

Chapter 14

The Ethics of Duty

14.1 Homework

Readings – EMP 8-9, RTD 9 (Kant), SLB 14

Study questions:

1. Why is Kant's argument in favor of the claim that our moral actions should be assessed on the basis of the moral value of our motives?
2. What is Duty theory? Explain the difference between 'acting according to our duty' and 'acting for the sake of our duty'. Give an example.
3. What is the difference between an hypothetical imperative and a categorical imperative? Illustrate your answer with an example.
4. What are the two formulations of the Categorical Imperative?
5. How can we use the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative to decide what the right thing to do is?
6. Is there any circumstances in which it is ok to lie for Kant? Why or why not?
7. What is the ultimate foundation of morality according to Kant?
8. Why does Kant think that we should respect human beings? What does it mean that we ought to treat people not as means, but as ends only?
9. Explain why someone could find Kant's view that it is necessary and sufficient to act from duty in order to act morally. What would be Kant's answer to such an objection?
10. Is there any circumstances in which one would think that lying is the right thing to do? How would Kant would analyze such a situation?

Study questions:

1. Do you think there are absolute moral rules which suffer no exceptions?

2. To what extent do you think that we ought to be deemed responsible for the consequences of our actions?
3. To what extent do you think that the moral value of one's motives should be taken into account when assessing the moral value of his or her actions?
4. Do you agree with Kant that morality is ultimately grounded in rationality?

14.2 Introduction

We have seen that for the utilitarian, one should assess a given action in assessing *the consequences* of this action. For the orthodox utilitarian, the “best” the consequences are (for everyone concerned), the best the action is, *whatever the motives*. The consequences are judged better or worse depending on *the increase or decrease of utility* that these consequences bring about for everyone concerned. *For the utilitarian, the ultimate value of our moral life is then: to make the world a better place.*

We have seen that this ideas put utilitarianism in conflict with our natural notion of right as absolutes. One of our moral intuitions is that there are some absolute moral rules, which have to be obeyed, no matter what the consequences are. The utilitarian's answer to this concern is that our notion of right is mistaken: what we call rights are moral rules that we decided upon because we thought they were likely to bring the general welfare in a human society. Once one has understood the true foundation of these rights we cherish so much, one is supposed to understand as well that these rights, when they do not fulfill their goal, that is, when they do not support the general welfare, should be abandoned, in favor of these rules which do bring about the general welfare.

In many ways, Kant can be seen as defending a view opposite to the utilitarian view.

About Kant : 1724 - 1804 – born and dead in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad in Russia).

Never travelled, never change his schedule: people would set their clocks by his walks on the path named after him “the philosopher walk”. Weekly much-sought-after dinner guest. Last words: “Es ist gut” (This is good).

Kant the philosopher : One of the most important philosophers of all times. Writings in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, aesthetics and religion. Very difficult to read. Most well known: the three “Critiques” , i.e. *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgment*.

The four components of Kant's ethics :

1. Actions are judged only on the basis of our motives – more precisely, on whether or not we do our *duty*.
2. These motives should strictly follow some absolute moral rules – which should pass the test of the *categorical imperative*.

3. These moral rules are grounded in the fact that human beings are *rational autonomous agents*.
4. Autonomy confers to human beings their *dignity*. And human dignity is worthy of an absolute *respect*.

The questions you want to think about in this chapter :

1. How important are the motives of our moral actions?
 - If someone has good intentions, but his action happens to work out badly, does he or she still deserve moral credit for it? – Chest compression during resuscitation attempt: ends up breaking a rib
 - If someone does something apparently morally good, but for the wrong reasons, does he or she still deserve moral credit for it? – The merchant giving the correct change to a boy only because of other customers being around.
2. Are there absolute moral rules, that is, rules which suffer no exceptions whatever the circumstances?

Look at the list given by Anscombe in EMP p.119: which of these do *you* deem absolute?
3. What does it mean that we ought to treat human beings with respect?

14.3 “The law within me” – The Importance of Doing our Duty

The first component of Kant’s theory of ethics is the idea that the morality of our actions should be assessed on the sole basis of our motives. The main idea is that we act morally only when we follow our duty, for the sake of it. Let us see this in more detail.

Motives vs. Consequences :

Think about the rescuers in *The courage to care*: do you admire these people because they actually managed to save people, or because they did what was right to do? Would you less admire them if their rescue, for one or another reason, had failed?

According to Kant, the motives of our actions are more important than the consequences.

One main motivation for this is that *consequences are always uncertain: they depend on events that belong to the realm of nature (by contrast to the realm of reason), that is, events on which we do not have any power*

By contrast, our motives depends on our reason and free will. We have complete power here, and hence, we are completely responsible.

Here is, roughly, Kant's argument for taking the motives as the basis for assessing the morality of our actions:

P1 Free will and Rationality is what define us as moral agents, that is, what makes us morally responsible.

P2 Only the motives of our actions depend entirely on our free will and rationality.

P3 By contrast, what's going to eventually happen does not depend *entirely* on us.

P4 Our moral actions ought to be assessed in regarding only what we are fully responsible for.

CC: So, our moral actions ought to be assessed in regarding only the motives of the actions.

→ *So, according to Kant, the moral value of our actions is to be assessed on the sole basis of the moral value of our motives, because, as free and rational agents, our motives are the only thing we are fully responsible of.*

How are we to assess our motives? thanks to our sense of duty

Duty Theory: The moral law within us :

Kant claims that each of us possesses a sense of duty. To deny it is but bad faith. At the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he writes:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within

What is the moral law? to do our duty.

→ *We have an intimate sense that one ought to do her duty. According to Kant, moral actions are to be assessed solely on the basis of whether this is the case or not.*

Definition 36 – Duty Theory

Duty Theory is the view that what is right to do is to act in conformity with duty and for the sake of duty.

What does it mean?

“In conformity with duty” vs “for the sake of duty” :

- **Conformity with duty**

Given that the moral law is to do our duty, and given that the moral value of our actions depends only on the moral value of our motives, one can conclude that we are doing the right thing whenever we follow our duty.

So: According to Kant, our actions are moral only if they are governed by these motives that are conform with our duty.

BEWARE! To act in conformity with duty is necessary, but not sufficient though...

- **The sake of duty**

It is possible to act in conformity with duty, but not for the sake of it: basically, it is possible to do what is right to do, but for the wrong reasons. According to Kant, this is not enough to act morally.

- What could be the reasons behind someone's doing his or her duty?

Example: the grocer who does not overcharge the kid

1. a witty person who wants to keep a good reputation
2. a friend of mankind who enjoys spreading happiness
3. a cold-hearted, unsympathetic person who nevertheless treat the kid right just because this is the right thing to do

- Kant classifies the above three kinds of motives in the following way:

1. action from mediate inclination
2. action from immediate inclination
3. action for the sake of duty

All three are doing what is in conformity with duty. Only the third one is doing for the sake of duty alone. According to Kant, the latter, that is, the third kind of person, is the most admirable person !

Kant's claim that motives of type 2 and 3 are preferable to motives of type 1 is easy to understand. It is pretty clear that the first kind of motive is not the best kind (Note that the utilitarian would not care though!).

Kant's claim is less obvious when it comes to compare 2 and 3: Why would the cold-hearted man be a better person than the friend of mankind?

- The friend of mankind acts upon his or her immediate inclinations, that is his or her desires

- Desires belong to our *bodily nature*, which implies that:

1. They don't depend on our free will (you are not morally responsible for your desires – they are part of your nature)
2. They can change: what if the friend of mankind gets sick of humanity after too much disappointment. He or she is likely to stop being nice to everybody and stop acting in conformity with duty.

By contrast, the cold-hearted man's behavior will remain steady whatever mankind does to him.

→ *The true moral life is based on reason and free will. A moral life based on desires and emotions lacks the reliability of one based on reason.*

Conclusion : So, the first component of Kant's Duty theory of ethics is that:

- a. The moral value of our action is to be assessed on the sole basis of the moral value of our motives

- b. Our motives have the greatest moral value whenever we act the way we do solely for the sake of doing our duty, in particular whenever we are doing so independently of our desires and emotions.

But how do we know what our duty is?

14.4 The Categorical Imperative as the Moral Law

The second component of Kant's view deals with what our duty consists of. The basic intuition is the idea of the Golden Rule: our duty is to do what we would not want other people to do.

For developing this idea, Kant makes a distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives:

Hypothetical vs Categorical Imperatives :

- **Examples:**

- Hypothetical imperative: '*If* one wants to be deemed trustworthy, she should keep her promises.
- Categorical imperative: 'one ought to keep her promises'

Notice the main difference: in the categorical imperative, there is no if-clause. The rule is taken to be true independently of any other consideration. A categorical imperative is unconditional, in other word, absolute. It suffers no exceptions because its validity does not depend on any particular condition.

- **Definitions from Kant (RTD p.82)**

Definition 37 – Imperative

An imperative is a command: it presents to my will what I should do.

Definition 38 – Hypothetical Imperative

An hypothetical imperative presents to my will what I should do “as a mean to something else”.

Structure: “If one wants then one ought to”

Definition 39 – Categorical Imperative

Categorical Imperative: presents to my will what I should do “as a good in itself”

Structure: “one ought to...” (no if-clause)

- **The moral law is a categorical imperative**

According to Kant, the moral law, that is, the law of duty, is a categorical imperative: it is unconditional. No further consideration should enter into account. It is an absolute

→ According to Kant, the moral law, that is, the law of duty, takes the form of a categorical imperative.

In fact, the moral law is *the* categorical imperative:

The Categorical Imperative – First formulation and usage

Definition 40 – The *Categorical Imperative (First Formulation)*

The categorical imperative is: “Act only accordingly to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”.

The idea is that:

- whenever you decide upon a moral action, you are deciding upon certain rules of action, which Kant calls maxims. *A maxim is the rule that a person has in mind when performing a certain action.*

- Kant claims that you can decide whether an action is moral or not just in checking on whether or not the rule of this action passes the test of the Categorical Imperative: is this rule universalizable?

The test consists into two questions :

1. Would it be possible that everybody follows this maxim? In other words: can I make the maxim of my action a universal law without contradiction?
2. Would I want that everybody follows this maxim? In other words: would I want to make the maxim of my action a universal law?

SO: how to decide whether action *A* is the right thing to do? it is pretty simple

1. Figure out what maxim is governing action *A*
2. Look whether you can and would want to make such a maxim a universal law.
3. If yes: then the action is the right thing to do / If not: then the action is the wrong thing to do

→ *Universality is the key: Our duty is to act in the way in which we would want everybody else to act.*

Kant's examples :

1. Is it right to commit suicide?

- Maxim: destroying my life as an improvement on my life
- Universalization: destroy life as a mean to improve life
- Possible? Desirable?

→ *Not even possible because contradictory*

2. **Is it right to lie** to get a loan when we are need, even if we know we won't be able to repay it?

- Maxim: because I am in need, I can promise to repay a loan (in order to get a loan) with the intention not to repay it

- Universalization? "anyone in need can promise what he pleased with the intention of not fulfilling it"

- Possible? Desirable?

Kant makes a strong case against any maxim which would allow us to lie. In short, the point is that whenever you lie, you shoot yourself in the foot! Here is why:

The problem is that, if this law was in place, nobody would believe in promises anymore, which makes lying about your promises inefficient. In other words, when we try to make lying a universal law, we understand that lying is self-defeating: when you lie, you damage the atmosphere of general trust that is necessary for a lie to work. In other words, *lying makes sense only if we expect that other people don't lie*. It follows from this that lying is not universalizable as a rule of action.

—> *Not even possible because contradictory*

3. **Is it right to neglect one's natural talents** and indulge in pleasure instead?

Universalization:

- Possible: yes

- Desirable: no

—> *Such a rule can be made universal – it would not create any contradiction – but not desirable as a universal law: we would not want to live in a world in which people do not exercise their talents.*

4. **Is it right to not help others** and to only care about oneself instead?

Universalization:

- Possible: yes

- Desirable: no

—> *Such a rule can be made universal – it would not create any contradiction – but not desirable as a universal law: we would not want to live in a world in which people never help each other.*

A requirement of consistency :

The two cases that are the most important to understand are cases 1 and 2 above. It is very important to understand that what makes the maxims about suicide and lying morally unacceptable is *not* that turning them into universal laws would have terrible consequences. Instead, Kant takes it that *what makes them unacceptable is that they are inconsistent when considered from an universal point of view*.

The main question is whether we run into a logical contradiction when we try to turn our maxim into a universal law. Here one can see that Kant's morality is fundamentally

based on rationality. The question is whether a *rational agent*, that is, a agent which considers the case from an universal point of view, could accept such or such maxim as the rule of her action.

Conclusion: The second component of Kant's view on Ethics is that:

a. The fundamental moral law is the Categorical Imperative. It requires that the maxims of our actions be made universal rules of actions

b. Such a requirement is a requirement of rational consistency

→ *The requirement of universalization is a requirement of rationality: the moral law only requires us to be logically consistent moral agents. This means that, according the Kant, the ultimate foundation of morality is just rationality.*

Let us explain this in more detail.

14.5 Reason, Rationality and Free will as the foundation of morality

Up to now, we have seen that:

(1) Kant puts on emphasis on the motives when it comes to the moral value of our action: to do the right thing is to act in conformity and for the sake of doing our duty

(2) Our duty consists in that we do and we do only what we could want everybody else to do.

We have seen that (2) relies ultimately on a requirement of logical consistency. This is an important element of Kant's view on morality: Morality is ultimately founded in rationality. What does this mean?

Logical consistency, not bad consequences – Back to the issue of lying: Compare

1. Lying to get advantage of others' credulity is not right because if put as an universal law, then everybody would lie all the time, and the society would not work well anymore

→ *Not right because of detrimental consequences*

2. Lying to get advantage of others' credulity is not right because if put as an universal law, then the very possibility of lying to get advantage of others' credulity becomes impossible (there is no more credulity). This reasoning does not consider the possible actual consequences of lying, but the general, logical consequences of taking a right to lie to be a universal rule.

→ *Not right because of logical inconsistency*

It is crucial to understand the difference between the two: according to Kant, the problem is not about the consequences but about the consistency of the rule of your action.

Morality ultimately founded in Rationality :

- The moral law is, in definitive, a *law of reason*, just like the laws of logic. If we pay enough attention to it, we should be able to grasp its necessity.

Now, what are the main characters of the moral law?

- Rationality imposes on us:

1. to think from the standpoint of everyone
2. to think consistently

- To be a moral agent is nothing else than being a rational agent! Acting morally is nothing more than acting rationally.

This implies that *to be immoral is nothing but being irrational*. This means that when you do something bad, you are being irrational, you've made a mistake!

→ *To act rationally is thus sufficient to be act morally. Conversely, to be immoral is nothing but being irrational.*

Why does Kant put such an emphasis on rationality?

Reason, Freedom and Autonomy :

- Kant makes the following important point:

P1 We are not truly free when we follow our immediate inclinations, desires and emotions.

P2 By contrast, we truly exercise our freedom when we use our reason to decide what to do and act.

P3 We are moral agents, that is, morally responsible agents, only when we are free agents.

CC: we are moral agents, that is, morally responsible agents, only when we use our reason to decide what to do and act.

- One can understand the reasoning in making the distinction between the notions of *freedom* and of *autonomy*.

To have autonomy means, literally, to give ourselves our own laws. When we follow our desires and emotions, we may well be doing "whatever we want to do", but we are not being autonomous. This is because the laws of our desires and emotions are not laws that we can decide upon. Desires and emotions are governed by biological laws. By contrast, whenever we make up our mind upon rational reasons, we are dictating our own laws, because our rational reasoning depends solely on us.

The point is thus that true freedom is not "to do what we want" (where "what we want" could well originate in biological desires) but rather "to do what we rationally decided was the best to do". This is what true freedom consists in and this is what is properly called *autonomy*.

→ So, Kant shows that exercising our reason is thus the only way for us to truly exercise our freedom, that is to say, to be autonomous, and hence the only way to be a moral agent.

In short, we have the following relation between the characters of a given agent:

$$\text{Rationality} \longleftrightarrow \text{Autonomy} \longleftrightarrow \text{Morality}$$

Morality and Dignity :

The most admirable thing in human beings, according to Kant, is precisely that we are able of true freedom, that is to say, that we are able to act against our immediate inclinations, desires and emotions, in listening to reason.

Being capable of following our duty, irrespective of our desires, is in fact the very essence of our dignity as human beings.

- When you act upon your desires, you act as an animal.

- When you act upon practical reasons, without any assistance from our feelings or desires, you are exercising “*the autonomy of the will*”

Only in the later case are you truly human.

→ *Rationality and morality are the necessary and sufficient conditions for human dignity.*

Side note on happiness – Notice that nothing in the above says that there is any guarantee of happiness !! In fact, according to Kant, the moral life is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness (this is in contrast with Plato’s view).

This is because, while acting Morality and having dignity does depend only on your will, whether or not you’ll be happy depends on contingent circumstances. It does not depend solely on your will.

Because happiness depends on contingent events which we do not control, there is simply no guarantee of happiness, whatever our actions.

Conclusion : The third aspect of Kant’s view on morality is that

a. Our morality is ultimately grounded in rationality.

b. Because to act rationally is the only way to be truly free, that is, autonomous, and worthy of human dignity

We have the relationships:

$$\text{Rationality} \longleftrightarrow \text{Autonomy} \longleftrightarrow \text{Morality} \longleftrightarrow \text{Dignity}$$

→ *Kant’s fundamental idea is that moral rules are nothing mysterious, but just the rules which reasonable, autonomous people would agree on if they*

all set aside their prejudices and special interests and in order to to live together in some mutually beneficial and harmonious way.

14.6 From Dignity to Respect

Human dignity comes from humans' unique ability to be exercise their freedom in being rational, that is, from humans' unique ability to be autonomous.

Such a dignity, according to Kant, has an absolute moral value: it ought to be respected in every circumstances. This is the fourth aspect of Kant's view on ethics, and is expressed through the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative :

Kant proposes a second formulation for it in the *Groundwork of a Metaphysics of Morals*:

Definition 41 – *The Categorical Imperative (second formulation)*

The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative is: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only”.

The precise relationships holding between the two formulations (consequence, equivalence or else) remains a matter of academic controversy. Nothing of interest for us. What is interesting for us is to understand what he means by “treating humanity [...] always as an end and never as a means only”, why he considers that this has the status of a supreme moral law, and what the consequences are.

Let's us try to understand first

Disentangling the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative :

The main idea is that:

1. Human beings have a *special kind of value*, “above all price”: two human beings do not count twice as much as one human beings. There is no relative value, hence no possible comparison, nor is there any replacement of comparative value. This is what Kant calls *human dignity*. Dignity is not for sale.
2. This special kind of value is grounded in humans' *rationality*. As rational agents, we are able to make our own decisions and set our own goals. This is our fundamental *autonomy*.
3. From this it follows that there are some constraints on how we can treat humans. The core idea is that we are never morally justified to treat humans merely as means to another's end. *We ought to respect every human's autonomy.*

4. In short then. we have the following relationships:

$$\text{Rationality} \longleftrightarrow \text{Autonomy} \longleftrightarrow \text{Dignity} \longleftrightarrow \text{Due Respect}$$

What is it to treat other people as ends? :

Some example to understand :

1. *Superbad* – Seth, Fogel and the fake ID – Compare Seth and Evan
2. The Tuskegee syphilis experiments 1930-1972 (!)
3. Factory Closing

Respect of autonomy – From the examples above, we gather that what we unacceptable is to:

1. not allowing people to get the relevant information
2. in doing so, not allowing them to make their own decision on the basis of that information

—> *Whenever we use other people merely as means, we remove their ability to make up their own mind. This is what Kant tells us is never morally justified.*

Using people as means, but as an end at the same time – There is a subtlety in the formulation of the second Categorical Imperative: it says that we are never justified to treat other *merely as a mean*. This seems to open for treating people as means, if we treat them as ends at the same time.

In most of the cases above, one may get the same result in treating people with respect:

- Seth could explain to Fogel how important it is for him to get alcohol for the party
- HIV experiments
- The director of the factory could negotiate with workers that they work seriously during the last week, with some compensation.

—> *You can use someone as a mean, but only if you treat him or her as an end as well. In this case, you tell the truth, and the person can decide to make your goal his own.*

Four clarification remarks :

1. **Self-respect** – Kant tells us to respect humanity in others *as well as in yourself*. Kant thus considers *self-respect* as a moral duty.
Example: the deferential wife

2. **Humans Only** – The duty of respect applies only to humans. Other things (including animals according to Kant) lack rationality, and hence lack both autonomy and dignity. “Things” (car, soap and dishwasher) don’t have value in and by themselves. Only humans’ ends and goals put a value on things.

That said, we have an indirect duty to treat animal without cruelty, not because of their feelings, but because to the effects that treating badly animals could have on our behavior towards humans.

Some would disagree with Kant on this point. That said, rejecting Kant’s idea that human dignity is necessary for moral consideration does not imply to reject the whole view.

3. **Emotions and feelings set aside** – Kant tells us to *act* and not to *feel*: as usual, Kant sets aside all emotional aspect of our moral life. Respect is shown through rational thinking and action, not emotions and feelings.

Conclusion : The fourth and last component of Kant’s view on ethics has thus to do with the notion of respect of human dignity:

- a. So, in Kant’s view, the most admirable aspect of human beings is their ability to reason, to set their own goals, and to make their own mind on how to achieve these goals. *As rational agents, all human beings have access to the supreme law of morality, i.e. the categorical imperative.*
- b. Dignity is worthy of respect, and this is the second fundamental moral law: we ought to respect other humans’ dignity. To respect one’s dignity is to respect one’s autonomy. To respect one’s autonomy consists in not removing her abilities to rationally make up her own mind. This is a moral obligation that we have toward all human beings, including ourselves.

By now, you should have a good grasp on Kant’s view on ethics. It remains to see what objections one can raise against it, and what answers could be provided.

14.7 Objections and Answers

Up to now, we have seen that:

(1) Kant puts on emphasis on the motives when it comes to the moral value of our action: to do the right thing is to act in conformity and for the sake of doing our duty

(2) Our duty consists in that we do and we do only what we could want everybody else to do. This ultimately amounts to a requirement of logical consistency.

(3) The strong link between morality and rationality comes from the fact to be rational is the only way for us to be free and to have dignity.

(4) Human dignity is worthy of absolute respect.

There are three main objections that are usually raised against Kant’s view.

Against “Duty Only” – Several philosophers have criticized Kant for his extreme emphasis on duty. These criticisms generally go under the following lines:

1. Reason is not enough

Kant considers human beings as strictly divided into two parts: the body on one side, and reason and free will on the other side. According to him, the moral agent has nothing to do with the body (with its desires and emotions), and everything to do with reason and free will.

But is the division that strict? Is it true that it is necessary and sufficient to act rationally in order to act morally? Some people consider that, while rationality may be necessary, it is not sufficient. Sentiments should be part of the story.

Example: you and your best friend after the break up

Virtue ethics will tell us that it is an important part of moral life to build up a virtuous character. According to virtue ethicists, you are being virtuous only if you actually take some pleasure in doing good.

2. Desires and emotions are not always unreliable

Some could argue that we can educate our emotional responses to various situations. So that our emotions become like secondary effects of our free will

Example: Learn to like to share your toys

—→ *So: Kant’s view of the moral agent seems incomplete. To make our decisions on the basis of logic and rationality may be necessary to act morally. It may not be enough though, and some argue that the way in which we do whatever reason dictates to do is to be taken into account.*

A restricted view on morality – Kant has a point when he explains that the only way for us to be truly free is to be autonomous, that is, for us to act according to reasons. He seems also to be right when he says that our moral obligation towards human beings is to respect their ability for autonomous actions.

From this, however, it does follow that only humans are worthy of moral consideration. Of course, non-human things do not possess the kind of autonomy/dignity that humans possess. But this does not mean that they cannot be part of the moral realm, if not as agent, at least as the bearers of interests that are worthy of consideration.

From this, it would follow that, while our morality is indeed grounded in rationality, and while it is indeed a moral obligation to respect humans’ dignity, it is also our moral obligation to take non-human things’ interest into account (especially animals).

Against absolute rules – Many have criticized Kant’s view on the idea that there are absolute moral rules which, very much like the laws of logic, do suffer any exceptions.

Example: Is it always wrong to lie?

Strict kantian : that it is wrong to lie follows from the categorical imperative: nobody can want that lying be a universal law. It is self-defeating (lies would not work anymore if people were not expecting other to tell the truth)

Objection – the fugitive in your home and the Gestapo at your door: should you lie? The point is of course to think about circumstances in which what seems to be right to do is the violate one of our most cherished absolute rules.

Two Possible Answers to the objections for the strict Kantian :

1. Uncertainty of consequences:
 - By the time you lie, the fugitive may have left your house, say through the bedroom window, and the Gestapo is going to find him if you send them away (while it would give him some time if they were to search your house)
 - The point is: because the actual consequences of our decisions are largely unpredictable, violating a rule could always end up to produce more harm.
 - More generally: we have no true power on the consequences of our actions, hence we should focus on what we are fully responsible for: our motives or rules of our action.
2. Moral Safety:

It follows from the above argument about the uncertainty of consequences that, according to Kant, we are not morally responsible of the consequences. By contrast, we are morally responsible of our motives, and fully so. So, we should secure the morality of our motives.

In other words:

 - if you break the rule of the categorical imperative, and the consequences are bad, you are morally responsible and you have done something bad
 - if you don't break the rule of the categorical imperative, and the consequences are bad, you are not morally responsible and you have not done something bad: you have been unlucky instead.

The problems with the above answers are that:

1. We have sometimes a pretty clear idea of the consequences – the world is not so unpredictable
2. It seems that we are responsible for the consequences of our actions when these consequences are foreseeable.

Kant thought there is a kind of safety in doing your duty. You cannot be held responsible for the consequences, if you have done your duty.

This seems unacceptable: if I can clearly foresee the consequences of an action, and that I act this way anyway, I am responsible for the consequences.

Conflict between rules :

- Some argue that if we were to strictly apply Kant's rule, then we would face moral dilemma, in which two absolute rules enter in conflict.

In the case of the fugitive and the Gestapo, the rules would be:

1. one ought not to be an accomplice in the murder of an innocent
2. one ought not to lie

- Kant's answer is twofold:

1. By definition, Reason cannot be contradictory (so, try again, you probably made a mistake)
2. As believers (if you are one), we must admit that God would not put us in such situations

It is far from clear that these answer are satisfactory.

Conclusion :

The objections above attack the core of Kant's view on ethics:

1. that morality has everything to do with rationality
2. that morality consists in absolute moral rules
3. that the realm of moral consideration is restricted to humans

These objections do not show that Kant is being inconsistent, or that his theory is logically flawed. Instead, they attempt to show that his view conflicts with some of our moral intuitions – about the kind of person that we want to consider as moral persons and about the possibility of exceptions.

Kant can well answer that our moral intuitions are just false in these cases, and stick to his view that there are absolute moral rules, which are rationally grounded, and that all that counts is whether we follows these rules or not.

14.8 Conclusion: Kant's legacy

Insights to keep from Kant :

Morality ultimately grounded in rationality : moral rules are just what reasonable, free people would agree upon if they would set aside their prejudices and self-interest

Reason and the moral life : we are morally obligated as *rational agents*. We are autonomous, hence responsible of our actions, when we use reason. Reason is thus the most reliable way to figure out moral issues.

Motives and moral credit : The reasons why we do what we do count a lot for moral credit. Motives are important

The beauty of duty : duty is one of the best of our motives. There is something immensely admirable about doing your duty *despite* your immediate inclinations.

On the moral point of view : there is something very suspicious about wanting to make exceptions for ourselves. *Universality* is a key aspect of morality.

What is missing in Kant :

The problem of absolute rules : we need a better account on whether or not there are exceptions to the rules.

The neglect of emotions and character – some argue that an element of moral life consists in overcoming the split between duty and inclination through education. Our emotions can be educated, and part of building our character consists in educating our emotional responses such that our emotions comply with the standard of reason. To care about people may be taken as an important virtue of character.

The place of consequences – Consequences, and in particular foreseeable consequences should be part of the picture.

Possible refinement of Kant's view :

- Some advocates of duty theory suggest that Kant's view is actually more flexible than usually depicted. The trick is to formulate the maxim of our actions appropriately. Different formulations of the maxim may lead to different conclusions.

Example: 'It is okay to lie' vs 'It is okay to lie in order to save an innocent's life'

- Some also think that Kant's view this can be accepted without turning rules into absolutes: all it takes is that the exception (in given circumstances) would be accepted by others.

- Is this true? what if we universalize: "one can lie to murderers seeking for a fugitive hiding in our house?" Would not this have as a consequence that murderers would not believe you anymore, which makes it self-defeating?

Maybe the lying case is the hardest one. It may be true in general that Kantianism is less rigid than often depicted, and that, if we refine the way in which we formulate the maxim, then we could find ways out of the biggest objections.