

## The Implication of Kant's Moral Philosophy in our Society Today

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### ABSTRACT

The contemporary society characterised by the influx of technological advancement has continued to experience progress to an unimaginable degree. With the inception of technology, innovations in communication, travel, production of goods and services and social relation has become possible. Hence, man in his widest experience has had great improvement in the way He lives his life and interact with his fellow human being and of course is environment. This progress evident in the impact of technology has had its attendant challenges, allowing man to question the real advantages of the offshoots of technology. The presence of war and Man's inhumanity to Man, the strive for power and love for wealth even to the detriment of the other, the abuse of means of communication and the media outreach especially as it affects the morality of the people etc have really continued to present an antithetical evaluation of the good sides of innovations made possible by technological advancement. Tin the light of these, the importance of Kantian ethical Philosophy remains indispensable in our contemporary society today. The aim of this article hence would be to see to what extent can Kant's moral philosophy go in moderating the excesses of the society. One of the paramount concerns in this article would be to know the basic approach to basic questions of man in his environment and how possible it is to respond to issues like disaster, murder, war, disrespect for citizenry by the government etc.

**Keywords:** Morality, Ethics, imperatives

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this essay is to consider how the dominant moral theories can be applied to the discourse on the respect of the human person and his environment. In specific times, specific values take priority. Kantian ethics established the basic principles of respect for human beings as ends in themselves, and for autonomy of rational beings; thus it cannot be ignored. In political decision-making, simply having good intentions does not suffice; they must be accompanied by responsibility. Both the ethics of consequentialism and virtue ethics (the virtue of wisdom) deal with responsibility for the future. Kant, unlike Mill, believed that certain types of actions (including murder, theft, and lying) were absolutely prohibited, even in cases where the action would bring about more happiness than the alternative. For Kantians, there are two questions that we must ask ourselves whenever we decide to act: (i) Can I rationally will that everyone act as I propose to act? If the answer is no, then we must not perform the action. (ii) Does my action respect the goals of human beings rather than merely using them for my own purposes? Again, if the

answer is no, then we must not perform the action. (Kant believed that these questions were equivalent). Kant's theory is an example of a deontological moral theory—according to these theories, the rightness or wrongness of actions does not depend on their consequences but on whether they fulfill our duty.

Kant believed that there was a supreme principle of morality, and he referred to it as the Categorical Imperative which determines what our moral duties are.

The aim of this paper is to consider whether the dominant moral theories can be applied to the discourse of War, disaster situations and other basic human challenges as mentioned above. There is enormous significance: found in the outstanding work of Immanuel Kant, this kind of ethics establishes the fundamental principles of respect for human dignity, autonomy, and accepting that a human being is an end in itself (Kant, 1968a)

Using the medical screening of patients to determine their priority for treatment, the separation of a large number of casualties, in military or civilian disaster medical care, into

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three groups: those who cannot be expected to survive even with treatment, those who will recover without treatment, and the priority group of those who need treatment in order to survive (Winslow, 1982, p.1). Does the human person need categorisation? Categorising people in this way may be considered to be ethically unacceptable since medical care should be equally available to all who need it.

### Morality and Imperatives

What does it mean for one's duty to be determined by the categorical imperative? What is an imperative? An imperative is a command. So, "Pay your taxes!" is an imperative, as are "Stop kicking me!" and "Don't kill animals!"

### Hypothetical Imperatives

These imperatives command conditionally on your having a relevant desire. E.g. "If you want to go to medical school, study biology in college." If you don't want to go to medical school, this command doesn't apply to you. Another example, your father says, "If you are hungry, then go eat something!" - If you aren't hungry, then you are free to ignore the command.

### Categorical Imperatives

These command unconditionally. E.g. "Don't cheat on your taxes." Even if you want to cheat and doing so would serve your interests, you may not cheat.

### Relationship between Morality and Categorical Imperatives

Morality must be based on the categorical imperative because morality is such that you are commanded by it, and is such that you cannot opt out of it or claim that it does not apply to you.

### How Does the Categorical Imperative Work?

The categorical imperative has three different formulations. That is to say, there are three different ways of saying what it is. Kant claims that all three do in fact say the same thing, but it is currently disputed whether this is true. The second formulation is the easiest to understand, but the first one is most clearly a categorical imperative. Here is the first formulation.

### First Formulation

#### *The Formula of Universal Law*

"Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law [of nature]."

A maxim is the rule or principle on which you act. For example, I might make it my maxim to give at least as much to charity each year as I spend on eating out, or I might make it my maxim only to do what will benefit some member of my family.

The command states, crudely, that you are not allowed to do anything yourself that you would not be willing to allow everyone else to do as well. You are not allowed to make exceptions for yourself. For example, if you expect other people to keep their promises, then you are obligated to keep your own promises. More accurately, it commands that every maxim you act on must be such that you are willing to make it the case that everyone always act on that maxim when in a similar situation. For example, if I wanted to lie to get something I wanted, I would have to be willing to make it the case that everyone always lied to get what they wanted - but if this were to happen no one would ever believe you, so the lie would not work and you would not get what you wanted. So, if you willed that such a maxim (of lying) should become a universal law, then you would thwart your goal - thus, it is impermissible to lie, according to the categorical imperative. It is impermissible because the only way to lie is to make an exception for yourself.

## KANT ON MORAL WORTH

### The Moral Worth of Persons

Kant also has something to say about what makes someone a good person. Keep in mind that Kant intends this to go along with the rest of his theory, and what one's duty is would be determined by the categorical imperative. However, one can treat this as a separate theory to some extent, and consider that one's duty is determined by some other standard. Keep in mind that what is said below has to do with how one evaluates people, not actions. A person's actions are right or wrong, a person is morally worthy or lacks moral worth (i.e., is morally base). A person's actions determine her moral worth, but there is more to this than merely seeing if the actions are right or wrong.

Kant argues that a person is good or bad depending on the motivation of their actions and not on the goodness of the consequences of those actions. By "motivation" I mean what caused you to do the action (i.e., your reason for doing it). Kant argues that one can have moral worth (i.e., be a good person) only if one is motivated by morality. In other words, if a

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person's emotions or desires cause them to do something, then that action cannot give them moral worth. This may sound odd, but there is good reason to agree with Kant.

Imagine that I win the lottery and I'm wondering what to do with the money. I look around for what would be the most fun to do with it: buy a yacht, travel in first class around the world, get that knee operation, etc.. I decide that what would be really fun is to give the money to charity and to enjoy that special feeling you get from making people happy, so I give all my lottery money away. According to Kant, I am not a morally worthy person because I did this, after all I just did whatever I thought would be the most fun and there is nothing admirable about such a selfish pursuit. It was just lucky for those charities that I thought giving away money was fun. Moral worth only comes when you do something because you know that it is your duty and you would do it regardless of whether you liked it.

### Kant and Consequences

A reason why Kant is not concerned with consequences can be seen in the following example. Imagine two people out together drinking at a bar late one night, and each of them decides to drive home very drunk. They drive in different directions through the middle of nowhere. One of them encounters no one on the road, and so gets home without incident regardless of totally reckless driving. The other drunk is not so lucky and encounters someone walking at night, and kills the pedestrian with the car.

Kant would argue that based on these actions both drunks are equally bad, and the fact that one person got lucky does not make them any better than the other drunk. After all, they both made the same choices, and nothing within either one's control had anything to do with the difference in their actions. The same reasoning applies to people who act for the right reasons. If both people act for the right reasons, then both are morally worthy, even if the actions of one of them happen to lead to bad consequences by bad luck.

### The Wrong Interpretation

Consider the case described above about the lottery winner giving to charity. Imagine that he gives to a charity and he intends to save hundreds of starving children in a remote village. The food arrives in the village but a group of rebels finds out that they have food,

and they come to steal the food and end up killing all the children in the village and the adults too. The intended consequence of feeding starving children was good, and the actual consequences were bad. Kant is not saying that we should look at the intended consequences in order to make a moral evaluation. Kant is claiming that regardless of intended or actual consequences, moral worth is properly assessed by looking at the motivation of the action, which may be selfish even if the intended consequences are good.

### Kantian Moral Philosophy and Time

The fact that quite different acts are appropriate in different times had been considered back in ancient times; evidence can be found in the well known passage in the Biblical text of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) beginning: For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up... (Ecclesiastes, 1966,p. 604).

In spite of the evidence provided for this in the existential speech in the book of Kohelet, there is a clear need for any society to have rules regulating human behaviour; and these rules have to be general, not dependent on the moment. Both these aspects, the need for a general law and the awareness of the particularity or uniqueness of the present moment have to be incorporated into adequate theories of ethics, as these contrasting aspects are embodied in praxis.

We can suppose that the rules themselves have developed on the basis of long-term experience of particular situations. In our discussion, we shall try to shed light on some of the aspects that should be considered in a discussion on temporality in ethics. Heather Dyke wonders why the temporal dimension has been neglected in ethical theories: Ethics seek answers to questions about the moral status of human actions and human lives... Lives have temporal extension, and are experienced from a sequence of temporal perspectives. Thus, one would think that answers to ethical questions should take some account of their temporal features. Yet there has never been a systematic study of the relations between time and ethics (Dyke, 2003, p.1). In recent years, several works have focused on the intersection between time and ethics. Time and Ethics (Dyke, 2003) is a collection of findings from a conference held at the

University of Otago in New Zealand in 2001. The book highlights the various ways these phenomena intersect, such as the issue of personal identity over time, which can make it difficult to hold a person responsible for a deed carried out many years previously; or the relevance of the utilitarian criteria of the amount of happiness in a universe in which time is infinite.

Several decades earlier, Hans Jonas propounded a temporal perspective of ethics in his concept of responsibility (Jonas, 1984), which is a crucial resource for the ethics of technology and environment. Another resource led to Czech philosopher Jan Sokol's discussion of time: inspired by the work of Paul Ricoeur, he published a book titled *Time and Rhythm* (Sokol, 1996) in which he gives an overview of the understanding of time in philosophy, traditions, and various sciences. In his later essay "Ethics and Time", he adopted an original temporal perspective on ethics (Sokol, 1998).

Sokol (1998) suggested that temporal features were omitted from modern ethics, probably under the enormous influence of Immanuel Kant. Kant sought to exclude time totally from his concept of ethics, since he considered it to be incompatible with the concept of freedom in his moral philosophy. Sokol points out that some parts of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant, 1968b) seem to be more radical than his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1968c) because practical reason (which concerns the sphere of morality) does not acknowledge temporal differences. Existence in time then seems simply to be one way in which a thinking being sensorially imagines the world, and this is reminiscent of the thinking of Plato (Plato, 2001), for whom time, which came into existence simultaneously with cosmos, was just a moving image of eternity (Sokol, 1998).

In his categorical imperative, Kant succeeded in formulating a rule that was completely independent of temporal conditions. In his struggle to save the freedom of human beings, Kant tries to make freedom possible by excluding causality and spatiotemporal constraints from the realm of morality. In fact, Kant identifies free will with practical reason because autonomous will is the faculty to decide to act in accordance with the moral law, and it is the substance of practical reason that establishes this moral law (Kant, 1968a). Moral law is recognized by practical reason, not from experience; while morality concerns the realm

of things in themselves, human acts as temporal empirical facts are just phenomena (*Erscheinungen*) (Kant, 1968a).

Kant eliminated any empirical differences connected with a specific situation through the universal form of the categorical imperative. This ethics, which excludes all that is related to experience, presupposes that the duties of all rational beings are equal and enables us to decide what is good or bad once and for all. According to Jan Sokol (1998), the disadvantage of this kind of ethics lies in the fact that instead of seeking out a moral decision one can instead comply with an (apparent) "obligation", and this is understood to be evident and obvious—yet, in some situations, understanding what "one's duty" may be (in that actual situation) difficult. Besides this, there is no space left for important aspects of moral life, including metanoia, change of mind, and one cannot imagine how actions like penitence or forgiveness could be universalized (Sokol, 1998).

### The Need to Take Responsibility

The questionable nature of an ethics which does not take into account temporal dimensions time seems more obvious in the context of the political sphere. Kant insisted on the a priori character of moral law, and he strictly denied the moral relevance of the consequences of a deed: it is not the outcome achieved by the action that is relevant but the motive behind the action; it is only "good will" that matters (Kant, 1968a, p. 393). In contrast to this view, Max Weber, in his famous lecture *Politics as a Vocation* (Weber, 1964), formulates two different kinds of ethics: an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*), which Weber sees as a necessary quality in politicians (*ibid.*).

The need to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions is especially great among politicians, since they make decisions which may prove good or fatal to a great number of people. Therefore, a politician cannot afford to decide only on the basis of an ethics of conviction or his own good intention. Politicians, according to Weber, must subscribe to the ethics of ultimate ends—that is, responsibility (Weber, 1964). These two kinds of ethics—based on intentions and responsibility—are complementary and necessary for a vocation in politics (*ibid.*).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1966) explains the need to take responsibility for the consequences of one's

actions and for history—at least, the history of one's nation—in a similar way, but places greater emphasis on the dimensions of responsibility. He criticises the “neo-protestant ethics of good intentions” and attributes the idea of responsibility for history before God to Christian ethics (Bonhoeffer, 1966). According to Bonhoeffer, “good intention” is not sufficient for a truly moral act, as there is always responsibility for success as well: “Wisdom and foolishness are not ethically indifferent, as the neo-protestant ethics of good intentions aimed to teach us” (Bonhoeffer, 1966, pp. 17-18). Bonhoeffer promotes an Aristotelian- Thomistic respect for wisdom, which is one of the cardinal virtues in virtue ethics: Since success is not morally neutral, and neither are foolishness and wisdom (Bonhoeffer, 1966).

Owing to the situation confronting the German nation after Hitler came to power, Bonhoeffer had to find a new way to reflect upon the moral state of society and to deliberate concepts in ethics. He tried to find out why the German nation was obedient to a regime which was clearly immoral. Bonhoeffer was convinced that the cause was not to be found in the lack of bravery and self-sacrifice of the people, but in the belief that obeying the law was the highest moral principle: “We had seen the meaning and the greatness of our lives in the subordination of all our personal wishes and thoughts to the task which was put on us” (ibid., p. 12).

For the Germans vocation and freedom were two sides of the same coin; in German thinking, the idea of freedom was propounded passionately from Luther to the philosophy of idealism, but it was a freedom seen in the deliverance from selfishness by working for the whole. These moral qualities were misused and there was a lack of personal courage: it is much easier to solve things by fulfilling a principle than accepting personal responsibility for a specific solution (Bonhoeffer, 1966). Bonhoeffer prioritizes free, responsible acts.

If we compare Kantian ethics with the idea of responsibility in Weber's lecture (Weber, 1964) and especially with Bonhoeffer's thinking on pursuing the right course of action in an extremely arduous situation, there are indications that Kantian ethics may be—in some contexts and situations—blind to the challenge of time. Rationalistic aspiration leads a person to strive for rules that are so apparent and indisputable that they can liberate conscience from uncertainty. But uncertainty, chance and

risk cannot be avoided completely in any human action, including morally relevant actions. This does not mean that rules are not useful but that moral life cannot be reduced to them. In some cases, responsibility for others prevents us from providing the information demanded and, in the worst case, encourages us to lie. In his novel *Les Misérables* Victor Hugo provides a good example of such a situation: only the lie of a truthful religious sister who had never before lied in her life can save the lives and happiness of other people. In such a case, following the rule (to avoid being responsible for breaking it) would be just selfish. We cannot expect there to be some kind of pre-established harmony which would guarantee that following the rule would lead to the best result in each case.

The solution in the novel contrasts sharply with Kant's position which has been criticized by Bonhoeffer: Kant insists that it was right to tell the truth, in keeping with the principle of truthfulness, even in a situation where a friend is hiding in his house and the murderer pursuing him comes and asks for him (Kant, 1996). Bonhoeffer considers this conclusion to be absurd; for him the solution is not found in following rules, nor does he see abiding by the law to be a source of the integrity of a moral being, it is found in obeying one's conscience (Bonhoeffer, 1998). For Bonhoeffer conscience begins with and seeks out not the law but living God and the living human person: “A conscience, freed from the law, will not shy away from taking on the guilt of another...A freed conscience... is open to those close to us in their hour of need” (Bonhoeffer, 1998, p. 279).

We may reasonably suppose that Kant's answer would differ if he were in a real situation; especially, if the Gestapo or terrorists were coming—instead of one isolated murderer- and there was no chance of his defending the friend. Kant was simply discussing truth-telling in general and was just thinking about “a case”, and was not—in contrast to Bonhoeffer—in “a situation” in which his friends really might be endangered by his truth-telling.

Romano Guardini highlights this distinction: While “a case” concerns an example used in moral theory to illustrate a difference in the circumstances which could change what is morally permitted, “a situation” involves me, concerns me and my existence (Guardini, 1931). The conscience always relates to a real “situation” and not an abstract “case” to be speculated upon theoretically. A “situation” is

constituted by various, often contradictory, demands and human and material relations. As Guardini states “each situation we find ourselves in is unique. It has never occurred before and it will never occur again. Therefore, what is supposed to occur within it will never have occurred before. And it is this which should be described and creatively elaborated on” (Guardini, 1931, pp. 31-32). In a situation the conscience is directed by previous experience and also develops gradually over time.

### The Relation of Norms and Principles

From this embodiment in time, it follows that norms and principles always relate—in real life—to a particular situation, and to insist that they should be applied in a particular way may lead to absurd results. Therefore, the manner of application must be left to the conscience of the moral agent. On the other hand, the principles cannot be inferred from the situation itself. The idea of “situational ethics” as propagated by Joseph Fletcher (1966) seems attractive, but the principle of “love” (agape or caritas) on which it is based is too vague to serve as a criterion of ethics. J. Lédl in *Nothing but Love? Optio Fundamentalis as a Criterion in the Situation Ethics* attempts to substitute the vague moral criterion (presented by Fletcher) with the concept of “fundamental decision”, and explains that in real life the quality of a moral decision depends on the moral level of the moral agent (Lédl, 2009).

Here, Lédl's position seems to come close to that found in virtue ethics which holds the well-developed notion that there are stages of virtues that a moral agent can attain. Virtue ethics includes temporal dimensions: In the different stages of maturation an individual (communities or nations) attains we can expect and demand different levels of virtues. Virtue ethics, which allocates the central position to wisdom (Aristotle, 2013), comes close to the concept of responsibility. When their capacity for wisdom is improved, the individual can make better decisions, foresee the consequences of a specific act or inactivity and take responsibility.

From what has been said, it is clear that in difficult situations personal responsibility can be expected only from a person who has attained a high moral level. But the personal moral condition is not a constant; it is a dynamic factor depending on personal effort and knowledge. Undoubtedly, Kant's moral philosophy constitutes one the most influential conceptions

of ethics in the modern times. Kant's respect for human dignity, the human being as an end in itself, means that no human being can be used as a means for any other end (Kant, 1968b), and this is always significant. Besides being important in philosophy, it is vital to other disciplines that rely on a concept of the human being and his/her autonomy, especially politics, and in medical ethics and bioethics, in relation to protecting the right of a person—or a patient—to make decisions about themselves. The most influential book in bioethics, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009), postulates that the principle of autonomy is one of four key principles, and makes explicit reference to Kant in many contexts.

### The Undesirability of Categorical Imperative

This categorical imperative cannot be denied, even where the dimension of time is incorporated into the ethical discourse, and it is also valid in the disaster ethics. Hans Jonas in his *Imperative of Responsibility* adds a time horizon to the moral calculus present in Kantian ethics (Jonas, 1984). In his “Old and new imperatives” chapter, Jonas explains that Kant's categorical imperative “was addressed to the individual, and its criterion was instantaneous” (ibid., p. 12), while his own “ethic of the future” takes account of real consequences.

Jonas had to distinguish his attempt at formulating a new ethics from earlier forms of “future-oriented ethics” (p. 12), in particular from modern utopia and from the ethics of fulfilment in the life hereafter. The latter, he explains, concerns a life that is good in itself (including virtues, like justice, charity, purity of heart etc.) and that is supposed to be awarded in future life, and, therefore, this preferable way of life is the best option in any case, even if there is no hereafter.

Thus, the presence characteristic of ethics is preserved in this case (Jonas, 1984). The relation between modern utopia (represented notably by Marxism) and ethics is different. The modern idea of progress made possible the emergence of a secular form of chiliasm, in which everything preceding the coming ideal society is understood just as a preliminary stage of it. Therefore, the ethics of the present time has only a preliminary character, while the real ethics of the future (in the coming society) is not yet clear and actual: the ethics in the preliminary stage need not do justice to human nature, as events occurring in the present time are

understood just as a means for the future (Jonas, 1984).

In his thoroughgoing analysis, Jonas explains the difference between the stance explained above and his ethics of responsibility for the future, which is authentic and does justice to the demands of today—that is, following moral rules (including Kant's categorical imperative) and aiming to fulfil the meaning of life of the individual in the present time. Therefore, Jonas attempts to formulate an ethics which is neither chiliastic nor utopian. Faced with the threats brought by technology, including the threat of nuclear war, ecological destruction, and genetic engineering, Jonas takes seriously the moral obligation to be aware of the altered nature of human action: it may result in total destruction. In contrast to earlier forms of ethics that took into account only the rules of behaviour and one person's responsibilities to another (that is, relations between existing people), it is now necessary to extend the scope of morality to include nature, and to future generations. The objective of Jonas' work was to develop an ethical theory adequate for an era of modern technology that possesses the ability to cause long term damage to nature or even make future human life impossible. While *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* is an attempt to provide the general basis of the concept of responsibility in ethics, Jonas's later work *Technik, Medizin und Ethik: Zur Praxis des Prinzips Verantwortung* is "the applied part" of the former, and gives a more detailed elaboration of his ethics of technology (Simek, 2014, p. 51).

In it, Jonas warns against new medical technologies, especially genetic manipulations, which may make it possible to deliberately shape future generations, and disrupt the successful process of evolution (Jonas, 1987, p. 174). Today, the new possibilities of human enhancement have led to the emergence of the concepts of transhumanism and posthumanism, and urgent questions about the moral limits of medicine: Should human nature be changed? Should we (ir) reversibly change the anatomy, physiology or genes of individuals or society as a whole? Contemporary medicine has to take future generations into consideration (Payne, 2015).

Because of the threat associated with the vulnerability of nature and the lack of power over technology, Jonas is convinced that human survival depends on purposeful efforts to care for our planet and its future. Given the nature of

modern technology combined with science and the fact that it has spread all over the world, the moral philosophy of our time has to extend the previous area of responsibility. Jonas summed up the challenge of the time in a new moral imperative: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life", or in other words: "Do not compromise the conditions for an indefinite continuation of humanity on earth" (Jonas, 1984, p. 11). Jonas's concept of responsibility provides us with a way of avoiding ethical relativism, without neglecting the challenge of the time

There is always an element of wager present in human action. If all the interests of humankind were at stake, Jonas suggests that a bad prognosis would prevail over a good one: "the heuristic of fear" (Jonas, 1984, p. 26) can help us to avoid the most evil disasters. Jonas's attempt to formulate an ethics adequate to the time led him to a widely accepted precautionary principle. In questions of disaster ethics, the precautionary principle could prevent man-made catastrophes. From the precautionary principle, it follows that there is a social responsibility to protect the public from exposure to harm, and the onus is on those performing the action to provide proof that the new technology or process is not harmful (Wingspread Conference on the Precautionary Principle, 1998). The heuristic of fear teaches us that a bad prognosis should have priority over a good one. As long as the danger is unknown, we do not know what to preserve and why. Knowledge of this comes, against all logic and method, from the perception what to avoid. This is perceived first and teaches us, by revulsion of feeling which acts ahead of knowledge, to apprehend the value whose antithesis so affects us. We know the thing at stake only when we know that it is at stake (Jonas, 1984, p. 27). "Uncertainty may be our permanent fate - which has moral consequences" (Jonas, 1984, p. 191). The moral consequences especially concern politicians, since they have the power to put the interests of others at stake, and therefore, they are responsible for them (Jonas, 1984).

### CONCLUSION

A careful reader may notice that in the example above one of the selfish person's intended consequences is to make him happy, and so it might seem to be that intended consequences do matter. One might think Kant is claiming that if one of my intentions is to make myself happy,

that my action is not worthy. This is a mistake. The consequence of making myself happy is a good consequence, even according to Kant. Kant clearly thinks that people being happy is a good thing.

There is nothing wrong with doing something with an intended consequence of making yourself happy, that is not selfishness. You can get moral worth doing things that you enjoy, but the reason you are doing them cannot be that you enjoy them; the reason must be that they are required by duty. Also, there is a tendency to think that Kant says it is always wrong to do something that just causes your own happiness, like buying an ice cream cone.

This is not the case. Kant thinks that you ought to do things to make yourself happy as long as you make sure that they are not immoral (i.e., contrary to duty), and that you would refrain from doing them if they were immoral. Getting ice cream is not immoral, and so you can go ahead and do it. Doing it will not make you a morally worthy person, but it won't make you a bad person either.

Many actions which are permissible but not required by duty are neutral in this way. According to Kant a good person is someone who always does their duty because it is their duty. It is fine if they enjoy doing it, but it must be the case that they would do it even if they did not enjoy it. The overall theme is that to be a good person you must be good for goodness sake.

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