

Introduction to Philosophy (PHIL104)

Handout 12

Kant V

FA ‘Act only in such a way that the maxim governing your conduct is at the same time comprehended as universal law in your volition.’

FORMULA OF AUTONOMY. Although the formula of autonomy is supposed to combine FH and FLN (or FUL), here we ignore its role in this regard. Instead let us notice the contrast with FLN. FLN involves a kind of universalisation which keeps the subject constant. In asking whether my maxim conforms to FLN, I am asking whether I could will that maxim to be a universal law. Another kind of universalisation occurs when I ask whether my maxim could be endorsed as universal law by every rational being.

This feature has the following consequence. You might ask: does FA actually promote amorality? The moral requirements it approves of are self-imposed! But this is a misconstrual: the subject legislates not merely for himself, but for all other agents (considered as ends in themselves).

Question 1. Should self-interested actions be compatible with FA?

THE KINGDOM OF ENDS. The kingdom of ends (KE) is a (harmonious) union of ends in themselves (i.e. of rational creatures). Here one idea is that to think of yourself as an autonomous agent is to think of yourself as legislating universally for other agents (that are ends in themselves).

But how can there be any such union if each citizen of the KE has his private goals? Could it be that the citizens have no private goals in the first place? Well, no, because then there would be nothing to unify. The insistence on harmonious unity should assume that the citizens of the KE have their private goals. The answer is, rather, that there is a normative requirement here. That is, whatever private goals the citizens have, they should be harmonised in conformity to FA.

DIGNITY AND PRICE. Here Kant claims that morality and rational nature (as far as it is capable of moral acts) have intrinsic value (dignity). As such, they are irreplaceable.

Remark 2. Stalin disagreed with Kant when he said that ‘no one is irreplaceable’. He put this rule into practice, too.

A question whether there is anything else besides morality and humanity that has intrinsic value. For example, works of art may be thought to be irreplaceable. But Kant flatly denies that. He does so presumably on the grounds that the value of art resides in the appreciation by observers, and that the same appreciation can be produced by other items (such as clever copies).

YSB