

In order to help us understand how Kant’s moral theory works, O’Neill then argues how each of these Kantian duties applies during times of famine. According to her, Kantian duties of justice requires that a person does not use others as a mere means to his or her own ends. What sorts of actions do these duties prevent a person from doing?

O’Neill argues that acting positively to relieve people from the effects of famine must also be a high priority for Kantians. Why is that? That is, why is it not sufficient that a person simply do not use those suffering from famine as means to his or her own personal ends? What sorts of actions must a Kantian do for those suffering from famine?



In the end, O’Neill believes that these demands of Kantian moral theory make it quite different from utilitarianism. Indeed, she argues that these differences reveal the superiority of Kant’s theory over utilitarianism. Next class we will continue this line of reasoning by comparing and contrasting these two competing theories of morality.

# Introduction to Philosophy

## An Application of Kantian Moral Theory

Contrary to many other philosophers, Immanuel Kant rejects teleological moral theories. He argues that morality is not about promoting happiness or any other final purpose or good. Instead, Kant maintains that right actions are judged with respect to the maxim or principle an agent intentionally adopts when acting. Intensionally, as opposed to accidentally, acting on a morally correct principle is what Kant means by having a good will, the only thing he believes is good without limitation. Defending this claim, of course, requires Kant to give us a rule for determining when an principle is morally correct or not.

Last time we saw how Kant tries to build up such a rule by delineating two opposed psychologies for human action.

Two Psychologies	
Purely Sensual	Purely Rational
Voluntary Will Subjective Grounds (The Agreeable) 	Holy Will Objective Grounds (Practical Good) 
Subjective Ends	Objective Ends

Kant maintains that any rule assessing principles of conduct for rational beings, including humans, must appeal to objective ends, that is goals or ends that hold for all rational beings as such. Happiness, Kant argues, only seems like an end like this, whereas upon further inspection, happiness is only a subjective end. This is what separates him from David Hume, who thought all ends pursued by people were ultimately subjective.

However, the question remains concerning what ends hold for all rational beings as such. Before laying this out, Kant makes one further distinction concerning the types of imperatives or commands that can be binding on rational beings, like humans, with a free will.

Purely Sensual	Purely Rational
<b>Hypothetical Imperatives:</b> Commands that have us seek <i>subjective</i> ends.  Given <i>X</i> as an end for <i>you</i> , then do <i>Y</i> (because you desire X).	<b>Categorical Imperatives:</b> Commands that have us seek <i>objective</i> ends.  Given <i>X</i> as an end for <i>all rational beings</i> , then do <i>Y</i> (because you are a rational being).

So now we finally reach the question Kant wants to answer: is there a categorical imperative applying to all rational persons? In order to answer this, Kant must now specify what he takes to be an objective end that could ground such an 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
<b>Relative (Conditional) Worth:</b> The value something has because it is _____.	<b>Absolute Value (Worth):</b> The value something has because it is _____.

Why do material goods have conditional worth, and not absolute value?

If all material goods, as well as all subjective ends like happiness, do not have absolute value, then what does?

*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?

The philosopher and contemporary Kantian, Onora O'Neill (1941–) helps explain what it means in general to treat a person as a mere means.

*To treat someone as a **mere means** is to involve them in a scheme of action **to which they could not in principle consent**. . . .*

- Onora O'Neill, *Matters of Life and Death*.

What exactly does this mean? What sorts of actions does this prohibit?

Meanwhile, to treat someone as an end in him or herself is quite different.

*To treat someone as an end in him or herself requires in the first place that one not use him or her as a mere means, that one respect each as a rational person with his or her own maxims. But beyond that, one may also seek to foster others' plans and maxims by sharing some of their ends.*

- Onora O'Neill, *Matters of Life and Death*.

What exactly does this mean? What sorts of actions does this encourage us to do?

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. It sets fundamental limits on how a person can treat another in the pursuit of his or her own individual, subjective goals like happiness. Of course, understanding these limits requires explanation. In particular, the distinction between treating a person as a means and as an end must be clarified.

This discussion leads O'Neill to make the following distinction between Kantian duties:

Duties of Justice:

Duties of Beneficence: