

# *Chapter 7*

# Kantianism

Team 1 -

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# 7.1: Virtue and Happiness

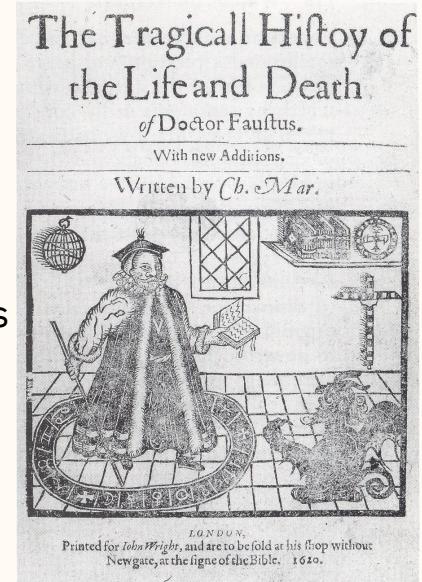
- Plato and Aristotle aimed to determine what the best life for a human being is, through moral philosophy
- For the Ancient Greeks, there was no distinction between the most desirable/happiest life and the worthiest/most virtuous human life
- Recall in Chapter 2: Nietzsche argues there's a radical cultural break between the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian world
  - Greco-Roman: assessment of human merit operated only according to attributes and accomplishments (like in sports/arts fields today)
  - Judeo-Christian: introduces concepts of divine law and human sin
    - Those who break divine law are evil, regardless of other skills/achievements

# *“Faring well” vs. “doing right”*

- In our everyday lives, we can see that people who act immorally can fare well enough
- The distinction between the happiest vs. most virtuous life came with the emergence of Christianity
  - The contrast between material profitability and spiritual/soul loss is stated explicitly in the New Testament

# Faust

- Legend of Dr. Faustus: gave his soul to Satan in return for unlimited material wealth and power
- Probably based on a real 16th century German magician, Johannes Faust
- Faust enters into a pact with Satan:
  - Faust gains knowledge and magical power that enables him to accomplish all his worldly desires
  - Faust is required to give Satan his soul at death
- Satan's servant, Mephistopheles, both conveys knowledge/power to Faust and is the instrument of his death



# Faust, cont.

- To assert that Faust has the worst end of the bargain, we must argue that the materially best life is not the morally best life
- This legend appeals to the rewards/punishments of a Christian afterlife
- To claim that Faust makes a mistake, we have to distinguish between having vs. leading a good life

# Faustian Bargain: “Deal with the devil”

- Faustian bargain: a narrative trope in which a person makes a pact to trade something of moral/spiritual importance (e.g. personal values, the soul), for a worldly/material benefit (e.g. knowledge, power, riches) (Britannica)
  - Also used metaphorically to condemn someone perceived as having cooperated with an evil person or organization (Wikipedia)
- Classic media (retells the legend):
  - “The Tragical Life and Death of Dr. Faustus”, play by English dramatist Christopher Marlowe
  - “Faust”, play by German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- “Devil's Contract: The History of the Faustian Bargain” and the [corresponding article](#), by Ed Simon

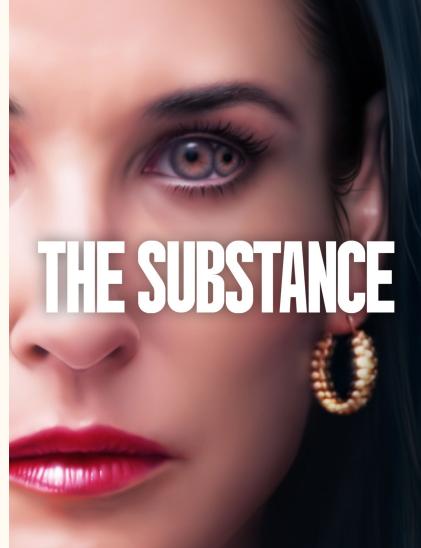
“[Faust’s] is an eternal story ... [a] symbolically charged [narrative] concerning the abjuration of a soul, of the ceding of what’s intrinsic to us, of the capitulations and negotiations that make up any failed life, which is to say every life.”

- Simon

# Faustian Bargain: Contemporary and Secular Media

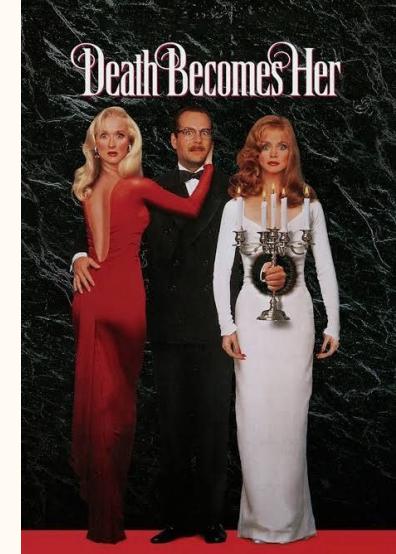
The Substance (2024):

- Body-horror movie where an aging celebrity, Elisabeth Sparkle, injects a black-market drug to create a younger version of herself, Sue



Death Becomes Her (1992):

- Black comedy (with body horror) movie, in which two frenemies, Madeline Ashton and Helen Sharp, drink a potion from Lisle Von Rhuman for eternal youth and beauty



- Main characters trade their current bodies/daily lives for eternal youth, only to end up losing their physical bodies (what they deemed gave them self-worth) and their sanity
- What are more examples of media that use the Faustian bargain?

# 7.2: Kant & the Good Will

- 18th-century German philosopher
- His most celebrated work: “The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals”
  - Aimed to lay out the **fundamental, rational character of moral thought and action**
  - Argues that: **material benefits and personal talents may be used well or badly**
    - so they cannot constitute **fundamental principle of good and evil**

“Nothing in the world—indeed nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will”  
(Kant, 1785, 1959:9)

# *Quote Interpretation*

- Talents of the Mind
  - intelligence, wit, judgement
- Qualities of Temperament
  - courage, resoluteness, perseverance
- These are “good” but can become bad and harmful if the will to make use of these “gifts of nature” is not good
  - Eg: criminals and terrorists exploiting their mastery of electronics / complex financial systems
  - Eg: great wealth being used to corrupt / belittle others

**So is what is important, the purpose to which wealth and talent are put?**

**No:** However carefully we plan our actions, it is impossible to guarantee the outcome.

# *Intention & Outcome*

- Eg: Person working for international charity, helping refugees (**good intention**)
  - In wake of big disaster they manage to dispatch medicines
  - Storage facilities fail, medicines get contaminated
  - Medicine is administered and death rate in camps is higher than if medicines hadn't been sent at all
- Charity worker feels guilty but they are **not responsible for this terrible outcome**
- But intentions can arise from **differing motives**
  - Charity worker could be doing welfare for **personal fame or glory**
- According to Kant, this would **destroy the moral worth of their actions**

# Motivation & Inclination

- There is a difference between:
  - the actions of someone who spontaneously and with pleasure does what is right (**inclination**)
  - the same action done on the part of someone who performs them (maybe with difficulty) **solely because it is right**
- True merit and demerit attach to **actions** regardless of the **feelings** of those who perform them
- **Action -> determines moral worth**
- We can only be **praised or blamed** for something that is entirely in **our control** -> “The will”
- **“Unqualified good will is doing your duty for duty's sake”**

(Theories of Ethics, Graham, pg 81)

# David Hume on Practical Reason

## Chapter 7.3

- Theoretical reason → tells us what **is**
  - Practical reason → tells us what we **ought to do**
  - Hume says that all practical reasoning only works if it connects to something you already **desire**
- 
- An argument like: You should take economics to get a high-paying job
    - Only works if
      - the facts are true
      - You *want* a high paying job



# *“Reason is the Slave of the Passions”*

“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” (Hume, 1739, 1967: 415).

- Hume indicates that Reason does not create goals
- Reason only tells us how to achieve goals we already have

For Hume:

- You cannot reason someone into having a desire
- Desires themselves are not rational or irrational
- E.g. if someone doesn't care about others, reason alien cannot make them care

# The Problem for Morality....

If Hume is right,  
then:

- Moral principles depend on desires
- If someone lacks the relevant desire → moral “oughts” do not apply to them → person lacks moral sentiment



## The Nonchalant Person

Imagine someone who does not care if others suffer, feels no guilt, has no desire to help anyone, only wants personal comfort.

If they *genuinely* lack any concern, are they morally wrong? Or simply acting according to their desires?

## 7.4: Hypothetical Imperatives

- Hypothetical Imperatives:
  - Technical (instructions that point to the technical means to an aim someone happens to have)
    - Imperative only applies if you choose them
  - Assertoric (appeal to desires that people tend to share ex. Health, happiness)
    - The goal is something you actually want
    - Command depends on that desire

Technical:

"You want to work at Apple. Therefore you must practice and prepare for your interview."

Assertoric:

"Since you want to be healthy, you should exercise and eat well".

## 7.4: Categorical Imperatives

- Unlike hypothetical, categorical imperatives transcend wants & desires
- Presents us with rational principles of action
- Pure practical reason: involves no appeal to matters of hypothetical fact or sensory experience
- “You ought to be genuine to your friends, if you want a long-lasting friendship”
  - What information would you need to fact-check this?
  - Vs. “You ought to be genuine to your friends”

“You ought to not lie”.

# *Section 2.2.16 - From Ontology to Epistemology*

- Ontology - studies the nature of existence, aiming to categorize what actually exists in the world
- Epistemology - the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope
- Universality is a key part of Kantianism
- How can we decide what is universal?

