

# What is good and what is not?



- What is the measure of good and evil in the world?
- Is there in the very nature of the Universe a set of laws which tells good from evil?
- Can we say that the bad and the evil are known only with reference to other things and don't have any autonomous meaning?

- A particular philosopher would always answer these questions of all times in a particular way and in accordance with the circumstances he's living in.
- Some philosophers tried to state the measure of good and evil in a set of commandments or essential principles of behavior for all times.



essentials

- The 10 eternal commandments handed down by God from the You shall have no other gods before Me.
- You shall not make idols.
- You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Honor your father and your mother.

- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet.



- Other thinkers were sure that what is evil in one place and time would be evil in another.
- For instance, is truth always good? If a person is chased by maniac who wants to kill him, should I make a favor to the maniac by truthfully showing him the turn the person took right before my eyes? Shouldn't I lie and thereby save the person's life?

- If God is good, then, why there is suffering in the universe?
- How can we reconcile a good God with an evil world?
- “Good” and “Evil” = “ethics”, “ethical problem”
- That’s a personal challenge to each philosopher!



- Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher of change, believed that good and evil are harmonious with each other.
- As music comes out of combination of low and high notes, so in the world harmony ensues from the mixture of opposites, good and evil.
- Solid ice can change into soft water...



- But only God can see this concord of things, for everything is fair in that it is an element of tremendous universal harmony.
- We should live in harmony with the Universal Reason and its laws; then we'll contemplate the all-pervasive harmony.
- Evil is not bothering for it is only a phase in the Universal Harmony, a necessary part of the good whole.

- Democritus the Atomist – the goal of the existence is happiness (state of tranquility attendant upon harmony of the soul; *inner* condition; balance of life).
- We should not depend on things of this world which come and go, for it is lack of them that makes us suffer.

- The good man is not that which does good but that which wants to do good at all times. Not our deeds, but our desires make us happy.
- Sophists – each one has the right to define what is good and what is evil for man is the measure of all things. Morality is habit, everyone ought frame his own code of morality!

- What is good for me, can be bad for you. If you are not agree, prove me wrong, give good reason for your disapproval of me! Chaos, pure individualism and absolute selfishness were the results of this approach. They lost the forest by caring too mach for the trees!
- But they laid bare a tendency which was rich in possibilities – independent human mind that thinks for itself being one of them. Everything should be justified before the bar of human reason.

- Socrates – living of good life is of the prime interest.
- There should be a basic principle of right and wrong applicable much beyond the individual principles of anyone.
- **The knowledge** is the highest good by which everything is measured. If you know what is right, you'll do it! Therefore, “No man is advertently bad”. He simply ignorant!
- Then, a life without trying to discover what is good is the worst kind of life.

- Plato – the world of sense is too fleeting. The world of ideas which is pure good may be known only through reason.
- The reason is the highest good for man. But we have to release our soul from our body in order for it to contemplate the world of ideas.
- Man consists of three parts – bodily appetites, spiritual part or will (action, courage, bravery), the reason (concerned with the best in man).
- When reason rules the will and the appetites, man is wise, brave and self-controlled. He is good and he is happy. To be good and to be happy is the same. But pleasure can not be the aim of life.

- Aristotle – every action of ours has some goal in view and these goals are endless. The only one goal which cannot be used as a means to obtain some other goal is happiness.
- Realize the potential to the fullest degree possible – that's the goal of everything. Each thing is different from another and has different talents to realize.

- Man alone possesses the supreme part of his nature, that is, reason. Then, the highest good for him is to realize this ability to its fullest. Pleasure will be naturally concomitant upon his complete realization of his intelligible powers.
- The rational attitude to the tripartite nature of man – “the golden mean”. That will elicit all possible virtues. For instance, courage is a mean between cowardice and foolhardiness. We should balance one extreme over against another.



- “Virtue is a disposition, involving deliberate purpose or choice, consisting in a mean that is relative to ourselves, the mean being determined by reason, or as a prudent man would determine it” – we cannot be forced to act virtuously by any authority outside of ourselves.

- Epicureans – happiness is the supreme good for all people. But we should be selective about what to take pleasure in – some immediate pleasures can lead to suffering.
- For example, to eat beyond reason. Gout and indigestion can be the result!

- See way ahead to the consequences of every pleasure we embark on! The best pleasure is the pleasure of intellect.
- We get pleasure by satisfying wishes or through becoming free from any wish at all. So, we ought to satisfy our desire and, thereby, get rid of it!

- Stoics – the highest good is to be in harmony with the Universe. We are contributive to the complete development of the world, for are parts of it.
- The ruling power of the Universe is reason, so we have to be ruled by it as well.
- If you know your place in the Universe and act correspondingly, then, you are happy almost in an “automatic” way!

- Evil is a discord which is harmony when heard in relation with the rest of the music – that's what evil was for the early Greek thinkers

- Babylonian and Assyrian religious traditions affected the Western religious worldview profoundly. A clear-cut distinction between light and darkness, life and death, good and bad became something well-accepted.
- Philo and Plotinus – God is perfect purity. The matter is the source of all evil. Mind or soul is the seat of good and the body is the seat of evil. We will fall from divine perfection if we follow our bodies...

- Apologists – we are created good, but through our attention to the body we fell afoul of God’s grace. The story of Adam and the original sin we are still hounded with.



- Saint Augustine – how to explain evil in a world fashioned by an all-good God?
- Well, if something seemingly evil fits well into the whole schemata of the world, it is good. Everything in the Universe is good! Shadows are absolutely essential to the beauty of a painting! But if you break it away from the entire picture, you will deem it bad... and, vice versa, when seen in the picture you'll understand that without them the beauty of the whole is impossible...



- Evil is lack of good, just like darkness is lack of light.
- Man should turn his back on the dim and faint delights of this realm and turn his sight entirely to God. The union with God can be completed thanks to love of God and His Divine Grace.



- Abelard – rightness or wrongness of an act does not lie in the act itself but in the intention of the actor.
- If I steal something with a good intention, his deed is good. The act itself is neutral.
- “God considers not what is done, but in what spirit it is done”
- The truly sinful man is one who acts with desire to do wrong.

- Thomas Aquinas – if one realizes the purpose of his existence, he reveals God’s goodness.
- Self-realization as God has ordained, not as you wish.
- There is purpose of everything, we have the purpose as well – to contemplate God through reason or faith. The summit of it is “intuition” – a coming to God completed in heaven.
- Can a bad act be good? Aquinas disagreed with Aristotle
- “The contempt of the world” is prominent in his works. Life of a dedicated saint in a monastery is ideal.



- Meister Eckhart – the unity of God and the individuality of man. To become one with God and overcome the individuality is the purpose of the really good life.
- “Whoever would see God, must be dead to himself and buried in God, in the unrevealed Godhead, to become again what he was before he was.
- Not deed, but being (losing ourselves in the unity of God) is really important.

- Thomas Hobbes – interpretation of the whole of the Universe on a materialistic basis. Good and evil are also motion. When motion is successful, it generates pleasure, and vice versa.
- Every displeasure is evil. Good and evil is comparative and relative. Even in the case of one person the notions may change during the lifetime.



- Descartes/Spinoza – God is perfect and incapable of causing us to make mistakes, for the power of man with which to discern between the good and the evil is not perfect.
- If you can't comprehend something and judge correctly, you are guilty out of your own accord. Error is lack of knowledge.

- The fundamental striving of everyone is self-preservation, which is good. Everything blocking it is bad.
- Still, this striving should be rational and be about our realization of all the consequences of our actions. The perfect understanding of what we are doing - this is the happiness. In other words, the understanding that our striving is the striving of God Himself.
- If we love the rational parts of ourselves we actually love God – “intellectual love of God”.



- Leibnitz – ‘this world is the best possible world’, but it is not perfect.
- God limited Himself when He expressed Himself in finite things, which caused sin and suffering.
- Evil serves to make good really good.
- We have certain inner principles which, if applied logically, can give us a hint about good and evil. For instance, we should seek pleasure and avoid pain. Because of our passions and impulses or the lack of knowledge we don’t follow these principles sometimes, but they are existent.



- John Lock – we are blank sheets of paper. Still, people can agree on many experiences and conclude the same things. Our parents have impressed on us ideas of right and wrong from the first days of our existence.
- Our conscience is nothing more than this ideas that we have had so long that they seem to be innate, inborn.
- Pleasure and pain are native to humans. We seek to avoid pain and deem the latter as evil.



- 3 types of law:
- 1. God-set ones to define our duties. If broken they cause us great pain.
- 2. Civil laws set by the groups of people as a constituted civil unit to define crime and innocence. If broken, the punishment is going to be administered by the groups of people.
- 3. Laws of opinion or reputation. They are great in number and cause by the fact that people treasure their reputations and shun being denounced by others.
- Like Hobbes, he saw that **morality is a matter of enlightened self-interest** – one is good because being good pays off the best in attaining individual pleasures.

- Lord Shaftesbury – the proper balance of the welfare of both individuals and society.
- “The greatest good for the greatest number” (Francis Hutcheson) – the criterion of the good act.
- Man is basically sympathetic. The welfare of the group can well be determinative of the good and the bad (Richard Cumberland).



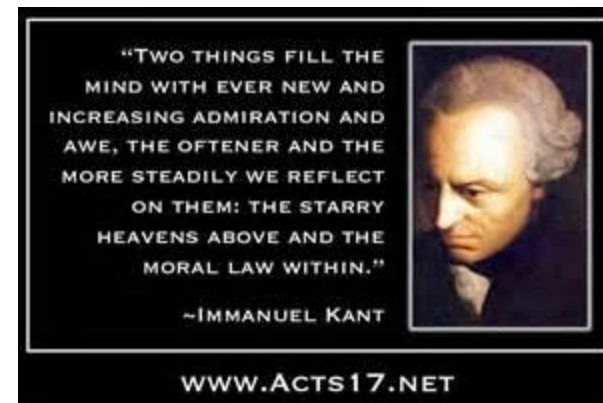
- Kant – what is the duty?
- The only absolutely good thing in the universe is the human will governed by respect for the moral law or the consciousness of duty (Rousseau).
- Moral act should be done because of our respect for the moral law, not because of selfish gain or sympathy for other people.

# KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

- UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE
  - A person should act that the principle of one's act could become a universal law of human action in a world in which one would hope to live.
  - A person should treat other people as having intrinsic value, and not merely as a means to achieve one's end.



- The results of an act can lead to pain or happiness, but it doesn't matter. If act is done with good intentions and out of respect for the moral law, it is thereby good.
- The moral law is inherent in reason. It is *a priori*, before experience, in the very nature of ours.
- Stop and think – stable human association is possible only through this law.



- So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only. (Always treat persons as ends, never as means to an end)
- The fundamental worth of every individual is affirmed – our actions should not be such as to use individuals as means for our ends.

- Fichte – the ignorant man cannot be good. Being free, nor forced by some external authority, man should know the moral law of Kant and its implications, and must not only respect this law but to act it out.
- Morality is not a state to be gained once and for all, but a constant struggle of the intelligent individual.





- Schopenhauer – Kant’s thing-in-itself, the source of all our impressions, is will to be, to live.
- The will is the cause of all evil and suffering, for it begets selfishness. The more powerful kill and devour the less powerful so that they may live.

- Sympathy or pity is basic to morality. It's a way to act for others. But to do this, we have to deny our individual will. Self-sacrifice brings happiness and tranquility.
- Every individual is actually part of the whole, the universal will. We are co-members of the one single unity of being.



Recent philosophers were concerned with man's social relationships. Good and bad are not written in the fabric of the Universe, but defined by social factors.

The consequences of the act in the experience of others is stressed upon.

The ideas of God setting down absolutely defined moral laws is gone.

The ideas that an evil act angers God while a good act makes Him pleased is missing

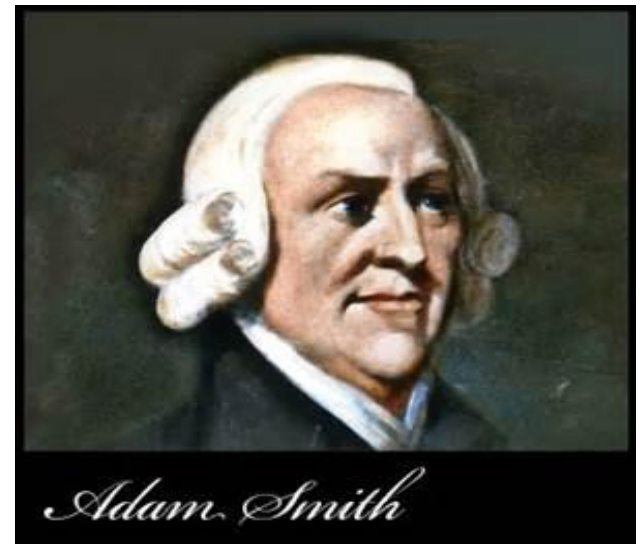
It is a relative morality. The effect our act has on the lives of others is the sole determinant.

- Mill (1806-1873) said that the two inclinations of our souls could be fused by the way of association - we may be self-regarding when carrying for the aid of others (as Hobbes said), but, in the due course, our thoughts grow to be so submersed in other people's well-fare that we start to regard *them* and not ourselves as a primary object of our attention and assistance.
- The goods of intellect are better than that of the senses



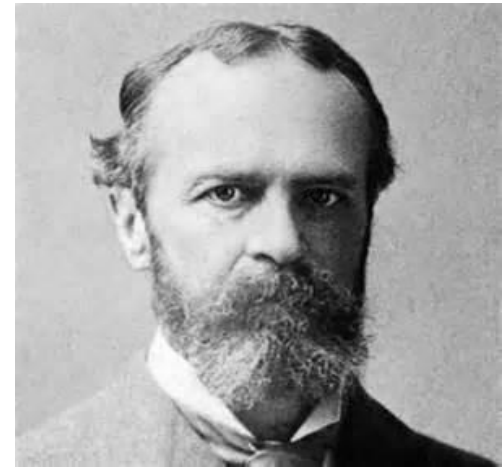
- Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) upheld a so-called “quantitative view”. Due to the mirroring capability of our conscience, we can see others as a huge bulk of our own emotional world; thus the happiness of the maximum possible number of people is highly conducive to the accruing of our own happiness, the latter playing in Bentham’s philosophy a role of the key motive to command our behavior.
- Goods do not differ in quality. Self-interest only can bring the greatest good to the one acting.

- Adam Smith (1723-1790) was another thinker to contribute his ideas into the discussion; for him, sympathy played an enormous part in our lives; we just cannot stay uninvolved into other's sufferings or happiness. For him, to share feelings with others and even identify us with others is something agreeable, invigorating, and contributive to our overall weal



- Herbert Spencer – conduct is developing, evolving thing. A matter of adjustment of acts to ends.
- The best conduct is that which makes living richer for the individual and for those among whom he lives and those who will come after him.
- The social group is the ultimate end of morality.
- **Absolutely** (immediately pleasurable)/**relatively** (not immediately pleasurable) **right** conduct.

- William James and John Dewey – a good act is one which considers the individual as an end in himself and not as a means. By so considering each individual, we consider the welfare ultimate measure of good and evil.
- What enriches my life should enrich lives of others. Individual and group are bound up with each other, since individuality is a social product and no one has true individuality save as a member of the group







- **2 fundamental positions**
- 1 – good and evil are **inherent** in the fabric of the Universe and forever true. Know the nature of the latter and you will understand everything! Whether the Universe speaks to man with its own voice (through scientific studies) or whether the voice be that of the Creator of the Universe, the position is similar.

- **2** - Good and bad are **relative** notions, and the measure is to be obtained through a study of the particular situation, considering time and place.
- For a sick man, some kinds of food may be harmful, but they are not so for a well man.
- In a modern social group, preservation of the aged and weak is first-rate, but in a more primitive society beleaguered by enemies and enforced to be always on the move to avoid death, to safeguard the aged and to protect the unwell is bad since it slows down the group and may result in ruin. The ethical quality of the act is defined in terms of the good of the whole