

Chapter 7.3 - 7.8 & 2.2.12

Team 3

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§7.3 - David Hume and Practical Reason

Practical Reason - logical justifications based on efficiency, feasibility, or functional utility that guide actions, decisions, and outcomes.

Ends with a conclusion about what is the case, e.g. smoking is a contributory cause to lung diseases

Theoretical Reason - the cognitive process of determining what to believe based on evidence, logic, and truth-seeking, rather than action.

Ends with a conclusion about what ought to be done.

Theoretical Reason

Two things:

- The claim needs to be *true*
- The person must want a desired outcome

Example: “You should bring an umbrella”

- Claim that must be true: It is going to rain today
- Desire: The want to stay dry

Practical Reason

“If you want such and such then you ought to do so and so”

The use of reason can only be practical so far as it points to the necessary means by which we can achieve ends that we independently desire.

In Hume's view, “we cannot reason about desires and cannot, therefore, declare any desire to be irrational”.

General principles of “You ought to not murder” must depend on some desire to not take the lives of others... But what if someone doesn't have this desire?

§7.4 - Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

Hypothetical Imperative

- Take the form of if x, you ought to do y
- Two kinds, technical and assertoric
- Technical based on desires one happens to have
- “If you want to run in the London marathon, you ought to start training”
- Assertoric based on naturally shared desires
- “You ought to give up smoking because it’s ruining your health”

Categorical Imperative

- “You ought to visit your neighbour in hospital, because you promised to”
- Commands we must follow irrespective of how we feel about them
- For Kant, moral duties are categorical
- Moral integrity takes precedence over popularity, profitability, and other personal advantages
- “You ought not to steal, if you don’t want to end up in jail” vs “You ought not to steal”
- Must examine imperatives in “pure practical reason”

§7.5 - Pure Practical Reason and the Moral Law

How do we decide whether a categorical imperative is rational?

Imagine **angels** - perfectly rational beings who always do what we as humans ought to do. Oughts, which we humans feel is a constraint on our actions, angels are naturally inclined to do. We can use moral laws to predict what these angels would do.

Maxim: To perform an action for a reason

If angels would not act on a given maxim, and the maxim could not be a law of nature in a world of perfect beings, then the maxim is not in accordance with pure practical reason, and thus not morally right.

Kant Applies Pure Practical Reason

1) A suffering man anticipates to suffer for the rest of his life, and contemplate suicide

Maxim: When the future promises more bad than good, kill yourself

Perfect beings would work to improve the future, rather than commit suicide. In a world where this maxim was the law of nature, the world would destroy itself rather than improve its circumstances.

2) A man in great debt is asked if he wants to borrow money with a promise to repay it, but he knows he will never be to

Maxim: When in poor circumstances, make false promises for your own benefit

In a world where this was the law of nature, everyone would lie and promises would carry no meaning, thus lenders would refuse to lend.

3) A man has natural talent for a skill, but laziness tempts him to ignore it and fail to develop his skill

A world of idle and pleasure-seeking people is an irrational desire, since anyone reasonable would want to keep open opportunities which only talented and skilled people can provide

4) A prosperous man sees others around him in poverty, but refuses to help them

It is impossible to will that a world where everyone acts selfishly all the time come into existence. To do so would deny yourself the help of others when you are on hard times.

Flaws in Kant's Examples

1) A suffering man anticipates to suffer for the rest of his life, and contemplate suicide

Maxim: When the future promises more bad than good, kill yourself

Perfect beings would work to improve the future, rather than commit suicide. In a world where this maxim was the law of nature, the world would destroy itself rather than improve its circumstances.

It is possible to maintain that suicide is rational in extremely adverse circumstances, while agreeing that it is irrational in the face of any adversity whatsoever. But Kant's example only makes sense by equating the two.

4) A prosperous man sees others around him in poverty, but refuses to help them

It is impossible to will that a world where everyone acts selfishly all the time come into existence. To do so would deny yourself the help of others when you are on hard times.

Kant assumes that the rich man would want others to help him if he fell on hard times. Though improbable, it is still possible for him to reject others help. This is a psychological improbability, not a logical impossibility.

§7.6 - Universalizability

The Test of Universalizability

- Can your reasons for action apply to everyone equally? Are there special cases?
- **Universalizability:**
 - A method for deciding what morality requires of us.
 - **What if everyone did that?**
- **Is that desirable?**
 - What if everyone lied?
 - What if everyone didn't pay their taxes?
- **Is that possible?**
 - What if everyone cheated?
- **Can we consistently will this to be the behavior of humanity ?**

§7.6 - Universalizability

The Categorical Imperative - Universal Law

- “I should never act in such a way that I could not also will that my maxim should be universal law”
- You can determine whether an action is morally right by asking yourself this:
 - Can you consistently will that everyone, whenever they have the same reason as you do, should act in that way?
 - Can you will that your maxim should be universal law ?
- The test is not about what people will actually do, or the consequences of everyone doing it, but about whether a maxim can actually be willed as a universal principle without contradiction.
 - The test is about consistency.

§7.6 - Universalizability

Respect for Persons - The Humanity Principle

- “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always as an end and never as a means only”
- To treat someone as an end : respecting someone’s humanity, dignity, and agency.
- To treat someone as a means only: Using others as a tool to serve your purposes.
- It is okay to treat people as a means (hiring someone) but not **only** as a means

§7.8 - Acts, Intention, and Outcomes

Does morality depend only on intention, or also on the outcome?

Kant's View

- Moral worth lies in intention
- Outcomes are often beyond our control
- So we should praise and attach blame to intention, not the outcome

Can outcomes be irrelevant?

- Cannot separate actions and consequences
- The wrongness of intention depends upon wrongness of its outcome
- Moral evaluation requires some connection to the outcome

§2.2.12 - *From Purpose to Truth*

Synthetic vs Analytical

Epistemology vs Ontology

Epistemology:

- “The theory of knowledge and understanding, esp. with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion”
- ‘Επιστήμη: knowledge, understanding, skill, scientific knowledge
- -ology: Forming nouns with the sense ‘the science or discipline of’
 - Combined form based on λογία (logia)

Ontology:

- “The science or study of being; that branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature or essence of being or existence”
- Onto
 - Borrowed from latin
 - Roots in greek οὐτ
 - Noun. being that exists

§2.2.12.1 - Analytical Truth

“It is pure, in contrast to being practical, as it does not require any external qualification, as it is self-contained”

Religion uses this concept

“The only proof of His existence is union with Him”

“The opening to instill knowing resides within”

§2.2.12.1 - Synthetic Truth

“Synthetic truth is inductively contingent on what is observed”

Something we know based on observations

Water boils at 100 °c

Gravity pulls objects down

Hume:

“Deny any causal necessity”

Gravity exists because the world is how it is, it does not HAVE to exist

Argues passion precedes reason
Therefore there is no ought to do