
Categorical and Practical Imperative

Categorical Imperative:

"I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.*"

"Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

"Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature."

Practical Imperative: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."

Some Applications of the Categorical Imperative [from] Kant's Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959) pp. 39 - 41:

1. A man who is reduced to despair by a series of evils feels a weariness with life but is still in possession of his reason sufficiently to ask whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he asks whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim, however, is: For love of myself, I make it my principle to shorten my life when by a longer duration it threatens more evil than satisfaction. But it is questionable whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. One immediately sees a contradiction in a system of nature whose law would be to destroy life by the feeling whose special office is to impel the improvement of life. In this case it would not exist as nature; hence that maxim cannot obtain as a law of nature, and thus it wholly contradicts the supreme principle of all duty."

2. Another man finds himself forced by need to borrow money. He well knows that he will not be able to repay it, but he also sees that nothing will be loaned him if he does not firmly promise to repay it at a certain time. He desires to make such a promise, but he has enough conscience to ask himself whether it is not improper and opposed to duty to relieve his distress in such a way. Now, assuming he does decide to do so, the maxim of his action would be as follows: When I believe myself to be in need of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know I shall never do so. Now this principle of self-love or of his own benefit may very well be compatible with his whole future welfare, but the question is whether it is right. He changes the pretension of self-love into a universal law and then puts the question: How would it be if my maxim became a universal law? He immediately sees that it could never hold as a universal law of nature and be consistent with itself; rather it must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law which says that anyone who believes himself to be in need could promise what he pleased with the intention of not fulfilling it would make the promise itself and the end to be accomplished by it impossible; no one would believe what was promised to him but would only laugh at any such assertion as vain pretense.

3. A third finds in himself a talent which could, by means of some cultivation, make him in many respects a useful man. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and

prefers indulgence in pleasure to troubling himself with broadening and improving his fortunate natural gifts. Now, however, let him ask whether his maxim of neglecting his gifts, besides agreeing with his propensity to idle amusement, agrees also with what is called duty. He sees that a system of nature could indeed exist in accordance with such a law, even though man (like the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands) should let his talents rust and resolve to devote his life merely to idleness, indulgence, and propagation - in a word, to pleasure. But he cannot 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 faculties should be developed, inasmuch as they 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 asks, "What concern of mine is it? Let each one be as happy as heaven wills, or as he can make himself; I will not take anything from him or even envy him; but to his welfare or to his assistance in time of need I have no desire to contribute." If such a way of thinking were a universal law of nature, certainly the human race could exist, and without doubt even better than in a state where everyone talks of sympathy and good will, or even exerts himself occasionally to practice them while, on the other hand, he cheats when he can and betrays or otherwise violates the rights of man. Now although it is possible that a universal law of nature according to that maxim could exist, it is nevertheless impossible to will that such a principle should hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will which resolved this would conflict with itself, since instances can often arise in which he would need the love and sympathy of others, and in which he would have robbed himself, by such a law of nature springing from his own will, of all hope of the aid he desires.

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[excerpts from] Kant's Metaphysical Principles of Virtue (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964):

IV. WHAT ARE THE ENDS WHICH ARE AT THE SAME TIME DUTIES?

They are these: one's own perfection and the happiness of others.

One cannot invert these and make, on the one hand, our own happiness and, on the other, the perfection of others, ends which should be in themselves duties for the same person.

For one's own happiness is an end which, to be sure, all men do have (by virtue of the impulse of their nature), but this end can never without contradiction be regarded as a duty. What everyone of himself already inevitable wants does not belong under the concept of duty, because a duty is a constraint to an end that is not gladly adopted. It is, therefore, a contradiction to say that one is obligated to promote his own happiness with all his powers.

Just so, it is a contradiction to make the perfection of another my end and to deem myself obligated to promote his perfection. For the perfection of another man as a person consists precisely in his being able to set his end for himself according to his own concepts of duty. And it is a contradiction to require (to make it a duty for me) that I ought to do something which no one except another himself can do....

But human perfection lies not only in the cultivation of one's understanding but also in that of one's will (moral turn of mind), in order that the demands of duty in general be satisfied. First, it is one's duty to raise himself out of the crudity of his nature, out of his animality... more and more to humanity, by which alone he is capable of setting himself ends.... Second, it is one's duty to push the cultivation of his will up to the purest virtuous disposition, in which the law is at the same time the incentive of one's actions which are in accordance with duty, and is obeyed from duty.
(pp. 43 - 45)

[excerpts from] Kant's Metaphysical Principles of Virtue (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964):
Some Particular Duties [Numbers and order are mine, not Kant's.]

1. "Cultivation of morality within ourselves." (p. 51)
2. "...to promote the happiness of others." (p. 52)
3. "...making mankind in general one's end is in itself a duty of every man." (p. 54)
4. "It is our duty to benefit other men according to our capacity, whether we love them or not..." (60)
5. "...insofar as virtue is based on internal freedom, it contains a positive command for man, namely, that he should bring all his capacities and inclinations under his authority (that of reason)." (p. 67)
6. "...man should not let himself be governed by his feelings and inclinations (the duty of apathy). For unless reason takes the reins of government in its own hands, feelings and inclinations play the master over man." (p. 68)
7. "Emotion always belongs to sensibility, no matter by what kind of object it may be excited. The true strength of virtue is the mind at rest, with a deliberate and firm resolution to bring its law into practice." (p. 68)
8. "...a man is still obligated to preserve his life simply because he is a person and must therefore recognize a duty to himself...To destroy the subject of morality in his own person [through suicide] is tantamount to obliterating from the world, as far as he can," the very existence of morality itself; but morality is, nevertheless, an end in itself." (p. 83 - 84)
9. "...a man cannot make use of another person for the pleasure of sexual gratification without special restriction through a juridical contract by which two persons are mutually bound to one another in marriage." (p. 85)
10. "The greatest violation of man's duty to himself considered only as a moral being (the humanity in his person) is the opposite of veracity: lying..." P. 90)
11. "Lying is the throwing away and, as it were, the obliteration of one's dignity as a human being." (p. 91)

12. [concerning one's dignity as a person or one's humanity] "Do not become the vassals of men. Do not suffer your rights to be trampled underfoot by others with impunity. Incur no debts for which you cannot provide full security. Accept no favors which you might do without. Do not be parasites nor flatterers nor ... beggars. Therefore, be thrifty so that you may not become destitute. Complaining and whimpering, even merely crying out in bodily pain, are unworthy of you, and most of all when you are aware that you deserve pain.... Kneeling down or groveling on the ground, even to express your reverence for heavenly things, is contrary to human dignity; as is also invoking heavenly things in actual images, for you then humble yourselves not to an ideal which your own reason sets before you, but to an idol which is your own handiwork." (p. 99)

13. "...know (search, fathom) yourself, not for the sake of your physical perfection (fitness or unfitness for all kinds of ends whether of your own liking or ordered of you), but for your moral perfection regarding your duty..." (pp. 103 - 104)

14. "A propensity to the bare destruction ... of beautiful though lifeless things in nature is contrary to man's duty to himself." (p. 106)

15. "Even more intimately opposed to man's duty to himself is a savage and at the same time cruel treatment of that part of creation which is living, though lacking reason (animals). For thus is compassion for their suffering dulled in man, and thereby a natural predisposition very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other men is weakened and gradually obliterated. However, man is authorized to put animals to adroit or painless slaughter or to make them do hard work, as long as it is not beyond their strength.... On the other hand, physical experiments involving excruciating pain for animals and conducted merely for the sake of speculative inquiry (when the end might also be achieved without such experiments) are to be abhorred." (p. 106)

16. "It is a duty of man to himself to cultivate his natural powers (of the spirit, of the mind, and of the body) as means to all kinds of possible ends. Man owes it to himself (as an intelligence) not to let his natural predispositions and capacities (which his reason can use some day) remain unused, and not to*leave them, as it were, to rust." (p. 108)

17. "The duty to love one's neighbor can also be expressed as the duty to make the ends of others (as long as they are not immoral) my own. The duty to respect one's neighbor is contained in the maxim, degrade no other man merely as a means to personal ends (do not require another person to throw himself away in order to pander to one's own ends)." (p. 114)

18. "It is a duty of every man to be beneficent, i.e., to be helpful to men in need according to one's means, for the sake of their happiness and without hoping for anything thereby." (p. 117)

Some Legal Principles [from] Kant's *Metaphysical Elements of Justice* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965):

19. [Capital Punishment] "Anyone who is a murderer -- that is, has committed a murder, commanded one, or taken part in one -- must suffer death." (p. 104)

20. [Just War] "In the state of nature among states, the right to go to war (to commence hostilities) constitutes the permitted means by which one state prosecutes its right against another." (p. 118)