

THE DIFFICULT CHOICE BETWEEN DEONTOLOGY AND CONSEQUENTIALISM

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Title: The Difficult Choice Between Deontology and Consequentialism

Abstract: In the following paper we will argue that the deontological emphasis on duty from Kant's main ethical works is based on the critique of the concept of happiness. The utilitarian consequentialism of both Bentham and Mill focuses, however, on a hedonistic evaluation of happiness, considering it along pleasure as the 'highest end' of life. We will try to provide a solution and bridge a gap between a rule-based universalist deontology and the more variable, empirical, and practical consequentialism, considering Richard M. Hare's two-level utilitarianism, with its shift between the intuitive and critical levels.

Keywords: *Kantian deontology; utilitarian consequentialism; categorical imperative; happiness; rational duty; principle of utility; hedonism; two-level utilitarianism;*

Immanuel Kant's deontology, presented in *Grounding of Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), emphasizes universality and prioritizes duty over hedonism. In his two groundbreaking works, Kant lays the foundation for deontological ethics, asserting that morality is grounded not in consequences (as in utilitarianism or hedonism) but in rational duty. Kant's system is non-consequentialist: even if a morally dutiful action leads to bad consequences, it remains the correct action because rightness is determined by the maxim's rationality and universalizability, not its outcomes. The influential triple distinction between maxim, law and imperative must be noted right from the start. "Practical principles are propositions that contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or *maxims*, when the condition is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will; but they are objective, or practical *laws*, when the condition is cognized as objective, that is, as holding for the will of every rational being ... A practical rule is always a product of reason because it prescribes action as a means to an effect, which is its purpose. But for a being in whom reason quite alone is not the determining ground of the will, this rule is an *imperative*, that is, a rule indicated by an ought [*ein Sollen*], which expresses objective necessitation to the action and signifies that if reason completely determined the will the action would without fail take place in accordance with this rule. Imperatives, therefore, hold objectively and are quite distinct from maxims, which are subjective principles" (Kant 2015, 17 f., emphasis in the original). Maxims are subjective and only valid for the will of the moral subject. Laws are

designed to be objective and applicable to the will of every rational individual. The imperative is a rule, which expresses an objective constraint toward action, being objectively valid. According to Kant, there is a hard distinction between subjectivity (the realm of the maxim) and objectivity (the domain of law and imperative). The law is superseded by the imperative, which brings along a surplus of objectivity, i.e. an “ought” [*ein Sollen*], an obligation of a certain action valid for all rational beings.

Kant builds his deontology in a negative fashion through the criticism of four basic hedonistic and utilitarian concepts: happiness, the faculty of desire, inclination and selfishness. Because of the limited space¹ we will focus mainly on the concept of happiness. Kant’s ethics is a basic disapproval of φιλαυτία (translated as ‘self-love’), in contemporary terms, the endless narcissism of the egocentric subject (see for instance Fromm 1973, 201 sqq). The German philosopher starts from a reasonable premise: “Now, a rational being’s consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence is happiness, and the principle of making this the supreme determining ground of choice is the principle of self-love” (Kant 2015, 20). One cannot, nevertheless, build an ethics focused on the principle of happiness, because it contradicts the cult of duty. “A command that everyone should seek to make himself happy would be foolish, for one never commands of someone what he unavoidably wants already” (Ibid., 33). The highly subjective ethical solutions later provided by Kierkegaard and Stirner would have been reprehensible for the author of the three *Critiques*. Super-individual objectivity dissolves the subjectivity of the *Einzigste*, just like the universal is a displacement of the particular: “The principle of happiness can indeed furnish maxims, but never such as would be fit for laws of the will, even if *universal* happiness were made the object. For, because cognition of this rests on sheer data of experience, each judgement about it depending very much upon the opinion of each which is itself very changeable, it can indeed give *general* rules but never *universal* rules, that is, it can give rules that on the average are most often correct but not rules that must hold always and necessarily; hence no practical *laws* can be based on it” (Ibid., 32, emphasis in the original).

Considering the triple distinction from the outset, the principle of happiness cannot elevate itself to the realm of laws or imperatives: it can furnish only non-universal (i.e. particular and contingent) maxims. A significant critique of eudemonistic and utilitarian ethics is provided by the absence of an empirical definition of happiness. This limitation suggests that it is not feasible to develop a universalist ethical framework based on the concept of happiness, as there is no clear understanding of what constitutes happiness for everyone. Bentham famously defined happiness in terms of pleasure and the absence of pain² – but this hedonistic cal-

¹ See Cîmpean 2023 for a more thorough analysis.

² “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In

culus is notoriously vague. For instance, we can ask ourselves: Is pleasure sensory or intellectual? Is all pleasure morally equal? As we shall see, Mill tried to refine this by introducing a qualitative hierarchy of pleasures, privileging ‘higher’ intellectual and moral pleasures – but this just makes the definition more contested and less measurable. Without a shared, empirical standard, the utilitarian framework struggles to ground universal moral claims. For instance, two people might derive ‘happiness’ from entirely opposite behaviors (e. g. I value solitude, and you value social life; I am the ascetic type, you are the indulgent type), making the moral evaluation of acts unstable. Aristotle’s εὐδαιμονία (flourishing, well-being, living according to reason) is more complex than mere pleasure, but it also suffers from a fundamental ambiguity: What counts as flourishing? Is it objective (the so-called life of virtue) or subjective (a sense of fulfillment)? Furthermore, modern individualism complicates Aristotle’s idea that flourishing is tied to a fixed human nature or teleological function (ἔργον), which contemporary science and pluralistic ethics no longer assume. Kant’s argument in favor of the indetermination of the concept of happiness follows: “If it were only as easy to give a determinate concept of happiness, then the imperatives of prudence would exactly correspond to those of skill and would be likewise analytic. For there could be said in this case just as in the former that whoever wills the end also wills ... the sole means thereto which are in his power. But, unfortunately, the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills. The reason for this is that all the elements belonging to the concept of happiness are unexceptionally empirical, i. e., they must be borrowed from experience, while for the idea of happiness there is required an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in my present and in every future condition.” (Kant 1993, 27).

The German philosopher’s counter-hedonism³ is even more obvious in the following fragment: “[H]appiness is not *the only thing* that counts. The human being is a being with needs, insofar as he belongs to the sensible world, and to this extent his reason certainly has a commission from the side of his sensibility which it cannot refuse, to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to happiness in this life and, where possible, in a future life as well. But he is nevertheless not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to all that reason says on its own and to use reason merely as a tool for the satisfaction of his needs as a sensible being ... No doubt once this arrangement of nature has been made for him he needs reason in order to take into consideration at all times his well-being and woe; but besides this he has it for a higher purpose: namely, not only to reflect upon what is good or evil in itself as well about which only pure reason, not sensibly interested at all, can judge but also to distinguish the latter appraisal altogether

words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility* recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of senses, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.” (Bentham 2003, 17, emphasis in the original).

³ For an analysis of the contemporary counter-hedonism, see Bolea 2024, 140–6.

from the former and to make it the supreme condition of the former” (Kant 2015, 52, emphasis in the original). The author of *Critique of Pure Reason* is not impressed by reason when it is used instrumentally, that is, when humans use it merely to calculate how best to achieve pleasure, comfort, or survival—things animals do by instinct. If reason is reduced to serving sensuous desires, then it loses much of its moral significance. This is a veiled critique of both hedonism and prudential reasoning – which are about achieving happiness or well-being through strategic use of reason. What elevates humans morally is that reason legislates the moral law to itself. This autonomy – the self-governing function of reason – is the true ground of human dignity. Kant’s revolutionary claim is that human beings are not merely animals with more advanced tools but are moral agents because they can act against inclination, in accordance with duty.

As we have seen, the universal takes precedence over the particular: that takes the character of universalization which can be later observed in the universal and binding feature of the categorical imperative. The humbling self-aware severity of the moral law takes accordingly priority over the self-indulgent φιλαυτία. Moreover, Kant argues that “inclination is blind and servile, whether it is kindly or not” (Kant 2015, 96), that moral actions based on inclinations “brings their considered maxims into confusion” (Ibid.), that perfect duty is “one which permits no exception in the interest of inclination” (Kant 1993, 30n.). Kant seems to argue that even if a person acts out of kindness, if their action is motivated by inclination (e.g., sympathy, love, or personal affection), then the act lacks moral worth.

Why is that? Because it is not governed by the moral law, but by contingent, emotional, subjective factors. Inclination is considered “servile” because it enslaves the will – we are no longer autonomous agents acting from duty, but rather reactive beings moved by feeling. If our moral choices are based on fluctuating inclinations, our maxims (subjective principles of action) lose their clarity and coherence. We cannot tell whether they are universally valid because they are based on arbitrary feelings rather than pure reason. Kant’s greatest nemesis is moral relativism: if we compromise moral law in favor of happiness, convenience, or even compassion (see Schopenhauer’s [2010, 401 sqq.] devastating criticism), we will allow everyone to make exceptions for their personal feelings. Additionally, Kant’s deontology acquires a more somber aspect at this juncture, positioning itself as an ethics of pain: “For, all inclination and every sensible impulse is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (by the inclinations that takes place) is itself feeling. Hence we can see a priori that the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a *feeling that can be called pain...*” (Kant 2015, 61, emphasis ours).

The famous fundamental law of pure practical reason is based upon the aforementioned principle of the objectivation of subjective will. “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law / *Handle so, daß die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne*” (Ibid., 28). Furthermore, pure reason “is practical of itself alone and gives (to the human being) a universal

law which we call the *moral law*” (Ibid., 29, emphasis in the original). Therefore, “this principle of morality ... is, therefore, not limited to human beings only but applies to all finite beings that have reason and will and even includes the infinite being as the supreme intelligence. In the first case, however, the law has the form of an imperative, because in them, as rational beings, one can presuppose a *pure* will but, insofar as they are beings affected by needs and sensible motives, not a *holy* will, that is, such a will as would not be capable of any maxim conflicting with the moral law” (Ibid., emphasis in the original). The categorical imperative is based on unconditional law, and the “relation of such a will to this law is *dependence* under the name of obligation, which signifies a *necessitation*, though only by reason and its objective law, to an action which is called *duty* because a choice that is pathologically affected (though not thereby determined, hence still free) brings with it a wish arising from subjective causes, because of which it can often be opposed to the pure objective determining ground and thus needs a resistance of practical reason which, as moral necessitation, may be called an internal but intellectual constraint” (Ibid., emphasis in the original).

Kant sees the moral law as a feature of reason itself, not of any particular psychology or biology. Therefore, any being capable of reason and willing – regardless of species or metaphysical status – falls under the scope of the moral law. This gives his ethics a cosmic universality: it’s not anthropocentric, but rationally universal. Humans possess reason (and thus the capacity for moral law), but, as we have seen, they are also affected by inclination, which introduces the possibility of acting against the law. Therefore, morality comes to us in the form of an imperative – a command – because we are not naturally aligned with the moral law. A holy will (for instance God’s) always wills the moral law spontaneously, without needing imperatives, commands, or obligations. In such a being, duty does not exist in the human sense, because there is no conflict between desire and law. In us, however, the will must be ‘necessitated’ by reason—that is, we must be compelled by the moral law against contrary inclinations.

The categorical imperative is based on an ‘ought’ [Sollen] and expresses the relationship between an objective law of reason and a subjective will, constrained by the objectivity of this reasonable principle. Moreover, the categorical imperative does not concern the matter of action (the empirical, changing mobile), targeting the form from which action derives (the determinant, the conditional, the a priori): “If I think of a hypothetical imperative in general, I do not know beforehand what it will contain until its condition is given. But if I think of a categorical imperative, I know immediately what it contains. For since, besides the law, the imperative contains only the necessity that the maxim should accord with this law, while the law contains no condition to restrict it, there remains nothing but the universality of a law as such with which the maxim of the action should conform. This conformity alone is properly what is represented as necessary by the imperative. Hence there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law ... [T]he universal imperative of duty may be expressed thus: Act as

if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature” (Kant 1993, 29f.)

A hypothetical imperative (*If you want X, then do Y*) has content which is contingent on a desire or goal – it only applies if you want something. Therefore, it is not universally binding, being prudential, not moral. A categorical imperative, by contrast, applies universally and unconditionally. It doesn’t depend on what you want, only on what reason demands. Its content is known *a priori*: it is the unconditioned form of moral obligation. In a categorical imperative, all that matters is that the maxim (subjective principle) of one’s action can be made universal. It does not refer to outcomes or desires, only to the form of the law. Kant draws attention to a formal principle: the logical consistency of willing. This is the first and most foundational formula of the categorical imperative. To test it, we may ask ourselves: can you rationally will that everyone act according to your maxim? If *yes*, the action is morally permissible. If *no*, it is morally impermissible (because it leads to contradiction or cannot be universalized without undermining itself). By acting according to a maxim that could be a universal law, you act autonomously – according to reason, not inclination. This preserves human dignity and is the basis of moral responsibility.

Kant’s deontology was mainly challenged by John Stuart Mill in his *Utilitarianism* (1863). According to him (Mill 2003, 181), the origin of utilitarianism is found in Plato’s *Protagoras* (358b), where an equivalence between the ‘good’ and the ‘useful’ is stated. Mill firstly considers that Kant legitimately lays down an “universal first principle as the origin and ground of moral obligation”: “So act, that the rule on which thou actest would admit of being adopted as a law by all rational beings.” Nevertheless, “when he begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows is that the consequences of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur” (Mill 2003, 183).

Mill admires Kant’s ambition to provide a universal moral principle, and he even quotes Kant’s formula of the categorical imperative approvingly. He acknowledges that this principle has a kind of formal clarity and elegance. Mill’s accusation is that Kant, despite his anti-consequentialist stance, ends up relying on consequences in practice. Kant says you must test your maxim by imagining if everyone followed it. But when you reject a maxim (like lying), you often do so because the world would be worse if everyone lied – e.g., trust would collapse. Mill sees this as implicitly utilitarian reasoning: evaluating actions by their outcomes (whether people would ‘choose to incur’ them). Therefore, Mill claims Kant’s test does not truly generate moral duties from pure reason alone – it still relies on people’s aversion to bad consequences. Mill is accusing Kant of practical *circularity*: the categorical imperative might sound formal and universal, but when we try to apply it to real moral cases, we inevitably consult the consequences of generalizing an action – thus, we are doing a form of rule utilitarianism, not pure deontology.

A Kantian could respond that Mill misunderstands the nature of the contradiction test: Kant is not evaluating outcomes but asking whether the very *logic* of the maxim collapses when universalized. For example, if everyone made lying promises, then the institution of promising would become meaningless, making lying by promise logically impossible – this is not a consequence, but a performative contradiction. Kant furthermore distinguishes between: a) contradiction in conception (perfect duties, like not lying): the maxim cannot even be thought as a universal law; b) contradiction in the will (imperfect duties, like charity): the maxim can be conceived universally but cannot be rationally willed by a being that wants happiness. Therefore, Kant's anti-consequentialist claim is that he is grounding morality in the form of willing itself, not in external outcomes.

The British philosopher criticizes his predecessor because the categorical imperative is not at all attuned to tangible reality, the ideal rationalism of duty being irrelevant for a world which acts according to the Freudian principle of pleasure (see also Mill 2018, 13 f.). This tangible and immanent universe, where immorality is not exceptional, is more fit for a sort of categorical anti-imperative. Moreover, Mill argues that the *Critique of Practical Reason* is not ... practical enough, dealing with 'ultimate ends', which are not verifiable with direct proofs. "Whatever can be proved to be good, must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof. The medical art is proved to be good, by its conducing to health; but how is it possible to prove that health is good? The art of music is good, for the reason, among others, that it produces pleasure; but what proof is it possible to give that pleasure is good? If, then, it is asserted that there is a comprehensive formula, including all things which are in themselves good, and that what ever else is good, is not so as an end, but as a mean, the formula may be accepted or rejected, but is not a subject of what is commonly understood by proof" (Mill 2003, 184). Mill is arguing that instrumental goods (like medicine or music) can be shown to be good because they lead to something else already regarded as good. For instance, medicine is good because it leads to health or music is good because it brings pleasure. But for things that are intrinsically good – ends in themselves, not means – no further proof can be given. We may ask ourselves: "what proof is it possible to give that pleasure is good?" Therefore, Mill concludes: any ultimate good cannot be proven in the usual sense (e.g. through deduction or empirical observation). At some point, we must reach a foundational value judgment, a kind of ethical intuition or consensus. Mill famously attempts to prove that pleasure is the ultimate good by saying: "the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it" (Mill 2003, 210). He analogizes 'desirable' to 'visible': Just as we say something is *visible* if it can be seen, something is *desirable* if people actually desire it. So, he observes that: (1) People do desire pleasure. Therefore, (2) pleasure is the only thing desired for its own sake. Therefore, (3) pleasure is the only intrinsic good, and all other goods are good insofar as they promote pleasure. Mill's argument may be criticized mainly for its circular reasoning: "pleasure is the only thing desirable because people desire it, and things are only desirable if people desire them". This fails from an empirical standpoint and it is highly tautological.

The English philosopher builds upon Bentham's principle of utility⁴, conceiving the principle of the greatest utilitarian happiness: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and ... all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain" (Mill 2003, 186).

Mill is reaffirming here Bentham's core utilitarian formula: The moral worth of actions depends entirely on their consequences, not on intentions, rules, or inherent character. Mill's two-part claim here: (1) *Only pleasure and freedom from pain are desired for their own sake*. (2) Everything else (e.g., health, knowledge, virtue, money) is either: inherently pleasurable, or instrumentally valuable because it produces pleasure or reduces pain. Thus, pleasure is the sole ultimate good, and all other values are derivative. Mill defends utilitarianism not as narrow pleasure-seeking, but as a rich, humane moral system that includes: intellectual fulfillment, moral development, a concern for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Mill deconstructs Kant's dismissal of happiness with a critique of the critique of happiness. He answers both to those that consider that happiness cannot be the rational end of human life and action because it is untouchable, and to those that ask themselves if we have the right to be happy, suggesting a minimal definition of happiness as alternation between tranquility and excitement (Ibid., 191). The author of *Utilitarianism* tries to convince the more rigid Kantians that happiness is the reasonable goal of living, that it is achievable as a mixture of serenity and exuberance, and that we are all entitled to it. Mill synthesizes utilitarianism, arguing that "pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends", and that "all desirable things ... are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain" (Ibid., 186). The English author is aware that a theory which supposes that the highest end of life is pleasure was designated "as a doctrine worthy only of swines" (Ibid.), a criticism that was applied to both utilitarianism and classical hedonism. He argues that the accusers "represent human nature in a degrading light", possessing a narrow perspective on humanity, in supposing that human beings are not capable of pleasures "except those of which swine are capable" (Ibid.).

The defenders of a more spiritual, deontological, or virtue-based ethics argued that if utilitarianism holds that the highest good is pleasure, then it reduces human beings to animals, since animals (like swine) also pursue pleasure. Therefore, utilitarianism was viewed base and degrading moral theory. Mill answered that the objection misrepresents human nature by implying that all pleasures are bodily or

⁴ "The *principle of utility* was an appellative ... employed by me ... to designate ... the *greatest happiness principle* ...: a principle, which lays down, as the only right and justifiable end of Government, the greatest happiness of the greatest number..." (Bentham 2003, 20 n., emphasis in the original)

base. In fact, humans are capable of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic pleasures that are “higher in kind”, not just in quantity. A being capable of these pleasures would not trade them for mere sensual gratification, even when the latter is more intense. It is “better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied” (Ibid., 188). Mill transforms utilitarianism into a richer, more humane moral system – one that aspires to educate desires, not just satisfy them. He accepts the hedonistic foundation of utilitarianism, but refines it to respond to moral and psychological complexity: not only the volume of pleasures is significant, but also the kind of pleasure pursued.

How are we to choose between the rigid deontological perspective and the more variable and contingent consequentialism? The contemporary philosopher Richard M. Hare with his two-level utilitarianism may provide a helpful insight. In his *Moral Thinking* (1981), Hare blends deontological intuition (rule-following) with utilitarian reasoning (outcomes which matter at a deeper level). He presents two levels of moral thinking: the intuitive level and the critical level. The first one is fast, rule-based and emotionally guided. On this level, we rely on moral rules like: “Don’t lie”; “Keep your promises”; “Help others in need”. These rules are usually good heuristics – they’ve evolved culturally or personally because they generally lead to good outcomes. At this level, we do not calculate consequences in every situation—we follow trusted principles. The second one is the philosopher’s or archangel’s level – used in special or problematic cases. At this level, we step back and evaluate rules themselves using act utilitarian reasoning, i.e., calculate which action will best satisfy preferences or maximize utility. When intuitions conflict or rules break down (e.g., in moral dilemmas, unfamiliar contexts), we shift to deep, consequentialist reasoning.

Hare synthesizes his two-level utilitarianism with his famous example of the ‘archangel’ and the ‘prole’: “Let us consider two extreme cases of people, or beings, one of whom would use *only* critical moral thinking and the other *only* intuitive. First, consider a being with superhuman powers of thought, superhuman knowledge and no human weaknesses. I am going to call him the archangel ... He will need to use only critical thinking. When presented with a novel situation, he will be able at once to scan all its properties, including the consequences of alternative actions, and frame a universal principle (perhaps a highly specific one) which he can accept for action in that situation ... On the other hand, consider a person who has these human weaknesses to an extreme degree. Not only does he, like most of us, have to rely on intuitions and sound *prima facie* principles and good dispositions for most of the time; he is totally incapable of critical thinking (let alone safe or sound critical thinking) even when there is leisure for it. Such a person, if he is to have the *prima facie* principles he needs, will have to get them from other people by education or imitation. Let us call him the *prole* (after George Orwell in 1984)” (Hare 1981, 45, emphasis in the original). While the archangel represents the ideal moral reasoner (fully rational, impartial and informed), the prole is morally unreflective, deeply embedded in habits, rules and social norms. While the archangel operates at the level of *critical* moral thinking (capable of assessing universalizing moral principles), the prole cannot move beyond the level of *intuitive* moral think-

ing: automatic, uncritical, pragmatic. Most humans are closer to the prole than the archangel, so they need moral rules to live ethically. These rules should be based on critical utilitarian reasoning but not require constant calculation.

Hare is also trying to bridge the gap between Kantian deontology (which gives us moral rules) and utilitarian consequentialism (which gives us moral justification). “Many people think,” Hare argues “that Kant and the utilitarians stand at opposite poles of moral philosophy. But ... the formal, logical properties of the moral words, the understanding of which we owe above all to Kant, yield a system of moral reasoning whose conclusions have a content identical with that of a certain kind of utilitarianism ... Utilitarianism itself is compounded of two ingredients, a formal and a substantial; and the formal element needs only to be rephrased in order to come extremely close to Kant; there is a very close relation between Bentham’s ‘Everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one’ ... and Kant’s ‘Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law’” (Hare 1981, 4 sqq.). This fragment shows that the apparent opposition between deontology and consequentialism might obscure a deeper logical commonality. Traditionally, as we have already seen, Kant and Mill are placed on opposite poles of moral philosophy. But the formal similarity between Kant’s universability of the moral law (“Act only that maxim...”) and Bentham’s impartial dictum (“Everyone to count for one...”) makes us think that both systems demand that moral reasoning abstract away from personal bias and treat others symmetrically. Therefore, Hare seems to claim that if one stripped Kant’s moral logic from metaphysical commitments, one would arrive to a preference-based utilitarianism. In this view, deontology is the prerequisite of consequentialism, not its fiercest adversary.

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