

For Kant, the good will is the *only* aspect of your motivation to act that counts as moral. The good will has three distinguishing features:

1. The good will is the indispensable condition for the value of other kinds of goods.
2. The value of a good will is incomparably higher than the value of any other kind of thing whether in isolation or aggregate.
3. The good will is the only kind of thing that is unconditionally good.

This is in direct conflict with both Bentham's, and Mill's, Utilitarian theories. For Kant, the good will is more valuable than any pleasure increase caused by an action. The will acts correctly when it acts without contradiction as explained by Kant's use of what is called the *Categorical Imperative*.

The Universal Law formula:

...act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law

There are two ways in which something can fail the first maxim.

1. **'Contradiction in conception'**: the situation in which everyone acted on that maxim is somehow self-contradictory. Suppose you want a gift to take to a party, but you can't afford it, so you steal it from the shop. Your maxim is something like: 'To steal something I want if I can't afford it'. This can only be the right thing to do if everyone could do it. However, if we could all just help ourselves to whatever we wanted, the idea of 'owning' things would disappear. Now, by definition, you can't steal something unless it belongs to someone else. Stealing presupposes that people own things. But people can only own things if they don't all go around helping themselves whenever they want. So it is logically impossible for everyone to steal things. In other words, it is inconceivable – a contradiction in conception – for everyone to steal things. We can't conceive of the maxim 'To steal something I want if I can't afford it' being a universal law, so we can't rationally will it to be a universal law. And so stealing (at least stealing just because one wants something) is wrong.
2. **'Contradiction in will'**: this is more difficult to understand. The maxim is not self-contradictory when universalised, but there is another way in which we cannot rationally will it. Consider a refusal to help other people, ever. It is logically possible to universalise the maxim 'not to help others in need'. The world would not be a pleasant place, but this is beside the point. Kant does not claim that an action is wrong because we wouldn't like the consequences if everyone did it (many philosophers and students have misinterpreted Kant on this point). His test is whether we can rationally will that our maxim be a universal law. Willing and wanting (or liking) are different. Someone can want something that they don't will – they don't choose to act on their desire, e.g. such

as cheating on their husband or wife with someone they find very attractive. And someone can will something they don't want, such as going to the dentist for surgery. Kant is concerned with willing not wanting. He argues that we cannot will that no one ever help anyone else. How so? Here is the formal argument:

- P1. A will, by definition, wills its ends (goals).
- P2. As we said above, to truly will the ends, one must will the necessary means.
- C1. Therefore, we cannot rationally will a situation in which it would be impossible for us to achieve our ends. To do so is to cease to will the necessary means to one's ends, which is effectively to cease to will any ends at all. This contradicts the very act of willing.
- P3. It is possible that the only available means to our ends, in some situations, involves the help of others.
- C2. We cannot therefore will that this possibility is denied to us.
- C3. Therefore, we cannot will a situation in which no one ever helps anyone else.

The Humanity Formula:

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.

Kant thinks that CI-1 and CI-2 are two sides of the same coin, though precisely how they are related is a matter of scholarly debate. Put very simply CI-2 says you should not use people, because if you do, you are failing to treat them as a rational agent and this is morally wrong.

Kant says that because people are ends in themselves, we must always treat them as such, and never 'simply' as a means. Note that he does not say we cannot use people as a means, but that we can't use them only as a means. We rely on other people in many ways as a means of achieving our own ends; e.g. people serving me in a shop are a means of getting what I want to buy. What is important, says Kant, is that I also respect them as an end.

To treat someone simply as a means, and not also as an end, is to treat the person in a way that undermines their power of making a rational choice themselves. It means, first, that we should appeal to other people's reason in discussing with them what to do, rather than manipulating them in ways they are unaware of. Coercing someone, lying to them or stealing from them all involve not allowing them to make an informed choice. If they are involved in our action in any way, they need to be able to agree (or refuse) to adopt our end as their own.

Second, treating someone as an end also means leaving them free to pursue the ends that they adopt. The value of what people choose to do lies in their ability to choose it, not just in what they have chosen. So we should refrain from harming or hindering them. This is to respect their rationality. Third, someone's being an end in themselves means that they are an end for others. We should adopt their ends as our own. What this means is that we should help them pursue

their ends, just as we pursue our own ends. In other words, the second formulation requires that we help other people. This should be one of our ends in life.

Kingdom of Ends Formula:

...every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends.

The so-called 'kingdom of ends' is supposed to be the way in which we see our unity together as rational, thinking agents. Since we each have a purpose for which we will certain actions into existence, we all are aiming at achieving something (an end). Part of being a rational agent is respecting this process in other rational agents.

The final formulation of the Categorical Imperative is a combination of CI-1 and CI-2. It asks us to imagine a kingdom which consists of only those people who act on CI-1. They never act on a maxim which cannot become a universal law. In such a kingdom people would treat people as ends, because CI-2 passes CI-1. We are required, according to this formulation, to conform our behavior to principles that express this autonomy of the rational will — its status as a source of the very universal laws that obligate it.