Reading Guide #7

Readings: Kant, p. 23-33, 36-44
Hill, “Humanity as an End in Itself”

Helpful prefatory remarks: Central to Kant's categorical imperative is the term 'maxim'. He defines this term in two places, once in footnote 13 (occurs on page 13) and again in footnote 9 (occurs on page 30). In footnote 13, Kant says that a maxim is "the subjective principle of volition." Good, but what does that mean? Volition has something to do with choosing, a principle is like a general rule, and a subjective principle has to do with what the agent actually acts on (as opposed to what the agent merely should act on). Putting all these together, we could say that a maxim is the reason that the agent is doing an action together with the action. For example, if I am buying a new car in order to impress my friends, then the action = ‘buying a new car’ and the reason = ‘to impress my friends’. The maxim = action + reason = ‘buying a new car to impress my friends’

1. The categorical imperative says: "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” (Page 30) This sentence contains Kant's proposed test to see if an action is moral or not. Traditionally, this test involves 3 stages: 1) determining the maxim, 2) universalizing the maxim, and 3) asking whether the universalization that occurs in (2) is possible. Now suppose that I am contemplating cheating on an exam
    a. **Determine my maxim**
    b. Later on, Kant says that universalizing your maxim involves asking “how would things stand if my maxim were to become a universal law?” Using this hint of Kant’s, universalize my cheating maxim
    c. **Is this universalization possible? Why or why not? [Hint #1: it should not be possible. Hint #2: the reason why it cannot be universalized has nothing to do with its bad consequences, but instead has to do with the fact that my will *contradicts* itself.]**
    d. According to Hospers, rule-utilitarianism also involves a form of universalization. How is Kant's procedure different from the one that we discussed for rule-utilitarianism? Can you think of an example where something would be recommended by rule utilitarianism but forbidden by Kantianism?
2. Where does Kantianism match your commonsense moral intuitions and where does it not match? To test this try to come up with an example of a situation where a) common sense says you shouldn't do something but Kant says it would be okay, OR b) an example where Kant says you shouldn't do something but common.

3. In your own words, can you explain why, according to Kant, it is not permitted to make a false promise?

4. **On page 36, Kant restates the categorical imperative as follows: "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" (Kant, 300). This sounds pretty, but what on earth does it mean? (rhetorical do not answer) Does it mean that I can never use someone as a mere tool? (again, rhetorical) Alright, but what does *this* mean? (again, rhetorical). Perhaps, it means that we should never use people for ends that they do not share. But, does this mean that I can't hire someone to do labor that they don't care about? Using Hill's explanation of this idea, explain whether this is the proper reading of Kant.**

5. Hill argues that humanity in our own person is that part of us that is "our rationality and capacity to set ends" (Hill, 215). Given this understanding of humanity, how on earth can you fail to respect humanity in your own person? Give an example of something that Hill thinks disrespects your own humanity and explain how that disrespects "our rationality and capacity to set ends."

6. On page 40, Kant says that "…everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent has a dignity" (Kant, 40). According to Hill, this obviously means that you can't "trade off" something that has dignity for any amount of something that merely has price. (Thus, you can't trade off someone's rational humanity for any amount of things). But Hill then asks what he takes to be a harder question: what about trade-offs among things that have dignity. Can I, for example, trade 1 rational humanity for 5 rational humanity's? What is Hill's answer to this harder question and why?