

# The deontology notion and human equality

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Founding Father George Mason once said “ We came equals into this world, and equals we should go out”( Brainy Quote 1). As humans, we all have feelings, thoughts, aspirations, desires, achievements, and failures. No assets, accomplishments, or lack thereof could determine an individual’s worth. When making decisions, many people make their decision in accordance to what choice will bring about the most good. These people would be considered utilitarianists. Those who favor utilitarianism believe that they must give and give until they are no longer benefiting society. However, there is an alternate view about making ethical decisions. The ethical idea of “ deontology” states that it is not always correct to help more people, if it is necessary to hurt even one person in the process of helping the larger number of people. Those who favor deontology believe that sacrificing the well-being of one person is never justifiable. It is still wrong even if hurting that person in some way would have greater benefit. While it may be considered correct to say that hurting one person, is not a morally correct thing to do, in some situations it is necessary to sacrifice the wellbeing of one person. If sacrificing that one individual can provide necessary help or benefit to others. I believe that no human life has more or less value than another. We came into this world equal, and we should live life as equals. The queen of England does not hold anymore worth or value than a homeless man asleep on a park bench. A war in which thousands of lives are lost, is not anymore terrible than one person dying. In most cases I find it crucial to adhere to deontological constraints, however in unavoidable situations, maximizing the overall benefits prevails.

One case that clearly identifies the issue of deontological constraints is about hurting a small child in order to save friends of yours. The scenario states that you are driving in the car with some friends when you get into car accident. Your friends are all seriously wounded. However you are the only one who is able to leave and search for help. You come upon the only house found for miles. In a frantic state, you go inside the house to attempt to borrow a car so you can drive your friends to the hospital. An old woman and her grandson are the only ones who live in the house. Unfortunately, upon entering the house but when you come in the house the old woman, out of fear, locks herself in her bedroom along with the car keys. This presents a dilemma because now you are unable to drive to your friends to the hospital. You believe the only way to get her to come out of the bedroom would be to hurt the small boy enough to make him yell. This decision at hand in this situation is, should you twist the boy's arm enough to make him scream in order to save all of your friends' lives? If you were to adhere to deontological constraints, you would not hurt the boy. Not hurting the boy would be just as important as your friends' lives. Though I generally would adhere to deontological constraints I would attempt to make the boy yell in order to save my friends lives. However, I would most likely not inflict any physical pain, rather I would use intimidation so that I would not have to harm him. I feel that the best thing to do in that situation would be to get a knife and scare the boy with it so that it would result in screaming. In this case I think that you should not adhere to deontological concerns because a brief moment of fear is less serious than death. In this situation, you have to weigh the options carefully, and decide which option you should take that will create the maximum good.

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“ Hurt one to save many” is another extreme example of choosing between deontological constraints and maximizing goodness. In this situation, you find yourself in a third world country staring at a group of natives held captive lined up against a wall. The army official holding the natives captive gives you an ultimatum. He gives you a choice: you can either walk away now and he will kill all twenty people or to pick only one individual to be killed. If you choose to only kill one individual, the rest would be saved. The deontological perspective on this case is that even killing just one of the people would be as bad as killing all of them, so you should choose to walk away and have all of them killed, instead of just choosing one to die. However, in this situation I know I would live the rest of my life engulfed in guilt if I was second handedly responsible for the death of twenty people. In this situation I would first offer myself in place of the natives. I would try and reason with the army official and see if it would be possible if he would take my life instead of them. I would go to this extreme for two reasons, 1) I would have to live guilt ridden life, which I could not handle, and 2) I could never choose one person to kill because of my view on deontological constraints. If reasoning with the official did not prove fruitful, I could risk my life attempting to take the weapon from the army official, and in turn hurting him instead. If possible, I would not want to kill him but if somebody had to die I would have to choose him because he was the one initiating the harm. If you kill one person, not only are you taking their life, but you are severely, negatively interfering with the lives of everybody

who loves that person. If you let all twenty of the natives die, their lives would be lost, and you would also be inflicting years of pain on those

countless loved ones. This is the biggest reason why I decided sacrificing my own life or possibly the army officials. When you decide to pick one person to be killed in order to save the other nineteen, you need to also make your choice of who dies based on how much pain their death will inflict on others. If the army official had to die, his family and loved ones would be grieving, however he would have died because he was in the wrong. The natives were just innocent people. Another example of picking someone that would cause the least degree of sadness would be pick an older adult with terminally ill cancer. This individual is nearing the end of their life anyway, and does not have many family members or loved ones. If they were killed, it is true that their life would be lost, but it would have been over soon anyway, and there will not be many people to mourn them. This is not to say that the little life they had left is worthless, but that they would most likely not be able to produce as much good in the world. Just like the terminally ill patient, the army official would also bring about the least amount of good. Therefore, when making your decision, you still decided that hurting one person (weather yourself or the official) is worth protecting the lives of others. However, it is crucial that you deliberated and made sure the choice you made was the absolute best choice you could make in that situation.

Austrian-American consultant, author and educator, Peter Drucker once said “ Trying to predict the future is like trying to drive down a country road at night with no lights while looking out the back window” (Brainy Quote 1). When can go through life only hoping to invent the best possible future, however being able to predict the exact outcomes that lay ahead is simple impossible. Logically, it makes sense to choose to always maximize good,

but to be very specific and careful with your decisions about who is being hurt in order to maximize the good. However, choosing this mode of action is arguable because there is no way to fully predict the outcomes of your actions in the future. It is impossible to tell if that one person you decide to harm will end up experiencing more trauma throughout their lives. For example, it is possible that if you decided to twist the little boy's arm he could suffer psychological issues later throughout his life. His mind could have a constant looming paranoia about the crazed individual that broke into his house in the middle of the night, twisted his arm and frightened his caregiver. It is also possible that by breaking into the boy's house the old woman became so afraid that she suffered a cardiac arrest and died. Then that would leave the boy not only traumatized but abandoned as well. Another example would be in regards to the native's scenario. If it was possible to kill the army official, and you went through with it, that could lead to numerous different outcomes. One would like to imagine that the people would be grateful, and one less bad individual would cease to exist, however it is possible that the natives could get together and start a rebellion and end up killing people like the army official. In addition, we are assuming that the army official will cause more harm than help in his life because of the terrible choice he is making at one specific moment in his life. I believe that people can change; his future potential is incalculable due to his life ending so abruptly. Despite the fact that it is impossible to predict the future, the best option is still to make the decision that would cause the least harm (if any) and maximize goodness.

Deontology presents the ethical theory that as humans we are all objectively equal, and that we could never choose to harm one individual over another. When possible it is important to adhere to deontological constraints, because one life lost is just as bad as twenty. However, there are times when we should not always adhere to these deontological constraints. Though hurting another person is not morally correct, all of the outcomes of a situation need to be considered and deliberated before coming to a decision. A compromise between abiding by deontological constraints, and ignoring them, and choose to harm the person is needed.