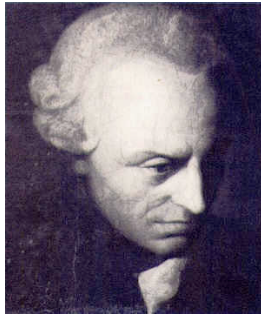


Kant



Suppose. . . .

- You are a good swimmer and one day at the beach you notice someone who is drowning offshore. Consider the following three scenarios. Which one would Kant say exhibits a good will?
 - Even though you know that no one would blame you if you did not try to save the swimmer, you feel pity for the drowning swimmer and decide to save him because you don't want to live with the guilt
 - You did your best to save the swimmer because you happen to know that he's the child of the wealthiest family in town and the reward will be generous
 - Even though the waters were dangerous, you attempt to save the swimmer because you feel it is your duty. Unfortunately, the child dies.

Kant Three Propositions

- 1st: The only thing which is good without qualification is a good will
- 2nd: A good will acts on the formal principle of duty--I will always do my duty because it is my duty
- 3rd: Duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law

The Good Will

- "The only thing good is a good will"
- Will: a faculty for determining courses of action
- Good will: a will which functions correctly
- What makes a person good is that they possess a will that makes decisions based on the moral law
- The idea of a good person directed by a good will is that this person makes decisions motivated by nothing other than doing what is right

Value of a Good Will

- A good will is valued not because it achieves some ends but because it is good in itself
- A good will is good regardless of the conditions
- A good will acts on the formal principle of duty--I will always do my duty because it is my duty

Motivated by Duty

- Kant compares motivation by duty with other kinds of motives
- If one is motivated by happiness alone, then one would do one's duty only if one's duty coincides with one's happiness
- If one is motivated by a motive of duty, then the morality of the action would express one's intent to act according to duty regardless of the circumstances
- While some actions may be motivated by self-interest or self-preservation, these actions may be praiseworthy but do not express a good will
- Motivation of duty is to have priority over all other motivations

Merchant and Acting from Duty

- The merchant charges the same price for both experienced and inexperienced customers
 - Why does he do it?
 - Is it so that he maintains a good reputation?
 - Is it so that he doesn't get arrested?
 - Is it because it is the right thing to do?
 - Which is Kant's preferred motivation?

Which Person is Moral?

- Bambi often makes personal sacrifices to help other people who are in need. Even though emotionally she is cold and indifferent to the needs of others, she knows that it is her duty to help others when she can.
- Clarice often makes personal sacrifices to help other people who are in need. She has a cheerful, compassionate disposition, and it makes her feel alive to help others. Since helping others is second nature to her, she never considers whether it is a moral obligation.
- According to Kant, which is person is genuinely moral?

Deontological Ethics

- An action's moral value is determined by the nature of the action itself and the agent's motive
- DE contrasts with Utilitarianism which says that the goal or consequences of an action determine its moral value
- Only humans have the ability to work in accordance with his conception of the moral law

Respect for the Law

- Being motivated by duty displays a respect for moral law or lawfulness
- Duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for moral law
- Acting from duty is acting according to moral laws that apply to us
- Acting in accordance with duty is motivated by our respect for the laws and principles of rationality
- We act on laws that any rational agent would act upon
- While we might decide not to act out of a sense of duty to civil laws or laws of a club, but we cannot help but act out of respect for the law of rationality

Rational Agents

- As rational agents, we are capable of guiding our behavior based on rational principles
- When we act morally, we act on principles that any rational agent in our situation would act upon

Can We Ignore Our Moral Reasoning?

- Regardless of the circumstances or of the consequences of an action, we cannot ignore the force of our moral reasoning
- Why?
 - Because our moral reasoning is based on universal principles of rationality; we cannot escape our duty
 - The principle which motivates a good will is the same principle that is fundamental to all of morality
 - That principle is the Categorical Imperative

How Do We Figure Out the Moral Law?

- Imperatives
 - Hypothetical: applies conditionally
 - Categorical: applies unconditionally
 -
 - Each of these tells us what we ought to do
 - Each is an imperative because it is a command; a command to use our wills in a certain way

Hypothetical Imperatives

- Definition: a rule that tells us what means to use to achieve a desired end
- Tell us what we ought to do given we have the relevant desires or have willed certain ends
 - If you want to be a physician, then you ought to go to med school
 - The degree to which the “ought” binds one to a certain action depends on the desire--if you don't want to be bound to do something then just give up the desire

Categorical Imperatives

- Definition: a moral law that tells us what we ought to do but does not depend on any prior conditions or subjective wants and wishes and contains no qualifications
- “We ought not torture babies for fun” carries with it a moral obligation independent of our desires
- Moral obligation has the form: “You ought not to do such-and-such, period.”
- The moral force of a categorical imperative applies to us unconditionally simply because we possess rational wills

Conformity to a Universal Law

- First formulation: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”
- This first maxim gives a procedure for determining whether an action is morally permissible
- Procedure:
 1. State the rule (maxim) you are following for some particular action
 2. Would you will that everyone all the time follow this rule?
 3. Follow that rule that can be universalizable

Money Lender Example

- Suppose a man needs to borrow money and he knows that he cannot repay the money. He also knows that no one will lend him money if he cannot repay the loan.
- If he were to promise to repay the debt, what maxim/rule would he be following?
- Could this maxim/rule become a universal law?

Giving to Charity Example

- Suppose you refuse to help someone in need. It's not that you want to take anything away from the needy individual. It's just that you don't feel any obligation to help them out or contribute to their welfare.
- What is the maxim you are acting upon in refusing to help the needy?
- Could this maxim/rule become a universal law?

Universalize This

- Can you universalize the following maxims? Would the principle undermine itself if followed without exception by everyone?
 - Never say "I love you" to someone unless that person says it to you first
 - Always pay your debts on time
 - When running a business, always charge less for your product than your competitor
 - Never help someone out unless you get something in return
 - Share some of your wealth with those less fortunate
 - Cheat on your tests whenever possible
 - Never cheat on a test

Moral Agent

- Being a moral agent means acting according to a universal law or rule
- A universal moral law is one that holds in all circumstances for all individuals--there are no exceptions
- An example of a universal moral law is, Do not tell a lie.

Lying

- Lying in any circumstance is the “obliteration of one’s dignity as a human being”
- Why think the prohibition against lying is so bad?
- Kant offers two arguments:
 - Prohibition on lying follows from the Categorical Imperative
 - Prohibition on lying is universal because we can never know the consequences

Prohibition on Lying Follows from the Categorical Imperative

- If lying were a universal law, then it would be self-defeating.
- It would be self-defeating because if every one were telling a lie, no one would believe you.
- For a lie to be successful means that there is a presumption of truth; generally, people need to believe that others are telling the truth if lying is to work
- So, if lying were a universal law, then no one would believe you were telling the truth

Are All Universalized Lies Self-Defeating?

- Kant thinks that the maxim “It is permissible to lie” is self-defeating
- But, do all formulations of the rule lead to the same problem?
- Suppose, you clarify the context in which lies are told. Would that still lead to lies being self-defeating?
 - Consider this rule: “It is permissible to lie when doing so would save someone’s life.”
 - Could we universalize this rule without it being self-defeating?

Categorical Imperative

- First Formulation: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”
 - What makes an action right or wrong is the maxim’s (for that action) fitness to be a universal law of nature
- Second Formulation: “act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never as a means but always at the same time as an end”
 - Treating other people as an end in themselves means taking on the ends of the other person

Second Formulation

1. I take myself to be an end, never merely a means.
2. Each person does this on the same rational grounds.
3. Either we are ends in ourselves, or none of us are.
4. If no one is an end in himself, then there's no categorical imperative.
5. There is a categorical imperative.
6. We are each an end in ourselves.

End in Itself

- Support for premise 4:
 - Only a good will is an end-in-itself
 - End-in-itself = good without qualification = reason, rational will
 - All rational beings are ends-in-themselves
 - For Kant, our humanity is contained in our being rational beings
 - When Kant talks about our rational humanity he means an agent who not only picks effective means but who acts for interpersonally justifiable reasons. That is, the rational agent is reasonable and acts on principles of practical reasoning

People are Ends-in-themselves

- People are not tools or objects without dignity
- People have a dignity which raises us above other things
- Formula of ends says we should never act in such a way that we treat someone as a slave, tool, or utensil
- The second formula requires that one act in a respectful manner toward another
 - Acting in a respectful manner to another means that one is acting on maxims that person would think acceptable, assuming they are reasonable
 - They would accept the maxim as reasonable because the Categorical Imperative is itself a test of reasonableness

Limits on Action

- The Second Formulation places constraints on one's behavior.
- Respecting humans as ends-in-themselves constrains the types of actions we can pursue in seeking our goals.
 - It's okay to want to get out of debt but not okay to lie as a means to that end
- We should also respect ourselves as ends-in-ourselves and strive to develop our rational capacities, since these capacities are the basis for that which is good without qualification--the good will
- Our respect for humanity demands that we consider other's ends in our actions

Why Adopt Another's Ends?

- Why help others and adopt another's ends?
 - We should help others because from the point of view of reason and morality no one's ends are any more important than another's
 - Our ends and another's ends ought to be pursued equally
- Since we are all rational beings at core, we ought to pursue our and other's ends because they are all the same, namely pure rationality and a perfectly good agent
- We are all intrinsically valuable and ought to treat others with this value in mind rather than as just tools to our own end

Mere Means

- Kant is not terribly clear about what treating another as a "mere means" includes
- Bob treats John as a mere means
 - Bob treats John in such a way that if John knew Bob's intentions, then John wouldn't want Bob to treat him that way
 - John has a goal which Bob could help John achieve, but Bob refuses to help John

Kant's Lying Promise Example

- Lying to the money lender to get a loan is using the lender as a means to the end of getting money
- What maxim is the borrower using?
- Is this a maxim the lender would adopt for the basis of the transaction? If the lender were to use the Categorical Imperative, could he rationally adopt the maxim?
- In using the lying promise maxim, I am not respecting the lender's humanity because I am relying on his not adopting my maxim in order to serve my purposes

Problems with Kant's Ethical Theory

The Inquiring Murderer

- Suppose your best friend is running from a murderer and tells you he is going home to hide. The murderer comes along and innocently asks where the man went. You think that if you tell the truth, your friend will be found and killed. And, the murderer seems to be on your friend's trail and if you remain silent then your friend will likely be found and killed.
- What should you do?
- What does Kant think you should do?

Kant's Analysis

- Kant thinks the intuitive analysis is mistaken
- Intuitively, we think that we should make an exception to the rule Never Lie and lie in order to protect our friend
 - We think that the consequence of telling the truth is worse than the consequence of lying
- Kant thinks we can never know the consequences of our actions--we simply don't know that lying will bring about good consequences
 - The best policy is to avoid lying and let the consequences unfold
 - If the consequences are bad, we are not at fault because we have done our duty

Response to Kant's Argument

- Kant's position is too pessimistic about our knowledge of consequences
 - Sometimes we are quite certain about the consequences of our actions
- Why should we be responsible for the bad consequences of lying but also not responsible for the bad consequences of telling the truth?
- If the murderer finds our friend because we told the truth, are we really blameless?

Conflicts Between Rules

- The main argument against Kant's claim that there are absolute moral rules arises in cases where rules conflict.
- Suppose actions A and B are both wrong in any situation. What happens if you are faced with the choice of either doing A or B and there are no alternatives available?
- This case of conflicting rules makes it seem as if Kant's appeal to absolute rules is unsupportable
- Are there really cases where rules conflict?

Kant's Possible Response to Conflicting Rules Argument

- There wouldn't be conflicting rules and duties if one were to specify the maxims correctly
 - Either (i) one would have exceptions built into the maxims
 - or (ii) the maxims would be a little more general
- The trick is knowing how to specify the maxims correctly

What Seems Right About Absolute Rules?

- Kant thinks the Categorical Imperative is binding on agents because they are rational
- One who did not accept the Categorical Imperative would be both immoral and irrational
- Kant emphasizes that moral judgments about right and wrong should be backed by good reasons
- If you accept certain reasons in one case, then you should accept the same reasons in future cases; you should not say that you accept a set of reasons some times but not all the time.
- There is a consistency requirement required in Kant's theory and all moral discourse.

Consequences of the Consistency Requirement

- Consistency requirement implies that a person cannot think oneself is special from a moral point of view
 - You don't get to break the rules everyone else must adhere to
- Consistency requirement also implies that there are rational constraints on our behavior
 - While we may want to break a rule we do not because we do not want another to break the rule against us
- Consistency requirement means that the rules have no exceptions
 - If we break a rule, then the reason we use to break the rule also has to be universalizable

Kant's Critique of Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism says that the morally right action is that action which maximizes happiness over unhappiness given all the relevant alternatives
- Kant thinks utilitarian theories devalue the individual
 - If utility is to motivate one's actions, then we treat others as means to an end; solely for what good they can be used for
 - It would be possible to justify sacrificing one person for the benefit of others
 - Utilitarianism embraces our base, hedonistic instincts and rejects the role of reason in guiding behavior

Kant vs. Mill

- According to classical utilitarianism, ethics has to do with how our actions affect others. If I were alone on a desert island I could do whatever pleases me and I would have no moral obligation.
- But, Kant thinks that we have moral duties to ourselves: e.g., duty to preserve our life, duty to develop our natural talents; duty to improve ourselves, etc.
- Do we have moral duties to ourselves?
- Or, is one's behavior morally permissible so long as one doesn't harm another?

Kant & Mill: Common Ground

- Both extremist Utilitarianism and Kantianism appear to alienate agents
 - Utilitarianism alienates agents from morality in that it seems to justify immoral actions in the name of impartiality
 - Kantianism alienates agents from relationships and projects in that one acts out of duty and not from care or love for one's family, friends, or interests.
- Both are concerned with the ends. If morality is concerned with caring about others as an ultimate end, then it will conflict with our personal projects and relationships