

Immanuel Kant

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Kant's Ethics is based on a single principle, "The Categorical Imperative."

- The Categorical Imperative is meant to be a Rational principle. It is meant to describe the rules that people should adopt simply by virtue of being Rational humans.
- In Kant's ethics only our intentions count, consequences - which Kant argues are inherently unpredictable - are not and should be not be (according to Kant) part of our ethical calculations.

"Good Will" Kant argues that a person is only acting with "Good Will" if they are following the rules of ethics, acting rightly, simply because they are the rules of ethics.

- In other words, our actions can be based on one of two types of principles
 - o Categorical Imperative
 - o Hypothetical Imperatives: these describe what a person should do, given that they have a certain goal or value.

"The Kingdom of Ends" one virtue of this theory, according to Kant, is that since it is based on a single rational principle, ANYONE is capable of deducing what behaviors are required of themselves and of anyone else.

Objections to Kant's Ethics:

- Is Kant correct that there are NO special cases?
 - o Perhaps we can specify the specific situations under which we would be - for example lying. And then test to see whether that lie and that situation would pass the Categorical imperative.
 - So, we might formulate a rule that one is allowed to lie just in case it is the only way to save an innocent person from punishment.
 - This runs in to the Problem of Specification: If we're allowed specify very carefully before applying the categorical imperative, then the categorical imperative will cease to work.
- Is Kant also correct that the consequences of our actions do not matter?
- Many philosophers object to Kant's concept of a Good Will. Because it implies that we must be impartial in what they would call strange or unacceptable ways.

Three Versions of the Categorical Imperative (The three versions, according to Kant, are all synonymous - they all express the same basic principle).

- 1) (The Formula from Universal Law) Act always such that the maxim of your action can be willed to be a universal law.
 - a. Example: Cheating on tests, Tell Lies, If you borrow things then you must repay the loan (more generally, we must keep our promises).
 - b. The key insight is this: with most of these actions (lying, cheating, conning...) they're effective because the person doing them is making themselves an exception. That is they're following a rule that they wouldn't want everyone else to follow.
 - i. You're treating yourself as a special case, when the rules of ethics are in fact universal and impartial (i.e. there are no special cases)
- 2) (The Formula from Humanity) Treat others always as an ends, and never only as a means.
 - a. Ends: To treat something as a means is to treat it as the goal or purpose of your action(s).
 - b. Means: To use something as a means is to take advantage of it to achieve some other goal.
- 3) (The Formula from Natural Law) Act always as though the maxim of our action were to become a law of Nature.