

Determining the ethics of a given situation can be difficult if casually attempted. There are several policies on moral issues. In each one, many things must be taken into consideration before a verdict can be reached. Let us say that a fresh-out-of-college business major, Brian, goes job hunting out in the "real world". During his search, he finds several different positions that he happens to qualify for. Brian gets exceptionally lucky and comes across a job that will offer him a plentiful paycheck, making his student loans appear considerably less menacing. Upon further investigation of the position, however, Brian finds out that this job would be socially inept. The company gives nothing back to the community; financial gain seems to be the lone reason that the company is in business. Even though Brian desires financial security, he does not know whether or not taking the job would be morally right. To come to a conclusion on what he should do, Brian consults the works of three different philosophers who discuss ethical issues in detail: Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. Each philosopher offers a different perspective and coming to a conclusion may not be easily done; but Brian wants to do what is morally right and so he begins his search for an answer.

Brian consults the works of Aristotle and finds that money is not really what the company is after. Aristotle says, "The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else." (Book I, Part 5) Money is just what people *think* will

make them happy, when what they are really after is their own happiness. To consider how money is just a means to an end, Brian considers a chain of events that start with him taking the job. He receives his first pay-check and a smile comes to his face. How could mere numbers on paper make him smile? He delves further. Large numbers on a paycheck mean that his bills get paid. When his bills are getting paid (on time, no less), he no longer has harassing phone calls from credit card companies and other debt collectors. The absence of threatening calls gives him peace of mind, and that peace of mind makes him happy. There are many other routes to happiness through money, but he realizes that the money itself is only the catalyst in a chain of events that will lead to his future happiness. Aristotle mentions what it means to be an excellent human being, which is what Brian intends to be. Aristotle says that the function unique to man is his ability to rationalize. Therefore, to be a well-functioning person, or a "good" person, one must perform their function (rationalization) well. To disregard this ability would be wrong, for it shows our capacity to be an excellent human by avoiding both excess and deficiency. Aristotle says, "Thus a master of any arts avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this- the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us." (Book II, Part 8) Brian applies this to his potential job. The job is one that pays well and will give him financial security. He might be able to buy some material goods that he enjoys, but it is not the kind of money that will buy a beach house and personal jet. The pay seems to be intermediate, which would be permissible in Aristotle's view. Brian considers the actions of the company. While they do not give to the community, they don't appear to take away from it, either. This would be an intermediate stance as well, but the virtues being considered are charity and greed, virtues which Aristotle says cannot

Will the paycheck contribute to Brian's personal growth + intellectual development? This is crucial!
It's not just whether the money is excessive or deficient.

You do a good job focusing on the individual here. However, Aristotle does say that making a contribution to society is very important — presumably

have an excess or deficiency because they are, in themselves, good or bad. Brian decides that Aristotle's set of guidelines would allow him to take the job because he would neither lack nor have an excess of money. Aristotle's views seem sensible to Brian because the world around him reflects the idea of the mean, or the intermediate. Too much rain and too little sun will flood the harvest, too little rain and too much sun will cause a drought; but the right amount of rain and sunlight will produce healthy crops. To be happy or "healthy", like the crops, we must have balance in our lives. Brian realizes that Aristotle's views mainly focus on the individual and do not elaborate on the bigger group, the society whom his job would be disregarding. To see how society would be affected by his choice to take the job, Brian moves on to the next philosopher.

because an individual must live in society, + so if everything crumbles it doesn't matter that the job goes well.

Brian consults the work of Immanuel Kant and discovers that his motives have to be considered before he can know if the job in question would be morally right. Studying Kant's ideas, Brian sees that the only thing that is truly good in itself is a good will, even if nothing (such as charity) can be done with it. Kant explains how to determine what is morally wrong or right. "What is essentially good in it is the intention, the result being what it may..." Kant emphasizes the idea of a categorical imperative, a moral command that applies to everyone. He says, "There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law." The maxim is *the policy for* what you intend to do. Brian considers his maxim and how the world would be if everyone followed the principle that he was planning to follow. Brian plans to take a well paying job that will offer financial security,

to society. He asks himself what his motives are. He needs money and debt collectors because he is feeling stressed from the

constant calls. He wants financial security and the happiness that comes from it. Brian next considers how the world would be if everyone were to follow his line of thinking. Everyone would choose a job based on their physical and emotional needs for financial security. If every person had a job that paid well, but offered no social benefit, Brian realizes that he, and the rest of the world, would be in big trouble. What about the people who dedicate their lives to helping the less fortunate? Those same people would only be concerned with the financial aspects of a job. Any job that didn't pay well wouldn't be desired. Where would all the McDonald's workers who serve Brian his lunch, almost daily, go? Would fast food even exist, since it performs a service? Where would all the health-care workers in nursing homes go? People wouldn't be looking out for others, only themselves and their financial gain. Brian had a hard time imagining just how impossible it would be for everyone to follow that maxim. Granted, there are some people who only have a job that provides a service to society because they have no other choice. It might be the highest paying job that they can get and consequently, they are performing the service out of necessity and not because they intend to do the right thing. Kant says that these types of people do not deserve moral credit for their contributions to society because their motives are not of good will but of some other personal desire or motive. There are also people who *do* deserve moral credit for their contributions because they intend to do the right thing even though it may not be in their best interests. Brian quickly sees the point that Kant is trying to make about the categorical imperative. Is it really fair that he would have a well-paying job and not have to give anything back to society? What makes him more deserving of higher pay than someone who takes care of the elderly for a living? Brian decides that things ought to be different. The caretaker

Well put!

Good.
This sounds like classic Kant.

is providing a service to society (a service he may one day need himself) and if indeed the caretaker is performing that service out of good will, she or he deserves moral credit; unlike he would if he took the job being considered. Brian decides that having the job would not be fair and would ultimately be morally wrong, according to Kant. Now that Brian has a tie between the first two philosophers, he moves on to the third and final philosopher to determine what his decision will be. (Section 2)

Counting votes!?

Reviewing John Stuart Mill's views show Brian just how diverse ethical guidelines can be. Unlike Kant, Mill does not determine ethics based on intentions or motives. "He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right; whether his motive be duty, or the hopes of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays his friend that trusts him, is guilty of crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under obligations." Mill is concerned with maximizing the total happiness in society, even if it means that some individuals are unhappy. It is not about you, it is about the group. Mill believes in "Rule Utilitarianism". This is a certain way of determining the overall good of accepting or rejecting a certain rule by weighing the pros and cons, or utilities and disutilities, of a given rule. Only the rules that promote the most overall happiness should be adopted. Our moral principles or rules should be ones that bring pleasure and avoid pain; much like our law system tries to do. Some people might detest extra security measures because it takes up their time, but the overall society feels safer and thus happy, and that is what matters more. Mill says that the true aim of life is happiness; but by happiness, he means pleasure and absence of pain. He says this because it is what the majority of society wants, and that in *itself* is the proof. To determine what pleasure out of two has more quality, (quality being that which makes a

pleasure worthy of existence) one must see what the overall preference is according to people who have experienced both pleasures. Brian considers the two pleasures involved: the pleasure of having a well paying job versus the pleasure of performing a service to society. It would be easy to assume that more people would choose the well paying job, but that could be tainted by our need to survive financially. Brian recalls the quote by Mill, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." Brian considers this. He could be the "pig", out there making great money and not contributing to anyone's happiness but his own, or he could be the human being, who sacrifices some of their happiness for the overall happiness of everyone else. Perhaps the person who has experienced both would say that performing a service to society is the better pleasure because it is a feeling that money cannot buy. Brian agrees with Mill in that some pleasures are simply of more quality than others. He has always preferred prime rib to the McRib, the television program to the infomercial and the warmth of summer to the cold of winter. To see that even his insignificant pleasures govern the daily choices he makes heightens his awareness of how important his decision will be. (Chapter 2)

After considering the views of Aristotle, Kant and Mill, Brian decides not to take the job. He comes to the conclusion that it is neither beneficial nor fair to society for him to have a well-paying job with no social contributions. Like Aristotle stresses, he will try his best to live his life in the intermediate; to be a "good" person. Like Kant says, Brian deserves moral credit because he intends to do the right thing, although it may be financially detrimental for him to turn the job down. Like Mill points out, Brian sees the value in sacrifice for the overall happiness of everyone else. It is difficult for Brian to

come to this decision. He might have bill collectors calling his house, requiring him to set the phone off of the hook to get some peace and quiet, but he is doing the right thing.

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Philosophy 101
Ethics – Aristotle, Kant & Mill

We live today in an era of moral ambiguity. World Religions clash, politics are becoming increasingly bitter, and international relations leave something to be desired. These troubles stem, many would argue, from an epidemic of intolerance for different ethics. So how do these ethics truly differ? Is one set of ethics superior to another and if so, how? Is there a universal standard for morality? These questions have been pondered for centuries by some of the greatest philosophers; among them are Aristotle, Kant and Mill. Here I will set out to answer a common question of ethics that everyday people are faced with at some time or another. *Should one take a well-paying job with a firm that does nothing socially useful?* By examining the philosophies and methods employed by Aristotle, Kant and Mill, I will seek an answer to this common ethical question and evaluate the rationality of a universal standard for morality.

Aristotle was a pioneer. He was the first philosopher to assert that ethics was not merely theoretical, but that a standard could be applied. And with an understanding of such a standard, human beings could achieve the highest good or as one might put today, the highest state of well-being. Being the highest good, all other goods Aristotle deemed, were subordinate. They were merely means to the highest good. If asked what their life goal was, many people might say to be famous or very wealthy, or live in good health and have a big family. Aristotle would tell them that those goals are intermediate means to the highest good... happiness, well-being. This concept is very broad and doesn't explain which goods lead to the highest good and which don't, so Aristotle further argues that utilizing rationality is the means to distinguishing different goods. For Aristotle,

Not true.

achieving the highest human well-being requires honoring what is distinctive about being a human and making the utmost of our rational capability.

Very good summary of Arist.

If asked whether one should take a well-paying job with a firm that does nothing socially useful, using Aristotle's theory may prove to be a bit challenging. The trouble is rationality is subjective. Each person, using their own rationale will come up with a unique conclusion. Depending upon the circumstances, one person might take the job for the economic benefit. In their view, it is rational to be a tax-paying citizen, to provide clothing, shelter and food for their loved ones and to enjoy art, sports and entertainment. These actions are certainly rational means to achieving the highest good. On the other hand, another person could justify not taking the job. For them it would be irrational to invest their energy into a job that does not improve their well-being or the general well-being of society. The rational choice would be to take a job where they will learn, grow and help others achieve the highest good. When it comes to such a specific question of ethics, Aristotle's philosophy does not provide a clear cut standard.

Although you are basically right, A. does give us more guidance than this. To be rational is to avoid excess + deficiency. This might help.

Kant would apply a very different standard to assess the morality of working for such a firm. According to Kant, a Christian philosopher from the 18th century, moral requirements are framed within the concept of Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives. By imperative, Kant means ^{command} duty. Therefore a hypothetical duty is a duty one would obey if they want to achieve a goal. An example: 'If you want to keep friends, you ought to shower daily.' On the other hand, a categorical duty is an unconditional duty. An example: Treat people with respect. Kant elaborates on the difference between the hypothetical imperative (HI) and categorical imperative (CI), explaining that the former does not bind the will. Because the HI is conditional, it is not irrational to disobey it. If

you want to keep friends, you ought to shower daily. *If* however you decide you do not want to keep friends, it is completely rational to avoid showering. The CI is different. It according to Kant "*leaves the will no liberty to choose.*" CIs are considered universal law and Kant believes rational beings conform to universal law. Therefore choosing not to conform to universal law makes one irrational. Much like Aristotle, Kant links morality and rationality, but goes further by providing a formula to apply to CI. Simply put, the formula is: *Behave in a way that your principles could be universalized without being self-defeating.* Self-defeating behavior is irrational because if everyone behaved that way, it would be universally self-defeating.

Not all CIs are rational. Morality must be in the form of CI. But to test a CI for rationality.

If asked whether one should take a well-paying job at a firm that does nothing socially useful, I believe Kant would say nay. Going by his theory, if everyone exhibited such behavior, it would be universally self-defeating. If every person took a high-paying job at a firm that did nothing socially useful, many jobs would be neglected. Who would teach in the schools? Who would police the cities? Who would heal the sick? On the other hand if every person took a job at a firm that was socially useful, the world would be very positive and productive. He might also argue that such a situation would neutralize class systems since there would not be as many well-paying jobs.

So why is this self-defeating?

Perhaps the clearest and most relevant theory is one provided by John Stuart Mill. Mill, a 19th century utilitarian believed that only pleasure and freedom from pain were ultimate ends. For him, ethics is a matter of maximizing happiness both personally and in society. Therefore, when making an ethical decision, one must calculate the utility of said decision (the upside and downside). Coining the phrase "It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied, than a pig satisfied," Mill believed quantity and quality should be factors in

calculating utility. Unlike the views of Aristotle or Kant, Mill's philosophy provides sanctions to ensure its ^{being followed} proper use. Among them are fellow feeling - sympathy for other's pain and pleasures, educational growth, and external and internal sanctions - the prospect of reward and punishment vs. one's conscience. Mill believes these sanctions are inherent in one's mind and will help regulate ethical decisions. Because it would be impossible to calculate the utility of every decision one makes throughout the day, Mill subscribed to Rule Utilitarianism, where one calculates the overall utility of particular rules, rather than each individual daily choice. In using this method, one can draw upon history, experience and science to assist their decision making. [✓] Some would argue that a policy such as *Rule Utilitarianism* is much too broad and would not provide a meaningful assessment of true utility for any given ethical question. While this is true, I believe Rule Utilitarianism is quite representative of how people answer questions of ethics today. *Some people, maybe.*

If asked whether one should take a well-paying job at a firm that does nothing socially useful, like Aristotle's theory, Utilitarianism would most-likely lead different people to different conclusions. Depending upon the specifics of the job, there would be multiple rewards and punishments. Taking the job would provide one with the means of paying bills and purchasing goods that lend to their overall happiness or the happiness of others. They would be helping the company owner or stockholders make more money to do the same. This person would provide an example of responsibility to those who look up to him or her. On the other hand, taking the job could leave one dissatisfied with one's life, feeling they are not contributing to the greater good. It would rob them of the opportunity to do something meaningful and helpful.

Are we evaluating a policy here?

Important. For Mill, must think of all the possible interests. So we also need to think about the pleasures received by ^{to others} your taking a socially

If asked whether one should take a well-paying job with a firm that does nothing socially useful, I would personally answer no. To me a job is an extension of who you are. It is representative of how you view the world and your part in it. By taking a job that is socially useful, you will affect people, perhaps in ways you're not aware of, for their entire life. Of course, if I were starving and had no place to sleep, I might feel otherwise.

Good. Need this for Mill.

Ethics are subjective. Each individual has a different experience and different priorities which fuel their conception of morality. Some people believe that nurturance, self-nurturance, empathy and compassion are qualities one must possess in order to live a moral life, while others give priority to self-discipline, self-reliance and respect for authority. By examining the theories of three historical philosophers and applying their methods to a common question of ethics, I conclude that there can be no universal law of morality. Though they are all relevant, the truth is these philosophies do not provide concrete answers to ambiguous ethical questions. What they do provide is a clearer understanding of the thought processes one might employ to arrive at such an answer.

Kant's does, doesn't it?

When faced with a question of morality, it is important to honor the uniqueness of that question and treat it accordingly. It would be irrational in my opinion to apply a standard to that question that does not produce a clear answer. So, what would you do?