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What is the Categorical Imperative?

The first and supreme principle of practical reason

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The Categorical Imperative

Kant's core aim in the Grundlegung:

To establish (make explicit) the

one supreme principle of
morality

(synthetic a priori)

The Categorical Imperative

- The ultimate principle of morality
- **Imperative:** command (to exercise our wills in a particular way)
- **Categorical:** applies unconditionally, solely because we possess rational wills

The Categorical Imperative

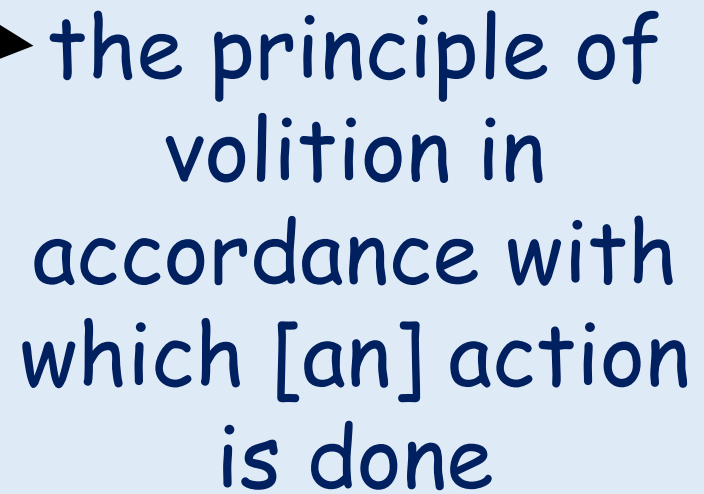
- **One** ultimate principle
- Leads to **many specific** moral principles (categorical imperatives)
- e.g. lying, preservation of life
- **Three/four/five** formulations
- Each formula 'unites the other two within it' (435)

1. Formula of Universal Law of Nature

"act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law."

What is a maxim?

subjective



the principle of volition in accordance with which [an] action is done

~ Kant (1785)

2. The Humanity Formula

"Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."

3. Autonomy Formula

"the Idea of the will
of every rational being
as a will that legislates
universal law."

4. The Kingdom of Ends Formula

"every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends."