Kant’s categorical imperative

Recap

What makes an action **morally valuable**?

- Not just the effects.
  - Even if it does have good effects.
- Not just performing it.
  - Even if it has positive expected value.
- Not just intentionally performing it.
  - Even if it is **in accordance w/duty**.
- Not even performing it because it brings you joy, or because you **feel** compelled to.
  - Even if it should be **encouraged**.
- It’s morally valuable because the agent performs it **for the right reason**
  - from the motive of duty
  - out of respect for the moral law

These equalities are Kant’s. You might like right reasons picture without the duty/law stuff.

The nature of the the moral law

Recall: categorical imperatives vs. hypothetical imperatives.

- Seems like the moral law must be categorical.
  - If it weren’t, couldn’t we just “opt-out”?
    - In other words: if it weren’t, couldn’t we just stop caring about the antecedent?
- How is it categorical?
  - Whatever it is, it must flow from something that holds unconditionally—of necessity—for those whose to whom it applies:
    - The rational faculty

Roughly, think of it like this: every law of morality will be of the form, **if you are a rational agent, do this**. For rational agents, the condition here—“if you are a rational agent”—is met necessarily.
**Formulation 1 of categorical imperative**

**Big Question** for any more theory:

- Why are the laws of morality binding? Why can’t we opt-out?

Specifically for Kant:

- How can reason categorically bind us to act in a certain way? Why can’t we opt out of reason’s demands?

**Amazing analogy!**

- There are requirements of theoretical reason that apply categorically:
  - Some theoretical requirements
    - Don’t believe contradictions.
    - Make only inferences for which you have justification.
  - Analogy: practical reason can do the same.
  - A practical requirement: hypothetical case
    - You intend to bring about X, and you learn that to bring about X, you must do Y. Practical rationality says you must either:
      - Give up your intention to bring about X.
      - OR
      - Intend to do Y.
  - A practical requirement: categorical case (Formulation 1)
    - “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”
    - [In more accessible terms: whatever you do you should act for reasons that could serve as acceptable reasons for anyone—to act otherwise is to act inconsistently.]
    - Example maxim: whenever one has an exam and doesn’t feel like studying, she shall copy off her neighbor’s work.
    - Counter-example maxim? whenever one has an exam and doesn’t feel like studying, and everyone else is well-prepared, and she can do it without being caught, she shall copy off her neighbor’s work.
Formulation 2 of categorical imperative

- Key quotes
  - Value of rational beings: “man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to an arbitrarily used by this or that will.”
  - Rational awareness of this value. “[Man] must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end.”

- Formulation 2
  “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”

  [In all action one should respect others, and oneself, as sources of value and never simply as instruments for one’s own purposes.]

  - This formulation prohibits the cheat-only-if-others-are-prepared maxim.
  - This seems like some sort of trick! Where did formulation 1 come from? What does it have to do with formulation 1?
  Here’s a way to think about it:
  1. As rational beings, we are autonomous deliberators.
  2. To treat a rational being as a mere end is therefore to subvert that being’s rational capacity for autonomous rational deliberation.
  3. But if I will that subversion of others, then by Formulation 1, I will that subversion of myself.
  4. Willing to subvert my own will is irrational.
  5. Therefore, Formulation 2.

A worry from last class

Is immorality irrationality?
As we’ve seen, the underlying rationale for Kant’s approach is that the source of morality is in reason or rationality.

- Could it really be that those who are (im)moral are (im)moral because in some important sense they are acting (ir)rationally??