

Formula of Humanity & Autonomy

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The Formula of Humanity

The Universal Law formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative looked like this:

The Categorical Imperative:

There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this:
act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. [Kant, 4: 421]

And the Impermissibility Test went like this: (1) isolate the relevant maxim; (2) formulate the maxim as a universal law; (3) imagine willing the maxim in a world in which the universal law holds; (4) check to see if there is a contradiction.

Question: Is Kant's Categorical Imperative a principle that necessarily governs our wills?

1. Insofar as we are rational, we act in accordance with what we take to be certain principles. (Kant calls these "laws").
2. What motivates us to formulate and follow through on these principles is always some end.
3. If there is an unconditional principle which we should all act in accordance with (for example: the Categorical Imperative), then there must be some *objective end*, shared by all rational creatures, that grounds it.

In order for the Categorical Imperative to be binding for all rational creatures, there must be some *goal* that we are all (insofar as we're rational) compelled to pursue.

Here is a way to get a handle on the idea. Ask yourself, "What if everyone did this?" Roughly, the categorical imperative says "Don't make an exception of yourself!"

Note: Consider a maxim that fails this test. The idea is *not* that to act on such a maxim in the actual world would be a contradiction; rather, it would be a contradiction to will such a maxim in the possible world in which the maxim was a universal law. Why, though, should this matter? Who cares about *would* be the case in some other possible world?

Argument for the Formula of Humanity

P1 If we rationally pursue some end *E* because it is important to us, then we must believe that there is *good reason* to pursue *E* (i.e., that *E* is a good thing).

P2 The value of *E* (i.e., how good it is, how much reason there is to pursue it) is either *intrinsic* or grounded in the fact that *E* is something that is important to us.

P3 If the value of *E* is not intrinsic (and so its value is grounded in the fact that it is something that is important to us), then we must believe that *we* are important.

C Insofar as we are rational, we must believe that we are important: *we are rationally compelled to treat ourselves and each other as ends.*

Why must we take ourselves to be important? Kant's idea is this: if *E* has value in virtue of the fact that we *take it to be good*, then we have the power to confer value onto things. We are a source of value. And a *source* of value is itself valuable — and thus important.

This line of thought gets us Kant's second formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

The Formula of Humanity:

Act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any others, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.
[Kant 4: 429]

Take Kant's example of the False Promise. If I lie to you, do I treat you merely as a means? (Kant thinks so). I lie to you in order to manipulate you into doing what will be in my interest. So I am using you. So I am treating you merely as a means, not as an end.

What does this mean? What is it to treat someone as an "end"? What is it to treat someone merely as a "means"? What are some examples of each?

Autonomy

We Legislate the Moral Law. You are rational insofar as you act on those principles you take to be binding. The binding force of a principle is grounded in value we necessarily attribute to our rational capacity to confer value onto things.

Formula of Autonomy:

Act so that each time you will, you could regard yourself as giving a universal law through your maxim [Kant 4: 432, 440]

For Kant, there are two ways to be motivated to obey a law. **Heteronomous:** we obey the law because doing so serves some (uncho- sen) interest we have. **Autonomous:** we obey the law because we endorse the law *itself* as a law.

Why Obey the Categorical Imperative?
In order for the moral law to have force for us, "[w]e must be autonomous beings, capable of being motivated by the conception of ourselves as legislative citizens in the kingdom of ends." [Korsgaard, xxv]