

Foundations of Western Culture II: Renaissance to Modernity

Lecture #15 - IX. KANT, *THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION OF MORALS*:

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Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals (1785)

by Immanuel Kant

(Adapted from the translation of T. K. Abbott by A.C. Kibel)

from Section One

Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgement, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honor, even health, and the general well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called happiness, inspire pride, and often presumption, if there is not a good will to correct the influence of these on the mind, and with this also to rectify the whole principle of acting and adapt it to its end. The sight of a being who is not adorned with a single feature of a pure and good will, enjoying unbroken prosperity, can never give pleasure to an impartial rational spectator. Thus a good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of being worthy of happiness.

There are even some qualities which are of service to this good will itself and may facilitate its action, yet which have no intrinsic unconditional value, but always presuppose a good will, and this qualifies the esteem that we justly have for them and does not permit us to regard them as absolutely good. Moderation in the affections and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation are not only good in many respects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person; but they are far from deserving to be called good without qualification, although they have been so unconditionally praised by the ancients. For without the principles of a good will, they may become extremely bad, and the coolness of a villain not only makes him far more dangerous, but also directly makes him more abominable in our eyes than he would have been without it.

A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, nay even of the sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfavor of fortune, or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature, this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitfulness can neither add nor take away anything from this value. It would be, as it were, only the setting to enable us to handle it the more conveniently in common commerce, or to attract to it the attention of those who are not yet connoisseurs, but not to recommend it to true connoisseurs, or to

determine its value.

There is, however, something so strange in this idea of the absolute value of the mere will, in which no account is taken of its utility, that notwithstanding the thorough assent of even common reason to the idea, yet a suspicion must arise that it may perhaps really be the product of mere high-flown fancy, and that we may have misunderstood the purpose of nature in assigning reason as the governor of our will. Therefore we will examine this idea from this point of view.

In the physical constitution of an organized being, that is, a being adapted suitably to the purposes of life, we assume it as a fundamental principle that no organ for any purpose will be found but what is also the fittest and best adapted for that purpose. Now in a being which has reason and a will, if the proper object of nature were its conservation, its welfare, in a word, its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose. For all the actions which the creature has to perform with a view to this purpose, and the whole rule of its conduct, would be far more surely prescribed to it by instinct, and that end would have been attained thereby much more certainly than it ever can be by reason. Should reason have been communicated to this favored creature over and above, it must only have served it to contemplate the happy constitution of its nature, to admire it, to congratulate itself thereon, and to feel thankful for it to the beneficent cause, but not that it should subject its desires to that weak and delusive guidance and meddle bunglingly with the purpose of nature. In a word, nature would have taken care that reason should not break forth into practical exercise, nor have the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself the plan of happiness and of the means of attaining it. Nature would not only have taken on herself the choice of the ends, but also of the means, and with wise foresight would have entrusted both to instinct.

And, in fact, we find that the more a cultivated reason applies itself with deliberate purpose to the enjoyment of life and happiness, so much the more does the man fail of true satisfaction. And from this circumstance there arises in many, if they are candid enough to confess it, a certain degree of misology, that is, hatred of reason, especially in the case of those who are most experienced in the use of it, because after calculating all the advantages they derive, I do not say from the invention of all the arts of common luxury, but even from the sciences (which seem to them to be after all only a luxury of the understanding), they find that they have, in fact, only brought more trouble on their shoulders. rather than gained in happiness; and they end by envying, rather than despising, the more common stamp of men who keep closer to the guidance of mere instinct and do not allow their reason much influence on their conduct. And this we must admit, that the judgement of those who would very much lower the lofty eulogies of the advantages which reason gives us in regard to the happiness and satisfaction of life, or who would even reduce them below zero, is by no means morose or ungrateful to the goodness with which the world is governed, but that there lies at the root of these judgements the idea that our existence has a different and far more worthy end, for which, and not for happiness, reason is properly intended, and which must, therefore, be regarded as the supreme condition to which the private ends of man must, for the most part, be postponed.

For as reason is not competent to guide the will with certainty in regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our wants (which it to some extent even multiplies), this being an end to which an implanted instinct would have led with much greater certainty; and since, nevertheless, reason is imparted to us as a practical faculty, i.e., as one which is to have influence on the will, therefore, admitting that nature generally in the distribution of her capacities has adapted the means to the end, its true destination must be to produce a will, not merely good as a means to something else, but good in itself, for which reason was absolutely necessary. This will then, though not indeed the sole and complete good, must be the supreme good and the condition of every other, even of the desire of happiness. Under these circumstances, there is nothing inconsistent with the wisdom of nature in the fact that the cultivation of the reason, which is requisite for the first and unconditional purpose, does in many ways interfere, at

least in this life, with the attainment of the second, which is always conditional, namely, happiness. Nay, it may even reduce it to nothing, without nature thereby failing of her purpose. For reason recognizes the establishment of a good will as its highest practical destination, and in attaining this purpose is capable only of a satisfaction of its own proper kind, namely that from the attainment of an end, which end again is determined by reason only, notwithstanding that this may involve many a disappointment to the ends of inclination.

We have then to develop the notion of a will which deserves to be highly esteemed for itself and is good without a view to anything further, a notion which exists already in the sound natural understanding, requiring rather to be cleared up than to be taught, and which in estimating the value of our actions always takes the first place and constitutes the condition of all the rest. In order to do this, we will take the notion of duty, which includes that of a good will, although implying certain subjective restrictions and hindrances. These, however, far from concealing it, or rendering it unrecognizable, rather bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth so much the brighter. . . .

I omit here all actions which are already recognized as inconsistent with duty, although they may be useful for this or that purpose, for with these the question whether they are done from duty cannot arise at all, since they even conflict with it. I also set aside those actions which really conform to duty, but to which men have no direct inclination, performing them because they are impelled thereto by some other inclination. For in this case we can readily distinguish whether the action which agrees with duty is done from duty, or from a selfish view. It is much harder to make this distinction when the action accords with duty and the subject has besides a direct inclination to it. For example, it is always a matter of duty that a tradesman should not overcharge an inexperienced purchaser; and wherever there is much commerce the prudent tradesman does not overcharge, but keeps a fixed price for everyone, so that a child buys of him as well as any other. Men are thus honestly served; but this is not enough to make us believe that the tradesman has so acted from duty and from principles of honesty: his own advantage required it; it is out of the question in this case to suppose that he might besides have a direct inclination in favor of the buyers, so that, as it were, from love he should give no advantage to one over another. Accordingly the action was done neither from duty nor from direct inclination, but merely with a selfish view.

Likewise, where self-interest and inclination coincide: it is a duty to maintain one's life; and, in addition, everyone has also a direct inclination to do so. But on this account the of anxious care which most men take for it has no intrinsic worth, and their maxim has no moral import. They preserve their life *as duty requires*, no doubt, but not *because duty requires*. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away the relish for life; if the unfortunate one, strong in mind, indignant at his fate rather than desponding or dejected, wishes for death, and yet preserves his life without loving it--not from inclination or fear, but from duty-- then his maxim has a moral worth. . . .

To be beneficent when we can is a duty; and besides this, there are many minds so sympathetically constituted that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest, they find a pleasure in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however proper, however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth, but is on a level with other inclinations, e.g., the inclination to honor, which, if it is happily directed to that which is in fact of public utility and accordant with duty and consequently honorable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem. For the maxim lacks the moral import of actions done from duty, not from inclination. Put the case that the mind of that philanthropist were clouded by sorrow of his own, extinguishing all sympathy with the lot of others, and that, while he still has the power to benefit others in distress, he is not touched by their trouble because he is absorbed with his own; and now suppose that he tears himself out of this dead insensibility, and performs the action without any inclination to it, but simply from duty, only then has his action its genuine moral worth. Further still; if nature has put little sympathy in the heart of this or that man; if he,

supposed to be an upright man, is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, perhaps because in respect of his own he is provided with special gifts of patience and fortitude and supposes, or even requires, that others should have the same. And such a man would certainly not be the meanest product of nature. But if nature had not specially framed him for a philanthropist, would he not still find in himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than that derived from good-natured temperament? Unquestionably. It is just in this that the moral worth of the character is brought out which is incomparably the highest of all, namely, that he is beneficent, not from inclination, but from duty. . . .

It is in this manner, undoubtedly, that we are to understand those passages of Scripture also in which we are commanded to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For love, as an affection, cannot be commanded, but beneficence for duty's sake may; even though we are not impelled to it by any inclination-- nay, are even repelled by a natural and unconquerable aversion. This is practical love and not pathological-- a love which is seated in the will, and not in the propensities of feeling-- in principles of action and not of tender sympathy; and it is this love alone which can be commanded.

[Thus the first proposition of morality is that to have moral worth an action must be done from duty.] The second proposition is: That an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined, and therefore does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire. It is clear from what precedes that the purposes that direct our actions, or their aims regarded as motives and incentives¹ of the will, cannot give to actions any unconditional or moral worth. In what, then, can their worth lie, if it is not to consist in the will and in reference to its expected effect? It cannot lie anywhere but in the *principle of the will* without regard to the ends which can be attained by the action. For the will stands between its *a priori* principle, which is formal, and its *a posteriori* motive², which is material, as between two roads, and as it must be determined by something, it that it must be determined by the formal principle of volition when an action is done from duty, in which case every material principle has been withdrawn from it.

¹The word *incentive* throughout translates *Triebfeder*, a drive-stimulant or impulse-trigger. *Motive* translates *Bewegungsgrund*, the basis of an action. In ordinary usage, both of the German words and the words used to translate them can bear the same meaning. A good way to capture the opposition that Kant means to draw is to call the first an *Impulse* and the second *The aim of action*.

²*a priori* judgments follow simply from the use of concepts and are not derived from or justified by appeals to experience; *a posteriori* judgments are derived and justified empirically. *All bachelors are unmarried* is an instance of an *a priori* judgement; in Kant's view $F=ma$ is also *a priori*, derived from the concepts of force, mass and acceleration, respectively, and it would be foolish to try disconfirming the formula by experiment. *All professors are intelligent* is an *a posteriori* judgement; it does not follow from the concept *A professor*. In his ethical philosophy, Kant extends the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* from judgements to the rules that determine courses of action.

The third proposition, which is a consequence of the two preceding, I would express thus: Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law. I may have inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action, but I cannot have respect for the object just for this reason, that it is an effect [a state or condition produced by action] and not an energy of will. Similarly I cannot have respect for inclination, whether my own or another's; I can at most, if my own, approve it; if another's, sometimes even love it; i.e., look on it as favorable to my own interest. It is only what is connected with my will as a principle, by no means as an effect-- what does not subserve my inclination, but overpowers it, or at least in case of choice excludes it from its calculation-- in other words, simply the law of itself, which can be an object of respect, and hence a command. Now an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and consequently the maxim³ that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it, nor in any principle of action which requires to borrow its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects could have been also brought about by other [sorts of] causes, so that for this there would have been no need of the will of a rational being; whereas it is in this alone that the supreme and unconditional good can be found. The pre-eminent good which we call moral can therefore consist in nothing else than the conception of law in itself, which certainly is only possible in a rational being, in so far as this conception, and not the expected effect, determines the will. This is a good which is already present in the person who acts accordingly, and we have not to wait for it to appear first in the result.⁴

³Kant has used the word *maxim* several times already. Here he adds a footnote, prompted by the word *subjective*. A maxim is the subjective principle of volition. The objective principle (i.e., that which would serve all rational beings also subjectively as a practical principle if reason had full power over the faculty of desire) is the practical law. In Kant's terminology, maxims are rules of conduct, some of which correspond to principles; principles are conceptions of laws; and laws are universal rules of conduct, valid for all rational beings.

⁴It might be objected that I take refuge in an obscure feeling behind the word *respect*, instead of giving a clearly resolving the question by a concept of the reason. But although respect is a feeling, it is not a feeling received through [external] influence but is self-wrought by a rational concept, and, therefore, is specifically distinct from all feelings of the former kind, which may be referred either to inclination or fear. What I recognize immediately as a law for me, I recognize with respect, which merely signifies the consciousness that my will is subordinate to a law, without the intervention of other influences on my mind. The direct determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness of this, is called respect, which is regarded as an effect of the law on the subject rather than as the cause of it. Respect is properly the conception of a worth which thwarts my self-love. Accordingly it is something which is considered neither as an object of inclination nor of fear, although it has something analogous to both. . . .

But what sort of law can that be, the conception of which must determine the will, even without paying any regard to the effect expected from it, in order that this will may be called good absolutely and without qualification? As I have deprived the will of every impulse which could arise to it from obedience to any law, there remains nothing but the universal conformity of its actions to law in general, which alone is to serve the will as a principle, i.e., *I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law*. Here, now, it is the simple conformity to law in general, without assuming any particular law applicable to certain actions, that serves the will as its principle and must so serve it, if duty is not to be a vain delusion and a chimerical notion. The common reason of men in its practical judgements perfectly coincides with this and always has in view the principle here suggested.

Let the question be, for example: May I when in distress make a promise with the intention not to keep it? I readily distinguish here between the two significations which the question may have: Whether it is prudent, or whether it is right, to make a false promise? The former may undoubtedly of be the case. I see clearly indeed that it is not enough to extricate myself from a present difficulty by means of this subterfuge, but it must be well considered whether there may not hereafter spring from this lie much greater inconvenience than that from which I now free myself, and as, with all my supposed cunning, the consequences cannot be so easily foreseen but that credit once lost may be much more injurious to me than any mischief which I seek to avoid at present, it should be considered whether it would not be more *prudent* to act herein according to a universal maxim and to make it a habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it. But it is soon clear to me that such a maxim will still only be based on the fear of consequences.

Now to be truthful from duty wholly different thing from being truthful from fear of injurious consequences. In the first case, the very notion of the action already implies a law for me; in the second case, I must first look about elsewhere to see what results may be combined with it which would affect myself. For to deviate from the principle of duty is beyond all doubt wicked; but to be unfaithful to my maxim of prudence may often be very advantageous to me, although to abide by it is certainly safer. The shortest way, however, and an unerring one, to discover the answer to this question whether a lying promise is consistent with duty, is to ask myself, *Should I be content that my maxim (to extricate myself from difficulty by a false promise) should hold good as a universal law, for myself as well as for others? and should I be able to say to myself, Every one may make a deceitful promise when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot otherwise extricate himself?* Then I presently become aware that while I can will the lie, I can by no means will that lying should be a universal law. For with such a law there would be no promises at all, since it would be in vain to allege my intention in regard to my future actions to those who would not believe this allegation, or if they over hastily did so would pay me back in my own coin. Hence my maxim, as soon as it should be made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself.

I do not, therefore, need any far-reaching penetration to discern what I have to do in order that my will may be morally good. Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for all its contingencies, I only ask myself: *Canst thou also will that thy maxim should be a universal law?* If not, then it must be rejected, and that not because of a disadvantage accruing from it to myself or even to others, but because it cannot enter as a principle into a possible universal legislation, and reason extorts from me immediate respect for such legislation. I do not indeed as yet discern on what this respect is based (this the philosopher may inquire), but at least I understand this, that it is an estimation of the worth which far outweighs all worth of what is recommended by inclination, and that the necessity of acting from pure respect for the practical law is what constitutes duty, to which every other motive must give place, because it is the condition of a will being *good in itself*, and the worth of such a will is above everything.

Thus, then, without quitting the moral knowledge of common human reason, we have arrived at its principle. And although, no doubt, common men do not conceive it in such an abstract and universal form, yet they always have it really before their eyes and use it as the standard of their decision. Here it would be easy to show how, with this compass in hand, men are well able to distinguish, in every case that occurs, what is good, what bad, conformably to duty or inconsistent with it, if, without in the least teaching them anything new, we only, like Socrates, direct their attention to the principle they themselves employ; and that, therefore, we do not need science and philosophy to know what we should do to be honest and good, yea, even wise and virtuous. Indeed we might well have conjectured beforehand that the knowledge of what every man is bound to do, and therefore also to know, would be within the reach of every man, even the commonest. Here we cannot forbear admiration when we see how great an advantage the practical judgement has over the theoretical in the common understanding of men. . . . Innocence is indeed a glorious thing; sad to say, it cannot well maintain itself and is easily led astray. On this account even wisdom—which otherwise consists more in conduct than in knowledge—still needs science, not to learn from it, but to make its precepts admissible and permanent. . . . In this respect, common human reason is compelled to go out of its sphere and to take a step into practical philosophy, not to satisfy any speculative want [but] to attain information and clear instruction respecting the source of its principle, and the correct determination of it in opposition to maxims based on needs and [ever-powerful] inclinations. It seeks this information to escape the perplexity of opposite claims and not run the risk of losing all genuine moral principles through the equivocation into which common human reasons easily falls. Thus, when practical reason cultivates itself . . . it will find rest nowhere but in a thorough critical examination of our reason.

from Section Two

One could not give poorer counsel to morality than to attempt to derive it from examples. For each example of morality exhibited to me must itself have been previously judged according to principles of morality to see whether it is worthy to serve as an original example. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before we can recognize him as such. . . . For the pure conception of duty and the moral law generally, with no admixture of empirical inducements, has an influence on the human heart so much more powerful than all other incentives which may be derived from the empirical field that reason, in the consciousness of its dignity, despises them and gradually becomes master over them. . . .

Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to *the conception of laws*, that is according to principles, i.e., have a will. This capacity is will. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, will is nothing else than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions which such a being recognizes as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary. That is, the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary, i.e., as good. But if reason of itself does not sufficiently determine the will, and if the will is subjugated to subjective conditions (motives, incentives) which do not always agree with objective conditions—in other words, if the will is not of itself in complete accord with reason, which is the case with human beings, then the actions which are recognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will according to objective laws is *constraint*, to which this will is not necessarily obedient.

The conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is obligatory for a will, is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an *imperative*. All imperatives are expressed by the word *Aought*, and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will, which from its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it. Such a will is under an

obligation, which is constraint. Imperatives say that something would be good to do or to forbear, but they say it to a will which does not always do a thing simply because it is presented as a good thing to do. That is practically good, however, which determines the will by means of the conceptions of reason, and consequently not from subjective causes, but objectively, that is on principles which are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the pleasant, which influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, valid only for the sense of this person or that person, and not as a principle of reason, which holds for everyone.

The dependence of the faculty of desire on sensations is called *inclination*, [which determines the will according to contingencies having to do with need]. The dependence of the contingently determined will on principles of reason, however, is called *interest*. Interest is present only in a dependent will, which is not of itself always in accord with reason. A perfectly good will would be just as subject to objective laws (the laws of the good) as a contingently dependent will, but could not be conceived as *obliged* to act lawfully, because it can be determined only of itself [and never by contingent circumstance] in accord with the *conception* of good. Therefore no imperatives hold for the Divine will, or in general for a holy will; Aought@ is here out of place, because the volition is already of itself necessarily in unison with the law. (Likewise, in divine will we cannot conceive an interest.) It follows that imperatives are only formulas expressing the relation of objective laws of all volition to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, e.g., the human will.

Now, all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). The *categorical imperative* would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, i.e., as objectively necessary. Since every practical law represents a possible action as good and therefore necessary for a subject practically determinable by reason, all imperatives are formulas determining an action which is necessary according to the principle of a will good in at least some respects. If now the action is good only as a means to something else, then the imperative is hypothetical; but if it is conceived as good in itself and consequently as being necessary in a will which of itself conforms to reason, then it is categorical.

Thus the imperative declares what action possible by me would be good and presents the practical rule in relation to the kind of will that does not forthwith perform an action simply because it is good, whether because the subject does not always know that it is good, or because, even if it know this, yet its maxims might be opposed to the objective principles of practical reason. Accordingly, the hypothetical imperative only says that the action is good for some purpose, possible or actual. In the first case it is a problematical principle [i.e., of the sort, *Aif* you want to, etc., then you should CA], in the second an assertorial practical principle [i.e., of the sort, *Asince in fact* you do want to, etc., you must CA here the principle is dependent upon an assertion of fact]. The categorical imperative declares an action to be objectively necessary in itself without reference to any purpose, i.e., without any other end; it is valid as an apodeictic⁵ (practical) principle. . . .

⁵Without reference to any designated time or place; universal in reference.

There is one end which we may suppose that all rational beings have by necessity of nature. This purpose is happiness; and one might therefore think that the hypothetical imperative which represents the practical necessity of action as means to the promotion of happiness is assertorial. But it is a misfortune that the concept of happiness is so indefinite that although each person wishes to attain it, he can never definitely and self-consistently state what it is that he really wishes and wills. The reason for this is that all the elements which belong to the notion of happiness are altogether empirical, i.e., they must be borrowed from experience, while the idea of happiness requires an *absolute* whole, a maximum of welfare in all present and future circumstances. Now it is impossible that a finite being, even the most clear-sighted and powerful should frame to himself a definite conception of what he really wills in this; because to do so he would need to be omniscient. . . . Happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting solely on empirical grounds, and it is vain to expect that these should define an action by which one could attain the totality of a series of consequences which is really endless. It is impossible for any finite being to form here a definite concept of what he really wills, and so the imperatives of prudence do not, strictly speaking, command at all, because they cannot present actions *objectively* as practically necessary; they are to be regarded as counsels rather than precepts of reason. . . .

When I conceive a hypothetical imperative, in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain until I am given the condition under which it becomes an imperative. But when I conceive a categorical imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that maxims shall conform to this law, while the law [itself] contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim of the action should conform to a universal law, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary. There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: *Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*

Now if all imperatives of duty can be derived from this one imperative as from their principle, we can show what we understand by the concept *duty* and what it means, even before we have determined what in particular counts as duty. The universality of law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form), that is, the existence of things so far as it is determined by general laws; by analogy, then, the imperative of duty may be expressed thus: *Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.*

We will now enumerate a few duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and ourselves and to others, and into perfect and imperfect duties.

1. A man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels wearied of life, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is: *From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction.* But it is questionable whether this principle founded on self-love can become a universal law of nature, for we see immediately that a system of nature whose law would be to destroy life by the very feeling whose special nature is to impel its improvement would contradict itself. Such a nature could not exist as a system; hence that maxim cannot possibly exist as a universal law of nature and, consequently, would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty.

2. Another finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises firmly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: *Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?* Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: *When I think myself in want of*

money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so. Now this principle of self-love or of one's own advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, Is it right? I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: How would it be if my maxim were a universal law? Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone in difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as what it is supposed to accomplish, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretenses.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which might if cultivated make him a useful man in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than to take pains in enlarging and improving his happy natural capacities. He asks, however, whether his maxim of neglect of his natural gifts, besides agreeing with his inclination to indulgence, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees then that a system of nature could indeed subsist with such a universal law although men (like the South Sea islanders) should let their talents rest and resolve to devote their lives merely to idleness, amusement, and propagation of their species-- in a word, to enjoyment; but he cannot possibly will that this should be a universal law of nature, or be implanted in us as such by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that his faculties be developed, since they are given him for all sorts of possible purposes.

4. A fourth, who is in prosperity, while he sees that others have to contend with great wretchedness and that he could help them, thinks: What concern is it of mine? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven pleases, or as he can make himself; I will take nothing from him nor even envy him, only I do not wish to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in distress! Now no doubt if such a mode of thinking were a universal law, the human race might very well subsist and doubtless even better than in a state in which everyone talks of sympathy and good-will, or even takes care occasionally to put it into practice, but, on the other side, also cheats when he can, betrays the rights of men, or otherwise violates them. But although it is possible that a universal law of nature might exist in accordance with that maxim, it is impossible to will that such a principle should have the universal validity of a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would contradict itself, inasmuch as many cases might occur in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others, and in which, by such a law of nature, sprung from his own will, he would deprive himself of all hope of the aid he desires.

These are a few of the many actual duties, or at least what we regard as such, which obviously fall into two classes on the one principle that we have laid down. We must be able to will that a maxim of our action should be a universal law. This is the canon of the moral appreciation of the action generally. Some actions are of such a character that their maxim cannot without contradiction be even conceived as a universal law of nature, far from it being possible that we should will that it should be so. In others this intrinsic impossibility is not found, but still it is impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, since such a will would contradict itself. It is easily seen that the former violate strict or rigorous (inflexible) duty; the latter only laxer (meritorious) duty. Thus it has been completely shown how all duties depend as regards the nature of the obligation (not the object of the action) on the same principle. . . .

The will is conceived as a faculty of determining oneself to action in accordance with the conception of certain laws. Such a faculty can be found only in rational beings. Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is an end, and, if this is assigned by reason alone, it must hold for all rational beings. On the other hand, that which merely contains the ground of possibility of the action whose effect is the end is the means. The subjective ground of the desire is the incentive, the objective ground of the volition is the motive; hence the distinction between subjective ends which rest

on incentives, and objective ends which depend on motives valid for every rational being. Practical principles are formal when they disregard all subjective ends; they are material when they have particular incentives to action. The ends which a rational being arbitrarily proposes to himself as effects of his actions (material ends) are all only relative, for it is only their relation to the particular desires of the subject that gives them their worth, and this worth cannot furnish principles universal and necessary for all rational beings and for every volition, that is to say, they cannot give rise to practical laws. Hence all these relative ends can give rise only to hypothetical imperatives.

Supposing, however, that there were something whose existence has in itself an absolute worth, something which, being an end in itself, could be a source of definite laws; then in this and this alone would lie the source of a possible categorical imperative, i.e., a practical law. Now I say: man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. In all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, he must be always regarded at the same time as an end. All objects of inclinations have only a conditional worth, for if the inclinations and the wants founded on them did not exist, then their object would be without value. But the inclinations, themselves being sources of want, are so far from having an absolute worth for which they should be desired that on the contrary it must be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them. Thus the worth of any object which is to be acquired by our action is always conditional. Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature's, have nevertheless, if they are irrational beings, only a relative value as means, and are therefore called things; rational beings, on the contrary, are called persons, because their very nature points them out as ends in themselves, that is as something which must not be used merely as means, and so far therefore restricts freedom of action (and is an object of respect). These beings, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence has a worth for us as an effect of our action, but objective ends, that is, things whose existence is an end in itself, an end of the sort for which no other end can be substituted, in relation to which they should count merely as means. For otherwise nothing whatever would possess absolute worth; and if all worth is conditional and thus contingent, no supreme practical principle for reason could be found anywhere.

If then there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of will, and can therefore serve as a universal practical law. The foundation of this principle is: rational nature exists as an end in itself. Man necessarily conceives his own existence as being so; so far then this is a subjective principle of human actions. But every other rational being regards its existence similarly, just on the same rational principle that holds for me: so that it is at the same time an objective principle, from which as a supreme practical law all laws of the will must be capable of being deduced. Accordingly the practical imperative will be as follows: *So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end, never as means only.* . . .

The conception of the will of every rational being as one which must consider itself as giving in all the maxims of its will universal laws, so as to judge itself and its actions from this point of view--this conception leads to another which depends on it and is very fruitful, namely that of a kingdom of ends.

By a kingdom I understand the union of different rational beings in a system by common laws. Now since it is by laws that ends are determined as regards their universal validity, hence, if we abstract from the personal differences of rational beings and likewise from all the content of their private ends, we shall be able to conceive all ends combined in a systematic whole (including both rational beings as ends in themselves, and also the special ends which each may propose to himself), that is to say, we can conceive a kingdom of ends, which on the preceding principles is possible. For all rational beings come under the law that each of them must treat itself and all others never merely as means, but in every case at the same time as ends in themselves. Hence results a systematic union of rational being by common

objective laws, i.e., a kingdom which may be called a kingdom of ends, since what these laws have in view is just the relation of these beings to one another as ends and means. It is certainly only an ideal.

A rational being belongs as a member to the kingdom of ends when, although giving universal laws in it, he is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as sovereign when, while giving laws, he is not subject to the will of any other. A rational being must always regard himself as giving laws either as member or as sovereign in a kingdom of ends which is rendered possible by the freedom of will. He cannot, however, maintain the latter position merely by the maxims of his will, but only in case he is a completely independent being without wants and with unrestricted power adequate to his will. [And no human being in the natural world meets this criterion.]

Morality consists then in the reference of all action to the legislation which alone can render a kingdom of ends possible. This legislation must be capable of existing in every rational being and of emanating from his will, so that the principle of this will is never to act on any maxim which could not without contradiction be also a universal law and, accordingly, *always so to act that the will could at the same time regard itself as giving in its maxims universal laws*. If now the maxims of rational beings are not by their own nature coincident with this objective principle, then the necessity of acting on it is called practical constraint, i.e., duty. Duty does not apply to the sovereign in the kingdom of ends, but it does to every member of it and to all in the same degree. The practical necessity of acting on this principle, i.e., duty, does not rest at all on feelings, impulses, or inclinations, but solely on the relation of rational beings to one another, a relation in which the will of a rational being must always be regarded as legislative, since otherwise it could not be conceived as an end in itself. Reason then refers every maxim of the will, regarding it as legislating universally, to every other will and also to every action towards oneself; and this not on account of any other practical motive or any future advantage, but from the idea of the dignity of a rational being, obeying no law but that which he himself also gives.

In the kingdom of ends everything has either value or dignity. Whatever has a value can be replaced by something else which is equivalent; whatever, on the other hand, is above all value, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity. Whatever has reference to the general inclinations and wants of mankind has a market value; whatever, without presupposing a want, corresponds to a certain taste, that is to a satisfaction in the mere purposeless play of our faculties, has an affective (sentimental) value; but that which constitutes the condition under which alone anything can be an end in itself does not have merely relative worth, i.e., value, but an intrinsic worth, that is, dignity.

Now morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in himself, since by this alone it is possible that he should be a legislating member in the kingdom of ends. Thus morality, and humanity as capable of it, is that which alone has dignity. Skill and diligence in labor have a market value; wit, lively imagination, and humor, have affective (sentimental) value; in contrast to both, fidelity to promises and benevolence from principle (not from instinct) have an intrinsic worth. Neither nature nor art contains anything which in default of these it could put in their place, for their worth consists not in the effects which spring from them nor in the use and advantage which they secure but in the disposition of mind, that is, in maxims of the will, which are ready to manifest themselves in such actions, even though they should not have the desired effect. These actions need no recommendation from any subjective taste or sentiment, that they may be looked on with immediate favor and satisfaction: they need no immediate propensity or feeling for them; they exhibit the will that performs them as an object of an immediate respect, and nothing but reason is required to impose them on the will; the will is not to be flattered into them, which, in the case of duties, would be a contradiction. This esteem shows that the worth of such a disposition is dignity and places it infinitely above all value, with which it cannot for a moment be brought into comparison or competition without as it were violating its sanctity.

What then is it which justifies virtue or the morally good disposition, in making such lofty

claims? It is nothing less than the privilege it secures to the rational being of participating in the giving of universal laws, by which it qualifies him to be a member of a possible kingdom of ends, a privilege to which he was already destined by his own nature; as an end in himself he is destined to be legislative in the kingdom of ends, free from all laws of physical nature, and obeying those only which he himself gives; his maxims can belong to a system of universal law, to which at the same time he submits himself. For nothing has any worth [as opposed to value] except what the law assigns it. Therefore, the legislation that determines the worth of everything must possess dignity, that is, an unconditional and incomparable worth; and the word *Respect* alone supplies a becoming expression for the esteem which a rational being must have for it. Autonomy then is the basis of the dignity of human and of every rational nature. . . .

Autonomy of the will is the property that the will has of being a law to itself, independently of any property of the objects of volition. The principle of autonomy is this: Always choose in such a way that in the same volition the maxims of the choice are also comprehended as universal law. If the will seeks the law that is to determine it anywhere but in the fitness of its maxims for its own legislation of universal laws and thus goes outside of itself and seeks the law in the character of any of its objects, then heteronomy always results. The will in that case does not give itself the law, but the object does so because of its relation to the will. This relation, whether it rests on inclination or on representations of reason, admits only of hypothetical imperatives: I ought to do *this* because I will *that*. In contrast, the moral, and hence categorical, imperative says that I ought to act this way or that way, *in any case*. . . .

from Section Three

[The bulk of Section Three develops the idea that nature and freedom constitute two independent aspects of the world and are viewed from two independent *Astandpoints*. Theoretical reason deals with what we can know about the natural world by way of the laws governing empirical events but offers no insight into the *>mechanics=* of freedom. Correspondingly, while rational beings must understand the world through understanding its mechanical principles, they can never think freedom away, for positing its freedom is an *a priori* condition of any rational being knowing the world at all.]

The will is a kind of causality belonging to living beings in so far as they are rational, and freedom would be the property attributed to such causality of being effective independently of foreign causes determining it; just as physical necessity is the property attributed to the kind of causality that determines the activity of all irrational beings by the influence of foreign causes. . . . What else then can freedom of the will be but autonomy, that is, the property of the will to be a law to itself? The proposition: AThe will is in every action a law to itself,@ only expresses the principle: ATo act on no other maxim than that which can also have as an object itself as a universal law.@ Now this is precisely the formula of the categorical imperative and is the principle of morality, so that a free will and a will subject to moral laws are one and the same. . . .

It is not enough to attribute freedom to our own will, from whatever reason, if we have not sufficient grounds for predicating the same of all rational beings. For as morality serves as a law for us only as we are rational beings, it must also hold valid for all rational beings; and as it must derive exclusively from the property of freedom, freedom must be shown to be a property of all rational beings. It is not enough, then, to derive freedom from certain supposed experiences of human nature (which indeed is quite impossible, and it can only be shown a priori), but we must show that it belongs to the activity of all rational beings endowed with a will. Now I say every being that cannot act except under the idea of freedom is thereby really free from the standpoint of practical reason. That is to say, all laws which are inseparably connected with freedom have the same force for that being *as if* its will had been shown to be free in itself by a theoretically conclusive proof. Now I affirm that we must grant that every rational being who has a will has also the idea of freedom and acts entirely under this idea. For in such a being we conceive a reason that is practical, that is, has causality in reference to its objects. [But the objects of reason, practical or theoretical, are judgements.] Now we cannot possibly conceive a reason consciously receiving a bias from any other quarter with respect to its judgements, for then the subject would ascribe the determination of its judgement [whether of theoretical matters or of questions of practice] not to its own reason, but to an impulse. Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independent of foreign influences. Consequently as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must regard itself as free, that is to say, the will of a rational being cannot be a will of its own except under the idea of freedom. This idea must therefore from the standpoint of practical reason be ascribed to every rational being.