

Group 1 – Week 7:

Actions, Reactions, and Universalizability

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Act and Outcome

- “Kant holds that the moral worth of an action must reside in the will with which it is performed, or, as we would more naturally say, in the intention behind it.” (pg 89)
- “It is both pointless and wrong to praise and blame people for things that they could neither prevent nor bring about.” (pg 89)
- “It is to our intentions, then, that praise and blame must be attached.” (pg 89)
- Vehicular manslaughter?
- “If we are to make a moral assessment of the lives of ourselves and others, we have to decide not only whether what we meant to do was right or wrong, but also whether what we did was right or wrong.” (pg 90)

Intentions Versus Consequence: What weighs heavier?

- Kant argues intention to be held above all else as determiner of “moral worth”
 - Because people have imperfect control over the world and consequences
- But at what point can intention be considered?
 - Only when the consequence occurs otherwise is it not a “thought crime” or cowardice?
- Can intentions outweigh consequences in the end?
 - If your intentions and consequences are in conflict which is more important
 - Ignorance (Ex: example of doctor unknowingly giving patient contaminated medicine)
 - Good intentions “evil” act (Ex: someone killing someone because they believe it is for the greater good)

Kant's Universalizability Test – Aadhil

- Kant's core principle: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."
 - Only do something if you'd be okay with everyone doing it, all the time.
 - If a rule can't work for everyone, it can't be morally valid for anyone.
 - Checks whether our reasons for acting are consistent & impartial — not based on special pleading.
- Example: If everyone lied to get out of trouble, promises would become meaningless.
 - Do you agree with Kant's reasoning here? Is lying always morally wrong?
 - Are there instances where lying is okay?
 - Would you hold the same standard for someone else?

Eichmann and the Misuse of Kant – Matthew

- **Eichmann** was a Nazi Officer who organized mass deportations to concentrations camps. At his trial, Eichmann claimed he was simply “**following orders**” and acting out his “**duty**”, referencing **Kantian ethics**
 - Kantian Duty
 - Principle of respecting humanity
 - Moral Autonomy
- Discussion: If someone follows harmful orders to avoid punishment, can good intentions still make their action morally right?
 - Is fear a valid excuse?

Duty for Duty's Sake

Lady Linlithgow

“But she meant to be true and honest, though she often failed in her meaning; and she had an idea of **her duty in life**. She was not self-indulgent. She was as hard as an oak post - but then she was also as trustworthy.”

Duty for Duty's Sake

Duty to whom?

Again becomes a prioritisation problem.