

Kristen Bernal

Professor Jeffrey Dueck

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Kantianism

Kantianism was the ethical philosophy developed by German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant created this form of ethics to highlight the focus on motives behind actions, rather than the overall consequences of those actions. Immanuel Kant believed in the categorical imperative that we must always act in a way that we believe is just under a universal law. He had a moral philosophy of freedom, believing that without human freedom, moral responsibility is impossible.

Kant's vision was based on reason with a universal system of values. He deduced three ways to perform a duty: for a reward, for the sake of achieving recognition or status, and lastly, one that identifies ethically in nature, out of a sense of duty/obligation; when you must make a sacrifice; not taking the easy way out. He formed this vision with the goal of eliminating ethical relativism.

Kant argued that rational duty was behind ethics and morals, so the only thing that matters when an action occurs, is the motive, and that the only truly good thing in the world is goodwill. With Kant's moral theory of the universal agreement that some actions are right, and some are wrong, he shows the existence of an objective, moral law, aware by everyone, making his argument absolute, and deontological. Not only are we aware of this moral law, but Kant said we "feel an obligation to obey it because it is the rational thing to do." To discover the right action, we must apply moral reason, revealing the moral law which we should obey.

An example to further elaborate on Kant's theory of moral reason is the idea of borrowing money from someone. By analyzing the maxim, one can deduce that they will satisfy a current need for money; however with the intention of not being able to payback this money. When deciding whether to keep their promise, the borrower of this money should consider whether or not their action could be universalized. Because this borrower's action is not essentially coming from good will, the borrower's action is not good.

What I find most unexplainable about Kant's theory on ethics is the difficulty in identifying whether or not someone's actions are from good intentions. There is no way of knowing without truly knowing their character, which cannot be done consistently with every action that is done. Aside from that, I do believe Kant is correct in that if someone has purely good intentions then it does not matter what comes about of their actions, because everything was done with sound and pure intentions.

According to Kant, morality is based on reason, not emotion, so should someone act in accordance with their emotions, they would be acting immorally; however, should someone act in accordance with reason, and pure intention, then they are acting morally. The good intentions that come about from actions are actually coming from good will, and are the only things truly good about the world. So, through reason, to inform good will, people are able to highlight their duties in any situation, and figure out if you're acting by a universalizable maxim. It is through this cycle of Kantian ethics that we are able to do morally good actions in the world everyday.