

# *Kant's Ethics of Duty*

*What do we owe one another?*



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# *The big question*

- All of the moral theories we have looked at so far have tied morality to *something else* -- culture, God, human nature, personal advantage, the social good, happiness...
- But don't moral demands *override* all of those at times?
- Having a moral conscience means that sometimes we can see that we just should or shouldn't do something ***no matter what*** else is telling the opposite.

*The question of morality is thus:*



*How can we possibly step back from all of our other concerns and act based only on what is right? Is there even such a thing?*



"Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*

# *Kant's ethics of duty*



Immanuel Kant  
1724-1804

- For Kant morality is distinctive because it is unconditional, overriding, rational, and autonomous: it articulates an ideal to guide us in our social lives.
- The key concept here is that of moral duty -- morality imposes **unconditional obligations** on us.
- Questions we'll need to answer are:

?

- 1. What are our moral obligations anyway?*
- 2. Why should we try to live up to their demands?*
- 3. How can we go about doing that?*

# *The moral ideal*



*If this all seems lofty and abstract, it helps to keep in mind that the point of this whole discussion is to defend an ideal we all take for granted.*

- We all owe each other basic respect and should never treat each other as objects to be used for some end.
- All adults are held responsible for their own decisions, since we are free to choose.
- All of us are capable of seeing what the right thing to do is.
- Nobody is inherently better than anyone else.

*Why be moral?*

*How?*

# *An important distinction*

conditional

unconditional





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