

THE SURGEON WITH COLD HANDS

This session was created by Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, from the University of Southern Denmark. She is part of the project Filosofi i Skolen (https://www.sdu.dk/da/om_sdu/institutter_centre/ikv/forskning/forskningsprojekter/filosofi+i+skolen/organisation+og+deltagere), which The Philosophy Foundation is partnered with.

Philosophy

A central question in moral philosophy concerns what makes something morally wrong. Is it if the act harms others? If it exploits others for one's own purposes? That it's uncomfortable to think about? That it is an act guided by unacceptable intentions? Or is it only a matter of what types of actions take place? The question is made even more complicated because it is entangled with various other topics, such as, for example, *how* you can know the intentions of others, or whether you *want* to know the intentions of others.

The Stimulus

Let me tell you about a surgeon with a rare condition called *frigidissima manibus*, which is Latin for “super cold hands”. Even on warm days, the surgeon's hands were always freezing. And in the winter, it was just awful. For this reason, the surgeon really looked forward to operating: putting your hands inside a patient to remove the appendix really warms them up nicely.

You might think that warming the surgeon's cold hands with your intestines is unpleasant for a patient, but remember that a patient would always be deeply sedated during an operation and so would never feel the cold, cold hands.

Task Questions:

- ✓ Would it be ok for the surgeon to warm their hands inside the patient?
- ✓ Would it make a difference whether the surgeon was looking forward to warming their hands or not?
- ✓ Would other people at the operation be able to tell if the surgeon was looking forward to it or not?
- ✓ Could it be the case that the surgeon was looking forward without realizing it?
- ✓ Would you like to know whether the surgeon looks forward or not?
- ✓ Would it make a difference if the story was about a masseur rather than a surgeon?

Nested questions:

- ✓ Should the surgeon ask for the patient's permission before the operation?
- ✓ What is the difference between a morally wrong act and a repulsive act?
- ✓ Can something be wrong even if no one experiences it?
- ✓ Can you use another person for a purpose without asking them?