

# Philosophy assignment

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Essay Philosophy assignment German philosopher Immanuel Kant's deontological theory talks about the good and bad things in relation to their universal acceptability. His theory includes the idea of a categorical imperative which suggests an unconditional and absolute requirement in all circumstances and is justified as an end in itself (Categorical imperative, first two paras).

When this theory is applied to Herman Melville's novel 'Billy Budd, sailor', different perceptions generate into our minds.

The novel story goes like this: Billy Budd, a gentle, sober, innocent and lovable sailor, serving the British merchant ship 'Rights-of-Man' is shifted to the warship 'H. M. S. Bellipotent' for war service. Billy agrees to shift to the warship out of his patriotism. On the warship, Claggart, his master-at-arms, somehow dislikes Billy. One night, one of Claggart's loyalists tries to bribe Billy in an attempt to make him join the group of some naval men ready to rebel. Aghast, Billy threatens to dump him in the high seas (About the novel, a brief synopsis, fourth Para). Later, Claggart lies and complains to the Captain Vere that Billy is involved in an attempted mutiny. In the enquiry, Billy, unable to control his anger and spurred by inability to speak due to stammering, unintentionally hits Claggart and kills him in the presence of Captain Vere.

The Captain faces a dilemma as to what he should do in the circumstances. He immediately calls for a drumhead court and sentences Billy to death, despite his love for the latter and the fact that Billy is not intentional in hitting and killing Claggart. The Captain is also sure that Billy Budd would never resort to involve in a crime of mutiny. Here, the Captain knows that his action of giving a death sentence to Billy is immoral and bad on his part but <https://assignbuster.com/philosophy-assignment/>

right and compulsory according to the universal principle of military rules, as laid out by the Kant's deontological theory. When viewed in the backdrop of Kant's theory, the court martialling and hanging of Billy is imminent, despite the fact that he is not at fault. Captain Vere must have been influenced by the thought that as a general and universal principle, any other captain would have acted the same way he did. It is of course true.

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References:

Categorical imperative. Deontological Ethics. 14 Nov. 2005.

About the novel. 14 Nov. 2005

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German philosopher Immanuel Kant's deontological theory talks about the good and bad things in relation to their universal acceptability. His theory on categorical imperative suggests an absolute requirement in all circumstances and is justified as an end in itself. Kant says that a person can act as he / she thinks if the action is perceived to become a universally accepted maxim or behaviour. He suggests : act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it would become a universal law. According to Kant, " for instance, one should only lie if they will that it be good for everyone to lie in the same way" ( Kant's categorical imperative). When this theory is applied to Herman Melville's novel 'Billy Budd, sailor', different perceptions generate into our minds.

The novel story goes like this: Billy Budd, a gentle, sober, innocent and lovable sailor, serving the British merchant ship 'Rights-of-Man' is shifted to the warship 'H. M. S. Bellipotent' for war service. Billy agrees to shift to the warship out of his patriotism. On the warship, Claggart, his master-at-arms, <https://assignbuster.com/philosophy-assignment/>

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Here, Claggart lies, as we understand from Kant's theory, to save his soul from the higher ups. There is no other alternative for him. He must have thought that others also would have acted in the same manner in the given circumstances, as laid out by the Kant's deontological theory. When viewed in the backdrop of Kant's theory, Captain Vere also must have thought what others would have done in the circumstances. Accordingly, he immediately calls for a drumhead court and sentences Billy to death, despite his love for the latter and the fact that Billy is not intentional in hitting and killing Claggart. The Captain is also sure that Billy Budd would never resort to involve in a crime of mutiny.

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References:

Kant's Categorical imperative. Talk: Deontological ethics. 14 Nov. 2005

About the novel. 14 Nov. 2005