DIMENSIONS OF DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS
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Abstract
This paper will mainly focus on one normative ethical theory, deontological ethics. It will highlight on the other deontological theories, namely Agent-Centred Deontological Theory, Patient-Centred deontological Theory, Contractarian Deontological Theory and Deontological Theories and Kant, the philosopher central to deontological ethical theories. The paper will also give examples for the application of duty-based ethics, both in the outside world and in the field of media. It will go on to give the strengths and weaknesses of deontological ethics.
Key words: Ethics, deontology,

Introduction
According to Brody (1983), ethics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the moral dimension of human life. The internet encyclopaedia of philosophy states that the field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. It further states that ethical theories are divided into three general subject areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Metaethics searches for the origins or causes of right and wrong. It focuses mainly on what morality itself is. Normative Ethics believes that right and wrong are found in an individual's behavior. It is the study of ethical action. Applied Ethics on the other hand, proposes that right and wrong can be found within scenarios. It is the philosophical examination, from a moral standpoint, of particular issues in private and public life that are matters of moral judgment.

Definition
Deontological comes from the Greek word deon, “that which is binding.” The concept of obligation or duty is thus central for deontologists, but not all deontological theories take duty as primary. For example, natural-rights theory takes rights as fundamental and establishes obligations or duties on the basis of rights. Kant’s theory does not establish all duties on the basis of rights.

Deontological approach is also called rule-based morality. It proposes that an action is right if it conforms to a proper moral rule (where that rule does not necessarily refer to the consequences of the action), and that an action is wrong when it violates such a rule (Brody, 1983). For example, according to the deontological approach to morality, when the rule in question prohibits certain types of actions, the prohibition holds even if performing the action would result in beneficial consequences in a particular case. The idea is that performing these actions is an illegitimate means that cannot be justified even if the ends are good ones. Another example may be rules to honor one’s parents, to aid one’s friend in times of distress, to nurture one’s children, or even to keep one’s promises. Here, the rules require a certain type of action towards people to whom one has a special relation, not to other people. The third example refers to the commonly accepted moral rules, which call upon us to reward or punish people in proportion to their deserts, which may include punishing criminals in proportion to the seriousness of their crimes and rewarding achievers in accordance with the merit of their accomplishment.
Types of Deontological Theories

1. Agent-Centred Deontological Theories
According to agent-centered theories, we each have both permissions and obligations that give us agent-relative reasons for action. An agent-relative reason is an objective reason, meaning you do something because of your own reasons. The same reasons may (although it may) not apply for anyone else. Basically, at the heart of agent-centered theories is the idea of agency. The idea is that morality is intensely personal, in the sense that we are each enjoined to keep our own moral house in order. Agent-centred deontology could be intention focused or action focused.

Patient-centred Deontological Theories
These theories are rights-based rather than duty-based; and some versions purport to be quite agent-neutral in the reasons they give moral agents. All patient-centered deontological theories are properly characterized as theories premised on people's rights.

Contractarian Deontological Ethics
Contractarianism is the belief that a contract or promise automatically gives moral weight to the actions necessary to fulfill that contract. The "contract" may be a voluntarily agreed-upon list of obligations or the assumed responsibilities of a citizen in a society.

Divine Command
The divine command theory states that an action's morality is based on its adherence to the command of God. An act can only be ethical if it obeys God’s law, and the Word of God overrides any other law, custom, or inclination.

Kant’s Duty Based Ethics
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was born in Königsberg East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia). He thought that what was good was an essential part of ethics, so he sought to answer the question “what is good?” He asked if there was anything that everybody could rationally agree was always good, and the only thing that he thought satisfied this test was a good will. He stood for the idea that a good will alone must be good in whatever context it may be found. He argued that only an action done for 'a good will' was a right action, regardless of the consequences. But what sort of action would this be? Kant taught that an action could only count as the action of a good will if it satisfied the test of the “Categorical Imperative.”

Kant and the Categorical Imperative
A British philosopher, Roger Scruton once described Kant’s system of ethics as one of the most beautiful creations that the human mind has ever devised. (In Sanders 2003). According to Scruton, Kant’s thought provided one of the principal ways of thinking about ethics and is also known as “prescriptivism”. According to this system, moral beings are free, rational agents. Individuals should act on the premises that the choices one makes for oneself could become universal law (Sanders 2003). Kant’s famous “categorical imperative,” governing all others, states the principle that one should ‘act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law for all rational beings.’ A clearer definition of categorical imperative is; it is a rule that is true in all circumstances. The categorical imperative comes in two versions and each emphasizes different aspects. Kant is clear that each of
these versions is merely a different way of expressing the same rule; they are not different rules. An example of the categorical imperative is: if one is thirsty, one must have a drink. Even if he does not do it immediately, he will definitely need to do it at some point. Another example is: do not murder. This is an order not to murder, and as deontologists may argue, one is not told not to murder because of the consequences. One is simply told not to murder: it is a rule not to. The categorical imperative asks us to act in a way that everyone would agree upon; thus everyone, following laws, would live in a free and equal society. For Kant, your will should be influenced only by reason; you can control your will, but you can’t control the consequences of your actions. His “supreme” version of the Categorical Imperative states, “Act only on a maxim that you can at the same time will to become a universal law”. In other words, if you are not willing for the ethical rule you claim to be following to be applied equally to everyone - including you - then that rule is not a valid moral rule. You cannot claim that something is a valid moral rule and make an exception to it for yourself and your family and friends. A media related example would be; do not plagiarize. Another good example is that of a public relations professional always trying to make his client look good (Peck; Reel 2013:12).

Categorical imperatives tell us how we ought to behave irrespective of our inclinations. They are compelling because they describe the structure of reason in action. Kant wished to establish morality’s domain without reference to individual needs and desires but only to the concept of rationality itself. This he did in an attempt to understand the structure of what he called ‘practical reason’ (Sanders 2003). Kant believed that responsibility includes following maxims that make us law-abiding members of the society, for example being responsible media professionals (a maxim is a principle upon which everyone can agree). According to Kant, “Every rational being must act as if by his maxims he were at all times a legislative member of the universal kingdom of ends” (Peck & Reel 2013). He believed that following a society’s laws is necessary, so order can be maintained.

Kant’s second formula of the categorical imperative states, “Act so as to treat humanity in oneself and others only as an end in itself, and never merely as a means.” Kant thought that all human beings should be treated as free and equal members of a shared moral community, and the second version of the categorical imperative reflects this by emphasizing the importance of treating people properly. It also acknowledges the relevance of intention in morality. Kant is saying that people should always be treated as valuable - as an end in themselves - and should not just be used in order to achieve something else. They should not be tricked, manipulated or bullied into doing things. Treating people as means and not ends may include treating a person as if they were an inanimate object, coercing a person to get what you want, and deceiving a person to get what you want. Moral rules must respect human beings.

You would avoid treating your workmates in a way you would not want to be treated yourself, for example. A media example would be for instance; reporting on a governor and selecting quotes that will make the governor appear incompetent, even though you have other quotes that can make him appear intelligent. The maxim here would be “All reporters should use quotes judiciously, as opposed to “choose quotes to fit your agenda”.

**Application of Deontological Ethics**

Many people have been caught in many complicated situations, making it necessary for one to determine what type of ethics they would want to apply. Looking at it from a deontological perspective, for example, is abortion right? How about euthanasia? Is
punishment and death penalty deserved? These are questions that may never fully be answered, as some may argue that a teenager with no one to take care of her cannot be in a position to take care of another child, so a deontologist may argue and say, it is ok to get rid of an unborn baby, not looking at the final result: a murder. The argument here is, especially if it is agent-based, I am doing it because it is the right thing for me to do, not looking at the result and not looking at what others will say. When it comes to euthanasia, I will let that sick relative be put to rest, not because I would like to murder the relative, but because it is the right thing to do. The person has been in an unresponsive coma for 20 years for example, and there is absolutely no hope. When it comes to punishment and death penalty, we will be forced to look at reward and punishment specially advocated for those who do good and those who do wrong respectively. The maxim that would govern death penalty for example is; the person has committed a very serious crime. He has to be put to death. Here the maxim that governs the action will most definitely not be “do not murder”.

Looking at examples from a media perspective, for example, would it be appropriate to lie to tell a story? Would it be ethical to lie to people that you are doing research then you go and publish their stories on national television or in the newspapers?

Secondly, would it be ethical to stage shots and reconstructions, for example shooting of wildlife in a zoo and mixing it with clips from the wild? Is it ethical to manipulate pictures for example using Photoshop and other means to modify the real pictures? Lastly, is it ethical to cheat viewers with effects? Are these the right means to appeal to your audience? Based on what we have covered, deontologists would argue that it is inappropriate to lie to get a story. The rule is, you are not to lie. So it does not matter whether you have a story or not, the fact that you may have lied to get the story is morally wrong. The same applies to lying to people about doing research, and the other examples. For a deontologist, it does not matter what message it is you want to convey, the end does not justify the means.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Duty Based Moralities**

**Strengths**

Deontological ethics emphasizes the value of every human being. It focuses on giving equal respect to all human beings and provides a basis for human rights. Secondly, it says some acts are always wrong and that some things should never be done, no matter what good consequences they produce. Thirdly, consequentialist ethical theories bring a degree of uncertainty to ethical decision-making, in that no one can be certain about what consequences will result from a particular action, because the future is unpredictable. Duty-based ethics on the other hand does not suffer from this problem because they are concerned with the action itself - if an action is right, then a person should do it, if it's a wrong action they shouldn't do it - and providing there is a clear set of moral rules to follow then a person faced with a moral choice should be able to take decisions with reasonable certainty.

Of course things aren't that clear-cut. Sometimes consequentialist theories can provide a fair degree of certainty, if the consequences are easily predictable. Kant’s theory provides moral laws that hold universally, regardless of culture or individual situations. Another point in favor of Kant’s theory is that it is clear. It gives us a system that a child could understand. “Would you like it if someone did that to you? No? Then don’t do it to someone else.” Duty ethics is rational – Kant is not swayed by emotion. His theory does not allow us to show favoritism for friends. It is a purely rational theory. Kant’s theory provides a basis for Human Rights. In 1948, the UN Declaration of
Human Rights was agreed by 48 countries & is the world’s most translated document, protecting humans around the globe. Deontology provides the foundation for modern conceptions of equality and justice. Lastly, by no means least, Kant’s theory strives to give objective standards, independent of our own interests, cultural bias and presuppositions.

**Weaknesses**

Duty based ethics is absolutist. It sets absolute rules, and the only way of dealing with cases that don't seem to fit is to build a list of exceptions to the rule. This means that it is inflexible; one is unable to break an unhelpful rule, even if the individual circumstances warrant it. It also allows acts that make the world a less good place. Thirdly, because duty-based ethics is not interested in the results it can lead to courses of action that produce a reduction in the overall happiness of the world. Another disadvantage of duty-based ethics is, it doesn't deal well with the cases where duties are in conflict. A good example is for instance, if someone is supposed to be at work, and is also supposed to take care of an ailing parent. Another important point against deontology is the question of moral law: Some philosophers question the existence of the moral law. Why should we believe that there is objective morality? Kantian ethics is anthropocentric. According to Kant, non-human animals (and certainly any non-rational creatures) have no intrinsic value. Many environmentalists see this as dangerous and wrong. Lastly, difficulty in forming maxims is a rather significant challenge. For example, if there were criminals hiding in your house, which maxim would you universalize? “Do not tell lies” or “Do not expose others to violence”? 

**Conclusion**

There is no escaping the question of ethics in journalism. Journalists are often faced with issues of deception, invasion of privacy, the use of sexually explicit materials, etc. Professional codes of practice setting out duties have proliferated in the last twenty years. Deontologists take their ethical bearings through strict adherence to them. These rules are undoubtedly useful and provide general guidance on some of the most contentious areas of journalistic practice, but they cannot contemplate every eventuality nor can they resolve hard cases (Sanders 2003). In a society that is often changing and with people questioning the media day by day, it is very important for a journalist to be sensitive to ethical matters. In my opinion, deontological theories are good and may ensure that a job is well done, but sometimes it may be advisable to switch to a theory that will not compromise journalistic standards. If it is a rule not to give your personal opinion when interviewing people for example, it would not be ethically wrong to advise viewers accordingly when you are interviewing a politician and he/she starts inciting people to violence.

**References**

Online resources