

University Press: 1975); Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1972): 123–44 (excerpted on p. 901 of this anthology); Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 1994); Frances Kamm, "Non-consequentialism, the Person as an End-in-Itself, and the Significance of Status," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 21, no. 4 (1992): 354–89.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Kant was a German philosopher of the Enlightenment whose work extolled the faculty of reason, exploring its powers and limitations. He was born in Königsberg and was a professor at the University of Königsberg. His work exerted and continues to exert a profound influence on the development of modern and contemporary philosophy in ethics, political philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind and of psychology, aesthetics, and the philosophy of religion. His most famous books include *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

Second Section: Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysics of Morals

Unless one wants to refuse the concept of morality all truth and reference to some possible object, one cannot deny that its law is so extensive in its significance that it must hold not merely for human beings but for all *rational beings as such*, not merely under contingent conditions and with exceptions, but with *absolute necessity*. . . . [I]t is clear that no experience can give occasion to infer even just the possibility of such apodictic laws.¹ For by what right can we bring what is perhaps valid only under the contingent conditions of humanity into unlimited respect, as a universal prescription for every rational nature?

Moreover, one could not give morality worse counsel than by seeking to borrow it from examples. For every example of it that is presented to me must itself first be judged according to principles of morality, whether it is actually worthy to serve as

an original example, i.e. as a model; but by no means can it furnish the concept of it at the outset. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as one. . . . Imitation has no place at all in moral matters; and examples serve for encouragement only, i.e. they put beyond doubt the feasibility of what the law commands, they make intuitive what the practical² rule expresses more generally, but they can never entitle us to set aside their true original, which lies in reason, and to go by examples.

... It is clear from what has been said that all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely a priori³ in reason. . . . that they cannot be abstracted from any empirical and hence merely contingent cognition; that their dignity to serve us as supreme practical principles lies just in this purity of their origin, that every time in adding anything empirical to them one takes away as much from their genuine influence and from the unlimited worth of actions; that it is not only a requirement of the greatest necessity for theoretical purposes, when only speculation counts, but also a matter of the greatest practical importance to draw its concepts and laws from pure reason, to set them forth pure and unmingled, indeed to determine the scope of this entire practical but pure rational cognition, i.e. the entire faculty of pure practical reason, and in so doing not . . . to make its principles dependent on the particular nature of human reason, but because moral laws are to hold for every rational being as such, already to derive them from the universal concept of a rational being as such. . . .

Every thing in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act according to the representation of laws, i.e. according to principles, or a will. Since reason is required for deriving actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. If reason determines the will without fail, then the actions of such a being that are recognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary; i.e. the will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary, i.e. as good. If, however, reason all by itself does not sufficiently determine the will, if it is also subject to subjective conditions (to certain incentives) that are not always in agreement with the objective ones; in a word, if the will does not *in itself* completely conform with reason (as is actually the case with human beings), then actions objectively recognized as necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will, in conformity with objective laws, is *necessitation*; i.e. the relation of objective laws to a will not altogether good is represented as the determination of the will of a rational being by grounds of reason, to which this will is not, however, according to its nature necessarily obedient.

The representation of an objective principle in so far as it is necessitating for a will is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called imperative.

² When Kant uses "practical," he is referring to principles, concepts, or reasoning relevant to action (as opposed merely to thought or reasoning independent of action).

³ Here, Kant means that moral concepts, moral principles, and their application can be known through consulting reason alone and one need not consult experience, our behavior, or our customs to know them. They apply to us and can be known merely by virtue of our being rational.

1. That is, indisputable or certain laws.

All imperatives are expressed by an *ought*, and by this indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that according to its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation). They say that to do or to omit something would be good, but they say it to a will that does not always do something just because it is represented to it that it would be good to do it. Practically *good*, however, is what determines the will by means of representations of reason, hence not from subjective causes, but objectively, i.e. from grounds that are valid for every rational being, as such. It is distinguished from the *agreeable*, as that which influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, which hold only for the senses of this or that one, and not as a principle of reason, which holds for everyone.

... Now, all imperatives command either *hypothetically*, or *categorically*. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else that one wants (or that at least is possible for one to want). The categorical imperative would be the one that represented an action as objectively necessary by itself, without reference to another end.

Because every practical law represents a possible action as good and hence, for a subject practically determinable by reason, as necessary, all imperatives are formulae for the determination of an action necessary according to the principle of a will that is good in some way. Now, if the action would be good merely as a means to *something else*, the imperative is *hypothetical*, if the action is represented as good *in itself*, hence as necessary in a will that in itself conforms to reason, as its principle, then it is *categorical*.

... Now, the skill in the choice of the means to one's own greatest well-being can be called prudence in the narrowest sense. Thus the imperative that refers to the choice of means to one's own happiness, i.e. the prescription of prudence, is still *hypothetical*; the action is not commanded per se, but just as a means to another purpose.

Finally, there is one imperative that — without presupposing as its condition any other purpose to be attained by a certain course of conduct — commands this conduct immediately. This imperative is categorical. It concerns not the matter of the action or what is to result from it, but the form and the principle from which it does itself follow; and the essential good in it consists in the disposition, let the result be what it may. This imperative may be called that of morality. . . .

Now the question arises: how are all these imperatives possible? . . . How an imperative of skill is possible probably requires no special discussion. Whoever wills the end also wills (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that is in his control. As far as willing is concerned, this proposition is analytic; for in the willing of an object, as my effect, my causality is already thought, as an acting cause, i.e. the use of means, and the imperative already extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of a willing of this end.

The imperatives of prudence would totally and entirely coincide with those of skill, and be equally analytic, if only it were so easy to provide a determinate concept of

happiness. For here as well as there it would be said: whoever wills the end also wills (in conformity with reason necessarily) the only means to it that are in his control. But, unfortunately, the concept of happiness is so indeterminate a concept that, even though every human being wishes to achieve it, yet he can never say determinately and in agreement with himself what he actually wishes and wants. The cause of this is: that the elements that belong to the concept of happiness are one and all empirical, i.e. must be borrowed from experience. . . .

By contrast, the question of how the imperative of *morality* is possible is no doubt the only one in need of a solution, since it is not hypothetical at all, and thus the objectively represented necessity cannot rely on any presupposition, as in the case of the hypothetical imperatives. However, it is never to slip our attention in this matter that it cannot be made out by *any example*, and hence empirically, whether there is any such imperative at all; but to be dreaded that all imperatives that appear categorical may yet in some hidden way be hypothetical. E.g. when it is said that you ought not to make deceitful promises; and one assumes that the necessity of this omission is not merely giving counsel for avoiding some other ill, so that what is said would be: you ought not to make lying promises lest, if it comes to light, you are deprived of your credit; but that an action of this kind must be considered as by itself evil, thus that the imperative of the prohibition is categorical; one still cannot establish in any example with certainty that the will is here determined, without another incentive, merely by the law, even if it appears so; for it is always possible that fear of embarrassment, perhaps also an obscure dread of other dangers, may covertly influence the will. . . .

We shall thus have to investigate the possibility of a *categorical imperative* entirely a priori, since we do not here enjoy the advantage that its actuality is being given in experience, in which case its possibility would be necessary not for corroboration, but merely for explanation. For the time being, however, this much can be seen: that the categorical imperative alone expresses a practical law, and that the others can indeed one and all be called *principles* of the will, but not laws; since what it is necessary to do merely for attaining a discretionary purpose can be regarded as in itself contingent, and we can always be rid of the prescription if we give up the purpose, whereas the unconditional command leaves the will no free discretion with regard to the opposite, and hence alone carries with it that necessity which we demand for a law.

In the case of this categorical imperative or law of morality the ground of the difficulty (of insight into its possibility) is actually very great. It is an a priori synthetic practical proposition⁴ and since gaining insight into the possibility of propositions of this kind causes so much difficulty in theoretical cognition, it can easily be inferred that in practical cognition there will be no less.

⁴ Here, Kant means that the concept of a categorical imperative is one that could be known without consulting experience but is *synthetic*, by which he means it is not a proposition true by definition.

With this problem, we shall first try to see whether the mere concept of a categorical imperative may perhaps also furnish its formula, which contains the proposition that alone can be a categorical imperative . . .

When I think of a *hypothetical* imperative as such I do not know in advance what it will contain, until I am given the condition. But when I think of a *categorical* imperative I know at once what it contains. For since besides the law the imperative contains only the necessity of the maxim⁵ to conform with this law, whereas the law contains no condition to which it was limited, nothing is left but the universality of a law as such, with which the maxim of the action ought to conform, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative actually represents as necessary.

There is therefore only a single categorical imperative, and it is this: *act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*

. . . Since the universality of the law according to which effects happen constitutes that which is actually called *nature* in the most general sense (according to its form), i.e. the existence of things in so far as it is determined according to universal laws, the universal imperative of duty could also be expressed as follows: *so act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.*

We shall now enumerate some duties, according to their usual division, into duties to ourselves and to other human beings, into perfect and imperfect duties.

1) Someone who feels weary of life because of a series of ills that has grown to the point of hopelessness is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it is not perhaps contrary to a duty to oneself to take one's own life. Now he tries out: whether the maxim of his action could possibly become a universal law of nature. But his maxim is: from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if, when protracted any longer, it threatens more ill than it promises agreeableness. The only further question is whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. But then one soon sees that a nature whose law it were to destroy life itself by means of the same sensation the function of which it is to impel towards the advancement of life, would contradict itself and would thus not subsist as a nature, hence that maxim could not possibly take the place of a universal law of nature, and consequently conflicts entirely with the supreme principle of all duty.

2) Another sees himself pressured by need to borrow money. He knows full well that he will not be able to repay, but also sees that nothing will be lent to him unless he solemnly promises to repay it at a determinate time. He feels like making such a promise; but he still has enough conscience to ask himself: is it not impermissible and contrary to duty to help oneself out of need in such a way? Suppose that he still resolved to do so, his maxim of the action would go as follows: when I believe myself to be in need of money I shall borrow money, and promise to repay it, even

5. A *maxim* is the subjective principle of acting, and must be distinguished from the *objective principle*, namely the practical law. The former contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations), and is therefore the principle in accordance with which the subject *acts*; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which he *ought to act*, i.e., an imperative. [Kant's note.]

though I know that it will never happen. Now this principle of self-love, or of one's own benefit, is perhaps quite consistent with my whole future well-being, but the question now is: whether it is right? I therefore transform the imposition of self-love into a universal law, and arrange the question as follows: how things would stand if my maxim became a universal law. Now, I then see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature and harmonize with itself, but must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law that everyone, once he believes himself to be in need, could promise whatever he fancies with the intention not to keep it, would make the promise and the end one may pursue with it itself impossible, as no one would believe he was being promised anything, but would laugh about any such utterance, as a vain pretense.

3) A third finds in himself a talent that by means of some cultivation could make him a useful human being in all sorts of respects. However, he sees himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to give himself up to gratification rather than to make the effort to expand and improve his fortunate natural predispositions. Yet he still asks himself: whether his maxim of neglecting his natural gifts, besides its agreement with his propensity to amusement, also agrees with what one calls duty. Now he sees that a nature could indeed still subsist according to such a universal law, even if human beings . . . should let their talents rust and be intent on devoting their lives merely to idleness, amusement, procreation, in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this become a universal law of nature, or as such be placed in us by natural instinct. For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all capacities in him be developed, because they serve him and are given to him for all sorts of possible purposes.

Yet a *fourth*, who is prospering while he sees that others have to struggle with great hardships (whom he could just as well help), thinks: what's it to me? May everyone be as happy as heaven wills, or as he can make himself. I shall take nothing away from him, not even envy him; I just do not feel like contributing anything to his well-being, or his assistance in need! Now, certainly, if such a way of thinking were to become a universal law of nature, the human race could very well subsist, and no doubt still better than when everyone chatters about compassion and benevolence, even develops the zeal to perform such actions occasionally, but also cheats wherever he can, sells out the right of human beings, or infringes it in some other way. But even though it is possible that a universal law of nature could very well subsist according to that maxim, it is still impossible to will that such a principle hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will that resolved upon this would conflict with itself, as many cases can yet come to pass in which one needs the love and compassion of others, and in which, by such a law of nature sprung from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the assistance he wishes for himself.

These, then, are some of the many actual duties, or at least of what we take to be such, whose division can clearly be seen from the one principle stated above. One must be able to will that a maxim of our action become a universal law: this is as such the canon of judging it morally. Some actions are such that their maxim cannot even be thought without contradiction as a universal law of nature; let alone that one could

will that it *should* become such. In the case of others that inner impossibility is indeed not to be found, but it is still impossible to *will* that their maxim be elevated to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself. It is easy to see that the first conflicts with strict or narrower (unrelenting) duty, the second only with wider (meritorious) duty, and thus that all duties, as far as the kind of obligation (not the object of their action) is concerned, have by these examples been set out completely in their dependence on the one principle.

If we now attend to ourselves in every transgression of a duty, we find that we actually do not will that our maxim should become a universal law, since that is impossible for us, but that its opposite should rather generally remain a law; we just take the liberty of making an *exception* to it for ourselves, or (just for this once) to the advantage of our inclination. Consequently, if we considered everything from one and the same point of view, namely that of reason, we would find a contradiction in our own will, namely that a certain principle be objectively necessary as a universal law and yet subjectively should not hold universally, but allow of exceptions.

We have thus established at least this much, that if duty is a concept that is to contain significance and actual legislation for our actions it can be expressed only in categorical imperatives, but by no means in hypothetical ones; likewise we have—and this is already a lot—presented distinctly and determined for every use the content of the categorical imperative, which would have to contain the principle of all duty (if there were such a thing at all).

... [One] must put the thought right out of one's mind that the reality of this principle can be derived from some *particular property of human nature*. For duty is to be practical unconditional necessity of action; it must thus hold for all rational beings (to which an imperative can at all apply), and *only in virtue of this* be a law also for every human will. By contrast, whatever is derived from the special natural predisposition of humanity, from certain feelings and propensity, and indeed even, possibly, from a special tendency peculiar to human reason, and would not have to hold necessarily for the will of every rational being—that can indeed yield a maxim for us, but not a law, a subjective principle on which propensity and inclination would *in* have us act, but not an objective principle on which we would be *instructed* to act even if every propensity, inclination and natural arrangement of ours were against it. ...

The will is thought as a capacity to determine itself to action *in conformity with the representation of certain laws*. And such a capacity can be found only in rational beings. Now, what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the *end*, and this, if it is given by mere reason, must hold equally for all rational beings. By contrast, what contains merely the ground of the possibility of an action the effect of which is an end is called the *means*. The subjective ground of desiring is the *incentive*, the objective ground of willing the *motivating ground*; hence the difference between subjective ends, which rest on incentives, and objective ones, which depend on motivating grounds that hold for every rational being. Practical principles are *formal* if they abstract from all subjective ends; they are *material* if they have these, and hence certain incentives, at their foundation. The ends that a rational being intends at its discretion as *effects* of its actions (material ends) are one and all only relative; for

merely their relation to a particular kind of desiderative faculty of the subject gives them their worth, which can therefore furnish no universal principles that are valid as well as necessary for all rational beings, or for all willing, i.e. practical laws. That is why all these relative ends are the ground of hypothetical imperatives only.

But suppose there were something *the existence of which in itself* has an absolute worth, that, as an *end in itself*, could be a ground of determinate laws, then the ground of a possible categorical imperative, i.e. of a practical law, would lie in it, and only in it alone.

Now I say: a human being and generally every rational being *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* for the discretionary use for this or that will, but must in all its actions, whether directed towards itself or also to other rational beings, always be considered *at the same time as an end*. All objects of inclinations have a conditional worth only, for if the inclinations, and the needs founded on them, did not exist, their object would be without worth. But the inclinations themselves, as sources of need, are so far from having an absolute worth—so as to make one wish for them as such—that to be entirely free from them must rather be the universal wish of every rational being. Therefore the worth of any object *to be acquired* by our action is always conditional. Beings whose existence rests not indeed on our will but on nature, if they are non-rational beings, still have only a relative worth, as means, and are therefore called *things*, whereas rational beings are called *persons*, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves, i.e. as something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence to that extent limits all choice (and is an object of respect). These are therefore not merely subjective ends, the existence of which, as the effect of our action, has a worth *for us*, but rather *objective ends*, i.e. entities whose existence in itself is an end, an end such that no other end can be put in its place, for which they would do service *merely* as means, because without it nothing whatsoever of *absolute worth* could be found; but if all worth were conditional, and hence contingent, then for reason no supreme practical principle could be found at all.

If, then, there is to be a supreme practical principle and, with regard to the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be such that, from the representation of what is necessarily an end for everyone, because it is an *end in itself*, it constitutes an *objective* principle of the will, and hence can serve as a universal practical law. The ground of this principle is: *a rational nature exists as an end in itself*. That is how a human being by necessity represents his own existence; to that extent it is thus a *subjective* principle of human actions. But every other rational being also represents its existence in this way, as a consequence of just the same rational ground that also holds for me; thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all laws of the will. The practical imperative will thus be the following: *So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*. Let us try to see whether this can be done.

To keep to the previous examples:

First, according to the concept of necessary duty to oneself, someone who is contemplating self-murder will ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the idea of humanity, *as an end in itself*. If to escape from a troublesome condition

he destroys himself, he makes use of a person, merely as a *means*, to preserving a bearable condition up to the end of life. But a human being is not a thing, hence not something that can be used *merely* as a means, but must in all his actions always be considered as an end in itself. Thus the human being in my own person is not at my disposal, so as to maim, to corrupt, or to kill him. . . .

Secondly, as far as necessary or owed duty to others is concerned, someone who has it in mind to make a lying promise to others will see at once that he wants to make use of another human being *merely as a means*, who does not at the same time contain in himself the end. For the one I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree to my way of proceeding with him and thus himself contain the end of this action. This conflict with the principle of other human beings can be seen more distinctly if one introduces examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others. For then it is clear that the transgressor of the rights of human beings is disposed to make use of the person of others merely as a means, without taking into consideration that, as rational beings, they are always to be esteemed at the same time as ends, i.e. only as beings who must, of just the same action, also be able to contain in themselves the end.

Thirdly, with regard to contingent (meritorious) duty to oneself it is not enough that the action not conflict with humanity in our person, as an end in itself, it must also *harmonize with it*. Now there are in humanity predispositions to greater perfection, which belong to the end of nature with regard to humanity in our subject; to neglect these would perhaps be consistent with the *preservation* of humanity, as an end in itself, but not with the *advancement* of this end.

Fourthly, as concerns meritorious duty to others, the natural end that all human beings have is their own happiness. Now, humanity could indeed subsist if no one contributed anything to the happiness of others while not intentionally detracting anything from it; but this is still only a negative and not positive agreement with *humanity, as an end in itself*, if everyone does not also try, as far as he can, to advance the ends of others. For if that representation is to have its *full effect* in me, the ends of a subject that is an end in itself must, as much as possible, also be *my ends*.

This principle of humanity and of every rational nature as such, *as an end in itself* (which is the supreme limiting condition of the freedom of actions of every human being) is not borrowed from experience, first, because of its universality, as it aims at all rational beings as such, and about that no experience is sufficient to determine anything; secondly, because in it humanity is represented not as an end of human beings (subjectively), i.e. as an object that by itself one actually makes one's end, but as an objective end that, whatever ends we may have, as a law is to constitute the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends, and hence must arise from pure reason. For the ground of all practical legislation lies *objectively in the rule* and the form of universality, which (according to the first principle) makes it capable of being a law (or perhaps a law of nature), *subjectively*, however, *in the end*, the subject of all ends, however, is every rational being, as an end in itself (according to the second principle): from this now follows the third practical principle of the will, as the supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislating will.

According to this principle, all maxims are rejected that are not consistent with the will's own universal legislation. Thus the will is not just subject to the law, but subject in such a way that it must also be viewed as *self-legislating*, and just on account of this as subject to the law (of which it can consider itself the author) in the first place. . . .

Now, if we look back on all the efforts that have ever been undertaken to detect the principle of morality to this day, it is no wonder why one and all they had to fail. One saw the human being bound to laws by his duty, but it did not occur to anyone that he is subject *only to his own* and yet *universal legislation*, and that he is only obligated to act in conformity with his own will which is, however, universally legislating according to its natural end. For if one thought of him just as subject to a law (whichever it may be), it had to carry with it some interest as stimulation or constraint, because it did not as a law arise from *his will*, which instead was necessitated by *something else*, in conformity with a law, to act in a certain way. Because of this entirely necessary conclusion, however, all the labor of finding a supreme ground of duty was irretrievably lost. For one never got duty, but the necessity of an action from a certain interest, be it one's own interest or that of another. But then the imperative always had to be conditional, and could not be fit to be a moral command at all. I shall therefore call this principle the principle of the autonomy of the will, in opposition to every other, which I accordingly count as heteronomy.⁶

The concept of every rational being that must consider itself as universally legislating through all the maxims of its will, so as to judge itself and its actions from this point of view, leads to a very fruitful concept attached to it, namely that of *a kingdom of ends*. By a *kingdom*, however, I understand the systematic union of several rational beings through common laws. Now, since laws determine ends according to their universal validity, it is possible—if one abstracts from the personal differences among rational beings, and likewise from all content of their private ends—to conceive a whole of all ends (of rational beings as ends in themselves, as well as the ends of its own that each of them may set for itself) in systematic connection, i.e. a kingdom of ends, which is possible according to the above principles.

For all rational beings stand under the law that each of them is to treat itself and all others *never merely as a means*, but always *at the same time as an end in itself*. But by this there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws, i.e. a kingdom, which—because what these laws have as their purpose is precisely the reference of these beings to one another, as ends and means—can be called a kingdom of ends (of course only an ideal).

The above three ways of representing the principle of morality are fundamentally only so many formulae of the selfsame law, one of which of itself unites the other two within it. . . .

We can now end where we set out from at the beginning, namely with the concept of an unconditionally good will. A will is *absolutely good* that cannot be evil, hence whose maxim, if made a universal law, can never conflict with itself. This principle

⁶ By "heteronomy," Kant refers to a force or impulse external to one's rational will.

is therefore also its supreme law: act always on that maxim the universality of which as a law you can will at the same time; this is the only condition under which a will can never be in conflict with itself, and such an imperative is categorical. Since the validity of the will, as a universal law for possible actions, has an analogy with the universal connection of the existence of things according to universal laws, which is what is formal in nature as such, the categorical imperative can also be expressed as follows: *act according to maxims that can at the same time have as their object themselves as universal laws of nature*. Such, then, is the formula of an absolutely good will.

A rational nature is distinguished from the others by this, that it sets itself an end . . .

TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How does a categorical imperative differ from a hypothetical imperative? Identify one of Kant's examples of a hypothetical imperative and supply one of your own.
2. A maxim is a description of the morally relevant features of an action, along with one's morally relevant reasons for acting in that way. In Kant's example of the false promise, the would-be promisor's maxim is "when I believe myself to be in need of money I shall borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen." Can you identify the maxims in his other examples?
3. What is the humanity formulation of the categorical imperative and why does Kant regard this principle as a categorical imperative? In your own words, can you briefly explain why this principle might deem as wrong offering a false promise? Refusing to help others?

NOTES AND QUESTIONS

1. *Contradiction in the conception*. A maxim may fail the categorical imperative test if its universalization would yield a *contradiction in the conception* (of its universalization). That means that it would not be possible for the maxim to operate as a universal law and succeed in accomplishing its purpose. We are to ask whether everyone could act in similar circumstances as the maxim directs and for this fact to be known or understood (or, "public"). In Kant's most famous example, the maxim "When in need of money but without the ability to repay, to get funds, one requests a loan and promises to repay without the intention of repaying" fails this test. If everyone in those circumstances offered false promises when they were in financial need, the ability of a promise to persuade someone to give you a loan would no longer succeed because the recipient of the promise would have no reason to believe that the promisor would repay. This failure shows that the success of one's action depends upon making an exception for oneself and concealing morally relevant features of one's circumstances (one's inability to repay) and one's intention to renege. That shows that one is not acting on universal reasons that could be shared and implemented by all rational agents.

Exercise: Kant's other case involving a failure through a contradiction in the conception is his example of suicide. Can you describe in your own words what the maxim is and how its universalization purportedly fails? Given this argument, would Kant disapprove of a person who chose to end his life because his mental capacities were deteriorating and he foresaw that he would soon fail to reason and behave well?

2. *Contradiction in the will*. A maxim may also fail the universalization test by revealing a contradiction in the will. In such cases, the maxim could possibly be universalized but its universalization would be inconsistent with another end that we must have. Take Kant's example of the person who, while flourishing, refuses to show regard for others and to help others in need to suit his own convenience. There is no contradiction in the conception here. It would be possible for all those flourishing to ignore the needs of others to suit their own convenience. (The consequences for others would be awful, but not inconceivable.) He argues that there is a contradiction in the will, however, because one's maxim contradicts another maxim that one must have as a matter of respect for one's self. Out of respect for the value of one's own life, one must will that one would seek help from others if one were in need of help. But that maxim's satisfaction would conflict with the universalization of the wealthy person's maxim to decline to aid those in need. Hence, the maxim to decline aid to others contradicts another maxim that person must affirm. So, there is a contradiction in the will.

Exercise: Consider Kant's example of a person who for pleasure and convenience decides to let her talents lie fallow. Her maxim purportedly fails the contradiction in the will test. Can you describe how Kant's argument is meant to work?

3. *Differences and specialization*. Some actions are permissible to perform, although we could not survive if everyone behaved the same way. For instance, it seems permissible that some of us grow wheat but do not dig wells, and that others of us do not engage in agriculture at all, although it is essential that some people do so. Is Kant's idea that one's maxim must be universalizable consistent with these examples? Can you say how?

4. *Market exchange and never treating humanity as a means only*. Suppose I enter a shop and I give the shopkeeper money in exchange for milk. I do not ask the shopkeeper how she is, or what her interests are. I interact with her only to get the milk I need and then I leave. Do I treat her unacceptably as a mere means to my nutrition and not as an end in herself?

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