



DEONTOLOGY: ETHICS AS DUTY

Problems with Utilitarianism

- One issue with Bentham's consequentialism was the unwilling transplant example we discussed last week. It appears morally wrong to murder someone to harvest their organs even if it will save 5 others.
- Mill tried to address this with his "harm" principle.
- However, an issue with Mill's harm principle is the difficulty of determining what is "harmful" to other people. Is walking naked down the streets harmful? Shouting racial slurs? Driving without a seatbelt?
- Additionally, if all we care about is utility, why does harm matter?

Problems with Utilitarianism

- Consequentialist think that we should only evaluate ends and not intentions; they think that no action is inherently good or bad but rather all actions must be evaluated based on end results. This could lead to good people doing bad things (or so we think).
- Maybe there is a better way to evaluate the ethical ramifications of actions.

Kant Rejects Consequentialism

- Kant argued that consequences don't have moral worth. Rather, the only thing that is good in and of itself is the Good Will. The Good Will freely chooses to do its moral duty. That duty is dictated solely by reason. The Good Will thus consists of a person's free will motivated purely by reason.
- How does this theory work?

Kant Biography

- Kant credited the skepticism of empirical philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) with awakening him from “dogmatic slumber,” although he disagreed with Hume, who claimed that the mind did not exist at all but was the result of mental associations derived from sensory experience.
- In 1781, at 56 years old, Kant published Critique of Pure Reason in Prussia.
- Almost immediately, it transformed him from an obscure professor of metaphysics and logic into a preeminent figure in the world of philosophy.

Hume's problem of induction

- Inductive knowledge is based on an assumption that the future will be similar to the past.
 - The sun rose yesterday and the day before that so therefore it will rise tomorrow.
 - The last 100 swans I saw were white so the next swan I see will be white.
 - How do we know inductive reasoning is true?

The Critique of Pure Reason

- In the 800-page tome, Kant argued that reality could not be discerned through reasoning or sensory experience alone but only by understanding the nature of the human mind – a synthesis of the two.
- Recall that knowledge independent of experience is "a priori" knowledge and knowledge obtained through experience is "a posteriori" knowledge. Kant had much to say about both of these.

The Critique of Pure Reason

- Kant weighed in on the debate between the empiricists and rationalists agreeing with the empiricists that there is no “intelligible realm” accessible only by reason. Kant denied that we can gain knowledge of how the world is, independent of experience.
- However, he did not conclude that knowledge is simply reducible to experiences as the empiricists did.
- For Kant, the human mind structured experience in a certain way which forces humans to experience the empirical world categorically.

The Critique of Pure Reason

- Kant responded to his predecessors by arguing against the Empiricists' belief that the mind is a blank slate that is written upon by the empirical world, and by rejecting the Rationalists' notion that pure, a priori knowledge of a mind-independent world is possible.
- Reason itself is structured with forms of experience and categories that give a phenomenal and logical structure to any possible object of empirical experience.
- These categories cannot be circumvented to get at a mind-independent world, but they are necessary for experience.

The Critique of Pure Reason

- According to Kant, ethics and ethical knowledge are “a priori” meaning that our moral duties are determined independently of empirical considerations.
- He thinks of ethics as something humans are born with; a mental faculty similar to the ability to do mathematics or know that objects have permanence.

The Critique of Pure Reason

- According to Kant a priori propositions are necessary and universal.
 - a proposition is necessary if it could not possibly be false, and so cannot be denied without contradiction.
 - a proposition is universal if it is true in all cases, and so does not admit of any exceptions.
- Knowledge gained a posteriori through the senses, Kant argues, never imparts absolute necessity and universality, because it is always possible that we might encounter an exception.

Kant's Ethics: Good Will

- Kant argued that the highest good was the good will. To act from a good will is to act from duty. Thus, a good will is a will that chooses a certain action because it is the action dictated by duty.

Good Will

- To understand his view of the good will, we need to understand what duty is and how Kant understands the human mind.
- Kant believed that people naturally had certain obligations to act a certain way and that individuals can determine what those moral obligations are – and how one should act – using pure reason alone. I.e., through deductive reasoning.
- Those moral obligations or rules that need to be followed no matter what – are called the “categorical imperative”.

Good Will

- The will, Kant says, is the faculty of acting according to a conception of law. When we act, whether or not we achieve what we intend with our actions is often beyond our control, so the morality of our actions does not depend upon their outcome. What we can control, however, is the will behind the action.
- The morality of an action, therefore, must be assessed in terms of the motivation behind it.
- Thus, it is the intention behind an action rather than its consequences that make that action good.

Good Will

- If two people perform the same act from the same conception of the law, but events beyond their control prevents one of them from achieving their goal, that failure is not less praiseworthy than succeeding.
- We must consider the individual who tries and fails to good on equal moral ground in terms of the will behind their actions as the person who succeeds.

Good Will

- Kant argues that the only thing that is good without qualification is the good will.
- Good traits such as courage can be used for ill purposes and therefore are not intrinsically good.
- For example, for Kant if a merchant is honest to earn a good reputation, his acts of being honest are not genuinely moral. The merchant is only truly moral if he is honest because being honest is right (one's duty). Persons of good will do their duty because it is their duty and for no other reason.

Kantianism

- But what does Kantian morality think our duties are?
- The answer lies in his explanation of imperatives.



BREAKTIME

Imperatives

- Kant calls rules which say what we ought to do imperatives.
- There are different sorts of imperatives. Some of these are hypothetical imperatives: these say that we ought to do such-and-such if we are interested in reaching some end (which Kant calls a "condition"). An example of a hypothetical imperative might be that you ought to work hard if you want to be rich.
- Kant does not think that you have any moral obligation to seek to become rich so he does not think you have an unconditional obligation to work hard.

Categorical Imperative

- In contrast, Kant thinks that if you want a good will, i.e., you want to act in a good manner, you have categorical duties of how to act.
- To reach the conclusion that morality and certain duties are categorical (unconditional) Kant argued that within the mind's complex structures there exists an inherent and unconditional duty to act ethically, which Kant calls the "categorical imperative."

Categorical Imperative

- Kant's moral principle is "imperative" because it commands, and it is "categorical" because it does so unconditionally - irrespective of the circumstances of the actor.
- This moral principle is given, a priori, by reason alone.
- Kant's ethics then is an ethics of duty rather than an ethics of consequences. The ethical person acts from the right intentions.
- The fundamental principle of ethics, the categorical imperative, is a requirement of reason binding on all rational beings.

Categorical Imperative

- Categorical Imperative: fancy way of saying that to act morally certain types of actions must always be taken, such as truth-telling.
- Kant believed that certain types of actions (including murder, theft, and lying) were absolutely prohibited, even in cases where the action would bring about more happiness than the alternative.
- The categorical imperative was expressed by Kant in a number of different ways. Kant regarded each expression as stating the same thing.

First Expression of Categorical Imperative

- The first expression of the categorical imperative states that we may act only in such a way that the maxim of our action, i.e. the principle governing our action, could be willed as universal law.
 - In other words, you can only do something if everyone doing the same would be fine.

First Expression of Categorical Imperative

- For example, one is forbidden to act on the maxim "lie whenever it provides me an advantage" because such a maxim would destroy trust among humans, and with it the possibility of gaining any advantage from lying.
 - Kant thinks those who act on non-universalizable maxims are caught in a kind of practical contradiction.
 - Note: Kant is not simply saying that if everyone lied the consequences would be bad. Rather, Kant is saying that the very concept of lying when convenient being used as a principle would be incoherent because lying would no longer work.

Second Expression of Categorical Imperative

- The Second expression of the categorical imperative stipulates that we must treat others as ends in themselves and not just as means to our own ends.
- In this formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant specifies that we must always respect others by treating them as ends in themselves, and never merely as a means.

Summary of Categorical Imperative

- Kant's categorical imperative is unconditional and contains two major suppositions:
 1. We must act on the basis of goodwill rather than purely on self-interested motives that benefit ourselves at the expense of others;
 2. we must never treat others as means toward ends benefitting ourselves without consideration of them also as ends in themselves

Practical Application of Categorical Imperative?

- Kant thought that observing the categorical imperative when considering what actions to take would directly lead to ethical actions on our part.



DEONTOLOGY

Deontology

- The term deontology stems from the Greek *deon*—duty, obligation, or command. As an ethical system, it holds that the consequences of a moral decision don't matter whatsoever.
- Kant's ethics is deontological: a normative ethical theory which argues that the morality of an action is based on whether the action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules, rather than based on the consequences of the action.
 - It is based on deductive rather than inductive reasoning.
 - It believes that morality and ethics is similar to math, it is rule based and one does not have to look to empirical science or probabilities to determine if an action is morally right or morally wrong.
 - From a Kantian perspective, moral duties build the framework for ethical acts.

Kant in Contrast with Utilitarianism

- How does deontology differ from utilitarianism?
 - Unlike Bentham and Mill, Immanuel Kant's deontology is not concerned with the consequences harm caused by one's actions.
 - Therefore objective calculus of consequences is not necessary for ethical action to result.
 - Duty, obligation, and good will are of the highest importance rather than particular outcomes.
 - So do consequences never matter?

Utilitarianism vs. Deontology

- In radical opposition to utilitarianism the consequences of a moral decision are of no matter whatsoever in determining if the action is right or wrong:
 - What *is* important are the motives as to why one has acted in the way that one has.
 - So an action may have beneficial results, but still be unethical *if* it has been performed for the wrong reasons.
 - Similarly, an action may have catastrophic consequences, but still be deemed moral if it has been done for the right reason.



WHAT DO YOU
THINK?

Hypothetical

- Imagine you win the lottery and decide it would be really fun to give the money to charity. You enjoy that special feeling you get from making people happy, so you give all your lottery money away.
- Did you do a good act according to Kant?

Hypothetical

- According to Kant, no, it was a selfish pursuit. Moral worth only comes from doing things because it is your duty regardless of whether you liked doing it.
- Does this makes sense?
- Does that square with our intuitions of right and wrong?

Kantian Business Ethics

- Unlike utilitarianism, which forms the philosophical foundation for most cost-benefit analysis in business, Kantian ethics is not so easily applied.
- It argues for the development of individual morality through acting on the categorical imperative to act ethically and it emphasizes human autonomy.
 - This imperative addresses one major side of business ethics: the personal.
 - Character and moral formation are crucial to creating an ethical culture. Indeed, business ethics is littered with cases of companies that have suffered damaging crises due to their leaders' lack of commitment to act on the basis of a good will and with regard for what benefits others.

Kantian Business Ethics

- On the other hand, in applying Kantian ethics to the real world, an ethical decision requires us to observe only the rights and duties we owe to others, and, in the context of business, act on the basis of a primary motive to do what is right by all stakeholders.
- Cost-benefit analysis is unnecessary to act morally in business according to Kant.
- So at least from an “is this act moral” perspective maybe Kantian ethics is easier to apply than a complicated consequentialist calculus.

Kantian Business Ethics

- A business manager who accepts Kantian morality would ask for any given decision, does the principle on which the decision is based pass the test of the categorical imperative.
- In other words, can it (the decision) be willed (done) universally without contradiction?
- If it can be, then the decision is morally permissible. If it cannot, the action is morally forbidden.



WHAT DO YOU
THINK?

Kantian Business Ethics

- Example: Employee theft.
- Is employee theft allowed according to Kant? Let's say it's just for office supplies?
- Could a maxim which permitted stealing of office supplies be universalized?

Kantian Business Ethics

- Example: Breaching a contract when it's economically beneficial.
- Could a maxim which permitted contract breaching in some circumstances be universalized?

Kantian Business Ethics

- At the end of the day, if a maxim for an action taken by a company is self-defeating if universalized, then the contemplated action is not ethical according to Kant.