Kant's Ethics of Duty

What do we owe one another?

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2020

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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