Kantian Ethics

Immanuel Kant(1724-1804)

What is Kantian ethics?

- Kant argued that most things we think of as good are not *always* good. Intelligence, wealth etc. could always be used for evil.

- For Kant, **the only thing that is always good in itself is a good will**. (This is a kind of drive to do the right thing, whatever it is.)

- We should want to act in a certain way because it is *right*, not because of the consequences.

- **Our job as moral agents is to work out what our duties are, and then to follow them.**

Deontological Ethics

- [Immanuel Kant](#) was an 18th century German scholar, university professor, scientists, and philosopher.

- Kant proposed a view of morality that was based on duty.

- Kant is regarded as the author of deontological ethics.

Deontological Ethics

DUTY

A duty is something one is required to do. It is an obligation, a responsibility.

We may have a variety of duties to others:

- employers and employees
- parents and children
- citizens and government officials
- Human and Non-human contents

What is Deontology?

- The word 'deontology' derives from Greek words '*Deno'* means 'duty' and '*Logos'* means 'study'.

- Deontological ethics or deontology is an approach to ethics that determines goodness or rightness from examining acts, rather than the consequences of the that act

- Deontologists look at rules and duties.

Study of ethics focuses on duty/ duties rather than ends/ goals/ consequences.

Duty is based on Good Will

"But this raises the question. If it is not desires that move us to do what is right (even really strong desires), what does? In our example, why is it that we keep our promise despite the strong desire to gossip? Kant's answer is "the good will." (Dimmock and Fisher 2017: 32)

What is good will?

A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes — because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end: it is good through its willing alone — that is, good in itself. (ibid)

"The good will unlike anything else is good *unconditionally* and what makes a good will good is willing alone; not other attitudes, or consequences, or characteristics of the agent" (ibid.p33)

Being unconditionally good

Acting *for the Sake of* Duty

- Imagine that you are walking with a friend. You pass someone begging on the street. Your friend starts to weep, fumbles in his wallet and gives the beggar some money and tells you that he *feels* such an empathy with the poor man that he just has to help him.

- For Kant, your friend's action has *no* moral worth because what is moving him to give money is empathy rather than duty! He is *acting in accordance with duty*. However, Kant does think your friend should be applauded as such an action is something that is of value although it wouldn't be correct to call it a *moral* action.

Acting *for the sake of* duty

- To make this point clearer, Kant asks us to consider someone who has no sympathy for the suffering of others and no inclination to help them. But despite this:

- *…he nevertheless tears himself from his deadly insensibility and performs the action without any inclination at all, but solely from duty then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.*

Categorical Imperative

- CI-1: *…act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*

- CI-2: *So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.*

- CI-3: *…every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends.*

Hypothetical Vs categorical imperatives

- Hypothetical imperative:
  - What I <u>ought</u> to do if some conditions hold.
  - E.g., Maxim: I <u>ought</u> to attend the lecture <u>if</u> I want to pass my examination.
- Categorical imperative:
  - What I ought to do unconditionally.
  - E.g., Maxim: I <u>ought not</u> to lie no matter what goal I have.

Philosophical Problems…

- Kant thought that only *good will* is good in itself, whilst Bentham thought that only *pleasure* is good in itself. Which of these views do you find more plausible?

- How many *other things* can you convincingly argue are good in themselves?

- How do we *test* for whether or not something is good in itself?

- Kantian ethics gives us no guidance as to what to do when duties conflict – this seems not to have occurred to him!

- E.g. Promise-keeping is a duty, but what if I have promised to two different people to be in two places at the same time?

- What if I have promised to lie to someone?

- What if I three people are drowning and I only have time to save one of them?

- **Moral dilemmas are real** – there are times when we violate a duty no matter what we do.