

Value and Humanity

Key Arguments and Concepts

1. Reflective Structure of Human Consciousness (pgs 113–114)

- Humans have a *reflective distance* from their impulses, unlike animals that act on instinct.
- This creates a necessity for *acting on reasons* rather than on brute desires.
- Our ability to step back and evaluate impulses forces us to have a *conception of our identity* as beings who act for reasons.

2. Procedural Realism vs. Substantive Realism (pg 112)

- Korsgaard rejects the idea that moral values are "out there" waiting to be discovered (*substantive realism*).
- Instead, she argues that values are constructed by human rationality (*procedural realism*).
- A good maxim is one that can be *willed as a universal law*, reflecting Kantian constructivism.

3. The Concept-Conception Distinction (pgs 113–114)

- Borrowing from Rawls, Korsgaard differentiates between *concepts* (which name problems) and *conceptions* (which propose solutions).
- The concept of *justice* raises the problem of distribution; different conceptions (utilitarianism, Rawlsian justice) provide solutions.
- Similarly, the concept of the *right* names the problem of what we may do, while different moral theories provide conceptions of it.

4. The Role of Practical Identity (pgs 115–118)

- Our *practical identity* determines our reasons for action.
- Different social contexts shape practical identities (e.g., being a parent, citizen, friend).
- The *Enlightenment identity*, in which we value ourselves as members of humanity, is superior to other contingent identities.
- Moral identity is inescapable because without it, we lose all reasons to act.

5. The Transcendental Argument for the Value of Humanity (pgs 122–124)

- Korsgaard reconstructs Kant's *Formula of Humanity*: *If we value anything, we must value our own humanity.*
- Human beings must endorse certain identities to have reasons to act at all.
- Since we are *reflective beings*, our humanity itself becomes normative.
- From this, the *value of humanity* is *inescapable*, giving rise to moral obligations.

6. Moral Identity and Conflicting Obligations (pgs 125–128)

- Not all obligations derive from moral identity; *personal relationships* and *contingent roles* also generate obligations.
- Some identities (e.g., being an assassin) are fundamentally incompatible with valuing humanity.
- Conflicts arise when different obligations pull us in opposing directions.
- *Personal relationships* create obligations independent of morality, forming "Kingdoms of Two" (mutual commitments).

7. The Ultimate Authority of Moral Identity (pgs 129–130)

- Korsgaard concludes that *moral identity governs all other identities.*
 - If an identity contradicts the value of humanity, it must be abandoned.
 - *Valuing humanity in oneself must lead to valuing it in others*, setting up the basis for moral obligations.
 - She leaves open questions about *obligations to non-human animals* and *why we must value anything at all*, to be addressed in the next lecture.
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Key Takeaways

- **Normativity arises from our reflective nature:** We must justify our actions to ourselves.
 - **Practical identity determines our obligations:** If we reject an identity, we lose our reasons for action.
 - **Moral identity is inescapable:** If we act at all, we must value our humanity.
 - **Moral obligations are not the only obligations,** but they set limits on which identities are permissible.
 - **Personal relationships create independent obligations,** sometimes in tension with moral duty.
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