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Lecture Notes, October 4

I. Continuing our discussion of the first version of the Categorical Imperative, the Formula of Universal Law.

Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will as a universal law.

The Categorical Imperative thus serves as a test on our potential actions.

A maxim fails the Categorical Imperative test if it is impossible to will, if it leads to a contradiction.

II. Two types of contradictions

There are two types of impossibility, which can cause a maxim to fail:

- 1) Contradiction in the world; and
- 2) Contradiction in the will.

A maxim can fail because it is not possible to have a world in which a maxim is universalized.

Or a maxim can fail because, though such a world is possible, it is not possible to will this world without contradiction.

If a maxim creates a contradiction in the world, it also creates a contradiction in the will, since it is impossible to will a contradiction.

See his four illustrations, pp 21-2.

III. Version #2 of the Categorical Imperative: The Formula of the End in Itself.

O'Neill stresses this one: never use humans as a mere means.

'Mere means' involve deceit and coercion,

E.g. involving some one in a plan to which they would not consent.

All humans are due respect as rational persons.

All rational beings are equally able to make and break the moral law.

All things have either a price (and so have value on conditionally, or hypothetically) or dignity (and so have unconditional, or categorical value).

Persons have dignity - they are the source of value.

IV. Version #3: The Kingdom of Ends, p 23

"All maxims as proceeding from our own making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature" (From the *Groundwork*, but not the edited version in our text.)

This is more positive take on the categorical imperative.

It recognizes that we, as the makers of ends and sources of value, have goals and desires.

These ends should mesh with the ends of all other rational beings.

V. A Kantian Vocabulary

Right intentions: intending to obey the categorical imperative.

Good will: the desire to do one's moral duty.

Moral duty: to obey the categorical imperative.

Freedom: the ability to make and obey the categorical imperative.

Note that one is most free when one is following the objective moral law, which constrains you from acting otherwise!

VI. Comparisons between utilitarianism and Kantian deontology

	Utilitarianism	Kantian Ethics
	Action-Guiding, moral theory	Action-Guiding, moral theory
What is the basis for morality?	Consequences	Good Will (§1)
Why should I be moral?	Pain/ Pleasure Favor/ Disapproval	Duty (§4-8): An action must have motive of duty to have moral worth. Not inclination - only some people may have them, but all people can be moral.
From where does that mandate come?	World	Self
How do we evaluate our actions?	Greatest Happiness Principle	Categorical Imperative Test
Justice, or moral acceptability	Creating the greatest happiness for the greatest number	Never breaking the moral law, the CI
Why do persons have value	They can be happy	Bearers of rational life
Beneficence, supererogation	There is no difference, no supererogation. One must always think of the whole world. (Peter Singer)	Sometimes aiding others in meeting their ends. Consider the maxim 'never help anyone' It fails - so, not-(never help anyone). I.e. help someone sometime(s).
Scope and precision	broad scope, imprecise	narrow scope, precise

VII. A first criticism of Kant's moral theory

Criticism #1: Kant's morality is rigid and exceptionless.

There may be times when we think that lying and killing are morally acceptable.

Consider the example of Dutch fishing boats ferrying Jews away from Nazi-controlled regions.

Or the case of the unfortunate botanist, who has to kill one man to free nine others.

It's hard to see how we could formulate such maxims without violating the categorical imperative.

In such cases, are we deciding to break the moral law, or do we want our morality to permit these acts?

It's clear that Kant bites the bullet, here.

That is, he dismisses the objection, and maintains his exceptionlessness.

See his, "On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns".