

## Thinking Straight Ethical Reasoning Workshop 4-1 (April 22, 2008)

### I A. In small group

- (1) Discuss Kant's notion that  
*An action is right if and only if it is in accord with the categorical imperative.*
- (2) What does Kant mean, according to the Rachels, by the categorical imperative, how does it differ from a hypothetical imperative. How does Kant handle cases like the McClosky (false witness) or York/Peeping Tom cases discussed in Friday's workshop?
- (3) What is Rachels' view of this strong version of the Kantian principle? What does he see as correct and what does he see as flawed in the view. What merit and flaws do you see in Kant's approach?

### B. Plenary discussion.

### II A. In small groups briefly review and discuss Kant's two formulations of the categorical imperative as presented by Rachels in Chapter 9

- (1) *Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*

This can be translated into a conceptual theory (of the kind described in Critical Reasoning Chapter 7) as

**An act is morally right if and only if it is in accord with a maxim by which the act can be willed to a universal law.**

- (2) *Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only*

This can be translated into a conceptual theory as

**An act is morally right if and only if it treats humanity, whether in the actor's own person or in that of another as an end and never as a means only**

**B.** The central focus of the chapter is the theory of punishment that grows out of Kant's account: retributivism. In a small group contrast retributivism with utilitarianism in the form of deterrence theory of punishment as well as rehabilitationist theories of punishment. Describe how they differ.

**C.** In a small group reconstruct Kant's justification for capital punishment as presented on p. 137 in Standard Form with implicit premises included. Is the argument valid? Is it sound? If not, why not.

### D. Plenary discussion.

**III A.** *A faculty member receives a paper from a sophomore student that is unexpectedly good. As she reads through it, she becomes concerned because the vocabulary and overall treatment of the subject matter seems much more advanced than she usually found with sophomores. She looked back at some previous written work from the student and discovered that these early papers were not nearly as well written. Near the end of the paper, she saw a reference to an author and decided to check. She looked up this reference and found nothing unusual, but in the process she unearthed another article directly on the subject the student had written about. She obtained it and discovered that much of the student's essay was taken directly from this second article. She faced the issue of*

*what to do about the plagiarism. The school allowed for a variety of punishment ranging from simple admonishment not to do it again, through no credit for the assignment, no credit for the program, to recommendation to the institution that the student be suspended.*

Discuss this example, in terms of the three approaches to punishment discussed in the chapter. Kantian retributivism and the two utilitarian approaches: deterrence and rehabilitationism.

**B.** In a small group discuss what you think the faculty member ought to do morally. What theory of punishment are you using? How would you justify this theory?

**C. Plenary discussion**



**Assignment for Friday, April 25** Read Rachels Ch 10 and handout on social contract theory and contractarianism passed out last Friday. **Review:** Rachels on Utilitarianism and Kantianism