

century and early part of the twentieth century, our nation experienced rapid industrialization. Many at the time believed that this was a good thing, and in many respects it was. However, our lack of understanding of the effects on the environment at the time has led to some serious consequences that current and future generations now have to address. During the early years of industrialization, no one knew what disastrous effects pollution would have, not only on our environment but on our own health as well. As a result of pollution, we have seen increases in things like respiratory and allergy problems. Hindsight is always 20/20. Would it be fair to judge the great industrialists of the nineteenth century as immoral for consequences they could not have known about?

Although utilitarianism does have a number of problems, this ethical theory does provide us with at least one useful analytical tool. Utilitarianism forces us to consider alternatives and to use logic in the consideration of possible alternatives.

## DUTY ETHICS (DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS)

In contrast to teleological ethics above, deontological or duty ethics is not concerned with the consequences of an act. Duty ethics says that we are morally obligated to act in a certain way regardless of consequence. Thus, those that ascribe to this theory deny that “the ends justify the means.”

In order to begin to understand the difference between teleological ethics and deontological ethics, let us look at a modern example that has made headlines in recent times. The example we shall use is child labor. In our modern American society, child labor is highly regulated by both the United States Department of Labor and the various state departments of labor. Children in the United States are permitted to work. But the jobs they are allowed to perform are limited by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) and by various state labor laws. With regard to children, the FLSA's purpose is to protect their educational opportunities and prohibit their employment in jobs that are detrimental to their safety or health. For example, under Title 29 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, children 15 years of age and younger are prohibited from working in “manufacturing, mining, or processing occupations, including occupations requiring the performance of any duties in work rooms or work places where goods are manufactured, mined, or otherwise processed . . .” (29 CFR 570.33). The United States regulation of child labor was a response to the exploitation of child labor during the early part of the industrial revolution when children from poor families were employed in dangerous industries. Today, we recognize that education of our children is necessary and that they should not be permitted to work in facilities that interfere with their education or present a hazard to their safety and health.

As the industrialized nations of the world began to eliminate child labor in manufacturing and other dangerous occupations, many of these manufacturing and dangerous jobs have been moved to lesser developed nations where child labor laws are either nonexistent or unenforced. U.S. businesses such as Nike,

Wal-Mart, The Gap, Levi Strauss, Target, Donna Karan, New Balance, Disney, Reebok, Adidas, Van Heusen, Liz Claiborne, Ralph Lauren, and Kathie Lee Gifford were using manufacturers in third-world nations to produce their goods. These manufacturers employed sweatshop conditions and exploited child labor.

Many economists and utilitarian ethicists argue that this is part of development and not necessarily a bad thing. From a utilitarian perspective, overall happiness is achieved by such practices. People in the United States and other industrialized nations get goods at a cheap cost, while those in the developing world benefit from making wages necessary to support themselves and their families. As those nations continue to develop and as technology continues to advance, child labor in those places will also end just as it has in the United States. However, at this time, sweatshop conditions and child labor are the reality. Many individuals from the developing world point out that our own past gives us little room to criticize. Therefore, utilitarian ethicists justify such practices based on a cost/benefit analysis.

For a duty ethicist, sweatshops and unregulated child labor are deplorable, inhumane, and unethical practices. Taking advantage of people who have little or no choice violates the autonomy of those that are exploited and our own humanity. No amount of economic utility can be used to justify such practices. For those that ascribe to deontological ethics, the use of child labor in sweatshops is a priori wrong. The fact that we in the United States at one time permitted such conditions to exist is beside the point and not a defense. Deontological ethicists would say that we have a duty to not engage in such methods and that those in the United States that employed them in the past were also guilty of a grave moral wrong. As to the argument that this is “just the way things are,” a duty ethicist would again point out that it is not the business of philosophy to tell us what has occurred or is occurring, but rather it is the business of philosophy to discover what is best.

Naturally, deontological ethics raises the question of what constitutes a duty. In other words, assuming that we do have “duties,” what are they and how can we know them? The German philosopher Immanuel Kant provided a method by which we can discern what our duties are in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785).

Kant distinguished between two types of imperatives: hypothetical and categorical. Hypothetical imperatives are a result of some desire. For example, we know that people with college degrees typically earn more money than people who only possess a high school diploma. Therefore, if you want a better chance of earning a higher income, you should go to college. In many instances, these types of imperatives are amoral, but not necessarily so. For some people, earning a high income or having what society perceives as a prestigious job is simply not important and there is no moral import to that. Of course, some desires may have moral import such as obtaining something by stealing. The important point here is that hypothetical imperatives exist because we have some desire.

On the other hand, Kant says that categorical imperatives exist because man is the rational animal. According to Kant, we can determine moral imperatives using the following formulation: Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.