

### Applying the first/second formulation of the categorical imperative

Here's a rather schematic approach to the first/second formulation of the categorical imperative: Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law of nature. The test for the rightness or wrongness of an action is whether the maxim of such an action is compatible with the nature of a universal law. We can apply Kant's insight by proceeding through four steps:

1. State your maxim (the general principle on which you are acting).
2. Universalize your maxim. That is, imagine that your maxim becomes a universal law of nature and everyone acts according to your maxim.
3. Ask yourself whether you can consistently universalize your maxim and still act on it yourself. Do you, in attempting to imagine a world in which your maxim is a universal law of nature, encounter a contradiction or inconsistency in trying to act on it yourself?
4. If you do not encounter a contradiction your maxim is consistent with the moral law. If you do encounter a contradiction, that is, if your maxim is self-defeating, it contradicts the moral law and it would be immoral for you to act on it.

As an example, consider the case of false promise making. I am thinking about making a promise I do not intend to keep. In order to determine the moral worth of this maxim, I apply the self-defeating test. Follow the above four steps:

1. State your maxim: "It is appropriate to make false promises."
2. Universalize your maxim: Imagine a world in which universally everyone makes false promises.
3. Would you be able to make a false promise in such a world?
4. No, because in such a world the institution of promise making would be destroyed. Such a maxim is self-defeating and it would be contradictory to imagine a world in which both you and everyone else makes false promises.

### Kant's Four Examples

	To Ourselves	To Others
<b>Perfect Duties (Necessary Duties)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admit of no exception in the interests of inclination</li> <li>• A duty that requires a specific course of action that must be taken or avoided</li> <li>• Trying to universalize an immoral maxim of this variety leads to an inconceivable system of nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not committing suicide</li> <li>• A logical contradiction in the idea of nature: the inconsistency lies in both supposing that a principle of self-love could give rise to both a feeling for the furtherance of life and one for the taking of life.</li> <li>• Human nature includes a principle of self-love</li> <li>• Problem with nature's purposes: do we have a natural instinct for self-preservation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping promises</li> <li>• A logical contradiction between the maxim and its formulation. There is an inconsistency in proposing an action that becomes impossible to perform at the same time that it is performed.</li> </ul>

<p>Imperfect Duties (Meritorious Duties)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a certain latitude or playroom for inclination</li> <li>• Trying to universalize an immoral maxim of this variety leads to an inconsistency: such a system of nature could exist {it is perfectly possible to imagine a world in which everyone acts according to these principles} but you could not will it become a universal law of nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivating our talents</li> <li>• The will could contradict itself: a rational being must necessarily will the development of his or her powers, not only because they serve, but also because they have been given for, all sorts of possible purposes.</li> <li>• The policy of not doing so contradicts an aspect of our rational nature: a rational being's tendency to employ its reason and develop its faculties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefitting others</li> <li>• The will would contradict itself</li> <li>• It is impossible to will that everyone act on this policy because at some time I may need and want the help of others.</li> <li>• If I choose not to help others, I am making an exception in my own favor to a rule I want other people to follow.</li> </ul>
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### The third through fifth formulations of the categorical imperative

**The third formulation:** So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a mean.

**The fourth formulation:** So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through it maxim. The idea behind the fourth formulation: when a rational agent makes or gives itself the laws which it obeys, it is acting autonomously. The will is not only subject to the law but it also makes the law. I am the source and author of the law to which I am subjected. In morally good action the will can be said to be self-legislative. It legislates for itself. We should act autonomously and not heteronomously.

**The fifth formulation:** So act as if you were always through your maxims a law-making member in a universal kingdom of ends. With the fifth formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant is moving from a single autonomous will (the fourth formulation with its focus on autonomy) to an entire community of such wills in which every member of this moral community, by virtue of being a rational agent, is his or herself the lawmaker willing his or her own laws. This is something of an ideal, Kant recognizes, in which we have a world of rational agents, each obeying the moral law for its own sake, respecting each other's freedom, treating each others as ends, and striving to realize a harmonious system of ends. The kingdom of ends is a harmony of rational agents each acting according to universal laws.

Some important issues/questions:

- Whether there are any objective ends. Are there any ends which we all ought to seek and which would not depend on any desire to achieve it or need for it?
- What is the connection between an objective end and the good will?

- Why does Kant distinguish between things and persons and what are some of the significant implications of this distinction?
- What is the significance behind Kant's distinction between price and dignity?