

dated before he met Grace, that Bob physically abused her, and in fact, she had to be hospitalized after one particularly brutal attack. Grace asks you to be her maid of honor at the wedding. What do you say?

2. Compare Kant's description of the categorical imperative to the Eastern notion of the Way. How are the two concepts similar? How do they differ? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
3. Discuss whether the use of torture on terrorist suspects, who in all likelihood have information that endangers the American public, violates Kant's categorical imperative, which prohibits using a person as a means only. Discuss also how a utilitarian would answer this question and how Kant might respond to their argument.
4. Are you satisfied with Kant's definition of personhood and moral community? What criteria should we use to determine whether another being (say, an alien from another planet) is rational or has self-consciousness? Using Kant's definition of personhood, discuss whether it would be morally permissible a) to use human embryos in stem cell research, b) to breed children in order to use their organs as spare parts, or c) euthanize elderly people with dementia who are no longer rational. Discuss also how Kant would respond to utilitarian Peter Singer's support of these policies.

The Good Will and Proper Self-Esteem

We cannot think of anything in the world or outside of it that could be purely good—something that is good in itself, without qualification—except a good will.

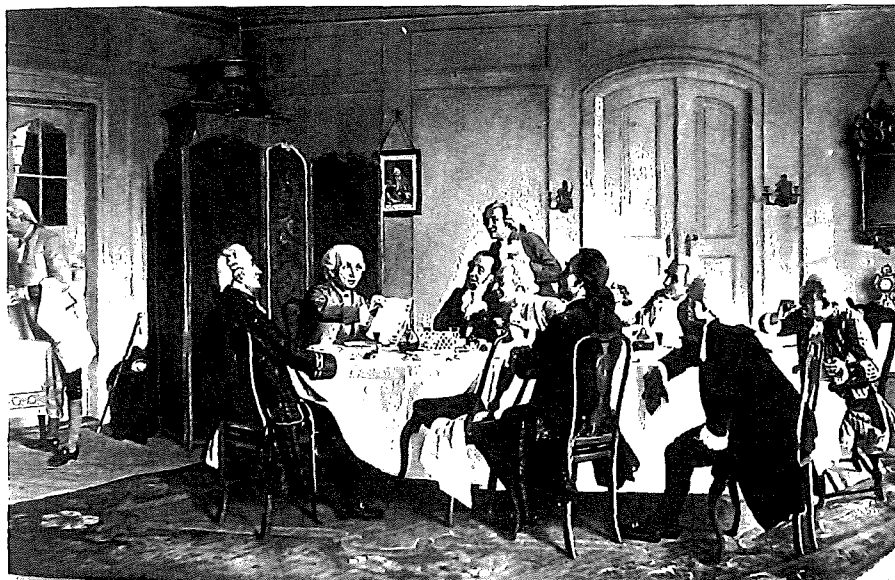
—IMMANUEL KANT, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), p. 393

Kant's Concept of the Good Will

The duty to improve ourselves as moral people is important in virtually every ethical system. In Confucian and Buddhist ethics, continuous self-improvement through right living and right thinking is the only way to reach moral excellence. For Kant, the development of the good will and proper self-esteem is the only way to ensure that we will consistently do our duty.

As autonomous and rational beings, we have the ability to use our reason to discern what is right and wrong without needing to rely on outside authorities. A person of **good will** always acts out of a sense of duty and a reverence for the moral law without regard for consequences or immediate inclinations. As autonomous beings, people of good will are free from external pressures. They are lawgivers unto themselves; that is, they impose the moral law upon themselves. Kant, however, was not suggesting that morality is relative or subjective. Instead, he believed that all rational beings would arrive at the same conclusions regarding what is right and wrong.

A person of good will can be depended on to do what is right, even when other motives are absent. An action that is done out of sympathy or because one enjoys helping others, rather than out of a sense of duty, may be praiseworthy;



Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), German philosopher. Kant (seated second from the left) is shown enjoying dinner with his friends. Kant was said to be witty and entertaining as well as a role model and inspiration to his many friends.

however, according to Kant, such an action has no moral worth. It is easy to help others who may someday return the favor or to feel compassion for those who are like us. Acting out of duty and the good will, on the other hand, involves the intention to do what is right, regardless of our feelings or any rewards. Cultivating the good will is also at the heart of Christian ethics. Jesus taught:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. (Luke 6:32–35)

The term *duty*, unfortunately, has a negative connotation for many people. Indeed, Kant has often been interpreted as promoting a sort of joyless duty. However, he was not suggesting that we ought not to feel sympathy for others or receive joy from helping others or from personal friendships. Kant believed that friendship is important as a means of connecting with others. Friendship also contributes to the development of our moral character by inspiring virtues such as compassion, wisdom, generosity, and happiness—virtues that make it easier for us to act in accordance with the good will. Indeed, Kant was described by his friends and students as a man of great feeling and compassion. “How often he moved us to tears,” wrote one of his friends.

How often he agitated our hearts, how often he lifted our minds and feelings from the fetters of selfish eudaemonism [inner happiness] to the higher consciousness of freedom, to unconditional obedience to the law of reason, to the exaltation of unselfish duty!⁹

Virtues like compassion may make it easier for us to do our duty and, for this reason, are important to cultivate; for Kant, however, it is the good will that *motivates* us to do our duty. The sentiments that might accompany a moral action are not what make the action moral, because we have a moral duty to help others even when we do not feel sympathy for them or get no joy out of helping them. If we separate our motivations, it is the sense of duty, rather than immediate inclination, that gives an action its moral worth. However, Kant did not believe that we should not act unless our motives are pure.

Cultivating the Good Will

By forming friendships and exhibiting respect for others we nurture the good will. Community service can help to develop the good will. For example, an ethics student chose to do community service work with Habitat for Humanity (a nonprofit organization that builds homes for low-income families), not out of good will, but primarily out of self-interest. "I chose to do this work," he wrote, "because I very much enjoy working outdoors and also enjoy framing houses." At the beginning of the semester, this student was at the lower level of conventional reasoning. By the end of the semester, though, he had entered the post-conventional level that exemplifies Kant's principled reasoning. As expected, his motivation for volunteering changed as he progressed in his moral development. At the conclusion of his journal, he wrote:

It seems to be pure caring which fuels the desire to give to others, and it seems to be a very moral thing to do. . . . I initially began this volunteer work because it was required for this class; but I noticed that the people [who worked on the project with him] did not need a class to make them come out and build this house.¹⁰

By caring for others as beings with intrinsic moral value (what the student calls "pure caring," as opposed to sentimental caring), the student volunteer strengthened his own good will. By the end of the semester, he was more autonomous. He continued to volunteer even after the semester was over because it was the right thing to do rather than because of extrinsic incentives.

Cultivating the good will and a sense of duty is an important corrective to our "feel good" approach to morality. For most of us, obstacles and subjective limitations, such as self-interest and pleasure, can at times take priority over the good will. A perfectly good will such as the will of God, on the other hand, has no obstacles to overcome; it acts purely out of the good will. For the perfectly good will, Kant writes, "there are no imperatives. 'I ought' is here out of place, because 'I will' is already of itself necessarily in harmony with the law."¹¹ Here, there is no distinction between reason and inclination. The perfectly good will always acts in accordance with the "ought." The concepts of duty and moral

Connections

What are the conventional and post-conventional stages of moral development? See Chapter 3, pages 90–94.

obligation are irrelevant because these come into play only when reason and inclination are in conflict. The moral life of the imperfect being, in contrast, is one of continual struggle between moral duty (reason) and desire.

The Duty of Self-Improvement

The cultivation of a good will involves the recognition that as rational beings, we have just as much moral value as anyone else. Kant believed that our primary moral duty is self-respect and the development of proper self-esteem. We have a duty to treat ourselves with respect, just as we have a moral duty to treat others with respect.

The greatest love I can have for another is to love him as myself. I cannot love another more than I love myself. . . . Our duties towards ourselves [therefore] constitute the supreme condition and the principle of all morality. . . . He who transgresses against himself loses his manliness and becomes incapable of doing his duty toward his fellows.

—IMMANUEL KANT, "Duties to Oneself"¹²

Kant was highly critical of moral philosophies that teach a person "should give a thought to himself only after he has completely fulfilled his duty towards others."¹³

No one can demand of me that I should humiliate myself and value myself less than others; but we all have the right to demand of a man that he should not think himself superior. Moral self-esteem, however, which is grounded in the worth of humanity, should not be derived from comparison with others, but from comparison with the moral law.¹⁴

Kant was not advocating ethical egoism, though. Self-respect is not the same as putting our own interests first, but neither do people with self-respect value themselves less than others. Instead, self-respect stems from our sense of moral duty and, as such, is the basis of our respect for others.

The importance of proper self-esteem in our moral development has been verified by psychological studies. Studies of well-being show a high correlation between positive self-esteem and high esteem for others. Young people with high self-esteem also "have more friends, are more apt to resist harmful peer pressure, are less sensitive to criticism or to what people think, have higher IQs, and are better informed, more physically coordinated, less shy and subject to stage fright, and are more apt to be assertive and get their needs met. High self-esteem is considered by some to be the essential core, the basic foundation, of positive mental health."¹⁵

Proper self-respect, besides being related to respect for others, makes one less dependent on the opinions and reactions of others. People who have high self-esteem receive more respect from others and are less vulnerable to being

Connections

What are the basic tenets of ethical egoism? See Chapter 7, page 202.

exploited by others.¹⁶ People with low self-esteem, on the other hand, "are especially vulnerable to developing stress disorders [such as] underachievement at school, depression, irritability, anxiety, fatigue, nightmares, hyperactivity, aggressive behavior, withdrawal from others, nervous laughter, body aches and emotional tension."¹⁷

When one is doubtful about one's worth, it is easy to use another's actions and reactions to define oneself.

—VIRGINIA SATIR, *The New Peoplemaking* (1988)

Deontologists maintain that self-esteem is a meaningless concept unless it is grounded in the cultivation of good will. Promoting self-esteem as an end in itself has become a driving force in parenting and education. To build self-esteem, children are routinely praised with such phrases as "you're the best," "you're the smartest," and "you are exactly what God intends you to be." According to educational psychologist William Damon, emphasizing self-esteem as an end in itself, independently of a person's character or actions, does not develop self-esteem but instead engenders distrust of adults and a false self-image:

Even though these white lies are intended to help rather than to deceive, children can and do see through them. If repeated often enough, these deceptions will undermine the child's trust in the adult's veracity. Even more dangerous, perhaps, children may actually internalize these empty phrases and dissociate their feelings of self-worth from any conduct that they are personally responsible for.¹⁸

Self-esteem that is not founded upon the development of moral character and good will encourages self-deception, egoism, and narcissism. In 1993, eight students from Lakewood High School in California were taken into custody for raping and molesting girls as young as ten years old. The boys belonged to a gang in which they won points through sexual conquest. Their activities were well-known around the school and were even accepted as normal by some school authorities and members of the community: "Boys will be boys." When the boys were interviewed on *Dateline* one of them responded with pride: "I'm definitely comfortable with myself and my self-esteem." When asked if he liked himself, one of the other boys answered, "Yeah, why wouldn't I? I mean, what's not to like about me."¹⁹

Key Claims of Deontology

- Duty is the basis of morality.
- Moral principles are universal.
- Reason is important in discerning and applying moral principles.
- Persons cannot be used as a means only.
- The moral community consists of all rational beings.

Proper self-esteem is not the result of empty praise or membership in a gang. According to Kant, we have a duty to use our freedom responsibly. People who rely on the flattery of others to inflate their self-esteem are not autonomous moral agents. True self-respect does not depend on outward achievements or the praise of others but comes from having a good will and living a principled life. Like happiness, proper self-esteem cannot be pursued as an end in itself. It is developed by seeking and living the good life.

The development of proper self-esteem is critical to our growth as autonomous moral reasoners. In Carol Gilligan's scheme of moral development, to make the transition from the conventional stage of moral development (where others' needs come before our own) to the postconventional stage (where we are able to balance our needs with those of others), we must first realize that we have equal moral worth. Only by saying no to exploitation and subservience can we fulfill our moral duty to ourselves and to others:

Connections

What are Gilligan's stages of moral development? See Chapter 3, page 95.



Exercises

- *1. What motivates you to engage in good actions? What happens when you lack the inclination to do good? Illustrate your answers with examples from your life. If you are doing community service, relate your answer to your work.
- *2. Some college courses require students to do community service. Are the teachers and students in these cases using the people they are serving as a means only—that is to fulfill a class requirement and to promote the students' moral development? Discuss how Kant would respond to this question and to the practice of a college's requirement of community service.
3. In the Dr. Seuss book *Horton Hatches the Egg*, Horton promises to help Lazy Mayzie by sitting on her egg. When he made the promise, he didn't realize that Lazy Mayzie was going to be gone for weeks. Discuss whether the fact that she "tricked" him into sitting on her egg excuses him from responsibility for caring for the egg. Relate your answer to a similar experience in your own life.
4. Read about the life of a moral reformer, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., or examine the life of your own moral hero. What motivated this person to continue even when the cause seemed hopeless? Was it reason or sentiment—or both? Explain.
5. Do you agree that we have a duty to develop proper self-esteem? Do you treat yourself with self-respect? Explain. Discuss how self-respect, or the lack of it, affects your treatment of other people.

*An asterisk indicates that the exercise is appropriate for students who are doing community service learning as part of the course.

Confucius: Duty and the Community

The cultivation of the person depends upon setting the mind in the right.

—CONFUCIUS, in *The Commentary of Tseng*²⁰

Confucian moral philosophy emphasizes our duties, as a member of a family and the community. Confucius (551–479 B.C.E) is said to be the first professional teacher in China, and he began what would become a tradition of wandering scholars in China. He traveled from province to province with his pupils, teaching and trying to influence the rulers. Confucius became the most revered philosopher in China and radically changed Chinese philosophy by focusing on our duties to humanity rather than on spiritual concerns.

Like Bentham and Mo Tzu, Confucius was interested in promoting a moral system that could be used to formulate public policy and to provide people with a stable and harmonious social order. Unlike Mo Tzu and the utilitarians, though, Confucius believed that the only way to put society back on the right path was to instill in people a respect for duty as set forth in the tradition of the ancient sages. He believed that the duties prescribed by the ancient sages were universal and binding upon all people. He also believed, like Kant, that these duties could be known through the use of reason.

In Confucianism, *yi*, or righteousness, demands that we do what is right simply because it is our moral duty. Moral knowledge—knowledge of our duties—is possible because our minds are united with the universe. To do our moral duty is to act in accord with the universal principle—the *Tao*, also known as *the Way*. The Way, writes neo-Confucian philosopher Chi Hsi (1130–1200), is “the principle that nourishes and develops all things.”²¹ The Way is part of our nature, just as Kant regarded moral law as being within each of us.

“Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?”

The Master said, “It is perhaps the word ‘shu.’ Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.”²²

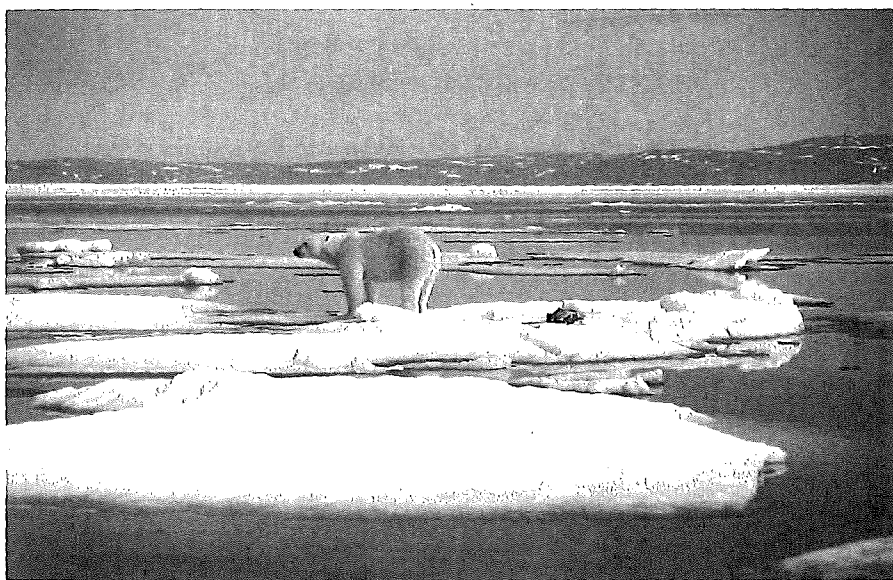
While Western deontologists tend to focus on the individual, Confucian deontology emphasizes communitarian values and duties over individual autonomy. There are five duties of universal obligation; these include the duty between ruler and citizen as well as duties between different members of the family. According to Confucius, the moral qualities or virtues by which these duties are “carried out are three . . . Wisdom, compassion and courage. These are the three universally recognized moral qualities of man.”²³ See the reading from the *Analects of Confucius* at the end of this chapter.

The Confucian emphasis on communitarian duties, however, does not entail ignoring our own moral development. The duty of self-cultivation is important because it makes us better citizens and members of the community. Self-cultivation involves developing our mental abilities; as well as avoiding activities, such as drunkenness and debauchery, that cloud our reason.

Self-cultivation and social duty are not considered to be at odds but are simply different aspects of the whole or the *Tao*. Because duty is associated with

Connections

What are communitarian ethics? See Chapter 7, pages 221–222.



A polar bear clings to a melting iceberg. The effects of greenhouse emissions from industrialized countries such as China and the United States, have contributed to global warming throughout the world. The green Confucian movement, with its emphasis on our duty to act in harmony with nature, has been active in promoting solutions to global warming.

the Way, or Tao, by doing our duty we can achieve inner harmony and inner peace as well as world peace. According to Confucius, only by cultivating a sense of duty and harmony within ourselves can we hope to achieve peace in our family, in our society, and in the world at large. People who neglect self-cultivation will not have a mind that is in harmony and equilibrium. People who lack inner harmony are more likely to make mistakes in their viewpoints, and this can lead to harm and disruption of the harmony of the community.²⁴ Only those who honor the duty of fidelity and maintain harmony within their families are suitable to be leaders of the state.

He who is in harmony with Nature hits the mark without effort and apprehends the truth without thinking

—*The Analects of Confucius*

The Confucian emphasis on universal harmony includes the duty to act in harmony with nature. This ideal has inspired the environmental movement in Asia, including China, the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Pan Yue, China's vice minister for environmental protection, has called on traditional Chinese religions such as Confucianism which promotes the idea of humans and nature as being one, to promote environmental awareness and ecological sustainability. For example, the green Confucian movement is concerned with

global warming and rationally developing and conserving resources. In addition, the United Nations Kyoto Protocol for reducing CO₂ emissions was first proposed by the Japanese, a country where Confucianism and Buddhism are the two official state religions.



Exercises

1. In the *Analects* (see reading at end of chapter), Confucius argued that communitarian duties are more important than pursuing our individual self-interest. Ayn Rand, in contrast, thought that the best way to achieve a stable society and individual happiness was by putting our self-interest above communitarian values. Using examples from your own experience, discuss which argument is stronger.
2. Both the Confucian and the Buddhist approaches to world peace require self-awareness and social awareness in equal measure.²⁵ Can people who are not at peace with themselves, their family, and their community still effectively promote world peace? Or, does world peace begin with self-cultivation? Support your answers. Discuss also how both Confucius and Kant would answer these questions and why.
3. The duty of filial piety is also found in the biblical commandment requiring us to honor our parents. Does the duty of filial piety entail doing everything our parents tell us to do? How should we respond to abusive parents or to parents whose plans for our future conflict with our own? Relate your answer to the Confucian duty of self-cultivation and the duty of filial piety.
4. Discuss what Confucius would most likely think of the practice of American companies laying off American workers and outsourcing services and manufacturing to "third-world" countries. Discuss also what his position might be on our government's obligation, if any, to illegal immigrants working in the United States.

Is the Duty Not to Lie Absolute?

To be truthful (honest) in all deliberations, therefore, is a sacred and absolutely commanding decree of reason, limited by no expediency.

—IMMANUEL KANT, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)

A person of good will, according to Kant, always does his or her duty no matter what the consequences. Kant assumed that moral maxims regarding our duties, such as "keep your promises" and "do not lie," would never conflict with one another because they are based on reason. In his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant adopted an absolutist position when it came to lying. He used the following example to illustrate his point that moral duties, such as the duty not to lie, are absolute:

After you have honestly answered the murderer's question as to whether his intended victim is at home, it may be that he has slipped out so that he does not come in the way of the murderer, and thus that the murder may not be committed.

But if you had lied and said he was not at home when he had really gone out without your knowing it, and if the murderer had then met him as he went away and murdered him, you might justly be accused as the cause of his death. For if you had told the truth as far as you knew it, perhaps the murderer might have been apprehended by the neighbors while he searched that house and thus the deed might have been prevented. Therefore, whoever tells a lie, however well intentioned he might be, must answer for the consequences, however unforeseeable they were, and pay the penalty for them.²⁶

According to Kant, not even the most altruistic intentions justify neglecting our duty not to lie, even a lie to save someone's life. In the above scenario if the murderer had found and killed his victim because of your honesty, you are not responsible for the death of the victim. Your only moral duty in this case was not to lie. The murderer bears full responsibility for his actions.

Confucius said: "I do not see what use a man can be put to, whose word cannot be trusted."

—*The Analects of Confucius*, 2.22

Confucius likewise maintained that lying by leaders or public officials is particularly egregious since it demonstrates a lack of sincerity or trustworthiness. When subjects are lied to by their government, it erodes the bond between citizens and the government and damages people's trust in their country's leadership.

Sissela Bok: The Duty Not to Lie Is Prima Facie

But what about cases where it is almost certain that a lie will save many lives? Deontologist Sissela Bok, in her book *Lying*, suggests that although lying is generally wrong, there may be rare cases where the duty to lie conflicts with the more important duty to protect innocent human life. She defines a lie as "any intentionally deceptive message which is stated"²⁷ to distinguish lying as a moral action from unintentionally misleading someone because of ignorance of the truth or withholding the truth.

Bok discusses the case of vessels used to smuggle Jewish refugees out of Nazi-occupied areas as an example of a moral dilemma or a situation when lying might be morally required. A patrolling Nazi boat that happened to pass these vessels would call out and ask the captain of the vessel whether there were any Jews on board. If the captain responded no, the Nazis would let the vessel go on its way. If the captain said yes or refused to answer, the Nazis would board the vessel and shoot the Jews. Would it still be our moral duty, in this case, to tell the truth?

Connections

What are five steps for resolving a moral dilemma? See Chapter 2, pages 67–68.

Kant would probably say yes. Bok disagrees. She asks: Is not preventing murder more important than telling the truth? By telling the truth, don't we bear at least some of the responsibility for the resulting deaths? Bok writes regarding Kant's position:

"[I]t is a very narrow view of responsibility which does not also take some blame for a disaster one could easily have averted, no matter how much others are also to blame. A world where it is improper even to tell a lie to a murderer pursuing an innocent victim is not a world that many would find safe to inhabit."²⁸

Although lying may be morally regrettable, Bok concludes that in some circumstances lying may be the only way to avert danger. In these cases, lying may be morally justified.

Bok is aware that most people lie too much and far too easily. As a deontologist, she acknowledges that we have a duty not to lie. On the other hand, unlike Kant, she also recognizes the importance of looking at consequences. However, she rejects utilitarianism as too simplistic to deal with complex situations when the outcome of one's actions is uncertain. She argues that we ought not to lie even if, by doing so, the net benefit will be the same as that brought about by not lying because lying restricts the autonomy of the person, such as Eric's wife in the opening scenario, who is the target of the lie. By lying, the liar gains power over the person he or she duped. Indeed, Bok maintains that deception may well outrank force as a means of getting people to acquiesce.

Excuses

Because we have a duty not to lie, we need to justify those times when we do lie. In her examination of the excuses we use, Bok notes that paternalism is one of the most common: the claim by the liars that they are benefiting the person they are duping. Parents, doctors, politicians, and other people in positions of power may be tempted to use this excuse to justify their lies, but in almost all cases, Bok notes, this claim stems from a failure to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of other people whom liars regard as lower than themselves.

Another common excuse is that the lie is being told in the name of a higher good, as in the Milgram study. In this study, subjects were led to believe that they were delivering actual shocks to the learner. This, however, involved treating a person as a means in the name of the higher good—in this case, increasing our knowledge about human behavior. While a utilitarian might approve of this approach, treating a person who is a research subject as a means only is immoral because it violates the categorical imperative. Many parents lie to their young children about Santa Claus being real rather than a fantasy figure, excusing the lie on the grounds that it stimulates children's imagination. In fact, there is no connection between children's belief in Santa as a real person and their "fantasy scores," which measure a child's ability to engage in