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Phi101:Introduction to Philosophy

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Reading Questions Week 6

Kant, "Duty and Reason as the Ultimate Principle" - pp. 506-512

1. Explain why Kant thinks the only thing truly good "in itself" is a good will.

According to Kant, intelligence, riches, and happiness can all be used for evil or pursued without regard for morality, whereas the only thing that is truly good is a good will.

2. What does Kant mean by doing our actions "from the motive of duty"? How is this different from acting out of self-interest, or out of natural inclination, or even just in "conformity" with duty?

Kant's "motive of duty" refers to behaving in accordance with moral standards as opposed to one's own inclinations or wants. It places a strong emphasis on abiding by the categorical imperative, a fundamental moral rule, regardless of the results. Acting out, on the other hand, denotes impulsive behavior that is motivated by emotions or whims rather than by commitment to moral ideals.

3. What does it mean for an action to have moral worth based on its principle, not based on the end it achieves?

According to Kant, an action's moral worth is decided by its principle or motivation, not by its results or repercussions.

4. Explain in your own words Kant's two formulations of the Categorical Imperative, on 510 and 511-512:

A key idea in Kant's ethical philosophy is the categorical imperative, which he expresses in two different ways. According to the first formulation, a deed is morally acceptable only if the maxim or principle that underlies it can be declared a universal rule.

According to the second version, we should never view humanity as merely a means to an aim but rather as an end in and of itself. This means that we should never treat rational humans as nothing more than things to be manipulated for our own goals, but rather respect their true worth and dignity.

Mill, "Happiness as the Foundation of Morality" pp. 512-517

1. Write out and explain Mill's "Greatest Happiness Principle".

A fundamental idea in John Stuart Mill's ethical system is the "Greatest Happiness Principle". According to this principle, one should aim to increase overall happiness and reduce overall pain or suffering. He contends that pursuit of happiness is the ultimate goal of human endeavor and that society has a responsibility to foster an environment in which this is possible, provided that doing so does not damage others.

2. What does Mill mean when he writes, "Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied"? Even though it is not always simple or enjoyable, Mill believed that it is preferable to lead a carefree and opulent life rather than a moral and intellectual one. Socrates died as a result of his pursuit of wisdom and knowledge despite the discomfort and rejection he encountered from his community. Even though they may lead happy

and enjoyable lives, fools who are content with their lot lack the depth and richness that come from actively seeking knowledge and understanding.

3. How does Mill discuss quality and kinds of happiness in contrast to calculating the quantity of happiness?

Mill makes a distinction between higher and lesser pleasures, highlighting the significance of happiness in terms of quality. He contends that humans favor higher pleasures over lower, sensory ones because they involve the mind and the heart. By emphasizing quality rather than just quantity, pleasure can be approached in a more complex way.

4. What role does all of previous human history and the experience of wise and competent people play in figuring out what will bring the most happiness in our actions?

Making ethical decisions is influenced by past human history and wise people's experiences, which offer insightful knowledge and teachings. These aid in our comprehension of the results of our activities, allowing us to make better-informed choices that maximize pleasure and reduce pain, thus directing us towards the highest overall enjoyment in our actions.