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Prompt #3

### Kantian Ethics

According to German philosopher Immanuel Kant, human beings have the highest value of all living creatures. In his eyes, humans are considered irreplaceable. Any living thing that is not a part of the human species has value only because its purpose is to serve humans. In Kant's eyes, animals are no more than "mere things". He stated that animals exist "merely as means to an end. That end is man" (136). By this standard, we should theoretically be able to treat animals however we want. Kant wasn't opposed to the torture of animals because it hurts animals, he was opposed to it because of the negative effect it had on the human temperament. He argued that the animal abuser "becomes hard in his dealings with men" (136). Kant's moral theory goes hand in hand with the notion that human beings have always thought of themselves as not only different from other creatures, but better than them. According to Rachels, Kant's belief is that "if people disappeared, then so would the moral dimension of the world" (137). The purpose of this paper is to introduce the complicated nature of Kant's moral theory. In this paper, I will explain more of the key components of the theory. I will explain the significance of the Categorical Imperative, discuss what it means to treat someone as an end, and define "lying promise". I will use this information to support my opinion that Kant's theory is convincing, but it does have its flaws.

A significant part of Kant's moral theory is the idea that "all of our duties can be derived from one ultimate principle" (Rachels p.137). This is known as the Categorical Imperative. Another definition of the Categorical Imperative given in the Rachels text is "binding on rational agents simply because they are rational" (134). Therefore, according to Kant, if someone did not

abide by this principle, they would be considered both immoral and irrational. To follow this way of living, Kant suggests that we “act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means”. In other words, we should treat all people, including ourselves, with respect and we must not manipulate people to reach our goals. What does this look like in real life? Consider this example: Suppose you are having work done on your car, so you need a ride to work every day for a week. You promise your coworker that if she gives you a ride to work for the week, you’ll pay her the gas money. However, you know that your car repair will be expensive and that you won’t really have the extra money to reimburse her, but you really need the ride to work. You decide to make that promise anyway. This is an example of treating someone as a “means” instead of an “end”. Treating your coworker as a means is the same as manipulating her to reach your own goal. In this case, the goal was getting to work on time every day. You knew that you wouldn’t be able to pay her back for gas, but you promised her reimbursement anyway. This is the manipulation. On the other hand, if you were treating her as an end, you would be honest with her about not being able to pay her back. This would allow her to make the decision to help or not. If she does, then you are not just using her to reach your goal because through agreeing to help you, your goal becomes your coworker’s as well. Kant makes it clear that he is not opposed to using someone as a means, but he “objects to treating someone *only* as a means” (Rachels 138). This example includes another key element of Kant’s moral theory, which is a lying promise.

A lying promise is essentially what its name states, it is a promise made on a foundation of intentional dishonesty. It is illustrated in the previous coworker example. When you made the promise to your coworker that you would pay her back for the rides to work with the knowledge that you didn’t have the funds to reimburse her, you made a lying promise. To further

demonstrate the concept of a lying promise, we can look at another example. Suppose you are a parent, and you have been dreading your child's upcoming doctor's appointment for weeks because you know that your child will be inconsolable the moment you walk through the clinic's doors. When it comes time to get to the appointment, your child will not get in the car. Since he is old enough to understand what a doctor's office is and what is done there, he refuses to go. Your goal is to get him to the appointment so you can check off the numerous other tasks that have yet to be completed during the day. To achieve that goal, you tell your child that you will let him watch as much TV as he wants and that he can pick out a special treat when he's finished at the doctor. You know all too well that errands will take up the rest of your day and that you have no business promising hours of TV to your child, but you do it anyway. Your child agrees to go to the appointment on the promise of being able to watch his favorite movies when he gets home, and the appointment goes smoothly. However, the lying promise has its consequences. What happens when your child gets out of the appointment and asks for his TV time? You will have to tell him that you still have a full day of errands to run. In Kant's eyes, decisions like this one are morally wrong. According to him, "[people] are rational agents, that is, free agents capable of making their own decisions, setting their own goals, and guiding their conduct by reason" (137). That being said, the only way for rational beings to be considered "morally good" is to "act from a sense of duty" (137). In other words, we as rational creatures are called to do the right thing, and lying certainly doesn't fall under that category.

Given the information previously discussed, I support the basic concepts of Kant's moral theory. I will argue this from a religious standpoint. I grew up in the church, so I was taught all about creation and how God made man to thrive and grow on His earth. It wasn't until the end of creation that God created man, and the purpose of creating man was to complete and improve

what already existed. Man was always meant to be the most important being on earth, especially since we are the only ones with a rational and moral capacity, as Kant stated. The only problem I have with the theory is that there is little to no concern for living things other than humans. I believe that all living things should be treated with respect, no matter what their purpose is considered to be. All life has value, even the seemingly insignificant lives of the smallest creatures. We as humans would not be able to survive without the help of the vast variety of animals that walk the earth because they all contribute in some sort of way. Animals provide food, clothing, and other resources for us. In addition, animals like bees allow us to enjoy honey and they pollenate our flowers so that our food can grow. In my opinion, this is a one-way dependence. According to the Bible, animals were created before humans, so animals do not require human assistance to thrive. They can survive independent of us. Some may argue that dogs and other pets need us in order to live, and although this is true, it wasn't always true. Animal domestication did not happen without the interference of humans, and if the animals had been left to their own instincts in the wild, they would be just fine. Another example of human influence on the natural independence of animals is the rescue and rehabilitation commonly seen in places like SeaWorld. If an animal gets injured to the point of not being able to fend for itself, nature would have taken its course and the cycle of life would continue on, just as it always has. However, if that animal was taken in by humans, it would be nurtured to the point where it was dependent on human care and would no longer be able to survive in the wild. Overall, though, I strongly agree with what Kant has to say regarding the fact that we as humans are the most important beings and that all other life serves a purpose to us. According to Kant, "Human beings tower above the realm of things" (137), and they have since the beginning of time.

In conclusion, Kant's moral theory is a lot to grasp. It is complicated and intricate. However, the purpose of this paper was only to introduce the theory. The Categorical Imperative, treating someone as an end, and the concept of a "lying promise" are all key components in the theory and they support my opinion that Kant's theory is convincing, but it does have its flaws.

## References

Rachels, S., & Rachels, J. (2015). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. Dubuque: McGraw-Hill Education.