

EVERYDAY KANTIANISM

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OVERVIEW

- 1. Roemer's Kantianism
- 2. Kant's formulations
- 3. Maxims of everyday Kantianism
- 4. Magical thinking
- 5. Action at a distance
- 6. Proust
- 7. Cooperation in the Prisoner's Dilemma
- 8. Tversky-Quattrone voting experiment
- 9. Ainslie and intrapersonal cooperation
- 10. Everyday Kantianism and public policy.
- 11. A paradox of everyday Kantianism
- 12. Some questions to Roemer.

ROEMER

- “In a symmetric game, suppose each player asks himself: what action would I most like *all* of us to take? I call this a *simple Kantian optimizing protocol*, as the individual is applying the categorical imperative of Kant: take that action one would desire to have universalized.”
- “The fully cooperative solution is attained by a Kantian optimizer who has no concern for others: caring about group gains is irrelevant. [...] . Playing the strategy that one would like everyone to play is, for me, motivated entirely by self-interest, not by a concern for the welfare of the group as a whole. It entails a recognition that cooperation can make *me* better off (incidentally, it makes all of us better off). But that parenthetical fact is not or *need not be* the motivation for my playing ‘cooperatively.’”
- (Roemer, “How we cooperate...perhaps”, February 2015).

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

- Act only on that maxim whereby thou can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

–	Duties toward self	Duties toward others
– Perfect	Do not kill yourself	Keep your promises
– Imperfect	Improve yourself	Help others

EVERYDAY KANTIANISM = IMPERFECT DUTIES TO OTHERS

- “A [man], who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: What concern is it of mine. Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress! Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist, and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in **which one would have the need of the love and sympathy of others**, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires.” [This seems to match Roemer’s claim that Kantianism is based on or consistent with self-interest.]

THREE MAXIMS OF EVERYDAY KANTIANISM

- “But what if everyone did that?” (Yossarian: “Then I’d be a fool to do otherwise, wouldn’t I?”)
- “If not me, who?”
- “If not now, when?”

MAGICAL THINKING: GENERAL

- Magical thinking is the tendency to believe that one can have a causal influence on outcomes that are actually outside one's control.
- Many people, afraid of tempting fate, will have had the thought, "If I don't take my umbrella, it's sure to rain".
- People will also place larger bets on a coin that has not yet been tossed than on a coin that has already been tossed and for which the outcome has been concealed.
- Also, people may fail to grasp the distinction between *causal and diagnostic relevance*. In one experiment, subjects who were led to believe that the length of time they could hold their arms in painfully cold water was the best indicator of longevity held their arms in the water longer than those not given this (false) information.
- Max Weber claimed that Calvinism made its followers adopt an ascetic lifestyle, not to gain salvation but to acquire the subjective certainty of being among the elect. They confused the causal and diagnostic relevance of their behavior. This is made quite explicit in a letter circulated by English Baptists in 1770: "Every soul that comes to Christ to be saved . . . is to be encouraged. . . . The coming soul need not fear that he is not elected, for none but such would be willing to come." (Newcomb's Problem.)

ACTION AT A DISTANCE: EPR

- In 1935 Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen showed that quantum mechanics implies the possibility of action at a distance, as if two people could make simultaneous coin flips at opposite ends of the world with one coin coming up head when and only when the other comes up tails. Einstein claimed that this magical effect (*spukhafte Fernwirkung*) showed that the theory was incomplete. He was probably wrong, but in ordinary macro-contexts the idea of instantaneous correlations at a distance is indeed magical.

ACTION AT A DISTANCE IN PROUST

- In Proust's novel, the Narrator hopes that he can enlist the curiosity of his friend Saint-Loup in his attempt to meet a girl.
- "But that curiosity I had been wrong in hoping to excite in Saint-Loup by speaking to him of my band of girls. For it had been and would long remain paralyzed in him by his love for that actress whose lover he was. And even if he had felt it lightly stirring him he would have repressed it, from **an almost superstitious belief that on his own fidelity might depend that of his mistress**"."
- It is clear from other passages that Proust excluded a **causal** link between his behavior and that of his mistress. She was in Paris at the time, whereas Saint-Loup was in Normandy.

MATCHING VS MAGICAL THINKING IN A ONE-SHOT PD

“Several theorists had attributed cooperation to a decision rule of *matching* the possible “good faith” cooperation of their counterpart. Yet a previous study had found that some individuals who cooperate display a pattern of choices inconsistent with the matching heuristic—cooperating when uncertain about the counterpart’s move, defecting when certain that the counterpart is a cooperator, and defecting when certain that the counterpart is a defector. We proposed that this arises from players following a *control* heuristic [magical thinking] even though the PD is a context where control is not possible. Illusions of control in other domains depend on the relative timing of events. To test our proposal, we hypothesized that the pattern would be more frequent if the counterpart’s move is an ‘open fate’ as opposed to a ‘sealed fate.’ Consistent support was obtained.” (Morris, Sim, and Giroto, J. of Exp. Soc. Psych. 1998).

Roemer’s theory seems closer to matching: “many of us have essentially the same preferences over the public good achieved by recycling and the disutility of our own effort -- and trust has been built by **observing** that, indeed, many others are recycling”.

RATIONALITY VERSUS REASONABLENESS IN THE ITERATED PD

- The finitely iterated Prisoner's Dilemma has non-cooperation as a dominant strategy, as is shown by the "zip-back argument" from the last game to the first. Empirically, such games show cooperation for a long time, with defections beginning some time before the final game. According to Luce and Raiffa, *Games and Decisions*, p. 101, this is what agents will do if they are "reasonable" rather than "rational". In a Kantian equilibrium, agents would presumably cooperate all the way to the last game.

TVERSKY-QUATTRONE VOTING EXPERIMENT

- In a study by Georges Quattrone and Amos Tversky, subjects were informed that they were supporters of one of two parties that will be running in an imminent election and, in addition, told that all supporters of this party are quite similar to one another. Half of the subjects were subsequently informed that the election would be decided by non-aligned voters, while the other half were told that the decisive factor would be the mobilization of supporters of the two parties. Finally, they were asked whether, under either hypothesis, they intended to vote despite high registration costs. The subjects who were told that the election outcome depends on non-aligned voters were significantly less inclined to vote than those who were presented with the other hypothesis. This finding confirms the magical thinking hypothesis: being like me, other members of my party will turn out if I do.

AINSLIE AND INTRAPERSONAL COOPERATION

- “If not now, when?”
- George Ainslie’s theory of self-control can be illustrated by an example from a time I was living up in the hills close to the university where I was teaching.
- Every day I took my bike to get to campus and back. The return trip involved some steep uphill climbing, so that every day I faced the temptation to get off the bike and walk rather than forcing myself to pedal.
- When I set out from campus I was firmly committed to staying on the bike all the way, but in the middle of the climb a seductive thought would often occur to me, “Why not walk today, and resume biking tomorrow?” Then, fortunately (having read Ainslie), a further thought occurred, “What is so special about tomorrow? If I yield to temptation today, does not that predict that I will do so again tomorrow, and the day after, and so on?” The last thought enabled me to stay on the bike.

EVERYDAY KANTIANISM AND PUBLIC POLICY

- Public authorities sometimes seem to count on the susceptibility of citizens to magical thinking. Thus in Paris buses one finds a sign saying : “Qui salit le siège à l’aller risque de se tâcher au retour” (if you dirty the seat going out, you risk getting stained coming back). Clearly, the idea was not that they might come back in the **same** bus.
- In a field experiment, 100,000 citizens who were late paying their taxes were randomly chosen to receive one of these messages: : (i) “Nine out of ten people pay their tax on time”; (ii) “Nine out of ten people in the UK pay their tax on time” ; (iii) **“Nine out of ten people in the UK pay their tax on time. You are currently in the very small minority of people who have not paid us yet”**; (iv) “Paying tax means we all gain from vital public services like the NHS, roads, and schools”. The effect on prompt tax payment was 2-3 times higher when they received (iii) than when they received one of the other messages. Specifically, social norms were more effective than the Kantian message (iv).

A PARADOX OF EVERYDAY KANTIANISM

- An everyday Kantian does not consider what others are **actually** doing, nor the consequences of her behavior. She considers only the **hypothetical** consequences of **all** acting in a certain way, and chooses the option that would have the best consequences. If, however, others do not make the same choice, the outcome may be disastrous. Unilateral disarmament may create a power vacuum that other states rush in to fill, with war as a result. Unilateral rebellion may lead to a general crackdown by the authorities. Roemer's "saints" may not be saints if their behavior harms others.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ROEMER

- 1. Cooperation in public-good games is mainly driven by the fear of punishment, not by a sense of fairness (Fig. 1 in Gintis 2000).
- 2. Since punishment is costly, wouldn't a population of punishing cooperators be invaded by a population of non-punishing cooperators, which could then be invaded by non-cooperators, to be invaded in turn by punishing cooperators?
- 3. Could not observed cooperation be fully explained by the combination of a "quasi-moral norm" of fairness (triggered by **my** observation of what **others** do) and social norms (triggered by **others'** observation of what **I** do)? What does Kantianism add to the mix?
- 4. Is "joint intentionality" consistent with methodological individualism?
- 5. What is the relation between Kantian equilibria and the Golden Rule?
- 6. Could intrapersonal cooperation à la Ainslie be formalized as a Kantian equilibrium?