Normative Ethics
Lecture 8
Merely as a means

§1. The formula of humanity

T1 ‘There is… only a single categorical imperative and it is this… act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.’

(Groundwork, p.73)

T2 ‘So act that you use humanity… whether in your own person or in the person of any other… always at the same time as an end… never merely as a means.’

(Groundwork, p.80)

When do I use someone as a means…?

When do I use someone merely as a means…? When I don’t take their interests into account…?

P1 In saving the child, I was using her merely as a means (to reward and adulation).
P2 If Kant is right, it is morally impermissible to treat a person merely as a means.
C1 If Kant is right, my action was morally impermissible.
P3 My action was not morally impermissible.
C2 Kant is wrong.

§2. Possible agreement

T3 ‘…he whom I want to to use for my purposes by [a false or lying] promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him and so contain the end of this action.’

(Groundwork, p.80)

P1 It is morally impermissible to treat a person in a particular way if they cannot possibly have agreed to your treating them in this way.
P2 A person cannot possibly have agreed to being coerced or deceived into doing something.
It is morally impermissible to coerce or deceive a person into doing something.

‘According to the Formula of Humanity... coercion and deception are the most fundamental forms of wrongdoing to others... the roots of all evil.’

(Christine Korsgaard, Right to Lie, p.333)

‘...if we coerce or deceive others... their dissent, and so their genuine consent... is in principle ruled out.’

(Onora O’Neill, Between Consenting Adults, p.59)

The fatal belief case...

‘I know that, unless I tell you some lie, you will believe truly that Brown committed some murder... Since you could not conceal that belief from Brown, he would then murder you as well.’

(Derek Parfit, On What Matters, p.178)

You could not possibly agree to being deceived into believing that Brown is not the murderer.

If Korsgaard and O’Neill are right, it is morally impermissible for me to treat you in a way to which you could not possibly agree.

If Korsgaard and O’Neill are right, it is morally impermissible for me to deceive you into believing that Brown is not the murderer.

It is not morally impermissible for me to deceive you into believing that Brown is not the murderer.

Korsgaard and O’Neill are wrong.

‘...he whom I want to to use for my purposes by [a false or lying] promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him, and so contain the end of this action.’

(Groundwork, p.80)

What is an end...?

‘...what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is an end...’

(Groundwork, p.78)

An end is something that gives me reasons to act or not act in a particular way...

What if your humanity is a reason to treat you or not treat you in a particular way...?
References