

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING



**DEONTOLOGY / DUTY
ETHICS**

Deontology / Duty Ethics



- “Deontologists believe that morality is a matter of duty. We have moral duties to do things which it is right to do and moral duties not to do things which it is wrong to do. Whether something is right or wrong doesn’t depend on its consequences. Rather, an action is right or wrong in itself” (Lacewing).
- For Kant, our duties are determined with a supreme law of morality: *the categorical imperative*.

Immanuel Kant



- Reason unites all human-beings as a species.
- Human-beings are not only rational, but also *law-giving* creatures.
- What we need to do is to use our capacity to reason in order to live free and just.
- However, this is not a mere calculation as Thomas Hobbes and utilitarian thinkers argue for.

Kant: Classification of Laws



- *Logic*: laws of thought
- *Physics*: laws of nature
- *Ethics*: laws of human action / freedom

- moral philosophy as a search of a universal law, of which we may be the authors

Kant's Critique of Utilitarianism



- Origin of freedom and good life is *good will*.
- Utilitarian ethics supposes that we are free in the absence of outer constraints while seeking the pleasure and avoiding the pain.
- Utilitarian ethics is guided by the laws of nature (obey your thirst!).
- “Now if, in a being that has reason and a will, its preservation, its welfare—in a word, its happiness—were the real end of nature, then nature would have hit on a very bad arrangement in appointing reason in this creature to accomplish the aim” (Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 8).

«The Good Will»



“There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a **good will**. Understanding, wit, the power of judgment, and like *talents of the mind*, whatever they might be called, or courage, resoluteness, persistence in an intention, as qualities of temperament, are without doubt in some respects good and to be wished for; but they can also become extremely evil and harmful, if the will that is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose peculiar constitution is therefore called character, is not good. It is the same with gifts of fortune” (Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 7).

«The Good Will»



“The good will is good not through what it effects or accomplishes, not through its efficacy for attaining any intended end, but only through its willing, i.e., good in itself, and considered for itself, without comparison, it is to be estimated far higher than anything that could be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, or indeed, if you prefer, of the sum of all inclinations” (Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 8).

Autonomy vs. Heteronomy



- **Freedom as autonomy**

- acting freely is not to choose the best means to a given end; it is to choose the end itself, for its own sake

- **Heteronomy**

- acting in accordance with the determinations given outside of me

Autonomy vs. Heteronomy



“why write a paper?
to get a good grade.
why care about grades?
to get a job in investment banking.
why get a job in investment banking?
to become a hedge fund manager.
why be a hedge fund manager?
to make a lot of money.
why to make a lot of money?
to eat lobster often.”

Duty vs. Inclination



- *doing the right thing for the right reason: **duty***
- “Kant believed that, whenever we make a decision, we act on a maxim. Maxims are Kant’s version of intentions. They are our personal principles that guide our decisions, e.g. ‘to have as much fun as possible’, ‘to marry only someone I truly love’. All our decisions have some maxim or other behind them” (Lacewing).
- “... we will put before ourselves the concept of **duty**, which contains that of a good will, though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances, which, however, far from concealing it and making it unrecognizable, rather elevate it by contrast and let it shine forth all the more brightly” (Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 10).

«The Honest Shopkeeper»



“An inexperienced customer, say, a child, goes into a grocery store to buy a loaf of bread. The grocer could overcharge him—charge him more than the usual price for a loaf of bread—and the child would not know. But the grocer realizes that, if others discovered he took advantage of the child in this way, word might spread and hurt his business. For this reason, he decides not to overcharge the child. He charges him the usual price.”

Hypothetical vs. Categorical Imperative



- An imperative is a statement that tells one **how to behave**.
- A *hypothetical imperative* is one that provides instructions for attaining a specified goal (*conditional*).
- A *categorical imperative* is one that provides instructions to be followed regardless of one's goals.
 - Categorical imperative defines supreme law of morality, and it is *unconditional*.

Categorical Imperative



- **Three Formulations of Categorical Imperative**
 - “Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (CI-1)
 - “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (CI-2).
 - “Act in accordance with the law you give” (CI-3).

How to Use Categorical Imperative?



● CI-1

- Find the maxim of the action being evaluated.
- Change the maxim to a universal law. (Change the word “I” in the maxim to “Everyone.”)
- Check to see whether one could coherently will a situation in which everyone behaved according to this universal law. If such a situation is coherent, then the action in question is permissible. If the imagined situation is incoherent, then the action in question is impermissible.

● CI-2

- An action is permissible provided all of these conditions are met:
 - Others are involved in the action *voluntarily*.
 - The benefits from the action are (at least roughly) *equal*.
 - Others are treated with *politeness and respect*.

Types of Duties: Perfect and Imperfect Duties (to oneself and to others)

- Perfect duties are ones that must be fulfilled at every opportunity (telling the truth; not committing suicide).
- Imperfect duties are ones that must be fulfilled at some point, but we are allowed to decide when and how this is done (helping someone; developing your talents).
- Examples
 - Suicide, Borrowing Money / Telling the Truth, Developing the Talents, Helping a Drowning Person, Murder

Kant on Justice



- Justice relies upon law
- Our societies and their laws originated from a social contract
 - Kant's account of social contract: not an actual, but an imaginary contract (*an idea of reason*)
 - Moral law stands higher than the ruler
 - Law is open to contestation
 - People are the authors of their own laws
- Just laws should consider individual freedom

Concluding Remarks



“Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: **the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me**” (Immanuel Kant).