

Kantianism

Tuesday
May 13, 2025

Dharnish B.R., Anderson L., Emerson C., Jasmine C., Connor A.

Kant be inclined

- Good will/good intentions matters in what we do, even if no success.
 - *A charity worker manages to bring in medicines during a disaster in a war zone. Those medicines are, however, contaminated. However, kudos to her still!*
- However, no worth in doing good things out of “inclinations”
 - I.e., instinct or inner satisfaction (purely).
 - Have to do it *because* it is right, regardless of feelings.
- But what is the “right” thing to do?
 - Kant: “rational will”



Theoretical and Practical Reasoning

- Theoretical reasoning
 - *What is*
- Practical reasoning
 - *What ought to be*
- For this reason, philosophers call practical reasoning “hypothetical”



Theoretical and Practical Reasoning

- Theoretical reasoning
 - *What is*
-
- (Is-ought dilemma)
- Practical reasoning
 - *What ought to be*
- Theoretical reasoning has no 'power' over practical reasoning
 - *What 'is' does not 'ought to be'.*



Hume and Practical Reasoning

- *“Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”*
 - Reason can only have practical effect if they serve to advance desires.
- The vegan argument: it is good to become vegan to reduce animal suffering, and fight climate change.
 - But what if I did not desire for either of these things? It does not have any practical effect on me.
- **Does it then mean that there is no morality? That there is no code of ethics or morality that all must abide by?**



Kant's Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

- **Hypothetical** Imperative: force that depends on us having the appropriate desire
 - **Technical**: instructions that point to the means to achieve an aim that *someone happens to have*. ex. If you want to run a marathon, start training!
 - **Assertoric**: appeals to desires that humans naturally share, not desires that someone happens to have. eg. being healthy and happy
- **Categorical** Imperatives: transcends wants and desires, These principles of conduct override desires.
ex. We want to make money when we run a business, but our *principle of honesty* tells us we shouldn't scam people

imperative 2 of 2 noun

- 1 : something that is imperative (see [IMPERATIVE entry 1](#)): such as
 - a : **COMMAND, ORDER**
 - b : **RULE, GUIDE**
 - c : an **obligatory** act or duty
 - d : an obligatory judgment or proposition
- 2 : the grammatical **mood** that expresses the will to influence the behavior of another or a verb form or verbal phrase expressing it

World of Angels (Pure Practical Reason)

- Each being is perfectly rational
 - They (angels) always **do** what we (humans) always **ought** to do
 - i.e. what is **objective law** for angels is also **subjectively necessary** for them
- Humans usually experience what is objectively right as a constraint on action



Determining Moral Law

- **Maxim** : an action performed for a reason
- “Could acting on that maxim be a law of nature in a world of perfect beings?”
 - If it could **not**, the proposed action is not in accordance with pure practical reason, therefore, not morally right



Suicide & Lying Promises

Lying Promises Maxim:

- “When in need of money, borrow regardless of capability to repay”
 - Were it to be a law of nature that those in dire financial circumstances always made lying promises, it would lead immediately to the collapse of the institution of promising
 - Conclusion: lying promises are against the moral law



Suicide & Lying Promises

Suicide Maxim:

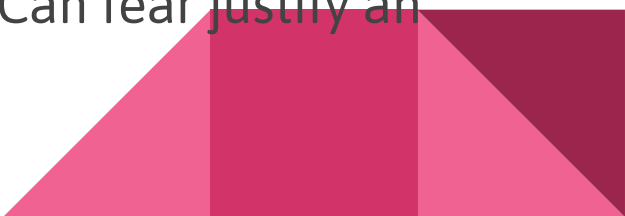
- “Whenever the future promises more bad than good, kill yourself”
 - It is precisely the fact of the future looking bleak that provides us with a reason to work for its improvement
 - A world in which the would-be suicide’s maxim held as a law of nature would swiftly destroy itself
 - Conclusion: suicide is against the moral law



Kant's Discussion: Golden Rule and Book Judgement

Golden Rule: "Treat others the way you want to be treated"

"Don't judge a book by its cover"

- Scenario: You are walking on the street and encounter a group of people who make you feel uneasy based on their appearance and behavior.
 - Question: Based on Kant's idea of universalizability, is it morally right to avoid them based on personal assumptions? Can fear justify an action that might be considered judgmental?
- 

Intention & Outcome (callback)

Kant: “moral worth of an action must reside in the will with which it is performed”

- Kant argues that *will*, not the outcome of an action, is the most important
- Possible to act in good will but bad faith
 - Can one act in both good will and good faith, but be morally wrong?
- Alternative view (not from kant): what we *try* to do counts
 - Shifts focus from good will to actions
 - Failure to perform “wholly good” actions becomes a matter of circumstance, not a moral failure



Universalizability Test

“should this be performed by similar people, for the same reasons?”

Or, that we should only act upon judgements that we think should be “universal”

- Contrary to egoism, since this denies any kind of exceptionalism
- Leaves at least some room for morality to differ based on circumstance
 - More leeway than a moral realist would give
- Is this an effective test?
 - Example from text: “consistency does not bring clarity”



Meeting Notes

- 7.2 Discussion Question, 7.3 - Dharnish
- 7.4 - Jasmine
- 7.5, 7.6 - Connor & Anderson
- 7.7, 7.8 - Emerson

