

# Kant's deontology assignment

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**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Religion & Philosophy Essay a) What are the central features of Kant's deontology? Immanuel Kant believed that to live a good life is to lead a life of happiness. This is not saying that people should only live a life that brings them pleasure and satisfaction, as is often argued in Utilitarianism. Rather it is saying that to live a moral life is to live in a state of peace. For Kant, the Summum Bonum (highest good) describes the ideal, where there is both virtue and happiness. In *The Fundamental Principles* Kant speaks of a very comprehensive moral argument.

This is of the Good Will in which he says " Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a Good Will". This means that only the intention in one's mind before carrying out an action can be called good as appose to the action itself. The action itself is morally neutral. Kant gives us an example of a grocer to illustrate his idea. In this example, he explains there is a grocer, who always treats his customers honestly, never overcharging.

However the only reason he is honest, is because he believes that if he is honest, customers will prefer to do business with him rather than other shops. The grocer is honest, not because it is his duty to be honest, but simply because it is in his own interest to gain customers, and according to Kant, an act with the intention of self-interest is not a moral act. According to Kant, consequences are not relevant in judging the morality of an action. Kant believes that extrinsic values of an act such as consequences are irrelevant because the consequences are out of our control and therefore cannot determine the morality of an act.

Kant believes that intrinsic values should be used to judge the morality of actions. Kant believes that everyone who has ever or will ever live have a universal moral law. These moral laws govern the social world and are expressed as imperatives. More specifically, there is one moral law, which governs the social world, and this imperative is called the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is a command that is absolute and one should follow the command as a duty. It has an intrinsic value and everyone should obey it because it simply is the universal rational law.

The first of Kant's three versions of the categorical imperative, from *The Metaphysics of Morals*, is as follows: " Act as if the maxim of your action was to become through your will a universal law of nature. " In another words you should ask yourself that if you take a maxim, would it be rational if everyone adopts your maxim as well. If it is, then you can let the maxim guide you through. According to Kant, a maxim can only be universalised if it can be followed by every rational being thus being morally correct.

Kant gives four examples that cannot be universalised: suicide; breaking promises; living indulgently; and refusing to help others. The second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative is as follows: " Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but at the same time as an end. "?? Here Kant is saying people should be treated with respect, as they deserve, as should you treat yourself with respect. The third and final formulation of Kant's categorical imperative is: " So act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a kingdom of ends.

In other words, Kant says we are all part of a universal kingdom and that all members deserve respect and are rational and free. b) 'The advantages of Kant's deontology outweigh the disadvantages'. Evaluate this claim. In my opinion although Kant's deontology is unlike utilitarianism in that it rejects positive consequences as the basis for making moral decisions, which allows individuals and minorities to preserve their rights, the advantages of Kant's deontology do not outweigh the disadvantages because there are many flaws that may arise from Kant's deontology.

Kant's idea that the intention behind an action is relevant to how we judge it sounds very sensible but Kant's view of the self, as an independent being making rational decisions uninfluenced by others is an 'atomistic' fiction. We are always influenced in our thinking and our intentions and attitudes change due to those around us. Aristotle said "Man is a social animal", which means that man enjoys the association of others and may derive many advantages from it as well as alterations in thinking.

Universalisability supports the idea that it would not be fair for one person to follow a maxim while another was criticized for acting the same way.

However, after Kant gives the first formulation of the categorical imperative, he offers four examples of the way maxims can be derived from moral law.

One of the maxims 'always tell the truth' results from the irrationality of breaking a promise. This is a big disadvantage because Kant says you have a moral duty to tell the truth to an inquiring murderer about the location of the person he is looking for.

Like in the case of the inquiring murderer, Kant does not come up with a way to resolve conflicts between the maxims: "you should not lie" and "you should save lives". Both are good maxims but if you follow one of the maxims (don't lie), then you cannot follow the other (save lives). Other conflicts similar to this would also be unresolved although Kant argues that you cannot know the future and all the other variables involved, and above all, morality is not a matter of considering the consequences of actions.

However, universalisability of maxims may cause conflicts that could cause worldwide chaos. In addition, some immoral maxims can be universalised e. g. thinking evil thoughts about an individual you do not like as appose to acting it out. There are also some moral maxims that cannot be universalised e. g. giving up your job and go to Africa to help the poor. Also, many people believe that morality and self-interest are two very different things but the majority of people would help others so they would feel better as appose of rationally considering the action as our duty.