



PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

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Deontological Ethics

- According to *deontology* (also known as duty ethics), an action is morally right if it is in agreement with a moral rule (law, norm, or principle)
 - that is applicable in itself,
 - independent of the consequences of that action.
- “Duty ethics says that right actions are those required by duties to respect the liberty or autonomy of individuals.”

Deontological Ethics or Kantism

- The most well-known system of deontology has been developed by Immanuel Kant.
- The deontological approach to ethics argues that duties are the base of ethics rather than the consequences. According to Immanuel Kant “Rules should be the foundation of ethical conduct.”
- According to Kant ethical actions follow universal moral laws- such as don't lie, don't steal



Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives

Hypothetical Imperatives

- Statements about what you ought to do if you want something else (if-then statements):

If you want

goal

then you should

action(s)

Avoid lung
disease

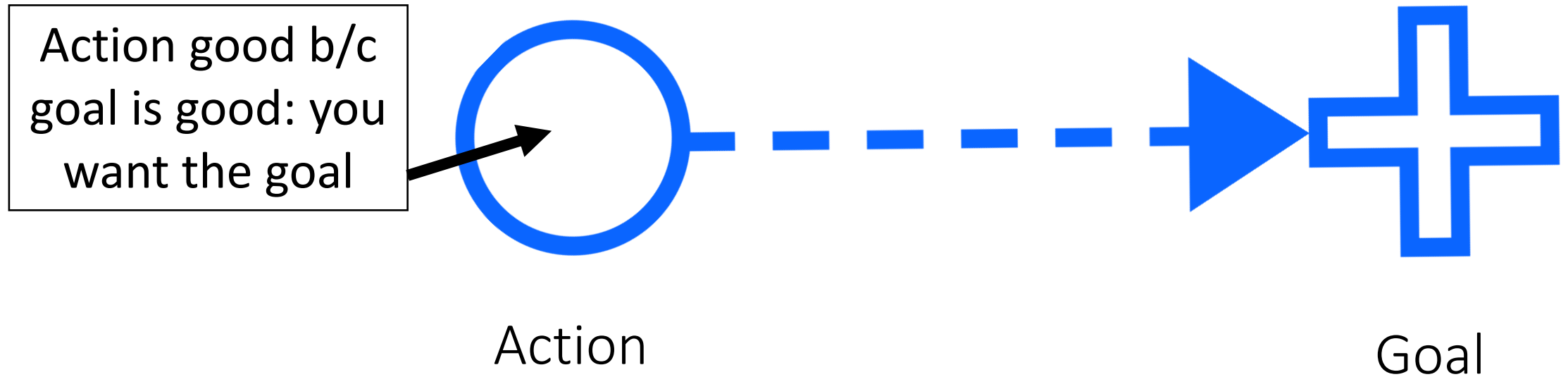
Only required if
you want the
goal!

Stop
smoking



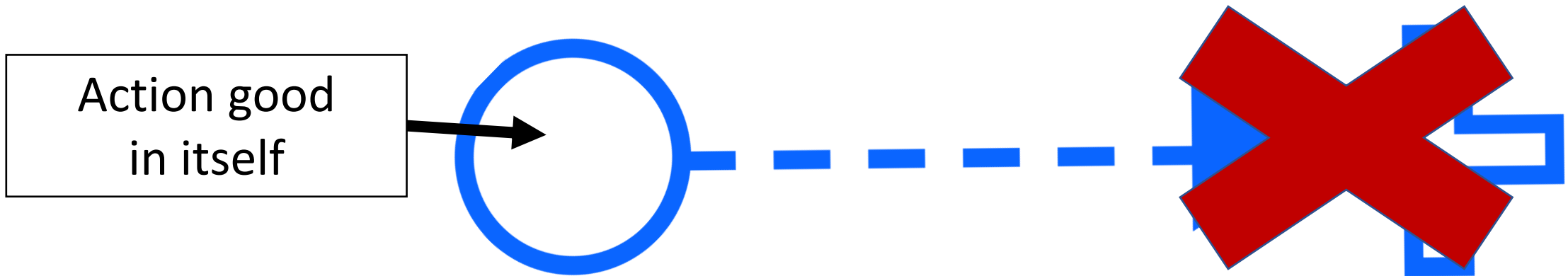
Hypothetical Imperatives

- Actions recommended are good only **instrumentally**, as a means to something else.



Categorical Imperatives

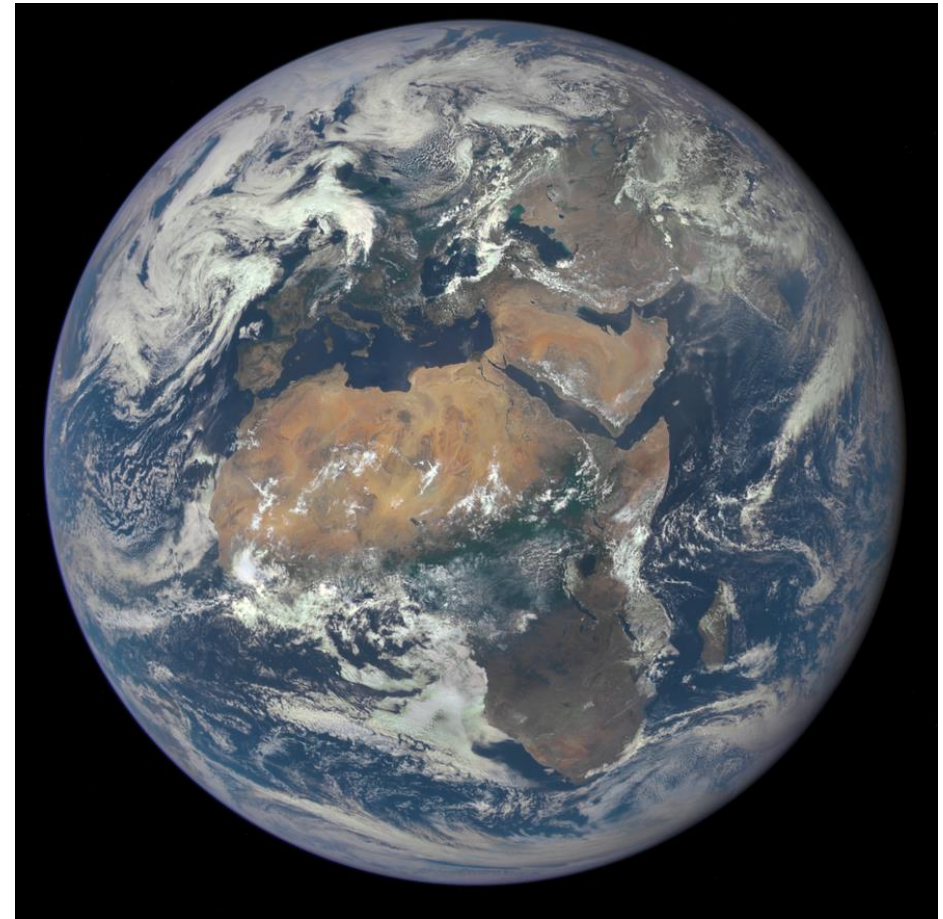
- Tell you what to do just because it's **intrinsically good**, good in itself, not because it leads to some other goal.



What actions could be intrinsically good, always good no matter what else they lead to?

Moral rules are Categorical Imperatives

- **Apply to everyone** (not just those who want certain goals)
- **Strong obligation:** outweighs our individual desires, goals
- Why is Kant's fundamental moral principle the categorical imperative?



[Africa & Europe from a million miles away](#), image by NASA.
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Kant's Fundamental Principle of Morality

The “Categorical Imperative”

First form, CI(1):

- Act only in such a way that you could will your maxim to be a universal law.

OR

- “An act is morally acceptable if, and only if, its maxim is universalizable”.

What is a Maxim?



- A kind of rule you're following when you act.

1. What you intend to do?

2. Why you will do it; your reason for doing it?

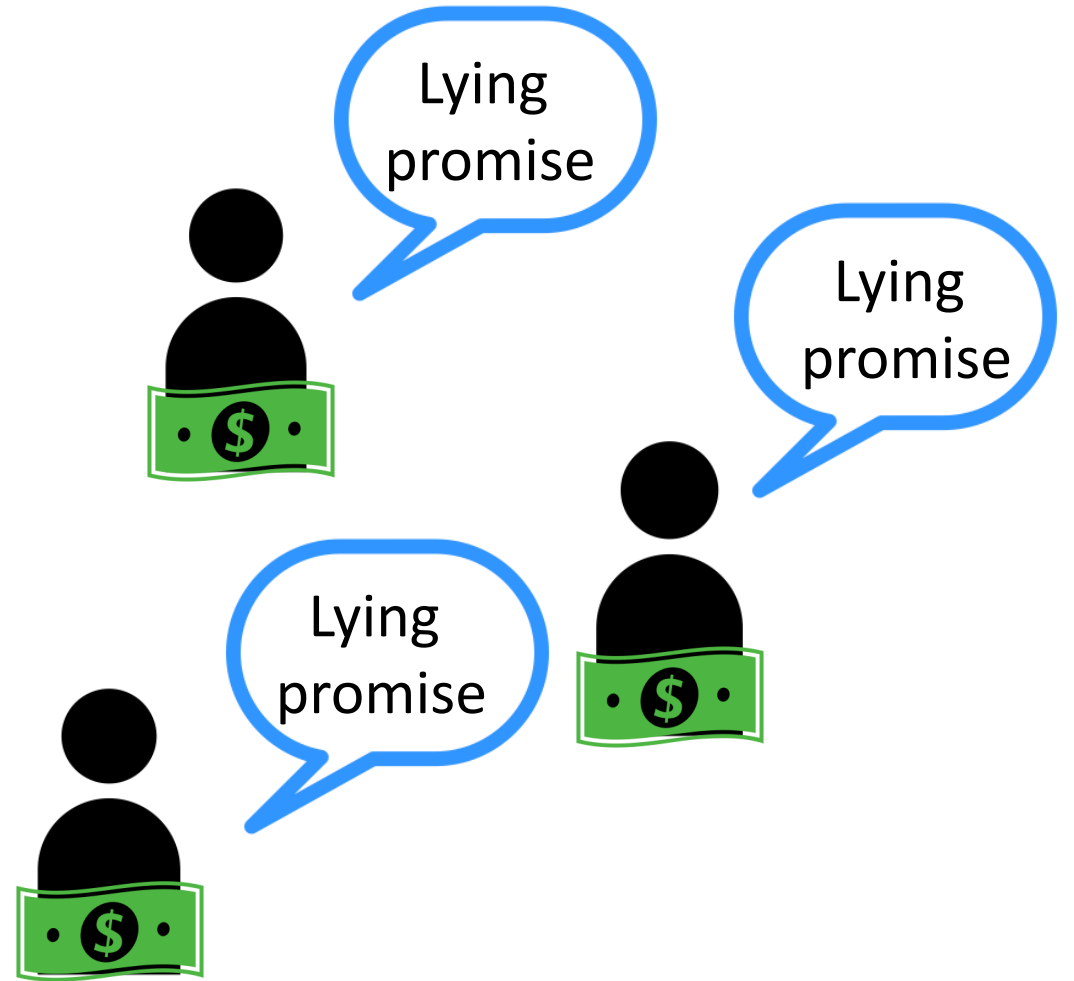
Example of a maxim



- When I can make a false promise to get myself out of difficulty, I will do so.
- e.g., borrowing to pay gambling debt.
- What are the “what” and “why” here?

Is this maxim Universalizable?

- Ask:
Can the goal of my action be achieved if everyone acted on my maxim?
- Lying promise example: **No!**



Universalizability & Reversibility

- Universalizability means the person's reasons for acting must be reasons that everyone could act on at least in principle.
- Reversibility means the person's reasons for acting must be reasons that he or she would be willing to have all others use, even as a basis of how they treat him or her.
- Unlike utilitarianism, which focuses on consequences, Kantian theory focuses on interior motivation.

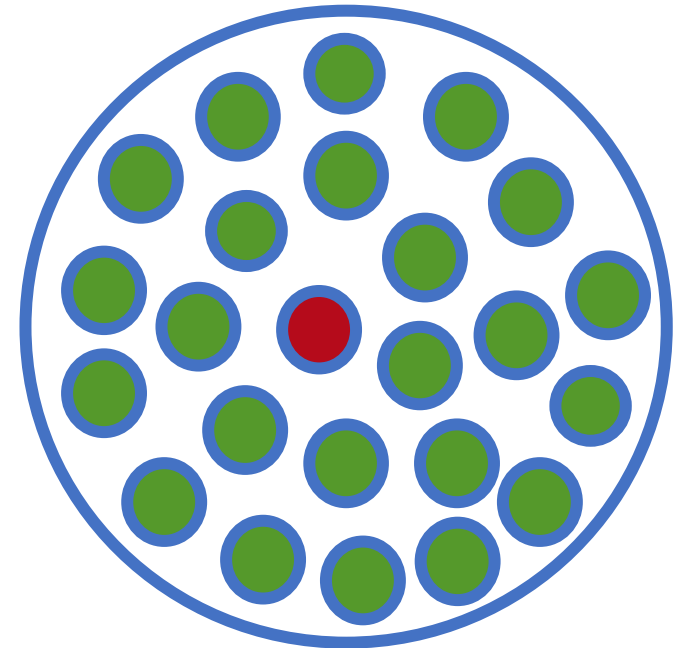
Why does Universalizability matter?

Inconsistency:

- If you have a good reason to do something, it should be good for all who would be in the same circumstance.
- If you can't will the act for all, you're being inconsistent.

Unfairness:

- If maxim can't be universalized, you are unfairly making an exception for yourself.



How do we act morally correctly?

- Don't just do what the Categorical Imperative requires; **do it in the right way, with the right motive.**

Good Will The Core Of Kant's Ethics

- Morality of an action lies on the inner motive rather than the external effects.
- Kant's ethics is primarily based on good will.
- Duty must be done out of pure reverence to the moral law.

Good Will

- Intending to do the morally right thing, because it's morally right
 - Intention: to do what is morally right, to do your moral duty
 - Motive: because that's your moral duty
- **Always good**; can never be bad (even if bad consequences)
- This puts morality **in our control**; consequences are not always in our control.



Good Will

- “A person is acting morally only when he suppresses his feelings and inclinations and does that which he is obliged to do.”
- INCLINATION means doing the things that one’s feels like doing, and thus no obligation exists.

Acting from duty vs. merely according to duty

- Acting **from duty**: because that is the morally right thing.
- Acting **merely according to duty**: doing the right thing but for some other reason/motive.

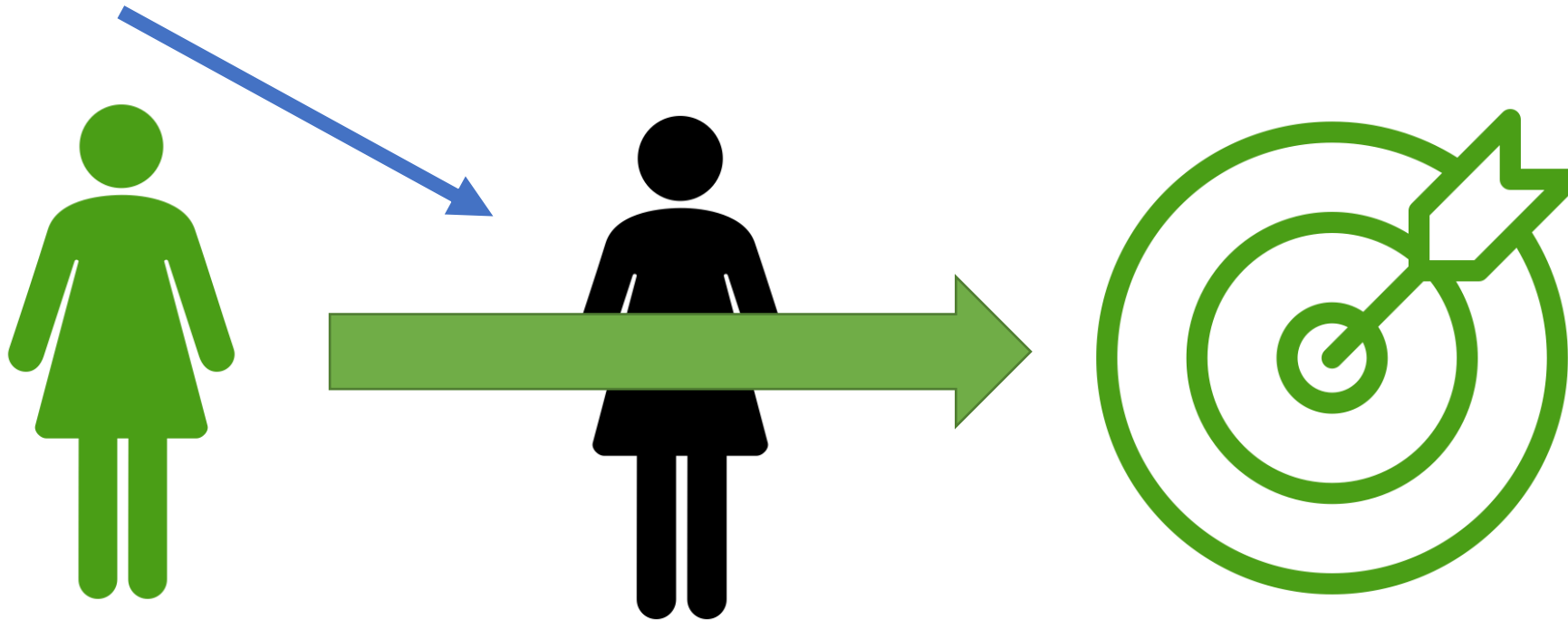


Example

- Helping your neighbor to fix her flat tire.
- Three possible reasons of helping:
 - Expectation of reward (Moral or immoral)
 - Pity (Moral or immoral)
 - As Duty (Moral or immoral)

Second form of Categorical Imperative - CI (2)

- “Act in such a way as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of anyone else, always as an end and never merely as a means [to an end].”



CI (2) According to Kant

- What Kant means by "treating humanity as an end" is that everyone should treat each human being as a being whose existence as a free rational person should be promoted.
- For Kant, this means two things:
 - Respect each person's freedom by treating people only as they have freely consented to be treated beforehand, and
 - Develop each person's capacity to freely choose for him or herself the aims he or she will pursue.

CI (2) According to Kant

- Kant's second version of the categorical imperative can be expressed in the following principle:
- “An action is morally right for a person if, and only if, in performing the action, the person does not use others merely as a means for advancing his or her own interests, but also both respects and develops their capacity to choose freely for themselves.”

Treating ppl **merely** as means to ends

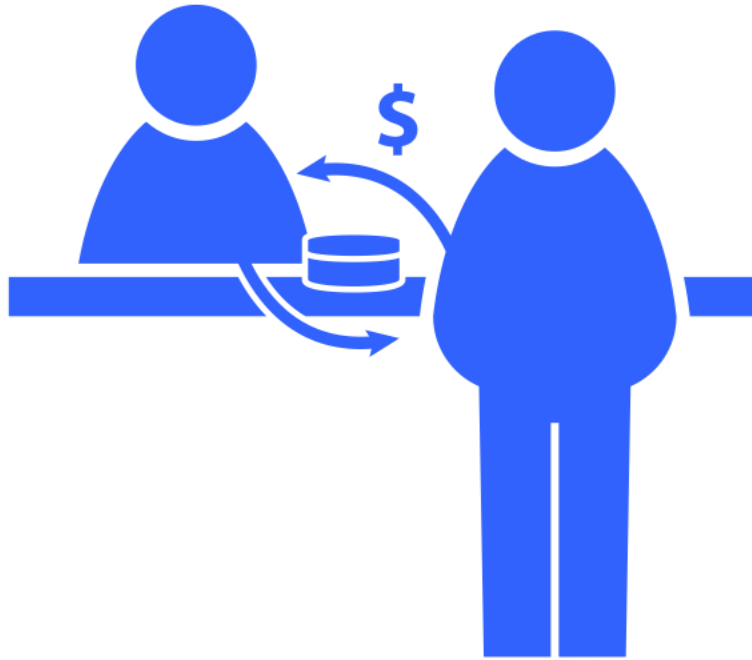
“We use others as *mere means* if what we do reflects some maxim *to which they could not in principle consent.*”

For example:

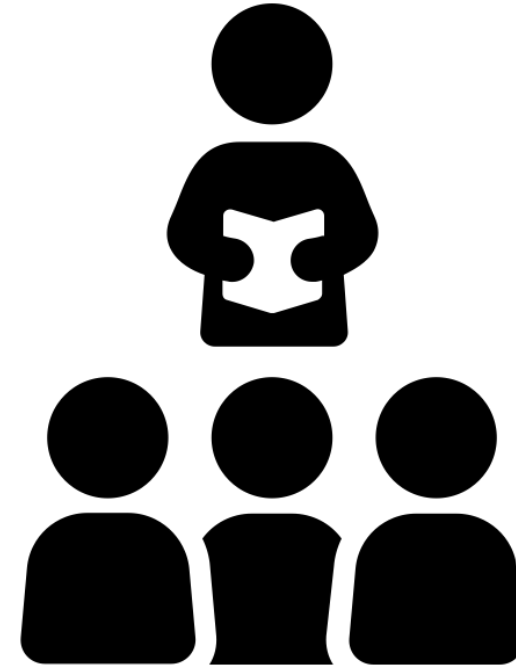
- Deception
- Coercion, violence



Treating people as means to ends



Buying and selling



Teaching and learning

Example

- Suppose that it is possible to download copyrighted music through the internet without paying for it. Suppose that the makers of such music (the artists) do not want their music freely copied in this way. How would Kant address the question of whether it is morally permissible to download such music without paying for it?

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

- We have a perfect duty not to murder.
- This means that we must never murder under any circumstances.
- We have an imperfect duty to help the needy.
- This means that we should do so on occasion, where this does not conflict with our perfect duties.

Perfect and Imperfect Duties

Duties	Perfect	Imperfect
To Others	tell truth, don't break promises, don't steal, Don't murder.	Assist others in need, help others achieve goals
To Self	no suicide or other forms of self-destruction	develop talents

Issues in Kant's Theory

- A first problem that critics have traditionally pointed out is that Kant's theory is not precise enough to always be useful.
- Another criticism of Kant's theory are that it ignores conflicts between norms and that it is too rigid.
- Another criticism is that in Kant's theory there is no such thing as bending a rule.
- Kant does not allow for any exceptions in his theory. In practice, we can easily imagine that sometimes lying could be morally acceptable (for instance, to save someone's life).

Issues in Kant's Theory

- Most duties are *prima facie duties*—they sometimes have permissible or obligatory exceptions.
- *Prima facie duties* are different from categorical duties in that they can be overridden by more important duties in a given situation.

Procedure for determining whether a proposed action violates CI1

- **Formulate the maxim:**
 - I am to do x in circumstances y in order to bring about z.
 - Example: I am to lie on a loan application when I am in severe financial difficulty and there is no other way to obtain funds, to deal with my financial crisis.
- **Generalize the maxim into a law of nature:**
 - Everyone always does x in circumstances y in order to bring about z.
 - Everyone always lies on a loan application when he is in severe financial difficulty and there is no other way to obtain funds.
- **Figure out the perturbed social world (PSW), that is, what the world would be like if this law of nature were added to existing laws of nature.**
 - Everyone knows that it is true, everyone knows that everyone knows, etc.

Procedure for determining whether a proposed action violates CI1

- **Two questions:**
- **Q1: Could I rationally act on my maxim in the PSW?**
This is the “Contradiction in Conception Test.”
- **Q2: Could I rationally choose the PSW as one in which I would be a member?**
This is the “Contradiction in the Will Test.”
- The Kantian evaluation rule is this: we must be able to answer yes to *both* questions for the maxim to be acceptable. If we get a no answer to either, we must reject the maxim and try to find another one on which to act.

Case Study Example

- “Martha, as a home-service medical care volunteer, has cared for George through the final weeks of his fatal illness. Just before he died, George told Martha where a large sum of money he had accumulated was stored. He asked her to see that the money was given to the Society for Protection against Alien Control of the Earth (SPACE). Since George's illness did not affect his mental capacity, she agreed. But now that he has died, she is considering using the money to support the activities of the local Hunger Task Force, an organization that provides donated food to those who need it. George has no surviving friends or relatives, and no one else knows about the money. He left no written will.
- Is Martha's action Justified according to Utilitarianism and Kantism?”

Kantian Analysis

- To run this case through the CI procedure, we first need to identify Martha's maxim.
- **I am to do x in circumstances y in order to promote z**
- So we can determine the maxim by specifying what should go in for x, y and z.
- The following substitutions seem good:
 - x = break a deathbed promise
 - y = when doing so will allow me to do much more good for humanity
 - z = the goal of increasing human welfare

Kantian Analysis

- So the three steps of the CI procedure will look like this:
- **Formulate the maxim:** I am to break a deathbed promise when doing so will allow me to do much more good for humanity, in order to promote the goal of increasing human welfare.
- **Generalize the maxim into a law of nature:** Everyone always breaks deathbed promises when doing so allows him to do much more good for humanity, in order to promote the goal of increasing human welfare.

Kantian Analysis

- **Figure out the PSW:** In the PSW, it will be common knowledge that people break deathbed promises whenever they think they can do much more good for humanity.
- **First question:** Would it be rational to adopt and act on my maxim in the PSW?
- No, because in the PSW no one would ask for deathbed promises, because everyone would know that they are not genuine commitments. The maxim would not be an effective policy for promoting human welfare.
- Since the answer to the first question is "No," Martha should not act on her maxim, since it fails the "contradiction in conception" test.

Utilitarian Analysis

- The steps here are as follows:
- Specify the options
- Specify possible consequences for each option
- For each option, estimate the probability of each of its consequences
- For each option, estimate the "utility" of each of its consequences
- Identify the best prospect.

Utilitarian Analysis

<u>Option</u>	<u>Consequences</u>	<u>Probability</u>	<u>Utility (impact on human welfare)</u>
Keep promise	SPACE gets the money and spends it on its own programs	Certainty	Low
Give money to HTF	HTF uses money to feed many hungry people	High	Very high
	Action is discovered	Low	Somewhat lower

References

- Mike Martin and Ronald Schinzinger, “Introduction To Engineering Ethics”, McGraw Hill, New York, 2010
- Miscellaneous Journals and Internet Resources.