

According to Kant, it is rational beings who have absolute value.

*Now I say that the human being and in general every rational being **exists** as an end in itself, **not merely as a means** to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded **at the same time as an end**.*

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

What does Kant believe that persons, and any other rational beings, must be treated as ends with absolute value?

All this culminates in Kant’s famous statement of the categorical imperative.

[The Formula of Humanity as an End Itself:] *So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.*

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

This is perhaps one of the most famous statements for what it means to treat a person with respect, and it sets fundamental limits on how a person can treat another in the pursuit of our individual, subjective goals like happiness. Next class, we will explore how Kantian moral theory can apply to a contemporary issue like global poverty.

Introduction to Philosophy

Kantian Moral Theory

In answering the practical question—“What ought I do?”—Ayn Rand, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill all maintain that the purpose of morality is to promote happiness, though they disagree over the nature of happiness and whose happiness matters from a moral point of view. This common purpose, though, is why all three of them advocate various teleological moral theories. Recall that a teleological moral theory holds that the foundation of morality is some final purpose or good, and that right actions are those that promote this final purpose or good. Teleological theories are very common amongst moral philosophers, though they are not the only option.

In his extremely influential work, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant presents a firm rejection of teleological theories, especially those basing morality on happiness.

*It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**. . . .*

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end.

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Among the proposed ends or effects that Kant distinguishes from the good will are the following:

1. Talents of the mind:
2. Qualities of temperament:
3. Gifts of fortune:
4. Happiness:

Why does Kant believe that all these things are not good without limitation?

These claims reveal that Kant is not defending a teleological moral theory. Instead, his theory is different.



Deontological Moral Theory: A moral theory that is *not* a teleological moral theory; the purpose of morality is not to promote some final purpose or good.

Since this is a negative definition, there are a wide variety of deontological moral theories. One major commonality between these theories is that they tend to emphasize constraints on actions. So these theories do not think happiness and other “good” things are bad; they just say that there are limits to how one may promote or pursue these things. More simply put: the right comes before the good. Of course, the task for a deontological theory is to then provide an argument for what defines the right. Kant provides one way, albeit one of the most famous, of doing this. Now, if Kant believes that we cannot judge a good will by its effects, what are we supposed to judge it upon? How does his example of the shopkeeper who sets fair prices (in order to keep his customers happy) illustrate this?

In order to fully appreciate Kant’s account here, it is best to flesh out his understanding of volition, or the power of a person to use his or her will.

[To have a will is to have] *the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws, that is, in accordance with principles.*
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

In explaining what it means to have volition, Kant compares two different and opposed psychologies of the will, two psychologies within which all human find themselves inexorably entangled.

| Two Psychologies | |
|---|--|
| Purely Sensual | Purely Rational |
| <p>Voluntary Will: When _____ infallibly determine the will, or what principles to follow and what laws to obey.</p> <p>Subjective Grounds: Reasons valid only for _____.</p> <p>The Agreeable: An influence by means of _____</p> | <p>Holy Will: When _____ infallibly determines the will, or what principles to follow and what laws to obey.</p> <p>Objective Grounds: Reasons valid for _____.</p> <p>Practical Good: An influence by means of _____</p> |
| which holds for the senses of this or that person but <i>not</i> for everyone. | which holds for every rational being as such. |
|  |  |
| Subjective Ends: The goals or ends that hold for this or that person, but <i>not</i> for all. | Objective Ends: The goals or ends that hold for every rational being. |

Now Kant’s task is to try and show that there exist objective ends that all rational beings must pursue. This naturally raises the proposal that happiness is this objective end for all rational beings.

*There is, however, **one** end that can be presupposed as actual in the case of all rational beings . . . and therefore one purpose that they not merely **could** have but that we can safely presuppose they all actually **do have** by a natural necessity, and that purpose is **happiness**.*
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Of course, Kant does not believe that the purpose of morality is to promote happiness. So how does Kant argue that happiness only *seems* like an objective end, when in fact it is not objective at all?

Without happiness as an option, it still remains unclear what an objective end for all rational being might be. Kant therefore turns back to the idea of volition. Volition is a special feature of human beings because it implies that we are able to *choose* the principles that we act on. The human will is fundamentally a *free* will in ways that animals and the divine do not possess. Even so, we often do not consider ourselves free, but rather bound to act in certain ways. This leads Kant to discuss **imperatives**, or commands that constrain our agency. This discussion appends material to his discussion of the two psychologies.

| Purely Sensual | Purely Rational |
|--|---|
| Hypothetical Imperatives: Commands that have us | Categorical Imperatives: Commands that have us |
| seek _____. | seek _____. |
| Given X as an end for _____, | Given X as an end for _____, |
| then do Y (because you _____). | then do Y (because you _____). |

Of course, this still fails to provide us with an objective end that could ground a categorical imperative. Even so, Kant believes there is such an objective end.

*Suppose there were something **the existence of which in itself had an absolute worth**, something which as **an end in itself** could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it, and in it alone, would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative.*
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

This leads Kant to make one final distinction using his comparison of the two psychologies.

| Purely Sensual | Purely Rational |
|--|--|
| Relative (Conditional) Worth: The value something has | Absolute Value (Worth): The value something has |
| because it is _____. | because it is _____. |