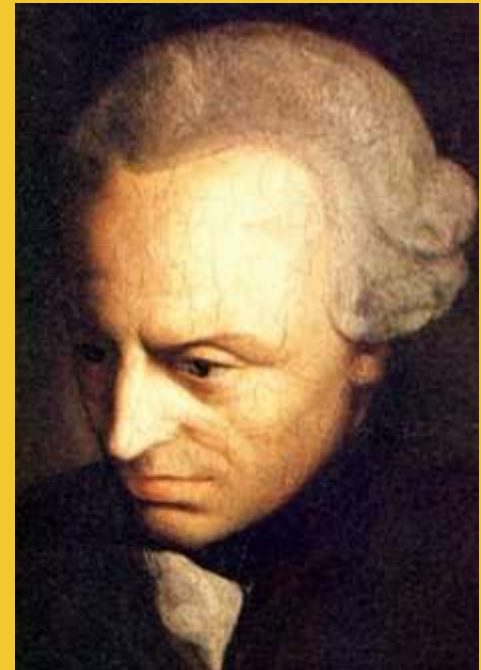


PHILOSOPHY FOR BEGINNERS

MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY



Week 4. Deontology
6th February 2019

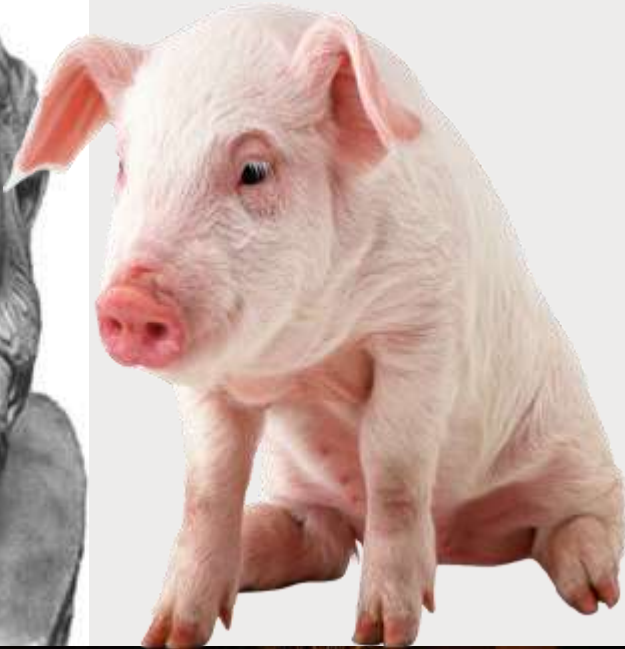
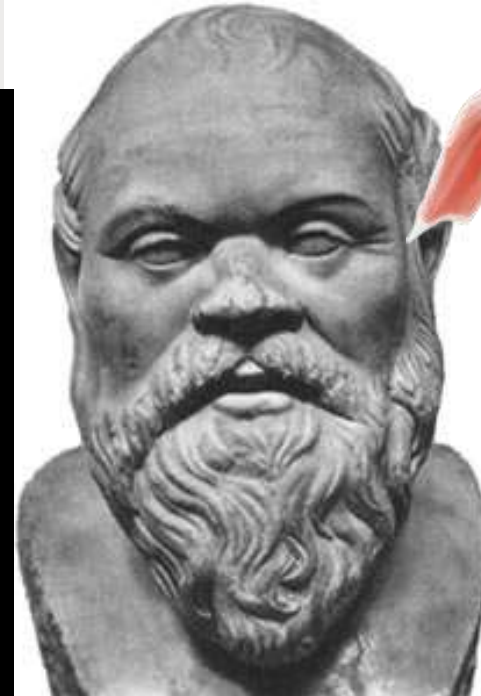
Class aims

- Evaluate Utilitarianism
- Introduce deontology: duty-based ethics, and the ideas of Immanuel Kant
- Discuss the categorical imperative, the highest good, and why *obedience* = *freedom*
- Question free will and moral agency
- Reflect on what factors truly motivate your own moral decision-making

Class recap



Auto-icon, Jeremy Bentham, London



Class recap

- Understand what utilitarianism is as a consequentialist moral theory
- Evaluate arguments for:
 - *the greatest good of the greatest number*
 - *Bentham's hedonic calculus,*
 - *Mill's 'higher' and 'lower pleasures'*
- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of utilitarianism as a moral theory, using everyday examples

Deontology in a nutshell

- A duty-based ethics (*deontology*)
- *Wanting to do good* is what really matters
- *Selflessness* – doing good even if this is not what would benefit us; in fact, it might be contrary to what would benefit us
- *Difficulty* – being moral shouldn't be easy; it's not the same as being 'nice' or having good manners
- *Free will* – all human beings have an independent capacity to make decisions and act on them, which is separate to and can be more powerful than desire, emotion, or custom

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)



Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- Born, lived and died in Königsberg, East Prussia, never travelling more than 10 miles beyond
- Modest upbringing under Pietist beliefs
- Heine joked that the women of the town set their watches by his punctual walks
- Reputation for frugal and austere life, and complex philosophical thought
- Actually lectured and taught on a vast range of subjects at the forefront of human knowledge, and enjoyed the company of others

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- Revolutionised philosophy with his Critical system
- Forged a middle-way through Hume's scepticism and the rationalism of Leibniz, and traditional morality and the discoveries of the New Science
- Our minds conceptually structure our experience of the world through our senses
- Wrote major works on epistemology, metaphysics, morality, aesthetics and politics
- Key works include *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87), *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *Critique of Judgement* (1790)

Immanuel Kant



*‘the starry heavens above me
and the moral law within me’*

Introducing Kantian ethics

Let's now turn to Kant himself, and his *Critique of Practical Reason*, on page 1 of the handout.

Group 1, please read and discuss the first 3 questions and the following paragraph (from 'The third question, namely...')

What is the importance of hope?

Group 2, please instead read and discuss the paragraph afterwards ('Happiness is the satisfaction of all...')

What is the difference between the practical and moral law?

Introducing Kantian ethics

1. What can I know?
 2. What ought I to do?
 3. What may I hope?
- Task: provide a new basis for morality consistent with metaphysics. ‘I found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith’
 - Previous philosophers erred in attempting to locate morality in transcendental ideas like God, or in empirical accounts of nature
 - But these result in disagreement or uncertainty
 - Kant instead wants a universal, rational basis for making moral judgements – an unconditional good.
 - *What could that be?*

Introducing Kantian ethics

- Universality is in what a person *ought to do* in any given situation
- Ordinarily, we often follow our natural inclinations
- Were morality based simply on this, Kant could agree with Hume: *reason is the slave of the passions*
- But reason guides us to pursue ends separate from our natural, day-to-day inclinations
- Reason observes a universal moral law in which we derive duties that command how to act in certain situations
- Through this, we can become worthy of happiness!

**ATM Hacked
In 5 Minutes
To Dispense
'Free Money'**



Who is acting morally?

A high-street cash machine begins discharging £20 notes at random. Who of the following acts morally and reasonably, according to Kant?

1. Joanna first passes the machine. She's tempted, but doesn't want to get into any trouble with the police or bank, and hurries off.
2. Steve follows. He has just come from the foodbank and hasn't enough to heat up his flat for his children. He takes £20 but no more, because his mother told him never to steal.
3. Alan watches Steve take the money. He fills a pocket with £100 and heads into the bookies, calling it a lucky day.
4. Misha gets a text from Alan. She decides that she will not take any money, because stealing is always wrong.
5. Roger passes and notices the machine. He fills a rucksack with £1000, which he later deposits in the local church's donation box for Syrian refugees.

Inclination vs Duty

- Kant is drawing our attention to two fundamentally different types of explanation for our actions, and two different kinds of intentions
- 1) Acting out of “inclination” – we act the way we do because of some particular *interest* that we have. And what explains why we have this particular interest is some story about how we are *caused* to have this inclination. For Kant this is something *hypothetical, contingent and subjective*
- 2) Acting out of “duty” – we act the way we do because we see that we *ought to*, in a categorical way...

The categorical imperative

- The moral law is universal and a priori, bounding all rational agents. Kant calls this the *categorical imperative*, true in all circumstances

- It comes in three forms:
 1. Moral rules must be universalisable:
Do as you would (will others) be done by...
 2. Moral rules must respect human beings
Never treat others as a means to an end...
 3. Act as though you were the legislator of moral laws
Be an example to others...

Hypothetical imperatives

- ‘If you want this, do that...’
- Hypothetical imperatives are conditional, non-objective motives that compel us to act, usually to satisfy a desire or inclination
- Because they are determined by desires and external causes, hypothetical imperatives do not result in freedom.
- Indeed, we give up our true freedom in letting ourselves be determined by them
- Kant instead wants to consider what is objective, universalisable, and which relate to moral ends themselves, rather than conditions

Categorical vs hypothetical imperatives



CI 1. Moral rules must be universalisable

- What if everyone in all times and in all places were to act the same as me?
- CI: Always act in such a way that you could will your action to become a universal moral law for all others
- The test for a moral maxim is whether you are willing for it to be applied to everyone else – if not, it is not a valid moral rule
- E.g. *It is OK for me to tell the occasional lie if it gets me out of trouble*

How do you think Kant will respond?

CI 1. Moral rules must be universalisable

- Kant rejects this: one should never tell lies or break promises if one is not willing to allow others to do the same to you, which a rational being would not accept, for then the value of honesty and promises would collapse

He gives some examples:

1. *A weary man who considers ending his own life...*
2. *Another who considers borrowing money for his debts, knowing he is in no position to repay...*
3. *Another gifted man on a South Sea island who would rather enjoy idleness and develop his gifts*

CI 2. Moral rules must respect human beings

- To have values as a rational being, we must respect the existence of other rational beings too
- All human beings should be treated as free and equal members of a shared moral community
- People should be treated as worthwhile, as ends in themselves, rather than as means for one to get one's own way
- It is therefore not acceptable to use, deceive, injure or coerce others, regardless of the 'greater good' it might apparently serve

Over to you: what do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of Kant's moral approach so far?

Kant's deontology

- Reason guides us to act morally, through conceiving ourselves as free
- We should be guided by what we ought to do. Ought implies can....
- Since the principles of practical reason 'command that these actions ought to happen, they must also be able to happen ... the principles of pure reason have objective reality in their practical use, that is, in the moral use'
- We are obligated to follow this duty, regardless of self-interest or desire
- In acting morally, one acts autonomously or freely: one is the cause of one's own actions (obeying freedom vs nature)



"You had good intentions. Let's find you
a nice job paving roads."

The good will

- Intention is everything...
- Turn to the passage on ‘the importance of a good will’

In pairs, discuss:

What are the merits of focusing on intention and will?

What potential dangers ensue?

The good will

- The only good reason for doing the right thing is because it is the right thing to do
- When we act according to our duty, then we have acted rightly
- ‘It is impossible to conceive anything in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without limitation, save only a good will.’ From *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- For Kant, what counts is the will or motivation in an action, not its consequences, seen or unforeseen



From Kant's "Duty" to "Rights"

- From perspective of "rights-holder" a "right" is permission to exist, to act
 - e.g., Absolute right to life
- From perspective of "rights-observer" a "right" is a *claim* – a duty or obligation
 - e.g., Absolute obligation to protect life

Justifications of Rights

- Declaration of Independence (1776)

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness [DIVINE/SELF-EVIDENT]

- Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789)

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only on the general good. 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptable rights of man. These are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. [NATURAL]

- UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world, ... [NATURAL]

What Rights Do We Possess?

- *Absolute* rights
- Matter of degree

Weaker

Stronger



Right to Smoke


Right to Breathe Unpolluted Air

Right to private property

Right to live

Right not to be tortured

Treating People as Ends in Themselves

- 
- *Recognising right to life*
 - *Not denying them relevant information*
 - *Allowing them freedom of choice*
 - *Permitting them resources to exercise freedom of choice*

Rights?

Putting deontology into practice

10 years of dying at Dignitas

COMMENTS (407)

By Philippa Roxby

Health reporter, BBC News



In groups of 2-3, discuss either one of the examples. What would a consequentialist say about euthanasia or the breeding and killing of animals for food? What would a deontologist say? Where do you sit on the debate?

Deontology round-up

- What are the overall strengths and weaknesses of following duties and evaluating actions in themselves?
- It puts a very high value on conscience and principle, over the practicalities of living well every day
- It is unclear how in each situation we will formulate the same maxim to obey e.g. euthanasia, the value of human life and the imperative to reduce suffering
- Some imperatives might pull in different directions, e.g. Sartre: fighting for the Resistance vs not risking his life for his mother, who had lost other sons to the war already
- In inflating the value of conscience, is this in fact selfish?
- Doesn't resolve problems of akrasia, emotions or political issues

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Next week

- We will be looking at three other accounts of morality
- Aristotle's virtue ethics
- Hume's morality of the sentiments
- Spinoza's account of desire
- Please bring a moral dilemma to class with you next week to discuss! It can be from the news, or from your own life, or a hypothetical one
- We will discuss what a utilitarian and consequentialist would say, but most importantly, what your view is