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Paper 1 Outline

PHIL 2310 – The Meaning of Life

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The Categorical Imperative: Living a Meaningful Life

I. Introduction – The Categorical Imperative of Immanuel Kant is the sole idea to live a meaningful life because it is the only good way to act, show free will to do so, and hold on society to do the same. Therefore, the Categorical Imperative is based on human knowledge, personal and objective values which can be applied to many ethical and moral decisions in life.

II. Terms - What is a free will?

1. Our understanding of a free will is for most of the part the definition of making independent choices without considering, if they are of good moral meaning. This would be autonomy without any obligations to someone else. Kant’s definition of a free will is depending on rational thinking and moral duty to other individuals which can be only justified by engaging in good actions. Those actions can be turned into universal law which can be followed by everybody.

III. Body 1 (A): Human knowledge is rational thinking and experience which is experienced through one’s own reason and reality.

1. “Plugging into an experience machine limits us to a man-made reality, to a world no deeper or more important than which people can construct” (Nozick 645). Knowledge cannot be constructed by an artificial intelligence; it would erase all human capability to think for themselves on a real and reasonable scale. The acquisition of rational thinking is essential, only in this way we can show that free will and independent thoughts lead to personal values which are an obligation to act morally.

IV. Body 2 (B): Moral actions are measured not only by obligations against others in form of dutiful behavior, they depend also on personal values.

1. “There is no answer to the question of what a person is like who has long been in the tank. Is he courageous, kind intelligent, witty, loving” (Nozick 645)? Immanuel Kant’s philosophy is not so much based on personal character, but it is important to introduce personal values in his theory because it depends on good moral actions which require a good will beside an obligation to other individuals to fulfill good moral deeds. The question remains should everyone be compelled to good moral deeds?

V. Body 3 (C): Objective values are therefore to be followed by everyone because they do not depend on personal feelings or preferences but on moral behavior.

 a. “Others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there’s no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in” (Nozick 644). If everyone is connected, the machines are not going to be serviced which would turn out to be disastrous for everyone else. That means under no circumstances can that be something which should be made into a universal law because it is morally wrong to do so. Personal preferences will bring disaster and destruction if taken too far.

VI. Conclusion: The Categorical Imperative shows that the Kantian theory of living a moral life, which is based on meaningfulness, can be challenging. It takes human knowledge, personal and objective values to do so. Anything else is seen as pure pleasure which represents the experience machine.