

The Power in Choice, The Power in Action

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## **Introduction**

This paper will explain, discuss, and analyze in what ways individual US consumers are morally obligated to respond to the child labor practices in the chocolate industry according to different ethical theories. The two ethical theories that will be explored in this paper are Kantian Ethics and Care Ethics. Both theories argue that individual US consumers do have a moral responsibility to respond to these practices. I agree with this. I believe that one of the most effective and arguably easiest ways to respond is for consumers to become more aware of the goods they buy. When consumers are educated on where their goods come from and how they are made, they can make more informative and educated choices. Buying fair trade can have a huge impact on the economy and ultimately affects how companies and farmers treat their laborers.

## **Background on Chocolate Production**

The chocolate that one eats and buys in a store originates from the seeds of the cocoa fruit. This plant only grows in a small strip around the equator and typically produces two harvests per year (Huschke). Each cocoa fruit will give about forty seeds. These seeds must then be removed from the fruit, dried, and bagged (Huschke). All of this requires a lot of manual labor. Labor is usually the most expensive cost of a company so “the cheaper the labor the cheaper the cocoa beans” and the more money that goes to the elite business owners (Huschke). It is important to note that when a chocolate bar gets sold, the cocoa farmers only receive about 6% of that money. Whereas the cocoa and chocolate companies receive about 70% (International Labor Rights Forum).

The growing and harvesting of the cocoa beans can be traced back to the Aztec and Mayan empires in South and Central America. Five hundred years ago rulers used slaves to harvest the cocoa bean and in 2018 slaves are still being used. Ivory Coast, a country in West Africa, is “the world’s largest supplier of cocoa beans, providing 43% of the world’s supply,” with its 600,000 cocoa farms (Robbins). Even though slavery - the “ownership of one human being by another” - is illegal in Ivory Coast, that does not mean it does not exist (Robbins). According to the BBC, thousands of children are purchased or stolen from their families then shipped to Ivory Coast and Ghana to be sold to cocoa farms. These children, sometimes as young as 8 years old, “are forced to do hard manual labor 80 to 100 hours a week. They are paid nothing, are barely fed, are beaten regularly,” and often use or are in the vicinity of dangerous tools (Robbins).

### **Kantian Ethics Analysis**

Immanuel Kant’s rational approach to ethics explains how ethics and morality is derived from reason, not from some other being (for example, God) or from our feelings and emotions. He believed that ethics can be as logical as math. In math, the fact that two plus two equals four will always be true. An experience or feeling will not change this. Kant believed that ethics can be similar to this, that ethics can have universality and an experience or feeling will not change that universality.

Kant believed that humans are rational beings because we are “capable of reasoning, of rationally discovering and following principles, and of autonomously choosing to follow the moral law” (Waller, 330). A moral law can be developed through Kant’s categorical imperative.

A categorical imperative is something you must always do no matter what the situation, it is a universal law.

One aspect of the categorical imperative is universality. Kant says, “act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” What he means by this is to act only in ways in which your action can be universalized without producing a contradiction. In this case of child labor in the chocolate industry, one would apply Kantian ethics by first universalizing the maxim of child labor. Could child labor be universalized without producing a contradiction? Could we live and function in a society where child labor is universalized or would society fall apart? Would you allow your own child be taken for labor purposes? If we take our maxim to be that child labor is a viable practice and then imagine a world in which everyone, everywhere would be allowed to use child labor than we face a dilemma. If every child, or even most children, participated in the labor force then our society would never advance. The advancement of a society relies on the advancement of the new generation. If children cannot go to school and get an education they will never be able to contribute to the progression of society. If the younger generation does not acquire adequate knowledge of the world they will never be able to contribute to society and knowledge will be lost.

Kant’s universalization also involves tolerability (Nall). The principle of tolerability ask that even if the maximum can be universalized, does the maxum have invisibility. In other words, would you want to be on the other end of the situation. In the case of child labor, would you want to have your child taken from you to be used for labor? Would you yourself want to be taken as a child and used for labor? Would you want to live in a world where if your child was

taken no one would do anything about it? Whatever the answer, we must then universalize it. If you do not think it is right for someone to take your child to be used for labor practices than it must also not be right for someone else to take someone else's child for the same reason. **If we do not wish to be treated the way child laborers in Ivory Coast and Ghana are treated then we cannot morally justify treating them said way.**

Kant's means-ends principle is a derivation of the principle of tolerability and universalization. The means-ends principle says we must "always treat all persons as an ends in themselves, and never as merely means to your ends" (Waller, 331). To treat someone as a means to your ends, means that you use them for some purpose that you value without recognizing that they are also a person with goals and aspirations, just as you are a person with goals and aspirations. When examining the morality of child labor one must ask oneself if they are using that child as simply a means to achieve their end? Kant argues that we do not get worth or dignity bestowed upon ourselves, we have worth and dignity within ourselves simply because we have personhood. **This implies that if you say you have value because you are a person then you must treat everyone as having value because they are a person, even if that person does not value or respect themselves, you still have an obligation to respect them.**

Through the means-ends principle it is evident that exploitation is fundamentally wrong. Exploitation requires "taking from another without providing a comparable equivalent benefit to the other" (Nall). Exploitation requires that you use someone as a mere means to your end, that you do not see them as the rational autonomous moral being that they are. Child labor is a form of exploitation and is therefore morally wrong.

Using Kantian ethics one can come to the conclusion that child labor is fundamentally morally wrong and therefore should not be practiced. Kant expresses two types of duties that can be derived from the categorical imperative: perfect and imperfect duties (Nall). Perfect duties must be followed without exception, for example, the duty not to lie or break a promise. The conclusion that child labor is morally wrong entails a perfect duty. Meaning that child labor must not be practiced anywhere and that duty must always be followed. Although, child labor is practiced in the chocolate industry and many other industries. This is why individual consumers must take action into their own hands because the chocolate companies are not.

The most effective way a consumer can take action is through what they spend their money on. The consumer who buys chocolate made from child labor is supporting the practice of child labor. A consumer does this because when they buy that chocolate they are essentially saying “this chocolate is worthy of my money.” By giving your money to that chocolate you are expressing that you support and are okay with the production, make, brand, taste and all other aspects of that chocolate. You also create a demand for more of that chocolate that was made by child laborers.

**Money has power, since you as the consumer have the money, you delegate power when you buy products at a store.** When we take the Kantian view and imagine what would happen if everyone, everywhere refused to buy products that were unethical made, for example chocolate made from child labor, we see that child labor will quite simply disappear. There would be no logical reason for a business person to make a product produced from child labor if no one is going to buy it. Fair trade products will become the norm. **Since a consumer has power when buying a product they have the capability as a “rational autonomous moral**

**being” to make the ethical choice.** And one cannot give the excuse that they are no ethical choices because there are (for example, Divine Chocolate). Since the average US consumer would not want their child to be taken away and used for labor, Kantian ethics would express that they therefore cannot expect others to rightly justify the moral correctness of taking one’s child for labor, as is being done in the chocolate industry. Kantian ethics expresses how everyone everywhere should not practice and therefore not support child labor, and that it is not ethical for a consumer to buy chocolate made from child labor.

### **Care Ethics Analysis**

Kant believed emotions have no place in ethics, whereas care ethics focuses on personal relationships and empathetic connection. Care ethics came about because it offered a different perspective of what is morally or justifiably right and wrong. Before care ethics, a lot of the major ethical theories that existed were rule-based. For example, Kantian ethics is based on the moral law and the categorical imperative and utilitarianism is based on the principle of which action will bring about the most happiness. Care ethics differs by believing that morality goes wrong when we emphasize impartiality because it’s our relationships that make our lives meaningful. The emotions and feelings we feel when we see someone we love or when we see something sad should be taken into consideration when deciding what is morally right or wrong. “We can derive moral wisdom from our connections to our loved ones” (Nall). Which means that we should treat people we do not know the same way we treat people we love and care about.

When applying care ethics, one must first recognize the connection one has to others and then generalize it. The child labor practices of the chocolate industry involves taking a child

away from his/her mother. This is one of the most important and valuable relationships a person can develop in their life, and the children on chocolate farms are not receiving it. How does that make you feel? Do you feel empathy for the child and parent? Imagine being a parent and having your child taken from you. You probably would not want that. And if one cannot accept their child being taken from them how can they tolerate it when it happens in West Africa. Your child is not morally different than any other child. By recognizing that the relationship between you and your child is similar to the one of a parent and child in West Africa one can come to the conclusion that you do have an obligation as a US consumer to respond to these practices. Just as you may have love and compassion for your child, a parent in West Africa also has love and compassion for their child.

One may take a different view of looking at this situation by recognizing how a parent wants to please their child. When a child feels sad or disappointed usually the parent will feel similar and try to do something to no longer make the child feel sad or disappointed. When a child wants chocolate and the parent says, "No, I cannot buy you that chocolate because it was unethically made," the child may start to cry and get sad. The parent wants their child to be happy and those emotions may make the parent ignore the fact that that chocolate was unethically made. Thus, the parent will buy the unethical chocolate. But this is not entirely justifiable. A parent could also look at their child eating that unethical chocolate and think about how that chocolate has made from a different child working long hours and using hazardous tools. The empathy and sympathy that that parent feels for that child in West Africa is what care ethics wants people to recognize. Care ethics wants us to act on this empathy and compassion in



our moral decision making. That is why care ethics argues that individual US consumers do have a morally responsibility to take action.

One of the most effective ways one can take action is by buying fair trade products. Care ethics does not express that one should fly out to Ghana or Ivory Coast and rescue all the children that have been taken from their parents, that would require too much to ask of a person. Care ethics wants us to recognize the connections and relationships we make and realize that those emotional connections can have an impact on our morally judgement.

### **Integrated Analysis**

Both Kantian and Care ethics come to the same conclusion that individual US consumers do have a moral responsibility to respond to the practices occurring in the chocolate industry. Although the way that one arrives at this conclusion differs with the theories. The Kantian approach steps away from emotions or feelings and looks at the situation in a logical and abstract way. Whereas care ethics recognizes that a human being has emotions and feelings that affect their morality. A person may choose to buy fair trade because they feel empathetic towards the children in West Africa. They may watch a documentary about the conditions in which child laborers work and begin to cry. The care ethicists realizes that these emotions play a role in the decision making process that takes place when buying goods at a store.

I believe that both Kantian and care ethics are important to look at when making a moral decision. Sometimes emotional decisions are unavoidable. We are humans and we do have feelings. To shut out these feelings in decision making can be very difficult and sometimes not always the best response. For example, often times to have a good deep relationship, whether

platonic or romantic, it requires a certain degree of listening, compassion, and empathy. When one is simply acting by their “moral duty,” as Kant would agree with, they may not be putting the most into the relationship. Visiting a friend who is sick or in need because you feel it is your moral duty might not be the best way to see your friendship. Friendship involves being there for them even when it is not your duty to be there for them. Care ethics realizes that sometimes you comfort a friend just because you feel an emotional attachment to that friend and not because you feel like you have some moral duty to comfort them.

Although, sometimes emotions and feelings can be unreliable and faulty. Kant recognized this and that is seen through his ethical theory. Kantian ethics can be very useful because of how logically it is. The theory does not allow for a lot of subjectivity and that makes it very clear to understand and accept. It offers a reasoned approach to ethics. Whereas care ethics allows for subjectivity and may not apply to everyone in the exact same way that Kantian ethics requires universality.

## **Conclusion**

This paper analysed two ethical theories - Kantian Ethics and Care Ethics - and how, according to these theories, individual US chocolate consumers are morally obligated to respond to the child labor practices that occur in the chocolate industry. Both theories come to the conclusion that consumers are obligated to respond. I believe the most effective way a consumer can respond is by buying fair trade. By buying fair trade you are letting the economy, the companies, and businessmen know that you do not accept unfair labor practices, such as child

labor. You create a demand for products that are ethically made and thus pushing more companies to ethically produce their products.

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