



What are the key features of Kant's categorical imperative?



FORMULATION 2: THE FORMULA OF HUMANITY

“Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end, and never as a mere means.”

“Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end, and never as a mere means.”



6:35 / 10:26



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bIys6JoEDw&ab_channel=CrashCourse

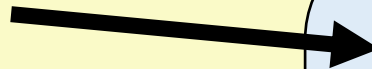
1. Formula of Universal Law of Nature



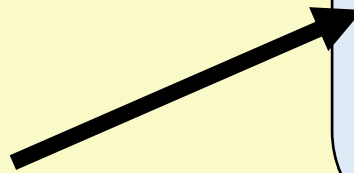
"act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law."

What is a maxim?

subjective



The rule on
which you act



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

~ Kant (1785)

Perfect moral duties	Imperfect moral duties
<p data-bbox="376 479 741 596">Negative</p> <p data-bbox="291 711 826 801">e.g. do not lie</p>	<p data-bbox="1215 479 1526 596">Positive</p> <p data-bbox="1041 711 1696 801">e.g. do tell truth</p>
<p data-bbox="384 1033 739 1108">Absolute</p>	<p data-bbox="1105 1033 1638 1108">Non-absolute</p>

A moral law,
to be a law,
must be...

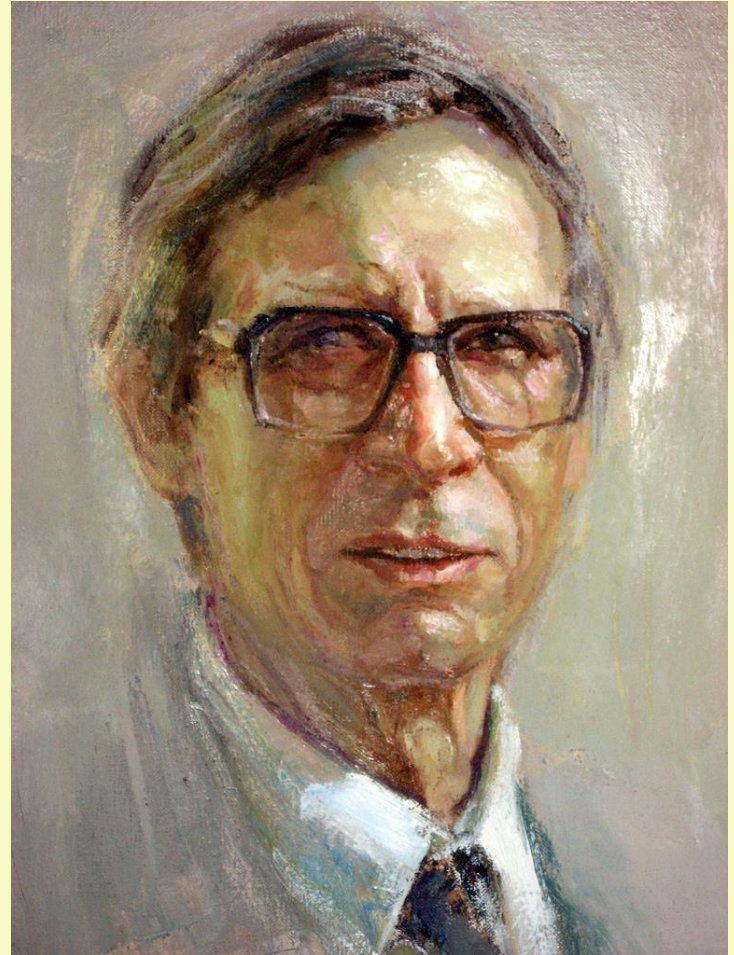
Universal

**How does Rawls
understand Kant's first
formulation of the
categorical imperative?**

Formula of the Universal Law of
Nature

Universal Law Formula

- Rawls (1999)
conceives of this
formula as a
**decision-making
process**



What do I do?

- work out the principle (maxim)
- **can** it be universalised (i.e. a moral law)?
- would **rationally will** it to be universal (i.e. a moral law)?

You are thinking of
pretending that you've
forgotten your homework -
which you didn't do because
your favourite show
Eastenders was on TV



Step 1

- **What is the maxim?**
- **Task: Formulate the maxim**

The form of a maxim is 'I will A in C
in order to achieve E'

- 'A' = some **act type**
- 'C' = some **type** of circumstance
- 'E' = some **type** of end to be achieved
by A in C.

Maxim

- 'A' = lying, dissembling
- 'C' = as an excuse
- 'E' = to avoid getting in trouble.

Step 2

- **What if everyone did that?**
- Universalise the maxim

What if everybody...

- Lied as an excuse to avoid getting in trouble?

Step 3

- Is it conceivable that everyone acted on the maxim?
- The conceivability test

Yes - then it's not absolutely wrong.
→ Step 4...

No - then it's absolutely wrong: a perfect duty

Kant would certainly argue...

- Lying as an excuse to avoid getting in trouble?
- Is not conceivably universalisable
- (and so cannot have the form of a genuine moral law)



You could be a great poet.
But you're mega rich and
you'd prefer to sit at home
watching Eastenders.

Step 1

- **What is the maxim?**
- **Task: Formulate the maxim**

The form of a maxim is 'I will A in C
in order to achieve E'

- 'A' = not developing potential
- 'C' = when you're not forced to
- 'E' = desiring a relaxed, easy life

Step 2

- **What if everyone did that?**
- Universalise the maxim

- What if everyone with potential, when life was easy, didn't develop it?

Step 3

- Is it conceivable that everyone acted on the maxim?
- The conceivability test

Yes - then it's not absolutely wrong.
→ Step 4...

No - then it's absolutely wrong: a perfect duty

**Kant would probably say
this is conceivable...**

- (Perhaps because it means that they'd be lots of undeveloped potential out there.)

Step 4

- Would you rationally will that everybody acted on the maxim?
- The 'willability' test

Kant would say 'No!'

- A rational will would think the idea of a free being not exercising and developing itself unacceptable...

Decision to make

Establish maxim

Universalise maxim

Conceivability test

Willability test

Morally permissible

Perfect
(absolute)
duty

