Hello again. Today we’re gonna continue our discussions of Kant’s ethics. Last time we talked about the good will and Kant defined the good will as the free rational will which acts from duty rather than desire. Kant believes, of course, that the good will is the only thing that’s intrinsically good because all other goods depend upon a good will making use of them. So anything else which we might think to be of value in the hands of a bad will will be turned bad.

We talked also about the difference between acting from duty and acting in accordance with duty which speaks to the agent’s motivation. Are you doing the right thing because it is the right thing or are you doing the right thing because — for some other reason under the impetus of some desire or other. And we also discussed the sense in which Kant believes that the will that acts from duty is — it’s only when we act from duty that we’re free. When we act from desire, we are enslaved.

The one thing we did not talk about was the content of moral duty and that’s what we’re going to spend a good part of today talking about.

There are two key characteristics of moral obligation and of moral commands that Kant focuses upon in his account of moral duty. The first is that moral obligations are universal. The idea is that moral duty applies universally to all rational beings and this is because, if you recall, moral laws are laws of reason. We talked last time about how the good will is the rational will, how reason is the faculty which identifies moral duty, and thus moral duty is always going to be rational. The moral thing to do is always going to be the rational thing to do. And thus the sense of universality that Kant has in mind is the domain or the kingdom — and you’ll see later why I use the word kingdom — the kingdom of rational beings. So the idea would be that if we discover somewhere that there are aliens who are rational, the moral law would apply to them too. The moral law being laws of reason, not laws of human nature.

Kant says this on page 20 of your copy of the groundwork. If you look at the
bottom of page 20, he says, quote, “Unless we want to deny to the concept of morality any truth in any relation to some possible object, we cannot dispute that its law is so extensive in its import that it must not hold only for human beings but for all rational beings as such, not merely under contingent conditions or with exceptions but with absolute necessity, then it is clear that no experience could give occasion to infer even the possibility of such apodeictic laws.”

Kant is very clear that one of the characteristics of moral obligations is the universality. And I think that aside from Kant’s sort of technical commitments here, his commitments to this idea of laws of morality being laws of reason, I think there’s also a more common sense notion working here and that is that, look, isn’t precisely what distinguishes a moral obligation from some sort of more contingent practical obligation precisely the fact that moral obligations are universal — all right — than moral duties are universal? Isn’t that what distinguishes duties from preferences?

So if you think about it, I might be obligated by a contract to do something. But, of course, that obligation only holds within the context of the contract. And Kant’s point here is, look, isn’t precisely what distinguishes a moral obligation from, let’s say, a contractual one, is precisely that the moral obligation has universal — is universally binding whereas the contractual obligation is only combining within the context of the contract. Isn’t it precisely that distinction between a universally binding obligation and an only contextually binding one? Isn’t that indeed the key distinction between — that makes the difference between moral obligations on the one hand and obligations of other kinds? So I think that there is also a common sense notion at work here and not simply this sort of technical, formal notion of the kingdom of rational beings and the universal laws that apply to them.

The second of these two characteristics of moral obligation that Kant wants to focus on is that moral imperatives are categorical. Now, by an imperative, we simply
mean a command. An imperative is a command. You ought to do this, you ought not to do that. And he says moral imperatives are always of a categorical form as opposed to a hypothetical form. This will require that we define the difference between a hypothetical and a categorical imperative, so let’s go ahead and give an example. It’s always best to define these abstract notions in terms of concrete examples.

Here’s an example of a hypothetical command. Aside from my accent, this will reveal, I think, where I’m from. Here’s an example of a hypothetical command. If you want to get to New York’s East Village, you ought to take the 4, 5, or 6 train. Now, what’s hypothetical about this? There is a command. It’s saying you ought to do something, you ought to take the 4, 5, or 6 train. But notice the command is hypothetical in the sense that it’s conditioned upon a certain desired outcome. You ought to do this if you want to get to New York’s East Village, which is on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Notice that if the desire to outcome changes — suppose instead that I want to get to Central Park or I want to get to the Upper West Side. The command will change. So if I want to get to the Upper West Side, then I ought to take the — gosh. Do I still remember what train to take? I think the B or the D train. So these imperatives are hypothetical in the sense that they’re dependent upon a sort of hypotheses, a hypothesized outcome, a hypothesized desire. If it’s this, then you ought to do that. If it’s the other, then you ought to do the other.

Contrast this with a categorical imperative. Here’s a categorical imperative. You ought not murder. Notice it doesn’t say you ought not murder if you want to be popular or you ought not murder if you don’t want to go to jail. The idea of a highly categorical imperative is that the imperative is unconditional. It’s a command that operates whatever the conditions, whatever the circumstances, irrespective of one’s desires.
Now, what Kant wants to say is that moral imperatives always command categorically, never hypothetically. And if you think about this, this makes perfect sense given the rest of Kant’s system. A hypothetical imperative commands a person from desire. It’s a commandment from desire. And, as we know, morality never commands us from desire, according to Kant. It always commands us from duty. And unlike desire, duty is unchanging. A desire may change from one moment to the next. And thus the corresponding imperative which commands us in such a way so as to fulfill a desire will change from circumstance to circumstance along with the desire. But a categorical command which commands from duty never changes because duty never changes for Kant. Duty is unyielding, it’s unwavering, it’s not circumstantial. It is a law of reason.

And so for this reason moral commandments for Kant are always categorical and other forms of commandments, other imperatives, are hypothetical. And if you think about these two characteristics of moral obligation, the idea that on the one hand moral obligations are always universal, they apply to all rational beings, and b) that moral commandments are always categorical, they always command unconditionally and irrespective of the circumstances, I hope you can see that one of the nice things about Kant’s moral philosophy is that you can identify a moral obligation or a moral command entirely by its form.

Whenever you see a commandment that has both a universal — that both has a universal scope, a universal application, and a categorical form, you know that that’s a moral command. Whereas if you have a command that does not apply universally but only applies within a certain context and has only conditional — commands only in a conditional form, you know that it’s not a moral command. So for Kant moral obligations and imperatives are always identifiable by their form and their form is always — that they are always of universal scope and always categorical in the way that they
command us.

Now, moving on to another sort of key notion that we have to have in hand in order to understand Kant’s moral philosophy and what we are working up to is going to be an articulation of a single supreme moral principle which for Kant will be the test — will provide the means by which to test any action that we are contemplating in any given time or place.

Another key notion that we have to have in hand is the concept of a maxim. Now, for Kant every autonomous morally ratable action is consciously willed. We know this from last time. For Kant the idea of morality is tied essentially and inherently to the idea of autonomous free willing. We are never — our actions are never moral if they’re under any kind of coercion and that includes the coercion of our own sentiments, of our own desires. Behavior in order to be moral must spring entirely from a free autonomous will.

And so for Kant every morally ratable action is consciously willed, freely willed. And if you think about, on this view, such an action is in a sense the material manifestation of intent. So think about it. A morally ratable action for Kant is one that stems from a clear free will. And in that sense, the action can be seen as the material manifestation of that will, specifically of the intent that the will is willing under. Intentions, of course, are in a sense the manifestation of a principle or at least they imply a principle. And so for Kant — Kant calls these principles of action, these intentions which are the manifestations of principles which yield actions — he refers to these principles of action as maxims. And again, the examples will clarify what is admittedly a very abstract treatment.

So let’s take an example. I’m gonna give an example of an action and then identify what the relevant maxim is, what the relevant principle of action is. So here’s the following action. Suppose that I’m in a bookstore and I see a book that I really,
really want. Let’s say — let’s make the example funny. Let’s say that the book is a book on Kant’s ethics. All right. So I see this book on ethics and I’m salivating over it. Professors salivate over things like that. But then I look in my wallet and I realize I don’t have any money — because professors also don’t make any money. And so I think to myself, “Well, darn it. I really wanted the book on ethics so I’m gonna steal it.” Not at any point considering the irony of stealing a book on ethics.

So I steal the book upon realizing that I don’t have the money to pay for the book but I want it. Here’s the maxim of my action, Kant’s understanding of a maxim. Whenever I’m out of money and want something, I will steal it. That’s the maxim of my action. And so I hope you see the sense in which this maxim embodies both an intent and a principle. My intent is to steal the book. The principle I’m acting on is that I will steal things when I don’t have the money for them but want them nonetheless. That’s the principle that is implied by the intention that then turns into this action.

Now, for Kant the relevant locus of moral assessment is the maxim. So when we are morally evaluated, when we finally have the supreme moral principle at hand, it’s gonna be applied to the maxim of my action. Now, why is that? Because Kant, as we should already realize, is completely concerned and solely concerned with the agent side of action. He’s not concerned with the outcome side. So between my intention and the outcome lies the action. We want to morally evaluate the action, and for Kant the morally relevant place to look is not on the action’s outcome but in rather the agent’s side of things, in the intention behind the action and the principle behind the action.

And the reason why — you know, we’ve been dancing around this and we’ve been given some indication of why Kant is concerned with the agent side of things rather than the outcome side of things, but let’s be very clear about it. His reason for thinking that it’s only the agent side of things that’s morally relevant is because it’s only the intentions, motives and principles that we act upon which are in our complete
control. If you think about it, no matter what my intentions are and what actions follow from them, the outcomes of those actions and especially the long-term outcomes are largely out of our control. That’s not to say that we don’t have any control over the outcomes of our actions, but only to say that circumstances and fortune play an enormous role in determining the outcomes of our actions. This becomes increasingly true as we look further and further to the long-term outcomes of an action.

Because the outcomes are largely out of our control, Kant thinks that they are not a suitable basis upon which to rest a moral assessment. For Kant there is no sense to making a moral evaluation of someone on the basis of an aspect of their action that’s not within their control. Remember, for Kant moral agency is the chief characteristic of rational autonomy, is because we are free and rational that we are subject to moral assessment. It is only because when we act from duty that we have genuine agency over what we do, that we become subject to moral assessment at all. And so it makes sense that moral assessment should always be and only be directed towards that aspect of action over which we have control. And the aspect of action over which we have control is the aspect that leads up to the act. Everything after the act has been performed is, in a sense, relegated to the world and that is not within our control.

Kant says as much on pages 13 to 14, towards the bottom. “Only what is connected with my will merely is ground and never is effect. What does not serve my inclination but outweighs it or at least excludes it altogether from calculation or making a choice can be an object of respect and so a command. Now, an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will. Hence, there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this law. And so the maxim of complying with such a law, even if it infringes upon all my inclinations, thus” — here’s the key part — “thus, the moral worth of an action does not lie effect expected from it and so too does not lie in
any principle of action that needs to borrow its [inaudible] from this expected effect. For all these effects could have also been brought about by other causes.”

So, for example — remember, Mill says what determines the moral value of your action is whether or not it makes people happy. And Kant says whether or not people are made happy can be determined by things having nothing to do with you. Indeed, a person may be made happy or unhappy irrespective of what you intended by your action. So how can you be morally evaluated on that basis? That would be to morally evaluate you on a basis that has nothing to do with anything you control. No, Kant says, the relevant basis on which to evaluate you morally is in all that stuff that happens prior to acting. The conceiving of an intention, the principle manifested by that intention, whether or not one is willing from duty or willing only in accordance with duty, willing from desire or other. Those are the relevant bases for moral evaluation. Not outcomes which not only are largely a matter outside of your control but which could have occurred irrespective of whether you ever acted or not.

All right. So with this idea of a maxim under our belt and this understanding that for Kant the sole relevant focus of moral attention is on the agent and on his intentionality, on his mindset, we’re now ready to articulate Kant’s supreme moral principle and to deploy in some examples to see how it works.

Kant gives an initial formulation of the supreme moral principle — and I say “initial” because over the course of this book — and we, of course, are not reading the whole book — over the course of this book he gives several formulations of this principle, all of which are supposed to be incidentally and interestingly equivalent. But the main formulation occurs on page 31 and actually states it in two slightly different forms. I’m only gonna give us the first.

Page 31, middle of the page. “There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this.” Remember, moral imperatives are categorical imperatives
and he’s saying there is just one supreme moral principle. Quote, “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it can become a universal law. Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it can become a universal law.”

Let me say a few things about this by way of analysis. First of all, as I already mentioned, the principle serves as a test for the moral rightness or wrongness of any action. So when you’re considering doing something, the idea is you contemplate the maxim of your action, you apply this test to it, and the test will tell you whether the action is right or wrong.

If we interpret this supreme moral principle into sort of ordinary language, what Kant is essentially saying is that you should only do those things which it is possible to wish that everyone else should do them. So what Kant is saying is, look: you’re gonna do X. The relative moral question is: is it possible for me to wish that everyone should do X? If I can’t wish that everyone should do X, then I shouldn’t be doing X.

There’s obviously a certain relationship of this supreme moral principle to the Golden Rule where the Golden Rule says do unto others as you would have done unto yourself. But this isn’t exactly the moral rule. Notice that it encapsulates all the distinctive qualities of moral obligation that we’ve discussed. Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it will become universal law. Well, first of all, it focuses on the maxim. It is a test that is targeted upon the motivations — one’s intentions behind an action.

Notice also that it speaks to morality as being universal. And so there’s a universality test built into the supreme moral principle. If what you’re doing is right, then everyone — at least, you know, on principle — everyone should be doing it. And if everyone shouldn’t be doing it, then it shouldn’t be right because right and wrong hold for everyone, for all rational beings.
It also includes the notion of morality as rationality. Although the word *rational* doesn’t appear here, it is implicit in Kant’s use of the word *can*. Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can and at the same time will that it will become a universal law. I have paraphrased it. If you want to hear -- my paraphrase of the supreme moral principle is act only in such a way that you can rationally will that the maxim of your action shall become a universal law.

Because when he says which you can at the same time will, what does he mean by *can*? He means that you can will it without logical contradiction. That is, you can will it without violating your reason, without violating the conditions of rationality. At the heart of this test, at the heart of this supreme moral principle, is the idea of the rational universalizability of an action’s maxim. If this is the right thing to do, then you should be able to universalize its maxim without violation of your rationality. So this is the supreme moral principle. It is Kant’s test for the moral rightness or wrongness of any action and it encapsulates all of the elements of morality — moral obligation that Kant has discussed. The thing to do now is to deploy it, test it.

And Kant gives — over pages 32 and 33, Kant gives four examples in which he wants to test the supreme moral principle. I’m going to discuss two of the four examples. I’m gonna discuss the false promise example and the charity example. But you, for your own studying and your own understanding, should go ahead and see if you can do exactly what I’m doing for the other two examples. So what I’m going to do is I’m going to take an example of an action — and these are Kant’s examples. I’m going to take an example of an action, identify the maxim, and then apply Kant’s supreme moral principle. I think for your own understanding you should as sort of a homework assignment do this yourself for the other two examples.

Let’s start with the false promising example. So Kant says, page 32, “finds himself urged by a need to borrow money. He well knows that he will not be able to
repay but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises firmly to repay it within a determinant time. He would like to make such a promise but he still has enough conscience to ask himself is it not forbidden and contrary to duty to help oneself of need in such a way. Suppose that he has still decided to do so.

So here we have a guy, he’s out of money and needs to borrow money. He knows he’s not gonna be able to repay the money, that he’s gonna have to lie, because he knows that no one’s gonna lend him the money unless he promises to repay it. So the action is borrowing money on a false promise to repay. This is a form of lying. Now, what’s the maxim? Continue on. “His maxim of action would be as follows: ‘When I believe myself to be in need of money, I shall borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen.’”

All right. So the maxim is whatever amount of money I can get from borrowing under a false promise to repay, I will do so. Now, the question is: is it morally right to do this? Let’s supply the supreme moral principle. Can I rationally will that this maxim should be a universal law? Can I rationally will — can I will that everyone should borrow money on false promises to repay or borrow anything on false promises to give back? Can I will such a state of affairs? Can I will such a world without violating my rationality? He thinks it is literally impossible to will such a world. Because in a world where everyone made false promises, no one would be able to make any promises because no one would believe promises.

In other words, when I borrow money on a false promise to repay, I am willing a world in which I could not do what I am doing right now. And that is a classic example of willing a contradictory state of affairs, of violating one’s reason. So the only way to perform this action is to abandon reason, to will something that is explicitly and obviously contradictory. And for Kant, this is the classic hallmark of an immoral action, an action whose maxim cannot be universalized without violating the principles of
Let’s take another example, the charity example, page 33. He’s describing now a fourth person because he gives four examples. “A person for whom things are going well, while he sees that others whom he could very well help have to contend with great hardships, he thinks ‘What is it to me? Let each be as happy as heaven wills or as he can make himself. I shall take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not care to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in need.’”

So the action in question is refusing to help someone in need, even when one has the means and the opportunity. So, I mean, for example, you know, I’m sure — well, maybe not for you. But living where I used to live — I used to live in Manhattan. I lived in Queens and other places and I would constantly pass beggars on the street and in the subway. And they’d ask me for money. And most of the time I had the means, I had the quarter or whatever it is they would’ve been satisfied with, and they were clearly in need. All right. So the action is refusing to help someone in need when one has the means and the opportunity. Now, the question is what is the maxim, what is the principle on which I’m acting? The maxim would go something like this. Whenever someone is in need and I’m in a position to help, I will refuse to do so. That’s the maxim. The question is, can this be universalized? Can we will a world in which everyone acted on this maxim without violating reason, without violating the principles of rationality? In other words, can I rationally will a world of universal hard-heartedness?

Kant says, “It is impossible to will that such a principle hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will that decided this would conflict with itself since many cases could occur in which one would need the love and sympathy of others and in which, by such a law of nature or reason from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the assistance he wishes for himself.”
So the idea is I cannot rationally will a world of universal hard-heartedness. Because inevitably a time will come along when I need help and I will ask for it. And in asking for it, I will be asking for something which will require that we not have a world of universal hard-heartedness. So when I deny — when I refuse to give the beggar a quarter, what I am doing is willing a world of universal hard-heartedness which then would make it impossible for me to ask help of anyone. And Kant thinks that this too is to will something that is a violation of reason because it is to will a contradiction, and thus this action violates the supreme moral principle and is wrong.

Okay. We’ve talked about Kant’s supreme moral principle and we’ve given some examples. We’ve given some examples of the principle of action. There’s one more piece of Kantian moral vision that we need to discuss before we wrap things up and before I make some closing remarks. And this has to do with what Kant calls the kingdom of ends and its relationship to the sovereignty of the individual, and this is sort of crucial to understanding where Kant’s moral philosophy fits into the modern liberal political outlook that is going to be what we finish the course with.

The modern liberal political outlook, of course, is the outlook of the entire Western world today. When I say liberal, I’m using liberal in the small L sense of liberal, not liberal as a political orientation but liberal as a type of political philosophy and type of political system. In that sense of liberal, all the Western democracies are liberal. Part of what I’m hoping to accomplish in this course is for you to understand where our own civilization comes from, where the modern liberal polity comes from, and one of the key ingredients is the Kantian idea of the sovereignty of the individual.

One of the other key ingredients is some of the stuff that we talked about with respect to Mill and utilitarianism, and I’m going to bring these elements, these source materials, out when we do talk — when we start talking about modern liberal political theory. But here I want to finish our discussion of Kant with a discussion of his notion
of the kingdom of ends and this relates directly to his understanding of the sovereignty of the individual which is his chief contribution to modern liberal political theory.

When Kant speaks of the kingdom of ends he means the moral universe. You say, “Well, what's the moral universe as opposed to the natural universe?” Well, I'm glad you asked, even though you didn't. The moral universe is the universe that is created by the act of willing the moral law which is unique to rational beings. So if you think about what we’ve been talking about this whole time, every time a free rational individual acts he is willing the moral law. When he acts from duty, when he acts from the motivation of moral obligation, he is willing the moral law. We just talked a minute ago about applying the supreme moral principle to actions. We're constantly asking, “What type of a world am I willing through my action when I rationally try to universalize this maxim? What sort of world am I willing?” And Kant literally thinks that we create the moral universe when we will and act — using will as a verb. We create the moral universe when we will and when we act. And what's distinctive about the moral law is that it’s the product of the combined efforts of every person’s rational will. In a sense, it's a collective creation of ours.

He uses the term *kingdom of ends* because, of course, the product of a successful act of willing is an end, right? The ends of my action are the results of what I’ve willed. And so to the extent to which each of us, when we act, that we will the moral law, we are creating a kingdom of ends through those individual acts of willing and of action.

Now, for Kant, in this kingdom of ends, each rational person is equal and sovereign. Now, why equal? Equal because we will the moral law as purely rational beings, not as identifiable individuals. So all the things that make me different from you or from the other guy are not relevant to the act of moral willing because we will morally only in our capacity as rational beings. The moral law is willed from pure reason. It is
not willed from the contingencies of our desires, our inclinations, our particular circumstances. We only act morally when we will from duty, when we will from pure reason, operating alone. And so when it comes to the creation of the moral universe, each person has an equal contribution, makes an equal contribution to that moral universe.

So when I said in the kingdom of ends each rational person is equal and sovereign, I’ve explained the sense in which we’re equal. Now in what sense are we sovereign? We’re sovereign because each of us is an author of the moral law and thus each of us is a creator of the moral universe. So, in a sense, the moral universe is a universe in which every person is equally a king because every person is equally an author.

The importance of this is reflected in a variation on the supreme moral principle that Kant articulates. So he’s just finished describing the kingdom of ends. Let me read to you his little description of the kingdom of ends. This is page 41. “The concept of every rational being is one who must regard himself as giving universal law through all the maxim of his will, so as to appraise himself and his actions from this point of view leads to a very fruitful concept, namely that of a kingdom of ends. By a kingdom, I understand a systematic union of various rational beings through common law. Now, since law determines ends in terms of their universal validity, if we abstract from the personal differences of rational beings as well as from all the content of their private ends, we shall be able to think of a whole of all ends and systematic connection that is a kingdom of ends which is possible in accordance with the above principles.”

All right. So he’s just described the kingdom of ends and the sense in which each individual person makes an equal contribution to creating this universal moral world, so to speak, because each of us, when we strip away our personal ends and speak purely of ourselves as rational beings, wills the same thing: a moral end. And
thus we create together a kingdom of ends.

Now, from this idea of a kingdom of ends, Kant produces a variation on the supreme moral principle which is quite telling. “For all rational beings stand under the law, that each of them is to treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves.” And this variation on the supreme moral principle is an explicit articulation of the sovereignty of the individual and of the dignity of the individual, and thus is perhaps one of the most powerful articulations of modern liberalism. Because modern liberalism is predicated on the idea of the sovereignty and dignity of the individual.

So let’s just restate this variation on the supreme moral principle. He’s saying we are always to treat ourselves and others as ends, not as means. Which means we must always respect others’ moral agency. We must never use other people. To use a person, to treat them as a tool, as an instrument to your ends, is to deny them their role as equal sovereign beings in the kingdom of ends, as equal authors of the moral universe. And thus is to violate their sovereignty and to deny them their dignity. I’ll have a few more things to say about this at the end of my closing remarks.

Let’s go right to the closing remarks. First, some remarks on Kant’s treatment of moral duty. The two cases that I’ve given, the case of lying and the case of refusing to give charity, are two of the best cases for Kant because there’s a pretty clear sense in which the person who acts in either of these ways is acting in a contradictory sort of way, is acting in a way that contradicts what he’s willing. Other cases don’t fit that well into this analysis. In other words — and I think if you consider the two other cases that I don’t give — that’s part of the reason I chose the ones I chose is because they’re the best cases and I want you to discover for yourself that with the other cases he gives the pre moral principle doesn’t apply quite as well. The problem is that it’s not at all obvious that behind every case of moral wrongness one can find a logical
inconsistency. In other words, I don’t think it’s true that every time someone acts wrongly it’s because there is some logical inconsistency behind their action. Similarly, it’s not at all clear to me that every case of moral rightness rests upon a bedrock of rational thinking.

It’s interesting to note that Mill wrote *Utilitarianism* in part as a response to Kant. Remember, even though we did Mill first, Kant is first in history — comes earlier than Mill in history. Mill, if you read the introduction to *Utilitarianism* which is in your edition here — Mill wrote his own introduction — Mill very clearly targets Kant and he says that all of Kant’s talk about rational universalizability simply disguises the fact that actions are to be despised from their bad outcome. So all these things that Kant says are wrong and he’s giving these elaborate explanations as to why they’re wrong. They’re wrong because you can’t universalize the maxim and the will would contradict itself if universalizes its maxim. Mill says really the reason these things are bad is because their outcomes are bad.

So Mill is, in a sense, offering what I think he sees as a common sense response to Kant. But, of course, when we talked about Mill we said Mill has his own problems. Mill wants to ignore the relevance of intention. Mill wants to deny the relevance of intention to the moral assessment of an action and we might say about Kant that he suffers the opposite problem. Kant refuses to acknowledge the relevant role of outcome to the moral evaluation of action. Even if we grant, as I think we should, that intentions are morally relevant, are they of exclusive relevance? Do we think that a person’s intentions are the only relevant basis on which to morally evaluate his actions or her actions to the exclusion of outcomes? This seems to me to be obviously incorrect.

Now, let me just say something about this kingdom of ends and the sovereignty of the individual. Kant’s is perhaps the most influential account of the sacredness of
the individual, and thus it’s a crucial building block in the modern liberal ethos. For modern liberal politics, preserving the sacredness of the individual, allowing the individual to retain dignity and sovereignty over himself and over his life, is the chief priority of politics. Modern liberal politics is individualistic at its core, at its heart.

Kant’s principle that we must always treat other people as ends and never as means — that is, that we must never use people as if they were instruments of our desire — this notion, this principle informs our basic common understanding of how we ought to treat each other in the modern liberal world. And all manner of prohibitions and certain ways of treating other people, in addition to all manner of obligations we have in treating other people, in the modern liberal mindset derive from this treatment of the sacredness of the individual that Kant offers in his discussion of the kingdom of ends.

All right. Next time we’re going to dive into — we’re gonna begin our discussion of modern liberal politics. We’re gonna start with the ultimate building block, the ultimate foundation stone, of modern liberal politics which is John Locke’s second treatise of government. There are some things I’d like you to think about. Thinking back to our opening lectures on ethics and politics, can you explain why Locke begins his analysis of the justification for civil society and government with a hypothetical state of nature or anarchy.

So go back to the opening lectures on ethics and politics, reread — go back through them, listen — watch the DVD or look through your notes, or listen to your tape, or however you’ve taken notes, and see if you can answer the following question. Why does Locke begin his discussion of politics — of civil society and government by imagining a hypothetical state in which there is no civil society or government? Second, what are the essential characteristics of natural man, according to Locke? How does he derive natural rights and natural laws from these natural facts about
human nature? Those are the two things I want you to think about as you begin your reading on John Locke.

We will see you next time. Thank you very much.