

Utilitarianism & Kantianism

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September 8, 2015

Hedonistic Utilitarianism

"Act in such a way that brings about the maximal amount of net happiness, compared to other available actions."

CONSEQUENTIALISM: You morally ought to ϕ just in case the complete world-history that would result were you to ϕ has greater value than the complete world-histories that would result were you to perform one of the other available actions.

ETHICAL HEDONISM: Happiness (pleasure) is the only thing of intrinsic value; suffering (pain) is the only thing of intrinsic disvalue.

TOTALISM: The value of a complete world-history is determined by the total amount of happiness and suffering it contains. (Happiness adds to its value, suffering subtracts from its value). All pleasures and pains count equally toward the total.

What you morally ought to do, according to the consequentialist, depends on what the consequences of your actions would be.

Kantianism

Kantianism is a *nonconsequentialist* view: it won't always be the case that the morally right thing to do is the thing that would have the best consequences

The Categorical Imperative:

Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. [Kant, 4: 421]

Example: don't make false promises

THE FALSE PROMISE. Suppose that you'd like some quick cash. You know that you could borrow some money from a friend, on the condition that you promise to pay her back. You have no intention of paying her back. But you could make a *false promise* — tell her that you will pay her back even though you know you won't. Should you?

No. You should not. Doing so violates the categorical imperative. How so?

Something is *intrinsically* good if it is good-in-and-of-itself. Contrast an intrinsically good thing with something that is merely *instrumentally* good. Something is merely instrumentally good if it is good but only because it brings about something else that is good.

The distribution of happiness and suffering across people doesn't matter.

Here is a way to get a handle on the idea. Ask yourself, "What if everyone did this?" Roughly, the categorical imperative says "Don't make an exception of yourself!"

The Categorical Imperative Test: false promise.

- (1) *Formulate the Maxim.* You are deliberating about whether to perform some action to achieve a certain end. Maxims are of the following form:

「I will do [ACTION] in order to achieve [END].」

In this case, your maxim is this: "I will make a false promise in order to get some quick money."

- (2) *Universalize the Maxim into a Law of Nature.* Turn your maxim into a universal law. In this case, the universal law that corresponds to your maxim is:

Everyone who wants to get some quick cash makes a false promise.

Imagine a world in which this is a Law of Nature.

- (3) *Imagine Trying to Will Your Maxim in Such a World.* What would the world be like if your maxim were a universally followed Law of Nature? Imagine such a world. Then imagine trying to will your maxim in such a world. Can you do it?
- (4) *Contradiction Step.* Is there a contradiction that follows when you imagine trying to will your maxim in a world in which your maxim is a universally followed Law of Nature?

For, the universality of a law that everyone, when he believes himself to be in need, could promise whatever he pleases with the intention of not keeping it would make the promise and the end one might have in it itself impossible, since *no one would believe what was promised to him but would laugh at all such expressions as vain pretenses.* [Kant 4: 422]

Perfect vs Imperfect Duties

Kant thinks that there are two different kinds of contradictions that can arise.

1. **Perfect Duty.** The maxim cannot even be thought of as a universal law of nature without contradiction. Maxims which fail the test for this reason give rise to *perfect duties*.
2. **Imperfect Duty.** The maxim can be conceived as a universal law of nature, but it would be contradictory to *will* such a maxim were it a universal law. Maxims which fail the test for this reason give rise to *imperfect duties*.

Examples of **Perfect Duties**: "keep your promises," "don't lie," "don't violate someone's rights," etc.

Examples of **Imperfect Duties**: "help others when they are in need of help," "make the best use of your talents," etc.

A Different Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

Kant takes the following imperative to be equivalent to the one given above.

The Formula of Humanity:

Act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any others, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. [Kant 4: 429]

What does this mean? What is it to treat someone as an "end"? What is it to treat someone merely as a "means"? What are some examples of each?

Take Kant's example of the False Promise. If I lie to you, do I treat you merely as a means? (Kant thinks so). I lie to you in order to manipulate you into doing what will be in my interest. So I am using you. So I am treating you merely as a means, not as an end.