

Wrong Is Always Wrong: Kant's Categorical Imperative

Chapter 2

Learning Objectives

- After reading this chapter, you will be able to:
 - 2.1 Analyze Kant's concept of human dignity and how it relates to reason.
 - 2.2 Articulate Kant's three statements on the categorical imperative.
 - 2.3 Summarize Kant's major theories after reading two selected essays.
 - 2.4 Discuss the morality of lying according to Kant.

Kant and the Dignity of All Persons

- Reason, which all people have, reveals to us both the equality of all persons and a necessary respect for the human dignity we all have.
- Showing that respect for others as well as for ourselves and recognizing our duty to do what is right.
- These are the aims one of the most influential moral philosophies ever proposed.

Deontological Theories

- Immanuel Kant
- Kantian Constructivism
- Ties morality and rationality together. Rational people are moral; irrational people are immoral. If you break the rules you are irrational (and immoral).

The Foundation of Kant's Ethics

- Kant employs a **deontological** analysis of ethical issues. The useful **neologism**, which Kant himself did not use, combines the Greek word for duty, *deon*, with *logos* or science.
- Deontological ethics focus on the act itself as opposed to the moral agent or the consequences of the act when evaluating ethical issues.

A Rule of Logic

- Lying, Cheating, Stealing and Killing are all wrong for Kant.
 - However, they are wrong not based upon the consequences, but because according to Kant, they violate a rule of logic.
 - For example, if we all lied all the time, there would be no truth in the world. As such, truth would be meaningless. Logically, it would not exist.

Kantian Moral Theory

- According to Kant our moral duty is knowable by means of our rationality. Our rationality allows human beings to be conscious of rules of behavior, which he considers to be both Universal and Necessary.

Kant's Categorical Imperative

- Categorical Imperative - It commands certain conduct immediately.
- Categorical - it applies instantly to all rational beings
- Imperative - a principle on which we ought to act
- **"Act only on that maxim (reason or motive) whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law".**
- **Imagine if everyone acted as you are about to act.**
- Kant thinks that certain moral rules apply to everyone all the time.
- A rule, such as lying is wrong, applies to everyone, and, therefore, morality commands that we never lie no matter what situation we find ourselves in.
- The beneficial consequences of our action do not justify any action that violates the categorical imperative.

Kant's Categorical Imperative (continued)

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