

**THIRD CLASS: OCTOBER 22****EXAMPLES OF DEONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT: ENDING HUMAN LIFE**

The Question: does (must) morality contain objective, exceptionless obligations?

In Jonsen, Topic 2, Forgoing Life Support, Topic 4 Euthanasia, Topic 7 Abortion

1. Start with the Karen Quinlan case, on p. 36. Note the objection made on pg. 38, "An important point..." Is this a deontological argument? If so, how might it be justified?
2. We then turn to the case of Elizabeth Bouvia, on pg. 48. If it is morally wrong to take human life, then does it make it right just because a person wishes to do so? Let us look carefully at the list of arguments on pgs 53-54.
3. We are led to the ethical question: are there any obligations that are absolutely binding, without exceptions, and not arising from the acceptance of individuals? Some might say that, unless there are, all morality becomes only a collection of personal preferences.
4. Listen to the great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804):

Everyone must grant that a law, if it is hold morally, that is, as a ground of an obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command "thou shalt not lie" does not hold only for human beings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it, and so with all other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being (i.e. its inclinations and needs) but simply in the concepts of pure reason...If there is a supreme practical principle, or in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end of everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of will, and can therefore serve as a universal practical law. The foundation of this principle is: rational nature exists as an end in itself. Man necessarily conceives his own existence as being so; so far then this is a subjective principle of human actions. But every other rational being regards its existence similarly, just on the same rational principle that holds for me; so that it is at the same time an objective principle from which as a supreme practical law all laws of the will must be capable of being deduced. Accordingly the categorical imperative will be: so act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end and never as a means only." (*Foundation of Metaphysics of Morals, ch.2, 66*)

We will discuss various aspects of this difficult problem of the objectivity and absoluteness of moral obligation. We are asking about the authority, the validity of moral norms. Are you willing to go along with Kant?

**NOTES**