

Introduction to Ethics
Dr. Heather Salazar
Main Theses, Week 2

Nagel: “Moral Luck”

1. “The good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some proposed end; it is good only because of its willing, i.e. it is good of itself...Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither diminish nor augment this worth.” (from Kant’s *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, cited by Nagel) (24)
2. “Prior to reflection it is intuitively plausible that people cannot be morally assessed for what is not their fault, or for what is due to factors beyond their control.” (25 and elsewhere)
3. “[T]he appropriateness of moral assessment is easily undermined by the discovery that the act or attribute, no matter how good or bad, is not under the person’s control.” (25) And “[M]ost or all ordinary moral judgments are illegitimate” (26)
4. Ultimately nothing or almost nothing about what a person does seems to be under his control.” (26)
 - a. “[T]he kind of person you are ... your inclinations, capacities, and temperament” are not under your control. (28-34)
 - b. “[O]ne’s circumstances – the kind of problems and situations one faces” is not under a person’s control. (28-34)
 - c. One’s actions are determined by “antecedent circumstances” that are not under the person’s control. (28-34)
 - d. “[T]he way one’s actions and projects turn out” is not under the person’s control.
5. “[V]irtue is enjoined on everyone and therefore must in principle be possible for everyone” (according to Kant) (33)
6. “[But] we judge people for what they actually do or fail to do, not just for what they would have done if circumstances had been different.” (34)
7. “I believe that in a sense the problem has no solution, because something in the idea of agency is incompatible with actions being events, or people being things. [And we must be both agents and things]” (37-38; see also 27)