

Deontology, Duty, and Journalism

Understanding the ethical framework of duty beyond consequences in society and journalism

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Deontology & The Ethics of Truth in Society and Journalism

Understanding Duty Beyond Consequences

What is Deontology?

Ethical theory focused on the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions

Derived from Greek word deon (meaning "duty")

Morality = following rules/duties regardless of consequences



Key Principles of Deontology

1 Duty Over Consequences

Do what is morally right—even if outcomes are harmful

2 Moral Rules are Universal

Actions must align with moral laws ("Do not lie")

3 Respect for Persons

Treat people as ends, not means (Kant's ethics)



Immanuel Kant's View



Morality is grounded in reason

Act by categorical imperative:

- Only act on maxims you'd want as universal laws
- Treat others as ends, never just as means

Real-World Example



Situation

You find a wallet full of cash

Deontological Response

Return it

Reasoning

Because stealing is wrong, even if no one knows





Deontology vs. Today's Society

True deontology is acting out of duty, not fear or gain.

Examples of ethical failure:



Legal Ethics

Lawyer defends the guilty for money



Medical Ethics

Doctor hides truth under pressure



Law Enforcement

Police ignore injustice out of loyalty

When Truth-Telling is Shamed

- Truth-tellers become enemies in modern systems
- Ethics shift to utilitarianism or Machiavellian logic
- Convenience, fear, and power > Duty



Why This Isn't Deontology



Professionals know the right thing, but act out of self-interest or fear

Real deontology = following moral law despite pressure or cost

What's Really Happening?

Society preaches duty, but practices:

Consequentialism
Ends justify means



Egoism
Self-preservation

Power Structures
Make ethics difficult, not impossible



Final Thought

True deontology is countercultural today. It takes moral courage.

Those who stand for truth and justice, even when punished, are living examples of real deontology.



Journalism and Deontology

Journalism's Deontological Duties:

- 1 Tell the truth
- 2 Report facts impartially
- 3 Respect human dignity
- 4 Serve the public good, not private interests

When Journalism Fails

Journalistic Behavior Deontological? Why or Why Not?

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Reporting facts objectively | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | Fulfils duty to truth/public |
| Hiding facts for politics | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | Violates truth/impartiality |
| Fear-mongering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | Uses people as means |
| Censorship of dissent | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | Breaks duty to inform |

What Would Deontology Say?

- Outcome doesn't justify the method
- Even for a "good cause," biased reporting = unethical
- Left, right, or state media—same standard applies





Consequences of Abandoning Duty

Public mistrust in media

Widening polarization

Truth becomes a tool, not a value

Propaganda replaces journalism



Final Reflection

A journalist is not a megaphone for power—they are guardians of truth.

Biased journalism is not deontological—it sells duty for influence and damages democracy.



Thank You

1 Dare to live by duty

2 Defend truth over convenience

3 Be the deontologist the world tries to silence

Questions & Discussion

Thank you for your attention. What questions do you have about deontology and its application to journalism?

