

Andria J. Williams

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Exam #2

*Deontology- a theory based purely on obligation or duty*

It cannot be agreed upon that actions considered right are deemed as such solely because the corollary of that action is determined to be good. Consequentialism, a well-known theory of the right, suggests that the consequences of an action determine whether that action is considered as good or bad. However, the consequentialist theory does not leave room for special circumstances and ultimately leads to alienation. It is for this reason that deontology proves to be not necessarily right, yet one of the most compelling and interesting theories.

Deontology is a theory of the right, which suggests that people have an obligation to behave in a specific way towards others. In other words, rules must be followed at all times. When broken down into the derivative words, the word “deontology”, is compiled of the Greek word “deon”, meaning duty. For instance, it is considered a moral duty not to kill, lie, or perform any other like tasks that violate moral written or unwritten laws, even if it produces a good consequence. This part of deontology protects the moral character of a person, thus refusing to impose on one’s personal belief or morale. One such situation where this theory may become relevant can be found within the following scenario. A white female has been raped. She accuses a black male, whom she cannot

completely or accurately describe, of committing the crime. Police search diligently and cannot find the accused rapist, thus leading members of a local white supremacist organization to a detrimental decision, to take the life of all of the black males in hidden or open view. In an attempt to pacify the white supremacist organization and prevent the murders of many innocent black males, the police decide to go against their morals, by defying justice, while framing an innocent black male. This matter provides a moral dilemma for the deontologists; however, a consequentialist would argue that the act performed by the police officers was right, despite the fact that justice was totally ignored. Deontology, with its emphasis on the upholding of law no matter what, allows for the preservation of justice as well as the morale of the officers. Through the enforcement of this aspect of deontology, justice is upheld, whereas, consequentialism totally undermines any such dealings other than the greater good based on the outcomes or consequences of the situation.

Immanuel Kant, in realizing the inconsistencies within the consequentialist theory, began to formulate the ideas for the theory mentioned and briefly defined above, deontology. The foundations for rule deontological ethics were derived from the beliefs of Kant. In summary, he tended to believe that knowledge was a direct result of the sort of “monkey see, monkey do” correlation. This relationship, in his opinion, was one in which the mind developed categories to determine the right from the wrong. The wrongs within the mind could be easily recognized due to a great reliance on rules and moral justice, not just the consequences or ending results of the situations. For example, the laws of each country are based on a consensus of moral and religious beliefs. Kant accepted as truth that these laws along with personal laws concluded the exact

connotation of “rightness”. Obligations, also stressed throughout his writings, he argues, arise from practical reasoning. An example in which Kant explains practical reasoning is “the lying promise”. This example depicts the injustice of borrowing money and promising to repay, knowing that there is no chance for reimbursement. If everyone borrowed without return, the idea of borrowing would become obsolete, due to an overall reasoning that there would never be any reciprocity. Using this reasoning lead Kant to his reckoning that lying is essentially wrong, thus building up to the idea of universal laws. One of his ideas that is central to the theory of deontology explains good will. Good will, according to Kant, must act in agreement with obligation harmonious to its own nature. The natural obligation that all human beings have helps to form the idea of universal law mentioned above. This idea, formulated by Immanuel Kant, defines deontology, briefly restating the theory and emphasizing its dependence on obligation or duty.

Robert Nozick, another well-known philosopher and supporter of deontology, branches off from Kant’s argument with his theory entitled side constraints. His theory’s foundation is based upon rules as well; however, he places the most emphasis on the idea of personal property. His theories follow that of John Locke and capitalism. Within the theory of side constraints, it is suggested that a person’s rights are side constraints. He strictly adheres to the concept that people should not be used as a means to an end, but only be used for ends that they themselves choose, thus further stressing the idea of personal rights. For instance, if a family owns an estate, which was justly acquired, no being should have the right to take this house or acquire anything of the inhabitants of the house, no matter what the circumstance. It would be wrong for anyone, government

included, to take the possession of another under normal, unstressed situations. In everyday life, provided there are no complications, this theory proves to be a very credible one, due to the sense that every being has a need to feel secure with his or her own holdings. It gives an ultimate sense of pride and helps to encourage hard work and strivings for the overall betterment of society as a whole, whereas, the opposite of side constraints, as described by Nozick, would be communism, a government in which nothing is truly owned by the people.

Side constraints are necessary to an extent for a people to progress; however, too much of anything and the addition of a complicating matter could turn Nozick's theory of personal rights into a debate about an injustice and moral wrong. This idea of personal rights or side constraints actually could yield an ultimate harm to members of a society, in the sense that certain circumstances need to allow for the compromising of personal property. If a person were fleeing from a mass murder, such as the Holocaust, and seeking a place of refuge, under the idea of Nozick's side constraints, it would not be wrong to refuse help to the fleeing individual if you were strongly opposed to the entrance of non-family members. Personal rights make the refusal that may lead to the brutal slaying of a fellow human being acceptable, because a person may act as they please regarding their property and the protection of that property. Side constraints allow for the notion that no being has the right to infringe on your personal property, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. In this sense, deontology is flawed, and consequentialism prevails. In some situations, personal rights should not take on such value and the greater good or maximization of good should be recognized. It is obviously wrong to allow the loss of a life in a situation such as that of the previously mentioned case dealing with the fleeing of

a victim simply for the reason that you value your home to the extent of only allowing family members to enter. Extreme circumstances bring out a major flaw of deontology with Nozick's theory of side constraints.

Within societies, people subconsciously agree to social contracts. The idea of these social contracts is a direct effect of deontology. When a person agrees to live in a certain society or culture, they are also agreeing to a certain set of unavoidable rules, being that they are written or unwritten. For example, the Hindu culture in India forbids the slaughter of cows no matter the purpose or reason. If someone chose to live within the bounds of the Hindu population and culture, they too would be bound by social contract to refrain from killing cows. If, however, a person broke this social contract by killing that sacred creature, the cow, that act would be regarded as wrong even if the population were starving, with no other source of food. A deontologist would find this act unquestionably wrong, no matter the outcome or consequence, because this person indubitably did not act according to the rules. On the other hand, consequentialism would find the act wrong if the person did not kill the cow. The consequence of not killing the cow would be the deaths of many people, thus making it satisfactory to break the rules, with out consideration for the religious beliefs and other sacred principles, which are the foundation of that particular culture. Deontology values the moral law in all situations, whereas the theory of consequentialism maintains that obtaining a good consequence, a right by consequentialist definition, far outweighs any other reasoning, thus, once again, totally undermining the law and justice as a whole.

Deontology, as a theory of the right, would be sufficient in the perfect world; however, Earth is not and will never be considered as any type of utopia. The idea,

which suggests that duties and obligations must be the foundations of all right physical and mental actions, does not always yield the best outcome. Deontology is in a sense a selfish theory, which promotes the strict following of rules and universal laws, while encouraging the private property of a person to be valued above overall well-being. This type of ranking can be used, in our not so perfect world, to promote moral wrongs. Ironically, these morally wrong actions are not considered as such by the deontologist, they are, in fact determined to be right. In knowing this deontology cannot be the best theory for determining what is right and wrong.

Although this theory of the right deemed deontology seems to be geared toward the rights of the people, it ultimately will also be predisposed to harm and take away from the rights of the people. It holds strictly that all rules should be followed. This type of reasoning leads to the eradication of rights, which is depicted undoubtedly within the previous scenario dealing with the mass murders of innocent people. Being that the theory of the right, deontology allows a person to adhere to their personal moral rules and universal laws, yet also has the possibility to lead to the rights of others being destroyed unintentionally, makes deontology ultimately insufficient.