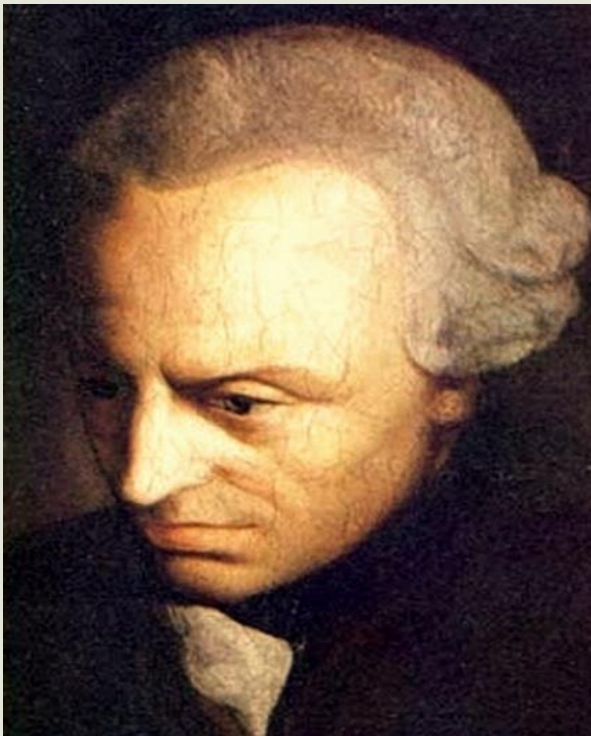


DEONTOLOGY

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)



BEYOND CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Kant argued that you can work out what is right and wrong by thinking when our actions have “moral worth,” ?
 - We praise and blame others seems to have little to do with the consequences of their actions.
 - Instead, what seems to matter is what people are intending to do.
 - This is why he thought that whether you act rightly depends on the quality of your will rather than on how good the consequences of your actions are.
 - Kant observed that whether you admire others for what they do depends on what motivates them to act.
 - Consider the act of saving someone’s life. You can save others for different reasons: because you need a hostage, or because you love the person in need, or because you just think that this is your duty.
 - Even if the act is the same in all these cases, saving a person for the first reason has no moral worth whereas saving them for the last reason would be admirable.
 - What motives do you then need to have for your acts to be morally admirable?

BEYOND...

- According to Kant, in order to answer this question you must look at the principles on which people act. Kant called our subjective principles that lead us to act, **maxims**.
- They have the following form

In my circumstances C, I do act A in order to achieve an outcome O.

- Whenever you act, you must therefore have in your mind a principle that specifies the circumstances you are in (C), what you aim to achieve in them (O), and what you intend to do in order to bring about that outcome (A).
- Kant believed that no subjective principle of action can ever make your action morally admirable. Within the principle on which you act, the relevant outcome you want to achieve appears as an incentive for you.
- Because of this connection to desires, Kant thought that our maxims are too unstable and superficial to make our actions morally admirable.

BEYOND...

- Because we have limited control over what we want, Kant thought that we could not be praised for acting in the way we do on the basis of our desires.
- Kant thought that our acts are morally admirable only if you first test whether your maxim can be **universalized**.
- All universalized versions of maxims, which Kant calls **universal laws**, have the following form:

Whenever anyone is in the circumstances C, they will do act A in order to achieve an outcome O.
- The “I” in the maxim has been replaced with “anyone” and “they.” Kant then claims that this could lead us to the fundamental principle of morality

1ST CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

- Principle of Universalization [Act only on that principle (maxim) which can occur as a universal law]
 - Whenever we want to perform an action, we can ask if our action can be generalized into a law.
 - If our action is immoral, then while universalizing it, we'll run into conceptual contradictions. This indicates that our action is not permissible.
 - Ex- Breaking a promise; cheating in an exam
 - It is impossible to even conceive of acting on the maxim when it is universalized because universalizing the maxim makes it impossible to act upon, that is, by robbing the proposed means of their ability to accomplish the end.
 - If framing such a law is possible then such an action is also permissible morally
 - Ex- Ambulance jumping traffic signals
 - It could also be that one couldn't consistently will it to be a universal law
 - Therefore, you have a perfect duty to abstain from it; Duties of omission

1ST CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE....

- There is a second type of contradiction, a contradiction in willing, corresponds to a different type of duty or obligation, so-called imperfect duty.
 - Let's say you don't want to help others
 - *Maxim: When a person needs my help and I can help him, I will not help him and preserve my own resources or pursue my own goals*
 - Contradiction is between the maxim and the agent's own will (nobody will ever help anybody v/s the wish/need to be helped occasionally)
 - Makes an exception for herself by expecting help but never being willing to offer it
 - Denies her nature as a finite, needy being.
 - Imperfect duties; Positive duties; Open-ended; Duties of commission

2ND CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

- Principle of Human dignity [Act only on that principle which treats human beings as ends in themselves and never merely as means]
 - Specifies the end for which categorical imperatives work
 - Kant believed that there should be a difference between how we treat objects and how we treat humans.
 - Objects can be used and disposed without causing them any 'harm' and 'injustice'.
 - Human beings cannot be treated like disposable entities.
 - requires that we treat humanity, wherever we find it, as an end that has absolute worth, that is, as an end that cannot be compared to or traded for some contingent end.
- Whenever we want to perform an action, we can ask if our action is treating human beings merely as means [immoral] or ends-in-themselves [moral]

2ND CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE...

- To treat somebody as means is to treat them like objects as your disposal, without worrying about their interests, with a sole aim of fulfilling your objectives.
 - Human trafficking, employment of children in hazardous industries
- To treat somebody as ends in themselves is to treat them as individuals with desires, ambitions and fears just like you have and give importance to their concerns for their sake.
 - Actions done with consent and welfare of people involved in mind
- Humanity need not be limited to homo sapiens alone.
 - has to do with practical rationality – that is, reasoning about action and acting on the basis of such reasoning.
 - capacity to set and pursue ends
- Highlights the importance of human rights and underlines the significance of human dignity

2ND CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE...

- Suicide v/s Victims of Fate
 - “Man can only dispose of things; beasts are things in this sense; but man is not a thing, not a beast. If he disposes of himself, he treats his value as that of a beast. He who so behaves, who has no respect for human behavior, makes a thing of himself.”
- Developing our Talents
 - To neglect one’s talents, Kant argues, “would perhaps be consistent with the preservation of humanity, as an end in itself, but not with the advancement of this end”
- Exceptions to homicide
 - Capital Punishment
 - The “principle of equality” as between crime and punishment demands that those who wrongfully kill another should be put to death, for, in having inflicted such an evil upon another, the murderer has effectively killed himself

3RD CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

- Principle of Kingdom of Ends [Act only on that principle according to which you are behaving not only as a follower of the law but also a legislator of the law]
 - Kant believed that both autonomy and following moral law are important and must be reconciled
 - His solution to the conflict between being free and following rules is to claim that moral laws are not externally imposed but internally given by each individual onto themselves
 - Merely following others' orders deprives an action of its moral worth
 - Such actions which are otherwise moral but lack autonomy of the doer, can be called as amoral actions
 - Only those actions that arise from a sense of duty and are done for duty's sake can be called as moral actions.
- Highlights the importance of autonomy, conscience and fixes moral responsibility especially in the context of public administration

3RD CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE – AS A DEFENSE OF OBEDIENCE?

- Adolf Eichmann was an officer in the SS. He was responsible for rounding up Jews and sending them into concentration camps.
- After the end of the 2nd World War he escaped to Argentina, where he was eventually caught. He was brought to Israel and convicted by the State of Israel for crimes against humanity.
- His defense was that he was just following orders. He was just a government functionary and that he was cog in the wheel. He explicitly quotes Kant and says how Kant asks us to obey our duties.
- Do you agree with Eichmann?



Duty for Duty's Sake

- Moral, Immoral and Amoral Actions
 - Actions contrary to morality
 - Actions that accord with morality but have self-interested motives
 - Actions that accord with morality but arises out of inclinations
 - Actions that accord with morality out of a sense of duty (contrary to the two above)
- Only action from the motive of duty leads non-contingently to moral action.

CRITICISMS OF KANT'S DEONTOLOGY

- Seems too absolute, rigid and counterintuitive
 - White lies
- No importance to sympathy, compassion or any emotions
- Following first categorical imperative can still lead to immoral actions and not all moral actions fulfill the first categorical imperative
 - Avoiding Rush hour traffic
 - In order to get some quick money, I will rob a bank on the corner of the main road at 3:22 p.m. on a sunny day during a leap year.”
- Human beings might be used as means in some extraordinary circumstances

SIGNIFICANCE OF DEONTOLOGY

- Rights overrule utility
 - In many cases we give importance to human dignity and ignore utility
- Present in other systems like Bhagvad Gita
- Adherence to constitutional provisions can become more important than purely creating maximum pleasure for maximum number of people
- Highlights the limitations of consequentialism