ENTREPRENEURIAL ETHICS

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CHAPTER 5
RATIONAL
MORAL DECISION-MAKING

Introduction

Normative moral theories generate normative moral principles. A moral principle is a *general* moral belief, value, law, rule, standard, norm, maxim, etc. which is necessary for making *particular* moral judgments rationally in specific situations. To think or deliberate ethically in a rational manner often takes the form of determining logically (rather than merely intuiting sensibly by 'feel') the extent to which a particular moral situation, idea, or issue 'fits' within or is encompassed by a general moral principle. If you think the situation fits under the principle, you will judge the moral issue favorably. If it doesn't fit in with the scope of the moral principle, you will feel something is morally wrong.

What moral principles *must* be involved in the decision to do business on Sunday?

The deployment of rational moral principles to make everyday, particular, moral decisions takes

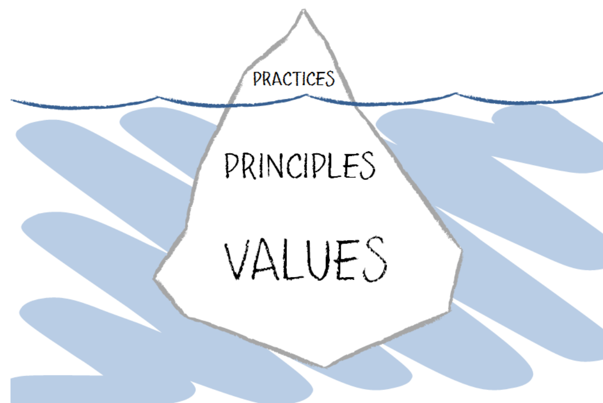
place unconsciously for most people most of the time. But your personal moral value orientation can be detected to be 'in play' behind the moral judgments you make, since you would not have made the judgments you did if you did not hold certain moral principles that would alone make such judgments possible. Those moral principles, then, could be understood as conditions for the possibility of the judgment. Which moral value orientation you are accessing when you respond automatically within a situation by making moral judgments, and how you are doing it, can be brought to light and understood using targeted thought experiments, as will be illustrated below with the runaway trolley thought experiment toward the end of this chapter.

In this chapter we will look at the normative moral principles generated by two different and very common rational moral theories or ethical perspectives. First, we will look at a deontological or duty-oriented approach to ethics focusing on the rationalist deontological moral theory of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Secondly, we will investigate the teleological moral theory called "utilitarianism" and the consequentialist moral principle generated by it as this moral perspective was described in the work of the liberal, empirical philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). We will then consider a criticism of both of these theories proposed by Professor Mollie Painter-Morland.

Both deontological and utilitarian moral theories establish rational moral principles which provide a supposedly absolute foundation upon which rational, autonomous and free moral agents—like you and me—can make sound and rationally justified moral judgments. In practice and in the context of specific moral issues, these two approaches to moral reasoning are often at loggerheads, however, as we will see. (Why do you think that is the case?) We will see numerous uses of both duty-oriented and utilitarian-oriented moral arguments on both sides of the moral issues that we will investigate throughout this text and the second text focusing on specific moral issues in business. So, it is good to get familiar with these theories now and even more important to see how these two orientations guide your own moral judgments in different situations, for it is quite certain that they do. That should become especially clear to you in the runaway trolley thought experiment.

Moral principles

Because of their importance to rational moral decision-making, we should take a moment to reflect on the nature of moral principles. As I suggested above, you can think of *moral* principles as general rules, preference commitments, belief orientations or general standards that you use as guides for making particular rational judgments. Standards (principles) allow for a kind of comparison between the particular and the general to see if the particular moral situation can be correctly subsumed under or accounted for by the general principle. We may want to determine whether a particular course of action fits under the category of 'things that will be beneficial for me in the long run', for instance, which would be the value principle by which I judge the particular proposed course of action.



Again, the belief that persons have inalienable *human rights* is a moral principle (or

set of moral principles) generated from theories of human nature that are then used to judge the particular actions of persons, states, political regimes and political/military groups' actions to see how these actions square with the principle of 'persons having inalienable human rights'.

Based on the theory of human rights, for example, the use of torture has been banned under international law and the laws of most countries. So, whether to use torture in a particular situation would have to be justified before the principle of persons possessing inalienable human rights. The concept of sustainability is another moral principle that limits the acquisition of resources by current consumers based on the rights of future generations to those same resources. Sustainability is a moral principle which can then be used to judge whether particular actions, like Norwegian whale hunting or rain forest clear-cutting, for example, is sustainable or not by comparing the particular whale hunting actions of Norwegians or the rain forest clear-cutting with the scope of the principle of sustainability. This is how the moral principles that are generated by Kant's deontological moral theory and Mill's teleological moral theory are used to ethically evaluate particular moral issues. You will be doing numerous analyses of this type.

What are the origins of these two moral theories? Kant's moral theory is derived from a deductive, analytic reflection on the rational nature of human beings, and Mill's moral theory is derived from an empirical reflection on the way in which people supposedly actually make moral judgments naturally. Both theories claim to establish the correct way to make moral judgments. Let's take a closer look.

Duty Ethics

Your moral motive, intention, and maxim

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Kant believed that you have two possible sources of motivation for your actions regarding what you should do: reason and sensible inclination; i.e., the world as thought, and the world as experienced through your senses or how you feel. Existentially, this is the difference between what you *think* you should do and what you just *feel* like doing. In general, acts done from rational conformity to correct moral principles, like Kant's "Categorical Imperative" (described below), and not from mindlessly going along with inclination or what you just feel like doing, are consistent with your moral duty, according to Kant. Moral duty is that which imposes an obligation on you to act in a specific way; what you *should* do. Moral duty should not be confused with duties that attach to social roles, such as the professional duty of a teacher to her students or the professional duties that attach to the social role of being a captain of a ship. Everyone is equally subject to moral duty.

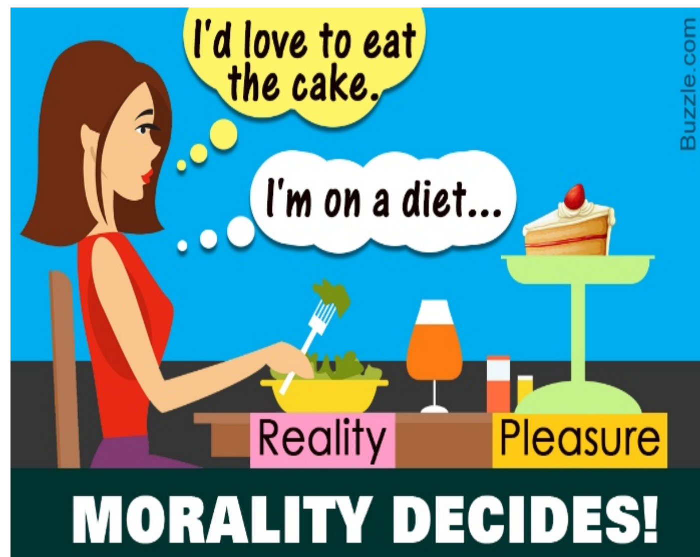
Kant deduced the nature of moral duty from the fact that human beings are rational. To act rationally is always to act from principles. Whenever I make a rational judgment about anything, I necessarily propose a principle to myself (even though I may not be conscious of doing so) that I believe is pertinent to the situation, and then I act from that *subjective* principle, just as if I were following the law, say, about speed limits. Think of speed limits as rational principles imposed by legislatures (instead of being self-imposed) concerning how fast you are allowed to drive. When you obey the speed limit (because it is the law and *not* because you might get caught and punished), then you are forming your will to act *from* principle. In this case, the rational principle is imposed upon you in the form of the speed limit law. On the other hand, if you don't speed because you

are afraid of getting caught, then you are acting from inclination (from the fear of punishment), like children and child-like people in Kohlberg's pre-moral stages.

So, you should see clearly that you can and do determine and impose principles on yourself and then act from them. This is the essence of acting rationally. We all do this all the time, sometimes very consciously and sometimes not. You do this when you make up rules about things for yourself and then follow those rules. Insofar as you would ever claim to be acting reasonably or rationally (rather than from inclination), you would *always and necessarily* be acting from some principle or other.

For example, when I decide not to eat a second helping of desert, although I crave it (am *inclined* to eat it), because I have imposed subjective rules on myself for dieting and trying to lose weight – if this truly is a rational decision and not merely a blind, emotionally motivated reaction – I will have, in actuality, proposed a principle to myself something like this: "Whenever someone is trying to lose weight they should not eat a second desert." And, then, I act rationally *from* this principle in practice by actually, in practice, foregoing the second desert.

Such a principle that I generate myself, impose on myself, and then utilize to make a rational decision in a particular situation, Kant called a **"maxim"** or "**subjective principle of action**." Your maxim regarding a particular action is the principle you create ad hoc in the context of a particular action. You can get a good determination of what your maxim is in any given situation in which you believe you are acting rationally when you answer the question: "Why did I do that?" or "Why am I doing this?" Your answer to these questions will reveal your maxim. Maxims are subjective (self-imposed) moral principles



And, if whatever you did was truly the rational thing for *you* to do, then it ought to be the reasonable thing for *any rational person* to do in the same situation. If the principles that you propose to yourself to lose weight are rational, then they will be the correct principles to rationally guide *anyone* who, like you, wants to lose weight. Otherwise, it must not be the rational thing for you to do. Such is the absolute and universal force of all true principles and laws.

But, how can you tell whether the supposedly rational maxim you propose to yourself to guide your action in some situation is, in fact, in line with your moral duty for what you should do? The Categorical Imperative is the answer to that question.

Categorical imperative

To determine whether your personal, subjective moral principles or maxims are in line with moral duty, Kant offers two suggestions or two versions of what he calls the "Categorical Imperative," which is his name for the universal moral principle that he believes we all should

follow in making every moral judgment: the Principle of Generalizability and The Principle of Respect. You should be familiar with how these principles work in real-life situations.

1. Principle of Generalizability

To see whether the subjective principle or maxim that you have proposed to yourself is truly informed by reason rather than inclination, try to generalize your maxim by imagining that it would become a general law for everyone and anyone in your situation. Using the diet example above, the generalized maxim would now read something like this: "Whenever *anyone* is trying to lose weight they should not eat a second helping of desert." If you can imaginatively generalize your maxim, without contradiction, as applying to everyone, then your maxim coincides with your duty. In this case, it sounds like your duty to yourself requires you not to eat a second desert, *and any reasonable person in the same situation should act the same way*. No problem or reality contradiction with that generalization. So, not eating a second desert must be your duty within the scope of your self-imposed diet.

But, suppose another person, with a weaker will than you, decides to go ahead and eat a second desert despite being on a diet to lose weight just like you. That person's maxim in that case might be: "Whenever you are on a diet and trying to lose weight but really, really crave a second desert, then you should eat a second desert since you crave it so badly." Trying to generalize that maxim into a universal law that commands and requires everyone to eat a second desert whenever they want to lose weight would be ridiculously contradictory since it would undermine the whole idea of dieting. If you are trying to diet but have a rule that you must follow that says you should eat double deserts whenever you happen to crave them, then that isn't much of a diet for losing weight, is it? Therefore, eating the second desert whenever you feel like it must not be your duty within the scope of your diet. (Try applying this same reasoning to speed limits.)

Kant calls this generalizability strategy the "universal law" approach to determining your duty. It is a Categorical Imperative or absolute duty we should always follow, since we should always act rationally. He states it as moral principle like this:

You should always act in such a way that the maxim of your action can be made into a universal law for everyone.

You can think of it this way: How would it be if everyone were *required* to act the way you did? If it wouldn't be good, then it is not your duty.

2. Principle of Respect

There is a second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, equal to the first version, according to Kant, but somewhat different. Let's call it the "end-in-itself" or 'respect' version.

What it means to be rational, Kant argued, is to have the ability to propose laws to ourself and then to act from those laws. To have the ability, the power, to do this is the source of our incalculable *dignity* as human beings. It is what sets us apart from all other non-rational beings, including all other animals. To have such superior dignity is the moral equivalent of being an ***end-in-itself.***

Here is what it means to be an end-in-itself. Think of rational actions as always being means to some end; when an end is achieved by some means, it then becomes a means for

achieving another end. Going to school is the means to achieving the end of getting a good education. After achieving the good education, that "end" then becomes a means for achieving the end of getting a job; the job then turns into a means for fulfilling the end of making money, etc. This means/end process goes on until it runs into an end-in-itself which cannot be turned into some means. An end-in-itself is precisely what should not be used as a *means* to accomplish some other end. All human persons are ends-in-themselves.

For a person to be an end-in-itself means that it is morally wrong to reduce a person to a mere instrumental means, i.e., to use them as a mere means for achieving some material end—without fair compensation for that use. To act morally toward other rational persons, who automatically have the dignity of being ends-in-themselves, is to treat them with *respect*. This means not to objectify and use them. Thus, when you treat someone as an end-in-itself you are treating them with respect, and you are thus acting *from* duty in your actions toward that person.

This version of the Categorical Imperative is stated as follows:

You should always act in such a way that your actions treat others as ends-in-themselves and not as mere means.

In short, the principle of respect asserts that you should treat others respectfully and not use them as a mere means to accomplish some end. All rational persons are worthy of respect, no matter what. It is 'built in' to their being rational. Respect is not something you "earn" for Kant. All rational persons *deserve* respect simply because they have the dignity of being rational persons.

You should be clear about the fact that the principle of generalizability and the principle of respect are used to determine *moral* duty. Do not confuse moral duty from other ways in which the term "duty" is used. All social roles have special duties attached to them. These duties are usually determined and judged by codes of ethics or other legal documents specific to the role. Professional duties, such as the duty of the captain of a ship to his or her passengers, is different from moral duty in general, which would be the same for the captain and all the human passengers on the ship. The CEO of a company will have duties determined by law and tradition, for example, that workers do not have. Professional or social duties attach specifically to professional or social roles; moral duties are the same for all rational persons.

Question: The "Golden Rule" moral principle asserts that you should treat others as you wish to be treated. How similar or different is this to the Categorical Imperative principle?

Utilitarian Ethics

John Stuart Mill's Utilitarian moral philosophy focuses on the *consequences* of our actions as the way to determine whether they are in line with moral correctness or not. From an empirical perspective, utilitarians argue, it is not the motivational principle by which an act should be judged good or bad, as with Kant, but the amount of good and bad that *flows from the act.* It is the consequences that determine whether an act or policy is moral or not.

Thus, when trying to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action, you should calculate how much good (happiness, pleasure, welfare) will follow from the action and for how many sentient (capable of feeling pleasure and pain) beings (including non-human sentient beings like dogs and frogs). That is the general idea.

The good or bad (pleasure or pain) flowing from an act could also be determined for classes of acts. U*tilitarian rules* can be formulated to cover all acts of a certain kind, like all acts that unnecessarily injure an innocent person. We don't need to keep testing every case of torturing innocent children and animals for the fun of it to see whether it is moral to torture this particular innocent child or animal for the fun of it. We can establish a utilitarian-based rule to cover all such acts. *Notice, however, that this kind of a utilitarian rule, although it may sound similar to a duty-oriented moral law, is certainly different in terms of the cognitive procedure for determining it and justifying it.*

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Principle of utility

In general, the utilitarian moral principle is formulated in accordance with the welfare distribution of outcomes and is usually stated thus:

You should always act in such a way that your acts produce the greatest good for the greatest number (of sentient beings).

Couple of things about this principle. First, there is the question of how to interpret that word "good" in there. Some traditional consequentialists think of this as pleasure, where pleasure is understood as the highest good. Mill distinguished between "higher" and "lower" pleasures. The pleasure of drinking a craft beer – though certainly a worthy pleasure in itself – is of a lesser quality, Mill argued, than the intellectual pleasure of solving a difficult mathematical problem with an elegant equation, such as when Pythagoras discovered the "Pythagorean Theorem." He was elated! This difference in the quality of pleasure should be taken into account when calculating the consequences of an action or decision. *Based on this idea, Mill thought it was better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.* What do you think of that?

A second thing to note about the utilitarian moral principle is that the term "greatest number" means the greatest number of *sentient* beings – beings who can feel pleasure and pain, like animals and maybe trees, too. Any beings that can experience pleasure and pain need to be taken into consideration in the utilitarian calculus of consequences. There have been some strong utilitarian arguments made by animal rights activists, like the philosopher Peter Singer, against vivisection, for example, because of the harm done to the animal. Kant, on the other hand, thinks you can use animals in pretty much any rational way you see fit within the bounds of moral duty as this applies to you, since you are a moral agent. Animals, being non-rational, are not moral agents for Kant and may be used without compensation. Singer has famously stretched the utilitarian argument so far as to suggest that some specially trained dogs may have greater utility or welfare value than some vegetative humans, something a Kantian would be unlikely to accept.

Finally, consequences can be extremely complex and sinewy, maybe even impossible to determine ultimately sometimes, or even most of the time, as in the Butterfly Effect. What will be the consequences of building the Keystone XL pipeline or the Mexican border wall, for example? What will be the consequences of raising the federal minimum wage to fifteen dollars? What will be the consequences of relaxing Dodd-Frank banking regulations under Trump? What will be the consequences of marrying one person rather another, or taking one job rather than another? These consequences will be hard to determine absolutely. Consequences can be of diverse types and insanely complex and difficult to ascertain in advance, yet they may sometimes appear deceptively simple and straightforward. This is something that you should be aware of when thinking through a moral decision from a consequentialist perspective.

The overvaluation of moral reasoning

Despite their fundamentally different approaches to moral reasoning, both Duty Ethics and Utilitarianism generate rational principles, sketched out above, that are commonly used to make supposedly morally correct rational judgments by everyday people. These general moral principles have been deeply established in Western culture over a long period of time. And they come with a general sense of what it means to be a moral human being attached to them.

Deontology focuses squarely on the deployment of "pure" reason, unadulterated by non-rational inclinations such as emotions, desires, and passions, which must be excluded from the rational decision-making process, since they would muck it all up and have us following the bliss of our feel-good inclinations instead of doing our duty. Remember, the harder it is to do your duty, the more meritorious it supposedly is when you do it.

Utilitarianism, as we saw above, based on the empirical idea that the consequentialist calculus is actually how persons go about making moral judgments anyway, argues for a rational analysis of consequences achieved by any means as long as they are justified by the greater good, in order to arrive at a correct rational moral judgment. Emotional pleasure or pain are consequences of actions, sure, but they must not be an active part of the rational calculus itself that weighs and evaluates the strength, duration, etc. of those consequences in a reasoning process that *starts* from a rational estimation of consequences and leads to a rational judgment about whether the act or class of acts under consideration is moral. For utilitarians and for deontologists, rationality is thought to be the only proper guide to moral reasoning. What about this reliance on rationality by both deontology and utilitarianism?

Mollie Painter-Morland

These "grand narratives," as Mollie Painter-Morland refers to both duty ethics and utilitarianism in her book *Business Ethics as Practice,* make "claims of rational superiority that are attached to their principles and procedures…. Morality is described as the rational application of objective principles to practical problems. It is this view of morality that is primarily responsible for the theory versus practice distinction that plagues the field of business ethics. Different moral theories emphasize different "rational" principles, but none make adequate provision for the consideration of contingent contextual parameters and conflicting claims." This is why an emphasis on a pluralistic entrepreneurial practice is so important. Painter-Morland explains it like this:

> Business ethics models that use utilitarian, communitarian, deontological, rights-based, and contractarian suppositions and principles as their starting point may ultimately do the cause of ethics in organizations more harm than good. Though conceived as vehicles for creating authoritative normative frameworks in business life, these approaches often facilitate the abdication of moral discretion and responsibility…. When ethics is understood as practice, it can no longer be something that is practiced at arm's length. Moral agents are required to remain

> fully engaged with the concrete contingencies and dynamics of the world. Instead of an abstract cognitive exercise, ethics as practice is all about participation, relationships, and responsiveness.[1]

It is the exclusively rational orientation of the "grand narrative" approach to moral decision-making that is worrisome to the Ethics of Care people. They feel that such an exclusively rational understanding and approach to moral reasoning and moral action propounded by duty and utility ethics wrongly claims the moral high ground and thus misses the existential moral situation of everyday people functioning morally without ever thinking of Kant or Mill.

Existential pluralists like Painter-Moreland believe that both duty and utility ethics under-value, degrade, and exclude the non-rational aspects of human beings from moral consideration. But these non-rational aspects of human beings, in fact, are more likely to guide our everyday moral interactions and relations with others, intuitively for the most part, yet with their own reasonableness. They are the mostly unconscious interpersonal sources of our dynamic and ever-changing value orientation. So, in the final analysis, you should not think of the distinction between rational and non-rational orientations to morality as an either/or type of situation between the Ethics of Justice or the Ethics of Care. As we have already seen, it is a matter of both/and, not either/or.

The extent to which deontological and/or teleological moral principles structure your own personal moral value orientation in particular situations can be determined and revealed to some extent by how you respond to the well-exercised Runaway Trolley moral thought experiment, to which we now turn.

Emotions and rational moral judgments: Runaway trolley

Thought experiments

Thought experiments in ethics are imaginary situations typically targeted to a particular moral value educative and developmental purpose that you 'enter into' empathetically and analytically for the purpose of resolving or illustrating a moral dilemma. They are often used by philosophers to clarify an abstract theoretical idea or value position in a more intuitive, concrete, and experiential manner.

Thought experiments can be personally helpful in other ways as well. For example, the targeted consideration of moral scenarios can help you to determine experientially how committed you are to certain moral principles or perspectives when those principles come into conflict with other moral principles you also consider to be important. You can do this in a thought experiment without having to actually be involved in such stressful, conflicted situations.

Thought experiments can also help you to determine more precisely what the moral principles are supporting your everyday intuitive and emotional moral judgments. For example, you can use the thought experiments found at the end of the chapters of this text to see where your moral value configuration stands regarding the various kinds of situations presented in those scenarios. Then, using the perspectives of justice and care as a general guide, for example, you could map out changes to your moral value orientation and direction of development as you see fit

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[1] Painter-Moreland, Molly. *Business Ethics as Practice.* New York: Cambridge, 2008, pp. 81-88.

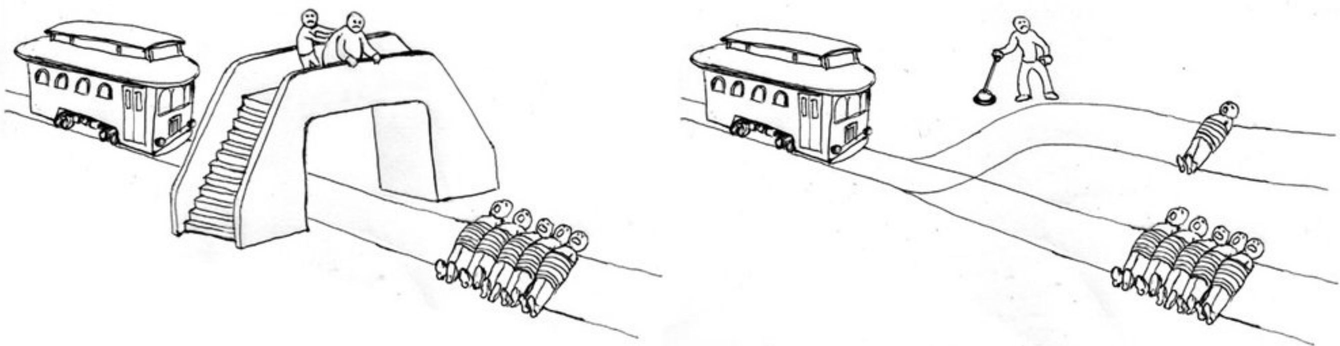
by, again, reflecting on how you responded to the various scenarios. In this way, you could steer a course that increases your likelihood of achieving the best possible life.

So, the first thing is to enter into the scenario empathetically and note how you respond to the specific circumstances of it. The second thing is to note what you think reflectively about how you respond and discern the principles behind your judgments. Give the following thought experiment a try. And stay tuned-in to how you respond.

The runaway trolley

The "Runaway Trolley" scenario is a well-known thought experiment created by philosopher Philippa Foot and used in her article "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect" (1967) to illustrate the double effect principle in practice in relation to normative questions about things like the moral permissibility of abortion. Generally, the moral doctrine of double effect asserts that if an act has two outcomes or effects, one good and one bad, the act is morally permissible only under certain conditions, the most important of which is that the good effect must be 'intended' (must be the primary motive for the act) while the bad effect must not be intended at all. This doctrine is nicely illustrated by the runaway trolley thought experiment, as you will see. But that is not our purpose here.

Beyond the interesting doctrine of double effect, however, I am even more interested in investigating how the runaway trolley scenario can help you to determine for yourself where you stand in regard to the moral principles espoused by Duty Ethics and Utilitarian Ethics presented in this chapter, and how your perhaps mostly unconscious positioning in regard to these theories is already announced tacitly in your everyday emotional moral judgments that may have been conditioned by those principles and theories since you were a child. Rational moral decision-making cannot escape the tacit influence of the emotions, and sometimes the emotions seem to act rationally themselves.



There are two parts to the classic version of Foot's runaway trolley experiment. Here is the first part:

> *A trolley's breaking system has failed, and it is hurtling driverless down the tracks toward four workers on the track who do not see it coming. If nothing is done, the four workers will surely die. You happen to be walking along the tracks at the time. You see that there is a lever that you can pull that will switch the runaway trolley onto a track where there is only one worker. Unfortunately, that one worker will get killed, but the four workers will be saved. Would you pull the lever to divert the trolley?*

If you were willing to pull the lever and divert the runaway trolley, you're in agreement with most others who participate in this thought experiment. Research consistently finds that people are willing to pull the lever to divert the trolley onto the track where only one worker will get killed. From a strict utilitarian perspective, it certainly seems *prima facie* better if only one worker dies instead of four. And this is usually what respondents will say to explain why they would pull the lever to divert the trolley, sounding like good utilitarians.

Okay, then, here is the second part of the scenario:

> *Same basic situation as in the first part: runaway trolley, four workers on the track who will get killed if nothing is done. But this time you are on a walking bridge that goes over the track the runaway trolley is hurtling down. There is a very large person on the bridge with you. The large person is near the edge of the bridge right over the runaway trolley's track, transfixed by the onrushing train. You see immediately that you could easily push the large person off the bridge onto the track and stop the runaway trolley. This would work. The four workers would be saved, but the large person would die. Would you push the person off the bridge?*

Note your feelings and thoughts as you decide.

If you find that you are reluctant or unwilling to push the large person off the bridge, again you would be in alignment with the majority of respondents, including professor Foot herself. From a *strictly* utilitarian perspective, however, it seems as if there is little difference in outcomes between the lever situation and the bridge situation, at least from the strictly instrumental perspective of net 'human resources': one person dies and four are saved in each case. But it is *how* the one person dies in each situation that is the moral problem.

If you ask people why they would be willing to pull the lever but not push the person, they say things like "That would just be the wrong thing to do" or "Pushing the lever doesn't hurt anyone" or "I just couldn't do that." In short, these reports of emotional reasoning seem to clearly reflect the moral principle that it is somehow very wrong, *in itself,* for me to actively and physically kill another innocent human being, regardless of the good consequences that flow from it. But that sounds like a deontological or duty-based principle, derived from the idea that all rational beings have an intrinsic dignity deserving of respect.

So, if you were one of those respondents who is willing to pull the lever to divert the trolley but not push the person, you should have had a fairly clear experience of just how much of a moral pluralist you are in practice. You deployed utilitarian moral principles in the first trolley situation with the lever but deployed deontological moral principles about the integrity of persons in the second footbridge situation. You probably made these judgments somewhat unconsciously, easily, and immediately, experiencing only the felt emotional approval or disapproval that led to your decision in each case. You were able to intuitively 'feel' the significant differences between the two situations even though there are significant similarities. But what, exactly, is that significant difference between the two moral situations?

How emotion drives moral judgment

The moral brain

Neuroscientists have recently used scenarios like the runaway trolley to investigate the way in which areas of the brain that correspond to emotional response are triggered by elements of the scenario. In one study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to measure subjects' responses to moral dilemmas, the two situations of the runaway trolley experiment were used to probe areas of the brain known to respond to emotional stimuli.

What the researchers found is that participant responses varied in accordance with the level of emotional engagement engendered by the scenario. They argue that these variations in emotional response were the chief causes of differences in moral evaluation and judgment of the scenarios. The authors argue that, "from a psychological point of view, the crucial difference between the trolley lever dilemma and the footbridge dilemma lies in the latter's tendency to engage people's emotions in a way that the former does not. The thought of pushing someone to their death is more emotionally salient than the thought of hitting a switch that will cause a trolley to produce similar consequences, and it is this emotional response that accounts for people's tendency to treat these cases differently.[2]

Other neuroscientific research supports the conclusions on emotion from the above study, including one from [The Morality Lab at Boston College](). Researchers there were interested in how neuro-chemical changes can influence moral decision-making. They compared a group of subjects who had damage to their ventromedial prefrontal cortex, a region of the brain that scientists have associated with the processing of emotion, with a group of normal subjects in terms of how they responded to the runaway trolley scenario. Predictably, subjects with damage to the emotion-processing ventromedial prefrontal cortex were much more likely than normal subjects to be willing to push the person off the footbridge to stop the trolley.[3]

This adds to the evidence linking emotion with moral judgment, but it doesn't necessarily decide the question of whether the emotion produces a physiological change which then results in a moral judgment, or whether the moral judgment produces a physiological change that produces the emotion, or whether the physiological change produces the emotion which then results in a judgment. Nevertheless, it does support the close link between emotion and rational moral judgment .

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[2] Greene, Joshua D., et al. "An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment." *Science* 14 Sep 2001: Vol. 293, Issue 5537, pp. 2105-2108.

[3] Damasio, A. *Neuroscience and ethics: intersections*. The American Journal of Bioethics. January 7, 2007.

Our moral tongue

In yet another cross-cultural study entitled "Your Morals Depend on Language" that ingeniously used the runaway trolley scenario to experiment with emotional response, researchers focused on the difference between the more emotionally laden consciousness associated with our native language and the less emotional consciousness associated with speaking a second language.

When the researchers had subjects respond to the runaway trolley dilemma in their native tongue, responses followed the usual pattern of people being willing to pull the lever to divert the trolley but not being willing to push the person off the footbridge. But, when the runaway trolley scenario was presented to subjects in a second language, willingness to push the person off the footbridge increased significantly.

The authors concluded that even the thought of actively pushing an innocent person to their death "engages a deeply emotional part of us" that we feel most fully and powerfully in the cultural context of our native tongue, whereas the same experience in a foreign language provides a muting of the emotional impact of the scenario. Subjects were less emotionally engaged with the scenario in the foreign language and thus more willing to push the person off the footbridge.

To check these findings, researchers presented subjects with a less emotionally laden version of the footbridge scenario. Instead of pushing the person off the bridge, the subjects could divert the trolley to a track where the person who had formerly been on the bridge would be killed by the trolley. The researchers found that this slight variation caused a big difference. When given the option, eighty per cent of the respondents chose to divert the trolley rather than push the person off the bridge, both in their native tongue and in a foreign language. [4]

A Brief Overview of Chapter 5

This chapter looks at two rational moral theories that generate moral principles that can be used in rational moral decision making: Duty Ethics and Utilitarianism

It is important to be clear about how **principles** are used in rational moral decision making. In a very basic sense, *to be rational is to be able to reason from principles*. Principles are general standards used to evaluate particular situations. Be sure that you are clear about this. There are different ways to define what it means to be a rational being, but this definition gets to the heart of the matter for our present purpose. To be rational is to reason from principles.

Duty indicates some level of moral obligation. You are surely familiar with how duties attach to social roles (note how difficult it can often be to specify these clearly and definitively, however, like the specific duties that attach to the pilot of a commercial airplane, for example). But rational beings also have moral duties just because they are rational beings. Duties that attach to social roles and moral duties are not always the same. Also, duties can conflict with one another, as with Jim in the hiring situation where the duty to be fair is in conflict with the duty to be loyal to a friend. In conflicts of duty, you must try to discern which is the most important duty in that situation.

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[4] Costa, A., et al. "Your Morals Depend on Language." *PLoS ONE* 2014: 9(4) e94842. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094842

The moral principle generated by Deontology (study of duty) is deduced from the idea of rationality. It is a rationalist starting point. Because we are rational, we have the possibility of two motives for our actions: **reason** (what we *think* we should do) and **inclination** (what we *feel* like doing). Non-rational beings are unable to have rational motives for actions; so, no moral conflicts for non-rational beings. From a duty ethics perspective, moral conflict is a conflict between reason and inclination *motives* that form our will to act. Our moral duty will always coincide with the rational thing to do. Sometimes, however, duty and inclination may inadvertently coincide. For example, this happens when I am inclined to do what duty commands, in which case there will be no moral conflict.

How do we know if the motive for our action is in line with our moral duty? The first test is called the **principle of generalizability**. This is based on the idea that to be rational is to act from principles. You can get an idea of what the principle is you are using to act rationally in a particular instance by asking yourself why you are doing what you are doing; this will reveal your motive for your action. This is your **maxim or subjective principle of action**. If you can generalize this into a law for everyone, without contradiction, then it is your duty. Just ask yourself: How would it be if everyone did this? If that picture doesn't look too good, then your motive is likely not in line with your duty. Take lying. Trying to coherently generalize a maxim allowing you to lie will never be possible because a general rule that you should lie whenever you feel like will undermine the presumption of honesty, screw up social relations, etc. Thus, all lies are contrary to duty. Again, duty *entails* obligation. (Utilitarians will have an easier time justifying a beneficial lie....).

One problem with this is that it is not always easy to clearly discern our motives for why we do what we do. Our maxims (subjective principles) and our motives for acting can be complex, internally conflicted and confusing. Another problem is when two or more duties conflict. This happens often in everyday living (like with Jim and the hiring scenario) and requires deliberation and choice to discern the more important duty.

Another way to approach duty is from the perspective of the **principle of respect**, especially regarding actions involving rational beings. What does it mean that we should respect rational beings as ends-in-themselves? This means that they should not be used as *mere* means, like the way we use a shovel as a means, because rational beings are ends-in-themselves. Thus, the principle of respect requires fair compensation in work situations, for example. One problem with the respect approach to determining moral duty is that it is not always easy to be able to say what constitutes respect *in practice*, especially when duties conflict. But if the duty question involves an action relating to another human being, you should try to employ the respect principle to gauge the morality of that action. If the action intends to use the person for some desired end (without fair compensation), it is likely not in line with duty.

Whereas Duty Ethics has its origin in a deduction from the nature of rationality itself, **Welfare Ethics or Utilitarianism** is derived from *empirical observation* of the desire to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. Utilitarianism is thus a hedonism or hedonic calculus. Actions, from this perspective, are evaluated from an analysis of real or possible consequences in terms of how much welfare (pleasure) or harm (pain) the consequences are likely to produce. We should thus act in such a way, or make rules up in such a way, that they result in the greatest amount of welfare for the greatest number of sentient beings (beings that can feel pleasure and pain).

One problem with this is that the welfare of the many is held to be more important than the welfare of the few. Thus, for utilitarianism, harm can be intentionally inflicted on the few for the benefit of the many; the end justifies the means. Duty Ethics would not permit this because there would be no way to generalize coherently a maxim that says it is sometimes okay to inflict intentional harm on an innocent rational being. That certainly wouldn't be respectful.

These two rational approaches to making moral decisions are often in conflict, just as they are for most people who participate in the **Runaway Trolley experiment**. In this hypothetical exercise, most people are willing to push the lever to divert the trolley, employing a quick Utilitarian calculation: better only one should die rather than four. But when it comes to pushing someone off the footbridge, people are less willing to push the person off despite the similarity in outcome to the lever scenario. Instead, they act like Deontologists who would hold that it is never morally acceptable to inflict intentional harm on an innocent rational being, no matter how beneficial the consequences.

If you were willing to push the lever but not push the person, you had a good existential experience of how your moral value orientation can change from one situation to another, fairly quickly. The research suggests that this switch is due to the emotional content connected to pushing a *person* rather than a *lever*. Thus, it seems to be our sensitivity to emotional aspects of situations that causes us to switch our moral value configuration from the lever scenario (Utilitarian) to the footbridge scenario (Deontology).

We will be looking in more detail at how **situational factors** impact our moral reasoning in future chapters of our text.

PRACTICE

TERMS TO KNOW

- Moral principles
- Duty ethics
- Deontology
- Rationalism
- Empiricism
- Sensible intuition
- Motive
- Maxim
- Subjective principle of action
- Categorical imperative
- Principle of generalizability
- End-in-itself
- Utilitarianism
- Consequentialist ethics
- Teleology
- Principle of utility
- Sentient beings
- Thought experiments
- Runaway trolley
- Doctrine of double effect
- The moral brain
- Our moral tongue

TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How are normative moral theories created?
2. What is a moral principle?
3. How are moral principles used to make particular moral value judgments? Provide an example.
4. In what way is the distinction between rationalism and empiricism pertinent to the investigation of duty ethics and utilitarian ethics. How do these differ?
5. What is the categorical imperative? Explain in a general way how Kant arrives at this moral principle.
6. What are the two forms or versions of the categorical imperative presented in this chapter? How are these moral principles used in practice to make particular moral judgments?
7. How can you use the maxim of your action to determine whether your action is moral or not from a deontological perspective?
8. Why does duty ethics focus on your motive for acting?
9. From the perspective of Kant's view of human nature, what does it mean to be rational?
10. What is the principle of utility and how does utilitarianism argue that you should make moral judgments? Why is it important to note that the principle of utility applies to all sentient beings?

11. What is the meaning of the idea of "good" inherent in the consequentialist assertion that the moral thing to do is whatever produces "the greatest good for the greatest number"?
12. What is meant by the "overvaluation of pure reason"?
13. What is a philosophical thought experiment?
14. How can the runaway trolley thought experiment help you determine how much of a utilitarian and how much of a deontologist you are?
15. Why do people consistently respond differently to the "lever" version of the runaway trolley and the "footbridge" version?
16. How does the runaway trolley thought experiment show that emotion plays an important part in moral decision-making?
17. Why were people who responded to the runaway trolley scenario in a foreign language more likely to push the person off the footbridge to stop the trolley than people who responded to the scenario in their native tongue?

REFLECTION EXERCISES

Duty ethics focuses on your motive for acting. If your motive or intention for acting is attuned to fulfilling your duty, if you are acting *from* duty, then your action is moral. This seems to presume that we are always immediately aware of and clear about our motives for doing things. Is that correct? Are you always 100% clear about your motives for doing something?

Look at what you are doing right now, reading this text. What are your motives for doing this? Assuming the text is assigned in a course, you're reading it now because it is required and you want to pass the course to fulfill the requirement. You may be genuinely interested in the material. You may want to get the requirement out of the way *and* be genuinely interested in the material. You may be doing it to see if you can find some flaw in the account. You may be reading it because you have nothing better to do and it helps to pass the time. Also, your motive may be under duress. You may feel somewhat 'forced' to read the text because it is assigned and perhaps resent that as part of your motive. You may have any number of motives, mixed and competing for your attention, don't you think? One thing is for sure. Your motive, whatever it is, is definitely sufficient since here you are actually reading the text.

Okay, but do you ever *fully* know your motive? Try this exercise. Reflect on and describe your motive for reading this text right now? Is your motive simple or complex? Is it 100% clear to you what your motive is? How does it feel? Is your motive in line with your moral duty?

SCENARIO EXERCISES

Scenario 1 DIRECTIONS: Evaluate the captain's actions from the perspective of duty ethics and utilitarian ethics and try to imagine the captain's feelings throughout his ordeal and how they are expressing his values and principles. What are the captain's moral values and principles that come into play? Also, imagine what the feelings of the other people might be. Imagine you are a member of the jury at the captain's trial. What would be your verdict? What moral theories and principles would justify your decision?

1. Overcrowded lifeboat

In 1842, a ship struck an iceberg and more than 30 survivors were crowded into a lifeboat intended to hold 7. As a huge storm threatened, it became obvious that the lifeboat would have to be lightened if anyone were to survive. If everyone remained in the lifeboat when the storm hit, all would perish certainly.

The captain reasoned that the right thing to do in this situation was to force some individuals to go over the side and drown. Such an action, he reasoned, was not unjust to those thrown overboard, for they would have drowned anyway. If he did nothing, however, he would be responsible for the deaths of those whom he could have saved.

Some people opposed the captain's decision. They claimed that if nothing were done and everyone died as a result, no one would be responsible for those deaths. On the other hand, if the captain attempted to save some, he could do so only by killing others and their deaths would be his responsibility; this would be worse than doing nothing and letting all die.

The captain rejected this reasoning. Since the only possibility for rescue required great efforts of rowing, the captain decided that the most reasonable thing to do would be to sacrifice the weakest. In this situation it would be absurd, he thought, to decide who stays by drawing lots, and who should be thrown overboard. I am needed to navigate and the strongest are needed to row.

As it turned out, after many days of hard rowing, the survivors were finally rescued. The captain was tried in court for his actions.

2. Favoritism and fairness: What should Kevin do?

Scenario 2 DIRECTIONS: Try using any of the perspectives we have considered so far, including Virtue Ethics, self-actualization theory, pragmatism, existentialism, deontology, and utilitarianism to evaluate Kevin’s predicament. What moral principle(s) might be in play for Kevin that would be consistent with what he is feeling? What moral principles might be in play unconsciously for Kevin’s brother judging by his actions and attitude? How do you think you would respond if you were Kevin?

Kevin is a talented basketball player whose high school team made it into the playoffs and all the way to the city championship game. As a result, Kevin had to miss his school’s baseball tryouts and a couple of weeks of practice. So, he was grateful when the coach gave him an opportunity to come out for the team anyway. Kevin’s older brother had been on the varsity team for four years, so the coach knew the family and assumed Kevin would follow in his brother’s footsteps. But Kevin had never played league baseball before and had no expectation of getting a lot of playing time. Besides, the team already had a solid lineup of experienced players; he would just have to be patient and earn his position through hard work.

Which is why Kevin was shocked when the coach announced the starting lineup for the first game: Kevin was picked to start at third base.

Kevin immediately felt confused, then embarrassed, then guilty. He was confused because the coach had never seen him play. He felt embarrassed and guilty because everyone knew that the coach must have made this decision based on Kevin's athletic reputation and the coach's relationship with Kevin's older brother. Kevin considered himself a team player. He also knew the other third baseman—a strong player who never missed a practice. Surely the other guy deserved to be the starter. He looked around at his teammates and saw himself through their eyes. He felt bad. He walked to his position without making eye contact with the coach or the players.

After the game, Kevin called his brother and said he was thinking about asking the coach to let him step down until he had earned the position in a way that was fair to the rest of the team. His brother said no way. Life is about seizing opportunity. That's how you achieve your dreams. Why give up your big chance? "Besides," he said, "I put in a good word for you, so don't blow it."

Kevin felt like he was stuck. If he kept silent, he risked losing the respect of his team; if he came forward, he risked losing the athletic opportunity and his relationship with his coach. He needed to make a decision before the next game.

What should Kevin do?