

Listening Guide: Radiolab, "The Bad Show:" Fritz Haber & Moral Ambiguity

Directions: Respond to the questions below on a separate sheet of paper. Please respond in complete sentences. Answer all parts of each question and provide a thoughtful and thorough response, particularly to the questions before and after listening.

Before Listening

1. Kant claims that what makes an action moral or immoral is the intention behind it and not its result. Do you agree or disagree with this idea?
2. Where do you stand on the tension between relying on context or absolutes in evaluating morality?

During Podcast (questions are chronological)

3. Who is Fritz Haber? What problem does he set out to resolve?
4. How does Haber approach the production of nitrogen?
5. What are the implications of Haber's discovery on farming?
6. Why did US officials name Haber a war criminal?
 - a. Military implications of his discovery about nitrogen?
 - b. What happens at Ypres?
 - c. Effect on the human body?
7. What happens between Haber and his wife? How does he respond? How does she respond?
8. How does Haber feel at the end of World War I? What does he attempt to do after the War?
9. What does Haber do when Hitler takes power?
10. How do the Nazis take advantage of Haber's agricultural research?
11. What is ironic about how the Nazis use Haber's research?

After Listening

12. Kant claims that what makes an action moral or immoral is the intention behind it and not its result. Do you think Kant would judge Haber's intentions as moral? Are Haber's actions governed by a hypothetical imperative or a categorical imperative?
13. In "Free Fruit For Young Widows," Shimmy argues for "context" in evaluating morality. Does Haber's story lead you to agree or disagree with Shimmy's argument?
14. Compare Professor Tendler and Fritz Haber by placing them on a spectrum of morality from 1-10 (1=most immoral, 10=most moral). Justify your view.
15. Does Haber pose a challenge to Kantian moral philosophy? In other words, to what extent does Haber reveal strengths and weaknesses in Kant's arguments about morality?
16. In your view, what is the best way to judge Haber—via attention to context or in absolute terms?
17. Do you find yourself judging Haber's morality differently than how you judge Tendler's? If so, why? If not, why not?