

# **Deontological Ethics**

Kantian Ethics

- Each and every human being deserve respect and since each of them deserves respect, each one's fundamental rights or preferences or interests should also be respected.
- Can humans be considered as mere *instruments* for the collective happiness of every one?
- Do I want others to *use* me?
- It is one thing to condemn the scenario of the suffering child in City of Omelas, because it reduces overall utility, and something else to condemn it as an intrinsic moral wrong, an injustice to the child.

- There is something fundamentally wrong in basing moral principles on maximizing utility or happiness.
- According to Kant the morality cannot be just founded on the empirical matters concerning interests, preferences and desires.
- **Our capacity to Reason:** We can reason our ways to morality.
- **Our capacity to Freedom:** We are capable of acting freely or we're capable of choosing freely.

# Freedom

- Freedom as the absence of obstacles in doing what we want to do.
- To act freely, is to act autonomously. And to act autonomously is to act according to a law I give myself—not according to the dictates of nature or social convention.
- Autonomy vs Heteronomy
- Heteronomous determination—doing something for the sake of something else.
- When we act heteronomously, we act for the sake of ends given outside us. We are instruments, not authors, of the purposes we pursue.

It is 3:00 a.m., and your college roommate asks you why you are up late thinking about moral dilemmas involving trolleys.

- “To write a good paper in Philosophy,” you reply.
- “But why write a good paper?” your roommate asks.
- “To get a good grade.”
- “But why care about grades?”
- “To get a job.”
- “But why get a job?”
- “To make a lot of money.”
- “But why make a lot of money?”
- “To eat lobster often, which I like. I am, after all, a sentient creature. *That’s why I’m up late thinking* about trolley dilemmas!”

# DEONTOLOGY

- *Deontology* = Theory of Duty
- The Greek word *deon* means duty/obligation
- “*Deontological*” was coined by the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham
- Knowledge of what is right or proper.
- Morality of an action is based on Rule not on consequences of the action.
- What makes us worthy of happiness?
  - Divine command ethics
  - Categorical Imperative

# IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804)

- What can I know? & What ought I do?
- ***What gives an act moral worth?***
- We generally ought not to be blamed or praised for what is not in our control.
  - What is in our control? **Intentions**
  - What is not in our control? **Consequences**
- Use/instrumental value and Intrinsic Value
- Persons have intrinsic or inherent value
  - The belief that *people ought not to be used*, but ought to be regarded as having the highest intrinsic value, is central to Kant's ethics, as is having *a motive to do what is right*.

# What Is the Right Motive?

- An act has moral worth only if it is done with a right intention or motive.
- Good will
- Having a right intention means doing what is right just because it is right.
- It is to act out of duty out of a concern and respect for the moral law.
- Three possible motive or intention
  - Example of shopkeeper
  - When do we *know* whether our acts are motivated by self-interest, inclination, or pure respect for morality?



# What Is the Right Thing to Do?

- Moral worth of an action = Act out of a right motivation and also do the right thing.
- How do I know what is the right thing to do?
- **Hypothetical imperative** and **categorical imperative**.
  - An imperative is a form of statement that tells us to do something.
  - “Stand up straight” and “Close the door” and “You ought to close the door.”

- **Hypothetical imperative**
  - “If I want to get there on time, I ought to leave early”
  - Contingent
  - Individuated
  - “If I want X, then I ought to do Y.” Whether I ought to do Y is totally contingent or dependent on my wanting X.
- **Categorical imperative**
  - Moral oughts/imperatives are unconditional or necessary.
  - If there is something I morally ought to do, I ought to do it no matter what—whether or not I want to, and whether or not it fulfills my desires and goals or is approved by my society.

# The First Form: The Formula of the Universal Law of Nature

- “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law”
  - Whatever I consider doing, it must be something that I can consistently will or accept that all others do.
  - Universality
  - *Maxim*
  - How do I know what I can and cannot will as a universal practice?
  - How I know if I can rationally, without contradiction, will something for all?
  - Principle of Fairness

# The Second Form: The Humanity Formula

- “We should never act in such a way that we treat humanity, whether in ourselves or in others, as a means only but always as an end in itself.”
- Persons are autonomous.
- **Auto**, meaning “self,” and **nomos**, meaning “rule” or “law”
- We ought to treat ourselves as well as others as ends rather than **merely** as means.
- We should treat persons as having value in themselves and not just as having instrumental value.

# More on Autonomy

- ...freedom does not consist in being bound by no law, but by laws that are in some sense of one's own making.
- Laws made and laid down by oneself, and, in virtue of this, laws that have decisive authority over oneself.
- Analogy between the autonomy in morality with the idea of political freedom as autonomy.
- The “moral legitimacy” of the Categorical Imperative is grounded in its being an expression of each person's own rational will.

- The Humanity Formula does not rule out using people as means to our ends.
  - Horse and the taxi driver as means of transportation.
- The idea of an end has three senses for Kant, two positive senses and a negative sense.
  - First positive sense: End is a thing we will to produce or bring about in the world.
  - Negative sense: End is something I do not act *against* in pursuing my positive ends, rather than something I produce.
  - Second positive sense: End is something to realize, cultivate or further by my actions.

# The Third Form: The Autonomy Formula

- Act so that through your maxims you could be a legislator of universal laws.
- Focuses on our status as universal law *givers*.
- In order to be a legislator of universal laws, contingent motives, must be set aside.
- We are required to conform our behaviour to principles that express this autonomy of the rational will.

# The Fourth Form: The Kingdom of Ends Formula

- We must “act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends”
  - (i) It requires that we conform our actions to the laws of an ideal moral legislature.
  - (ii) This legislature lays down universal laws, binding all rational wills including our own.
  - (iii) Those laws are of “a merely possible kingdom” each of whose members equally possesses this status as legislator of universal laws, and hence must be treated always as an end in itself.