

Kant, Immanuel. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Thomas K Abbott. In *Basic Writings of Kant*, Allen W. Wood, ed. New York: The Modern Library, 2001.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 A.D.) wrote a pivotal ethics in multiple parts. The first is *Critique of Pure Reason*. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *Critique of Practice Reason*, and *Critique of Judgment* followed. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* erodes exaggerated Enlightenment confidence in human reason, and castigates unbridled metaphysical speculation. Kant was a warm conversationalist and popular lecturer in Königsberg, Germany, and a Pietist by religious sentiment. Some believe Kant's work represents the transition point between Enlightenment and modern philosophy.

Preface. Material philosophy examines laws of nature and laws of freedom. Metaphysics examines understanding itself, and a metaphysic of morals examines the concepts underlying the laws of freedom. Bunglers mix up practical anthropology with the pure rationality of morality. A metaphysic of morals aims at moral principles derived from pure reason alone, without any cultural or empirical intermixing or consideration. All such moral laws carry absolute necessity at their root. A metaphysic of morals examines pure practical reason, and seeks the supreme rational principle of morality.

First Section: Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical. Only a "good will" is unarguably good. It is good in itself, not because of the good results it fosters. Rational thought does not lead to happiness; reason is ill-suited to that end. The good will is best examined under the notion of duty, which incorporates it. The duty with which Kant is concerned is duty performed for duty's sake alone, and not expedient acts that also conform to duty. Moral action derives value not from its purpose or its result, but only from the will to do one's duty. Respect for law implies a duty to obey it. Respect for the law derives from an immediate intuitive recognition that moves me to obey, despite its possible negative effects on me. Always act so that you would be satisfied if every person followed your lead. Consider your actions a universal law for all sentient. If lying promises were universal, no promises would be credited. Such a law would destroy itself. But our desire for present happiness calls us irresistibly to question duties, and forces examination of the underlying concepts of morals upon us.

Second Section: Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to the Metaphysic of Morals.

All human actions are principle mixed with self-interest. None arises from duty alone; the self lies beneath, a "secret spring of action" always. True virtue may be doubted. What cannot be doubted is that reason specifies duties even if men lack purity in performing those duties. True morality must bind all rational creatures, not only humankind, with absolute necessity. Popular morality pleases with its anecdotes and sloppy reason. It is a "disgusting medley" for "shallow pates." A pure metaphysic of morals wins and clarifies the human heart. Moralities mixed of reason and feelings confuse, and lead to evil as often as good. Morality derives from human reason *a priori*. Lesser conceptions cannot promote the maximum human goodness. Nature operates according to laws. Reason wills to operate according to laws, which makes it practical reason. However, human wills compete with impulses and desires, which makes any human's compliance with reason contingent, an obligation. Moral laws obligate the will, and are called Imperatives. Categorical imperatives call for actions necessary not as means to ends, but in themselves.

Morality concerns categorical imperatives. Man's practical end is to be happy. Knowing in what happiness consists is elusive. The only categorical imperative is to conduct oneself as though your choices were to become a universal natural law. Kant analyzes, according to the categorical imperative, suicide, borrowing without intention to repay, laziness, lack of charity. Humans exist as ends in themselves, not as means to ends. So the categorical imperative has this implication and restatement: Treat every person, including yourself, as an end and never a means alone. Ultimately, a good will is a universal legislator of human means and ultimate purposes, which, given human society, becomes a kingdom of ends. Each member follows his own will, but

it dovetails neatly with all other member actions because all are guided by the identical rational principle.

Human dignity derives from each man's autonomous universal legislating. Men must choose actions that can be universalized to all men in all circumstances. To so act is the good will. To will less is to will heteronomy, that is, to do something not for itself, but in order to achieve some particular end or benefit. Lesser principles fail as ethical guidelines. One cannot seek happiness as an end; to do so teaches us merely to calculate better. Moral sense theory, which makes feelings the basis of morality, leaves us with no general standards of good and evil. We cannot look to ontology for guidance, because its insights tend to be circular and presuppose the morality it intends to explain. We cannot look to theological conceptions of divine morality, because, rationally, we know nothing of God. With all other ethical theories it is the same; they offer no universal rational basis. They are not autonomous (law governed by a single rule), but heteronomous (law guided by more than one principle).

Third Section: Transition from the Metaphysic of Morals to the Critique of Pure Practical Reason.

Freedom from outside causality describes human will, when it is rational. Freedom must describe all rational beings. Our sense experiences provide the mind with appearances, not understanding of the things-in-themselves. But we also know reason, and creatures of understanding. Categorical imperatives are possible because we are both creatures of reason and creatures of sense. Rationally, we know what must happen. Sensibly, we know what must happen may not. So, categorical imperatives become "oughts" for us, maxims of living.

We cannot comprehend how free will can exist in a determinative material universe. Yet we must presume it exists, for without freedom, rationality is impossible. How shall the contradiction be resolved? Man as a rational being belongs to a different order of reality when considered in himself. Simultaneously, man is a sensible being subject to nature's laws. Both are true of man. Reason takes a point of view about its freedom which authorizes its existence, as it must. Reason does not understand how freedom is possible, only that it must be possible, since reason exists. The mind has different law governing the phenomena it perceives than exists in the sensible world governing things-in-themselves. Universal law is, at a minimum, dualistic. To posit freedom of the will is required as an axiom of both speculative philosophy and of practical living. It is not possible to rationally evaluate how this hypothesis is possible. Stretched to its limit, human reason still fails to grasp "unconditional necessity" of moral demands, but reason can recognize its incapacity. That is all that a moral philosophy can require.