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Lecture Notes, September 29

### I. Introduction to Kant's Ethics

Consider helping a struggling person across the street.

This is a good act.

Consider the same situation, but which ends with an unforeseeable bad consequence.

E.g. a truck, from nowhere, runs you both over.

The utilitarian, given the bad outcome, must describe this as a bad act.

But the initiating action is the same action.

How could it be good in one case and bad in the other?

Kant says that the only good thing is a good will, a desire to do one's duty.

Since the will in each case was the same, the moral worth of each action was the same, independently of the consequences.

For Kant, morality is always independent of consequences.

### II. The contrast between will and inclination

Will is what results from rational deliberation, reason in its practical employment.

Dogs and cats can have inclinations, which are immediate.

Consider saving someone when there's a big reward.

Is it a good act?

Kant says, the answer is unclear, since we have to determine the content of the will.

To have moral worth, an action must be done from the motive of duty.

How duty and inclination may meet:

There are 4 cases to consider:

1) Acting contrary to duty

E.g. robbing, murdering, lying.

These are obviously not morally valuable.

2) Acting consistently with duty, but not with immediate inclination, though we might have some inclination

E.g. Not picking some one's pocket.

Here, we might be inclined to swipe the twenty, but we want to avoid being caught.

So, we act in the right way, but for the wrong reasons.

3) Acting consistently with duty and with inclination

E.g. the shopkeeper charging a fair price.

Here, we do no wrong, but since the act is in our interest, we can't see the moral value in it.

4) Acting consistently with duty but contrary to inclination.

Here morality shines.

E.g. returning lost money.

Weak claim: We can see only see moral value in acts done contrary to inclination, though other acts may also have moral worth.

Strong claim: Only acting contrary to inclination creates moral worth.

Kant is committed to the stronger claim, but the weaker one is less controversial.

### III. How do we determine what our duties are?

The simple answer is that our duty is to obey the categorical imperative.

An imperative is a command.

Hypothetical imperatives take the form, 'If you want A, then do B'.

Categorical imperatives take the form, 'Do B'. See p 20.

Moral commands cannot be hypothetical imperatives, according to Kant, because then you would be worrying about the consequences.

Kant's argument that morality can not be about the consequences of our actions:

1. Consequences are out of our control.

2. Morality is within our control.

So, morality can not be based on consequences.

Moreover, if morality were based on consequences, it would not be about duty, but self-interest.

### IV. Autonomy and the categorical imperative

If the commands of morality don't come from the consequences, which are beyond our control, they must come from ourselves.

Kant implicitly assumes two axioms (statements):

We are free to act.

Morality is possible.

Then, he argues for autonomy:

1) A moral action must be done, independently of your desires.

2) So there must be some reason to do it.

3) The reasons don't come from outside of us.

Therefore, we give the moral law to ourselves, i.e. we are autonomous.

See p 25.

Premises 1) and 2) are supposed to be obvious.

Premise 3) relies on the insight that external motivation is a consequentialist notion.

If we act for external reasons, then we would undermine the universal character of morality.

For, external conditions are always different, and not controllable by the individual, p 17.

### V. The Categorical Imperative

We still need to know precisely what these commands of morality are.  
There is one moral law, according to Kant, but there are three versions of the CI.  
So there is one rule in three supposedly equivalent forms.

Version #1: Formula of Universal Law , p 21.

Version #2: The Formula of the End in Itself., p 23.

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

## VI. Version #1: Formula of Universal Law

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

As an example of how to use it, consider: Should I cheat on my philosophy test?

1. Determine your maxim, the rule that guides your action

O'Neill says to erase all reference to particulars of time and place in your intentions.

'I will cheat here and now' becomes 'cheating in general'.

2. Consider the situation if everyone did the same, if the maxim were to be universalized.

3. Would it be possible to will this situation?

No, because it would eradicate the notion of test-taking.

Contradictions make categorical imperatives fail.

Take, for another example, lying.

The essence of morality, according to the formula of universal law, is universalizability.

So when we lie, we are actually willing that others lie to us.

But we don't want others to lie to us.

So we both want and don't want others to lie to us.

That makes it impossible to will a lie.

Though we can be inclined to lie, due to our base nature.

Here, we are not willing a universal lie, but only that we may be an exception to a universal law of truth-telling.