

THE INDIVIDUAL AS A MORAL SUBJECT

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*Warning: some listeners may find
various opinions expressed here not
to their liking. Tough!*

SECTION A: THINKING FOR YOURSELF

Er . . .



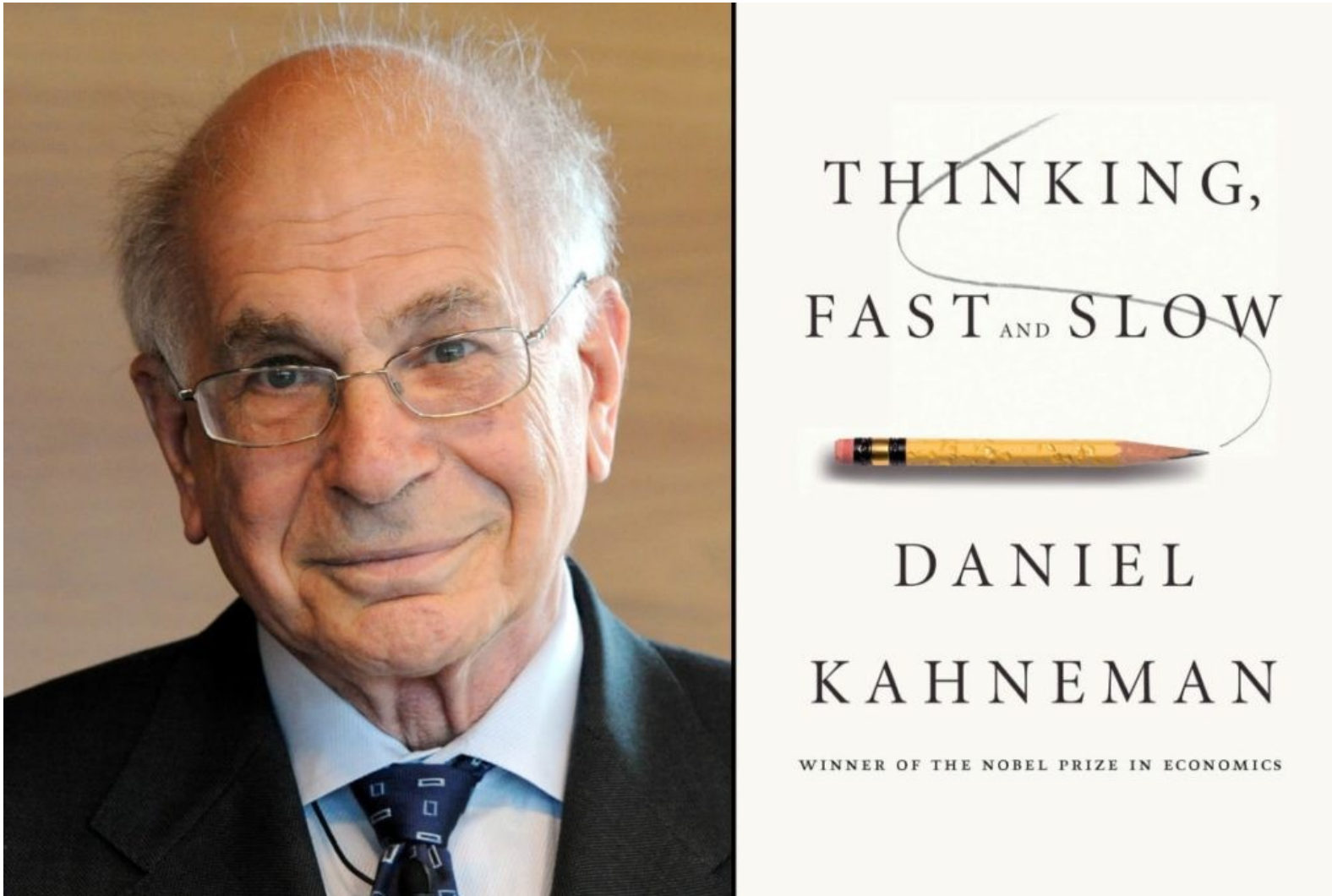
Wisdom from Kant's *Groundwork*

- [The human being] is subject *only to laws given by himself but still universal* and that he is bound only to act in conformity with his own will, which, however, in accordance with nature's end is a will giving universal law (4:432)
- I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law. (4.402)

Possible sources of authority



1. The Myth of Rationality



2. Cultural authorities (we didn't expect)



“You’re
WEIRD”

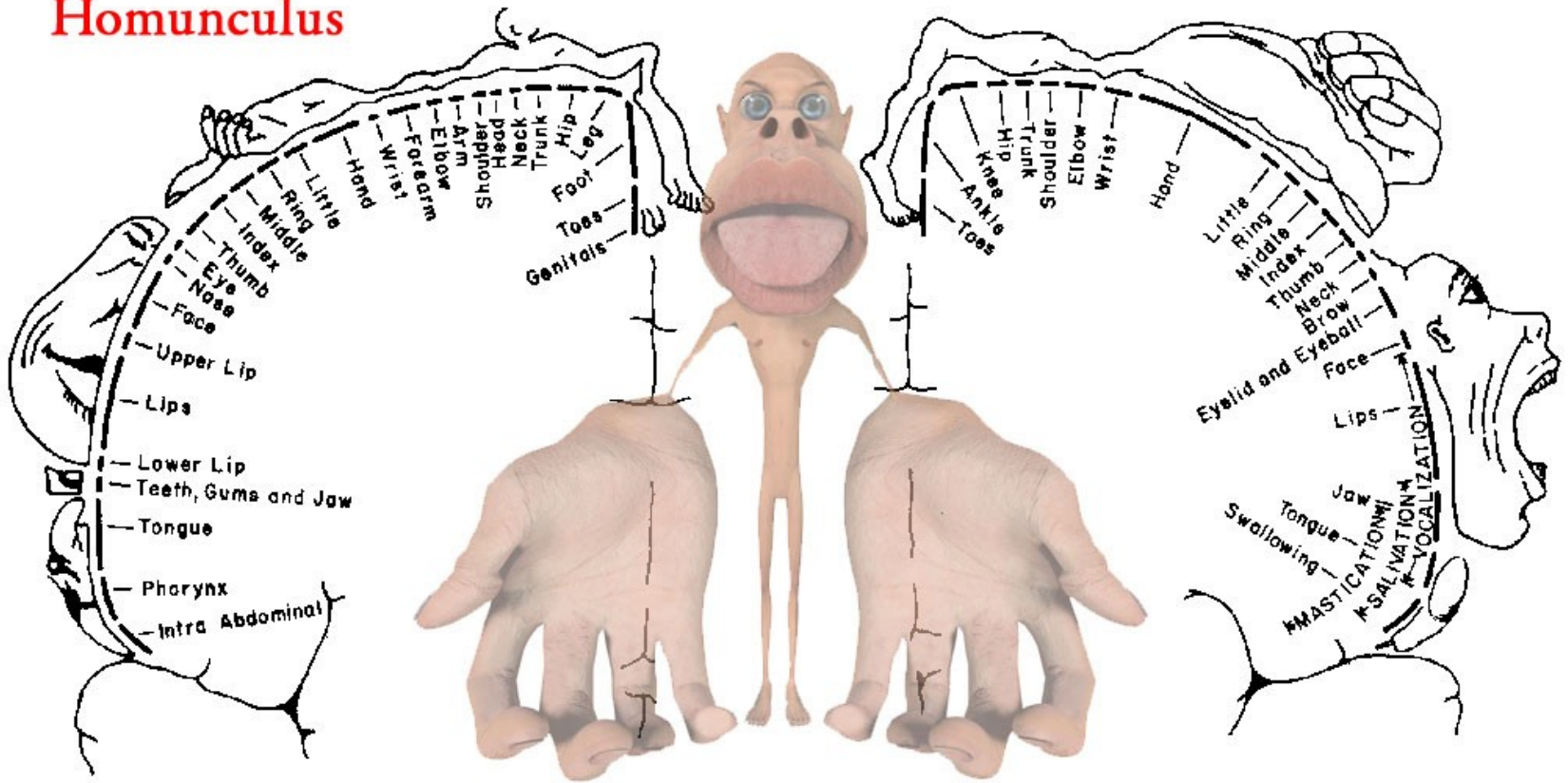
3. A different conformis m



[Together] Yes, we're all individuals

4. The Myth of Free Will

Homunculus



**An
individuali
stic
society is .
..**

NOT

one where
individuals
freely choose
many different
principles and
lifestyles, after
weighing them
all up

BUT

one where
individuals
are
bombarded
by awareness
of many
different
principles
and lifestyles,
and are
attracted to

The story so far . . .

Individualism in moral thinking is:

- a) not sensible, in the eyes of many cultures
- b) often a preference for a different brand of conformism
- c) entirely determined by genes, history, circumstances

. . . but still the recommended option!

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Section B

The individual as a moral agent

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VIRTUE ETHICS


Advantages

- We have to *think* intelligently
- The *particular* circumstances are key
- Virtue is a process of *learning*
- We are *self-critical*, and so less hypocritical

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Dangers of Virtue Ethics

1. It's all about
me

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Analogies with Virtue



The rewards
of virtue:
smugness
and Heaven



Virtue-
signalling

Virtue
quandary



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Dangers of
Virtue
Ethics

2. The 'clean hands' fallacy

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Treating
wounded
soldiers

'Good' by C P Taylor

“you find somebody you love . . .
you have a family . . .
you look after them . . .
and try not to harm anybody . . .
isn't that what happens? . . .”



Keeping yourself pure

Pythagoreans

- Abstain from beans
- Do not pick up what falls from the table
- Do not touch a white cock
- Do not touch any fish that is sacred
- Do not break the loaf
- Do not step over a balance
- Do not poke the fire with a sword
- When on a journey, do not turn back
- Don't, whatever you do, pluck the crown

Deuteronomy

- 22,4: When you see your fellow-countryman's ass or ox lying on the road, do not ignore it; you must help him lift it to its feet again
- 11: You shall not wear clothes woven with two kinds of yarn, wool and flax together
- 5: No woman shall wear an article of man's clothing, nor shall a man put on woman's dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God
- 23,1: No descendant of an irregular union, even down to the tenth generation, shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord



Two unnatural act



Conclusion (British compromise)

Individualism in morality is half-right, half-wrong:

- As a moral *thinker*, be an individual: think for *yourself*
- As a moral *agent*, think and act for the benefit of *others*

- If anyone needs help with any of the issues raised by this talk, please get in touch with *www.thebar.afterwards*