

UNIT 10

KANT'S MORAL THEORY

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1. Introduction

In this unit, we will discuss the second major ethical theory – deontological ethics in Kant’s formulation. Deontology is the study of duty. Indeed, the central tenet of Kant’s ethics is that doing one’s duty (obeying the universal moral law) is the key to morality.

2. Kant’s Moral Theory

There are two central thoughts of Kant’s theory, which at the same time distinguish him from the utilitarians:

1. The key to morality is not pleasure or happiness but doing one’s duty by obeying universal moral law (which is established by reason).
2. He focuses on the act itself (the intention with which it was done) rather than on its consequences.

2.1. The Moral Significance of Intentions

Unlike the utilitarians, Kant thinks that moral theory cannot focus on the consequences. Consider the following fragment of his text:

A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favour of any inclination, nay even of the sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfavour of fortune, or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature, this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. (Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. S420)

Kant clearly thinks that moral evaluation should focus on the intentions with which an action is performed rather than with its consequences (effects). Moreover, his main reason for thinking so is that we have no control over the consequences of actions.

Reason 1: We have no control over the consequences

The fundamental reason why the consequences of actions should not matter to our moral evaluation is, according to Kant, the fact that while we do *not* have control over the consequences of what we do.

Let’s consider an example that will illustrate the point. Suppose that John intends to donate \$1000 to the famine relief fund. He donates the money through a money transfer. As it turns out, however, before the money is sent over, the bank is electronically robbed of all its money. All of it is gone. There is only a slim chance that John will get some of it back. As a result of all of this, his intention is not in fact carried out – through no fault of his.

This case illustrates how our intentions can fail to come to fruition independently of our will. A lot of circumstances that we simply have no control over can intervene at any single moment and prevent our intention ripening into the action we intended to carry out. It is because we do not have control over those circumstances that, according to Kant, we cannot morally evaluate the consequences of actions but only the intentions with which actions are carried out.

Reason 2: A morally good act and a morally bad act can have the same consequences

Furthermore (perhaps you will see this as, in part, a consequence of the first point), a morally vicious intention can have the same consequences as a morally good one.

Example:

A vicious cunning man saves a drowning child because he wants to get the favors of the child's mother – a rich widow. After he marries her he plans to dispose of the child. As it turns out, the widow is getting married the very next day so he does not succeed to carry out his plan fully, but he still saves the child.

A passerby sees the child drowning and saves him without any ulterior motive except that he thinks it would be wrong for him not to try to do so. As a result, he saves the child.

This is one among many cases where two intentions seem to differ in our moral evaluation of them despite the fact that the consequences are the same (in both, the child is saved).

☯ Are these cases a problem for utilitarianism? Why?

2.2. Morality as Obedience to Universal Moral Law

According to Kant, the intentions of actions, or the principles of action to use Kant's language, are important because in them our practical reason, or our will, is manifested. The will is the faculty of acting according to the conception of laws, i.e. according to principles. In other words, our will is that part of us that enables us to align our actions to rules or principles. Good will chooses only those actions which conform to objective rational principles: the commands or imperatives of reason.

In grasping the moral laws, we grasp our duties. This is the central tenet of Kant's deontological ethics: to do what is morally right is to do one's duty.

Kant's work derives from a long tradition, according to which to act morally is to obey moral laws. But Kant gives that tradition a distinctly rationalist turn. Kant believes that only rational persons can truly grasp and understand their duties. Kant thus thinks that only a rational person can truly act morally for only such a person can grasp the moral laws.

At the same time, Kant does not think that morality has anything to do with pleasure or happiness. Quite to the contrary, often morality demands sacrifices.

One immediate consequence of Kant's view is that only rational beings can be moral agents. Kant gives the examples of most human beings as well as angels. Animals are not moral agents according to Kant since they are incapable of grasping moral laws – they do not have reason.

2.3. Kant's View of Moral Worth

One consequence of Kant's views thus laid out is that only actions that are done out of duty have any moral worth. To make the view clearer, let's consider three possible ways in which a given consequence (saving of a drowning child) could be brought about. (What we want to know is whether we would think the action is morally valuable – has any moral worth).

Case (a): An automaton (a robot) saves the drowning child.

Case (b): A person moved by desire/inclination saves the drowning child (she can't help herself)

Case (c): A person wills to save the drowning child (she thinks she should save the child; she is moved by her respect for moral duty).

Kant's view about moral worth implies that only case (c) has any moral worth. In other words, he believes that neither (a) the robot nor (b) the person moved by sheer inclination deserve any moral credit. Let's start by considering case (a) because it is more likely to stir in us the same intuitions as Kant's.

We will probably all agree that case (a) – the saving of a child by a robot – does not have any moral worth. After all, we are talking about a machine, which might be (in the more or less distant future) programmed to save drowning people. The machine deserves no moral credit – its action does not have any moral worth. (It is a separate question whether the designers of the machine deserve credit for this particular saving.)

One way of understanding why Kant believes that in the case (b) of a person acting on desire or inclination there is no moral worth is to note that cases (a) and (b) are to some extent similar. Think of one's desire for food or for water – they function almost automatically, moving us (unreflectively) toward eating or drinking. No rational mediation is present. By contrast, case (c) involves the exercise of our rational faculties (reason). Only action that flows from the rational faculty of will carries any moral worth.

Kant's view about the moral worth of an action has been considered very objectionable. He sometimes seems to be claiming that an action has moral worth only if it is done from duty *against* one's inclination or desire. Consider the example he gives:

...it is a duty to maintain one's life; and, in addition, everyone has also a direct inclination to do so. But [for that reason] the often anxious care which most men take of it has no intrinsic worth, and their maxim has no moral import. They preserve their life as duty requires, no doubt, but not because duty requires. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away the relish for life; if the unfortunate one, strong in mind, indignant at his fate rather than desponding or dejected, wishes for death, and yet preserves his life without loving it – not from inclination or fear, but from duty – then his maxim has a moral worth. (Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. S422)

But this would be a very strange view to hold. For it would mean in particular that an action of saving a child's life, say, would have moral worth only if someone saved the child's life out of duty and *against* the natural inclination (perhaps one hates children or dislikes saving helping people). Let us call this view Interpretation A of Kant's theory of moral worth.

Someone who accepted Interpretation A would have to hold that only when we were repulsed by the right thing to do, could our action of actually doing the right thing (overcoming our repulsion) have moral worth. So, on this view, when a person saves a child's life by jumping into ice-cold water because this is something that comes naturally to her – she loves children and would never want to see any child suffer – is not performing an action that carries moral worth. By contrast, someone who is repulsed by children, dislikes their sight, but who overcomes this

natural repulsion because he recognizes that it is his duty to rescue a child from drowning, would be performing an action that carries moral worth. There is something bizarre about such a view.

There is an alternative interpretation (Interpretation B) of Kant's view that one could give here. On this interpretation, Kant is making the general point that only actions that are done from duty carry any moral worth. This has to do with what we have said above about the necessity that an action be done in the right way. Natural and spontaneous actions are simply too automatic for us to give any moral credit to the agent for performing them. The agent is not an agent unless he recognizes the call of duty.

Someone who adopts Interpretation B will believe that an action that is motivated both by a natural inclination *and* duty will have moral worth, though it will have moral worth only because it is motivated by duty.

How then does Interpretation B handle Kant's own words, which definitely seem to suggest Interpretation A? – Kant could be seen as making an epistemic¹ point in his discussion of the examples, viz. that, in such doubly motivated cases, we are really in no epistemic position to tell whether the action has any moral worth or not. This is because we have no way of accessing the person's mind to tell which of the motivations was really at work. His point about the moral worth of an action may thus be entirely epistemic: we can only *know* that someone's action carries moral worth if it was performed out of duty and against inclination.

To return to the case of the person, who loves children and who rescues the child by jumping into ice-cold water. On Interpretation B, Kant should say that as long as the person also does so because she recognizes that it is her duty, then her action would carry moral worth. If she did it only because of her natural inclination, if she did it because she could not help herself, Kant would say that it was good that the child was saved, but her action was not morally meritorious, did not have any moral worth.

- ☯ Explain Kant's account of moral worth, distinguishing the two interpretations of the account. Use your own example to illustrate Kant's claims. Which of the two interpretations do you find better? Do you think that Kant is right?

3. The Categorical Imperative

The universal moral law is called by Kant "The Categorical Imperative" (note the capital 'C' in 'Categorical'). Kant distinguishes two general kinds of imperatives: hypothetical and categorical (note the lowercase 'c' in 'categorical'). There are many categorical imperatives but one (*The Categorical Imperative* with capital 'C') is quite special. It is special because it is fundamental among the categorical imperatives – it underlies all the others. To complicate matters still, Kant believes that the Categorical Imperative can be formulated in three different ways.

This is all bound to sound a little confusing. This is why the detailed explanation will be spread out in §3-§5.

¹ 'epistemic' means 'having to do with knowledge'; 'epistemological' means 'having to do with the theory of knowledge'.

3.1. Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives of Reason

Kant distinguishes two kinds of imperatives: hypothetical and categorical imperatives. A hypothetical imperative is always relativized to some desire or goal – it has the following form:

If you want X, you ought to ϕ.

Here are some examples:

If you want to be slim, you ought to refrain from eating overcooked food.

If you want to be healthy, you ought to exercise.

If you want to be a doctor, you ought to go to medical school.

Etc.

Categorical imperatives, on the other hand, are unconditional – they hold irrespective of what someone desires. They have the general form:

You ought to ϕ (regardless of what you want)

and can be exemplified thus:

You ought to treat others with respect.

You ought not to kill.

You ought not to lie.

You ought help the needy.

Kant believes that all moral obligations are categorical and not hypothetical. (Hypothetical imperatives depend on individual's desires, and actions performed from desires do not have moral worth, remember?) Individuals ought to follow moral rules regardless of what desires they have. Moral rules apply to us because we are thinking, rational beings. If we could not think and reason they would not apply to us, but given that we are rational we are obligated to obey them.

3.2. A categorical imperative vs. the Categorical Imperative

So far we have been talking about a formal distinction between types of imperatives. Categorical imperatives are those that hold unconditionally. This is a formal distinction. On this criterion, the following would also count as *a* categorical imperative:

You ought to kill.

Mind you, Kant does not accept such an imperative, but according to his formal criterion, it does count as a categorical rather than hypothetical imperative because it is not conditional on any desire.

Kant further introduces “the Categorical Imperative” (I always capitalize it to distinguish it from categorical imperatives in the merely formal sense), which is the fundamental principle of morality according to Kant. First, it is a principle that every rational being does and must accept. Second, it is a principle that is capable of generating all categorical imperatives that we do accept, like “You ought not to kill,” “You ought not to lie,” etc. In other words, all our moral duties can be derived from the Categorical Imperative. It will not yet be clear to you in what sense the Categorical Imperative generates all the categorical imperatives that we do accept but it will become clear once we discuss Kant’s illustrations (in §4.2).

3.3. Three Formulations of the Categorical Imperative

What then is the mysterious Categorical Imperative? Kant gives three formulations of the Categorical Imperative, which he takes to be equivalent to each other:

- 1: Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it would become a universal law.
- 2: 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 always at the same time as an end.
- 3: Act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends.

4. The First Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

4.1. The First Formulation

We have already seen the Categorical Imperative in its first formulation (a maxim, very roughly, is the content of the intention with which an action is performed):

- 1: Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it would become a universal law.

Given this formulation, we can tell when an act is morally right, according to Kant:

An act is morally right iff it is possible to will its maxim to be a universal law.

It follows that an act is morally wrong iff it is impossible to will its maxim to be a universal law.

To fully understand how the Categorical Imperative is to work, we need to look at Kant's own examples. He provides four of them.

4.2. Four Illustrations of the Categorical Imperative

The four examples illustrate two ways in which it is impossible to will the maxim of an action to become a moral law. The first two (1 & 2) are ones where the universalized maxim leads to a contradiction and it is therefore impossible to will it. The other two (3 & 4) are ones where the universalized maxim does not lead to a contradiction but it is nonetheless impossible to will it.

I consider them below in a somewhat different order than Kant for the sake of clarity. Example 2 is the most perspicuous.

Example 2. Lying promises

2. [Someone] finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed

thus: “When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so.” Now this principle of self-love or of one’s own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, “Is it right?” I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: “How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?” Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretences. (Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. S427-S428)

The maxim of the person’s action can be formulated thus:

(M) Whenever I need money, I should make a lying promise while borrowing it.

When the maxim is universalized, we get:

(UM) Everyone should make lying promises.

Is it possible to will that (UM) be a universal law? No. (UM) leads to a contradiction. If everyone were making lying promises, the very institution and practice of promises would cease to exist. Why? The first thing to note is that it is part and parcel of a promise that people can count on the person who promises to fulfill the promise. (It would not be a promise otherwise, but at the very best perhaps a statement of a wish. “I promise to bring all the food to the party, but don’t count on my actually doing so” is unintelligible – it demonstrates that promises normally license other people to count on their fulfillment.) But if (UM) were the law then people could not count on the fulfillment of the promises made (because they just as well could be lying promises). But if people could not count on promises being fulfilled then there would be no promises. “I promise to do my half of the research for the group paper we are writing” would amount to nothing -- it would be empty, i.e. no promise at all. What this shows is that (UM) leads to the breakdown of the institution and practice of promises.

But this does not yet show how accepting (UM) leads to a contradiction. Here is the further step needed to see that. If the institution of promises breaks down (it is impossible to promise anything) then it is impossible to break a promise or to make a lying promise. But this is what was intended in (M). This is where the contradiction arises. If (UM) were a universal law, it would be impossible to intend (M).

Not all of Kant’s examples exhibit this structure so clearly.

Example 1. Suicide

1. A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is: “From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction.” It is asked then simply whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature. Now we see at once that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life by means of the very feeling whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself and, therefore, could not exist as a system of nature; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty. (Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. S427)

Here the maxim and its universalization are:

(M) From self-love, I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction (p. 427)

(UM) Everyone should shorten his/her life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction

Here the contradiction seems to take a different form. What is contradictory is that the motive of self-love impels two contrary actions. Usually self-love promotes life. So, it could not also generally promote death, as it would do if (UM) were a universal law.

Example 3. Neglect of talent

3. A third finds in himself a talent which with the help of some culture might make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rest and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species- in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they serve him and have been given him, for all sorts of possible purposes. (Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. S428)

(M) I will neglect my talents

(UM) Everyone should neglect their talents.

Here (UM) does not lead to a contradiction. However, Kant believes that it is nonetheless impossible to will (UM). This is because every rational being uses faculties; it would thus be irrational to will that they not be developed.

Example 4. Refusing to help others in need

4. A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: "What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress!" Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and goodwill, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires. (Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. p. S428)

(M) I will not help others.

(UM) Everyone should not help others.

Again, (UM) is not contradictory. However, Kant believes that one could not will it because one would not want to live in a world where people don't help one another – after all, one might find oneself on the needing end.

☯ Try to exercise Kantian thinking. In each case, you need to (a) distill the maxim and then (b) universalize it. Finally, (c) you need to decide whether it would be possible to will that the universalized maxim become a moral law.

1. I've had an affair. It was on my business trip. But it was nothing. I did not even take her phone number (well, I lost it). The problem is that my wife is incredibly

touchy about these things. There is no way she is going to forgive me again. I think I better not tell her about it at all. This time, I am pretty sure she would divorce me.

Maxim: In view of the possibility of divorce, I should lie about my cheating on my wife.

Universalized maxim:

2. I need a term paper for my English course. But I hate writing papers and certainly don't feel like writing one now. There is this web-site, I'm told, where you can buy term papers on all kinds of topics. I think I will just get one from there.

3. I'm crazy about nice clothes. I've seen this incredible suit. The store is always crowded. I'm pretty sure I can sneak in, change into it and walk out without anyone noticing.

4. My children are hungry. I am left with no money at all. My husband still drinks and is months late on alimony payments. I can get no money from welfare because they have lost all of my paper work. I can't find any work. The only thing I can do is what I could do taking my children with me (my youngest is 3 months old) since I have nobody to leave them with. I can get no regular job so I could pay for day-care — nobody wants to hire a convict. This is a small town — there are no shelters here. I'm going to have to steal some food. Fortunately, there is a big supermarket so I won't have to steal from either of the two little grocery stores.

5. The Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

5.1. Means and Ends

Some objects or events have no value in themselves for an individual. They are only valuable insofar as they play a role in helping him achieve his goals. These are the means. By contrast, ends are those objects or events that are valuable for the individual in themselves, not as a means to anything.

Suppose that I don't care about education, college or otherwise. But I want to become a doctor, so I must go to college. Going to college is a means to my end of becoming a doctor. I value becoming a doctor in itself. But I don't value going to college in itself -- only as a means to my goal.

5.2. Persons as ends in themselves (the Second Formulation)

According to Kant, only persons are valuable as ends. People are intrinsically valuable because they are rational agents. Only rational beings capable of abstract reasoning can distinguish right from wrong and choose to act accordingly.

Kant formulated the categorical imperative in yet another way. (Note that Palmer talks about it as a third formulation. I'm ignoring the subtle distinction between the first and second of Kant's formulations.)

An act is morally right iff it does not use any person as a means but only as an end.

It follows that an act is morally wrong iff there is at least one person who is therein used as a means.

5.3. Illustrations

Kant believes that this is just another formulation of the same principle. So it should render the same verdicts. Consider the four examples again.

Example 2. If I borrow the money, and make the lying promise, I in effect use the person from whom I borrow. Kant would say I treat her as a means to my end without any legitimate regard for her.

Example 1. Here it is somewhat harder to see the point. But here are two possibilities. Perhaps most importantly I treat myself as a means to my end. My life is only valuable to me insofar as it constitutes the means (killing power) to my end (suicide). Moreover, if I have any dependents to whom I have made commitments, I do not treat them as ends. They, their needs and expectations, are all subordinated toward my end of finishing my life.

Example 4. When I decide not to help others in their misery when I could do so, I am clearly treating them as a means toward my end of becoming even more prosperous, say.

Example 3. When I neglect my natural talents, am I treating anyone as a means? Well, again, perhaps I am treating myself (equipped with the natural talents) as a means toward indulgence? Or, I could be treating others who depend on my developing talents as a means toward that goal.

As before, not all these illustrations are extremely clear.

6. The Third Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

The third formulation of the Categorical Imperative may sound somewhat mysterious at first. It refers to some “Kingdom of Ends”. This is Kant’s theoretical construct – he imagines a society of rational beings who need to live together and devise laws to regulate their lives. The third formulation of the Categorical Imperative tells us to imagine ourselves in the position of a law-maker in such a society, and to choose the best possible set of laws that the society of rational beings would live by.

This third formulation has been quite influential. It has influenced John Rawls, a social philosopher who is most famous for his theory of justice. Rawls considers the question what social institutions would be just and he proposes an interesting (and Kantian) approach in searching for the answer to this question. He asks us what sort of social institutions we would find just. One of the problems with answering such a question is that we have our own biases. Depending on where we stand, we might answer such important questions differently. For example, men and women might have different answers to the question whether abortion should be legal. The so-called “majority” and various kinds of minorities might have different answers to the question whether affirmative action is a just policy. Rawls proposes that we should try to work out a consensus by imagining ourselves in the so-called “original position”. The original

position is a theoretical situation where we do not know on what side of the actual social divides we stand. We are thus abstracting from all the factors that may influence our social lives. In the original position, we are supposed to draw a “veil of ignorance”, which will help us reach an unprejudiced consensus on what is just.

7. Some Objections

The view is overly absolutist. It has been objected that Kant’s verdicts are too absolute. Kant believed that it is always wrong to lie, but there are circumstances where lying could save someone’s life. Presumably, however, Kant’s focus on the act itself (lying) rather than its good consequences prohibits us from considering such cases.

In response, Kantians have claimed that Kant’s theory tells us only what our duties are. But it does not preclude the possibility that our duties may come into conflict with one another. When someone is interrogated by the Gestapo, she may find herself in conflict between two duties: to tell the truth (about the whereabouts of her Jewish friend) and to help rescue the life of her friend (by not telling the truth). The theory explains why these two duties are her duties but it does not adjudicate which duty should be followed in this case. This is something that the agent must decide.

The view is overly rationalist and calculated. On Kant’s view, moral worth belongs to acts done from duty not from desire or inclination. Picture two people performing the same type of action (helping another in need). The first is, by nature, helpful. When she sees another being suffering, she runs to help him with genuine natural concern for his well-being. She does it out of a natural inclination, this is the kind of person she is. In a way, she can’t help herself. The second person is reserved. There is no spontaneity in his action of helping the other. In fact, he may feel slightly disgusted at the thought. But he overcomes his revulsion because he thinks that it is his duty to help another being in need. (I can’t help but think of the Casaubon character from *Middlemarch* when picturing the second person, and perhaps Dorothea when picturing the first.) On Kant’s view, the action of the first person has no moral worth, while the action of the second person does. But this seems to run against our intuitions. We seem to locate moral worth in the natural sentiment (a kind of moral warmth) that the first person exhibits.

Problematic consequences. As mentioned at the very beginning, animals do not have any moral standing in Kant’s theory because they are not rational beings. If so then it would seem that anything could be done to them. Kicking a dog or a cat would be like kicking a stone or a bean bag – a morally neutral thing to do. But this consequence violates most of our intuitions on the moral value of such actions.