**Theory of Conduct**

**“Duty”**

**Learning objectives**

Knowledge:

* Understand the ethical principle of deontology: judgement of the nature of the action itself is more important than its consequences
* Understand the concern of Kantian deontology: reason is the basis of morality and morality reflects human autonomy and freedom
* Understand the Formula of Humanity, the Formula of Universal Law and the process of moral judgement of Kantian deontology
* Understand there may be conflicts between duties
* Understand the strengths and weaknesses of Kantian deontology
* Apply Kantian deontology

Skills

* Skills of application of Kantian deontology
* Critical thinking skills
* Problem solving skills

Values and Attitudes:

* Rationality, self-discipline, freedom

Important notes:

1. This learning resource is prepared for teachers of Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies. Teachers are expected to make adaptation and enrichment according to the needs of their students. Moreover, after each learning activities, teachers should provide debriefing to students for their development of positive values and integrative application of generic skills.

2. The ERS curriculum is for S4-S6 SS students. This learning resource uses plain language as far as possible to explain theories of ethics, which, in some cases, are simplified to suit the learning needs of the students.

3. Cases, stories, movie plots, and classic moral dilemmas are included for the purpose of students’ reflection in the learning process. To illustrate moral dilemmas, some viewpoints in this material may seem exaggerated and critical. Teachers should always remind their students of the difference between these viewpoints and the reality in the present world. Judging the past with contemporary standard is not the intended perspective, rather, students should be guided to make contrast and holistic understanding of the relationship between these practices and their historic, cultural and social contexts.

4. The discussion questions, key points and knowledge content of the learning resource are suggestion in nature. Learning and teaching should not be limited to these suggestions. Teacher should use them flexibly for ongoing development of school-based resource according to the learning objectives of the curriculum.

**Suggested teaching period: 5 lessons**

**Teacher shall prepare:**

* Introductory Activity: Is motive more important than consequence?
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (1) : The Principles of Deontology
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (2): Two Formulae in Kantian Deontology for Judging Moral Principles
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (3): Conflicts between duties
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (4): Strengths and Weaknesses of Kantian Deontology
* Case Study (1): Is it humane to do so?
* Case Study (2): Is it moral to borrow money with no intention to pay it back?
* Case Study (3): Is it moral to take care of oneself alone without helping others?
* Case Study (4): The story of Kalamas
* Case Study (5): Killing one person to save five hundred people
* Case Study (6): The Story of Rahab and the Israeli Agents
* Case Study (7): Daniel in the Lions' Den

Teaching process:

1. Teacher discusses with the students “Introductory Activity: Is motive more important than consequence”.

* Teacher may guide students to understand that, when we make decisions related to morality, we may sometimes consider the motive of the action itself instead of its consequences.
* **Teacher may further explore with the students the case of “Organ transplants”. Compare it with the case of the “Using the Railroad Switch” in the last section and find out their differences.**

**2. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): The Principles of Deontology”

Teacher may ask student to summarize the key points of Kantian deontology:

* The judgement of the nature of the action itself is more important than its consequences
* **W**e make moral judgments of right and wrong according to reason
* Morality reflects human autonomy and freedom

**3. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (2): Two Formulae in Kantian Deontology for Judging Moral Principles”. Teacher may use the examples provided to explain the process of moral judgement of Kantian deontology. Teacher may ask students to summarize the key points:

* **The Formula of Humanity: When we act, we have to treat ourselves or others as ends instead of mere means. From another perspective, we should not treat others in ways that they do not agree with.**
* **The Formula of Universal Law: If we claim that our moral acts have to be based on a certain principle, then this principle must be one that everyone can live by. We use rational thinking to formulate certain moral principles. If others also use their rational thinking, they will agree with us that those principles are reasonable and feasible.**

**4. Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss “**Case Study (1): Is it humane to do so?”, “Case Study (2): Is it moral to borrow money with no intention to pay it back?” and “Case Study (3): Is it moral to take care of oneself alone without helping others?”. Student shall try to apply the judgement method of Kantian deontology.

**5. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (3): Conflicts between duties” and discusses with students how to deal with conflicts of duties.

6. Teacher explains “Knowledge Content of the Subject (4): Strengths and Weaknesses of Kantian Deontology” and use it as a conclusion.

7. **Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss “**Case Study (4): The story of Kalamas”, “Case Study (5): Killing one person to save five hundred people”, “Case Study (6): The Story of Rahab and the Israeli Agents”, or “Case Study (7): Daniel in the Lions' Den”, and finish the questions.

8. Based on students input, teacher draw conclusions on the necessary conditions for the world to operate on pure Kantian deontology.

**Introductory Activity: Is motive more important than consequence?**

The two honest shopkeepers

A and B are the shopkeepers of two shops respectively. They are doing business on the same street. They are honest businessmen.

When asked why they treat their customers honestly, shopkeeper A would say: “It's very simple, customers are smart people, and you cannot think you can always deceive them. If they find out I have cheated them, my shop's reputation will be destroyed. Will I not end up paying a cost for this? “

Shopkeeper B will say, “My father taught me that no matter what, to be human is to be honest. To do business is part of being human. Honesty is our duty.”

A fictional story

Question for discussion:

Whose argument do you agree with?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

* The actions of the two shopkeepers are the same, leading to the same consequence.
* However, their motives are different. Shopkeeper A is concerned with the consequences of being honest or cheating, while shopkeeper B is motivated by the duty of being honest.

Organ transplants

Imagine you are a surgeon. Five patients in the hospital are in urgent need of different organ transplants to survive. One of them needs a heart, one a lung, one a liver, and the other two each a kidney. All five happen to have the same rare blood type, so it is hard to find the right donor. At this time, a foreign traveler came to the hospital for a simple body check. By chance, he has the same rare blood type as theirs. With your expertise, as long as you use some simple medication to end the life of the traveler painlessly and without the notice of others, then his organs can save the five people awaiting organ transplants.

Question for discussion:

What would you do? Would you kill one person to save five people?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

* If you calculate the consequences of surgery on the basis of utilitarianism, you will find it ethical to kill a single traveler to rescue the five patients. However, for many people, this is against their moral intuition.
* Because this organ transplant operation involves taking the initiative to kill a person directly, there is a violation of the moral obligation of not to kill. In addition to our moral intuition that takes killing as wrong, Kantian deontology also uses reasoning to establish the moral obligation of “do not kill”.

Suggested pedagogy: The Four Corners.

Key points:

* Students should make judgement independently (on which side they decide to stand). We should give them enough time and guidance and let them first discuss with classmates of the same stand.
* Organize students in groups according to their views. Place each group in a corner and give time for them to organize and consolidate their views within the group.
* Then ask students to have discussion with classmates holding different views and listen to each other's opinions and then to clear up their own views.
* If conditions permit, teacher may ask students to attempt to persuade those holding opposite views, aiming to reach a consensus. (Everyone can change position and move to another corner.)
* The teacher invites some students to present their conclusions and processes of thinking to the class.

In-depth exploration:

* Compare with the case of “Using the railroad switch” of the last section, check if there is any difference between the principles behind their answers.
* We can employ the “the principle of double effect” in ethics to explain the differences between the two. The “the principle of double effect” broadly states that although an action may cause harm *indirectly* (that is, “double effect” or “side effect”), if it can lead to greater good, then this action is moral.
* On the contrary, if the action leads *directly* to harm, even if it can lead to greater good, it is immoral.
* In the case of “Using the railroad switch”, the aim of switching to another railroad is to save the five workers. It is a good act. Although it will *indirectly* kill the other worker on the other track, it is still a moral decision.
* On the contrary, in the case of organs transplants, to save the five patients, it is needed to kill one person *directly*, thus it is an immoral decision.
* Most of us will agree with using the railroad switch, which reflects the moral intuition of consequentialism. And most of us will disagree with killing the foreign traveler, which reflects the moral intuition of deontology.

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): The Principles of Deontology**

As mentioned in the previous section, the theory of conduct of Western Ethics is mainly divided into two schools: Consequentialism and Deontology. The former focuses on the consequences of action, while the latter focuses on the action itself.

**Deontology**

Deontology advocates the judgement of right or wrong according to the nature of the action itself. Deontology is very different from consequentialism, objecting that we should make moral judgement according to the consequences of the action. It focuses on whether or not we decide our action basing on deontological duties. A “duty” refers to the responsibility we have to bear in order to act according to moral principles.

For example, as it is wrong to force others to act in a way that is against their will. For example, torture is, of itself, wrong and immoral, despite the possible consequences of bringing the criminals to justice.

Immanuel Kant provided rich elaboration on many issues of deontology in ethics and he had a profound influence on later generations.

**Key points of Kantian Deontology**

1. Reason is the basis of morality.

Kant thinks that we make moral judgments according to reason. Both humans and animals act under the influence of natural instincts. For example, we want food when we are hungry, defend ourselves against attacks, protect the people we love, and so on. However, the basic difference between humans and animals lies in the fact that human being is not solely under the domination of natural instincts but can also act by following our reason. We will step back and reflect on whether our actions are right or wrong. If we rationally judge an actions to be right, we have an obligation to do it.

For example, we do not snatch the food from others when we are hungry, probably due to fear of punishment. Although our law-abiding action is correct, the motivation is to avoid the pain of punishment, which is the same as the natural instinct of animals. Only by making rational reflection and understanding that it is contrary to morality to snatch others’ belongings, will our action be genuinely moral.

2. Morality reflects human autonomy and freedom

Some people think that morality has many restrictions on human conducts and limits people's freedom. Kant's view is exactly the opposite. He thinks that if we act only according to our instincts, doing whatever we like, we are actually under the control of the laws of nature. We are dictated by heteronomy (i.e. under the control of something other than oneself) thus losing our own freedom. True freedom is to use our rationality to set moral principles for ourselves and then act according to them. This is an autonomous act.

For example, many people love sweet or deep-fried foods. If we eat whatever we like, we will put ourselves under the control of our instincts and cannot act freely. On the contrary, we may judge with our rationality that it is more beneficial to our health if we reject or eat less these food. If we can act accordingly, then human autonomy and freedom are reflected.

Reference:

[**https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/**](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/)

Kant went out for a walk every afternoon at the same time. His timing was so accurate that people in Königsberg could adjust their own clock with the time of his walk. At the same time, he insisted on walking alone, only to avoid opening his mouth, so as not to harm his health by inhaling air through his mouth. After the walk, he was obsessed with reading and thinking until 10 o'clock at night, only by then would he go to rest. We can see from Kant's daily routine how he established with rationality his own personal discipline, and how he practiced autonomy.

Reference:

Dieter Henrich, Between Kant and Hegel (Harvard University Press, 2008), 55.

Wayne P. Pomerleau, Twelve Great Philosophers: A Historical Introduction to Human Nature (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 226.



Portrait of Immanuel Kant, Anonymous, 1768

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (2): Two Formulae in Kantian Deontology for Judging Moral Principles**

Each of us has our own habits and norms guiding our own conduct. “One must keep promise”, “Do what you have promised to do”, “I will treat you well if you treat me well”, “Everyone for himself and the devil yake the hindmost” are some popular codes of conduct. The question is, what kind of principle could pass the rational judgement of deontology?

Kant puts forward two well-known formulae of judgement for deontology: “the formula of humanity” and “the formula of universal law”. Kant believes that the two principles are the consistent, either one of them can be used for making judgement.

1. The Formula of Humanity

Kant's first formula for judging moral principles is simple: you only have to think about the way you deal with people when you act, and you have to treat yourself and others as an end, not just as a mere means. From another perspective, we cannot treat people in a way that they do not agree with. It is noteworthy that according to this formula, it is wrong to do something that our own hearts do not agree with.

Slavery is a clear example of violation of this formula. Slave owners use violence and intimidation to force their slaves to work for them. It is a violation of the will of the slaves. Slave owners regard the slaves as merely means of satisfying themselves without considering the ends (or the free will) of the slaves.

The formula of humanity does not condemn all acts that treat human as means. It only rejects those acts that treat humans “merely” as a means. For example, while serving us, waiters who serve in restaurants are also a means of satisfying us. However, they also have their own ends of act, such as earning a living or gaining satisfaction. Furthermore, they voluntarily agree to serve their guests instead of being forced to do so. On the contrary, if we treat waiters impolitely or force them to replace food that is good, then we are acting immorally.

2. The Formula of Universal Law

If we claim that our moral acts have to be based on a certain principle, then this principle must be one that everyone can live by. Kant believes that all human beings have the ability to think rationally. We use rational thinking to formulate certain moral principles. If others also use their rational thinking, they will agree with us that those principles are reasonable and feasible. In other words, the principles on which our moral actions are based must be universal.

Let us use the famous question of “whether suicide is moral or not” as an illustration. Kant thinks that suicide is immoral. Why? We can try to understand his moral reasoning by the following four steps.

2.1 Identifying the principle behind the action

Some people may think that their lives are so painful and feel that it is better to die than to live. So they want to end their own lives. Behind this intended action, there is a principle like this: “For love of myself, I will shorten my life when it brings me more disasters than satisfaction.”

2.2 Imagine a world in which everyone lived by that principle

Imagine a world in which everyone, out of love for themselves, will shorten their lives when they have more disasters than satisfaction. That is, in face of unbearable suffering, everyone will choose to commit suicide.

2.3 Whether a world could exist in which everyone lived by that principle?

You then need to test the above situation and see whether it can pass the “Universalizability Test”. Think about it: image a world in which everyone lives by that principle. Could this world exist? Kant believes that this imagined world cannot exist in reality. He said it would be a contradiction to propose that “self-love” (or self-protection) drives people to save their own lives while at the same time it drives people to destroy their lives. So this imagined world is full of contradictions and therefore impossible to exist.

Committing suicide cannot pass the test, it is therefore immoral.

2.4 Whether you are rationally willing to act on that principle in a world where everyone lived by it?

We also ask: According to reason, are we willing to act on this principle.

If a principle of action can pass both the above and this test at the same time, we have a “perfect duty” (i.e., absolute duty) to fulfill. Otherwise, if a principle of conduct passes only the universal test but fails to pass this test, then it is an “imperfect duty.” For example, the principle “takes care of yourself only, and does not help others” can pass the “universalizability test” (the imagined world can exist), but we may not be willing to live in such a world. Therefore, in certain situation and within our acceptable limits, we have a duty to help others.

Reference:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/>

Christopher Panza and Adam Potthast, *Ethics for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2010) pp.155-159

**Case Study (1): Is it humane to do so?**

Kant's “formula of human nature” is simple and powerful. When we actually use it, we only need to consider whether the act itself treat others (or ourselves) as mere means? Or, do you see others as a means of achieving our goals without their consent?

The following conducts are generally considered immoral. If they are tested with the formula of humanity, what kind of moral reasoning and judgement will be resulted? (hints: the guiding questions are;

1. Does the conduct treat others as mere means?

2. Does the conduct respect the humanity of others (and ourselves), regarding others (and ourselves) as persons with rationality and dignity?)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Conduct | Moral reasoning | Moral Judgement |
| 1. Breaking promise | Treating other’s trust as means for achieving one’s goals. | Immoral |
| 1. Cheating in examinations |  |  |
| 1. Murder |  |  |
| 1. Rape |  |  |
| 1. Theft |  |  |
| 1. Torture |  |  |

(suggested answer)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Conduct | Moral reasoning | Moral Judgement |
| 1. Breaking promise | Treating other’s trust as means for achieving one’s goals. | Immoral |
| 1. Cheating in examinations | Without classmates’ permission, peek at their answers to achieve one’s goals. | Immoral |
| 1. Murder | Without the consent of the victim, kill her/him for the sake of achieving one’s own purpose (such as expressing hatred, covering up secrets, etc.). | Immoral |
| 1. Rape | Without the consent of the victim and treat her/him as a means of satisfying one's sexual drive.  (Or) do not respect another person as a human being and treat her/him as a means of satisfying one's sexual drive. | Immoral |
| 1. Theft | Without the consent of the owner, snatch his/her possessions to meet one’s own needs. | Immoral |
| 1. Torture | Do not respect the humanity of another person and do not treat her/him as a person of rationality and dignity.  (Or) do not respect one’s own humanity, in such a way that cause animals to bear unnecessary suffering. | Immoral |

**Case Study (2): Is it moral to borrow money with no intention to pay it back?**

Keeping promise is another morally right action that Kant mentioned. We can consider whether the following actions are moral by using Kant's deontology.

Suppose you want to borrow money from a friend and promise to pay it back by a certain deadline, but in your heart, you actually know you cannot repay it on time.

Kant would say: “borrowing money with no intention to pay it back is immoral”. Can you guess his arguments? Try to follow the steps of Kant's “formula of universal law” to do a moral reasoning.

1. Identifying the principle behind the action.

“When I need money, even if I know I cannot pay it back, I will still make a promise of returning it.”

2. Imagine a world in which everyone lives by that principle.

3. Whether a world could exist in which everyone lives by that principle?

4. Whether you are rationally willing to act on that principle in a world where everyone lives by it?

(Only when the principle passes through the third step of the test should we consider this step.)

(suggested answer)

1. Identifying the principle behind the action.

“When I need money, even if I know I cannot pay it back, I will still make a promise of returning the borrowed money.”

2. Imagine a world in which everyone lives by that principle.

Imagine a world in which, when in need of money, everyone would make promises of returning borrowed money, even if they knew they cannot pay it back.

3. Whether a world could exist in which everyone lives by that principle?

If everyone acts according to the principle, everyone promising others that he or she would return the money when knowing he or she actually cannot. The problem is, this would destroy the trust between human beings. No one would believe any promise. It is contradictory that everyone keeps on promising other while disbelieving the promise itself. Thus, the act is immoral.

If everyone lives by that principle, when in need of money, the people in that world would make promises of returning borrowed money, even if they knew they cannot pay it back. The problem is that doing so would undermine the trust of others’ promise in paying back the money. As a result, no one would believe pay back promises. In such a world, everyone would make promises of returning borrowed money, even if they knew they cannot pay it back, but no one would believe such a promise. This is contradictory.

It is immoral to borrow money with no intention to pay it back

4. Whether you are rationally willing to act on that principle in a world where everyone lived by it?

(Only when the principle passes through the third step of the test, should we consider this step.)

This step is not needed in this case.

**Case Study (3): Is it moral to take care of oneself alone without helping others?**

We have mentioned above the idea of imperfect duties, one example of which is “to take care of oneself alone without helping others”. By this principle, we mean “I do not help others, nor do I expect others to help me.” Kant would say: “we cannot say ‘I do not help others, nor do I expect others to help me’ is absolutely moral or immoral. However, at least we have the duty to help others under some circumstances.” Try to follow the steps of Kant's “formula of universal law” to do a moral reasoning.

1. Identifying the principle behind the action

2. Imagine a world in which everyone lives by that principle

3. Whether a world could exist in which everyone lives by that principle?

4. Whether you are rationally willing to act on that principle in a world where everyone lives by it?

(Only when the principle passes through the third step of the test that should we consider this step.)

(suggested answer)

1. Identifying the principle behind the action

“I do not help others, nor do I expect others to help me.”

2. Imagine a world in which everyone lives by that principle

Imagine a world in which everyone would not help others and would not expect others to help them.

3. Whether a world could exist in which everyone lives by that principle?

If everyone live by the principle above, none of the members of this world help others or expect others to help themselves. In such a world, those who need help from others would be denied of help, and they will either be harmed or even unable to survive. However, this world could still exist because people who are more fortunate or capable do not need others to help to survive. There would be no contradiction in this world.

Thus the principle of “I do not help others, nor do I expect others to help me” is moral.

4. Whether you are rationally willing to act on that principle in a world where everyone lives by it?

(Only when the principle passes through the third step of the test, should we consider this step.)

Although the principle of “I do not help others nor do I expect others to help me” passes the third step of the test, living in such an indifferent world is very difficult and no one can be sure that he or she will never be in need. Therefore, we do not want to live in such a world.

Therefore, “to take care of oneself alone without helping others” is not a perfect duty.

(Kant also gave us another example of imperfect duty, which is about the development of personal talents. The principle of action can be stated as: “Suppose I have a useful talent, and I prefer to spend time on enjoyments than developing it. In short, I would rather just devote myself to enjoyments.” Try the moral reasoning steps with this example.)

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (3): Conflicts between duties**

Scholars have attempted to list out some basic ethical duties. Below are seven of them:

1. Promise keeping
2. Fidelity
3. Gratitude for favors
4. Beneficence (doing good to others)
5. Justice
6. Self-improvement
7. Nonmaleficence (non-harming or inflicting the least harm possible)

None of these duties have absolute priority over others. In some situations, the question is relatively simple if there is only one duty to consider, such as we have to do the thing we have promised a friend. However, there are other situations where there are more than one duties to be fulfilled and these duties are in conflict with one another. In such situations, we have to decide which one can override the other and play the dominant role.

For example, you want to be loyal to your friends, but they ask you to bully others. In this case, fidelity and nonmaleficence are in conflicts. You cannot keep both. How do you decide? We can only make moral choices on our own, or we can seek opinions from those who have deeply reflected on this issue of conflict. In general, the principle of non-maleficence enjoys a higher priority.

Reference: Louis P. Pojman and James Fieser, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong,* 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2012), p.140.

Question for discussion:

In the above example of friendship and bullying, how would you choose?

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (4): Strengths and Weaknesses of Kantian Deontology**

Strengths of Kantian Deontology

1. Everyone is treated equally

Kant clearly distinguishes between duties and personal preferences. He regards moral duties as objective and unrelated to the subjective desires and orientations of individuals. In the moral judgment of deontology, everyone is treated with respect and fairness. Unlike utilitarianism, in deontology, individual will not be allowed to suffer for the happiness of the whole.

2. Providing clear criteria of right and wrong based solely on rationality

Kantian deontology provides clear criteria of right and wrong and thus the moral guidance is clear and direct. Deontologists will neither be affected by the consequences of moral judgments, nor will they follow the instructions of religious or traditional authorities. It too ignores the individual's subjective feelings and emotions. It solely bases its judgement on rational reasoning.

Weaknesses of Kantian Deontology

1. Too absolute, sometimes violating our moral intuition

Kantian deontology emphasizes that the moral principles that have passed rational judgment are absolute. All rational people have to consider these duties and obey them unconditionally. However, this absolute position sometimes violates our moral intuitions. Here is one of the most famous examples. Suppose your friend is being chased after by a man holding a weapon. Now your friend is hiding in your house. The armed man goes to your house and ask if you know where your friend is. As required by deontology, you must be honest to any rational person (even if they lose their minds for a brief moment), so you must truthfully tell the truth to the armed man. For many, Kant's demands are against our moral intuition and his requirements are too absolute.

2. Too rational, ignoring feelings

Kantian deontology has also been criticized for being too rational, ignoring the importance of feelings in human life, especially moral feelings such as compassion, kindness, regret, and so on. For example, suppose Person A is ill and two of her friends come to visit her. Friend B really cares about A. When B knows A is ill, he becomes very worried and immediately rushes to visit her. Friend C, on the other hand, does not have much feeling on A’s illness. He originally does not want to give her any regard, but, after some rational thinking, he reluctantly goes to visit A. Which friend's action should be promoted? Kant’s answer would be Friend C, because Friend C's action is based on reason. However, many people find it hard to agree with such a conclusion.

3. Failing to solve the problem of conflicting duties

Kant provided the way to judge morally, while he did not explain how we could make our decision when there is a conflict of duties. For example, when honesty and helping the innocents conflict with each other, which one should we choose? Deontology does not provide a clear guideline.

Kant only puts forward how to judge whether a principle is moral or not or whether it is a moral duty, but he does not tell us how to choose between conflicting duties. For example, how can we choose between the two conflicting duties of being honest and protecting innocent people? Deontology does not give clear guidance.

4. Excluding non-rational beings from moral consideration

Rationality and autonomy are the bases of Kantian deontology. Only rational and independent people deserve human respect. Then, how about those severely mentally challenged people? Do we need to respect them? How about animals and the environment, do we not need to respect it?

Reference:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/duty_1.shtml>

**Case Study (4): The story of Kalamas**

Once when Buddha visited a town of the Kalama people in the Kosala country. The Kalamas heard that Buddha had come so they paid homage to him and said, “Lord, there are some priests and contemplatives who come to our village. They expound and glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, and disparage them. And then other priests and contemplatives come. They expound and glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, & disparage them. They leave us absolutely uncertain & in doubt: Which of these venerable priests & contemplatives are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying?”

“It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by rumours, by scripture or authority of a certain religion, by theories or conjecture, by the appearance of a matter, by subjective views of personal preferences or conjecture, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher', or by the number of believer. Kalamass! After detailed observation, analysis, reflection and discussion, when you know for yourselves that something is unkind, wrong or evil, then you should abandon them…… And when you know for sure something is kind and good, then you should enter and remain in them.”

The above story was adapted from the <Kalama Sutta>

Questions for discussion:

1. From what Buddha taught the Kalamas above, what factors should they consider before making choices and decisions? What factors should they not consider? Why?
2. Religion usually gives people an impression of emphasizing on compassion/ faith instead of reason, does the story of Kalamas support or reject this impression? Why?
3. In your view, will Kantian deontology judge the Buddha’s principle of act moral?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

* Only after I have undergone detailed observation, analysis, reflection and discussion, will I accept or reject the teaching of others.
* We may then further judge the above principle of act by using “th**e formula of humanity” and “the formula of universal law”.**

**Case Study (5): Killing one person to save five hundred people**

In the *The Sūtra on Skill in Means*, there is a story about Sakyamuni Buddha killing one person to save five hundred people. In one of his reincarnated lives, the Buddha is a monk and had superpower. He took a merchant ship to the sea, and on this ship there were 500 merchants.

The captain of the ship knew that the 500 businessmen were very rich. An idea emerged in his heart--he wanted to kill them for their money.

The Buddha knew that. By his superpower, he observed and knew that all of these 500 merchants were reincarnated bodhisattvas. If the captain was to murder the 500 people, this karma would be great. Even if these people were not reincarnated bodhisattvas, the karma of such killing would still be great.

If the captain succeeded in doing what he wanted, he would fall into the evil realms without hope of getting out. In order to prevent the captain from making this bad karma, the Buddha killed the captain and saved the 500 merchants.

Questions for discussion:

1. According to Kantian deontology, is it moral to one person to save five hundred people?

2. With his compassion captured by the saying “If not me going to hell, who will go there?”, the Buddha killed one person to save five hundred people. What are the differences between the presuppositions of the Buddha and those of Kant?

3. Can the above story point out how to make up the inadequacies of deontology? Explain your answer.

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

* In the story, the principle of killing one person in order to save five hundred people is that we cannot just let people doing bad things and entering into the evil realms. If we can stop them from doing so, we have to stop them (a moral duty), although we have to pay the cost. According to Kantian deontology, it is wrong to kill regardless of the consequences. For example, according to the formula of humanity, the life and death of the captain became a means to an end. What the Buddha was concerned was not to take the life and death of the captain as means, but rather to take his own self as means (to safe the captain from the evil realms). However, Kant will still see it as immoral.
* Kant argues that the act of killing degrades the victim into a means. However, in the story, the Buddha considered the captain as a subject, and he himself was willing to become the means. As Buddhism has the concept of reincarnation and delivering all beings, it accepts the plot of the story.
* Deontology thinks with pure reason, it cannot solve all kinds of moral dilemma. As in the story, we would not be able to do anything even if there was going to be a murder (taking the initiative to kill the captain is immoral). The focus of this Buddhist story is how to deliver sentient beings in that particular situation (this is related to the idea of virtue, which will be introduced in detail later). This can make up the inflexibility of deontology.

**Case Study (6): The Story of Rahab and the Israeli Agents**

After the death of Moses, the prophet, Joshua became the leader of the Israelites and continued to lead them out of the wilderness into the Promised Land of milk and honey. To enter the Promised Land, he must first fight with the natives living there. As an able and wise leader, Joshua sent two agents to the all-important Palestinian city of Jericho to collect military information.

The two agents arrived in Jericho and hid in the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Someone said to the King of Jericho, “Israelites will come here to spy on us tonight. To avoid being discovered, they may hide in a brothel. You need to be careful.”

Then, the soldiers came to Rahab’s home and said to her, “Hand over the men who have come into your house. They are spying on our military information for the Israelites”. In fact, Rahab knew the identity of the men and she had already kept them on the roof. She told the soldiers, “Those men had been here before. They are probably outside the town already. You better go now to catch them up.” Then the soldiers left.

Then, the soldiers came to Rahab’s home and said to her, “hand over the men who have come into your house. They are spying on our military information for the Israelis”. In fact, Rahab knew the identity of the men and she had already kept them on the roof. She told the soldiers, “Those men had been here before. They are probably outside the town already. You better go now to catch them up.” Then the soldiers left.

Rahab continued, “Now, I have been kind to you, will you swear that when you attack the land of Jericho, you will save my family, so that death may not come on us?’ The men said to her, ‘If you keep our business secret, we will treat you with kindness and honesty. When we come to the land, tie this cord of bright red thread at the window, and your family will be safe. Then she liberated the men, let them down from the window by a cord, since the house where she lived in was at the boundary of the town.

Reference: Chapters 1-2, *Book of Joshua*, *the Bible*

Questions for discussion:

1. From the perspective of deontology, is Rahab’s act of lying to the soldiers moral?

2. From the perspective of utilitarianism, is Rahab’s act of lying to the soldiers moral?

3. Does Rahab’s moral dilemma involve a conflict between duties? Do you agree with her decision?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

According to the story, there may be two reasons behind Rahab’s act of lying:

* First, it was a calculation of personal interest. She knew that Israel would win, thus helping them may result in saving her own life. This is a consequentialist thinking, but it is not utilitarian (as it does not aim at bringing forth the greatest happiness).
* Second, it was done out of religious duty, that is, to obey the will of God. (Note: Religious duties or rules are different from those of Kantian deontology).

From the perspective of deontology, both only considering one’s own interest and lying could not pass the universalizability test. These ideas treat human beings only as a means and thus are immoral. Religious duties are different from duties that are the result of rational thinking, but we shall not discuss them here.

From the perspective of utilitarianism, we cannot know the number of people affected, nor we know how Rahab’s act of lying had influenced those people involved, thus we have no grounds to judge if the act is moral. Students may point out that letting the agents go may lead to the destruction of Jericho and a massacre carried out by the Israelite army. Or students may say that handing the agents over to the soldiers might have prevented the collapse of the city and would led to different result. But from the available information, we cannot calculate the happiness of the majority, this is one of the limitations of utilitarianism.

The moral dilemma of Rahab includes the conflicts of two duties: “protect the family” and “be honest”. The former presumes that no matter she lied or not, the city would be destroyed by the Israelite army, while lying could save her family.

**Case Study (7): Daniel in the Lions' Den**

Daniel, the Jew, was one of three administrators in the Persian palace. Though Daniel was a man in power, he was very dedicated and faithful to the Lord, the Jewish God. Daniel prayed to the God three times a day, every morning, noon and evening, and he never worshipped any other god or spirit. With the blessings of the Lord, he distinguished himself from the other administrators and the Persian King wanted to set him over the whole kingdom.

On hearing this, the other administrators envied Daniel and tried to find grounds for charges against him and plotted to kill him, but in vain. Finally, they thought of a trap to set him up. They asked the King to establish a royal statute that within thirty days, whosoever shall ask a petition of, worship or pray to any god or man, save the King, should be cast into a den of lions and be preyed by the lions.

Daniel was a very keen worshipper of the Lord. He took no notice of the ban and kept worshipping and praying to God three times every day. When the administrators against him were informed of his worshipping, they complained to the King and accused Daniel of violating the prohibition, asking the King to throw him into the den of lions. The King felt he was in a dilemma as he very much appreciated Daniel’s talents. He regretted that he had issued such a senseless ban. Then, he suddenly realised that there was not any evidence to verify the claim that Daniel had worshipped other Gods; as long as he denied the accusation, he would be safe since there had not been any proof.

On the thirtieth night after the order of the ban, the Persian King went to Daniel’s home with his administrators. He asked Daniel, “I issued the ban on worshipping any God and human beings except me - those who ignore the ban will be thrown into the Lion’s Den. But now I think that this is a senseless order, and if I was allowed to choose again, I would have never issued such a divine order. In the past few days, there had been accusation that you have violated the ban. You are my most beloved servant. If I do not see you violate the ban with my own eyes or hear you admit that you have disobeyed the order, I would not believe in any accusation against you. Now I am at your home and do not see you worship any other god. Can you tell me if you have worshipped any other god in the past thirty days?”

Although the Persian King knew Daniel had disobeyed this ban, his words obviously implied Daniel’s denial to the administrators’ accusation. Finally, Daniel preserved his own faith and principle and admitted the charge in front of the King and the administrators, though he understood the King’s thought. The King thus had no choice but to order the soldiers to throw him into the den of lions.

Reference: *The book of Daniel, Bible*

Questions for discussion:

1. The administrators have no evidence to prove the accusation of ‘worshipping other god’. Daniel would not be killed if he denied it. Why did he still make the frank confession?
2. From the perspective of deontology, do you think Daniel’s frank confession was a moral decision?
3. From the perspective of utilitarianism, do you think Daniel’s frank confession was a moral decision?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

* Daniel’s ’s frank confession is a fulfillment to the duty of “being honest”. From the perspective of deontology, “to be honest” can pass the “universalizability test” and is therefore moral.
* From the perspective of utilitarianism, Daniel has two options:
  + Option A: Daniel denied the accusation, he might be unhappy because he lied and was unfaithful to God. Persian administrators would also be unhappy because they could not accuse him successfully. The Persian King would become happier as Daniel was saved.
  + Option B: Daniel made a full confession. He was not afraid of death but would be happier as he acted according to the duties of being faithful/loyal and honest. The administrators might become happier as they successfully eliminated Daniel. The Persian King would suffer as he might be worried of Daniel’s death.
  + In comparison, Option B would produce more happiness than Option A. Thus, Daniel’s frank confession was moral.

Other References for this session:

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