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In this paper, I will argue that the first form of Kant's Categorical Imperative should be rejected. To do so, first I will state and explain the first form of the Categorical Imperative. Second, I will extract, explain, and evaluate an objection to Kantianism from a passage about dinner. Finally, I will discuss one way that a Kantian might respond and then refute that response, revealing the flaws of the first form of the Categorical Imperative that justify its rejection.

The first form of the Categorical Imperative is as follows: an action \underline{a} is morally right if and only if the agent of \underline{a} can consistently will that $GM(\underline{a})$ become a universal law of nature. Some technical terms to know are agent; to will and to will consistently or inconsistently; maxim, $M(\underline{a})$, and $GM(\underline{a})$; and universal law of nature. An *agent* is a person who would do an action if it were to be done. An agent *wills* something to be the case if the agent commands him/herself to make the thing be the case; an agent wills *consistently* by *not* willing *inconsistently*; and an agent wills *inconsistently* if either the agent wills an action that is a logical, metaphysical, or physical impossibility, or if the agent wills two actions that cannot *both* be possible at the same time. A *maxim* is "a subjective principle of action," or in other words, a statement of the form, "Whenever I am in situation S, I will do action-type A." $M(\underline{a})$ is the maxim that the agent of action \underline{a} had in mind in doing \underline{a} ; and $GM(\underline{a})$ is the generalized form of $M(\underline{a})$, the result of replacing all references to the agent of \underline{a} in $M(\underline{a})$ with references to everyone, anyone, etc. Finally, a *universal law of nature* is a completely general claim that expresses a physical necessity.

A passage objecting to Kantianism is as follows:

Smith, a Kantian decides to make it his maxim to eat dinner at 7.00 pm. Accordingly, he considers the generalized version of this maxim, and is horrified at the result. If everyone were to eat dinner at 7.00 pm, essential services would go unmanned, patients would be left on the operating table, airplanes would crash, etc. So he rejects this maxim. But for *any* time the same problem arises for a maxim prescribing dinner at that time. Smith is faced with starvation! This shows what nonsense Kantianism is.

Kantianism reasons that it is morally wrong to make a moral exception of oneself, so maxims should be generalized to include everyone. If the goal of the agent's maxim cannot be achieved in a world in which everyone supported that maxim, then that maxim is immoral. The above passage points out some flaws with this claim. An example of one of these flaws is expressed in the following argument:

1. If Kantianism is true, and Smith eats dinner at 7:00pm, then everyone should eat dinner at 7:00pm.
2. If everyone ate dinner at 7:00pm, then disastrous results would occur.
3. If disastrous results would occur if everyone ate dinner at 7:00pm, then eating dinner at 7:00pm is immoral.
4. Eating dinner at 7:00pm is not immoral.
5. Therefore, Kantianism is false.

The rationale for the first premise is based on the principle of universalizability, suggesting that if a maxim can be universalized, then the agent is not making an exception of himself. The rationale for the second premise is that if everyone stopped what they were doing to have dinner at 7:00pm, then essential services would go unmanned, patients would be left on the operating table, airplanes would crash, etc, and these would be disastrous results. The rationale for the third premise is that an action that causes disastrous results when everyone

does it cannot be moral, because that implies that the action would only *not* cause disaster if someone made an exception of himself in doing that action. This would conflict with the first premise. The rationale for the fourth premise is that 7:00pm is a reasonable time to eat dinner. As the passage suggests, this time is irrelevant and can be substituted for another time—for example, 8:00pm—and disastrous results would still only occur when *everyone* was eating at that time. As a result, unless Kantianism is suggesting that an action with disastrous results is moral, or that everyone should starve, Kantianism cannot be true.

This argument is valid because is in the form of Modus Tollens: if A (if Kantianism is true), then B (then eating dinner at 7:00pm is immoral); not B (eating dinner at 7:00pm not is immoral); therefore, not A (Kantianism is not true). It is impossible for this argument's premises to be true but its conclusion to be false. However, this argument may not be sound, because all the premises might not be true.

In response to this argument, first a Kantian would want to clarify what Smith's maxim is. Is Smith saying, "Whenever I am in situation S, I will eat dinner at 7:00pm" or "Whenever it is 7:00pm, I will eat dinner"? If his maxim is the former, the maxim is incomplete and the argument is irrelevant to Kantianism. For the sake of the argument, assume the maxim is the latter of the two options.

A Kantian's next move would be to reject the third premise. Since Kant is not a consequentialist, he believes that the disastrous results that would occur if everyone ate dinner at 7:00pm are not relevant to the morality of that action. Instead, he contends that the *motive* behind the action is key to determining its

moral status. Assuming that Smith's motive to eat dinner at 7:00pm is moral, his causing of essential services to go unmanned, patients to be left on the operating table, airplanes to crash, etc, is excusable. In other words, Kantianism is not false simply because Smith's maxim does not have pleasant consequences. That is a flaw in Smith's maxim and not in Kantianism as a whole.

The reason Smith's maxim has disastrous results is because it is an unreasonable maxim. It may be *possible* for Smith to eat dinner every day at 7:00pm—he could have a very strict daily routine and plan everything around eating dinner at that time—but accidents may still happen. What if it is 6:59pm and Smith's frail relative trips while walking to the dinner table? Does Smith drive her to the hospital (or at least help her up from the floor) or does he choose to eat dinner instead? If Smith follows his maxim, he must prioritize dinner over anything and everything else. This is a recipe for disaster. Instead, Smith's maxim should be modified to reflect the specifics of the situation. A more reasonable maxim could be, "Whenever it is 7:00pm and my presence is not needed elsewhere, I will eat dinner." This maxim prioritizes Smith's frail relative over his eating dinner, and when applied generally, this maxim takes into account the lives of the people on the plane, the life of the patient on the operating table, etc. Crisis averted.

However, an opponent of Kantianism would be less satisfied with this response. To Kant, since consequences are irrelevant, these maxims are equivalent (Smith's motive for eating dinner hasn't changed). But the modified maxim is

obviously better than the original maxim¹. A moral theory is supposed to tell you what you ought to do. Assuming everything else is the same, you ought to do the action that has the better consequences. But the first form of the Categorical Imperative does not tell you that. It justifies an action with disastrous consequences when an alternative with better consequences is available. As a result, the first form of the Categorical Imperative is flawed. And since it is flawed, it should be rejected in favor of a Categorical Imperative that is not flawed (or at least one that is less flawed).

¹ However, this modified maxim is still flawed. How do you know when you are “needed” or what has priority over dinner? A Kantian could further specify the maxim to address this question, but the more the maxim is specified, the fewer people it applies to, until it is not much of a generalized maxim at all (e.g. If it is 6:59pm and someone trips and breaks his/her hip, then you drive that person to the hospital and eat dinner afterwards). And the reverse situation is also flawed. If the maxim is too broad, for example, “have dinner in the evening,” the agent might not know when to follow it. Should Smith eat dinner at 6:00pm or 8:00pm? This maxim does not give the agent enough guidance about what to do.