

[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small dots enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Four ellipses.... indicate the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth.

## Kantian Ethics, Extract One

Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

In the version by Jonathan Bennett presented at [www.earlymoderntexts.com](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com)

Nothing in the world — *or out of it!* — can possibly be conceived that could be called ‘good’ without qualification except a GOOD WILL. Mental talents such as intelligence, wit, and judgment, and temperaments such as courage, resoluteness, and perseverance are doubtless in many ways good and desirable; **but they can become extremely bad and harmful if the person’s character isn’t good** — ie if the *will* that is to make use of these gifts of nature isn’t good. Similarly with gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health, and the over-all well-being and contentment with one’s condition that we call ‘happiness’, create pride, often leading to arrogance, if there isn’t a good will to correct their influence on the mind.... Not to mention the fact that the sight of someone who shows no sign of a pure and good will and yet enjoys uninterrupted prosperity will never give pleasure to an impartial rational observer. So it seems that without a good will one can’t even be worthy of being happy.

Even qualities that are conducive to this good will and can make its work easier have no intrinsic unconditional worth. We rightly hold them in high esteem, but only because we assume them to be accompanied by a good will; **so we can’t take them to be absolutely or unconditionally good**. Moderation in emotions and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation not only are good in many ways but seem even to constitute part of the person’s *inner* worth, and they were indeed unconditionally valued by the ancients. Yet they are very far from being good without qualification — ‘good in themselves, good in any circumstances’ — for without the principles of a good will they can become extremely bad: ‘for example’, a villain’s coolness makes him far more dangerous and more straightforwardly abominable to us than he would otherwise have seemed.

What makes a good will *good*? It isn’t what it brings about, its usefulness in achieving some intended end. Rather, good will is good **because of how it wills** — that is, it is *good in itself*. Taken just in itself it is to be valued incomparably more highly than anything that could be brought about by it in the satisfaction of some preference — or, if you like, the sum total of all preferences! Consider this case:

Through bad luck or a miserly endowment from stepmotherly nature, this person’s will has no power at all to accomplish its purpose; not even the greatest effort on his part would enable it to achieve anything it aims at. But he does still have a good will — not as a mere wish but as the summoning of all the means in his power.

The good will of this person would **sparkle like a jewel all by itself, as something that had its full worth in itself**. Its value wouldn’t go up or down depending on how useful or fruitless it was. If it was useful, that would only be the *setting* of the jewel, so to speak, enabling us to handle it more conveniently in commerce (‘a diamond ring is easier to manage than a diamond’) or to get those who don’t know much about jewels to look at it. But the setting doesn’t affect the value of the jewel and doesn’t recommend it the experts.

## Kantian Ethics, Extract Two

Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

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My topic is the difference between doing something from duty and doing it for other reasons. In tackling this, I shall set aside without discussion two kinds of case — one for which my question doesn’t arise, a second for which the

most of the things we think of as ‘good’ are actually corruptible - think of the highly obedient and efficient guard at Auschwitz... this is a dig at Virtue Ethics

the good will

i think this bit is well important, a lot of the rest of the book is explaining what this means...

here it Kant’s example but you could probably think of a better one...

the moral value is solely located in the will for Kant... this doesn’t actually mean consequences are irrelevant but they are in assessing purely the morality of an action....

eg: killing your child because you can't be bothered cooking for it....

shopkeeper example

in this third case it is impossible to assume the shopkeeper wants to do right and wants to get rich...

question arises but is too easy to answer for the case to be interesting or instructive. Following those two, I shall introduce two further kinds of case.

1 I shan't discuss actions which — even if they are useful in some way or other — are clearly opposed to duty, because with them the question of doing them from duty doesn't even arise.

2 I shall also ignore cases where someone does A, which really is in accord with duty, but where what he directly wants isn't to perform A but to perform B which somehow leads to or involves A. For example: he (B) unbolts the door so as to escape from the fire, and in so doing he (A) enables others to escape also. There is no need to spend time on such cases, because in them it is easy to tell whether an action that is in accord with duty is done •from duty or rather •for some selfish purpose.

3 It is far harder to detect that difference when the action the person performs - one that is in accord with duty — is what he directly wanted to do, rather than being something he did only because it was involved in something else that he directly wanted to do. Take the example of a shop-keeper who charges the same prices for selling his goods to inexperienced customers as for selling them to anyone else. **This is in accord with duty. But there is also a prudential and not-duty-based motive that the shop-keeper might have for this course of conduct:** when there is a buyers' market, he may sell as cheaply to children as to others so as not to lose customers. Thus the customer is honestly served, but we can't infer from this that the shop-keeper has behaved in this way from duty and principles of honesty. His own advantage requires this behaviour, and **we can't assume that in addition he directly wants something for his customers and out of love for them he charges them all the same price.** His conduct of his policy on pricing comes neither from duty nor from directly wanting it, but from a selfish purpose.

[Kant's German really does say first that the shop-keeper isn't led by a **direct want** and then that he is. His point seems to be this:— The shop-keeper does want to treat all his customers equitably; his intention is aimed at precisely that fact about his conduct (unlike the case in (2) where the agent enables other people to escape but isn't aiming at that at all). But the shop-keeper's intention doesn't stop there, so to speak; he wants to treat his customers equitably not because of what he wants for them, but because of how he wants them to behave later in his interests. This involves a kind of **indirectness**, which doesn't assimilate this case to (2) but does distinguish it from a fourth kind of conduct that still isn't morally worthy but not because it involves the indirectness' of (2) or that of (3).]

4 It is a duty to preserve one's life, and moreover everyone directly wants to do so. But because of the power of that want, the often anxious care that most men have for their survival has no intrinsic worth, **and the maxim Preserve yourself has no moral content.** Men preserve their lives according to duty, but not from duty. But now consider this case:

Adversities and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away this unfortunate man's relish for life. But his fate has not made him passively despondent or dejected. He is strong in soul, and is exasperated at how things have gone for him, and would like actively to do something about it. Specifically, he *wishes for death*. But he preserves his life without loving it, not led by any want or fear, but acting from duty.

For this person the maxim *Preserve yourself* has moral content.

this is a problematic example again...

'direct want' seems to mean something like 'primary desire' or 'foremost motivation'  
if someone does an action because they want something (else) that the result of the first action will bring it is this they should be judged on

his motive to treat people fairly must either come before his motive to succeed financially...that or vice versa... one must come first....

it is because he wants to die that Kant finds it impressive, fighting to stay alive because you want to is not a duty in the same way...

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'nice' people

We have a duty to be charitably helpful where we can, and many people are so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy and take delight in the contentment of others if they have made it possible. **But I maintain that such behaviour, done in that spirit, has no true moral worth,** however amiable it may be and however much it accords with duty. It should be classed with actions done from other wants, such as the desire for honour. With luck, someone's desire for honour may lead to conduct that in fact accords with duty and does good to many people; in that case it deserves praise and encouragement; but it doesn't deserve high esteem, because the maxim on which the person is acting doesn't have the moral content of an action done not because the person *likes* acting in that way but from duty. [In this context, *\_want\_* and *\_liking\_* and *\_desire\_* are used to translate *Neigung*, elsewhere in this version translated as *\_preference\_*; other translations mostly use *\_inclination\_*.]

Now consider a special case:

This person has been a friend to mankind, but his mind has become clouded by a sorrow of his own that has extinguished all feeling for how others are faring. He still has the power to benefit others in distress, but their need leaves him untouched because he is too preoccupied with his own. But now he tears himself out of his dead insensibility and acts charitably purely from duty, without feeling any want or liking so to behave.

Now, for the first time, his conduct has genuine moral worth. Having been deprived by nature of a warm-hearted temperament, this man could find in himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than he could have got through such a temperament. It is just here that the worth of character is brought out, which is morally the incomparably highest of all: he is beneficent not from preference but from duty.

for Kant being 'nice' is not acting from duty, so someone shouldn't be congratulated... someone doing an action 'cause they like to is nice, but not morally good....

duty over inclination

**Kantian Ethics, Extract Three**

**Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals***

**In the version by Jonathan Bennett presented at [www.earlymoderntexts.com](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com)**

CI: universalisation

So the universal imperative of duty can be expressed as follows: **Act as though the maxim of your action were to become, through your will, a universal law of nature.**

...

I want now to list some duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and duties to others, and into perfect duties and imperfect duties.

1 A man who has been brought by a series of troubles to the point of despair and of weariness with life still has his reason sufficiently to ask himself: *'Wouldn't it be contrary to my duty to myself to take my own life?'* Now he asks:

***'Could the maxim of my action in killing myself become a universal law of nature?'*** Well, here is his maxim:

For love of myself, I make it my principle to cut my life short when prolonging it threatens to bring more troubles than satisfactions.

So the question is whether *this* principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. If it did, that would be a nature that had a law according to which a single feeling created a life affirming push and **also led to the destruction of life itself;** and we can see at a glance that such a *'nature'* would contradict itself, and so couldn't be a nature. So the

when you universalise a maxim and the world it creates is illogical, Kant says it contradicts duty/good will.... this is also known as a contradiction in conception

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maxim we are discussing *couldn't* be a law of nature, and therefore would be utterly in conflict with the supreme principle of duty.

2 Another man sees himself being driven by need to borrow money. He realizes that no-one will lend to him unless he firmly promises to repay it at a certain time, and he is well aware that he wouldn't be able to keep such a promise. He is disposed to make such a promise, but he has enough conscience to ask himself: 'Isn't it improper and opposed to duty to relieve one's needs in that way?' If he does decide to make the promise, the maxim of his action will run like this:

When I think I need money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that the repayment won't ever happen.

Here he is —for the rest of this paragraph -reflecting on this— 'It may be that this principle of self-love or of personal advantage would fit nicely into my whole future welfare, so that there is no *prudential* case against it. But the question remains: would it be right? To answer this, I change the demand of self-love into a universal law, and then put the question like this: If my maxim became a universal law, *then* how would things stand? I can see straight off that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, and must contradict itself. For if you take a law saying that anyone who thinks he is in need can make any promises he likes without intending to keep them, and make it *universal* so that everyone in need *does* behave in this way, that would make the promise and the intended purpose of it *impossible* -no-one would believe what was promised to him but would only laugh at any such performance as a vain pretence.'

3 A third finds in himself a talent that could be developed so as to make him in many respects a useful person. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances, and would rather indulge in pleasure than take the trouble to broaden and improve his fortunate natural gifts. But now he asks whether his maxim of neglecting his gifts, agreeing as it does with his liking for idle amusement, also agrees with what is called 'duty'. He sees that a system of nature conforming with this law could indeed exist, with everyone behaving like the Islanders of the south Pacific, letting their talents rust and devoting their lives merely to idleness, indulgence, and baby-making — in short, to pleasure. But he can't possibly will that this should become a universal law of nature or that it should be implanted in us by a natural instinct. For, as a rational being, he necessarily wills that all his abilities should be developed, because they serve him and are given to him for all sorts of possible purposes.

4 A fourth man, for whom things are going well, sees that others (whom he could help) have to struggle with great hardships, and he thinks to himself:

What concern of mine is it? Let each one be as happy as heaven wills, or as he can make himself; I won't take anything from him or even envy him; but I have no desire to contribute to his welfare or help him in time of need. If such a way of thinking were a universal law of nature, the human race could certainly survive — and no doubt that *state of humanity would be better than one where everyone chatters about sympathy and benevolence* and exerts himself occasionally to practice them, while also taking every chance he can to cheat, and to betray or otherwise violate people's rights. But although *it is possible that that maxim should be a universal law of nature, it is impossible to will that it do so.* For a will that brought *that* about would conflict with itself, since instances can often arise in

false-  
promise  
-making

don't help  
poor  
people

when you universalise a maxim and the world it creates is illogical, Kant says it contradicts duty/good will... this is also known as a contradiction in conception

this one isn't illogical, but no one in their right mind would decide to make the maxim a rule for everyone... so it's not illogical but is contradictory in terms of motivation (will)

this situation is another contradiction of the will as it is perfectly possible to imagine this world without a logical problem in the conception... Kant thinks nobody would will it as we would be worried about falling on hard times ourselves...

which the person in question would need the love and sympathy of others, and he would have no hope of getting the help he desires, being robbed of it by this law of nature springing from his own will.

Kant's summary of dealing with univ'sed maxims

Those are a few of the many duties that we have (or at least think we have) that can clearly be derived from the single principle that I have stated low on page 23 above. **We must be able to will that a maxim of our action become a universal law; this is the general formula for the moral evaluation of our action.** Some actions are so constituted that their maxim can't even be *thought* as a universal law of nature without contradiction, let alone being *willed* to be such. It's easy to see that an action of that kind conflicts with stricter or narrower (absolutely obligatory) duty. With other actions, the maxim-made-universal-law is not in that way internally impossible (·self-contradictory ·), but it is still something that no-one could possibly *will* to be a universal law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself. It's easy to see that an action of that kind conflicts with broader (meritorious) duty.

**Kantian Ethics, Extract Four**  
**Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals***  
**In the version by Jonathan Bennett presented at [www.earlymoderntexts.com](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com)**

But suppose there were something *whose existence in itself* had absolute value, something which *as an end in itself* could support determinate laws. *That would be a basis - indeed the only basis - for a possible categorical imperative, ie of a practical law. this means the same things apply to us all, because we are all special in the same way we are equal...* *There is such a thing! It is a human being!* · I maintain that man — and in general **every rational being** — exists as an end in himself and *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will at its discretion. Whenever he acts in ways directed towards himself or towards **other rational beings**, · a person serves as a *means* to whatever end his action aims at; but · he must always be regarded as *also an end*. Things that are preferred have only *conditional* value, for if the preferences (and the needs arising from them) didn't exist, their object would be worthless. · That wouldn't count against the *objects* ' in question if the desires on which they depend did themselves have unconditional value, **but they don't!** If the preferences themselves, as the sources of needs, did have absolute value, one would want to have them; but that is so far from the case that **every rational being must wish he were altogether free of them**. So the value of any objects *to be obtained* through our actions is always conditional. Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only relative value as means, and are therefore called *things* ' [*Sachen*]; whereas rational beings are called *persons* ' , because **their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves (ie as not to be used merely as means)** — which makes such a being an object of respect, and **something that sets limits to what anyone can choose to do**. Such beings are not merely subjective ends whose existence as a result of our action has value *for us*, but are objective ends, ie things [*Dinge*] whose existence is an end in itself. It is indeed an *irreplaceable* end: you can't substitute for it something else to which it would be merely a means. If there were no such ends in themselves, nothing of absolute value could be found, and if all value were conditional and thus contingent, **no supreme practical principle for reason could be found anywhere**. So if there is to be a supreme practical principle, and a categorical imperative for the human will, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of something that must be an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of the will that can serve as a universal law. **The basis for this principle is: rational**

ends not means

think of the expression means to an end'... what does each word mean in this context?

"but they don't!" are peoples preferences more important than people? Kant says no...

it's your/human nature... and this is what leads to his grounding of ethics...

basic process:  
i) find the maxim  
ii) universalise it...  
iii) test it for logical contradictions  
iv) test it by deciding if you can will it to be a universal law  
v) if it passes these it is prob a good maxim

note the pretty high view of humanity in Kant...  
it's clear from this passage that rationality or reason is his reason for this position....

and part of this rationality, Kant says, is not wanting to get 'used' by other people  
we each have our own goals and don't want other people to stop us getting ours so they can get theirs...

*we all do things for reasons... we should never use other people to achieve ours at the expense of theirs....*

Kant is pretty upfront that if he is wrong about rationality his ethics are not persuasive... It is clear to him that he is not...



*nature exists as an end in itself.* Human beings necessarily think of their own existence in this way, which means that the principle holds as a subjective principle of human actions. But every other rational being also thinks of his existence on the same rational ground that holds also for myself;<sup>11</sup> and so it is at the same time an *objective* principle — one that doesn't depend on contingent facts about this or that *subject* — a supreme practical ground from which it must be possible to derive all laws of the will. So here is the practical imperative.

we are all the same (rational) so we deserve the same

practical imperative

**Act in such a way as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of anyone else, always as an end and never merely as a means. Let us now see whether this can be carried out.**

To return to our previous examples:

First, someone thinking of committing suicide will, if he is guided by the concept of necessary duty to oneself, ask himself

suicide example

Could my suicide be reconciled with the idea of humanity as *an end in itself*? And his answer to this should be No. If he escapes from his burdensome situation by destroying himself, he is using a person merely as *a means* to keeping himself in a tolerable condition up to the end of his life. But a man is not a *thing* [*Sache*], so he isn't something to be used *merely* as a means, and must always be regarded in all his actions as an end in himself. So I can't dispose of a man by maiming, damaging or killing him — **and that includes the case where the man is myself.** (This basic principle needs to be refined so as to deal properly with questions such as 'May I have one of my limbs amputated to save my life?' and 'May I expose my life to danger in order to save it?' I shan't go into these matters here; they belong to *morals* and not to the metaphysics of morals.)

[Three times in this next paragraph, and nowhere else in this work, Kant writes of someone's 'containing' the end of an action by someone else. Presumably for B to 'contain' the end of A's action is for B to have A's end as *his* end also, to seek what A seeks.] Second, as concerns necessary... duties to others, when someone A has it in mind to make someone else B a deceitful promise, he sees immediately that he intends to use B merely as a means, without B's containing in himself the *end* of the action. **For B can't possibly assent to A's acting against him in this way,** so he can't contain in himself the end of this action. This conflict with the principle about treating others as ends is even easier to see in examples of attacks on people's freedom and property; for in those cases it is obvious that someone who violates the rights of men intends to make use of the person of others merely as means, without considering that as rational beings they should always be valued at the same time as ends, i.e. as beings who can contain in themselves the end of the very same action.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, with regard to contingent (meritorious) duty to oneself [for 'meritorious' see middle paragraph on page 25], it isn't sufficient that the action *not conflict* with humanity in our person as an end in itself; it must also *harmonize* with it. In human nature there are predispositions to greater perfection that are part of nature's purpose for humanity...; to neglect these might perhaps be *consistent* with the preservation of humanity as an end in itself but not with the **furtherance** of that end. [In the original, the italics contrast 'furtherance' not with 'consistent' but with 'preservation'. The present version is based on a conjecture that was a slip.]

Fourthly, with regard to meritorious duty to others: — Humanity might survive even if no-one contributed to the happiness of others, but also no-one intentionally took anything away from the happiness of others; and this is a likely enough state of affairs, because the end or purpose that all men *naturally* have is *their own* happiness. This

if the red arrow is correct then this is the logical next step...

1  
'using' yourself - the suicide example  
approach seems to be killing yourself is the exact same as killing an (rational) other...

2  
notice the apparent consistency between this imperative and the explanation at the beginning of the text...  
Lying is wrong because it is 'using' and trying to deny B her rationality..

3  
this is difficult, Kant appears to be saying just because something doesn't use someone it doesn't make it okay...

would put human conduct into harmony with humanity as an end in itself, but only in a *negative* manner. For a *positive* harmony with humanity as an end in itself, what is required is that everyone positively tries to further the ends of others as far as he can. For the ends of any person, who is an end in himself, must as far as possible be also *my* ends, if that thought of him as an end in himself is to have its *full* effect on me.

This principle concerning the status of each human being — and more generally of each rational creature — as an end in himself is the supreme limiting condition on the freedom of action of each man. (*Supreme* in the sense that it trumps everything else, eg *prudential considerations*.) It isn't drawn from experience; there are two reasons why it *can't* be. One reason is the principle's universality: it applies to *absolutely all rational beings*, and experience doesn't stretch out that far. The other is the fact that the principle isn't about humanity considered subjectively, as something that men *do* take to be an end, ie do choose to aim at, but rather about humanity considered as the objective end that *ought to* constitute the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends, whatever they may be. Experience can inform us about what subjective ends men *do* set before themselves, but not about what non-subjective end *ought to* trump every subjective end. So this principle can't arise from experience, and must arise from pure reason.

<sup>11</sup> Here I put this proposition forward as a postulate. The reasons for it will be given in the last chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Don't think that the banal 'Don't do to anyone else what you wouldn't want done to you' could serve here as a guide or principle. It is only a consequence of the real principle, and a restricted and limited consequence at that. It can't — as it stands — be a universal law, because it doesn't provide a basis for duties to oneself, or benevolent duties to others (for many a man would gladly consent to not receiving benefits from others if that would let him off from showing benevolence to them!), or duties to mete out just punishments to others (for the criminal would argue on this ground against the judge who sentences him). And so on.

4

finally we should be looking to treat people as ends *positively* rather than negatively... ie help people achieve aims rather than simply *not do things that inhibit* their goals...



Kant's theory is sometimes accused of being 'vacuous\*', this part should inform your decision in this area...

this is a straight denial of utilitarianism

\*Warburton, N Philosophy: The Classics, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2001)