

Chapter 7

Kantianism

Team 1 -

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7.1: Virtue and Happiness

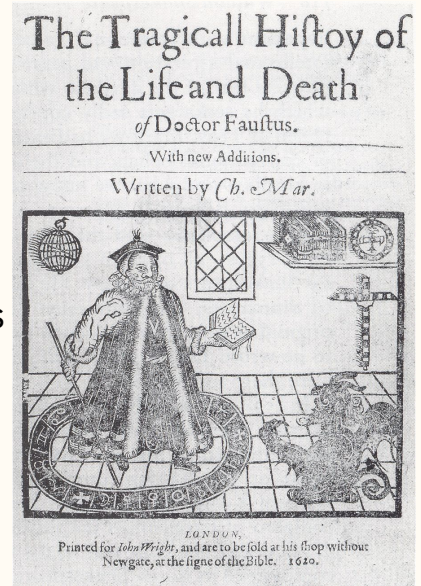
- Plato and Aristotle aimed to determine what the best life for a human being is, through moral philosophy
- For the Ancient Greeks, there was no distinction between the most desirable/happiest life and the worthiest/most virtuous human life
- Recall in Chapter 2: Nietzsche argues there's a radical cultural 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

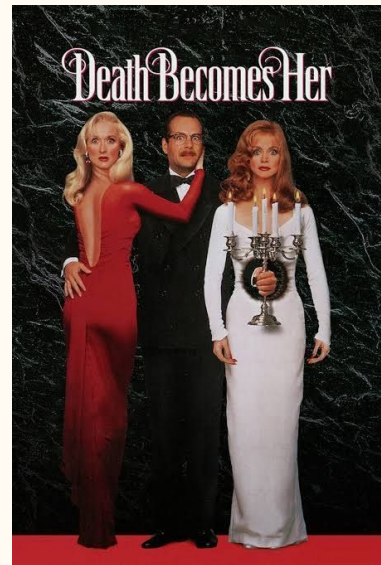
The Substance (2024):

- 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"**

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**
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- 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....

The Nonchalant Person

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



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?

