KANT
Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals

Nothing in the world—or out of it!—can possibly be conceived that could be called 'good' without qualification except a GOOD WILL. Mental talents such as intelligence, wit, and judgment, and temperaments such as courage, resoluteness, and perseverance are doubtless in many ways good and desirable; but they can become extremely bad and harmful if the person's character isn't good—i.e. if the will that is to make use of these •gifts of nature isn't good. Similarly with gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health, and the over-all well-being and contentment with one's condition that we call 'happiness', create pride, often leading to arrogance, if there isn't a good will to correct their influence on the mind. . . . Not to mention the fact that the sight of someone who shows no sign of a pure and good will and yet enjoys uninterrupted prosperity will never give pleasure to an impartial rational observer. So it seems that without a good will one can't even be worthy of being happy. Even qualities that are conducive to this good will and can make its work easier have no intrinsic unconditional worth. We rightly hold them in high esteem, but only because we assume them to be accompanied by a good will; so we can't take them to be absolutely ·or unconditionally· good. •Moderation in emotions and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation not only are good in many ways but seem even to constitute part of the person's inner worth, and they were indeed unconditionally valued by the ancients. Yet they are very far from being good without qualification—·good in themselves, good in any circumstances·—for without the principles of a good will they can become extremely bad: ·for example·, a villain's •coolness makes him far more dangerous and more straightforwardly abominable to us than he would otherwise have seemed. What makes a good will good? It isn't what it brings about, its usefulness in achieving some intended end. Rather, good will is good because of how it wills—i.e. it is good in itself. Taken just in itself it is to be valued incomparably more highly than anything that could be brought about by it in the satisfaction of some preference—or, if you like, the sum total of all preferences! (…) ·

So much for the **first proposition** of morality: •For an action to have genuine moral worth it must be done from duty.· The **second proposition** is: •An action that is done from duty doesn't get its moral value from the purpose that's to be achieved through it but from the maxim that it involves, ·giving the reason why the person acts thus·. So the action's moral value doesn't depend on whether what is aimed at in it is actually achieved, but solely on the

principle of the will from which the action is done, irrespective of anything the faculty of desire may be aiming at. From what I have said it is clear that the purposes we may have in acting, and their effects as drivers of the will towards desired ends, can't give our actions any unconditional value, any moral value. Well, then, if the action's moral value isn't to be found in •the will in its relation to its hoped-for effect, where can it be found? The only possible source for it is •the principle on which the will acts—and never mind the ends that may be achieved by the action. For the will stands at the crossroads, so to speak, at the intersection between •its a priori principle, which is formal, and •its a posteriori driver—·the contingent desire that acts on it·—which is material. In that position it must be determined by something; and if it is done from duty it must be determined by the formal principle of the will, since every material principle—·every contingent driver of the will·—has been withdrawn from it. The **third proposition**—a consequence of the first two—I would express as follows: •To have a duty is to be required to act in a certain way out of respect for law. (…)

So we have a law the thought of which can settle the will without reference to any expected result, and must do so if the will is to be called absolutely good without qualification; what kind of law can this be? Since I have robbed the will of any impulses that could come to it from obeying any law, nothing remains to serve as a ·guiding· principle of the will except conduct's universally conforming to law as such. That is, **I ought never to act in such a way that I couldn't also will that the maxim on which I act should be a universal law**. In this context the ·guiding· principle of the will is conformity to law as such, not bringing in any particular law governing some class of actions; and it must serve as the will's principle if duty is not to be a vain delusion and chimerical concept. Common sense in its practical judgments is in perfect agreement with this, and constantly has this principle in view. (…)

All imperatives command either •hypothetically or categorically. The •former expresses the practical necessity of some possible action as a means to achieving something else that one does or might want. An imperative would be categorical if it represented an action as being objectively necessary in itself without regard to any other end. Since every practical law represents some possible action as •good, and thus as •necessary for anyone whose conduct is governed by reason, what every imperative does is to specify some action that is •necessary according to the principle of a will that has something good about it. If the action would be good only as a means to something else, the imperative is **hypothetical**; but if the action is thought of as good in itself and hence as •necessary in a will that conforms to reason, which it has as its principle, the imperative is **categorical**. (…)

Now if all imperatives of duty can be derived from this one imperative as a principle, we'll at least be able to show what we understand by the concept of duty, what the concept means, even if we haven't yet settled whether so-called 'duty' is an empty concept or not. The universality of law according to which effects occur constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense,. . . .i.e. the existence of things considered as determined by universal laws. So the universal imperative of duty can be expressed as follows: **Act as though the maxim of your action were to become, through your will, a universal law of nature**. (…)

It •follows from this—no-one could question that it follows—that every rational being, as an end in himself, must be able to regard himself as a giver of universal laws that include any laws to which he may be subject. For what marks him off as an end in himself is just this fitness of his maxims for universal law-giving. It also •follows that this dignity that he has, his prerogative over all merely natural beings, involves his having to take his maxims from the point of view of himself and every other rational being as law-givers—which is why they are called 'persons'. In this way, a world of rational beings. . . .is possible as a realm of ends, through the law-giving activities of all the persons who are its members. Consequently every rational being must act as if his maxims made him at all times a law-giving member of the universal realm of ends. (…)

The autonomy of the will as the supreme principle of morality A will's autonomy is that property of it by which it is a law to itself, independently of any property of the objects of its volition. So the principle of autonomy is: Always choose in such a way that the maxims of your choice are incorporated as universal law in the same volition. That this practical rule is an imperative, i.e. that the will of every rational being is necessarily bound to it as a constraint, can't be proved by a mere analysis of the concepts occurring in it, because it is a synthetic proposition. This synthetic proposition presents a command, and presents it as necessary; so it must be able to be known a priori. To prove it, then, we would have to go beyond knowledge of •objects to a critical examination of the •subject (i.e. to a critique of pure practical reason). But that is not the business of the present chapter. But mere analysis of moral concepts can show something to our present purpose, namely that the principle of autonomy that we are discussing is the sole principle of morals. This is easy to show, because conceptual analysis shows us •that morality's principle must be a categorical imperative and •that the imperative ·in question· commands neither more nor less than this very autonomy. [See note on page 32 for 'autonomy' and 'heteronomy'.] **The heteronomy of the will as the source of all**

spurious principles of morality A will is looking for a law that will tell it what to do: if it looks anywhere except in the fitness of its maxims to be given as universal law, going outside itself and looking for the law in the property of any of its objects, heteronomy always results. For in that case the law is not something the will gives to itself, but rather something that the ·external· object gives to the will through its relation to it. This relation, whether it rests on preference or on conceptions of reason, admits of only hypothetical imperatives: •I should do x because I want y. The moral or categorical imperative, on the other hand, says that •I should do x whether or not I want anything else. For example, the hypothetical says that •I shouldn't lie if I want to keep my reputation. The categorical says that •I shouldn't lie even if lying wouldn't bring the slightest harm to me. So the categorical imperative must abstract from every object thoroughly enough so that no object has any influence on the will; so that practical reason (the will), rather than catering to interests that are not its own, shows its commanding authority as supreme law-giving. Thus, for instance, I ought to try to further the happiness of others, but not in the spirit of 'it matters to me that these people should be happier, because. . . ' with the blank filled by a reference to some preference of mine, whether directly for the happiness of the people in question or indirectly via some satisfaction that is related to their happiness through reason. Rather, I should to try to further the happiness of others solely because a maxim that excludes this can't be included as a universal law in one and the same volition.