

## CHAPTER 5

### The Argument over Means and Ends

*Do something every day that you don't want to do; this is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain. — Mark Twain*

One of the longest running arguments in ethical theory has been that of whether means or ends should decide what is moral. Some philosophers have contested that a moral act is one that uses ethical means without consideration of the consequences, or ends. Others hold that the consequences of an act are what count. Good consequences are the result of right action. In other words, the means are ethical only if the results are good. The camps have been strongly allied with some of the greatest philosophical minds of the ages, and their arguments have been continued right up until the present day. These two points of view are usually called either *teleological* (having to do with consequences) or *deontological* (having to do with rules or duties). To simplify matters we'll call them *consequential* and *duty-based* theories.

#### Consequential Ethical Theories

Although rules of morality may seem to be the most common approach used, both historically and currently, such is not the case. If you think about it, even rules must be arrived at by considering the consequences of actions. For example, by proposing that public relations practitioners not lie to the media we are also asking, in effect: Why not? And when we ask why not, we're considering consequences. As already mentioned, consequentialism has acquired something of a bad reputation, at least in the Machiavellian form (egoism). However, no one today would seriously propose that we make moral decisions *without* considering the potential consequences of our actions. In order to better understand the nature of consequential ethical thought, we need to explore its most common forms.

First of all, all consequential theories contend that the moral rightness of an action can be determined by looking at its consequences. If the consequences are good, the act is right. If the consequences are bad, the act is wrong. What is right is determined by considering the ratio of good to evil that the action produces. The right act is the one that produces, or is intended to produce, the greatest ratio of good to evil of any alternative being considered. The two consequential theories we're going to discuss here are *egoism* and *utilitarianism*.

## Egoism

*Egoism* contends that an act is moral when it promotes an individual's best long-term interests. If an action produces, or is intended to produce, a greater ratio of good to evil for the individual *in the long run* than any other alternative, then it is the right action to perform. Remember Machiavelli? He basically proposed that a monarch should do anything in his power to improve his position and to gain more power. Any act was justified if it aided the acquisition and maintenance of power, for a good ruler sometimes had to be ruthless if his people were to derive any benefit from his being in charge.

Also recall that Thomas Hobbes saw human beings as essentially egoistic (self-interested), and this is why a strong government was a necessary component of his social contract. Unless forced to do otherwise, he believed, most people would simply look out for themselves. Although the other social contractarians, such as Locke, took a slightly less callous view of the self-interested nature of people, they still recognized that the temptation existed. In fact, all moral decisions contain an element of egoism. When a reporter writes a story about a social problem, he certainly hopes that some good will come of it. He probably also hopes that some good will come to him as well—recognition, a promotion, a Pulitzer Prize. There is nothing inherently wrong with self-interest, as long as it doesn't become the overriding reason for making a decision.

Not only people are egoistic. Organizations can act egoistically, as can entire nations (typically called chauvinism or jingoism). It wasn't that long ago that the infamous line, "what's good for General Motors is good for the nation," was uttered. When a local television news outlet withholds a story critical of a local car dealer because car dealerships are its main source of advertising income, it is acting egoistically. When an advertising agency runs a campaign for a big-name liquor brand directed at a minority with a known predisposition for alcoholism, it is acting egoistically. When a public relations firm decides to drop a controversial client because it is worried about its reputation, it is acting egoistically. This is not to say that these are unethical decisions; however, if self-interest is the sole motivating factor, they may well be.

There are some misconceptions concerning egoism that give it a worse reputation than it deserves. For example, egoists don't necessarily do anything they want. An egoist might undergo unpleasant or even painful experiences as long as the long-term outcome is positive. It is also not true that egoists are bereft of such traits as honesty, generosity, and self-sacrifice. Egoists can possess all of these traits, as long as they advance long-term self-interest. For example, an egoistic CEO might be willing to admit to wrongdoing in the short term if the net gain were a better reputation in the long run. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear public relations counselors phrase advice in egoistic rather than moralistic terms to their clients. You'd be much more likely to hear, "I think that course of action will damage our potential sales in the minority markets," than, "I don't think that's the ethical thing to do."

Of course, the most obvious weaknesses of egoism have been pointed out by numerous theorists, including some we've already discussed. First of all, egoism ignores blatant wrongs—actions that, in and of themselves, are morally unacceptable. That is why Machiavelli has such a bad reputation for recom-

mending egoism as a legitimate form of moral decision making. Murdering your rivals just doesn't seem very democratic. We also recognize that egoism cannot be used successfully by everyone at the same time. If all people were egoists exclusively, we would probably end up back in Hobbes' "state of nature." We have seen for ourselves how, in unsettled times, whole societies become egoistic to the extent that they are willing to wipe out other cultures different from themselves. In short, there is simply no way to resolve conflicts of egoistic interests. All egoists are compelled to look out for themselves unless forced to do otherwise. Obviously, the interests of others must be considered as well as the likely consequences of our actions on these other parties. That's where utilitarianism comes in.

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**When using egoism, try the following exercise:**

*Ask yourself to what degree your choice of alternatives is based on your own or your organization's best interests? Remember that self-interest is always present, but it shouldn't be the driving force behind your decision.*

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**Utilitarianism**

Although it was not entirely his idea, the credit for utilitarian philosophy is usually given to Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham was something of a radical reformer in his lifetime, pursuing such causes as prison reform, public education, censorship, and government corruption. At the base of all of his activities lay a single guiding philosophy: The rightness or wrongness of any action can be judged entirely in terms of its consequences. Motives are, thus, irrelevant—completely the opposite of Kantian theory. Good consequences give pleasure whereas bad consequences result in pain. (This became known as the "pleasure–pain principle.") His idea was that the right course of action was the one that promoted the greatest pleasure or minimized the most pain. He called this philosophy *utilitarianism*, because it promoted an action based on its utility, or usefulness.

On the down side, Bentham is also largely responsible for developing utilitarianism into a coldly objective and formulaic method for making decisions. He was convinced, for instance, that pleasure and pain could be arithmetically calculated, and that the more objective the decision maker, the fairer the outcome. Under his conception of utilitarianism, there was no room for emotion or for the individual. Only the greater good was important.

Bentham continued to crusade for utilitarianism his entire life, bringing about numerous reforms in Great Britain. His philosophy was furthered by his disciple James Mill, who is largely credited with bringing Bentham's works to the forefront of British politics in the early part of the nineteenth century. Government and social agencies in Britain, even today, are heavily influenced by the utilitarian notion of the greater good and the welfare of all of society as having precedence over that of the individual.

### ***John Stuart Mill***

James Mill is probably best known, however, as the father of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). The result of John Stuart Mill’s work has been a utilitarian philosophy much more amenable to the individual and less rigid in its attention to the majority’s happiness, and in one of his greatest works, *On Liberty* (1859), he asserted once and for all the rights of the individual. In addition to his more famous work, Mill is also credited with bringing the rights of women to the forefront in a series of works co-authored with his wife, Harriet Taylor, culminating with *The Subjection of Women* (1869). In it, Mill and Taylor (and after Taylor’s death, her daughter, Helen) argued forcefully for sexual equality, a subject that had been largely ignored since ancient times (except, of course, by women, most especially philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote vehemently about women’s rights in the eighteenth century).<sup>1</sup>

### ***Modern Utilitarianism***

Utilitarianism today has lost much of the mathematical machinery that Bentham developed in order to weigh good and evil against each other. In fact, today we tend to be suspicious of decision-making methods that use calculation as a basis. Think of the negative connotation of the word “calculating.” How about the business practice of cost–benefit analysis—reducing everything to numbers (typically monetary)? Modern utilitarianism simply asserts that we should always act to produce the greatest ratio of good to evil for everyone concerned with our decision. Ideally, that would include all of the moral claimants affected by our decision. In this way, utilitarianism pays strict attention to third-party interests, thus not allowing client loyalty (for example) to override the best interests of others. In fact, one of the primary benefits of using utilitarianism is that it recognizes the four primary claimant groups: clients/customers, organization, profession, and society.

We can easily see the attractiveness of utilitarianism as a decision-making tool for the media. Every time a journalist argues that publishing a story benefits his readers more than it harms the subject of the story, he is using utilitarian logic. The common claim that the practice of advertising adds to the “marketplace of ideas” is also a utilitarian argument. In fact, making a moral decision without considering the likely outcome of the action on the various claimants would strike most of us as decidedly errant. One of the problems with utilitarianism, however, is that it causes us to have to make decisions on a case-by-case basis. Every decision requires that we stop and consider how our actions will affect everyone on our list. Then, we must balance the potential good against the possible harm caused by our action. If the good outweighs the harm—for the most people—then we go with the decision. Wouldn’t following rule be a lot easier?

### ***Act and Rule Utilitarianism***

In fact, utilitarians have had similar problems with their own philosophy. That’s why there are two basic forms of utilitarianism. *Act utilitarianism*, which is what we’ve been talking about so far, states that the right act is the one that

produces the greatest ratio of good to evil for all concerned, and is used on a case-by-case basis. On the other hand, *rule utilitarianism* states that ethical actions and judgments can be based on rules that promote the greatest ratio of good to evil for all concerned.

For example, a reporter working under the act utilitarian guideline could write a completely fictitious story about a ghetto child hooked on drugs and how his life is a microcosm of the tragedy of our inner cities. The publication of this story could win the paper accolades and the reporter a major prize and a glowing reputation. It could also prompt intense public concern, and stimulate legislative activity to help correct the inequalities suffered by people living in the inner cities of this country. Under act utilitarianism, the publication of this fictitious story could be justified because it serves the greater good via recognition of the problem and probable social reform. However, is lying ever acceptable in journalism? Almost everyone would agree that it is not. How, then, can a utilitarian justify not writing the story?

Rule utilitarians believe that not every decision calls for a balancing of good over evil. They hold that some types of decisions can be made in advance, because the logical right choice can generally be said to be in the best interest of all concerned. For example, if we assume that lying, in any form, irrevocably damages the reputation of journalism, and that that damage is definitely counter to the greater good, then we can make a rule that says, "Never lie in journalism." The idea is that the greater good is nearly always promoted by following this rule. Any exceptions can be resolved using act utilitarian methods.

### ***Weaknesses of Utilitarianism***

The benefits of using utilitarianism as a decision-making tool are that it forces us to consider everyone concerned with our actions, and that it directs us to pick the alternative that generates the greatest good for the greatest number of people—a very democratic concept. In fact, that is exactly what makes a democracy work—majority rule. The majority choice is the one that is put into effect because the majority, by default, is the greatest number of people.

The problem, of course, is that the majority may not deserve the greatest good, a point made very clear at the beginning of the nineteenth century by a visiting Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville had come to America to study its new form of government for himself, and ended up writing one of the most probing investigations of democracy ever produced, before or since. One of his most cogent insights was that the focus of majority rule under a democratic form of government might well lead to what he termed "the tyranny of the majority"—a point not wasted on anyone who has ever lost an election.<sup>2</sup>

And, in fact, under utilitarianism, the minority basically loses out. Only by balancing utilitarianism with the theory of justice can we account for the often-neglected minority interest. The *theory of distributive justice* basically asserts that those who deserve something should get it, whereas those who are not deserving should not. Thus, a deserving minority might benefit from an action over an undeserving majority—a concept that runs decidedly counter to

the purest form of utilitarian theory. In this country, however, we have vari-ously recognized this shortcoming of utilitarianism by enacting laws to help mitigate the effect of the tyranny of the majority. Affirmative actions laws are a good example of the theory of distributive justice used as a counter to the “greater good” approach.

This potential conflict was not lost on John Stuart Mill, who, in his treatise on utilitarianism, dealt with the connection between justice and utility. Mill admits that certain examples of justice and injustice merit a higher consideration than the mere meting out of pleasure. For example, he agrees that we:

- Should not deprive anyone of his or her personal liberty, property, or any other thing that belongs to him or her by law. In other words, do not violate a person’s legal rights.
- Should not take or withhold from anyone that to which they have a moral right. This is especially important if a bad law has resulted in someone either being deprived of their rights or having been given rights they do not deserve. The fact that these rights are conferred by law makes them legal rights; however, the fact that the law may have deprived someone of rights that they deserve makes those rights (prohibited by the law) moral rights. Think, here, of the segregation laws prior to the 1960s.
- Should give to those who are deserving, and withhold from those who are not deserving (the notion of distributive justice).
- Should keep promises that we have entered into voluntarily.
- Should not show partiality in circumstances in which impartiality is considered appropriate.

Mill warns us that a blind devotion to the greater good should be tempered first by these considerations.

Finally, many have suggested that utilitarianism is a flawed concept because it considers only the greater good in its calculations, leaving no room for individual choice or integrity. Deni Elliot, however, contends that utilitarianism is widely misunderstood, and does, in fact, allow for a broader consideration of issues and constituents beyond mere calculation of the “greater good.” She differentiates between the “greater good” and the “aggregate good.” Aggregate good can be defined as “the overall good for the community as a whole, or for all of the people who can be identified as being affected by a particular action.”<sup>3</sup> According to this view, the good of the whole community, including those potentially harmed by an action, must be considered. Thus, any harm caused to an individual can be justified only if it serves the good of the entire community—even the person being harmed. And the only way to insure this approach is for the moral agent—in this case, the journalist—to “make the determination with dispassionate objectivity.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, impartiality must be the hallmark of ethical decision making if the community is to be served.

Elliot assures us that Mill was concerned with minority opinion and argued that only public discussion could discover truths. Thus, the aggregate good must be sought over any simple arithmetical good. Cold calculation of

numbers alone cannot suffice when deciding on moral action. The moral agent must have developed sense of benevolence toward the entire community, free of personal interest, yet aware that the community includes everyone, not just the majority. For example:

It would follow that the good journalist and good news organization will have the good of the community as a practical priority. Certainly the First Amendment allows news organizations to publish whatever they want—and Mill would enthusiastically support this liberty. But . . . Mill answered the question of what one is supposed to do with all of that freedom. The answer is to promote the good of all.<sup>5</sup>

In order for utilitarian decision making to succeed, Elliot proposes a “Utilitarian Decision Tree” based on the principles of justice provided by Mill and outlined above. These principles are justified, Elliot says, “because of their utility in advancing the aggregate good.”<sup>6</sup> Any exception to these principles can only be allowed because the exception contributes to the aggregate good. A decision tree founded on Mill’s theory of utilitarianism would look like this:<sup>7</sup>

1. What is the intended action?
2. Will it cause harm?
  - If not, no analysis needed.
  - If yes, review principles of justice.
3. Is someone being denied legal rights?
  - If so, action is unjust.
4. Is someone being denied moral rights?
  - If so, action is unjust.
5. Is the person being harmed getting what s/he deserves? Or is the person being helped getting what s/he deserves?
  - If so, action is just.
6. Has the person being harmed had a promise broken to him/her?
  - If so, action is unjust.
7. Has everyone in the situation been treated impartially?
  - If so, the action is just.

In the rare occasions that exceptions to following these rules are justified, it is essential to show how the exception will lead to the aggregate good and how following the rule will not lead to the greatest good for the whole group. Only if the action has been determined to be just do we advance to the utilitarian calculus:

1. How will harming this individual promote the overall good of the community? Consider whether the community will be better or worse if everyone knows that individuals can be harmed in this way for this reason.
2. How will the community be harmed if the proposed action is not taken?

1. Consider whether the community will be better or worse if everyone knows that individuals will not be harmed in this way for this reason.

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**When using utilitarianism, try the following exercise:**

*Ask yourself which of the alternatives you're exploring will generate the greatest benefit (or the least amount of harm) for the greatest number of people?*



*However, keep in mind that the precepts of justice require that you consider the merit of those who are affected by the consequences of your action.*

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## Duty-based Ethical Theories

Every time you reference a law, a rule, a code, or a guideline, you are using duty-based ethical theory to bolster your position. Likewise, if you are acting out of a sense of duty or obligation, you are using duty-based logic. The idea behind duty-based theory is that the action itself should be the focus of decision making, not necessarily the outcome of the action. Some actions are simply right or wrong by nature; and, as human beings, we intuitively understand this, and we understand that it is our duty to do the right thing.

The earliest form of duty-based ethics came from religion. The Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments are a good example of a rules-based approach to morality. If you keep the commandments, you are moral. If you break the commandments, you are immoral. This is pretty simple reasoning and is, therefore, very appealing to many people. In fact, the strong appeal of duty-based ethics is that there is something concrete to base your decisions on. You don't have to dig any deeper than the rule that governs this particular action to find your answer. If your newspaper has a policy against running rape victims' names, then you simply don't run their names—no questions asked. If your professional code of ethics says always tell the truth, then you don't have to mull over whether you should lie or not. These guidelines are sometimes referred to as *conjunctive rules*, and specify a minimal cutoff point for a decision.<sup>8</sup> An example of an ethical conjunctive rule might be the admonition in the Society of Professional Journalists' code never to distort the content of news photos or video. Application of such a guideline would clearly invalidate an option of "doctoring" a photo to remove an unwanted or distracting image.

Most laws, codes, policies, and regulations are the result of duty-based ethical thinking: generally the result of people coming together to make guidelines by which to govern their own actions. The process itself is a major triumph of the Enlightenment and a direct result of the social contract ideas of many of the theorists already discussed. Exactly how these rules of conduct are derived, however, has been often debated. Let us look, then, at some of the more important contributors to this line of thought.

### **Immanuel Kant**

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was born and lived his entire life in what was then known as Prussia. By all accounts, he was a quiet intellectual whose studious life ran like clockwork, day after day, and year after year. Despite his reserved lifestyle, Kant was a popular figure in his hometown of Königsberg, in eastern Prussia, and he became world-famous in his own lifetime.

In a period of just under ten years at the end of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant produced some of the most influential philosophical work of his or any other time. Through various volumes covering a huge array of topics, he developed a systematic view of the universe such as had not been seen since the time of the Greeks. Along with his other achievements, Kant also created an ethical system based solely on the human ability to reason and the belief that all moral actions were the result of virtuous intent.

#### ***Good Will***

Kant held that nothing was good in itself except *good will*. In other words, no action, in and of itself, was either wrong or right. Only the motive of the actor lent the action its morality. If a person acted out of a vested interest (because of a possible consequence) then the act was non-moral—it had no moral implications whatsoever. But, if a person acted because she thought she was doing the right thing, then she was acting out of good will and the act was a moral act.

In Kant's view, actions have true moral worth only when they spring from recognition of a duty and a choice to discharge it. For example, using Kantian logic, an advertiser who avoided untruthful advertising because he was afraid of getting caught and fined would not necessarily be acting morally. However, if the advertiser recognized a duty to his constituents to tell the truth, and that is the reason he didn't lie, then the act would be a moral act.

Kant defined “good will” as the uniquely human capacity to act according to one's principles, not out of an expectation of potential consequences. In fact, Kant had learned through the writings of the Italian philosopher and royal counselor Niccolò Machiavelli that basing decisions solely on likely consequences could excuse any action, even the most abhorrent. In his famous treatise, *The Prince*, Machiavelli had proposed that any action taken by a monarch should be based on an assessment of the best outcome for the monarch himself. Under this guideline (which is also known as *egoism*), actions such as murder could be excused if they are in the best interest of the person making the decision.

Like other Enlightenment theorists, Kant believed that human beings were endowed with the ability to reason, and reasoning would logically lead to an understanding of how to construct moral rules to live by. Rational beings

***Kant insisted that we always act so as to treat others as ends in themselves and never completely as means to an end. In other words, we are not to use other people or treat them merely as objects.***

would, then, logically abide by the rules they set for themselves. In this, he was in accord with the social contractarians. Rules arrived at in this manner would also become morally obligatory, and Kant saw obligation (or duty) as the overriding determinant of morality. He believed that we would recognize our duty when we saw it because we could reason, and reason would lead us logically to recognition.

For Kant, there were two obvious types of duties: perfect duties and imperfect duties. *Perfect duties* were those that we must always observe; however, he framed these as proscriptions, or negative obligations. For example, “Never lie,” or “Never kill.” We must always refrain from these actions, no matter what. *Imperfect duties* were those that we must observe only on some occasions. These were framed as positive obligations, or prescriptions—such as: “Give to charity.” He realized that some duties, such as “give to charity,” could be observed only by those capable of doing so, whereas others, such as “don’t kill,” should, and could, be observed by everyone. Of course, he knew that rational beings would recognize when a duty was completely binding and when it was not. In this, Kant was an intuitionist, believing that human beings naturally knew right from wrong. The question remains, however, exactly how we should come up with the rules by which to live a moral life.

### *The Categorical Imperative*

“We should act in such a way that we could wish the maxim of our action to become a universal law.” That’s the way Kant believed we would be able to develop rules of order, or duties. *Maxim*, in this sense, means the principle on which the action was based—the type of principle that people formulate in determining their conduct. So, if a person won’t lie out of principle, he should be willing to apply that principle as a law, universally. Under the *Categorical Imperative*, we would only act in ways that we would want everyone else to act, all the time. Thus, if we wished everyone to lie all the time, then it would be permissible for us to lie. We could murder with impunity only if we would allow others to do so. However, Kant proposed that the proper use of the Categorical Imperative would have us act in a prescribed way regardless of whether we would wish to be treated that way ourselves. Kant reasoned that rational beings wouldn’t tolerate a state of existence in which everyone could lie or kill without compunction. And, of course, that’s true. How could we live in a society in which we would expect a lie for every question we asked, or one in which murder were the rule rather than the exception? Kant knew that social order could only come from rules formulated by all and obeyed by all. In fact, a key component of his Imperative is that those who legislate the laws are also bound by them.

Kant, writing as he did at the end of the eighteenth century, was probably heartened by the birth of democracy as a potentially viable form of government. In fact, his idea of a moral community was very much akin to the concepts of democracy given voice by the movers and shakers of the American and French revolutions (although he probably disagreed with the methods of both, since he viewed political change as most properly evolutionary, not revolutionary). If we look at his Categorical Imperative as a method of achieving a

political state that promotes individual autonomy along with the general good, we can better understand the importance of his method. For example, using the Categorical Imperative, we begin by considering the formulation of laws that will be binding on all citizens all the time, with no exceptions. These laws will not only benefit individuals, but also the state as a whole—or the public good. These laws would also be binding on those whose responsibility it is to legislate and enforce them, because they are categorical. And these laws would respect the citizens of the state and their individual rights as human beings.<sup>9</sup>

This recognition of the inherent worth of human beings is a key feature of Kant's Categorical Imperative. As part of his method for recognizing moral duties, Kant insisted that we always act so as to treat others as ends in themselves and never completely as means to an end. In other words, we are not to use other people or treat them merely as objects. He rationalized that all human beings were owed a minimum of respect simply because they were human beings and capable of reason—in the same way as other natural rights philosophers believed that we are all born with “certain unalienable rights.” For Kant, we all had the right to basic respect as human beings. Only if we demonstrated that we did not deserve to be respected would we relinquish that right. In other words, every person's autonomy would be respected except in cases in which the exercise of that autonomy conflicted with the public good (as represented by the laws of the state). So, we can see that Kant's method of arriving at moral rules allows not only individuals to construct moral guidelines for themselves, but it also permits whole communities to formulate laws for the governance of an entire political system under which individual rights are also clearly recognized.

### **Duty-based Theory in Modern Practice**

Kant's theory is still much debated today, mostly because of his seemingly absolutist stance on perfect duties. For example, there appears to be no clear reason why prohibitions against some acts should hold without exception. Is it never permissible to lie? What if the lie is to save another person from harm? Likewise, could we ever be justified in killing another person? How about in defense of one's family? These are important questions over which Kant clearly struggled. On the question of conflicting duties, for instance, Kant, much like other intuitionists, insisted that we would recognize which was the “true” moral duty and act according to our reason. This smacks a bit of the rationale given in this century by a Kantian scholar already covered in Chapter 2. William David Ross, whose six obligations were discussed as a means of identifying moral claimants, also held that rational human beings would be able to decide for themselves which of these duties were paramount in any given situation. The reasoning here is that the very struggle involved in determining the priority of duties is instructional in itself and will ultimately lead to more thoughtful decisions.

The fact that all of the media professions have codes of ethics, and that nearly all media outlets (journalistic, advertising, and public relations) have their own, individual, codes as well, speaks to the Kantian desire to make and follow moral rules. And these rules are almost always made with no exceptions

in mind. When an earlier version of the PRSA code stated in Article 5 that “a member shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information,” it meant “no member—ever.” Not surprisingly, most rules are like that.

Kantian guidelines continue to proliferate in every newsroom and media agency. They vary from the overly complex to the exquisitely simple. The former *Washington Post* ombudsman, Joann Byrd, has developed what she calls her “Four-Minute Ethics Guide.” Her decidedly Kantian rules are:

- Do not kill.
- Do not cause avoidable harm.
- Act justly (meaning: Give people what they are due, treat them fairly).
- Help those in immediate need.
- Keep promises.
- Respect persons (as in: Appreciate their dignity, privacy, and autonomy).
- Do not lie.

To these, Byrd adds the “only two principles of journalism [that] can be weighed on the same scale with the rules that guide the human race. They are: Inform the public and Serve the public interest.”<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect of Kantian ethics apparent today is that of personal integrity. Kant’s emphasis on individual autonomy and respect for persons as ends in themselves leads us to respect individual integrity as well. It also insists on our practicing individual integrity in recognition of our duties as moral agents. The legal scholar Stephen Carter, in his book *Integrity*, says that the practice of integrity today has three requirements.<sup>11</sup>

- First, a person must discern the difference between right and wrong. Of course, Kant believed that, as reasoning human beings, we were capable of doing just that. According to Carter, this first criterion “captures the idea of integrity as requiring a degree of moral reflectiveness.”
- Second, a person must act on what she has discerned, even at personal cost.
- This brings in the ideal of an integral person as steadfast, which includes the sense of keeping commitments. You’ll recall that the key to Kant’s morality was good will—acting out of a sense of duty.
- Finally, Carter states that a person must be willing to say openly that she is acting out of an understanding of right and wrong, “which reminds us that a person of integrity is unashamed of doing the right thing.”

Thus, on the view of both Kant and his successors, the moral person is the one who is willing to formulate rules that will then become binding on both her and on everyone else in her society. Then, that person must act out of recognition of those rules and out of respect for the integrity of others as well as her own. We can clearly see the influence Kant has had on modern ethical thought as well as its potential implications for the media. However, the ques-

tion that must concern us now is whether simply following the rules, no matter how logically arrived at, is the only way we can conceive of moral action. Is it not possible that the probable outcome of our actions should also be considered?

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**When using Kantian logic, try the following exercise:**

*Ask yourself what are your duties to others and if the action you are taking would disrespect any of your claimants, especially if it violates their autonomy.*

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**NOTES**

1. Harriet Taylor's first husband requested that her name not appear on works jointly or almost wholly written by her and Mill, with whom she had been carrying on a very close relationship. Following her husband's death and her subsequent marriage to Mill, she was, according to Mill, still reluctant to have her name appear on their works. After her death from tuberculosis in 1858, *The Subjection of Women* was finished by Mill and Helen Taylor, Harriet's daughter. Mill credited both of them with the bulk of this work, even though only his name appeared on it.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 233.
3. 67 Deni Elliot, "Getting Mill Right," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 20 (2–3), 101.
4. 68 *Ibid.*, 102.
5. 69 *Ibid.*, 107.
6. 70 *Ibid.*, 110.
7. 71 *Ibid.*, 110–111.
8. David J. Fritzsche, "A Model of Decision-Making Incorporating Ethical Values," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 10, 841–852.
9. For an excellent discussion of the political component of Kant's philosophy as well as a clear explanation of his ethics as a whole, see Roger J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Kant's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
10. Joann Byrd, "Let's Stop Abusing the First Amendment" (Seventeenth Annual Ruhl Lecture, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication, 1993).
11. Stephen Carter, *Integrity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).