

## Topic #2: The Doctor Scenario

This paper will aim to analyze the doctor scenario using Kant's moral theory. First, I will explain the scenario and the duties involved in it. Then, I will show how these duties do not conflict using Kant's formula of humanity. Finally, I will explain how this presents no issue for Kant's moral theory. In the end, this paper will show that the scenario only has one moral outcome according to Kant, and therefore poses no problems to his theory.

The scenario in question involves a doctor's decision to inform her patient about a series of injections that will cure their illness. If the doctor tells the patient what the injections are, the patient will refuse to take them, and their quality of life will diminish substantially. The only way to prevent this is for the doctor to lie to the patient.

To begin, I will discuss what a duty is in Kant's moral framework. A duty is a source that motivates action, and is only available to rational beings that are capable of acting intentionally. Kant describes it as the moral motive, as opposed to our inclinations, which are capable of leading us to immoral action for our own happiness (Kant, 4:398). For instance, if being rich would make you happy, then robbing a bank would be justifiable, yet clearly immoral. In relation to the scenario, the doctor has two duties that will motivate her actions: the duty to help and the duty to never lie. In this context, the duty to help is an imperfect duty, while the duty to never lie is a perfect duty. An imperfect duty is a duty that is described by a general policy, such as "never endanger yourself", and tend to generate "contradictions in willing", which means that it would be irrational to will that these policies be obeyed by all rational beings. On the other hand, a perfect duty

is a duty that consists of actions that we must do, such as “always help others”, and create “contradictions in conception”, meaning that it is impossible for us to conceive of a world in which these duties were universally obeyed by all rational beings (Kant, 4:422).

Kant calls the structure of a motive leading to an action leading to an end a maxim. While this scenario is motivated by a duty, Kant’s theory claims that there are 2 main motives: duty, or morality, and happiness. If your end was to eat lunch, you might take the action of going to a restaurant, which would be motivated by a desire to make yourself happy. In the doctor’s case, the duties would become the motive for her to either lie to the patient or tell them the truth. This would result in either the patient getting cured, or the patient receiving all the information about his condition.

Kant’s theory claims that, as rational beings, we are given the unique opportunity to analyze maxims’ morality, then choose to act on them accordingly. This determination is made on one of Kant’s standards of correctness. The first of which is the hypothetical imperative, which is based on happiness. The hypothetical imperative tells us if we want Y, do X, which, as shown earlier, can lead to immoral actions. Therefore, this analysis is grounded in the other standard, called the categorical imperative, which holds in all cases, for all rational beings. It is a universal and necessary principle that commands us to do an action that is good in itself, essentially telling us to do X (Kant, 4:416-417).

In order to test our maxims, Kant provides two formulations of the categorical imperative. One of these is the Formula of Humanity, or FOH. The FOH states, “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant, 4:429). Kant defines

humanity as our rational nature. To use this simply as a means is to use other people's ability to act for your own personal gain without treating them as having a value in themselves, often done through coercion or deception (Kant, 4:429-431). However, if you allow someone to do something for you while also respecting their humanity, that action would still be considered moral, as it is being used as an end at the same time. If the maxim in question avoids these violations, it is moral in Kant's framework.

We must now apply this definition to the doctor's maxims. The first maxim, where the doctor chooses the duty to help, and, as a result, lies to the patient in order to give them the injections, is a clear violation of the FOH. She is withholding information from the patient, prohibiting them from using their own rational nature to make decisions for themselves. The doctor is putting her opinion above the patient's, acting as if her humanity were more valuable than theirs. However, the risk of death lies on the patient, so logically the decision should lie on the patient rather than the doctor. All the doctor should do is use her humanity to offer advice to the patient, allowing the patient to consider all their options. On the other hand, the second maxim, where the doctor chooses the duty to never lie, causing the patient to refuse the injections, leading to both parties having the same knowledge of the situation, makes no such violation. The doctor entrusts that the patient can make the best decisions for themselves, showing that she values the patient's humanity, and is not simply willing to use it to achieve an end that she believes is desirable. Instead, she opens the discussion to both sides and allows the final decision to be made with the mutual agreement of all those involved. While the patient's health will deteriorate, the doctor has treated them as an equal and has not

deceived them into choosing an option that they would not have otherwise. Take a similar scenario, where a detective gets a criminal convicted, but they planted evidence. Sure, they acted because they were trying to help, but their method is obviously immoral, as they lied to accomplish their goals. After this analysis, it is clear to see that these duties do not actually conflict, as there is only one maxim that would be morally acceptable to follow.

In addition to the FOH, there are other reasons that Kant would come to this conclusion. First of all, Kant holds that perfect duties must take precedence over imperfect duties (DeWitt, Week 8). Since perfect duties are duties that must be performed, while imperfect duties can change based on the situation, an imperfect duty that forces you to violate a perfect duty is irrational to follow. It does not make sense to compromise something you must do for something you sometimes do. In this case, the imperfect duty of helping violates the perfect duty of never lying. Additionally, Kant also states that morality is more desirable than happiness. While it is rational to will for both, in a situation where only one can be achieved, morality should always be picked. Taken to an extreme, this would imply that preserving morality is more valuable than preserving life, which directly applies to the doctor's situation here (DeWitt, Week 8).

Using Kant's Formula of Humanity, it is clear to see that there is only one moral solution to the doctor scenario, and therefore, it creates no issues for Kant's moral theory. I established Kant's definitions for relevant concepts, and then applied them to the given scenario, showing how his definitions lead to a definite conclusion within his framework.

In the end I established that, while it seemingly presents an issue on the surface, the doctor scenario can be made clear through Kant's theory.