

# The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant (part 2): Kant's Moral Philosophy

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## I. Morality for Its Own Sake

### A. Introduction

### B. Prefatory Material from Kant's Theoretical Philosophy

1. The *a priori/a posteriori* distinction
2. The Noumena/Phenomena distinction
3. The limits of theoretical Reason and the postulates of practical Reason

### C. Deontology

1. "Axiological" or Value-based ethical systems
2. Deontological or Duty-based ethical systems

Morality as an end-in-itself in Deontological theories

### D. The Good-Will as the Only Unconditionally Good/Worthy Thing

1. All other goods are only *conditionally* good
2. Happiness (as the satisfaction of desires) only *conditionally* good
3. Virtue as the Worthiness of morally permissible Happiness
4. The Good-Will and Morality as selflessly motivated, free of Incentives

## II. The Moral Law

### A. Morality and Motivation: The Good-Will as Respect for the Moral Law

1. Inclination
2. Acting *merely in accordance* with Duty
3. Acting *from duty*
4. Reprise: The Good-Will and Morality as selflessly motivated, free of Incentives
5. Acting with inclination not necessarily wrong
6. Obscurity of our true Motives when we have an Inclination and (allegedly) Respect
7. "Radical Evil" in Kant's late ethical Thought

### B. Morality a priori

1. Morality is *necessarily* binding
2. Morality as *unconditional*

### C. Hypothetical/Categorical Imperatives

1. Hypothetical Imperatives are conditional (and are followed out of inclination)
2. A Categorical Imperative would be unconditional (and could admit of respect)
3. The Moral Law(s) must be Categorical Imperative(s)

### D. [\*Time Permitting\*] Pure Practical Reason and the Categorical Imperative

1. *Pure Practical Reason* or the Will (*Wille*) as legislator of the Categorical Imperative
2. Autonomy v. Heteronomy
3. The Development of Kant's Thoughts about Freedom
4. The Will/Choice Distinction *Wille* [Will] /*Willkur* [Choice]
5. Positive Freedom (of the Will) and Negative Freedom (of Choice)

### III. The Formulations of the Categorical Imperative and Duties

#### A. The First Formulation of the Categorical Imperative

1. Maxims
2. The Categorical Imperative as a *formal* Rule for the adoption/test of all Maxims
3. *FUL* [the Formula of Universal Law]
4. *FLN* [the Formula of the Law of Nature]
5. The element of truth in this

#### B. The Categorical Imperative Generates Perfect Duties

1. Negative or Narrow Duties must be universally followed
2. They *proscribe* what we may never do
3. Bans on Suicide, Lying/Promise Breaking

#### C. The Categorical Imperative Generates *Imperfect* Duties

1. Positive or Wide Duties cannot be universally neglected, but they involve discretion
2. They *prescribe* what we must sometimes do at some point
3. “Ends that are also Duties”: Perfecting Oneself
4. “Ends that are also Duties”: Promoting the Happiness of Others
5. Why not Perfecting Others? Why not promoting the Happiness of Oneself?
6. Kantian Ethics not strictly Altruism, but opposed to self-love

#### D. The Formula of Humanity

1. Humanity as the capacity to choose to accept the moral law (or not)
2. Objectification of one's self or others
3. Humanity as an end-in-itself v. the individual as an end-in-himself

#### E. [\*Time Permitting\*] The Formula of the Realm of Ends

1. The “sumum bonum” or highest good
2. *Practically* justified faith in God as the common author of Natural and Moral Law

#### F. Summation and Points of Reflection

1. Morality is for its own sake; it's not about *you*, neither for nor against your interests
2. Morality requires sacrifice; values threaten virtue (see “Causality vs. Duty”)
3. Morality must be absolute—the element of truth in this

## FORMULATIONS OF THE MORAL LAW<sup>1</sup>

### First Formula

FUL *The Formula of Universal Law*

“Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (4:421)

FLN *The Formula of the Law of Nature*

“So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature” (4:421)

### Second Formula

FH *The Formula of Humanity (as End in Itself)*

“Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means” (4:429)

### Third Formula

FRE *The Formula of the Realm of Ends*

“Act in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends” (4:439)

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1. Translation of Allen Wood.

**Kant's Biography**<sup>2</sup>

- 1724 Kant is born on April 22 in Königsberg, Prussia
- 1730–32 Attends elementary school at *Vorstädter Hospitalschule*
- 1732–40 Attends the Pietist *Collegium Fredericanum*
- 1737 His mother, Anna Regina née Reuter, dies tending to the illness of a sick friend
- 1740–46 Attends the *Albertina* (Königsberg's University); leaves without degree
- 1746 Death of Kant's father
- 1748–54 Works as a private tutor for families in Judtschen, Arnsdorf, and Rautenberg
- 1749 Publishes *True Estimation of Living Forces*
- 1754 Returns to Königsberg; publishes “Whether the Earth Has Changed in Its Revolutions” and “Whether the Earth Is Aging from a Physical Point of View”
- 1755 Receives M.A. for “On Fire” (*Meditationum quarundam de igne succincta delineatio*); earns the right to lecture as *Privatdozent* with *A New Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge*; begins lecturing; publishes *General Natural History of the Heavens*
- 1756 Publishes doctoral dissertation on *Physical Monadology*; three essays on the Lisbon earthquake and an essay on the theory of winds
- 1757 Announces lectures on physical geography
- 1758 Publishes “New Doctrine of Motion and Rest”
- 1759 Publishes “Essay on Optimism”
- 1762 Publishes “The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures
- 1763 Publishes *Only Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God* and “Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy”
- 1764** Declines professorship of poetry; publishes *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and the second-prize-winning essay for the 1762 Berlin Academy competition, ***Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality*** (Moses Mendelssohn wins first prize)
- 1766 Adds the position of sub-librarian at the castle and university library; publishes *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*
- 1768 Publishes “Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space”
- 1769 Declines offer of professorship at Erlangen
- 1770 Declines offer from Jena; appointed Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at Königsberg; defends and publishes inaugural dissertation *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World (De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis)*; beginning of the “Silent Decade”
- 1772 February letter to student and friend Marcus Herz outlines project of a critique of pure reason; begins anthropology lectures; gives up sub-librarian position
- 1775 Essay “On the Different Human Races” announces his anthropology lectures
- 1776 Essay on the educational philosophy of the *Dessau Philanthropinum*
- 1778 Declines professorship at Halle
- 1781** ***Critique of Pure Reason*** published in May
- 1782 First negative review of *Critique* published
- 1783 Responds in *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*
- 1784** Essays on “**The Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View**” and “What Is Enlightenment?”
- 1785** Publishes ***Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals***, review of parts I and II of Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, and essays on “Volcanoes on the Moon,” “The Wrongful Publication of Books,” and (contra Herder) “The Definition of the Concept of a Human Race”

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2. Chronology adapted from Paul Guyer's *Kant* (Routledge, 2006). The three critiques and the other major works that are most important for understanding Kant's moral philosophy and their year of publication are in boldface.

- 1786 Publishes *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, essays on “Conjectural Beginnings of the Human Race” (again, against Herder) and “What Does Orientation in Thinking Mean?”; begins to serve as rector of the university; becomes external member of the Berlin Academy of the Sciences
- 1787** **Second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason***
- 1788** Publishes *Critique of Practical Reason* and “**On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy**”
- 1790** Publishes *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and “On a discovery that is to make all new critique of pure reason dispensable because of an older one” (in response to the polemic of J. A. Eberhard)
- 1791 Publishes “On the Failure of All Attempts at a Theodicy”
- 1792** Publishes essay that will become Part I of the *Religion*
- 1793** Publishes the whole of *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*, essay “**On the Adage: That may be correct in theory but it is of no use in practice**”
- 1794 Prohibited from publishing further on religion; elected to the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg
- 1795** Publishes *Toward Perpetual Peace*
- 1796 Publishes “On the recently supercilious tone in philosophy”; gives final lecture on July 23
- 1797** Publishes *Metaphysics of Morals* and “**On a presumed right to lie from philanthropic motives**”
- 1796/7–
- 1800/1 Works on the unfinished “Transition from the metaphysical principles of natural science to physics” (Known today as the *Opus postumum*; first published only in 1936–1938, and even then, out of sequence)
- 1798 Publishes *The Conflict of the Faculties* and *Anthropology from a Practical Point of View*
- 1799 August 7, Kant’s open letter against Fichte’s *Doctrine of Science*
- 1800 Publication of Kant’s *Logic*, edited by B. G. Jäsche (from his lectures)
- 1802 Publication of Kant’s *Physical Geography*, edited by F. T. Rink (from lectures)
- 1803 Publication of Kant’s *Pedagogy*, edited by Rink (from lectures)
- 1804 Dies on February 12; publication of *What Real Progress has Metaphysics made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?* Edited by Rink