

CHAPTER 2

WRONG IS ALWAYS WRONG: KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 2.1 Analyze Kant's concept of human dignity and how it relates to reason.
- 2.2 Articulate Kant's three statements on the categorical imperative.
- 2.3 Summarize Kant's major theories after reading two selected essays.
- 2.4 Discuss the morality of lying according to Kant.



Is the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) always wrong?
Source: Library of Congress

2.1 THE ATOMIC BOMB AND ASSAULTS ON HUMAN DIGNITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO KANT

An old professor we knew a while back, a Jesuit who taught philosophy at a major university, had a reputation for being an easy grader but also was not the most sociable or friendly person in the department. His teaching assistant got used to the fact that virtually all players on the college's basketball popular team got an A no matter how they actually did on their

exams. But he had a tougher time figuring out why this very nice old man always seemed so sad, never socializing much with other faculty or graduate students, limiting his days to celebrating mass, teaching freshman ethics, and not much else.

Soon, however, the graduate student found out the reason for all the sadness, all the regrets: As a very young man, this Jesuit had not only been a priest and philosopher but also a nuclear physicist of immense promise. And, beginning in 1943, he volunteered his services to his country in World War II and in fact served as one of the hundreds of scientists involved in the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, near Albuquerque, New Mexico.

There, out in the desert and in isolation, where scientists worked on their own on various different elements of the overall war effort, this young physicist helped develop what would become one of the two types of atomic bombs that in 1945 U.S. President Harry Truman decided to drop on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war.



Wrecked framework of the Museum of Science and Industry in Hiroshima, Japan, shortly after the dropping of the first atomic bomb, on August 6, 1945.

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The controversy about that decision remains alive to this day, and the use of nuclear weapons remains a danger to the entire world. But for this man of God, this old professor, finding out what he himself had done devastated him personally. The sheer scale of the killing of innocent people, of vaporizing entire populations even to end a war, in his view was murder—a murder that he himself felt he had committed. It was something he had done that was unforgivable, because there was no possible justification he could claim himself for having done so. His religious training already had taught him that, according to St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, it is wrong to do evil so that good may come. Beyond a theological prohibition on doing evil, however, the old Jesuit knew that his own reason told him that killing the innocent as a means to an end was unforgivable. His own God doubtless forgave him—his religion is clear about forgiveness of sins. By his own reasoning, however, he could never forgive himself.

24 An Examined Life

Are there are some things that reason shows us are just wrong and acts that one may not do no matter what? Are there courses of action that it is simply one's duty to take or not take, with no exceptions? Actions that, as Kant himself put it, entail the very "obliteration of one's dignity as a human being." If so, these would be clear dictates of reason, moral obligations that allow for no gray areas. Wrong is always wrong. That is what Immanuel Kant proposes.

2.2 KANT AND THE DIGNITY OF ALL PERSONS

Reason, which we all have, reveals to us both the equality of all persons and a necessary respect for the human dignity we all have. Showing that respect for others as well as for ourselves and recognizing our duty to do what is right. These are the aims of one of the most influential moral philosophies ever proposed.

While Aristotle's ethics, as we have seen, focus solely on the character of the moral agent, Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy makes the act itself the determining factor in our moral judgment. The traits that make one a good or a bad person are not relevant in making that judgment. What counts is what you do, not who you are.

Kant employs a **deontological** analysis of ethical issues. The useful **neologism**, which Kant himself did not use, combines the Greek word for duty, *deon*, with *logos* or science. It fits: Kant took emotion out of both aesthetic and moral judgments, relying entirely on reason. Deontological ethics focus on the act itself, as opposed to the moral agent or the consequences of the act, when evaluating ethical issues. The common thread that runs through all deontological analysis is the assumption that duty and obligation are primary in ethics. The morally significant value of consequences, the "good life," is ancillary. Because we all are able to give reasons for our actions, moral judgments depend on those reasons. Doing the wrong thing, according to Kant, means not acting according to rational rules of behavior which are necessary and universal.

Along these lines, doing the wrong thing is acting irrationally. By acting immorally, we become less human. Lying, for example, degrades our humanity. Kantian analysis of ethics stresses that moral rules are fundamental to behaving morally. The moral rules are absolute and universal.

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THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY

Something unexpected happened when Harry S. Truman visited England in 1956. The background to the story is simple: It was Truman's decision to drop the new atomic bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and a second bomb on Nagasaki on August 9. Japan surrendered on August 14, and World War II came to an end. After leaving office, like many former presidents, Truman traveled. His trip to England was marked with the usual honors and publicity, until he visited Oxford University. The faculty decided to bestow an honorary doctorate to Truman, something that was not expected to cause any sort of controversy. After all, the 33rd president of the United States could take more than a little credit for the fact that the Nazis did not succeed in conquering England. The degree was Oxford's—and England's—way of saying thank you.

But a young philosophy professor, **Elizabeth Anscombe**, objected. Oxford should not be in the business of rewarding mass murderers, she said, forcing a vote on the issue.

"For men to choose to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder, and murder is one of the worst of human action," she wrote, adding that "with Hiroshima and Nagasaki we are not confronted with a borderline case.

In the bombing of these cities it was certainly decided to kill the innocent as a means to an end." She added as an aside that "a couple of massacres to a man's credit are not exactly reason to show him honor."



President Truman making a fateful decision to use atomic weapons.

Source: Library of Congress



THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY *continued*

Her argument was Kantian, breathtakingly simple. Killing the innocent is murder. And, as we will see, murder is always wrong according to the categorical imperative. Dropping the atomic bombs on those two cities and vaporizing their populations was mass murder. They were not a side effect of battle; they were an act of terror, according to Anscombe. Agreeing with Kant's absolute moral rules, the ends do not justify the means. Even if the consequences were good, say, ending the war, the act itself was wrong. This is an anti-consequentialist, deontological argument. Anscombe refused to entertain the notion that Truman was perhaps courageous in making this tough decision; she thought he was just barbaric. In the next chapter we will see how a utilitarian justification is not only possible but it is found in virtually all the historical literature defending Truman and the American conduct of World War II. But in this case, the categorical imperative is clear. And Truman was clearly wrong.

G.E.M. Anscombe (1919–2001) was born in Limerick, Ireland. She studied at Oxford but also commuted to Cambridge to catch the lectures of Ludwig Wittgenstein. She became Wittgenstein's friend and translator and later his literary executor. Her position on the atomic bomb was carefully considered. She was not a pacifist, and she was hardly naive. Anscombe had lived through World War II, and she had seen firsthand the brutal realities of the Blitz—a period of intense bombing of the United Kingdom by Nazi German forces—so she was not an academic living in some isolated ivory tower. As a Catholic philosopher, she also largely accepted her church's centuries-old Just War Theory, that is, a case made by the likes of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas to justify fighting wars since the beginning of Christianity. But Anscombe thought the atomic bomb crossed the line. Many people have agreed since then and perhaps just as many disagree.

Would you have given Truman that honorary degree?

2.3 THE FORMULATIONS OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Kant's supreme moral principle, and his most influential contribution to moral philosophy, is the **categorical imperative**. It is based on the intrinsic dignity of all human beings, something Kant believes our reason reveals to us. Kant states several formulations or syntheses of the categorical imperative in his monumental *Grounding for the Metaphysic of Morals*. We will consider what are traditionally known as the three formulations. The first formulation of the categorical imperative, also known as the formulation of a universal law of nature, says this:

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

If you think this sounds a lot like the Golden Rule, to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, you are partially right. Kant's version is tighter and formal—and universal no matter what the context. You want everyone to do unto others, including yourself, as you would have them do unto you. The idea is that our actions should be such that we would be willing to make them universal, that is, universalizable for everyone including all others in our same circumstance. In his other formulations of the categorical imperative, which very much supports the first, Kant says:

- "Always act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of others, in every case as an end in itself, never only as means to an end."
- "*Every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends.*"

This third articulation, which Kant also believes to be a result of our reason, has parallels in a much later moral philosophy called **existentialism**. Existentialism, discussed in a later chapter, believes that when you choose you are in fact choosing for everyone.

As is the case with many systematic philosophers from Aristotle to Sartre, it is difficult to consider any particular aspect of Kant's philosophy separately from his entire philosophical system. To do so will often result in a hopelessly distorted view, one that bears little resemblance to what Kant originally stated in his works. In fact, many

contemporary bioethicists have latched on to key phrases of Kant's moral philosophy to support their own views, but they often seem to have misinterpreted his philosophy.

Simply citing the categorical imperative or the principle of humanity is insufficient grounds to resolve an ethical dilemma. Such a move does not establish that patients have particular rights, for example, nor does it demonstrate that physicians have specific responsibilities or obligations. From a Kantian perspective, certain acts such as abortion, euthanasia, or assisted suicide are either always permissible or never allowed depending on their compatibility with the categorical imperative.

MORAL PHILOSOPHERS: IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804)

The most important and influential moral philosopher since Aristotle, Immanuel Kant was born on April 22, 1724, in Königsberg, Prussia. He died there in 1804, never having traveled much and seldom attracting controversy. In his quiet way, the lifelong bachelor transformed philosophy. Kant questioned the necessary conditions of experience, and he explored our possibilities of knowledge of that reality in his elusive, difficult 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*. That book alone made him one of the most significant philosophers of the modern era. He analyzed human experience and the way we organize it in terms of how that reality appears to us but also how it really is—a radically precise reassessment of a problem that goes back to Plato and Aristotle. His contributions to ethics, his search for one ultimate principle to guide morals, culminated in his 1785 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* and continued as he explained the rational justification for ethical judgments in his 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*. The 1790 *Critique of Judgment* followed. For Kant, reason is the guiding principle of morals.

Kant led a quiet life, and he was methodical as his writings might suggest. He stuck to his daily constitutional schedule so consistently that, so the story goes, housewives in Königsberg would set their clocks by him. He began lecturing at the University of Königsberg in 1755, finally got tenure as professor of logic and metaphysics in 1770, and soon afterward wrote his first *Critique*. Only his religious views caused a few ripples in conservative Prussia. "Our age is," Kant wrote in the introduction to his first *Critique*, also taking a swipe at political philosophy "an age of criticism, and to criticism all our beliefs must submit. Religion in all its holiness, and the state in its majesty, cannot exempt themselves from its tribunal without arousing suspicion against themselves." Kant thought that the question of God could not be answered rationally, so in 1792 the king of Prussia forbade his lecturing or writing on religion. Kant continued teaching in Königsberg until he retired in 1796, shortly after the publication of his visionary 1795 political work *Perpetual Peace*.

Kant's categorical imperative guarantees fairness and recognizes human dignity by using reason to ask, quite simply: "What if everybody did this?" and "How would you like if it were done to you?" If you are not willing for everyone to do as you are doing, then you are contradicting the categorical imperative if you in fact go ahead and do it. Murder, theft, making false promises, and lying, for example, are always wrong according to Kant.

Rationality, according to Kant, is not aimed at the individual good or self-interest. When we act in such a way that our action is not such that we would turn it into a universal law, we are contradicting ourselves. For Kant, one is rational and autonomous if and only if one is acting in accordance with the universal rules of behavior, which are compatible with the categorical imperative. If an individual is acting only from what he believes is his prudential self-interest, and in a way that is not compatible with the categorical imperative, then he is neither rational nor free in Kant's view. The following passage, taken from *The Foundation of the Metaphysic of Morals*, sums up his view on autonomy: "The Concept of Freedom is the Key to the explanation of the Autonomy of the Will. WILL is a kind of causality belonging to living beings in so far as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient, independently of alien causes *determining* it; just as *natural necessity* is the property that the causality of all non-rational (irrational) beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes."

RATIONALITY AND MORAL AUTONOMY

For Kant, rational wills are free, whereas irrational wills are not. A necessary condition of one's acting autonomously is that one be rational. On his view, we must postulate ourselves as being "free," in a metaphysical sense, if we are to consider ourselves as moral agents. In support of this interpretation, consider the following passage, "the idea of freedom and the concept of autonomy are now inseparably combined, and with the concept of autonomy the universal principle of morality, which in idea is the ground of all actions of rational beings, just as the law of nature is the ground of all appearances." Kant says that all of our actions, ideally, would be performed in accordance with the "universal principle of morality"—the categorical imperative. If individuals act in accordance with the categorical imperative, then they are autonomous; when they don't act in accordance with the categorical imperative, they are not autonomous.

Moral autonomy is exercised when our actions are arrived at by means of reason and the maxim of the action is compatible with the categorical imperative. The idea is that our actions, to be considered rational, must be universalizable in accordance with the categorical imperative. Kant believes that reason shows us that to go against that categorical imperative and act in a way that we would not want others to act is an insult to human dignity. It should be noted that rationality is not aimed at the individual good or our self-interest.

LYING OR NOT: THE CASE OF THE MURDERER AT THE DOOR

According to the categorical imperative, lying is clearly just as wrong as it is irrational. Always. There are strong objections to this absolute prohibition on lying, and the cleverest of them came in Kant's lifetime, offered by the Franco-Swiss novelist and philosopher Benjamin Constant in 1797. What if there is a murderer at your door, candidly telling you that he plans to do away with your best friend—who happens to be upstairs in your house. "Where is he?" the murderer asks. Should you tell the truth or lie, say, tell the murderer that your friend left town? The answer would seem obvious to most sane people—of course you should lie. Surprisingly, Kant answered that even in this case, one has no option but to tell the truth. And his was no quick and shallow answer, either. Kant wrote a book titled *On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Motives of Humanity*.

IS KANT RIGHT THAT LYING IS ALWAYS WRONG?

Is it possible to lie, ever, and still be guided by the categorical imperative?

Kant thought not, but can you think of a way? Here's a hint: What universal law, what maxim, could you be following if you lied?

The categorical imperative indeed forbids one to lie in every circumstance, Kant thought, even if telling the truth in this case would lead to a murderer's success. It is simply and always one's duty to tell the truth. Lying to the murderer would be treating him as a means to an end, it would be insulting the human dignity of the one being lied to, and it also would be acting in a way contrary to the willingness to make this particular action a universal law. In other words, if lying is wrong for everyone all the time, how can it possibly be right for you? Our actions must be based on a maxim that we can 'will to be universal', and, if so, it is our duty to do the right thing. It is our duty

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to tell the truth. The categorical imperative requires that you never lie, no exceptions. Later neo-Kantians, in particular, Elizabeth Anscombe, tried to alleviate what seems like an obvious flaw in Kant's moral philosophy on this moral dilemma. Still, just because the right thing to do is difficult, it does not follow that it is not right. It merely means that it is difficult.

The morality of an action is independent of what we may think about the action. The categorical imperative in fact reveals to us whether an action is rational or not. A moral agent is rational and therefore is duty bound to act only as if according to a maxim that he or she would will for all other rational agents to act in the same way.

Would You Fry the Baby?

Suppose there's a 10-month-old baby visiting your class today, an adorable little tyke named Boomer who is in his young mother's arms in the front row. All of a sudden, 10 terrorists armed with automatic weapons burst into the classroom, take you hostage, and make this demand:

"We will kill every single person in this room, unless you take that baby sitting there, carry him across the street to a fast food restaurant, put him in the basket where French fries are made, and fry him."

Would you fry Boomer?

The example is not crazy. In fact, thousands of babies were fried in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and some are likely being fried by a drone attack somewhere in the world as you read this. But making the example personal was the philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe's idea. "Come now," she wrote in 1957, "if you had to choose between boiling one baby and letting some frightful disaster befall a thousand people—or a million people if a thousand is not enough—what would you do?"

So, would you fry Boomer?

PROBLEMS IN APPLYING THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

There are three central issues raised by employing the first version of the categorical imperative to evaluate the ethical permissibility of an action:

1. There is a question of proof. Is the categorical imperative a valid moral principle? This is important because utilitarians (and others, as we will begin to see in chapter 4) will simply challenge the truth of the principle.

2. Often it is not clear how to apply the principle to specific ethical issues. How can one tell whether anyone can rationally *will* that the maxim of his or her contemplated act.
3. Two reasonable people can employ two different maxims for the same act.

First, the truth of the categorical imperative is not self-evident. Nevertheless, Kant and contemporary Kantians argue that it is a correct moral principle that emerges from our use of reason. Generally, philosophers don't agree on much, and the competing theories discussed in the text-book bring this to light. Despite Kant's claims, one cannot simply assume that the categorical imperative is binding in all ethical circumstances, for that would beg the question against rival moral theories that may just as reasonably reach different moral conclusions.

Second, it is not clear how to apply the categorical imperative in many cases. Kant provides notoriously few examples of the application of the principle. Besides what he takes to paradigm cases such as lying or suicide, he says very little. Even so, what he does say, particularly regarding the ethical permissibility of suicide, calls into question reliance on the categorical imperative in a number of problematic ethical situations. In the case of suicide, Kant maintains that a desire to end one's life is irrational and therefore wrong, as we will see in a later chapter. Yet it is irrational only if you make several additional assumptions. First, it is irrational if the maxim of the action actually violates the categorical imperative, and, second, if all actions that violate the categorical imperative are irrational. Whether this is the case or not is debatable. It is certainly possible to imagine particular circumstances where an individual would really be better off dead.

As for the third point, different people could employ different maxims as they consider the ethical permissibility of an action. A key problem for Kantians is that for the very same act, there can be many different maxims, some of which are universalizable and some of which are not. If this is true, then it will be both morally permissible and morally impermissible to perform some actions, depending on the maxim of one's act, to include placebo controls or to randomize.



QUICK LOOK: MAKING A KANTIAN ARGUMENT

The act itself, not the consequences of the act or the person performing the act in question, is the key element in any moral decision according to Kant. To make a Kantian argument—to decide if an action is right or wrong—you ask these questions:

- Am I acting as if according to a maxim that I would at the same time will to be come a universal law?
- Am I treating humanity, in my own person as well in that of others, as an end in itself and never as a means to an end?

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Application of the categorical imperative, as we have seen, is complicated. The second version of the categorical imperative is often discussed when considering the rights of persons. In the following chapters, we will examine how, for example, the rights of patients, including the right to assisted suicide, will face powerful opposition from Kantian arguments: You cannot use even yourself as a means to an end, even if that end is actually the end of your own suffering.

Kant calls this a “supreme practical law,” meaning this is the principle of humanity: *Always act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, in every case as an end in itself, never as a means to an end only.* This statement of the categorical imperative is today the main argument against, for instance, assisted suicide. One cannot treat a person as a means to an end, not even yourself, and not even if the end in question is that of ending your own pain from a terminal disease. Suicide is, following this reasoning, always wrong and tantamount to murder.

Interpreting the notion that a person should never be used as a “means only” can lead to considerable disagreement. Some philosophers argue that one would violate such a principle when paying for gas, as you are using the cashier as a means to an end (buying gas) as opposed to a person in his or her own right. More charitable interpretations also can lead to a problem of application of the theory.

Still, the categorical imperative is binding on all persons, and Kant's recognition of diversity and commonality in humanity is not to be underrated. Consistency is the key here: If a moral law is to be valid, reason tells us it must be valid for all people at all times. For Kant, moral rules are absolute. The law is for everyone. No one is special; no one is an exception. Whatever you choose to do, you have to ask yourself what rule can be constructed by that act; and if you are not willing to say that you are fine with everyone following that rule all the time, then you may not do so either. Moral rules, according to Kant, are absolute. They are meant for everyone, always. There are no gray areas. The consequences of your act do not come into the argument, as they will later for the utilitarians. And the kind of person you are, virtuous or otherwise, also does not matter in judging an action right or wrong. Only the act counts, no matter what the consequences, no matter who you are.

2.4 READINGS IN KANTIAN THEORY

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) here discusses the will and explains the most important principle of his moral philosophy, the categorical imperative, the ultimate principle from which all human beings derive their duties and obligations.



READING: THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE AND THE GOOD WILL from GROUNDWORK FOR THE METAPHYSIC OF MORALS

As my concern here is with moral philosophy, I limit the question suggested to this: Whether it is not of the utmost necessity to construct a pure thing which is only empirical and which belongs to anthropology? for that such a philosophy must be possible is evident from the common idea of duty and of the moral laws. Everyone must admit that if a law is to have moral force, i.e., to be the basis of an obligation, it must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the precept, "Thou shalt not lie," is not valid for men alone, as if other rational beings had no need to observe it; and so with all the other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in

From *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals* by Immanuel Kant, Translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, 1785.

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the conception of pure reason; and although any other precept which is founded on principles of mere experience may be in certain respects universal, yet in as far as it rests even in the least degree on an empirical basis, perhaps only as to a motive, such a precept, while it may be a practical rule, can never be called a moral law.

Thus not only are moral laws with their principles essentially distinguished from every other kind of practical knowledge in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests wholly on its pure part. When applied to man, it does not borrow the least thing from the knowledge of man himself (anthropology), but gives laws a priori to him as a rational being. No doubt these laws require a judgment sharpened by experience, in order on the one hand to distinguish in what cases they are applicable, and on the other to procure for them access to the will of the man and effectual influence on conduct; since man is acted on by so many inclinations that, though capable of the idea of a practical pure reason, he is not so easily able to make it effective in concrete in his life.

In order that an action should be morally good, it is not enough that it conform to the moral law, but it must also be done for the sake of the law, otherwise that conformity is only very contingent and uncertain; since a principle which is not moral, although it may now and then produce actions conformable to the law, will also often produce actions which contradict it. Now it is only a pure philosophy that we can look for the moral law in its purity and genuineness (and, in a practical matter, this is of the utmost consequence): we must, therefore, begin with pure philosophy, and without it there cannot be any moral philosophy at all. That which mingles these pure principles with the empirical does not deserve the name of philosophy; much less does it deserve that of moral philosophy, since by this confusion it even spoils the purity of morals themselves, and counteracts its own end.

The metaphysics of morals has to examine the idea and the principles of a possible pure will, and not the acts and conditions of human volition generally, which for the most part are drawn from psychology. It is true that moral laws and duty are spoken of in the general moral philosophy (contrary indeed to all fitness). But this is no objection, for in this respect also the authors of that science remain true to their idea of it; they do not distinguish the motives which are prescribed as such by reason alone altogether a priori, and which are properly moral, from the empirical motives which the understanding raises to general conceptions merely by

comparison of experiences; but, without noticing the difference of their sources, and looking on them all as homogeneous, they consider only their greater or less amount. It is in this way they frame their notion of obligation, which, though anything but moral, is all that can be attained in a philosophy which passes no judgment at all on the origin of all possible practical concepts, whether they are a priori, or only a posteriori.

Intending to publish hereafter a metaphysics of morals, I issue in the first instance these fundamental principles. Indeed there is properly no other foundation for it than the critical examination of a pure practical Reason; just as that of metaphysics is the critical examination of the pure speculative reason. But in the first place the former is not so absolutely necessary as the latter, because in moral concerns human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and completeness, even in the commonest understanding, while on the contrary in its theoretic but pure use it is wholly dialectical; and in the second place if the critique of a pure practical reason is to be complete, it must be possible at the same time to show its identity with the speculative reason in a common principle, for it can ultimately be only one and the same reason which has to be distinguished merely in its application. I could not, however, bring it to such completeness here, without introducing considerations of a wholly different kind, which would be perplexing to the reader.

Since a metaphysics of morals, in spite of the discouraging title, is yet capable of being presented in popular form, and one adapted to the common understanding, I find it useful to separate from it this preliminary treatise on its fundamental principles, in order that I may not hereafter have need to introduce these necessarily subtle discussions into a book of a more simple character.

The present treatise is, however, nothing more than the investigation and establishment of the supreme principle of morality, and this alone constitutes a study complete in itself and one which ought to be kept apart from every other moral investigation. No doubt my conclusions on this weighty question, which has hitherto been very unsatisfactorily examined, would receive much light from the application of the same principle to the whole system, and would be greatly confirmed by the adequacy which it exhibits throughout; but I must forego this advantage, which indeed would be after all more gratifying than useful, since the easy applicability of a principle and its apparent adequacy give no very certain proof of its soundness, but rather inspire a certain partiality,

which prevents us from examining and estimating it strictly in itself and without regard to consequences.

Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical. Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good. It is the same with the gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honor, even health, and the general well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called happiness, inspire pride, and often presumption, if there is not a good will to correct the influence of these on the mind, and with this also to rectify the whole principle of acting and adapt it to its end. ...

The Good Will. A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, nay even of the sum total of all inclinations.

Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfavor of fortune, or the niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature, this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. ...

It would be, now in a being which has reason and a will, if the proper object of nature were its conservation, its welfare, in a word, its happiness, and then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose. For all the actions which the creature has to perform with a view to this purpose, and the whole rule of its conduct, would be far more surely prescribed to it by instinct, and that end would have been attained thereby much more certainly than it ever can be by reason....

Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to the conception of laws, that is according to principles, i.e., have a will. Since the deduction of actions from principles requires reason, the will is nothing but practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, then the actions of such a being which are recognized as objectively necessary are subjectively necessary also, i.e., the will is a faculty to choose that only which reason independent of inclination recognizes as practically necessary, i.e., as good. But if reason of itself does not sufficiently determine the will, if the latter is subject also to subjective conditions (particular impulses) which do not always coincide with the objective conditions; in a word, if the will does not in itself completely accord with reason (which is actually the case with men), then the actions which objectively are recognized as necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will according to objective laws is obligation, that is to say, the relation of the objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is conceived as the determination of the will of a rational being by principles of reason, but which the will from its nature does not of necessity follow.

A perfectly good will would therefore be equally subject to objective laws (viz., laws of good), but could not be conceived as obliged thereby to act lawfully, because of itself from its subjective constitution it can only be determined by the conception of good. Therefore no imperatives hold for the Divine will, or in general for a holy will; ought is here out of place, because the volition is already of itself necessarily in unison with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulae to express the relation of objective laws of all volition to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, e. g., the human will. Now all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, i.e., as objectively necessary.

Since every practical law represents a possible action as good and, on this account, for a subject who is practically determinable by reason, necessary, all imperatives are formulae determining an action which is necessary according to the principle of a will good in some respects. If now the action is good only as a means to something else, then the imperative is hypothetical; if it is conceived as good in itself and consequently as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, then

it is categorical. Thus the imperative declares what action possible by me would be good and presents the practical rule in relation to a will which does not forthwith perform an action simply because it is good, whether because the subject does not always know that it is good, or because, even if it know this, yet its maxims might be opposed to the objective principles of practical reason.

Accordingly the hypothetical imperative only says that the action is good for some purpose, possible or actual. In the first case it is a problematical, in the second an assertorial practical principle. The categorical imperative which declares an action to be objectively necessary in itself without reference to any purpose, i.e., without any other end, is valid as an apodictic (practical) principle. Whatever is possible only by the power of some rational being may also be conceived as a possible purpose of some will; and therefore the principles of action as regards the means necessary to attain some possible purpose are in fact infinitely numerous. All sciences have a practical part, consisting of problems expressing that some end is possible for us and of imperatives directing how it may be attained. These may, therefore, be called in general imperatives of skill. Here there is no question whether the end is rational and good, but only what one must do in order to attain it...

If it were only equally easy to give a definite conception of happiness, the imperatives of prudence would correspond exactly with those of skill, and would likewise be analytical. For in this case as in that, it could be said: "Whoever wills the end, wills also (according to the dictate of reason necessarily) the indispensable means thereto which are in his power." But, unfortunately, the notion of happiness is so indefinite that although every man wishes to for. As yet he never can say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills. The reason of this is that all the elements which belong to the notion of happiness are altogether empirical, i.e., they must be borrowed from experience, and nevertheless the idea of happiness requires an absolute whole, a maximum of welfare in my present and all future circumstances.

Now it is impossible that the most clear-sighted and at the same time most powerful being (supposed finite) should frame to himself a definite conception of what he really wills in this. Does he will riches, how much anxiety, envy, and snares might he not thereby draw upon his shoulders? Does he will knowledge and discernment, perhaps it might prove to be only an eye so much the sharper to show him so much the more fearfully

the evils that are now concealed from him, and that cannot be avoided, or to impose more wants on his desires, which already give him concern enough. Would he have long life? Who guarantees to him that it would not be a long misery? Would he at least have health? How often has uneasiness of the body restrained from excesses into which perfect health would have allowed one to fall? And so on. In short, he is unable, on any principle, to determine with certainty what would make him truly happy; because to do so he would need to be omniscient.

Our moral duties. We cannot therefore act on any definite principles to secure happiness, but only on empirical counsels, e. g. of regimen, frugality, courtesy, reserve, etc., which experience teaches do, on the average, most promote well-being. Hence it follows that the imperatives of prudence do not, strictly speaking, command at all, that is, they cannot present actions objectively as practically necessary; that they are rather to be regarded as counsels than precepts of reason, that the problem to determine certainly and universally what action would promote the happiness of a rational being is completely insoluble, and consequently no imperative respecting it is possible which should, in the strict sense, command to do what makes happy; because happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting solely on empirical grounds, and it is vain to expect that these should define an action by which one could attain the totality of a series of consequences which is really endless. This imperative of prudence would however be an analytical proposition if we assume that the means to happiness could be certainly assigned; for it is distinguished from the imperative of skill only by this, that in the latter the end is merely possible, in the former it is given; as however both only ordain the means to that which we supposed to be willed as an end, it follows that the imperative which ordains the willing of the means to him who wills the end is in both cases analytical. Thus there is no difficulty in regard to the possibility of an imperative of this kind either.

On the other hand, the question how the imperative of morality is possible, is undoubtedly one, the only one, demanding a solution, as this is not at all hypothetical, and the objective necessity which it presents cannot rest on any hypothesis, as is the case with the hypothetical imperatives. Only here we must never leave out of consideration that we cannot make out by any example, in other words empirically, whether there is such an imperative at all, but it is rather to be feared that all those which seem to be categorical may yet be at bottom hypothetical. For instance, when the precept is: "Thou shalt not promise deceitfully"; and it is assumed that the

necessity of this is not a mere counsel to avoid some other evil, so that it should mean: "Thou shalt not make a lying promise, lest if it become known thou should destroy thy credit," but that an action of this kind must be regarded as evil in itself, so that the imperative of the prohibition is categorical; then we cannot show with certainty in any example that the will was determined merely by the law, without any other spring of action, although it may appear to be so. For it is always possible that fear of disgrace, perhaps also obscure dread of other dangers, may have a secret influence on the will....

Secondly, as regards necessary duties, or those of strict obligation, towards others: He who is thinking of making a lying promise to others will see at once that he would be using another man merely as a mean, without the latter containing at the same time the end in himself. For he whom I propose by such a promise to use for my own purposes cannot possibly assent to my mode of acting towards him and, therefore, cannot himself contain the end of this action. This violation of the principle of humanity in other men is more obvious if we take in examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others. For then it is clear that he who transgresses the rights of men intends to use the person of others merely as a means, without considering that as rational beings they ought always to be esteemed also as ends, that is, as beings who must be capable of containing in themselves the end of the very same action....

Thirdly, as regards contingent (meritorious) duties to oneself: It is not enough that the action does not violate humanity in our own person as an end in itself, it must also harmonize with it. Now there are in humanity capacities of greater perfection, which belong to the end that nature has in view in regard to humanity in ourselves as the subject: to neglect these might perhaps be consistent with the maintenance of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the advancement of this end. Fourthly, as regards meritorious duties towards others: The natural end which all men have is their own happiness. Now humanity might indeed subsist, although no one should contribute anything to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally withdraw anything from it; but after all this would only harmonize negatively not positively with humanity as an end in itself, if everyone does not also endeavor, as far as in him lies, to forward the ends of others....

With this we come to the third formulation of the principle, namely, in the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislating

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will. For although a will which is subject to laws may be attached to this law by means of an interest, yet a will which is itself a supreme lawgiver so far as it is such cannot possibly depend on any interest, since a will so dependent would itself still need another law restricting the interest of its self-love by the condition that it should be valid as universal law. Thus the principle that every human will is a will which in all its maxims gives universal laws...

Looking back now on all previous attempts to discover the principle of morality, we need not wonder why they all failed. It was seen that man was bound to laws by duty, but it was not observed that the laws to which he is subject are only those of his own giving, though at the same time they are universal, and that he is only bound to act in conformity with his own will; a will, however, which is designed by nature to give universal laws. For when one has conceived man only as subject to a law (no matter what), then this law required some interest, either by way of attraction or constraint, since it did not originate as a law from his own will, but this will was according to a law obliged by something else to act in a certain manner. Now by this necessary consequence all the labor spent in finding a supreme principle of duty was irrevocably lost. For men never elicited duty, but only a necessity of acting from a certain interest. Whether this interest was private or otherwise, in any case the imperative must be conditional and could not by any means be capable of being a moral command.

I will therefore call this the principle of autonomy of the will, in contrast with every other which I accordingly reckon as heteronomy. The conception of the will of every rational being as one which must consider itself as giving in all the maxims of its will universal laws, so as to judge itself and its actions from this point of view- this conception leads to another which depends on it and is very fruitful, namely that of a kingdom of ends. By a kingdom I understand the union of different rational beings in a system by common laws. Now since it is by laws that ends are determined as regards their universal validity, hence, if we abstract from the personal differences of rational beings and likewise from all the content of their private ends, we shall be able to conceive all ends combined in a systematic whole (including both rational beings as ends in themselves, and also the special ends which each may propose to himself), that is to say, we can conceive a kingdom of ends, which on the preceding principles is possible. For all rational beings come under the law that each of them must treat itself and all others never merely as means, but in every

case at the same time as ends in themselves. Hence results a systematic union of rational being by common objective laws, i.e., a kingdom which may be called a kingdom of ends, since what these laws have in view is just the relation of these beings to one another as ends and means. It is certainly only an ideal.

A rational being belongs as a member to the kingdom of ends when, although giving universal laws in it, he is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as sovereign when, while giving laws, he is not subject to the will of any other. A rational being must always regard himself as giving laws either as member or as sovereign in a kingdom of ends which is rendered possible by the freedom of will. He cannot, however, maintain the latter position merely by the maxims of his will, but only in case he is a completely independent being without wants and with unrestricted power adequate to his will.

“All rational beings come under the law that each of them must treat itself and all others never merely as means, but in every case at the same time as ends in themselves.”

Immanuel Kant

Morality consists then in the reference of all action to the legislation which alone can render a kingdom of ends possible. This legislation must be capable of existing in every rational being and of emanating from his will, so that the principle of this will is never to act on any maxim which could not without contradiction be also a universal law and, accordingly, always so to act that the will could at the same time regard itself as giving in its maxims universal laws. If now the maxims of rational beings are not by their own nature coincident with this objective principle, then the necessity of acting on it is called practical necessitation (i.e., duty). Duty does not apply to the sovereign in the kingdom of ends, but it does to every member of it and to all in the same degree....

All maxims, in fact, have:

- I. A form, consisting in universality; and in this view the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus, that the maxims must be so chosen as if they were to serve as universal laws of nature.

2. A matter, namely, an end, and here the formula says that the rational being, as it is an end by its own nature and therefore an end in itself, must in every maxim serve as the condition limiting all merely relative and arbitrary ends.
3. A complete characterization of all maxims by means of that formula, namely, that all maxims ought by their own legislation to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as with a kingdom of nature. There is a progress here in the order of the categories of unity of the form of the will (its universality), plurality of the matter (the objects, i.e., the ends), and totality of the system of these. In forming our moral judgment of actions, it is better to proceed always on the strict method and start from the general formula of the categorical imperative: Act according to a maxim which can at the same time make itself a universal law. If, however, we wish to gain an entrance for the moral law, it is very useful to bring one and the same action under the three specified conceptions, and thereby as far as possible to bring it nearer to intuition....

The Categorical Imperative. We can now end where we started at the beginning, namely, with the conception of a will unconditionally good. That will is absolutely good which cannot be evil- in other words, whose maxim, if made a universal law, could never contradict itself. This principle, then, is its supreme law: *Act only as if according to a maxim which can at the same time be willed to be a universal laws of nature.* This is the sole condition under which a will can never contradict itself; and such an imperative is categorical. Since the validity of the will as a universal law for possible actions is analogous to the universal connection of the existence of things by general laws, which is the formal notion of nature in general, the categorical imperative can also be expressed thus: *"So act as if your maxim were to serve likewise as the universal law for all rational beings."* A kingdom of ends is thus only possible on the analogy of a kingdom of nature, the former however only by maxims, which is self-imposed rules, the latter only by the laws of efficient causes acting under necessitation from without. Nevertheless, although the system of nature is looked upon as a machine, yet so far as it has reference to rational beings as its ends, it is given on this account the name of a kingdom of nature. Now such a kingdom of ends would be actually realized by means of maxims conforming to the canon which the categorical imperative prescribes to all rational beings, if they were universally followed.

But although a rational being, even if he punctually follows this maxim himself, cannot reckon upon all others being therefore true to the same, nor expect that the kingdom of nature and its orderly arrangements shall be in harmony with him as a fitting member, so as to form a kingdom of ends to which he himself contributes, that is to say, that it shall favor his expectation of happiness, still that law: "**Act only as if according to a maxim of a member of a merely possible kingdom of ends legislating in it universally,**" remains in its full force, inasmuch as it commands categorically. And it is just in this that the paradox lies; that the mere dignity of man as a rational creature, without any other end or advantage to be attained thereby, in other words, respect for a mere idea, should yet serve as an inflexible precept of the will, and that it is precisely in this independence of the maxim on all such springs of action that its sublimity consists; and it is this that makes every rational subject worthy to be a legislative member in the kingdom of ends: for otherwise he would have to be conceived only as subject to the physical law of his wants...

"Act only as if according to a maxim which can at the same time be willed to be a universal law."

Immanuel Kant

A will whose maxims necessarily coincide with the laws of autonomy is a holy will, good absolutely. The dependence of a will not absolutely good on the principle of autonomy (moral necessitation) is obligation. This, then, cannot be applied to a holy being. The objective necessity of actions from obligation is called duty. From what has just been said, it is easy to see how it happens that, although the conception of duty implies subjection to the law, we yet ascribe a certain dignity and sublimity to the person who fulfills all his duties. There is not, indeed, any sublimity in him, so far as he is subject to the moral law; but inasmuch as in regard to that very law he is likewise a legislator, and on that account alone subject to it, he has sublimity. We have also shown above that neither fear nor inclination, but simply respect for the law, is the spring which can give actions a moral worth.

Our own will, so far as we suppose it to act only under the condition that its maxims are potentially universal laws, this ideal will which is possible to us is the proper object of respect; and the dignity of humanity consists just in this capacity of being universally legislative, though with the condition that it is itself subject to this same legislation.

The Autonomy of the Will as the Supreme Principle of Morality
Autonomy of the will is that property of it by which it is a law to itself (independently

of any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy then is: "Always so to choose that the same volition shall comprehend the maxims of our choice as a universal law."

Is it always wrong to lie, even if it means saving someone's life? Kant took the question seriously, discussed the dilemma at length, and came up with an infamously surprising answer in this selection from his writings.



READING: CONCERNING A PRETENDED RIGHT TO LIE FROM MOTIVES OF HUMANITY Translated from the German of Immanuel Kant, by A.E. KROEGER.

In the work, "*France in the Year 1797*," Sixth Part, No. 1, "*Concerning Political Reactions*," by Benjamin Constant, the following passage occurs on page 123:

"The moral principle, that it is a duty to tell the truth, would, if taken unconditionally- and separately, make all society an impossibility. Of this we have a proof in the very immediate consequences which a German philosopher has drawn from this principle; he going so far as to maintain, that a lie-told to a murderer, who asks us whether a friend of ours, whom he is persecuting, has not hidden himself in our house-would be a crime."

On page 124, the French philosopher refutes this principle in the following manner:

"It is a duty to tell the truth. The conception of duty is inseparable from that of right or law. A duty is that which corresponds in one being to the rights of another. Where there are no rights there are no duties. Hence it is a duty- to tell the truth, but a duty only towards him who has a right to the truth. But no man has a right to a truth which harms others."

The first error, lies here in the proposition "*that it is a duty to tell the truth, which we owe only to him who has a right to the truth.*"

It is to be remarked, first, that the expression "to have a right to a truth" is a phrase without any sense. One ought rather to say that man has a right to his own veracity, i.e. to the subjective truth in his person. For that I have a right objectively to a truth means: I depend-altogether as in the mine

From *Motives of Humanity* by Immanuel Kant & A.E. Kroeger, Translator, 1890.

Wrong Is Always Wrong: Kant's Categorical Imperative 47

and thine-upon my *will* whether a given proposition is to be true or false; which would establish a strange logic.

Now the first question is, whether a man has the authority, or the right, to be untruthful in cases where he cannot escape answering by either Yes or No. The second question is, whether he is not even obliged to be untruthful in that statement, which an unjust compulsion forces him to make, for the purpose of preventing a threatened crime to be committed upon either him or another.

Truthfulness in statements which we cannot avoid making is the formal duty which each one owes to all men, no matter how great a disadvantage may result therefrom to him or to another; and although I inflict no wrong upon the person who unjustly compels a statement from me, by falsifying it, I yet by such a falsification-which may, therefore, be also called a lie, though not in a legal sense-commit a general wrong. Namely, in this: I do all in my power to bring about a state of things wherein no statement whatever any longer finds belief, hence wherein all rights based upon agreements crumble away and lose their power, which is a wrong committed upon mankind in general.

Hence the lie, defined simply as a wilful untrue statement made to another man, needs not the additional definition that it must inflict harm upon another, as the lawyers define it: *mendacium est falsiloquium in prejudicium alteris*. For it always hurts another; and if not another man, at least mankind in general by making the source of all right useless

This good-humored lie may, however, become punishable, by accident (*casus*), under civil law, since that which escapes punishment merely by accident can also be adjudged a wrong by external laws. For instance: if you by telling a lie have prevented some one, who intended to commit murder, from the deed, then *you* are legally responsible for all the consequences that may arise from your lie; whereas, if you keep strictly to the truth, public justice can prefer no charge against you, let the unforeseen results be what they may. It is quite possible, that, after you have honestly replied to the murderer, upon his asking whether his intended victim is in your house, by saying Yes, the person may have escaped from your house unobserved and thus avoided the murderer, in which case the deed would be prevented; where as, if you had told a lie and said that the person was not in your house, whilst he has really escaped-although unknown to you-and the murderer had met and killed him, you could justly be charged

with the death of the victim. For if you had stated the truth to the best of your knowledge, the murderer, in looking up his victim in your house, might have been caught by the arrival of some of your neighbors, and the deed might thus have been prevented. Hence whosoever *lies-no matter* :with what good intention is legally amenable to and must suffer the consequences of his lie before a civil tribunal, however unforeseen these consequences may have been. For truthfulness is a duty which must be considered as the basis of all duties that are based upon agreements, the law of which agreements would become utterly uncertain and useless if the least exception were admitted.

Hence it is a holy-unconditionally commanding, and by no conveniences to be limited-Imperative of reason to be *truth-ful-that* is, honest-in all our statements. Quite just and at the same time correct is M. Constant's remark concerning the decial of such strict principles, of which it is said that they lose themselves in impracticable ideas, and should, therefore, be discarded. He says :

"Whenever a principle, that has been proved to be true, seems to be inapplicable, it is because we do not know the *middle principle*, which contains the means of application."

He cites the doctrine of Equality, as forming the first link of the social chain, thus :

"No man can be bound by other laws than those which he has assisted to frame. Nevertheless, although in a very limited society this principle can be immediately applied, and needs no middle or mediating principle in order to become universal, still in a very numerous society must be added a new and mediating principle, namely, that the individual men can assist in the framing of laws *or by representatives*. Whosoever should try to apply the first principle to a numerous society without adding the other mediating one, would inevitably bring about the ruin of that society. Yet this circumstance would prove only the ignorance or inability of the legislator, but would prove nothing against the principle itself."

M. Constant concludes thus:

"A principle that has been recognized as true must, therefore, never be abandoned, no matter what apparent danger it seems to incur."

And yet the good man had just before repudiated the unconditional principle of truthfulness on account of the danger it seemed to threaten society, and only because he could discover no middle principle which might seem calculated to prevent this danger, and because really there is no such middle principle to be inserted here.

Adopting M. Constant's terminology, the "French philosopher" mistook the act whereby some one harms (*nocet*) another in telling a truth which he cannot avoid stating, with an act whereby he wrongs (*loedit*) another. It was simply an accident (*casus*) that the truthfulness of the statement harmed the refugee of the house, and it was in no manner a free deed, in legal meaning. For a pretended right to demand of another that he should lie for my benefit; would involve results opposed to all justice. But every man has not only a right but the strictest duty to be truthful in his statements and this duty he cannot avoid whether it harms him or others. Hence he himself does not inflict harm upon whomsoever may suffer from that truthfulness; the harm is *caused* by accident. For he who acts is not free to choose; truthfulness being his unconditional duty, if he is bound to speak at all.

Hence the "German philosopher" cannot admit this proposition: "To tell the truth is a duty only towards him who has a right to the truth"; firstly, because its formula is not clear, since truth is not a possession to which we may deny the right to one and admit it to the other; but, secondly and chiefly, because the duty of truthfulness-of which alone we speak here-makes no distinction between persons to whom we may owe this duty and those toward whom we may repudiate it, but is an *unconditioned* duty which is valid in all circumstances.

Now, in order to proceed from a *Metaphysic of Rights*- which abstracts from all conditions of experience-to a *Fundamental Principle of Policy*- which applies the conceptions of that *metaphysic* to cases of experience-and thus to arrive at the solution of the problem of such a *policy* which shall be conformable to the *Metaphysic of Rights*, the philosopher must furnish:

1. *An Axiom*-that is, an apodictically certain proposition-which results immediately from the definition of External right. In other words, a harmony of the freedom of each individual with the freedom of every one according to a general law.

2. A *Postulate*-of the external public law, as the united will of all according to the principle of *Equality*, without which there would be no freedom of any single individual.
3. A *Problem*-what must, therefore, be done in order to establish harmony, according to the principles of freedom and equality, in ever so large a society; that is, by means of a representative system.

This result or means would then become the fundamental principle of policy or politics, and the establishment and regulation whereof, obtained from an empirical knowledge of men, would have in view only the mechanism of the administration of law, and how that might be best effected. Right must never be made to conform to policy, but policy must always be inade to conform to right.

M. Constant says: "A principle recognized as :true"-and I add, à *priori* recognized and hence apodictic principle-"must never be abandoned, no matter how apparently it incurs danger."

But here we ought to interpret the word "danger" as relating not to any-accidental-harm, but, generally, to *doing wrong*. The latter would occur if I were to make the duty of truthfulness, which is altogether unconditioned and which in statements is the supreme legal condition, a conditioned and subordinate duty. But furthermore, although by telling a certain lie I may really not do any one any wrong, yet I vio- late thereby the principle of right *generally* in regard to all absolutely necessary statements-I do a wrong *formaliter*, though not *materialiter*-which is much worse than to do an injustice to somebody, since such an injustice does not always presuppose an intention in principle on the part of the subject.

Whoever does not listen, with indignation at the suspicion that he might be a liar, to an inquiry whether in his now-to-be-made statement he intends to be truthful or not, but rather asks for permission to consider whether there might not be possible exceptions to his truthfulness, is already a liar *in potentia*; since he shows that he does not recognize truthfulness as a duty in itself, but keeps in mind exceptions to a rule which in its nature admits of no exceptions, since in admitting them it would directly contradict itself.

All legal-practical principles must contain strict truth, and the here so-called middle principle can contain only a closer determination of their application to occurring cases according to rules of policy, but never exceptions, since exceptions annihilate that universality on account whereof alone they are called *principles*.

The Rejected Lover
By John Albee

I heard that in this land were many poor,
Therefore I sought them out from door to door

Methought I had a gift would comfort give,
And make them wish on earth to longer live.

My gift I offered freely everywhere
To those whom some deep want did seem to bear,

But all in vain; for ampler store
Of gold they wished whereby to heap up more.

My Gift was love-which they must needs pass by
Since it exacts the largest usury.

CHAPTER PHILOSOPHERS

Anscombe, Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret (1919–2001) a native of Limerick, Ireland, and a major force in ethics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language.

Kant, Immanuel (1724–1804) German philosopher and proponent of the most influential moral philosopher since Aristotle; see also “categorical imperative.”

KEY TERMS

Categorical imperative an unconditional moral obligation that is binding in all circumstances and is not dependent on a person's inclination or purpose.

Deontological from the Greek words for duty (*deon*) and science (*logos*). Deontological ethics, including Kant's, focuses on the act itself, as opposed to the moral agent or the consequences of the act, when evaluating ethical problems; it stresses that reason shows us our duty to do the right thing.

Existentialism a school of philosophy that emphasizes that existence precedes essence, that is, that we are responsible for the meanings we bring to the world and we are both responsible for our actions and free within the brutal limits of the material world.

Neologism a newly invented word created for the purpose of clarifying or defining something for which there was previously no appropriate term.