

Introduction to Philosophy Tutorial 6, Week 8

Kant's ethics

1. Kant distinguishes the idea of a categorical imperative from that of a hypothetical imperative. What is the difference between the two?
2. If I ought to perform some action, φ , as a result of a categorical imperative, then I ought to φ whether or not doing so promotes achievement of one of my goals, or satisfaction of one of my desires. It seems that moral oughts have this feature, but is it *only* moral oughts that have it? Try to give two other examples of oughts that are plausibly *not* dependent on our desires.
3. One way in which Kant formulates the Categorical Imperative is as follows: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." Consider the example Rachels calls "The Case of the Inquiring Murderer." A man asks where my friend has gone, and I know that this man will kill my friend if he finds her. So I lie to the man about my friend's whereabouts. Kant suggests that in this case I must be acting according to the maxim "It is permissible to lie." Is this correct? Try to give three examples of other maxims in accordance with which I could be acting.
4. Rachels explains that Kant did not believe that animals have moral worth, because animals are not rational.
 - What connection might there be between whether a being is rational and whether their *actions* have moral worth?
 - Is there a connection between whether a being can perform actions that have moral worth and whether that being *itself* has moral worth?
5. In addition to the formulation of the Categorical Imperative given above, Kant gives at least two more:
 - "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."
 - "Act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends"He claims that the formulations are *equivalent*. What *could* he mean by this? Try to give three possibilities.
6. It is possibly what is sometimes called the "Humanity formulation" of the Categorical Imperative—"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"—that most brings out the contrast between Kant's ethics and consequentialism.
 - The consequences of actions might figure in deciding what is morally right even according to Kant—how might this be so?
 - Despite this, Kant's ethics are definitely not consequentialist. Try to explain why this is so.
7. Possibly one of the biggest problems with the idea that moral rules are absolute is that they can conflict. Try to give a couple of examples in which different moral obligations can require different actions.