1).

* We cannot know for certain what the outcome will be of our action in this circumstance—can we be certain that if we tell the truth the murder will be avoided? Kant: no. (2)
* What we do know for certain is that telling a lie, when you cannot avoid speaking, is morally wrong.

You can even be held legally responsible for the outcome if you lie (2)

-- See Korsgaard on why Kant may have said this, p. 335, 337)

* We are responsible for chains of events we initiate; if you tell the truth to someone and they choose to act on their own, to initiate their own chain of events, then you are not responsible for that
* But if you lie, you are not allowing them to be a “first cause” in a chain of events; you are driving the events yourself.
* “the liar tries to take the consequences out of the hands of others; he, and not they, will determine what form their contribution to destiny will take . … The liar takes the world into his own hands, and makes the events his own” (335)

**Korsgaard on Kant on Lying**

“The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil” (1986)

*A way to address the problems in Kant’s view of lying to the murderer at the door*

**FUL (formula of universal law) and FH (formula of humanity) forms of CI give different answers to this question**

1. According to FUL form of CI (CI1), lying to murderer is permissible b/c universalizable

-- b/c even if it were a universal rule that everyone lies to murderers at the door, the murderer doesn’t think you know you’re in that situation (329-330)

-- *his own deception of you is making it possible for you to lie to him*: you can lie to a liar in this sort of case

2. Acc. to FH (CI2), lying to murderer is impermissible, b/c it violates the requirements of treating rational beings as ends in themselves

*-- it must be possible for them to assent* to what you’re involving them in, and deception (and coercion) don’t allow this

-- if you lie, you’re not treating the other person as rational being who can and should decide to act on your plan or not; not treating them as a first cause of their actions (337)

**Korsgaard: elsewhere, Kant suggests that we *can* lie, if our words would be used for a bad end (338)**

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (“Ethical Duties Towards Others: Truthfulness”)

A case to consider:

“A man who knows that I have money asks me: ‘Have you any money on you?’ If I fail to reply, he will conclude that I have; if I reply in the affirmative he will take it from me; if I reply in the negative, I tell a lie. What am I to do? If force is used to extort a confession from me, if my confession is improperly used against me, and if I cannot save myself by maintaining silence, then my lie is a weapon of defence. … The forcing of a statement from me under conditions which convince me that improper use would be made of it is the only case in which I can be justified in telling a white lie.”

Korsgaard: we can interpret Kant as saying that we can lie to someone who is using us as a mere means to their ends: “You do not have to passively submit to being used as a mere means” (338)

-- the person who wants to take your money is aiming to coerce you if you don’t give it willingly

-- the person who wants to murder someone else is likely lying to *you*, not telling you the truth about what they want to do

*So perhaps Kant didn’t need to be as strict in the lying to the murderer at the door case as he was in this essay.*

**Korsgaard suggests interpreting K’s moral theory as a double-level one: ideal and non-ideal**

Ideal moral theory: says what a perfectly moral society would look like; rules that people would follow if they were perfectly moral (341)

-- determine what these rules should be under the assumption that everyone follows them, and that the ideal is realizable (342)

Nonideal moral theory: says how we should act under nonideal conditions, when there is not strict compliance and the ideal is not realized

-- “Our conduct toward those who do not comply, or in circumstances which make the immediate realization of a just state of affairs impossible, is governed by the principles of nonideal theory” (342)

Value of having both ideal and nonideal moral theories

* Ideal theory provides us with a clear goal: what do we want human interaction to look like?
  + This can be something we work towards, when we are in nonideal conditions: “we are to work towards the conditions in which it is feasible” (343)
* Nonideal theory can tell us how to operate when others are *not* living up to the ideal, and when the ideal cannot be realized effectively by following it
* Nonideal theory can also give us absolute requirements, rules that must not be violated, no matter how bad the conditions in the real world are

Korsgaard: we might interpret FH (CI2) as part of ideal theory, saying that ideally, we must never treat any rational being as a mere means to ends

-- so ideally, it is impermissible to lie to any person

-- in a kingdom of ends, no one *would* lie to anyone else; so no need to ask if we can lie to liars

Then we could interpret FUL (CI1) as part of nonideal theory

-- in a situation where there *are* people doing morally wrong things, FUL shows that it may be permissible to lie to them (or coerce them (347)), b/c this may be universalizable

-- FUL also gives us absolute moral requirements that must never be violated, no matter how badly people are acting—maxims which cannot be universalized w/o contradiction (349)

*But (my question): nonideal rules should allow us to more effectively move closer to the ideal than if we were to follow the ideal itself*

* Can lying to liars move us closer to a situation where everyone tells the truth than telling liars the truth?
* Or can it help us move closer to a situation where everyone treats all rational beings as ends in themselves, never merely as means?

Kant himself does not give an ideal vs nonideal theory

* Korsgaard notes that he focuses on ideal moral theory (344)
* yet, he does speak in some of his writings of what to do in nonideal circumstances (349)
  + e.g., lying to the person who wants to take your money
  + e.g., even though peace is an ideal, that doesn’t mean we always have to be nonviolent; Kant accepts that war may sometimes be justified

**An important question this article brings up**: is it morally permissible to act against a moral principle or value for the sake of promoting that principle or value itself in some other way?

*Korsgaard is suggesting yes*, and that we can interpret Kant’s own view in a way that could support this

*But does this make sense, in your view?*