THE INTERRELATIONS OF KANT'S FORMULAE OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

by

GRACE CHUNG-YEE TSE

B.A., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972
M.Phil., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1974

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
Philosophy

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

[redacted]

© GRACE CHUNG-YEE TSE, 1975
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

August 1975

Supervisor: Professor Howard J.N. Horsburgh

ABSTRACT

It is our concern in the present thesis to consider the problem of the interrelations of Kant's formulae of the categorical imperative. Kant's commentators have argued bewilderingly on the number of formulae of the categorical imperative without coming to a settled conclusion. Our view is that it is of little importance how many formulae there are in Kant's *Groundwork;* the important thing is to make clear how these various formulae are related to each other and the reason why Kant brings in each formula.

At the beginning of this thesis we point out that Kant's Critical Philosophy has two basic assumptions. These are: that human beings are finite, and that a valid distinction is to be made between Noumena and Phenomena. It follows that we humans are not fully rational beings. We are the possessors of both rational and sensuous natures and have affinities not only with God and other rational beings but also with animals. We are related to God because we can make use of reason and can act rationally and morally; and we are related to animals because we share their sensuous natures and have desires and impulses. Kant

tells us that he does not intend to offer a new principle of morality but only a new formula. Owing to the finite nature of human beings, the supreme principle of morality appears to us as a categorical imperative.

Kant does not give us only one formula of the categorical imperative in his *Groundwork;* instead, he lists five. The five formulae of the categorical imperative are: The formula of universal law (formula I), the formula of the law of nature (formula II), the formula of the end in itself (formula III), the formula of autonomy (formula IV) and the formula of the kingdom of ends (formula V). After examining the formula of universal law we claim that this formula states the very essence of moral maxims. Morally permissible maxims must be necessary and universal, i.e., they are only acceptable if they can be prescribed as universal laws. It is obvious that there is a close connection between formula I and formula II. They both share the common form of universality and lawfulness. On the basis that the unconditioned and absolute law of morality has no corresponding object in sensuous experience, the law of nature serves as the "typic" of universal law and provides a necessary condition for our moral maxims. However, formula II by itself cannot be a sufficient criterion for moral maxims. Formula III tells us the absolute worth of humanity. Humanity so far as it is capable of morality has absolute value in itself and is worthy of respect. Hence, we must treat

ourselves and others never simply as means but also as ends in themselves. Moreover, this formula also enjoins objective ends which it is our duty to attain. By stating that rational will must be subject to universal law and humanity is worthy of respect, formulae I and III both supply the criteria of right action.

Formula IV, or the formula of autonomy, is significantly different from the previous formulae. It is the fundamental presupposition of the possibility of morality. Without the presupposition of freedom of the will, duty and rationality are mere fantasies of the mind. Considered as the condition of morality, formula IV is the most important formula amongst all.

Finally, we try to show that formula V is also different from the previous formulae. The formula of kingdom of ends leads us to Kant's moral Ideal—a kingdom of ends. This moral Ideal is possible through our own moral progress and the development of history.

These considerations lead to the general conclusion of the thesis which may be stated as follows: The interrelations of Kant's formulae of the categorical imperative reveal to us a system of moral philosophy. Formulae I and III set out the criteria of moral maxims. Formula II is served as a "typic" of formula I but it itself cannot be a sufficient criterion for moral maxims. Formula IV states the fundamental presupposition of morality under which all the

formulae of the categorical imperative can be applied to human lives. Finally, formula V reveals to us that all moral actions point towards an ultimate goal: the Ideal of a kingdom of ends on earth. Hence, the formulae of the categorical imperative do not simply prescribe what we ought to do; they also give us hope for a better world which is possible only if we act morally.

[redacted]

Supervisor, Department of Philosophy.
Dept of Philosophy
Dept of Philosophy
Dept. of Phil. U.B.C.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Professor Howard J.N. Horsburgh very sincerely for his numerous suggestions for improvement and patient guidance throughout the preparation of this thesis. Particularly I am indebted to his generous encouragement that helped me to face all kinds of difficulties in an alien country.

I would also like to thank Dr. Alan R. Drengson for his constructive remarks on the latter part of this thesis. I am especially indebted to him for spending so many hours supervising my work during the absence of Professor Horsburgh.

Finally, it is a pleasure to express my feeling of gratitude to all faculty and staff of the Department of Philosophy for their kindness and helpfulness towards me during my study at the University of Victoria.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that two centuries have already passed since the publication of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* in 1785, and despite the fact that so many commentators have worked on this little book, there still remains a lot to be done. E.g., "What is the difference between Kant's various formulations of the categorical imperative?" "What is the significance of each formula to Kant's moral philosophy?" "How are these formulae of the categorical imperative related to each other?" Proper answers to these questions are of vital importance if we are to understand Kant's moral philosophy as a whole. For this reason, in this essay, I will try to reach a clear understanding of the relations of Kant's various formulae of the categorical imperative. I hope this work will at least help me to understand Kant's moral philosophy in its fullness.

Before I go on to the main work of this essay, it is necessary to grasp the reason why the supreme principle of morality appears to human beings as a categorical imperative. The introduction is written for this very purpose.

1. Basic Assumptions of Kant's Critical Philosophy

Kant's Critical philosophy rests upon two basic assumptions which must constantly be borne in mind if we are to understand his philosophy as a whole. These are:

a. The finiteness of human beings.

b. The distinction between Noumena and Phenomena.

Once (a) is fully understood, (b) can be derived from it. Therefore (a) is more fundamental than (b). There can be no doubt that Kant emphasizes the finiteness of human beings in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. For, according to Kant, all human knowledge is knowledge of appearances. It is beyond the capacity of human reason (i.e. theoretical reason) to have knowledge of what objects really are in themselves. According to Kant, there are two sources of human knowledge: sensibility and understanding. "The capacity (receptivity) for receiving representation through the mode in which we are affected by objects, is entitled sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts."[1] Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our knowledge, so that

---

[1] C.P.R. B32-33=A19

All quotations and references from Immanual Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are taken from Norman Kemp Smith's translation (New York: Macmillan 1965); references to the *Critique* are given with the customary 'A' and 'B' for the first and second editions, as in that translation. Here it is written in abbreviation as C.P.R.

neither concept without an intuition corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts can yield knowledge. Without sensibility no object can be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. "Thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[2] Human nature is so constituted that our intuition can never be other than sensible, and apart from this, we possess no other kind of intuition, as e.g. intellectual intuition. Kant explained this as follows:

> The mode of intuiting in space and time need not be limited to human sensibility. It may be that all finite, thinking beings necessarily agree with man in this respect.... But however universal this mode of sensibility may be, it does not therefore cease to be sensibility. It is derivative, not original, and therefore not an intellectual intuition.[3]

Thus we see that for Kant a finite being is a dependent being, dependent in existence as well as in intuition, and intellectual intuition cannot be ascribed to him. Intellectual intuition, then, would seem to belong only to the Primordial infinite being, i.e. God. Kant holds that these two kinds of intuition are distinct. Human beings who have sensible intuition, know objects only as they appear to them, and these appearances are called "phenomena". The primordial being, whose intuition is intellectual, knows objects as they

---

[2]C.P.R. B75=A51.

[3]C.P.R. B72.

are in themselves, and these objects are called "Noumena".[4]

Kant's basic assumption about human limitations plays a very important part in his Epistemology. We can see that the concept of Noumena is itself a limiting concept. It marks the limits of the objective validity of human knowledge, and prevents us from thinking that our sensible intuition can give us knowledge of things as they are in themselves. In this way it tells us the scope of human knowledge.

So far we have discussed Kant's assumption about human limitations from epistemological viewpoint, but this assumption also operates in Kant's moral philosophy. It is to his moral philosophy that we now turn.

In moral philosophy, we are not concerned with theoretical knowledge of objects of the external world, but with action. Humans act according to their will, which is not totally blind, and is also not a fully rational will. Thus, for Kant, the human will is different from a purely rational will and also from a holy will. These differences will be explained later. Kant holds that human will is under the limitations of human conditions, where there exist unruly impulses and

---

[4]It is of interest that for Kant there are two meanings for the word 'Noumena'. 'Noumena' is used in a positive sense as when by 'Noumena' he means an object of intellectual intuition. When by 'Noumena' he means that which is not an object of sensible intuition, this is its negative sense. As we are now contrasting two kinds of intuition, we are using the term in its positive sense. Vide C.P.R. B306.

desires, subjective limitations and obstacles;[5] these are impediments of the finite being who bears a human will, and presuppose the limitations of the imperfect nature of human beings.

2. The Differences between Holy Will, Rational Will and Human Will

Although human beings are subject to conditions which impose limitations, they are nonetheless also endowed with reason. Through reason, one can control one's blind will, impose a constraint upon all his inclinations, and determine his will to act rationally. Through the constraints of reason one's will can gradually become rational. However, human will can never attain holiness. The holy will is only a practical Ideal; it serves as a model toward which all finite rational beings must strive, even though they cannot reach it.[6] The utmost that a human being can attain is "virtue", which is a "naturally acquired faculty"[7] of a non-holy will. Here, we

---

[5] Vide Gr., 397=8
In the case of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, the references are taken from H.J. Paton's translation. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974.) Here is written in abbreviation as 'Gr'.

[6] Vide C. Pr. R. 32
References to the *Critique of Practical Reason* are taken from L.W. Beck's translation. (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1956.) It is referred to in abreviation as 'C. Pr. R.'. The pagination refers to the page numbers in the Prussian Academy edition as they appear in Beck's translation.

[7] C.Pr.R. 33.

must make clear Kant's distinction between a holy will, a rational will and a human will.

A holy will, or what Kant sometimes called a "Divine Will", is a perfect will, a completely good will; it unerringly wills what is good. Such a will does not have any internal obstacle to overcome, and no impediment in the form of "subjective limitations and obstacles"; every action according to this will is void of constraint and springs spontaneously from its own nature. A will of this kind can never belong to a finite human being, but only to God. A human will is the will of any finite human being, and it is composed of two parts, rational and irrational. When human inclinations and desires take over the will, the acts which issue from it are irrational, and are without moral value whether they conform to the moral law or not. When reason controls the human will, this will then acts rationally. However, because we humans are finite, our will can never become fully rational, and only a divine being with a holy will has a fully rational will.

3. The Concept of Duty.

So far, we have made a clear distinction between the holy will and human will. Our concern now is not with a holy will which is perfect in all actions, but with a human will whose actions can be said to be morally good or morally evil. It is of the utmost importance, for Kant, that actions which have moral worth are not merely done from inclinations and desires,

but are done from duty. The concept of duty implies the possibility of conflict between inclinations, desires and what is morally right. This idea of duty cannot be applied to an infinite being, for His will is holy and is absolutely good; he has no inclination or desire to overcome. Actions which flow from His will are in perfect purity, and it would be absurd to speak of Him as doing his duty. But in finite rational creatures, there are, e.g., certain human limitations and hindrances, the only possible experience of a good will is that of a will which acts from duty. So the concept of duty puts forth practical constraint, and it determines one to act for the sake of duty. Kant expresses this as follows:

> The action which is objectively practical according to this law (i.e. the moral law) and excludes inclination from its determining ground is called duty; and because of the exclusion, in the concept of duty there is that of practical constraint, i.e., determination to action, however reluctantly they may be done.[8]

Here, we must understand that whenever we act for the sake of duty, there exists no inclination to impel us to do so; in other words, action done from inclinations will not have moral worth. This implies that we have to distinguish action which is done for the sake of duty and action which is only accord with duty. Kant indicates that some actions which spring from inclinations or purposes or self-interest are in conformity with duty,[9] but they are not done from duty and thus have no moral

---

[8] C.Pr.R. 80.

[9] Vide Gr., 397=9.

value. When one acts for the sake of duty, one is aware of one's unruly impulses which conflict with duty, and in one's action duty is the determining factor of one's conduct. Although morally good actions must be done for the sake of duty, it does not follow that actions cease to have moral value if they are accompanied by pleasure or even a desire for pleasure; actions cease to have moral worth only if they are done for the sake of pleasure or desire. Kant does not hold that pleasure or desire can never accompany actions in which one is doing one's duty.

Kant proceeds to say that "an action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon."[10] This is central to Kant's moral philosophy, he rejects Utilitarianism because it weighs the moral worth of an action by its outcome. He holds that the moral value of an action does not depend on results sought or attained, but depends on the occasion for the agent's acting. It has moral worth in the case where he acts from duty. If the purpose or outcome determines an action's moral worth, we would not be able to distinguish actions which spring from our inclinations from actions which are done for the sake of duty, and this will lead to moral confusion and will distort the purity of morality.

So far, we have mentioned that moral action is action which is done for the sake of duty, and an action done from duty has

---

[10] Gr., 399=13.

its moral worth, not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the moral worth of the maxims which determined the will to act. This will be more explicit if we consider this along with Kant's third proposition of duty: "Duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law".[11] Before we discuss this proposition, we have to clarify some of Kant's technical terms.

In moral philosophy, we are concerned with practical principles of action. Kant states, as a personal belief, that human action is distinguished from animal behaviour by the fact that man can act in accordance with principles. He says "Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the power to act in accordance with his idea of laws—that is, in accordance with principles—and only so has he a will."[12] And, what is a principle? In Kant's terminology, it is a universal proposition which contains a general determination of the will. There are subjective and objective principles. A subjective principle is a principle on which a rational agent does act. Accordingly, Kant states a maxim is a subjective principle of volition.[13] It is a purely personal principle, and it may be good or it may be bad. E.g., "I will lie in order to get myself out of embarrassment.", "I will return the borrowed books to the library." etc., these are personal maxims of our actions. They are called subjective principles, or

---

[11] Gr., 400=14.

[12] Gr., 412=36.

[13] Gr., 400n=15n.

maxims, because the condition is regarded by the subject as valid only for his own will. This contrasts with what Kant calls an objective principle which is valid for every rational being. Hence, it is one on which every rational agent would necessarily act if reason had full control over his actions, and therefore one on which he ought to act if he is so irrational as to be tempted to act otherwise. An objective principle remains objective whether we act on it or not, and only when we act on this objective principle can it also become subjective.

Having explained Kant's technical terms, we can now turn back to the concept of duty. Kant says that an action has moral worth only if the maxim of the action is to act for the sake of duty. Maxims may or may not be in accord with the objective laws of action. E.g., acting on the maxim "I will lie in order to get myself out of an embarrassing situation." will not give rise to a morally good action. Although he does not express this clearly, it is nonetheless certain that Kant does hold that a dutiful maxim must not aim solely at particular results. Here again, we have to distinguish two kinds of maxims: mere maxims and maxims which conform to the objective principle of action.

As we have seen, Kant holds that a rational human is not purely a rational being. He may act on some maxims which are only valid for himself and suitable for his situation, but, in so far as he is rational, he may sometimes recognize some maxims as not valid merely for himself but also as valid for all other

rational beings as well. In the first case, what he acts upon is a mere maxim, in the latter, it is a maxim and also an objective principle of action. Thus, there are for Kant two kinds of maxims, material and formal. Maxims based on personal inclinations or desires which aim at the attainment of certain results are called material maxims. Maxims which are based on duty and do not aim solely at certain results are called formal maxims. Since all actions are based on maxims, we must understand that to have moral worth, an action must conform with a formal maxim and not with a material maxim.

Kant puts this more positively in his third proposition of duty: "Duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law." For this Paton substitutes another proposition: "To act for the sake of duty is to act out of reverence for the law."[14] This is, I think, less open to misunderstandings than Kant's formulation, and it says the same thing. To act according to a formal maxim is to act out of reverence for the law. Hence, the moral law is a universal and objective law. Kant says that if our actions aim solely at certain results toward which we are inclined, then we do not act from reverence for the law. But an objective law is universal and binding; when we recognize this law immediately and without the mediation of external influences on our senses, this creates strong feelings that we recognize as reverence for the law.

---

[14] H.J. Paton: *The Categorical Imperative.* A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 63.

In order to draw the present discussion to a close, we can sum up Kant's account of the concept of duty as follows: In the case of finite rational beings, actions with moral worth are actions which are done for the sake of duty. This does not mean that an action's moral worth rests upon bringing about certain results. An action done for the sake of duty does not derive its moral value from results which the agent seeks to attain, but only from the formal maxim upon which the agent acts. In this sense, a formal maxim is identical to the objective principle of action. For Kant, to act for the sake of duty is the same as to act out of reverence for the moral law which is binding upon us, or to act for the sake of the law itself.

4. Duty, Obligation and Spontaneity

Since desires and inclinations often stand against reason, it is a plain fact that human beings do not always do what would necessarily be done by a rational agent where reason has full control over the passions. This is why Kant says that duty puts forth the practical constraint on human action. It requires that we act in accord with the objective law of practical reason. The reverence we have for the moral law is not a feeling connected with the satisfaction of our inclinations or desires, but a feeling of humility before the objective moral law when we compare the sensuous propensity of our

nature with the purity of the law.[15]

All such moral motives as duty, reverence, and maxims as well, can only be applied to finite beings. They all presuppose the limitations and finiteness of human nature, whose subjective principles of action are not always in full accord with the objective principles of practical reason. This is why we do not always act disinterestedly. Thus "for men and all rational finite creatures, the moral necessity is a constraint, an obligation". Kant says, "Every action based on it [moral necessity] is to be considered as duty, and not as a manner of acting which we naturally favor or which we sometimes might favor."[16] This once more brings out Kant's contrast between a finite being who has rational will, and an infinite being whose will is divine. For in a holy being, there is no question of duty or obligation, since every action is done by His own perfect will and hence will always be good. Obligation applies only to beings whose will is potentially good, but not holy. God's subjective inclinations always conform with objective principles. All He inclines to do is perfectly good and flows freely and spontaneously from His own essential rational nature. What finite beings can do is attain a stage of moral goodness and virtue, but this does not apply to God, since He does not by nature have sensuous inclinations which conflict with pure rational principles. Given

---

[15] Vide C.Pr.R. 74.

[16] C.Pr.R. 81.

the foregoing, our concern will be mainly with the resistance of finite beings to virtue, and with trying to set out the criteria upon which to judge the moral worth of our actions.

5. Imperatives

If our wills were purely rational or holy, there would be no question of command or obligation. But, inasmuch as our wills are not holy and are also susceptible to special impulses and desires, the objective principle of practical reason necessarily takes for us the form of an imperative. Practical reason commands us to overcome human desires and inclinations which conflict with the objective principles of practical reason. As Kant says,

> If reason infallibly determines the will, then in a being of this kind the actions which are recognized to be objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary—that is to say, the will is then a power to choose only that which reason independently of inclination recognizes to be practically necessary, that is, to be good. But if reason solely by itself is not sufficient to determine the will; if the will is exposed also to subjective conditions (certain impulsions) which do not always harmonize with the objective ones; if, in a word, the will is not in itself completely in accord with reason (as actually happens in the case of men); then actions which are recognized to be objectively necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determining of such a will in accordance with objective laws is necessitation.[17]

In other words, since human actions are not wholly guided by reason, the objective principle thus necessitates our will,

---

[17] Gr., 412-3=36-7.

or, as Kant later says, an objective principle appears as a command of reason, or as an imperative, and commands us to act as we ought to act. All imperatives are expressed by an "ought" and thereby express the relation of the objective law of reason to a will which is not necessarily determined by this law in virtue of its subjective constitution.

Three kinds of imperatives apply to us as a result of our human imperfections. Each appears as an objective principle and *obliges* us to act because we are not perfectly rational beings. Each of these three kinds of imperatives is objectively valid, although they may not be valid unconditionally. According to Kant, these three kinds of imperatives fall into two categories: hypothetical and categorical imperatives. While all imperatives aim at different kinds of good, only the categorical imperative aims at actions which can be said to be morally good in themselves. Other actions commanded by practical reason may or may not be good without qualification, but they all appear in some sense good.

Kant's distinction between the categorical and hypothetical imperative requires more detailed discussion. Let us therefore first consider hypothetical imperatives. A hypothetical imperative has the following form: "If you wish to attain x, then do y." The action commanded by this imperative has value solely as a means to some further end. It will never do good unconditionally. Hypothetical imperatives themselves can be further classified into two types: 1. problematic and, 2, assertoric. When the end is merely

one that we might will, the actions performed have value simply as means to a certain end. Kant calls these problematic hypothetical imperatives, or imperatives of skill. They are called problematic because the ends sought will vary with different persons. They are called imperatives of skill because the actions they enjoin are good in the sense of being skills useful to the attainment of certain ends. So the problematic imperative can be expressed as follows: Every rational agent, if he wills a certain end, ought to will the action good as a means to this end. Still, there is another kind of hypothetical imperative. When the end can be presupposed as actual in all rational beings by their very nature, the imperative is called assertoric. It affirms that every rational being has the purpose, by a natural necessity, to further his own happiness. This imperative does not take the form "If you will a certain end", it asserts that every rational agent does desire happiness as an end. So this type of imperative would be expressed as follows: Every rational agent does desire happiness as his very end, so he ought to will those good actions which are a means to this end. The latter kind of hypothetical imperative differs from the former kind in that the end is constant, while in the former the end is flexible. These two kinds of imperatives are objectively valid for every rational agent and thus differ from maxims which are valid only for each specific person who acts according to such maxims. Since beings like us do not always will the means necessary to their ends, even when they

know the means, the hypothetical imperative expresses a constraint of reason upon impulses, and sets before us a principle of using the most effective means to attain a certain end. This is objectively valid for every rational agent who seeks the end, but it is also a condition on the rational agent who wants to seek the end. If there is a rational agent who does not aim at this further end, of course, the imperative cannot be applied to him. This, however, in no way means the hypothetical imperatives cease to be objectively valid for every rational being.

The above two kinds of imperatives, though objectively valid for all rational agents, do not appear to be unconditionally necessary for all of them, since many ends might not be pursued. There remains another kind of imperative, namely, the categorical imperative. To this, we shall now turn.

Kant begins his discussion of the categorical imperative with the following comment:

> Finally, there is an imperative which, without being based on, and conditioned by, any further purpose to be attained by a certain line of conduct, enjoins this conduct immediately. This imperative is categorical.[18]

This imperative does not take the form of "If you wish to attain x, then....", but commands "Do y" categorically. It enjoins the action simply because that action ought to be done, quite irrespective of the agent's inclinations or

[18] Gr., 416-43.

desires, and this is determined directly by the objective moral law. In other words, all actions enjoined by the categorical imperative are actions good in themselves. They are not good as means to any end, but are good as ends themselves, and so it is our duty to do them. Thus we can say they are morally good, good without qualification, and are unconditionally and necessarily binding on all limited rational beings. Explicitly, we can state the categorical imperative in this general form: Every rational agent ought to will the action which is good in itself. Since limited rational beings such as ourselves do not always act in morally good ways, practical reason expresses the moral law in the form of a categorical imperative, and commands us to act morally and stand against the inclinations and desires which conflict with what we ought to do. Since this command is universally binding on all finite rational beings, it differs from the hypothetical imperative in being unconditional and absolute, independent of any pathological conditions. For this reason, Kant calls this imperative an apodictic imperative, or the imperative of morality.

As we have stated above, the hypothetical imperatives exhibit the form "If you wish x, then do y," and the categorical imperative exhibits the form "Do y". Now, if we confine ourselves to the logical distinction between these two types of imperative, there are certainly difficulties in interpreting Kant's thought. The problem is that there are imperatives that are in the categorical form and yet do not bear any moral

value, or in Kant's words, are not "practically right". And there also exist imperatives in the hypothetical form which are morally necessary and practically right. As L.W. Beck points out in his "Apodictic Imperatives",[19] "Shut the door!" is formally categorical, while "If you are married, remain faithful to your spouse" is formally hypothetical. Presumably it would be possible to show that the latter is "practically right" and is in some sense a law. And certainly the former is not "practically right", in the sense required, if we are to regard it as a law; it is at most technically, and not morally, practical. In the case of this difficulty, it is clear that the term "categorical" in Kant's phrase "categorical imperative" is meant to do more than refer to the form in which the imperatives is expressed. We have to stress that the distinction between these two types of imperatives does not rest on their grammatical forms, but rather on their modality. The most important point is that no imperative can be morally valid if it is directed to some further end, and only a moral imperative commands unconditionally regardless of human desires and inclinations. Imperative under this modality is moral and apodictic no matter whether it is formally hypothetical or categorical. For example: "If you are married, be faithful to your spouse"

---

[19] L.W. Beck: 'Apodictic Imperatives' in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* with critical essays edited by Robert Paul Wolff (Indianapolis, N.Y., The Bobbs-Merriel Co., Inc., 1968), P.135.

and "Be honest" are moral imperatives, although they appear in different forms.

Having made this observation, we will now confine ourselves to the categorical imperative which is "practically right"; that is, to the moral imperative, as this is the target of this essay.

6. The Categorical Imperative

The categorical imperative is the only kind of imperative that directs us to moral living; hypothetical imperatives, in so far as they are concerned with the satisfaction of desired ends, do not direct us to live morally. The categorical imperative is not limited by the condition that some particular end is to be fulfilled, it enjoins the action simply because it is our duty to so act, because, i.e., the action is good in itself. We can say that it commands actions in a purely *a priori* way, underived from any particular desires or inclinations for a particular end. Thus, the categorical imperative states that every rational being ought to will the action that is good in itself. But, how is such a categorical imperative possible? How can we assure ourselves that human beings have the ability to act according to the command? Here we come to the core problem of Kant's moral philosophy. It deals with the concept of freedom and of the *a priori* synthetic connection between the rational being and his actions. This will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

From the concept of the categorical imperative, Kant proceeds to discover the formula of the categorical imperative. He describes his task in the following passage:

> In this task we wish first to enquire whether perhaps the mere concept of a categorical imperative may not also provide us with the formula containing the only proposition that can be a categorical imperative. [20]

Hence, from the concept of a categorical imperative, from the concept that an action is unconditionally and abidingly commanded, there emerges the formula of the categorical imperative. However, two paragraphs after the above citation, Kant does not give us a formula, but what he calls the "one categorical imperative". He says, "There is therefore only a single categorical imperative, and it is this: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.'"[21] This is, in fact, a formula, a formula in which the terms "maxim" and "law" are variables. For the present, it will be necessary to distinguish between the categorical imperative as the formula and the categorical imperative as a particular command of reason. Whereas the latter sets out the particular kind of action commanded by reason, e.g. "Do not commit adultery", "do not steal", "preserve one's life", etc.; the former does not concern any action in particular, but simply gives us a form, expresses the characteristics which are common to every

---

[20] Gr., 420=51.

[21] Gr., 421=52.

particular imperative. This difference is clearly noted by C.D. Broad,[22] as he calls a particular categorical imperative a first-order principle, and the formula of the categorical imperative a second-order principle which states the necessary and sufficient conditions that must be fulfilled by any particular categorical imperative. Thus, the formula of the categorical imperative [second-order principle] sets out a criterion for particular categorical imperatives [first-order principle.] An imperative which is practically right must be one that commands an action which is motivated by a maxim that fits the formula. This means it must satisfy the criterion of the formula in deciding whether it is morally good or not. If we can always test our maxims by means of this formula, then we will be able to act without going astray, and we will be able to live a moral life.

Before proceeding to discuss the formula of the categorical imperative in more detail, we will now sum up the results of this chapter in a few words. According to Kant, we must recognize that man is partly sensuous and partly rational, and as a partially rational being he differs from a wholly rational being such as God. The moral law, which is objective and unconditional, appears to a fully rational being (infinite being) as a subjective principle of action. In Him, subjective inclinations are identical with objectively valid

---

[22]Vide C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967), pp.121-122.

principles. But in the case of human beings, an unconditionally binding, objective principle is one we necessarily obey if reason has complete control over our desires and inclinations. It is one we ought to obey when we are tempted by desires which are part of our human disposition. Thus, the moral law, the unconditionally binding and objective principle, appears as a categorical imperative which commands us to do our duty. A categorical imperative differs from a hypothetical imperative in that it is a principle that can be applied unconditionally to all rational beings. Hence from the concept of duty and the concept of the categorical imperative, Kant derives the formula of the categorical imperative: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." It is the different formulae of the categorical imperative that we shall be examining in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

THE FORMULAE OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

In the first chapter, we have already stated one formulation of the principle of the categorical imperative. However, Kant does not content himself with giving only one formula. Having set aside the single categorical imperative in the form: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.", he immediately proceeds to state other formulations of the categorical imperative. Commentators have disagreed about the exact number of formulae developed by Kant. H.J. Paton has claimed that there are five formulae, which he has named and numbered as the following:[1]

(a): Formula I or the Formula of Universal Law: Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

(b): Formula Ia or the Formula of the Law of Nature: Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.

(c): Formula II or the Formula of the End in Itself: So act as to use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means.

(d): Formula III or the Formula of Autonomy: So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxim.

---

[1]Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 129.

(e): Formula IIIa or the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends: So act as if you were always through your maxim a law-making member in the universal kingdom of ends.

This system of numeration, according to Paton, is intended to bring out the special connections between different formulae and to conform, as far as possible, to the view that there are three main formulae,[2] and two sub-formulae.

C.D. Broad, on the other hand, holds that there are only three formulae, namely, the formula of universal law, the formula of the end in itself, and the formula of Autonomy, and insists that the three formulae are not logically equivalent to each other.[3]

A.R.C. Duncan, being unsatisfied with Paton's system of numeration, claims that there are four formulae and not more than four, and elucidates a possible historical reason why there should be four. He says that there is a general formula for the categorical imperative,

(1): "Act only on that maxim whereby you canst at the same time will that it should become universal law.",

and three subsidiary formulae. The first subsidiary formula is:

(2): "Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature."

---

[2]Paton, Ibid.

[3]Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp.131-132.

This is the formula of the Law of Nature. The second subsidiary formula is:

> (3): "So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end, and never as a means only."

This is the formula of the End in Itself. The third subsidiary formula is:

> (4): "Hence follows the third practical principle of the will, which is the ultimate condition of its harmony with the universal practical reason, namely, the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislative will."

This is the formula of Autonomy.[4] In addition, Duncan regards the formula of the Kingdom of Ends as only a different wording of the formula of Autonomy.[5]

In view of this bewildering range of opinion on the number of formulae of the categorical imperative, it would no doubt be wise for us to adopt Paton's exhaustive enumeration and treat each formula separately, and attempt to make clear how these various formulae are related to each other before we come to a conclusion about how many such distinct formulae there in fact are. Thus, the decision on such questions as how many formulae Kant intended to offer, or whether there exists any formula superior to any others, will only be treated in the last chapter of this essay. The chapters which immediately follow are mainly concerned with the various formulations of the categorical imperative.

---

[4] Duncan, A.R.C., *Practical Reason and Morality*. (Toronto and New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1957), p.173.

[5] Ibid., p.174.

CHAPTER III

THE FORMULA OF THE UNIVERSAL LAW

—Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

It is clear that Kant claims pure reason has not only a theoretical function, but a practical use as well. Reason in its practical application is concerned with the production of moral choices or decisions in accordance with the law which proceeds from itself. In other words, through practical reason, we recognize the moral law to which the maxims of our objectively correct actions must conform. As we have stated above, owing to the double nature of our being, our actions are not exclusively determined by reason. They are guided by our pure practical reason, but they are also affected by our inclinations. It is this aspect of our nature that distinguishes us from a holy being. As humans, we do not spontaneously act in conformity with the moral law. Our actions will not, therefore, coincide with the actions of a holy being. Therefore when through pure practical reason we become aware of the universality of the moral law, we are nevertheless obliged to restrict ourselves and act under the command of the supreme moral law. Hence, the moral law is regarded as a prescriptive law of our sensuously

affected and temptable being. But the moral law is not taken by itself, only a prescriptive law; it is also a law which describes how a perfectly rational being would inevitably act. That we come to regard the moral law as subjecting us to an unconditional (categorical) imperative is not due to the nature of the law as such. The moral law takes the form of a prescription because human nature is so structured that human beings are partly sensuous and partly rational. If we were incapable of being tempted, we would not regard the moral law as a law which is binding upon us. If we were not partly rational beings, we would not come to apprehend the universality of the moral law. Because human beings have desires and inclinations in addition to the capacity for reason, they realize that they are not holy beings. The moral law, which for the will of a holy being is a law of holiness, is for the will of a finite rational being a law of duty, a law of moral constraint. It is thus that the moral law appears as a categorical imperative, commanding and offering us a necessary and sufficient criterion by which every subjective principle of action has to be tested and judged before it can rightly be accepted and acted upon.

Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative runs as follows: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." Before we discuss this specific statement, it will be useful to give a fuller account of Kant's concept of "maxim".

1. Maxims: formal and material.

Kant defines maxim in two places in the *Groundwork*. In one passage he says that it "is the subjective principle of a volition,"[1] and as "a subjective principle of action...[it] contains a practical rule determined by reason in accordance with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or again his inclinations); it is thus a principle on which the subject acts."[2] Also, in his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant states that "a maxim is a subjective law in accordance with which we actually do act."[3] From these passages one can see in what ways Kant thinks human behaviour differs from that of animals. Animal behaviour takes place strictly according to "laws of nature", that is, in accordance with psychological and physiological laws, where there are set responses to given stimuli. Although human beings also act in accord with laws of nature and may sometimes be presumed to be entirely under the control of natural impulses and blind drives, nevertheless human nature is always in some respects "rational". A human being has the ability to act according to his conception of law, i.e. to principles, either subjective or objective. Only a being who is capable of adopting

---

[1] Gr., 400n=15n.

[2] Gr., 421n=51n.

[3] Immanuel Kant: *Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Louis Infield, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p.43.

maxims, i.e. acting on principles, can be moral or immoral. Were there a being who lives a life only of instinct and impulse, he would lose his dignity and turn himself into a beast. Rational beings, and this, as far as we know, means only the species of man, can act rationally according to laws. It is this capacity which, according to Kant form the basis of our worth or humanity. That is why Kant insists that even when a man is a bad man, humanity in his person is worthy of esteem;[4] and even an immoral man has his own maxims, though his maxims are material and not moral ones.

At this point we must distinguish between a material maxim and a formal maxim. For Kant, all maxims, whether material or formal, have a matter or content or material end, since all actions are purposive and presuppose ends and consequences. Kant says explicitly that it is undeniable that every volition must have an object and a material end.[5] If the material end is supposed to be the determining ground and condition of the maxim, then it is only a material maxim, and it is specific to the particular subject who seeks to fulfil his end. Thus Kant says a maxim is a subjective principle of volition, a principle on which the subject acts. Material maxims are of the form "When life is miserable, I will commit suicide" etc., they all refer to an object of desire, and it is this object that is the condition of

---

[4]Vide Ibid., p.151.

[5]Vide C. Pr. R. 34.

action. Maxims of this type cannot be said to be moral maxims. The reason is, as suggested previously, due to the contingent fact that these maxims are only valid for a particular agent, and for him only because of his motives in relation to some particular ends. Material maxims have their origin in a combination of reason and inclinations. Although Kant does not show how maxims arise, he clearly states that they are determined by reason and inclinations. "...[F]rom these feelings there arise desires and inclinations, from these in turn, with the co-operation of reason there arise maxims."[6] And as quoted above, a maxim is said to be a subjective principle of action determined by reason in accordance with the conditions of the subject. If a person acts solely according to his desires and inclinations, then he acts blindly without being guided by his rational will. In this case his action is not an action based on principle.

In all actions of human will, there are two distinguishable factors: First, a desire, which is the dynamic factor of our action; and secondly, a recognition of that which we ought to do. What we want appears as an incentive, and it speaks to our inclination, impulse, drive, and propensity. What we ought to do in order to achieve what we want is discerned by reason. Reason may discover a rule for what ought to be done, if we are to obtain what we want. Thus from the

---

[6]Gr., 427=62

co-operation of inclination and reason, there arises a principle on which the subject acts. As, for example, "When I am in need of money, I will work," is a maxim determined by the subject's inclination towards money, and arises from the co-operation of reason which directs the subject to fulfil his inclination by working.

So far we have been concerned exclusively with maxims that are determined by inclinations and desires which arise from the co-operation of reason and inclination. To these, Kant gives the name "Material maxim". Because material maxims seek mainly to produce certain results, they are termed "mere maxims". They are subjective and good only for the individual who acts upon them; the only value they can have is in relation to the desires and inclinations of that individual. "Ends that a rational being adopts arbitrarily as effects of his action (material ends) are in every case only relative; for it is solely their relation to special characteristics in the subject's power of appetition which gives them their value."[7] Thus, this value has no universal significance, and we can say that actions based on material maxims have no genuine moral value.

Not all maxims are material maxims. According to Kant there are maxims which confer moral value on actions. These he calls formal maxims. Actions based on formal maxims also produce or seek to product results. Although they all have

---

[7] Gr., 427=64.

a "matter" or "content" and seek to produce results, formal maxims, unlike material maxims, are not grounded in subjective ends, and thus are not determined by inclinations and desires but by reason alone. The distinction between the two kinds of maxims thus rests on the difference in the nature of the motive from which the action is done. Kant puts the distinction between formal and material maxims in the following way:

> Practical principles are formal if they abstract from all subjective ends; they are material, on the other hand, if they are based on such ends and consequently on certain impulsions.[8]

Whereas material maxims are subjective principles of volition, valid only for the particular agent, formal maxims enjoin actions that are objectively binding on all rational beings as such, and therefore they are also valid for the particular agent who acts on them. For example, a formal maxim such as "under no circumstance will I steal money from others", can serve as a subjective principle for a particular agent; but it can also serve as a principle of action for any rational being. Unlike actions based on material maxims which have only relative value, actions based on formal maxims have universal and absolute value and can be said to have moral worth.

---

[8] Gr., 427=64.

2. The relation between the moral law and maxim

In the *Groundwork*, Kant distinguishes sharply between an objective principle and a subjective principle.[9] He says that a maxim (a subjective principle) states how we might behave and a law prescribes how we ought to behave. This distinction implies the following possibilities:[10] The first possibility would be an action based on a mere maxim. This would be a case in which a rational being acts according to some maxim while holding it to be valid only for him, and for him only because its condition is the actual state of his own motives. The second possibility would be an action based on a law: In this case a rational being recognizes a condition valid for, though not necessarily binding on, all rational beings. The third possibility would be an action based on a law which is also a maxim. In this case a rational being recognizes a condition as present and binding for all rational beings as such and therefore as valid for and applicable to himself. On the basis of this trichotomy, we see that the objective principle of morality may also be a subjective principle of volition, functioning as a maxim of an agent. But there may also be a discrepancy between the objective principle of morality and an agent's

---

[9]Vide Gr., 421n=51n.

[10]Vide L.W. Beck: *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason.* (Chicago and London: The U. of Chicago Press, 1960), p.81.

maxim. As we have stated before, if we were all purely rational moral agents, the objective principle of morality would also be the subjective principle of our volition. We would then act on maxims that are identical with the objective principles of morality. In point of fact, however, we are capable of acting on maxims that are incompatible with the moral law. So the moral law takes the form of an imperative and commands us to act in a certain way. Thus, if our subjective principle of volition accords with the canon of moral judgement, then the action is said to have objective validity, and the subjective principle becomes an objective principle of morality.

There is a further point which has a bearing on the relation between the moral law and maxims of action.[11] It is sometimes maintained that Kant's moral philosophy is absurdly formalistic, because he claims to be able to deduce moral maxims from the moral law. If Kant were really to make such a claim, his moral philosophy as a whole would be palpable nonsense. For as Kant has pointed out repeatedly, no material principle can be deduced from a purely formal principle. A maxim is a practical, useful, subjective rule of voluntary action in the empirical world. It describes a person's subjective policy for behaviour in certain circumstances. A maxim containing no reference to any material end

---

[11] Vide Dietrichson, Paul: 'Kant's Criteria of Universalizability'. in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* with Critical Essays edited by R.P. Wolff. (Indianapolis, N.Y. The Bobbs-Merriel Co., Inc., 1968), pp.163-207.

could not possibly be of any practical use to us. It would not be a maxim of action. But in point of fact Kant does not say that moral maxims can be deduced from the moral law; what he means is merely that our maxims are not morally legitimate unless they conform to the moral law, and that we can therefore appraise our maxims in terms of the formal principle. There is an important difference between testing and deducing. We can appraise our maxims by the moral law, but we cannot deduce any subjective principle of action from a formal objective law.

3. The first formula of the categorical imperative.

If we are to test our subjective principle of volition in terms of the moral law, then we have to pass through a special canon. According to Kant, this means that we must be able to will that the maxim of our action should become a universal law. Thus, in one form, the categorical imperative runs as follows: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[12] If we are to understand this formula, it will be necessary to clarify some phrases. First of all, the phrase "can at the same time will" is the main clue to understanding the whole of this formula. Our maxim, the subjective principle of action, will have moral worth only when it

---

[12] Gr., 421=52.

can be universalized, and shown to be applicable to every rational being. It is clear that a material maxim by which an individual aims at some further ends, cannot be so universalized, and thus cannot be regarded as a universal law. The principles of moral action must be the same for every rational being. No rational being is entitled to make exceptions in his own favor. It is inconsistent to will that a maxim be a universal law, and at the same time make an arbitrary exception in our own favor. Kant holds that this contradiction in the will is "the contradiction that a certain principle should be objectively necessary as a universal law and yet subjectively should not hold universally but should admit of exceptions."[13] Hence, the phrase "can at the same time will" means "can at the same time will without contradiction", and this is the interpretation we have given above.

One of Kant's fundamental assumptions is that our will is rational and that we can judge what is morally right or wrong. The discovery that a given maxim leads to inconsistency is one discovery which leads a rational agent to reject such a maxim. However it seems that Kant has exaggerated the ease and certainty with which the rational will decides upon its course of action. It is true that even very young children are sometimes able to judge what is right or wrong, and even bad men have some insight into justice and

---

[13] Gr., 424=58.

injustice. But how can we guarantee, on the basis of the procedure under discussion, that there would not be cases of misjudgement, innocence and ignorance in willing which will lead to immoral action? How, on the basis of Kant's procedure, can these possibilities be guarded against? For example, a drunkard, who is deeply fond of alcohol and thinks everybody should be as well, may act on the basis of the following maxim: "If I do not hurt anybody, I will take alcohol whenever I like." He takes it for granted that he can act according to this maxim. But this is a matter of ignorance, for this maxim cannot be universally followed. If it were, it will lead to social disorder. Also, in some cases, even when a man has rational control over himself, he may wrongly judge that his maxim can be universalized. This could be the result of lack of knowledge and thought. Kant does not overlook these difficulties. He holds that such difficulties are misjudgement, innocence and ignorance, can be overcome by, for example, moral education.[14] Through moral education, we come to recognize what our duties are. *The Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* do not deal with education for specific duties. This is the problem that Kant takes up in other works such as the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Lectures on Ethics*, etc. We will discuss these problems no further as

---

[14] Vide *Lectures on Ethics*. p.253. and also *Education*, Trans. A. Churton (Ann Arbor Paperbacks: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp.6-9.

they are off the main subject of this thesis.

Now, as the categorical imperative commands, we have to put aside our personal interests, and estimate impartially and impersonally, the fitness of our maxims to be principles for ourselves and also for every rational being. It is only when our maxims have universal validity, that they can serve as a basis for actions which have moral worth. Otherwise, they are only maxims of personal advantage and must be rejected. The Universal validity of our maxim is the ground of all our actions. As Kant points out clearly, we can act only on the maxim through which we can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. Maxims which do not satisfy this demand must be excluded.

4. Is the first formulation of the categorical imperative sufficient to be a criterion of moral action?

As we have stated above, according to Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative, we ought to act only on that maxim which we can at the same time will to be a universal law. Maxims which do not meet the requirement of universality have to be rejected, and it will be morally wrong to act on such maxims. On the other hand, will it in all cases be morally right to act on maxims which meet the requirement of this formula of the categorical imperative? This is the question which demands attention here. We will, in the following, give examples of maxims, examine how they

are to be appraised in terms of Kant's first formulation, and see whether this formulation is a sufficient criterion of moral action.

In order to pursue this aim we will consider 3 sorts of cases. First, let us consider one of Kant's examples. The maxim runs as follows: "Whenever I believe myself short of money, I will borrow money and promise to pay it back, though I know that this will never be done."[15] This subjective principle of volition is that of giving false promises in order to get oneself out of a financial difficulty. It is clear that one cannot turn this maxim into a universal law. For this universal law would destroy all faith in promises, whereas the maxim presupposes faith in promises. On the other hand, the agent himself is only making an exception in his own favor where he personally thinks everyone else should keep his promises to others.[16] Since this maxim cannot meet the requirement of universality it has to be rejected.

Secondly, consider an example where an agent takes the following as his maxim: "One shall never commit adultery." We must ask of this maxim whether it can be universalized. It is clear that this maxim can be willed to become a universal law and actions based on this maxim will then be considered as morally right.

---

[15] Gr., 422=54.

[16] This maxim will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Finally, there are cases of maxims that would obviously be morally wrong ones, but which can nonetheless be universalized. Among these, consider the following one: "Someone is himself flourishing, but he sees others who have to struggle with great hardships (whom he could easily help); and he thinks 'what does it matter to me? Let every one be as happy as heaven wills or as he can make himself; only I have no wish to contribute anything to his well-being or to his support in distress!'"[17] This maxim can be universalized without contradiction. If there were such a universal law where nobody would try to help others in distress, the human race could still continue to exist, "better no doubt than if everybody prates about sympathy and good will, and even takes pains, on occasion, to practise them, but on the other hand cheats where he can, traffics in human rights, or violates them in other ways."[18] We can now see that this maxim could become a universal law, although we find no internal contradiction in this maxim, it is nevertheless impossible to will that everybody should act according to it. On the basis of our ordinary judgements, we would say that the maxim of non-benevolent action is not morally commendable.

On the basis of the above examples we can see that Kant's first formula of the categorical imperative seems

---

[17] Gr., 423=56

[18] Ibid.

to be not a sufficient criterion of moral maxim. This is owed to the agent's incapability of impartial judgement rather than the formula itself. In case of ignorance and a lack of scholarship, one may misjudge easily. Seeing the frailty of human nature, Kant gives us five formulae of the categorical imperative. The different formulae will surely help to judge one's maxim from different angles and accordingly they provide a sufficient criterion for moral maxims. This will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

CHAPTER IV

THE FORMULA OF THE LAW OF NATURE

—Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.

Immediately after stating the first formula of the categorical imperative—the formula of the universal law, Kant gives another formulation of the imperative, namely to "act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature."[1] In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant puts this formula in the following way:

> Ask yourself whether, if the action which you propose should take place by a law of nature of which you yourself were a part, you could regard it as possible through your will.[2]

There is a sharp difference between this and the first formula. We will, in the following sections, first examine what Kant means by the universal law of nature, and then proceed to the relation between the two formulae and the significance of this formula towards Kant's criterion of moral action.

---

[1] Gr., 421-52.

[2] C.Pr.R. 69.

1. Kant's Views about the Order of Nature

It may seem a little surprising at first that Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative is expressed in terms of the universal law of nature. But his reasons for this become clear if we consider Kant's beliefs about the order of Nature. Nature was regarded, in the eighteenth century, not as a mere chaos, but as a mechanical system operating under laws. The order of nature under law, as Beck points out,[3] means two things. First, it means a uniform sequence of phenomena under causal law, and from this arises the concept of the universal uniformity of nature. Phenomena are the matter of nature and are subject to causality. Phenomena under causal law should have no exceptions; the same cause always produces the same effect. Causal law covers not only the mechanical causation of physical bodies but also the instinctive behaviour of animals and men. Thus, the order of nature is uniform, is governed by causal law which is universal in application, and the course of nature continues always uniformly the same.

Nevertheless, in order to understand the order of nature more fully, Kant uses another concept in addition to the concept of the uniformity of nature, namely, the concept

---

[3] Vide Beck : *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. p.159.

of the systematic harmony of nature as an organic whole. A systematic harmonic nature is a nature of purposes and ends, which appears as a kingdom of ends in Kant's account. Under this teleological point of view to interpret nature, we assume that "no organ, no faculty, no impulse, indeed nothing whatsoever is either superfluous or disproportioned to its use, and that therefore nothing is purposeless, but everything exactly conformed to its destiny in life."[4] The concept of a systematic harmony of nature may seem strange to us today. As Paton points out, "Eighteenth-Century optimism about nature was shattered by the advent of Darwinism, and we tend to regard nature as 'red in tooth and claw', careless of the race as she is careless of the individual."[5] But in Kant's view, along with the prevailing idea of the uniformity of nature, we have the concept of the order of nature as a systematic harmonic unity under which everything adapts to its purpose and end. Now, we are not questioning Kant's view about the order of nature; what is important here is that Kant regards the laws of nature, not only as causal laws, but also as teleological laws. According to Kant, everything in the world can be viewed as connected by a systematic unity under teleological laws, but the world as a systematic unity under teleological laws is, for him, only

---

[4] C.P.R. B425.

[5] Paton : *The Categorical Imperative*. p.150.

a regulative idea which is used to explain the phenomena of nature.[6] Kant says:

> The speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard all order in the world as if it had originated in the purpose of a supreme reason. Such a principle opens out to our reason, as applied in the field of experience, altogether new views as to how the things of the world may be connected according to teleological laws, and so enables it to arrive at their greatest systematic unity.[7]

The concept of a kingdom of ends in its teleological aspect as applied to nature, differs from its application in ethics. In the first case, the concept is only a regulative idea used to explain nature comprehensively. In the latter case, a possible kingdom of ends is something we can aim to achieve through our moral progress in the long run. This is treated in Kant's last formulation of the categorical imperative, and we will discuss this later.

---

[6]Kant states that there are three transcendental Ideas of pure reason: the soul, the world, and God. These Ideas do not give us knowledge of corresponding objects. That is, they never have any constitutive employment. But, on the other hand, they are indispensably necessary to direct our search for knowledge and lead to the greatest possible unity combined with the greatest possible extension in our knowledge. E.g., the Idea of God as a supreme intelligence and the cause of the universe leads us to think of Nature as a systematic teleological unity and aids the mind in its investigation of Nature. Ideas which have only regulative employment are called regulative Ideas. Vide C.P.R. B670-675 = A642-647.

[7]C.P.R. B715 = A687.

Now, under the concept of a systematic harmonic nature, Kant says we regard everything in nature as conforming to its own destiny in life. Everything that exists in nature has its route and purpose and should not be thwarted or interrupted. Nothing is superfluous, for each thing has its own natural function in life. We may say in summary that the idea of the uniformity of nature and the idea of a systematic harmony of nature are the two main aspects of Kant's views about nature.

2. The formula of the Law of Nature

Kant's criterion of moral action may seem more comprehensive when he brings in the second formulation of the categorical imperative. Kant alters his wording in the second formula when he says "Act as if...", these words enable us to test the morality of our maxims by treating them as if they were laws of nature, but Kant cautions against hypostatization, i.e., against supposing that our maxims can actually become universal laws of nature. It is only the formal aspect of a law of nature, its lawfulness, that leads Kant to introduce this second formula.

According to this formula we can determine whether the maxim of our action is morally permissible if the maxim passes this criterion, if it could, in other words, be a universal law of nature. This can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, under the concept of uniformity of nature,

the causal law of nature is universal in application and allows no arbitrary exceptions. When we test a maxim by treating it as a law of nature, the question is whether we can will that maxim as though it is a causal law of nature such that there could be no breach in its application. If we cannot, then we ought not to act on such a maxim. If we nevertheless act on such a maxim, we violate a moral law, and our maxim is morally inadmissible.

Secondly, the order of nature can be regarded as a systematic harmony, according to which every organ in this organic whole has its natural purpose and is said to form under the teleological law of nature a harmonic purpose for unity. Now, when we test a maxim by treating it as a teleological law of nature, we simply ask whether such a maxim can have the form of a teleological law such that a systematic unity would not be thwarted. We will be aware when considering nature from a teleological standpoint that we do not assume that every organ performs according to a conscious purpose to form a unity, but only that it has a natural drive to realize its own destiny in life in the order of nature. But in the case of human conduct, it will be quite a different matter, when we act on a maxim, we set purposes before ourselves, and whether these set purposes will promote the systematic harmony of nature is our main concern. If we can treat our maxim as if it could become through our will a universal law of nature, our maxim is a morally permissible one. Hence, the difference in wording between this and the

formula discussed in Chapter III should not be glossed over. We will deepen our understanding of Kant's second formula if we consider his illustrations of it.

3. Illustrations of the application of the second formula of the categorical imperative.

Kant uses four examples to illustrate the second formula of the categorical imperative. We will discuss Kant's examples under the following headings and in the order listed: 1. Suicide; 2. False promises; 3. Developing one's talents; 4. Kindness towards others in distress. We will then go on to discuss Kant's distinction between perfect and imperfect duties.

3.1 Illustrations

1/. Suicide. Kant states that there is a perfect duty towards oneself in the preservation of one's life. Suppose a man feels sick of life as the result of a series of misfortunes, and wants to take his own life. Kant's account of the wrongness of suicide rests on a teleological assumption about the function of the principle of self-love. The suicide's maxim is "From self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if its continuance threatens more evil than it promises pleasure." Now, let us see whether this maxim could become a universal law of nature. In this case, Kant assumes that a system of nature contains the principle of self-love which manifests itself in our purposes that promote the

furtherance of life. Thus, it is impossible for men who are weary of life to commit suicide morally, for the suicide's maxim could not be willed to become a universal law of nature, for this, according to Kant, would contradict the law of nature itself. Now, this argument is obviously open to criticism. One may, for instance, object to Kant's views about the purposiveness of nature, and thus object to the function of the principle of self-love as he expresses it. Or, less sweepingly, as Paton points out,[8] one may believe that there is a merciful dispensation of Providence that the same principle of self-love which leads to a furtherance of life may lead to death when life offers nothing but continuous pain. Unless we have a strong belief in the perfection of teleology in nature, this argument against suicide can carry little conviction except to those who are already convinced that suicide is morally wrong. But anyhow, Kant himself is consistent in this argument, and the argument against suicide is on stronger ground when we come to his later formulations of the categorical imperative.

2/. False Promises: Kant's second example is an example of perfect duty towards others. In this case, the maxim which Kant is projecting to is "Whenever I believe myself short of money, I will borrow money and promise to pay it back, though I know that this will never be done."[9] Reflection

---

[8]Paton: *The Categorical Imperative*, p.154.

[9]Gr., 422-54.

shows that the man who acts on this maxim in order to get out of financial difficulty cannot turn it into a universal law of nature without contradiction. First of all, when we act on a maxim to make a false promise, we want ourselves to be trusted, and the maxim presupposes faith in promises. If this maxim were to become a universal law so that everybody made false promises in order to get out of difficulties, it would destroy the very purpose of false promises, and no one would take the so-called promises seriously. Such promises would be known to be worthless and would therefore not be regarded as promises. Thus, in Kant's view, this universal law would be self-contradictory; the law in question could be no law at all. Here, once again, we can see the operation of Kant's basic assumptions about Nature. Kant firmly believes that Nature is a well established order, and that truth is the guiding principle in social intercourse, for without trust and mutual confidence there will be no society of men.[10] So the keeping of promises and the development of mutual confidence are seen to be essential within the systematic harmony of nature. Thus, apart from contradicting itself, the maxim also destroys the mutual confidence, trust and harmony of purposes among men, and hence cannot become a universal law of a nature which is harmonic, and well-established in its functioning. Thus this maxim of false promises is regarded as defective and must be rejected.

---

[10]This is claimed explicitly in his *Lectures on Ethics*.

3/. Developing one's talents: In this example of one's duty to develop one's talents, Kant's teleological views are seen even more clearly. If a man has a talent whose cultivation would make him a useful man for all sorts of good human purposes, he ought to develop his fortunate natural aptitudes. A man's duty to develop his faculties, is not dependent on any advantage which this development may bring him. If such were the case, it would be a hypothetical and not a categorical imperative, that commands us to do our duties in this respect. The key to an understanding of Kant's position here lies in the following sentence: "For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all his powers should be developed, since they serve him, and are given him, for all sorts of possible ends."[11] What chiefly distinguishes man from the rest of creation, according to Kant, is the possession of powers. These powers include the ability of theoretical activity, the power of aesthetic appreciation, and the ability to lead a moral life. Being given all sorts of powers by nature for all sorts of purposes, a rational being must necessarily use his power to develop his talents. Although there is no contradiction in conceiving a universal law such that every man should let his talents rust and should be bent on devoting his life solely to idleness, indulgence, procreation and enjoyment, this maxim of neglecting one's natural gifts cannot be willed as a universal law of nature. Nature is systematically established with purposes

---

[11] Gr., 423=56.

and ends. These purposes and ends should be fulfilled, or else there would be a disruption to the systematic harmony of nature. Moreover, the use of one's powers, as manifested in the deliberate cultivation of one's talents, is unlikely to be successful if used merely to promote one's own happiness. In this case, "nature would have hit on a very bad arrangement by choosing reason in the creature to carry out this purpose."[12] Human nature, being what it is, is "the more a cultivated reason concerns itself with the aim of enjoying life and happiness, the farther does man get away from true contentment."[13]

In passing we might observe that this doctrine of developing one's talent rather than enjoying one's life in idleness is not fashionable today. But it is surely a very sensible doctrine, and it represents a profound insight into the nature of duty.

4/. Kindness towards others in distress: Kant describes his last example in the following way:

> [Someone] is himself flourishing, but he sees others who have to struggle with great hardships (and whom he could easily help); and he thinks 'What does it matter to me? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven wills or as he can make himself; I won't deprive him of anything; I won't even envy him; only I have no wish to contribute anything to his well-being or to his support in distress.'" [14]

---

[12] Gr., 395=4.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Gr., 423=56.

This maxim of behaviour towards people in need of help is certainly not a maxim of benevolent action, but neither is it a maxim of malevolent action. It is instead a maxim of non-benevolent action towards man. If this maxim were to be a universal law, then noone would go to the assistance of others in distress. Furthermore, the human race could still continue to exist under such a law, and may be "better no doubt than if everybody prates about sympathy and goodwill, and even take pains, on occasion, to practise them, but on the other hand cheats where he can, traffics in human rights, or violates them in other ways."[15] But yet it is impossible to will that such a principle should hold as a law of nature. Kant's presupposition in this case is the principle that every person at times desires some type of help from others in order to carry out his purposes and to realize happiness. This assumption may lead us to think that Kant commits himself to the view that the motive of benevolent action is the desire for benefits in exchange for being altruistic, and it might also lead us to conclude that if we refuse to help others, nobody is likely to help us. Nothing of this sort, however, could be further from Kant's meaning. Kant simply asserts that we ought to help others in distress even if we are strong enough to do without help from them. In so far as a human being comes to recognize that he is partly rational and partly sensuous, and is not omnipotent, the

---

[15] Ibid.

principle of mutual help is assumed to be *a priori*. A human being under a systematic order of nature, is so constituted that he desires to get benevolent actions from others some of the time. Thus, in many situations a man may need love and sympathy from others; and hence, if the above maxim of non-benevolent action were to become a universal law, he would will an exception to this law in his own interest and consequently would disturb the systematic harmony of purposes in Nature. Clearly, such a maxim fails to meet the basic requirements of moral life.

3.2 Perfect and Imperfect duties

According to Kant, duties may be divided into duties towards oneself and duties towards others, and further into perfect and imperfect duties. This gives us four main types of duty. In the foregoing section examples of each of the following have been given: perfect duties towards oneself; perfect duties towards others; imperfect duties towards oneself; and imperfect duties towards others.

The distinction between duties towards oneself and duties towards others seems clear enough, but the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties requires some explanation. Kant defines a perfect duty as "one which allows no exception in the interest of inclination."[16] In the case of perfect duties, we are directly commanded to do our duties--e.g., to preserve one's life and to keep one's

---

[16] Gr., 421n=53n

promises whether one likes it or not. We cannot refuse to keep our promise to pay back the money we owe to others on the ground that we can use the money in a much better way than the owner, or that we need the money to educate our children. Also, we cannot shorten our lives because they have become burdensome to us. The preservation of life and promise-keeping must be regarded as perfect duties. Objections have been brought against both these examples. It may be objected that Kant confuses the blind tendency to preserve one's life at all cost without any recognition that it is one's duty to do so, and with the practical moral insight that leads one to preserve one's life. But this is not Kant's point. Kant's point is that it is wrong to commit suicide in order to avoid difficulties or because we prefer to be dead.

The two examples (3 and 4) that we discussed earlier in this section are examples of imperfect duties. These two examples, to refresh the reader's memory, are examples of: 1. duty to develop one's talents, and 2. duty to help others in distress. There is a "latitude" or "play-room" in the case of such duties. Although it is our duty to develop our talents and also to help others in distress, we cannot develop all our talents or help everyone at the same time; it is left to our own discretion which talent we are going to develop first and to decide whom we ought to help first.

Referring to his four illustrations, Kant also marks his distinction between perfect and imperfect duties as follows:

> Some actions are so constituted that their maxim cannot even be conceived as a universal law of nature without contradiction, let alone be willed as what ought to become one. In the case of others we do not find this inner impossibility, but it is still impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself. It is easily seen that the first kind of action is opposed to strict or narrow (rigorous) duty, the second only to wider (meritorious) duty,...[17]

Hence, the first two examples are of perfect duties and here if a maxim in conflict with perfect duty is universalized in the form of a law of nature, it is said to involve a contradiction. In the last two examples of imperfect duties, although the maxims of actions in conflict with these duties can exist as a universal law of nature without contradiction, it is still impossible for anyone to will these maxims should be universal laws. It is because according to Kant, these maxims will disturb the systematic harmony of purposes in Nature.

Even though Kant says that the maxims in the first and second examples when universalized give rise to inconsistency, this does not, in his view, constitute logical contradiction. Kant's procedure of testing the soundness of a maxim does not seem to be one of finding out whether the universalized maxim taken by itself is contradictory, but whether it is consistent with possibilities which rest upon

---

[17] Gr., 424=57.

our basic assumptions about the world.[18] The difficulty thus lies in the question which assumptions about the world are to be considered in order to judge the morality of an action. Kant's second formula of the categorical imperative is based on his belief that nature is a systematic harmony— something that may seem erroneous to us today. But even if we do not hold the same beliefs as Kant, his theory still remains extremely important for the understanding of moral experience and moral judgement.

4. The relation between the first and the second formulae of the categorical imperative.

We have stated at the opening of this chapter that Kant has given us the formula of the universal law of nature immediately after the formula of the universal law. There is no explicit explanation in the *Groundwork* of why he introduces this second formula. In dealing with the practical use of the categorical imperative, it is obvious that the two formulae are quite similar. In formula I, we are told to act in a certain way, namely on maxims that can be fully universalizable in the form of laws. But the problem is this: even if a person has a crystal clear awareness of the universalizability requirements which apply to the maxim of

---

[18] Vide S. Korner: *Kant*. (Penguin Books, 1955.) p.139.

this action, this does not enable him to judge whether a particular maxim is capable of becoming a law, because he could lack sufficient knowledge required to enable him to judge the particular case adequately. The purely formal moral law thus cannot be applied directly as a standard for determining whether or not our maxim is of a morally legitimate kind. We have seen that in the *Groundwork* Kant is conscious of the difficulties inherent in using the purely formal principle itself as a criterion of moral action. Thus in discussing the illustrations, Kant simply uses formula II to derive statements of particular moral obligations. The reason for introducing formula II is clearly expressed in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant says that the purely formal moral law is a supersensuous ideal and cannot by itself be exhibited in *concreto*.[19] There is an obvious need for some principle of mediation, whereby the purely moral law can be made concretely applicable as a criterion of whether our maxims are of the morally legitimate kind. Hence, he says that the universal law of nature serves as a "type" of moral law, which is simply a practical device for symbolizing the abstract principle of the moral law.

It is no surprise when Kant takes the universal law of nature to be a "typic" of the moral law. The laws of actions (the laws of freedom) and the laws of nature both

---

[19] C.Pr.R. 68.

share the common feature of lawfulness in general, however much the laws of freedom and the laws of nature differ. It is this formal aspect that allows the law of nature to be a "type" or model for the moral law. We will consider what "typic" means in what follows, so that we can get a full view of Kant's method of passing from formula I to formula II.

The easiest way to understand what "typic" is is to recall "The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding" in the first Critique. The transcendental categories of the understanding are pure concepts of the understanding, and they are formal and universal. On the other hand, sensuous impressions are the manifold of our sensible intuition; they are material and particular. The pure concepts of the understanding and the sensuous impressions of sensible intuition are thus heterogeneous in character. How then, is the subsumption of intuitions under pure concepts, the application of a category to appearances, possible? There must be, Kant says, some third thing which is homogeneous both with the category and with the appearance, and thus makes the application of the former to the latter possible.[20] Clearly this mediating thing must be intellectual in one respect and sensible in another. This representation is what Kant calls the transcendental schema. Through the schematization, the purely abstract, existentially

---

[20]C. P.R. B177=A138.

indeterminate categories can be applied to concrete sensible intuitions, and thus organize these manifolds in such a way as to enable us to understand actual and possible objects of the phenomenal world. Hence Kant says that "the schemata are thus nothing but *a priori* determinations of time in accordance with rules."[21] Time is the formal condition of the connection of all representations. The transcendental determination of time is homogeneous with the category in that it is universal and rests on *a priori* rule. But, on the other hand, it is so far homogeneous with appearance, in that time is contained in every empirical representation of the manifold. Thus an application of the category to appearances becomes possible by means of the transcendental determination of time, which, as the schema of the concepts of understanding, mediates the subsumption of appearances under categories.[22] Hence when we make cognitive judgements concerning the nature and existence of phenomenal objects, we literally impose the schematized categories upon our sensible intuitions; and through the co-operation of concept and intuition, we are able to understand the phenomenal world.

In the case of the purely formal moral law, it would certainly be convenient if a schematism would once again do as a mediation-procedure, such that the moral law could be

---

[21] C. P.R. B184=145.

[22] C. P.R. B.178=A139.

made concretely applicable as a criterion so as to subsume actions under it. But the difficulty is that the moral law cannot be schematized. It is important to know why this difficulty exists. Kant states that our concept of the unconditioned and purely moral law is an Idea of reason, and as such an Idea it is supersensuous. Nothing corresponding to it can be found in sensuous intuition.[23] The moral law is not a law of the phenomenal realm, it is a law of the noumenal realm. Consequently, it is subject to special difficulties, which result from the fact that a law of freedom is to be applied to actions which are events occurring in the world of sense, and thus subject to the laws of nature and not to the laws of freedom. It therefore would seem absurd to try to find a case in experience to which the moral law applies so that the Ideal of moral good can be exhibited in concreto. But failing this there is, however, the "typic" of the moral law which is analogous to the schematism in the first Critique. The "typic" of the moral law is the media through which the purely moral law can be made concretely applicable.

When judging whether an action can be subsumed under the moral law, we have to appraise it by means of an analogy. There is an analogy between the universal law of nature and the universal moral law. As we have pointed out, both types

---

[23] C. Pr. R. 68.

of law have the common form of universality. Their universality plays an important part in allowing us to view different types of law analogously. Nature, in Kant's view, is uniform in its operation and is also a systematic harmonic unity; all events are phenomena falling under the laws of nature and together form a kingdom of nature. Hence, for the purpose of judgement, we can treat events governed by the law of nature as models for objects conceived to fall under the moral law. The laws of nature therefore, may be called the typic of the moral law.

According to Kant, Nature under law (a kingdom of nature, a sensuous world) is the best model for a realm of moral order (an intelligible world). The universal law of nature is the "typic" of the moral law which we use for judging the legitimacy of our actions. It runs as follows: "Ask yourself whether, if the action which you propose should take place by a law of nature of which you yourself were a part, you could regard it as possible through your will." Although the universal law of nature is only a "typic" of the moral law, it is nonetheless "a type for the estimation of maxims according to moral principles",[24] and it provides a necessary condition of an act's being moral. Here Kant writes:

> If the maxim of action is not so constituted as to stand the test of being made the form of a

---

[24]C. Pr. R. 70.

> natural law in general, it is morally impossible though it may still be possible in nature. [25]

That is, what is not possible in an order of nature under law is not morally possible, though what is actual in nature has no judicative function in the abstract determination of what is morally possible and necessary.

Now, we can see from the above that formula II does not of itself express the essential characteristics of morally legitimate action. It provides only a test for maxims, and appears as a supplement of formula I. Just as a pure category can be applied only through a transcendental schema, formula I can be applied only through formula II which, as the universal law of nature, is said to be the "typic" of the universal moral law. We may see this more clearly after we have examples in section 5 showing how the two formulae of universal law and of the universal law of nature come together as a test of maxims for actions.

5. Illustrations of the co-operation of the first and the second formula as a guide to moral actions.

We have observed in the last section that formula II is a "typic" of formula I, and that formula I can be applied more fully through formula II; we will now show by means of examples how the two formulae work together as guides to moral action.

---

[25] C. Pr. R. 69-70.

The formula of the universal law commands us to put aside our personal interests, to avoid personal bias, and estimate impartially and impersonally the fitness of our maxims to be principles for ourselves and also for all other rational beings. Hence, our acts must be based on universal and objective principles of action. But the problem is that even when an agent knows clearly the universalizability requirements of morally legitimate action, this alone does not enable him to solve his practical moral difficulties. This may be partly due to a lack of adequate judgement, and partly to the formal nature of the universal law which does not clearly light our way to particular actions. As we indicated in the last section of the previous chapter, a man may adopt the maxim of non-benevolence as his maxim of action, and this maxim could possibly become a universal law without contradiction. But by our ordinary judgement, we cannot say that the action of non-benevolence is of the moral type. Now, how can we judge whether an action can be subsumed under the moral law? This is done through a typic of pure practical judgement. In order to do this, we must imagine the adopted maxims of our actions becoming laws of nature. Hence, firstly we can test them by considering whether these adopted maxims would be universal in application and allow no arbitrary exceptions; secondly, we ask whether such maxims would further or fail to further, or would rather destroy the systematic harmonic unity. A maxim which is not possible as a law of nature,

is morally unacceptable.

The case of suicide may help us to see the situation more clearly. The maxim: "From self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if its continuance threatens more evil than it promises pleasure" might at first sight seem morally acceptable. This maxim does not interfere with anyone else and mainly concerns oneself. But, according to Kant, the order of nature is so constituted that the function of human nature is to stimulate the furtherance of life. The maxim of suicide does not pass the test of the second formula and cannot be reckoned morally legitimate.

Though it is itself a principle for testing morally legitimate maxims, the formula of the universal law may seem only marginally applicable owing to its purely formal character and its absence of content; but nevertheless it can serve as a principle for determining whether or not a maxim is morally legitimate. This will be remedial insofar as we universalize maxims by treating them as universal laws of nature. However, through moral education we come to a stage of moral maturity in which we will get a clear sight of the universal law, and we will then have the ability to judge morality in actual practical circumstances.

CHAPTER V

THE FORMULA OF THE END IN ITSELF

—Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.

In the section of Chapter II of the *Groundwork* referred to by Paton as "The canon of moral judgement," Kant states, after he has given the two formulae of the categorical imperative, that he has shown: (1) If duty is to have any meaning and real legislative authority over our actions, it can only be expressed in categorical, not hypothetical imperatives; (2) The content of the categorical imperative must contain the principle of all duty. But he still has to show that there actually is such an imperative which by itself commands absolutely and without any further motives. The reality of this principle cannot be derived from the special characteristics of human nature since it must be valid for all rational beings. The question therefore is this: "Is it a necessary law for all rational beings always to judge their actions by reference to those maxims of which they can themselves will that they should serve as universal law?"[1] For if the will

---

[1]Gr., 426=62.

were determined to action only by ends which a rational being proposes to attain to himself at pleasure, then his action is only relative; and there would be no categorical imperative. If, on the contrary, there is such a thing as a categorical imperative, then, according to Kant, it must be connected *a priori* with the concept of the rational will. In order to settle this point, Kant introduces his concept of objective ends. This is expressed in his third formula of the categorical imperative. Before we proceed to this formula, it is necessary to clarify some technical terms involved in this formula.

1. The concept of End

Kant's use of the term 'end' appears to be ambiguous. This will be made clear only by a careful examination of Kant's texts.

1.1 The general notion of end:

"End" in its ordinary sense, is commonly thought of as the object of desire, or as an effect or state of affairs which one seeks to produce or achieve through action. It is in this sense that end differs from means.[2] E.g., if I want to post a letter, I will go to the post office or the post-box. Posting the letter is the effect produced by my action. Furthermore,

---

[2]The contrast of end and means will be discussed in a later part of this section.

if I wish to have a good meal, I will go to the restaurant which I like most, thus a good meal is the object of my desire and is said to be my end in going to that restaurant. Hence, ends are the aims or goals of persons and can be thought of as the intended results or effects of what is to be done. Kant is right in asserting that actions point to an end. It is the end that is the ground of action. Kant says that ends are "determining grounds of the will in accordance with principles."[3] Beside the ordinary notion of "end", Kant also uses the term in another way. A large portion of this section is devoted to an examination of the ways in which Kant uses the term "end".

1.2 Ends and Means:

Kant observes that,

> The will is conceived as a power of determining oneself to action in accordance with the idea of certain laws, ... Now what serves the will as a subjective ground of its self-determination is an end; ... What, on the other hand, contains merely the ground of the possibility of an action whose effect is an end is called a means.[4]

In this passage, Kant explains his use of the concepts of means and end. We understand that an end is an effect which a rational being seeks to produce. Now, in order to fulfil our desired ends, we have to use some means. In this sense, means are connected with what Kant calls "rules of skill".[5] The

---

[3] C. Pr. R. 59.

[4] Gr., 427=63.

[5] Vide Gr., 415=41.

means will tell us how to attain the relevant ends. E.g., a prescription drug issued by a doctor is a means to cure a man's disease. Someone who is not a gourmet may regard eating only as a mere means to the maintenance of life. To a student, taking a course on "Reading and study skill" is a means to achieve the aim of effective study in other subjects. These are examples of the morally permissible use of means to all sorts of abritrary ends. In this cases we are using things and not persons as means to attain our purposes. Everything, except rational beings, has only a market price or a fancy price, and thus has only a relative value.[6] Even though it is morally objectionable to treat rational beings as mere means, it is clear that we sometimes do treat men as means. E.g., as when we go to the barber, or when we hire someone to wash our car. In these cases we do use others as means to attain our ends. But we are not entitled to treat them *merely* as means for arbitrary use by this or that will. We can treat men as means, but we must always view them at the same time as ends. Kant elucidates this point in the following passages:

> Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end.[7]

---

[6]This will be explained in a later section.

[7]Gr., 428=64.

> But man is not a thing--not something to be used merely as a means: he must always in all his actions be regarded as an end in himself.[8]

These two passages introduce the concept of man as an end in himself. This involves the concept of humanity and the absolute value of personhood and moral worth, all of which will be discussed in later parts of this section. Now, we wish to emphasize that for Kant personhood and dignity are possessed by every rational being. If this is so, then it is immoral to outrage another's dignity for the satisfaction of one's own purposes. This can be seen clearly by noting some obvious examples. We all admit that slavery is wrong. Why is slavery so severely condemned? It is not objectionable simply because it deprives people of certain basic freedoms or because it often involves a great deal of suffering. Granted these are reasons for condemning it. But it is also objectionable because it involves the use of human beings as simply means; it is an outrage against the dignity of a moral agent.

The same applies in cases of rape and violence. Once again what is reprehensible is not solely the ends of the agents. The actions are to be condemned because they make use of another human being as a mere means to the attainment of one's own arbitrary ends. They violate the supreme worth and dignity of human beings.

---

[8]Gr., 429=67.

1.3 Subjective ends and objective ends:

From the plain fact that human actions are purposive, it is clear that they are directed to some further ends, and that the end is the ground of action. This brings us to the distinction between subjective and objective ends. Subjective ends are based on impulses and they are valid only for the specific agent, being grounded in his desires and inclinations. They have no moral worth in themselves whatsoever. The only value they can have is in relation to the feeling and inclinations of the agent. As Kant says: "Ends that a rational being adopts arbitrarily as effects of his action (material ends) are in every case only relative; for it is solely their relation to special characteristics in the subject's power of appetition which gives them their value."[9] Now, all hypothetical imperatives aim at the satisfaction of some further ends, consequently all these subjective ends can be said to be the ground of hypothetical imperatives. E.g., the slave owners and agent are said to be aiming at subjective ends which only further their own desires.

Apart from subjective ends, there are ends that are given by reason itself and which are not based on inclinations. These are objective ends. Ends of this kind are equally valid for every rational being. Objective ends are good in themselves and not merely good for a particular agent. Hence they would supply the ground for all categorical imperatives.

---

[9] Gr. 427=64

1.4 The twofold meaning of objective ends:

In the foregoing part of this section, we have distinguished between subjective and objective ends. Objective ends are said to be independent of any particular circumstances or desires which may be applicable only to some rational agents and are equally valid for all rational beings. Material or subjective ends have merely a value for us, and do not possess value in themselves. Only something whose existence has in itself an absolute value can serve as an objective end. Hence Kant says,

> Suppose, however, there were something whose existence has in itself an absolute value, something which as an end in itself could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it and in it alone, would there be the ground of a possible categorical imperative—that is, of a practical law. Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end.[10]

The question now is, what does Kant mean by saying that man as an end in himself is an objective end of all our actions? I shall try to answer this question in what follows.

First of all, we consider the following quotations from Kant's work:

> (K.1.) .... Thus the value of all objects that can be produced by our action is always conditioned .... Rational beings, on the other hand, are called persons because their nature already marks them out

---

[10] Gr. 428=64.

> as ends in themselves—that is, as something which ought not to be used merely as a means—and consequently imposes to that extent a limit on all arbitrary treatment of them (and is an object of reverence). Persons, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value for us: they are objective ends—that is, things whose existence is in itself an end, and indeed an end such that in its place we can put no other end to which they should serve simply as means... [11]

> (K.2.) ... [H]umanity is conceived, not as an end of man (subjectively)... but as an objective end—one which,... constitute[s] the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends and so must spring from pure reason.[12]

> (K.3.) Rational nature separates itself out from all other things by the fact that it sets itself an end. An end would thus be the matter of every good will. But in the Idea of a will which is absolutely good—good without any qualifying condition (namely, that it should attain this or that end)—there must be complete abstraction from every end that has to be produced (as something which would make every will only relatively good). Hence the end must here be conceived, not as an end to be produced, but as a self-existent end.[13]

> (K.4.) ...[A]subject of ends, namely, a rational being himself, must be made the ground for all maxims of action, never merely as a means, but as a supreme condition restricting the use of every means, that is, always also as an end.[14]

In K.1., Kant states that objects sought merely from inclinations and which can be produced by our actions have only a conditional value. There is nothing of absolute value to be found anywhere apart from rational beings. He thus

---

[11] Gr., 428=65

[12] Gr., 431=70

[13] Gr., 437=82

[14] Gr., 438=83

describes a person as an end in himself and as something possessed of unconditional value. Now, human beings as ends in themselves are self-existent ends; they are already given and cannot be effects or results brought into existence by human actions. Furthermore, they serve as the subject and the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends which can be made the goal of actions (K.2.), or as a supreme condition restricting the use of every means (K.4.). It is the rationality of humanity that distinguishes it as the supreme limiting condition restricting the adoption of all purposes which one might try to achieve. Thus it is that we can say that man is an end in himself; he is the subject of ends, that is the ground for all maxims of actions, and he can set before himself all possible ends. Objects other than rational beings can never set themselves ends, and cannot act rationally according to their own will. Secondly, man is a self-existent end in the sense of a supreme limiting condition restricting the adoption and pursuit of all subjective ends. That is why Kant says one ought to restrict one's maxim by the condition that it should also be universally valid as a law for every subject.[15]

In treating man as a self-existent end, the passage K.3. requires additional explanation because Kant uses the term "end" in a number of ways in K.3. Firstly, as we have mentioned above, "end" in its general meaning refers to something

---

[15] Gr. 438=83

that can be realized. But in the statement "Rational nature separates itself out from all other things by the fact that it sets itself an end.", the expression "an end" seems to be cut off from the ordinary notion of end, since rational nature sets itself, not "an end", but "ends". So what Kant means here seems to refer to what he says of an unconditioned, absolute worth which ought to be realized by every rational being. This is a self-existent end. Secondly, in the sentence, "An end would thus be the matter of every good will," we find further difficulties. E.g. this use of "end" is ambiguous, referring either to ends that are only conditionally good or to ends-in-themselves which are absolutely good. The confusion here is owing to the fact that Kant does not state explicitly what "good will" is referring to. It may mean relatively good will or an absolute good will. Only when our will is absolutely good do we abstract from every subjective end and conceive an end which is self-existent.

In dealing with the concept of a self-existent end, Ross criticises Kant as follows:

> Kant distinguishes between independently subsisting and non-independently subsisting ends. This is forced upon him by the fact that he has already described man, i.e., all men, as ends. This in the ordinary sense of the word, men are not. For an end is an object of desire, and an object of desire is something that does not yet exist. He therefore has to justify his description of man as an end of this very exceptional kind, an end which already exists. The notion of self-subsistent ends is nothing but an embarrassment to Kant.[16]

---

[16] *Kant's Ethical Theory*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.51.

If one restricts oneself to only one meaning of "end", then Ross's criticism of Kant is justified. For it may seem arbitrary to speak of existing things as ends. The notion of a self-existent end is odd in the context. As Ross points out, "end" is often used to mean something to be produced, which does not yet exist. In this sense we might agree with Ross that man is not an end at all. But Kant's use of the word "end" is much wider than the ordinary use. Contrary to subjective ends which are to be produced or brought into existence by our actions, man is an objective end that is self-existent, and is not the sort of thing that one seeks to achieve. Only as an end which is self-existent can it be the subject who can set out all the possible ends and never be an object to be produced by other actions. This end is necessary in itself, and has its value in itself. Thus the term "end" as used in this context expresses the unconditional absolute value of a person which is contrasted with the relative value of contingent ends.

From the above, we realize that the objective ends Kant provides are of a peculiar sort, quite unlike those which one might have expected. For "self-existent" ends are not really ends at all in any generally accepted sense of the term. Consider, for example, Ross's account of the matter:

> The plain fact is that in strictness man is not an end at all, and the description of him as an objective and at the same time self-subsistent end can be understood only if we take this as a way of expressing the fact that there is something which can be realized in any man and is

> worthy of being an object of desire to every man. From the beginning of the *Grundegung* we know that in Kant's view good will is just such a thing.... If there is something that has absolute value, there must be a duty to conserve this and to promote it to the best of one's ability. Now, there is such a thing, viz. good will, and it exists either actually or potentially in every man; therefore in all our actions we must treat neither ourselves nor others as mere possible enjoyers of pleasure, but as beings in whom good will may be and should be conserved and promoted.[17]

We do not question that a good will has absolute value in itself, and Ross is also right in thinking that for Kant, man has his value from his possible possession of good will. But is this what Kant wishes to emphasize in his third formula of the categorical imperative? Surely it is not, since Kant wishes to stress that persons are objective ends.[18] However, Ross's opinion that an objective end is an object worthy of desire by everyone seems to get textual support from Kant. Consider the following passage from the *Groundwork:*

> If then there is to be a supreme practical principle and—so far as the human will is concerned—a categorical imperative, it must be such that from the idea of something which is necessarily an end for every one because it is an <u>end in itself</u> it forms an <u>objective</u> principle of the will and consequently can serve as a practical law.[19]

Apart from this passage, there seems no other place in the *Groundwork* in which Kant expresses this attitude towards objective ends.

---

[17] Ibid., p.52.

[18] Vide Gr., 428=65.

[19] Gr., 428=66.

In 1797, twelve years after he published the *Groundwork*, Kant published the *Metaphysics of Morals*. This work is divided into two parts: (1) the *Doctrine of Law*, and (2) the *Doctrine of Virtue*. In the latter Kant uses the expression "objective ends" in a different sense from that which we have been examining. Consider the following:

> Only the concept of an obligatory end, a concept that belongs exclusively to ethics, establishes a law for the maxims of actions by subordinating the subjective end (which everyone has) to the objective end (which everyone ought to adopt as his own.)[20]

Hence, "objective end" corresponds to the general sense of "end". Whereas subjective ends are characterized as something rational beings do in fact aim at and seek to attain, "objective end" in this sense is an end which all rational beings *ought* to attain. Here we have to concentrate on what Kant means by "objective end" in this passage.

It is essential to remind the reader at this point of Kant's view of human nature as both rational and sensuous. Since the sensuous inclinations tempt us to ends which may be contrary to duty, our legislative reason can check their influence only by subordinating them to objective ends which are given *a priori* , independently of the inclinations. Such obligatory ends are properly called "duties of virtue". A duty of virtue is based only on free self-constraint because virtue contains consciousness of the power to master one's

---

[20] *Doctrine of Virtue*, Translated by M.J. Gregor, (Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1964), p.48.

inclinations when they rebel against the law. Now, under the commands of pure practical reason, there are ends which are presented as objectively necessary—ends which we have a duty to realize.

Kant states explicitly that one's own perfection and the happiness of others are ends which are also duties.[21] These ends are objects of free choice under moral laws and are objects one ought to adopt as one's ends. When saying that man has a duty to take as his end the perfection characteristic of man as such, it means that perfection is what man can bring into being by his actions, not mere gifts he receives from nature; for otherwise there would not be a duty to make perfection an end. In dealing with one's own perfection as an obligatory end, consider the following passage from the *Doctrine of Virtue:*

> Natural perfection is the cultivation of all one's powers for promoting the ends that reason puts forward.... The power to set an end—any end whatsoever—is the characteristic of humanity (as distinguished from animality). Hence there is also bound up with the end of humanity in our own person the rational will, and so the duty, to make ourselves worthy of humanity by culture in general by procuring or promoting the power to realize all possible ends so far as this power is to be found in man himself. In other words, man has a duty to cultivate the crude dispositions in human nature by which the animal first raises itself to man. To promote one's natural perfection is, accordingly, a duty in itself.[22]

---

[21] *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.44.

[22] Ibid. p.51.

As a rational being, man has the duty to strive to raise himself from the crude state of his nature, from his animality and to make humanity function more fully in himself. Man has the power to set ends and to realize them. Insofar as one tries to cultivate these abilities, one develops humanity in oneself and makes oneself an end of one's actions.

In addition to cultivating all one's powers to promote the ends that reason puts forward, one has also the duty of cultivating one's will to the purest attitude of virtue. This is the duty of striving for inner practical moral perfection. One's actions must be in accordance with duty. But mere outward conformity is insufficient to give moral worth to one's actions. Thus it is our duty to strive for moral purity, to make the moral law not merely that which binds us but also the motive of our actions. Moral perfection consists in doing one's duty from the motive of duty. Kant does not hold that one has a strict obligation to achieve such a state of virtue, but only that one has a duty to strive for it. Hence striving for one's natural perfection and one's inner moral perfection in one's own person is one way of promoting humanity in oneself.

Still more is involved in treating persons as ends. To promote the happiness of others is a way of advancing humanity in oneself. Kant presents this point in the following passage:

> The proof that beneficence is a duty follows from the fact that our self-love cannot be divorced from our need of being loved by others. Now our maxim cannot be obligatory [for others] unless it qualifies as a universal law and so contains the will to make other men our ends too. The happiness of others is therefore, an end which is also a duty.
>
> .... The happiness of another also includes his moral well-being, and we have a duty, but only a negative one, to promote this. Now it is not my duty to prevent another person from deservedly experiencing this inner reproach: that is his affair. But it is my duty to refrain from anything that, considering the nature of man, could tempt him to do something for which his conscience would pain him; in other words, it is my duty not to give scandal.[23]

The above indicates that there are two ways to advance humanity by improving the happiness of others. Positively, we have a duty to help others in distress and improve their happiness. Negatively, we have a duty to ward off the scandals and vices that will tempt others to depart from duty.

Sensibility is as much a part of human nature as rationality. Having desires and inclinations is essential to being human despite the fact that other creatures also possess them. What distinguishes human nature from brute nature is the possession of personhood (humanity). Thus, in fulfilling one's own perfection and seeking the happiness of others one can be said to ward off the temptation of submitting to the guidance of sensibility, and thereby one acts according to one's rational nature. Through promoting one's perfection and the happiness of others to the best of one's

---

[23] *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.54.

ability, one realizes humanity as an objective end through one's actions.

Now, in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, by saying that man is an objective end of our actions, Kant is referring to the development and improvement of humanity by means of our actions. Humanity is an end which every one ought to attain. However, in the *Groundwork* man as an end in himself is treated as a self-existent end and not as something to be realized by our actions.

Hence, Kant seems to use the term "objective end" in two senses. In one sense, an objective end is called a self-existent end. It is not a subjective end which can be produced by action; it is an end whose existence has in itself an absolute value and serves as the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends. As a self-existent end, man is commanded to treat himself and others not merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end. It is evident that it is morally acceptable to behave in this way: avoid violating humanity in one-self and others and treat humanity negatively as the supreme limiting condition of one's actions. The *Groundwork* explicitly takes up this position. However, humanity as an objective end in itself does have its positive meaning. As we have pointed out, treating humanity in this negative sense is not sufficient for the performance of our duty. It is our duty to become virtuous and perfect the state of personhood. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant declares that it is our duty to make

the highest possible good the final object of all our conduct.[24] In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, he says that there are obligatory ends which we have a duty to promote. They are the perfection of oneself and the happiness of others. Through the improvement and development of our duties, humanity can be actualized in ourselves. In this sense, the positive conception of objective ends emerges. Objective ends are regarded as ends which humanity ought to seek as the ultimate purposes of actions. It may be difficult to conceive why Kant does not consider objective ends in this sense in *Groundwork*, especially as he even explicitly states that objective ends cannot be produced by our actions.[25] But in the last two illustrations, he does have the idea of promoting humanity in our person as our ends. Hence, we may admit that there is a twofold meaning in Kant's treatment of objective ends. The treatment of man as an objective end in the negative sense is regarded as a self-existent end, a supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends. The treatment of man as an objective end in the positive sense is to seek one's own perfection and the happiness of others, and thus make humanity fully realized through our actions. The third formula of the categorical imperative can be fully understood only by taking account of this twofold meaning of objective ends. This will be fully realized by considering Kant's illustrations in the *Groundwork*.

---

[24]Vide C. Pr. R. 129.

[25]Vide Gr. 437=82.

2: Humanity and Moral Worth

One of the most distinct features of Kant's moral philosophy is the objective value he places upon human beings. This point is explicitly expressed in the third formula of the categorical imperative. In the above section, we have explained Kant's distinction between subjective and objective ends, and we have defended Kant's claim that we ought never to treat human beings simply as means to the satisfaction of our subjective ends but also as ends in themselves. This means that Kant attributes absolute worth to human beings. But at this point we must ask, Why must we treat man as an end? What is the ground of our assertion that human beings have absolute worth? This is the question to be dealt with in this section.

In Chapter I of this essay, we have pointed out the difference between a fully rational being—a holy being—and a human being. As a possessor of both a rational and a sensuous nature, man has affinities not only with God and other rational beings but also with animals. In the former case, he is related to God because of his rational nature. Because man is rational he can use his reason to act rationally and morally. In the second case, man is a sensuous being with desires and inclinations, and if he acts solely from his inclinations and impulses, he is no different from an animal. His rational and sensuous nature are both

essential to his nature as a moral agent. Without rationality, he would not be capable of moral action and could not be held responsible for his actions. Without his sensuous nature, he would be a holy being, not a "human being". It is through moral constraint in overcoming his sensuous inclinations and desires that a human being becomes worthy of esteem, for then he acts upon principles that are rationally certifiable.

Not only does Kant distinguish men from God, he also differentiates men from other beings. He holds that human beings have a value which is absolute and unconditioned. The concepts of dignity and price are used to mark the difference between men and other beings. The following passages indicate the differences:

> (L:1): ... [E]verything has either a <u>price</u> or a <u>dignity</u>. If it has a price, something else can be put in its place as an <u>equivalent</u>; if it is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalent, then it has a dignity.... [B]ut that which constitutes the sole condition under which anything can be an end in itself has not merely a relative value—that is, a price—but has an intrinsic value—that is <u>dignity</u>.[26]

> (L:2): [M]orality, and humanity so far as it is capable of morality, is the only thing which has dignity... [27]

From (L:1), we learn that Kant marks the contrast between human beings and things by distinguishing dignity from price.

---

[26]Gr. 434-5=77.

[27]Gr. 435=77.

Human beings are possessors of dignity while other things can have only a price. A price is only a conditional value. A thing has a price if we can put something else in its place as an equivalent, i.e., if it can be replaced by other things. Dignity, on the other hand, is of absolute value; it is above all price and has no equivalent or replacement. But how can we attribute dignity to human beings? In (L:2) Kant says that humanity has dignity "so far as it is capable of morality". It is this capability which differentiates humanity from other beings, and it is only because of this capability that we can lay duties on men. The notion of having duties implies the possibility of choosing not to act in accordance with morality but to express the desires and impulses which often divert men from morality.

In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant marks the distinction between humanity and things by the fact that a person is a subject whose actions can be imputed to him, and a thing is something that is not susceptible to such imputation.[28] This point makes the contrast between persons and things lucidly clear. Things have price and only rational beings have dignity. Those things which are relative to human inclinations and needs have a market price. Their value is dependent on their utility to attain some particular goal. Those which accord with certain tastes have a fancy price. "Taste" is characterized as "satisfaction in the mere purposeless play of our mental powers."[29] Unlike market price, fancy price does not aim at a particular need; things which have a fancy price do not depend for their value on their usefulness, but on the satisfaction of aesthetic taste. However, both of these kinds of things have only relative value; thus they do not have absolute, intrinsic value. Human beings are called persons, they are valuable and worthy of reverence because their rational nature sets them apart from other beings. They are rational, exist as ends in themselves, and are potential possessors of a will which is unconditionally and absolutely good. Hence, man, as the subject of morally right actions is exalted above any price, and dignity can

---

[28] *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.22.

[29] Gr. 434=77.

thus be attributed to him.

There is one further point that we have to notice here. As long as a human being is subject to duty, he cannot renounce his personhood; personhood is the attribute which distinguishes humanity from things. Thus moral worth arises from the capability of overcoming desires and inclinations and the capacity to act for the sake of duty. However, personhood is only an Idea of reason. All human, finite beings have a predisposition to attain it, although no one ever *fully* achieves the Ideal. It is only through moral practice that we can progress towards this Ideal and only through such practice can men become actually virtuous.

3: The Formula of The End in Itself

Given the above explanations, it now should be much easier for us to grasp the full meaning of the formula of the end in itself. This new formula, regarded as the third formula of the categorical imperative, is expressed in the following way: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of every other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." This third formula is also called the principle of humanity because it enjoins respect for persons as such. We must stress once again that the words "always at the same time" and "simply" must not be passed over lightly. They are of great importance to an understanding of Kant's

attitude towards this principle of humanity. Hence, we need some clarifications here.

First of all, the "end" indicated here is that of an objective end, an end in itself, and not a subjective end which is particular to the specific agent. Secondly, when Kant uses the phrase "treating persons as means", he means using them as means to the fulfilment of one's desires and inclinations, or, in other words, as means to the satisfaction of one's subjective ends. Now, this formula states that we should never treat persons simply as a means; it does not, however, forbid us from treating men as means and ends at the same time. It is plain that in our daily contact with others, we often use them as means to attain our subjective ends. E.g., in making a long distance call to a friend, we use the operator as a means to attain our aim. When we go to the bank to have a cheque cashed, we use the bank teller as a means. We cannot avoid using people as means, but we can refrain from using them merely as means. The word 'merely' is important here because we expect them to act according to their rational will, and so to act in accordance with duty. In other words, we do not treat them simply as a means, but also at the same time we regard them as persons, as beings capable of self-constraint, and capable of acting on the basis of morally sound maxims, and so as ends in themselves. Hence, treating someone as a means and at the same time as an end is what distinguishes treating some one as a means from treating some one as a *mere* means. Kant's position will be clearer after

considering his illustrations.

(a): The case of suicide:

Kant's discussion of suicide introduces the concept of necessary duties to oneself. If one contemplates suicide in order to escape from troubles and miseries, one is making use of oneself merely as a means to maintain a tolerable state of affairs till the end of one's life. But man is not a thing, he is above all relative ends and has absolute value in himself. He has humanity and ought not to cast away his personhood and degrade his inner worth below the level of animal creation where only pleasure and luxury are sought. As Kant says in his *Lectures on Ethics:*

> Suicide is an abomination because it implies the abuse of men's freedom of action: he uses his freedom to destroy himself. His freedom should be employed to enable him to live as a man. Man is free to dispose of his condition but not of his person; he himself is an end and not a means; all else in the world is of value only as a means, but man is a person and not a thing and therefore not a means. It is absurd that a reasonable being, an end for the sake of which all else is means, should use himself as a means. It is true that a person can serve as a means for others (E.g., by his work), but only in a way whereby he does not cease to be a person and an end.[30]

In these remarks, Kant does not really show how to apply his new formula in the case of suicide; he only asserts that to commit suicide is to treat oneself as a mere means and has to be forbidden. However, we must point out that there are examples in which suicide is not merely a means to avoid a

---

[30] *Lectures on Ethics*, p.120.

painful situation. Kant seems to accept this position too. He regards all acts of treating people as mere means as wrong but considers some acts of suicide not to be cases of treating people as mere means and thus as being morally permissible. Moral sacrifice is such a case.[31] A man might find himself so placed that he can continue living only under circumstances which deprive life of all value, e.g. circumstances in which he can no longer live conformably to virtue and prudence, so that he must from noble motives put an end to his life. A person burns himself in order to protest the violence of politics and war, etc. In these cases, though men use their human bodies as means, they do not degrade their personhood. On the contrary, it is because they recognize the supreme value of human dignity, that they sacrifice themselves to protest against the violence of politics and war. Humanity in one's own person is something inviolable; it is a holy trust.[32] If one deprives oneself of life only in order to escape from hardship, one loses one's manhood and treats oneself merely as a means to the attainment of an end of hardship. In this case, according to Kant, suicide is morally wrong.

There is a passage in the *Lecture on Ethics* which deals with Kant's attitude towards suicide, sacrifice and humanity.

---

[31] Vide ibid., pp.148-157.

[32] Ibid. p.151.

The following quotation is lengthy, but all of it is needed if we are to grasp Kant's view:

> Humanity in our own person is an object of the highest esteem and is inviolable in us; rather than dishonour it, or allow it to be dishonoured, man ought to sacrifice his life; for can he himself hold his manhood in honour if it is to be dishonoured by others? If a man cannot preserve his life except by dishonouring his humanity, he ought rather to sacrifice it; it is true that he endangers his animal life, but he can feel that, so long as he lived, he lived honourably. How long he lives is of no account; it is not his life that he loses, but only the prolongation of his years, for nature has already decreed that he must die at some time; what matters is that, so long as he lives, man should live honourably and should not disgrace the the dignity of humanity; if he can no longer live honourably, he cannot live at all; his moral life is at an end. The moral life is at an end if it is no longer in keeping with the dignity of humanity. Through all the ills and torments of life the path of morality is determined. No matter what torments I have to suffer, I can live morally. I must suffer them all, including the torments of death, rather than commit a disgraceful action. The moment I can no longer live in honour but become unworthy of life by such an action, I can no longer live at all. Thus it is far better to die honoured and respected than to prolong one's life for a few years by a disgraceful act and go on living a rogue.[33]

(b): False promises:

In the example of suicide discussed above, Kant says that it is wrong to treat humanity merely as a means to an arbitrary end, but that it *is* morally permissible to treat men as means if one also treats them as ends. In his second illustration of using false promises, Kant introduces an additional consideration to establish that it is wrong to use man

---

[33] *Lectures on Ethics*, p.156.

as a means to attain an arbitrary subjective end. He says:

> ... [T]he man who has a mind to make a false promise to others will see at once that he is intending to make use of another man merely as a means to an end he does not share. For the man whom I seek to use for my own purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree with my way of behaving to him, and so cannot himself share the end of the action...as rational beings, they ought always at the same time to be rated as ends--that is, only as beings who must themselves be able to share in the end of the very same action.[34]

Thus we see that, according to Kant, to make false promise to others is to fail to respect persons and in such a case we treat humanity merely as a convenient means to our own ends. The promiser makes a false promise to the promisee who cannot possibly agree with the promiser's way of acting towards him and who does not share in the subjective end of the promiser's action. Thus a false promise is only a means of attaining some personal advantage and as such has to be rejected. In the passage cited above, Kant introduces a further criterion for distinguishing morally acceptable from morally unacceptable ways of treating persons as means. He says that when one treats a person merely as a means one treats him as a means to ends in which the other person cannot share. When two people share the very same end, then even though they might treat one another also as means, they do not necessarily treat humanity only as a means. For example, in posting a letter, we use the postal official as a means to reach our

---

[34] Gr. 429-320=67-68.

end, but the postal official can also share in our end. Thus in this case, our action is morally acceptable. But when we tell lies in order to gain some advantage from others, those whom we deceive do not share our ends. The one whom our action falls upon does not share our ends! Hence, sharing an end is necessary to morally permissible action. But this does not in itself ensure that one is treating someone as an end in himself. For a person could be treated as a mere means while at the same time sharing the end achieved by the action. For example, two men, A and B, run a company together; they both share the same end, viz., to become wealthy through a prosperous business. A co-operates with B because of his usefulness to their common end, and B treats A in the same way. A and B thus share a common end. However, even though sharing ends is a necessary condition to morally permissible action *vis a vis* others, it is not by itself a condition which is sufficient to satisfy the principle of humanity.

Let us now return to Kant's discussion of false promises. The one who makes false promises treats the promisee as a means to fulfill his own purpose, whereas the promisee does not agree with the promiser's way of acting towards him, and so he cannot share the end of the action. If one treats another as an end, one will share the ends of another in the very same action. The concept of "sharing an end" is necessary to morally acceptable action towards others, but it is not sufficient to be the sole criterion for differentiating morally right actions from morally wrong ones.

(c): Meritorious duty to oneself:

In both the cases of suicide and false promises discussed above, we have examples of failing to respect humanity in both oneself and others and also examples of treating humanity merely as a means. As for the imperfect duty of developing one's talents, to neglect this duty can admittedly be compatible with the maintenance of humanity as an end in itself, but this nonetheless fails to promote humanity as an end. Kant's emphasis on the positive sense of humanity as an end in itself is expressed clearly in this illustration. He says,

> [I]t is not enough that an action should refrain from conflicting with humanity in our own person as an end in itself: it must also harmonize with this end. Now there are in humanity capacities for greater perfection which form part of nature's purpose for humanity in our person.[35]

This coincides with Kant's assertion in the *Doctrine of Virtue* that there are ends which are also duties. Man has a duty to take as his end the perfection of those characteristics distinctive of humanity as such. The development of one's human capacities involves the duty to strive to raise oneself from the crude state of one's nature, from one's animality, and to realize even more fully in oneself the humanity by which alone one is capable of setting ends.[36] This duty to oneself is the cultivation of one's powers (or natural capacities) to

---

[35]Gr. 430=69.

[36]Vide *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.45-46.

the best of one's ability. Through the recognition of one's end as a duty and the cultivation of one's moral perfection, the advancement of humanity can be promoted.

(d): Meritorious duties to others:

The obligation to help others in distress and make them happy is an imperfect duty. Kant does not state that one is unconditionally bound to further others' happiness and one's own moral perfection. If a person has the opportunity to further the happiness of others, but refuses to do so, humanity would no doubt subsist, and, in any case, he has not violated it. Here, the agent is left with some latitude. But if we do not merely try to refrain from destroying humanity, but try positively to further the advancement of it, we have an imperfect duty to take the happiness of others as our ends. By a natural tendency of his nature, man inevitably wants and seeks his own happiness. Hence one's own happiness is not an obligatory end. But the happiness of others is an obligatory end. The proof follows from the fact that our self-love cannot be divorced from our need of being loved by others, and of receiving help from them when we are in need, so that we make ourselves an end for others. From this it follows that our maxim cannot be obligatory for others unless it qualifies as a universal law and so contains the will to make the happiness of others our end too.[37] Hence the

---

[37] *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.53.

happiness of others is an objective end which it is our duty to fulfill.

Through the four illustrations discussed above, Kant's principle of humanity is explained. In the first and second illustrations, it commands us not to treat humanity merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end which is the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends and is the subject of ends. It also commands, as seen in the third and fourth illustrations, that we ought to attain humanity in the positive sense and not just negatively try to avoid violating humanity. Thus in the latter two cases, we are told to attain our own moral perfection and fulfill the happiness of others to the best of our abilities.

4. The Relationships between Formulae I, II and III

We have shown, in this chapter, why Kant introduces the formula of the end in itself. His aim is to show that there is such a thing as duty and that the application of the categorical imperative to human beings is possible. He expresses this idea in the following passage:

> [I]f duty is a concept which is to have meaning and real legislative authority for our actions, this can be expressed only in categorical imperatives and by no means in hypothetical ones. At the same time--and this is already a greal deal—we have set forth distinctly, and determinately for every type of application, the content of the categorical imperative, which must contain the principle of all duty (if there is to be such a

> thing at all). But we are still not so far advanced as to prove *a priori* that there actually is an imperative of this kind—that there is a practical law which by itself commands absolutely and without any further motives, and that the following of this law is duty.[38]

The formula of universal law only asserts that duty is an objective fact, it does not show us the ground of the categorical imperative. In order to convince people that the categorical imperative is not a chimera of the brain, Kant brings in the formula of the end in-itself.

As shown above, there are objective ends as well as subjective ends. These ends are valid for every rational being. Objective ends in one sense are self-existent. They are not to be conceived as ends to be produced by our actions, but are already existent. They have absolute value in themselves and hence serve as the ground of the categorical imperative. The objective ends discussed here are those which refer to humanity. Kant states that men are ends in themselves, their existence has absolute value, and in them can be found the ground of a possible categorical imperative. There seem to be three senses in which one can say that rational agents are also the ground of a categorical imperative.[39] Firstly, because rational agents exist, a categorical imperative must enjoin respect for their rationality.

---

[38]Gr. 425=59.

[39]Vide Paton: *The Categorical Imperative*, p.170.

Secondly, because rational agents exist with wills that can be thwarted or furthered in different ways, we must recognize particular categorical imperatives: we ought not to thwart our wills by fraud or violence, and we ought to further our moral perfection and the happiness of others. Thirdly, only because rational beings exist as ends in themselves, can there be such a thing as a categorical imperative. It is because rational beings are rational and have absolute value that their wills necessarily manifest themselves in universal laws and not merely in maxims valid only for particular agents. Because agents are not wholly rational, these laws eventually take the form of categorical imperatives. Kant's moral philosophy is based solely on the rationality and dignity of human beings. The categorical imperative arises from the bare fact of rationality in humanity. It is only because of the rationality in human will that duty can be attributed to human beings and imperatives can be commanded absolutely without any further motives. Hence we can say that men as ends in themselves can serve as the ground of the categorical imperative.

We have pointed out that there is also another sense of the term objective end. These ends are discussed in Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue* as "ends which are also duties". These ends are equally valid for everyone and appear as duties which all rational beings must aim to perform. These duties are to bring about one's own perfection and the happiness of others.

These ends are of absolute value. The ends in question are not intended to provide the ground for the categorical imperative. What Kant says of the ground of the categorical imperative refers mainly to self-existent ends and thus refers to humanity.

Kant claims that the third formula provides a content or matter for the principle of universality. Hence, he says:

> All maxims have, in short,
>
> 1. a form, which consists in their universality; and in this respect the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus: 'Maxims must be chosen as if they had to hold as universal laws of nature;'
>
> 2. a matter—that is, an end; and in this respect the formula says: 'A rational being, as by his very nature an end and consequently an end in himself, must serve for every maxim as a condition limiting all merely relative and arbitrary ends'...[40]

In formula I, we are told that all moral maxims must share the same form in general, namely, the form of universality. But the bare form is devoid of content. Now, Kant says that only objective ends are the proper matter for moral actions. With reference to the categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states that the transition from formula I to formula III involves passing from the unity of the form of the will (its universality) to the multiplicity of its matter (its objects, that is, its ends.)[41] Formula III substitutes the dignity of human personhood for the bare notion of universalizability. Thus, in right action we are not merely passively subject to

---

[40] Gr. 436=80.

[41] Ibid.

the universality of the law; we have also to recognize that we are ends in ourselves. We must not merely treat ourselves as means, and must also treat human beings other than ourselves never merely as means, but also as ends in themselves. The first formula of the categorical imperative says nothing at all about the matter of morality. It neither commands nor forbids the adoption of any end, but merely states the essence of our moral maxims and the notion of universalizability that sets a limit to our actions. Only the third formula of the categorical imperative supplies the ends we may have. But the end is conceived as a special kind, namely, a self-existent end. It is said to be conceived only negatively, that is, as an end against which we should never treat humanity and that in all our willing we must never treat them merely as means, but always at the same time as ends.

We are now in a position to discuss the relationship between the above three formulae. It is clear that formula II is a typic of formula I, but there is not any explicit declaration in Kant's writings about the relation between formula I and III. By referring to the formula of the end in-itself as the second formula of the moral law,[42] Kant suggests that it is in some sense equivalent to the first formula. "The aforesaid

---

[42]It is said that the formula of universal law, the formula of end in-itself and the formula of autonomy are the three main formulae of representing the principle of morality.

three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom merely so many formulations of precisely the same law."[43] An argument for the equivalence of these two formulae is contained in the following passage:

> The principle 'So act in relation to every rational being (both to yourself and to others) that he may at the same time count in your maxim as an end in himself' is thus at bottom the same as the principle 'Act on a maxim which at the same time contains in itself its own universal validity for every rational being'. For to say that in using means to every subject is just the same as to say this—that a subject of ends, namely, a rational being himself, must be made the ground for all maxims of action, never merely as a means, but as a supreme condition restricting the use of every means—that is, always also as an end.[44]

It is clear from the above passage that Kant regards the first and the third formulae as equivalent. These moral principles are equivalent if and only if they are equivalent as moral criteria. It is said that for any proposed action in any moral situation, when the one criterion forbids (or allows) the action, the action is also forbidden (or allowed) by the other criterion. We are not claiming that they are identical such that one moral principle implies the other, but we are inclined to say that they have the same moral implication, i.e. they both supply a criterion for determining whether a maxim is morally legitimate. Although on some occasions, one criterion is much easier to apply than the other, this does not indicate that they are nonequivalent. Commentators on

---

[43] Gr. 436=79.

[44] Gr. 437-8=82-3

Kant's moral theory disagree widely on the equivalence of these two formulae. Most of them claim that these formulae are not equivalent, however, without examining closely the full meaning of the formulae. These critics fail to fully support their claim. One holds that they are not equivalent in the sense that while one formula allows or forbids a given action, the other neither allows nor forbids it.[45] Another holds that while one formula forbids one action, the other seems to allow it. In the following, we will try to show that Kant's two formulae are equivalent.

Our claim, then, is that formulae I and III are equivalent. However, in some cases, the applicability of one formula is more explicit than the other. For example, suppose we find a $5 bill in a book we have borrowed from a friend, and we are quite sure that he does not remember that it was there; so we decide to keep the money. In such a situation the formula of universal law easily expresses the wrongness of our action since it is evident that we should refuse to will our maxim as a universal law because we should not want it to apply to any case in which we ourselves have inadvertently left a $5 bill in a book that we have loaned to a friend. This maxim, of course, is also wrong when judged by the criterion of formula III. By doing this action, we dishonour and

---

[45] See e.g. Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics* (New York: Knopf, 1961), pp.233-237, and John E. Atwell, "Are Kant's First Two Moral Principles Equivalent?" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol.7, no.3. (July, 1969), pp.273-284.

degrade our dignity and do not treat ourselves as ends possessing absolute value; and we neglect our duty to work out our own moral perfection. But the legitimacy or illegitimacy of our maxim is seen more clearly by means of formula I than by means of formula III.

Consider another case. Suppose we hire a lady to clean our house and we know that she really needs the money to feed her family. Now, we may take advantage of her and ask her to do more work than we have paid for. In testing whether our maxim is right or wrong, we see immediately that we are mistreating the lady because we are using her simply as a means to our own ends. This maxim is seen at once to be morally illegitimate when judged by means of formula III. Although formulae I and III are equivalent in being criteria of moral maxims, the variance in their ease of application may lead one to think that they are non-equivalent. It is only when we understand fully the implication of the formulae, that we will see that they are in fact equivalent.

I have claimed at the end of Chapter III that the formula of universal law seems to be insufficient by itself to be a criterion of moral maxims, and in addition, I note that there are examples that appear to show that formula III is also not a sufficient criterion for moral maxims. But I think that these insufficiencies are the result of a lack of practical judgement and scholarship rather than an insufficiency of the formulae themselves. Owing to the difficulties of ignorance and moral immaturity, a certain blindness might block our way

to sound moral judgement. Hence, in order to remedy this, the use of all three of Kant's formulae (I, II and III) of the categorical imperative will help to clear away our difficulties. Thus in case we are not certain of the legitimacy of our maxim, we will test it in terms of these formulae. In Kant's view, a maxim which is morally legitimate must pass all criteria of the formulae, if it does not, it is morally illegitimate.

Let us consider a few examples that will help to show how these three formulae are supplementary to each other and how when taken together they form more explicit criteria for evaluating maxims. As Kant has written in his *Lectures on Ethics*, a drunkard might do no harm to anyone else and, if he has a strong constituion, he might even do no harm to himself. Now, a drunkard may will his material maxim as if it were a universal law of nature such that every one under the same conditions as he is will act as he has acted. Of course the drunkard does not really will his maxim as if it is a universal law, but it is hard to see what is wrong with his maxim when judged by the formula of the universal law. At the same time, we are certain that this maxim cannot be a morally legitimate one; so the formula of universal law seems insufficient as a criterion for all of our maxims. This is really a matter of lack of moral sense. Now, when we test this maxim in terms of the formula of the end in-itself, we see that drinking as much as he desires, the drunkard indulges

his desires and inclinations and often behaves irrationally. By allowing his desires and inclinations to rule him, he degrades and dishonours his own personhood and the rationality which distinguishes men from brutes. In this case, it is hard to say that the drunkard treats himself merely as a means, but he does irrationally let inclinations and desires take over his own power--a power to act rationally. His maxim hence cannot be a morally legitimate one.

For a case of treating others merely as means, we introduce the example of polygamy. There are many kinds of polygamy. In some cases, a man may have two or more wives, but he may treat them respectfully. The relationship between them is not as such, one which entails treating each other as means, but is one in which we could find love and respect. This type of polygamy is not in itself reprehensible. On the contrary, it is much better to practice polygamy in this way than to practice monogamy simply because of the restrictions of a particular legal system. There are also other kinds of polygamy: E.g., there is the form of polygamy practiced by Mohammedans and also that which exists throughout the history of the Chinese ruling class. In those cases, the wives existed only in order to serve their husband; they were required to be modest and obedient. As Kant's doctrine shows, this type of polygamy is open to serious objections on moral grounds. One who practices polygamy in this manner may well will his maxim into a universal law without contradiction; but in doing this, he neglects and dishonours the dignity of

other persons and treats others simply as means to the satisfaction of his own desires. Maxims which lead to mistreating humanity fail to satisfy formula III.

In the above two examples, we have seen that some maxims may seem to pass the test of the formula of universal law, but fail the test of the formula of the end in-itself. Consider still another case. Suppose while driving along a seldom travelled desert road, we encounter someone in need of assistance, e.g. a 'little old lady' trying rather unsuccessfully to change a flat tire, and suppose we do not stop to help her. Now formula III tells us either never to treat persons merely as means, or that when we do treat someone as a means, we also at the same time treat him as an end. If we violate one of these two injunctions, we are said to act wrongly. Now, in driving non-stop we are not treating the lady as a means, so we do not have to treat her at the same time as an end. And since we are not treating her as a means, we are certainly not treating her merely as a means. Our maxim is certainly compatible with humanity as an end in itself and thus cannot be reckoned as wrong on these grounds alone. If, on the other hand, we judge our maxim in terms of the formula of universal law, this formula would forbid us to act according to our maxim, and would therefore prescribe that we help the old lady to fix her flat tire. Asking whether our maxim satisfied the formula of universal law, we see that the answer must be "no". We can will this in the sense that it is a logical possibility for us to do so, and also in the sense that no logical

impossibility would follow from not offering any help to someone in need. Although it might be logically possible to will it to become a universal law, we nonetheless would not be content should this maxim be a universal principle; furthermore, nature is so constituted, according to Kant, that there is a systematic harmony of nature such that mutual help is a distinct feature of the harmony. Kant undoubtedly would regard this maxim as unacceptable according to formulae I and II, and, in addition, it does not seem to have the sound support of formula III.

From the above examples, we see that although some maxims might seem to pass one of these formulae (formula I or III), they will be ruled out by one of the others. We might conclude from the foregoing that either formula I or formula III by itself will be insufficient as a criterion for evaluating moral maxims. But this is mistaken, for a maxim that seems to pass one formula might not actually satisfy it if it is examined more closely.

In considering the aforesaid examples, we hold that the drunkard case and the polygamy case both seems to satisfy the requirements of formula I but do not appear to satisfy formula III. Now, it is easy enough to show that this satisfactoriness is illusory. First of all, the drunkard does not hurt himself and does no harm to anybody else. His maxim can be willed to be a universal law in the sense that it is logically possible for it to be universal. But this maxim cannot be willed to a universal law in the sense that we would each at

the same time be content to see this maxim hold as a universal law. Even if the drunkard thinks his maxim can be a universal law, he will probably not be content to see everyone become a drunkard and so leave everything to rust and remain undone. Someone must produce the drink, after all. What he wishes is that others will work and keep everything in order, while he himself enjoys that which interests him without caring for, or interfering with others. We can say that he enjoys the advantages of being served without giving any service to others, and if everyone tried to do likewise there would be no service at all. Apparently the maxim in the drunkard case seems satisfactory when judged by formula I, but actually, as we have attempted to show, it turns out to be unsatisfactory. In the polygamy case, the husband might think his maxim can be universalized. But his universalized maxim is confined to only the male sex. He probably would not let his wives have as many husbands as they wish. This is discriminatory and entails inequality based arbitrarily on difference in sexes, and the relevant maxim can not be fully universalized. It is plain that the illusion of the apparent applicability of a formula might block our way to sound moral judgement; hence to avoid this situation the maxim must be checked by more than one formula so as to eliminate our blindness.

In the case of the 'little old lady', we do not mistreat her by refusing to stop and we do not treat her merely as a means. We simply show no concern for her. This maxim of indifference to someone in need might initially seem compatible

with the maintenance of humanity as an end in itself, but the formula of an end in-itself commands that we do more than this. As we have argued in section 1 of this chapter, we also have duties to work to realize our own moral perfection and to work to further other people's happiness. Indifference to someone who needs help is a case not only of neglecting one's duty, but also might violate another person's well being. To treat others simply as a means is obviously wrong, and clearly we do not want others to treat us in this way. However, it is difficult to see that we have obligatory duties to cultivate moral perfection in ourselves, and that we also have an obligation to further other people's happiness. In the case of such a difficulty, I have suggested above, the use of all three of Kant's formulae (I, II and III) may help us to see more clearly whether or not our maxim is morally legitimate. However, taken by themselves, these formulae will not eliminate moral immaturity. By what course is the human race brought to a state in which moral disposition may rise and flourish and hence prevent men from falling into evil? How can human beings be brought from innocence and ignorance to knowledgeable moral maturity? Let us briefly explore Kant's suggestions relating to these matters.

In the "Ultimate Destiny of the Human Race" in the *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant claims that the ultimate destiny of the human race is the realization of the greatest moral perfection possible for humanity. This perfection will arise only through education and through nothing else. It is not

surprising that Kant would think this. As Kant states in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, there is a natural propensity to evil in man as well as a natural predisposition to good.[46] This propensity to evil lies in the subjective ground of the possibility of acting on maxims which deviate from the moral law. Kant elucidates this further by pointing out that there are three distinct degrees in this propensity towards evil:[47] 1) The frailty of human nature, which finds expression in our weakness for adopting maxims from inclination; 2) The impurity of the human heart, which is obvious in mixing immoral and moral causes together giving rise to actions which are not done purely for duty's sake; 3) The wickedness of human nature, which is the propensity to adopt evil maxims. On the basis of the above, we can see what Kant means by saying that man is evil by nature, i.e. he may fall into evil from the state of innocence and deviation from freedom to which his natural inclinations lead. How then, is the human race to be brought to attain the highest moral perfection? Contrary to the conviction of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, who held that sound ethics must be based upon knowledge and that progress in knowledge is a guarantor of moral progress, Kant respects the ordinary moral consciousness of the ordinary man. He says in his *Lectures on Ethics* that conscience is an instinct to pass judgement upon ourselves

---

[46]Vide *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p.24.

[47]Ibid., p.24-5.

in accordance with moral laws.[48] It is the representative within us of divine justice. We must not hurt or injure it. If a person is capable of judging right from wrong, and is capable of reproaching himself for his sins, his conscience is said to be alive. On the other hand, if a man searches needlessly for evidences of evil in his conduct, his conscience is melancholy. Conscience is not a work of art and education. But art and instruction can bring into actualization that for which we have a natural aptitude of goodness, and can activate the liveliness of our melancholic conscience. Hence in the "Ethical Doctrine of Method" of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant states explicitly that virtue cannot be based on anthropological knowledge drawn from experience, but it can and must be learned.[49] It is education that guides us to continuous striving after the good and shows us our duties towards beings and things. The method of education for morality can be delivered either in a lecture or by the method of questioning. The method of questioning is again divided into the method of dialogue and that of catechism.[50] For the still untrained pupil the first and most essential doctrinal instrument to the knowledge of virtue is a moral catechism, such that virtue is recommended on no ground other than its intrinsic worth. Through the guidance of education, we come to the

---

[48] Vide *Lectures on Ethics*, p.133.

[49] *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.149.

[50] Ibid., p.150.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORMULA OF THE AUTONOMY OF THE WILL

--Never ... choose except in such a way that in the same volition the maxims of your choice are also present as universal law.

In this chapter we turn to discuss Kant's fourth formula of the categorical imperative. In it Kant attempts to focus upon the will in order to spell out the features of the morally good will. Our aim now will be to explain Kant's doctrine of the autonomy of the will, and to show how this doctrine fits into his moral philosophy as we have thus far given an account of it.

1: Autonomy and Heteronomy of the Will.

1.1 Heteronomy of the Will:

For Kant, motive is the basis of the distinction between an action which is done from duty and an action which accords with duty. An action is called moral not because it conforms to duty, but because its motive is pure and excludes any pathological interest. Thus, actions directed towards the satisfaction of interests cannot be reckoned as morally

praiseworthy. It is upon this distinction that Kant sharply differentiates autonomy and heteronomy of the will. The will is heteronomous when it is determined by interest, desire and inclination. Such a will can only give rise to hypothetical imperatives, never categorical imperatives.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant classifies all moral principles founded on heteronomy into two types: They are either empirical and based on the principle of happiness, or they are rational and based on the principle of perfection. Empirical principles are unfitted to serve as grounds for moral maxims, since they are based on the special constitution of human nature or on the accidental circumstances in which one is placed. Kant objects to the principle derived from personal happiness because there is no necessary connection between prosperity and good conduct. It contributes nothing to the establishment of moral behaviour, since making a man happy is quite different from making him virtuous. And, most importantly, it based morality on sensuous motives which destroy its sublimity. The empirical principle which is based on moral feeling is also rejected. The appeal to feelings is superficial, since feelings differ from one another by an infinity of degrees and are incapable of furnishing a uniform standard of good and evil. One also cannot legislate one's own feeling as a standard for others.

The rational principles which are drawn from the principle of perfection can be based either on an ontological concept, or on a theological one. Principles derived from an

ontological concept Kant regards as empty and indefinite. It is circular to assert that perfection is a possible result of action and at the same time argue that perfection is the source of moral principles. However, Kant holds that this concept is better than the theological one which derives moral principles from a divine and supreme perfect will. His reason for holding this is that we cannot intuit God's perfection, but can only derive it from our own concepts, and especially from our concept of morality. Thus, to base morality on the divine will is to reason in a circle. But this concept is even much more damaging than this suggests, since a hedonistic motivation can be postulated as the ground of obedience to God so as to gain divine reward, or it may only be a blind appeal to authority. Kant rejects the view that morality is based on religion, but holds instead that religion is based on morality. The relation between morality and religion is fully explained in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Kant states firmly in the preface to this work that,

> Morality...stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty.... Hence for its own sake morality does not need religion at all (whether objectively, as regards willing, or subjectively, as regards ability to act); by virtue of pure practical reason it is self-sufficient.[1]

---

[1] Kant, Immanuel: *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. translated by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p.3.

It is thus clear that for Kant morality does not require a basis in religion. Nevertheless, morality leads the way to religion. The will of God is a symbol of the holy, perfect will; that is an ideal, man's final end, towards which we can and ought to strive.

In rejecting heteronomy of the will, Kant does not reject the empirical, religious and political goods which the principles of heteronomy has commanded. He says that one has a duty, though an indirect one, to assure one's own happiness.[2] One also has a duty to cultivate one's moral feelings, i.e. feelings of satisfaction and contentment in the performance of duty. But the concept of duty cannot be derived from these feelings.[3] As we have argued in the last chapter, our own moral perfection is one of the ends which we are also obligated to strive to attain. Holiness is the final goal of our moral activities. These kinds of goods are all affirmed, but only under the condition that their pursuit be regulated by a formal principle of morality. The only law which the will of every rational being imposes on itself, without assuming any impulse or interest as a foundation, is a principle which qualifies as the formal principle of morality. This is the principle of autonomy of the will.

---

[2]Gr., 399=11-2.

[3]Vide C. Pr. R. 38.

1.2. Autonomy of the Will:

In the above, we have mentioned that the will which is determined by the circumstances of the physical or social world, personal inclination or the appeal to authority, is always heteronomous in its character. It can only give rise to hypothetical imperatives. In contrast, the moral will which gives rise to categorical imperatives must not be determined by any pathological interest. It must not be heteronomous. A moral will is a rational will, it is motivated by nothing other than principles given by itself. In other words, it is autonomous. While heteronomy of the will is the source of all spurious principles of morality, autonomy of the will is the sole condition of the supreme moral principle. The principle of morality is declared by reason to be a law for all rational beings in so far as they have a will. However, the law has the form of an imperative. For though we say that men as rational beings have a rational will, their will is also capable of maxims which conflict with the law. Hence the categorical imperative runs as follows:

> Never choose except in such a way that in the same volition the maxims of your choice are also present as universal law.[4]

---

[4] Gr., 440=87.

2. The approach to the formula of autonomy of the will.

After discussing the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy of the will, Kant leads us to the formula of autonomy of the will. He bases this formula on the nature of human beings whose wills can be rational. It is the rational will that gives to itself the law which is unconditional and universally valid for every rational being.

First of all, let us consider how Kant introduces this formula. What he says is as follows:

> ...the ground for every enactment of practical law lies objectively in the rule and in the form of universality which (according to our first principle) makes the rule capable of being a law (and indeed a law of nature); subjectively, however, it lies in the end; but (according to our second principle) the subject of all ends is to be found in every rational being as an end in himself. From this there now follows our third practical principle for the will--as the supreme condition of the will's conformity with universal practical reason--namely, the Idea of the will for every rational being as a will which makes universal law.[5]

In this passage, Kant states that the formula of autonomy follows from a combination of formulae I and III. The first principle (i.e. the principle of universality) states the objective ground of morality which lies in the form of universality. The second principle (i.e. the principle of humanity) supplies the subjective ground of morality which states that the subject of all ends is to be found in every rational being as an end in himself. Hence, a rational will, being an end

---

[5]Gr., 431=70.

in itself, must not simply be subject to universal law, but must also be considered as making the law for itself, and this is the supreme condition of morality. It is thus the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal laws. By this principle, all maxims are rejected which are not consistent with the will's own enactment of universal law, i.e., the autonomy of the will.

There is also a similarity between formulae I and IV—this fact is clear. In bidding us to act only on maxims which we can at the same time will to be universal law, formula I must presuppose that the will is autonomous, and can be its own law-maker. But they cannot be reckoned as the same. Formula I emphasizes the objectivity and universality of the moral law and how it must impose itself on the human will. Nevertheless, it has to presuppose that the human will is autonomous, so that the moral law can be seen to be categorical. We are bound to make this assumption if we wish to explain the concept of duty. Formula IV brings out the presupposition of formula I. It insists on the autonomy of the will where the only compulsion is given by the principle itself. It is the superme condition under which morality is possible.

Formula IV is also closely related to formula III. In enjoining respect for human beings, formula III makes it clear that it is their rational nature which makes them capable of leading the moral life and which gives them absolute value. Hence, formula III already suggests that the will is autonomous and is an end in itself, and it is the ground of

categorical imperative. Autonomy of the will is the condition of being an end in itself. The reason is clearly that the subject of all ends is the essential mark of autonomy of the will. We must assume autonomy before we declare human beings exist as ends in themselves and also as subjects within the totality of subjective and objective ends.

Towards the end of Chapter II of the *Groundwork*, there is a passage in which Kant refers to the principle of autonomy as the 'Supreme Principle of Morality'. 'Autonomy of the will', he says, 'is the property the will has of being a law to itself (independently of every property belonging to the object of volition.)'[6] The will of every rational being is necessarily bound to the principle as a condition. The proof of this principle involves showing how a synthetic *a priori* practical proposition is possible; we will leave this justification to the next section. In the meantime, we will see how Kant provides preliminary justification for this principle by means of an analysis of the concepts of morality. The following passage is useful in explaining Kant's approach:

> None the less by mere analysis of the concepts of morality we can quite well show that the above principle of autonomy is the sole principle of ethics. For analysis finds that the principle of morality must be a categorical imperative, and that this in turn commands nothing more nor less than precisely this autonomy.[7]

---

[6] Gr., 440=87.

[7] Gr., 440=88.

Kant seems to mark a difference between "the sole principle of ethics" and "the principle of morality". The following may serve to clarify the difference. When saying the principle is "the sole principle of ethics", Kant means that it is the fundamental presupposition or the sole condition of morality under which validity can be given to the categorical imperative. "The principle of morality" is referred to as the principle of moral action. When applied to human beings, the principle exists as a categorical imperative. Thus "the sole principle of ethics" is the foundation for the principle of morality.[8] Kant also advanced this view in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. There he says that the autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of the duties conforming to them. This autonomy of the will is itself the formal condition of all maxims, under which alone they can all agree with the supreme practical law.[9]

Given the above considerations, we may conclude that formula IV is logically different from formulae I, II, and III. Its real significance lies not in being a criterion for moral maxims but in being the condition under which morality is possible. The principle of autonomy must exist as an imperative because human will can also be thwarted by desires

---

[8]See also Williams, T.C.: *The Concept of the Categorical Imperative*, (Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.33-5.

[9]Vide C. Pr. R. 33.

and inclinations.

Of the above, Kant says "We have merely shown by developing the concept of morality generally in vogue that autonomy of the will is unavoidably bound up with it or rather is its very basis."[10] Chapter II of the *Groundwork*, like Chapter I, is merely analytic. The justification of the doctrines advanced there is left to the final chapter of the *Groundwork*. Thus Kant summarizes his position at the end of Chapter II as follows:

> In order to prove that morality is no mere phantom of the brain—a conclusion which follows if the categorical imperative, and with it the autonomy of the will, is true and is absolutely necessary as an *a priori* principle—we require a possible synthetic use of pure practical reason. On such a use we cannot venture without prefacing it by a critique of this power of reason itself—a critique whose main features, so far as is sufficient for our purpose, we must outline in our final chapter.[11]

3: The Possibility of Moral Action.

In the previous sections, we have discussed Kant's attitude towards the principle of autonomy. The real significance of this principle is that it serves as the necessary condition for the very possibility of making sound moral judgements. If there is such a thing as morality, if duty and moral obligation are not merely chimerical, then a justification of the

---

[10] Gr., 444=95

[11] Gr., 445=96

principle of autonomy of the will is greatly needed. Kant's strategy is to ask for a justification for the possibility of a practical *a priori* synthetic proposition.[12] Before turning to Kant's justification of the principle, it is necessary to say something about a number of his distinctions.

3.1. Freedom and physical causality.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states that our knowledge of objects is restricted to the phenomenal world. All phenomena are subject to causality according to laws of nature without exception. Now, under physical causality, everything is determined by something else to produce an effect, i.e., every event in nature must have a cause. In nature, there is no spontaneity or freedom. Nature only exhibits an endless chain of causes and effects. A given event is determined by a previous event and so on indefinitely. But is physical causality the only kind of causality that human beings can comprehend? Do human beings exist simply as a part of the causal order of nature such that they are totally determined? Kant's answer is, "no!" According to Kant's account, man is noumenally free and phenomenally determined.[13]

---

[12] According to Kant, a proposition is *a priori* if it is independent of all experience and all impressions of the sense. If, at the same time, the predicate of this proposition is not contained in its subject, then this proposition is a synthetic *a priori* proposition. Vide 3.5 of this Chapter for further details.

[13] In Kant's view, noumenal freedom represents another kind of causality which he calls a causality of freedom. It is a causality that is spontaneous. It flows from man's rational nature.

But what does this mean, and what is the basis for Kant's assertion?

It is an obvious fact that man is a natural existent, and his activities are subject to natural law. As is true of all other objects of nature, he has a phenomenal aspect, and, in virtue of this, he takes his place as part of the natural order. But man is unique among these natural existents. He knows not only of himself as a sensible existent, but also becomes aware of himself as possessor of Understanding and Reason. These powers distinguish him from all other things. Through Understanding men can know nature only as phenomena revealed through our senses, but understanding "cannot produce by its own activity any concepts other than those whose sole service is to bring sensuous ideas under rules and so to unite them in one consciousness".[14] Natural objects can be known only in the particular relations in which they are found under laws of physical causality. However, reason is the power to frame and use Ideals. It produces concepts which go beyond sensibility and shows a pure spontaneity which is entirely independent of sense. Hence Kant says:

> Reason does not here follow the order of things as they present themselves in appearance, but frames to itself with perfect spontaneity an order of its own according to Ideas,[15]
>
> Reason, on the other hand—in which are called 'Ideas' —shows a spontaneity so pure that it goes far beyond anything sensibility can offer: it manifests its highest function in distinguishing the sensible and

---

[14] Gr., 452-108.

[15] C. P. R. A548-B576.

> intelligible worlds from one another and so in marking out limits for understanding itself.[16]

Unless we can differentiate men from all other existents, we cannot plausibly assert that they can be free while other things are totally determined, and, for Kant, the powers of Understanding and Reason which exist only in humans distinguish them from all other beings.

Kant's justification for the assumption that man is noumenally free and phenomenally determined proceeds by two main routes. The first is taken in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The third antinomy of pure reason concerns the question of whether there is or is not freedom. Can an event be both free and determined? Kant's solution lies in the recognition of the two-sided character of every natural existent. It is, in one aspect, mere appearance; in another, it must rest upon a transcendental object as its foundation. An event is an appearance of the transcendental object. Now there is nothing to prevent us from attributing to the transcendental object a causality which is not phenomenal. This causality, not being subject to time, does not require another cause of which it is the effect. Given the foregoing, we can now see that Kant derives an explanation of the possibility of an action being at once free and causally determined from his transcendental idealism. This explanation can be applied to either a first cause of the whole realm of natural phenomena or to a finite being regarded as a free agent. The

---

[16] Gr., 452 (=108).

concept of freedom is a transcendental Idea which can neither be derived from experience nor verified by it. It is the power of beginning a series of events spontaneously. This Idea is created by reason so as to comprehend an absolute totality of conditions.[17] This opens up the possibility that in the third antinomy both thesis and antithesis may be true. In Kant's view the alternatives, 'Every event is determined by the laws of nature' and 'Every event arises from freedom' are not incompatible with one another. They may be true of one and the same event when that event is viewed in its different relations.[18] Now freedom and natural necessity can exist without conflict in one and the same action. But the transcendental Idea of freedom, or transcendental freedom, is only a purely theoretical, negative concept. Yet, Kant says, this negative concept of freedom is necessary if a positive concept of freedom is to be possible.[19] Furthermore, Kant claims in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that he does not intend to prove the possibility of freedom or to establish its reality, but simply to show that causality through freedom is neither incompatible with, nor necessarily excluded by nature.[20]

---

[17] Vide C. P. R. A533=B561.

[18] Ibid., A536=B564.

[19] Ibid., A533=B561.

[20] C. P. R. A557-8=B585-6.

According to Kant, within the context of scientific knowledge, the concept of freedom has no positive content. Freedom means nothing beyond being independent of the mechanical order of nature. But if we want to seriously entertain the idea that man is a free being, we need to advance to the positive concept of freedom. Kant goes beyond the negative concept of freedom to a positive one by showing that freedom is equivalent to autonomy.

In the preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes,

> The concept of freedom, in so far as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, is the keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason and even of speculative reason.[21]

Soon after this passage, Kant again claims that freedom is the only idea of speculative reason whose possibility we know *a priori*. It is known as the condition of the moral law. Consider the following passages with this in mind:

> (M.l.) To avoid having anyone imagine that there is an inconsistency when I say that freedom is the condition of the moral law and later assert that the moral law is the only condition under which freedom can be known, I will only remind the reader that, though freedom is certainly the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the latter is the *ratio cogoscendi* of freedom. For had not the moral law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we would never had been justified in assuming anything like freedom, even though it is not self-contradictory. But if there were no freedom, the moral law would never have been encountered in us.[22]

---

[21] C. Pr. R. 3.

[22] C. Pr. R. 4n.

> (M.2.) The consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out from antecedent data of reason, such as the consciousness of freedom (for this is not antecedently given), and since it forces itself upon us as a synthetic proposition *a priori* based on no pure or empirical intuition. It would be analytic if the freedom of the will were presupposed, but for this, as a positive concept, an intellectual intuition would be needed, and here we cannot assume it. In order to regard this law without any misinterpretation as given, one must note that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason, which by it proclaims itself as originating law.[23]

> (M.3.) Moreover, the moral law is given, as an apodictically certain fact...of pure reason, a fact of which we are *a priori* conscious, even if it be granted that no example could be found in which it has been followed exactly. Thus the objective reality of the moral law can be proved through no deduction,.... Nevertheless, it is firmly established of itself.[24]

> (M.4.) The moral principle serves as a principle of the deduction of an inscrutable faculty which no experience can prove but which speculative reason had to assume as at least possible.... This is the faculty of freedom. ... The moral law thus defines...the law for a causality the concept of which was only negative in speculative philosophy, and for the first time it gives objective reality to this concept.[25]

With respect to the above quotations, Kant states that the moral law is an apodeictic fact of pure reason, and he attempts to build upon the moral law a positive account of freedom. As is clear in (M.2.) and (M.3.), Kant regards the moral law as apodeictically certain. It is, for Kant, a fact obvious from our ordinary moral experience that we apprehend the moral

---

[23] C. Pr. R. 31.

[24] C. Pr. R. 47.

[25] Ibid.

law and that we are subject to it. Though Kant does not state explicitly that we have a direct awareness of the moral law, he undoubtedly believes that we do, and moreover, he has great respect for ordinary moral consciousness. He says that it was Rousseau who put him on the right path of honouring ordinary men. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he says that even against his will his spirit will bow before a man, however humble and ordinary, in whom he finds integrity of character in a measure which he is not conscious of finding in himself.[26] Thus from our consciousness of the moral law, the positive concept of freedom must be necessarily presupposed. But the positive concept of freedom is based on the idea of transcendental freedom. A denial of the transcendental Idea of freedom would therefore involve the elimination of all practical freedom in Kant's philosophy.[27] So, according to Kant, if the assumption that freedom is self-contradictory there could be no moral action, and the apprehension of the moral law would then be only an illusion. However, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant has established to his satisfaction the internal consistency of this concept of freedom. Hence our apprehension of the moral law is the evidence of freedom. Freedom and the moral law reciprocally imply each other. The moral law is regarded as the *ratio*

---

[26]Vide C. Pr. R. 77.

[27]Vide C. P. R. A534=B562.

cogoscendi of freedom. Kant's reason for holding this has been stated clearly in (M.l.). The gist of what he says is that we cannot assume anything like freedom without the immediate consciousness of the moral law. On the other hand, freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law. Thus the moral law could not be imposed by something other than itself, i.e. it must be self-imposed. In this way, freedom is identical with autonomy. The moral law is said to be a law under a free, autonomous will.

In summary, Kant's approach to the concept of freedom involves the following: Freedom can be recognized in two senses, negative and positive. In its negative sense, freedom is a transcendental Idea. It is the power of beginning a series of events spontaneously without being determined by the mechanical order of nature. In its positive sense, freedom is autonomy, the will imposes the moral law upon itself.

3.2. *Wille* and *Willkür:*

Although Kant's account of freedom clarifies the nature of personhood and moral obligation, its full power is not apparent until that account is applied to cases of moral struggle. Human will is not a pure will. We are free to act morally, but we can also choose to act otherwise. Thus human will has two aspects, *Wille* and *Willkür*.

When Kant refers to the will in its familiar aspect as the power to choose between alternatives, he calls it *Willkür*. It is the faculty of deciding. *Willkür* is *Wille* in its subjective aspect, it is determined according to the strength

of the pleasures or displeasures it anticipates in connection with the alternatives open to it. It is therefore individualistic and arbitrary in the sense that one person's choice may differ from and may even be incompatible with another person's choice. But *Willkür* is not a blind impulse. It can be influenced by interests and inclinations, but it isn't wholly determined to action by them.[28] Its actions are always determined according to the strongest inclination, but only after *Willkür* has itself made a decision about which is the strongest inclination. Thus *Willkür* is also determined by itself and is free. Kant says:

> The freedom of the will [*Willkür*] is of a wholly unique nature in that an incentive can determine the will [*Willkür*] to an action only so far as the individual has incorporated it into his maxim (has made it the general rule in accordance with which he will conduct himself); only thus can an incentive, whatever it may be, co-exist with the absolute spontaneity of the will [*Willkür*]. (i.e. freedom).[29]

It is clear that no impulse or desire can wholly determine *Willkür* to action unless *Willkür* chooses to act. Although *Willkür* is not *Wille* which is autonomous and absolutely free, it is spontaneous and has the power of initiating a new causal series in time. Hence *Willkür* is both free and under the influence of desires and inclinations. It has an incentive for action. At the same time, although it is not pure, it can still be determined to act by pure will. It is free only in

---

[28] Vide *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.10.

[29] *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone*, p.19.

the negative sense of freedom, i.e. free in the sense of being independent of sensuous impulses and from the mechanisms of the natural order in the determination of its choices.

In contrast to *Willkür*, *Wille* does not make decisions or act as the direct determiner of action, it does not act. Rather, it is the lawgiver. It lays down the moral law which has universal validity. While the power of choice (*Willkür*) is the appetitive power viewed in relation to action, *Wille* is the appetitive power viewed in relation to the ground that determines *Willkür* to act.[30] *Wille* is the determining ground of *Willkür*. It is the purely rational aspect of our human will. In so far as *Wille* can determine *Willkür*, *Wille* is practical reason itself. *Wille* gives the moral law to *Willkür*. The moral law is a synthetic *a priori* statement upon which *Willkür* would necessarily conform if it were exclusively rational and fully realized by its potentialities. And since *Willkür* is also influenced by inclinations, *Wille* thus lays down the law as an imperative of duty. Hence the positive concept of freedom is the concept of the power of pure reason to be of itself practical.[31] It is the legislative function of our human will. Its freedom is autonomy.

3.3 Autonomy and Heteronomy of the Will are modes of freedom:

In Kant's moral philosophy what does it mean to be a rational being or to be a person? Kant's answer to this

---

[30]Vide *Doctrine of Virtue*, p.10.

[31]Ibid.

question becomes clear when it is considered in the light of our discussion of *Willkür* and *Wille*. The moral law, which is given by *Wille*, reveals the fact that human beings are beings who are rational and who possess personhood. By telling us what we ought to do regardless of our inclinations and desires, the moral law forces us to be aware of ourselves as agents, rather than as mere creatures of desire. And so in one aspect, we have *Willkür*, the power to choose for ourselves that which is most desired and contrary to our duty; in another aspect, *Wille* informs us, through the voice of the categorical imperative, of what we ought to do and that we must be responsible for our actions. By adopting maxims which conform to the universal law, we express the unconditioned character of our *Wille* and reveal ourselves as rationally free beings.

These double characteristics of human will also enable us to see that autonomy and heteronomy of the will are both modes of freedom. The fact that autonomy of the will is a mode of freedom requires no argument. That freedom involves the independence of the will from external influences and from all antecedent determination has been generally recognized. To say that the will is free is to say that it is autonomous and acts rationally. But Kant holds that heteronomy of the will is a mode of freedom as well. As a transcendentally free being who possesses *Willkür*, the individual is determined neither by desires and inclinations nor by mechanical nature. The individual proposes his object of choice by his own *Willkur*. By acting from his *Willkür*, rather than his *Wille*,

his action is heteronomous. But the decision to act heteronomously is nonetheless his own decision, for the individual is free to act rightly or wrongly. The adoption of heteronomy of the will is an expression of transcendental freedom, i.e. freedom to act spontaneously; it is an expression of freedom in its negative sense, for in this case the person does not act solely as a law giver.

Whereas heteronomy of the will is an expression of transcendental freedom, autonomy of the will is an expression of both transcendental freedom and practical freedom, i.e. freedom in both its positive and negative sense. In its negative sense, autonomy of the will is freedom to act spontaneously, free from the mechanical determination of the natural order and the influence of desires and inclinations. It is a fulfilling realization of transcendental freedom. Autonomy of the will in its positive sense is the ability to maintain unconditional independence of personal dispositions by acting in according with one's legislative *Wille*.

3.4. The antinomy of freedom and necessity and the two standpoints theory:

In the above section, we have stated that man has the ability to maintain independence of personal dispositions by acting in accordance with his own free will. On this basis, there seems to arise an antinomy of free willing and natural causality within the context of the very same action.

By an antinomy, Kant means a pair of statements, each of which can be validly proved, but which nonetheless appear to

contradict one another. There are four antinomies discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The third antinomy is concerned with freedom and natural causation. The solution of this antinomy we have discussed in part 1 of section 3. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant holds that freedom is a transcendental Idea, and as such he claims that "[pure] reason showed freedom to be conceivable only in order that its supposed impossibility might not endanger reason's very being and plunge it into an abyss of skepticism."[32] Hence, the concept of freedom is needed for the completion of a consistent account of theoretical reason itself. Thus there is, for Kant, no genuine contradiction between freedom and physical causality. However, although there is no theoretical contradiction in asserting freedom along with physical causality, there is still the problem of how we can reconcile the antinomy between free willing and natural causality within the context of the very same action. In the case of practical reason, the concept of freedom is a necessary presupposition which appears as a property of the will of all rational beings. To deny the possibility of freedom is to reject the possibility of morality and practical reason. On the other hand, the concept of natural causality is a category of the understanding without which there can be no knowledge of nature. Yet these two concepts seem incompatible with each other. According to the first, our actions must be free; and according to

---

[32]C. Pr. R. 3.

the second our actions as events of the natural order are determined by causal laws. There will be no way to resolve the contradiction if we consider ourselves as free and as determined in the same sense and in the same relationship in respect to the same action. In order to escape from this contradiction, Kant introduces his two standpoints theory. As we have remarked earlier, Kant holds that our knowledge of objects is knowledge of appearances. It is knowledge of the phenomenal world. This phenomenal world is revealed to us through our sensibility. Our knowledge of it arises from a combination of sensibility and understanding. Beyond the appearances which they reveal to us we do not know what these objects are in themselves. But we must assume that behind these appearances there are things-in-themselves. This gives us a rough account of Kant's distinction between phenomena (things as they appear to us) and Noumena (things that are in themselves). Hence, appearances constitute the phenomenal or sensible world. The world of things-in-themselves may be called the noumenal or intelligible world. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the Idea of the Noumenal world is only a limiting concept. It is necessary in order to give objective validity to our sensuous knowledge by stating its limit since this prevents us from thinking that our sensuous intuitions can give us knowledge of things as they are in themselves. Within the field of practical reason, the Idea of an intelligible world must also be presupposed. We can only think of it negatively. It is the world as it is, independent

of our sensible intuition. At the same time, we have no intellectual intuition through which to know it. Now man must consider himself from different points of view as both a member of the intelligible world and as a part of the sensible world. As a result of his rational nature, his personhood, his independence of sensuous impressions in the use of reason, a man must regard himself *qua* intelligence as belonging to the intelligible world. Thus, in this respect he is free from the mechanism of nature and is subject to the law which reason imposes on itself. But a man is also a being of needs, impulses and senses; he is also a part of the order of nature. This aspect of his being is his empirical self, the part which belongs to the sensible world. As a member of the intelligible world, a man is subject to autonomous laws given by reason. As a member of both the intelligible world and the sensible world, he ought to obey the laws which appear as categorical imperatives for him. If man were solely a member of the intelligible world, all his actions would necessarily accord with the moral law. If a man were solely of the sensible world, his actions would be entirely subject to the laws of nature. If the former were the case a man would be a Saint. If the latter held, a man would be nothing but a mechanical being. But a man is a finite rational being, and as such he must regard himself from two standpoints: As both a member of the intelligible and the sensible world. Hence, with reference to the very same action, we observe that on Kant's account it is to be seen from two different

points of view. One refers to man's activity as empirically observed, and the other refers to its noumenal reality. Once this is grasped, the antinomy between free willing and natural necessity disappears. Thus man, as a rational being is not responsible for having desires and impulses, but he is responsible for indulging them when he allows them to influence his maxims and fails to conform with rational laws.

3.5: The possibility of moral action:

On the basis of the foregoing discussion we are now able to show on Kant's account how moral action is possible. The first two chapters of the *Groundwork* are said to be analytic. There Kant's object is to show that if there is such a thing as morality, and if our moral judgements are not merely chimerical, then rational beings must be capable of acting in a certain way, i.e., as the categorical imperative commands. Through the principle of the autonomy of the will Kant states the necessary condition under which all our moral actions will be possible, and since the principle of autonomy and its corresponding categorical imperative are synthetic *a priori* propositions, his further task is to show how such *a priori* synthetic propositions are possible. Clearly, the categorical imperative is synthetic because the obligation cannot be obtained by mere analysis of the concept of a rational being. On the other hand, since a rational being is unconditionally and necessarily obligated to act in a certain way, independent of consequences, principles determining moral action must be *a priori*. The possibility of the

practical synthetic *a priori* proposition hence rests on a 'third term' which is the necessary connection between the predicate and the subject. Kant states his position in the following passage:

> Nevertheless the principle of morality is still a synthetic proposition, namely: 'An absolutely good will is one whose maxim can always have as its content itself considered as a universal law'; for we cannot discover this characteristic of its maxim by analysing the concept of an absolutely good will. Such synthetic propositions are possible only because two cognitions are bound to one another by their connexion with a third term in which both of them are to be found.[33]

Kant goes on to argue that it is the Idea of freedom which gives us the third term. Freedom is thus attributed to all rational beings as a necessary condition for rationality itself. It is a property of the will of all rational beings. The presupposition of freedom is neither self-contradictory nor excluded by physical causality once we grasp the necessity of considering reality from two different viewpoints. A rational being must regard himself as belonging, not only to the sensible world which is ruled by causality, but as belonging also to the noumenal world. As a member of the intelligible world, a rational being acts under the Idea of freedom and the moral law. If man were solely a member of the noumenal world, all his actions would necessarily conform to the moral law. However, since man is also a part of the sensible world, he is tempted to act contrary to the moral law, but as a rational being he ought to conform to it.

---

[33] Gr., 447=98.

The property of freedom of the will makes moral obligation possible, for, as Kant says, ought implies can. Thus every rational being would necessarily act in accordance with the principle of autonomy, if he is rational enough; and he *ought* to so act, if he is irrational enough to be tempted to do otherwise. As Kant writes in the following passage:

> And in this way categorical imperatives are possible because the Idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world. This being so, if I were solely a member of an intelligible world, all my actions would invariably accord with the autonomy of the will; but because I intuit myself at the same time as a member of the sensible world, they ought so to accord. This categorical 'ought' presents us with a synthetic *a priori* proposition, since to my will as affected by sensuous desires there is added the Idea of the same will, viewed, however, as a pure will belonging to the intelligible world and active on its own account.[34]

Thus Kant's answer to the question which we raised earlier in this chapter can now be given. 'How is a categorical imperative possible?' Consider what Kant himself says:

> Thus the question ... can be answered so far as we can supply the sole presupposition under which it is possible—namely, the Idea of freedom—and also so far as we can have insight into the necessity of this presupposition. This is sufficient for the practical use of reason—that is, for conviction of the validity of this imperative, and so too of the moral law. But how this presupposition itself is possible is never open to the insight of any human reason. Yet, on the presupposition that the will of an intelligence is free, there follows necessarily its autonomy as the formal condition under which alone it can be determined.[35]

---

[34] Gr., 454=111.

[35] Gr., 461=124.

Hence the Idea of freedom is necessary for the very conception of the possibility of moral action. However, Kant says human reason is not able to fully explain how such freedom is possible. Human intuition is sensible. We have no intellectual intuition with which to grasp noumenal reality. At the same time, we cannot prove the existence of freedom through any possible sense experience. It appears only as a necessary presupposition of reason in beings who have the power to act in accordance with laws of reason independently of natural instincts. Thus Kant holds that we can indicate the condition under which a categorical imperative is possible. And while we do not comprehend the practical *unconditioned* necessity of the moral imperative, we do comprehend its incomprehensibility. At this point we have reached, according to Kant, the very limit of our human reason.

CHAPTER VII

THE FORMULA OF THE KINGDOM OF ENDS

—Every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxims always a law-making member in the universal kingdom of ends.

Throughout his moral philosophy, Kant does not restrict himself in developing the means to evaluate maxims for action. He also goes on to present us with an ultimate goal of moral actions: the kingdom of ends, or, to use the expression found in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *summum bonum*. Thus Kant's ethics presents human actions as having to be oriented towards the realization of an ultimate goal, such that all our maxims of actions ought to harmonize with such a possible kingdom of ends. We will, in the following sections, discuss fully Kant's treatment of this matter.

1. The Kingdom of Ends:

Kant introduces the kingdom of ends in the following passages:

> I understand by a 'kingdom' a systematic union of different rational beings under common laws.[1]

---

[1] Gr., 433-74.

> For rational beings all stand under the law that each of them should treat himself and all others, never merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end in himself. But by so doing there arises a systematic union of rational beings under common objective law—that is, a kingdom. Since these laws are directed precisely to the relation of such beings to one another as ends and means, this kingdom can be called a kingdom of ends (which is admittedly only an Ideal).[2]

As is clear from the above passages, Kant means by a kingdom of ends a community of rational beings governed by a system of common laws. These common laws are universal in their application and are given by rational beings themselves. They are, in other words, a product of their autonomous wills. Once we see freedom of the will as a property of rational beings, we will see that the Ideal of the kingdom of ends is not a mere fantasy of our minds. Rational beings are free to act in morally right or wrong ways. According to Kant, if one acts wrongly one simply abnegates one's freedom to act according to one's *Willkur*. It is the autonomy of the will that is the fulfilling realization of freedom and it is our self-legislative will on which the dignity of man as a moral person rests. And, according to Kant, it is always within one's power to do what one ought to do.

Now, we have seen, that for Kant, every rational being has dignity and is an end in himself, and that rational beings make universal laws by means of maxims that they autonomously will. Reflection on these matters leads us to realize the

---

[2]Gr., 433=74-5.

necessity of discussing this concept of the kingdom of ends. Although the kingdom of ends is only an Ideal, it is not a mere chimera of our minds. The reason Kant considers it as an Ideal is clear, for even though we can realize the commands of morality, the frailty of human nature always tends to make us act contrary to the moral law. Nonetheless, it is our duty to strive to attain this Ideal, and this leads us towards impartiality and universality in our actions. This ideal presents us with a vision of a moral community which can be actualized through our actions. The kingdom of ends is an organic whole which is conceived as a systematic conjunction of all objective ends. Kant holds that these ends are not simply confined to rational beings as ends in themselves, but also include the personal ends which each may set before himself if these ends have objective validity.[3] Hence, in so far as rational beings exist as ends in themselves and act upon self-imposed, universal laws, we shall be able to conceive a kingdom of ends.

2. The Approach to the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends.

It comes as no surprise that the Ideal of the kingdom of ends should, in Kant's account, take the form of a categorical imperative. It is an Ideal that a system of fully rational beings would necessarily strive to attain, and it

[3]Vide Gr., 433=74.

also is an Ideal which imperfectly rational beings (human beings) *ought* to strive to attain. Hence, that we *ought* to strive to realize the Ideal is for Kant categorical.

By means of our previous discussions of the formulae of the categorical imperative it is easy to establish the formula of the kingdom of ends. We can introduce it by means of any of the other formulae. Hence, we will treat them separately in what follows. Formula I commands us to act only on maxims which we can at the same time will to be universal laws. Kant holds that this command applies to every rational being without exception. If rational beings act only on maxims that are impartial in character, these maxims are formal and universal, i.e., they are laws common to other rational beings as well. In so far as every rational being acts only on laws common to others, a systematic union of different rational beings under common laws will be established. Hence, a kingdom of ends will emerge.

Formula III tells us that we should treat all rational beings (including ourselves) never merely as means but always at the same time as ends. This enjoins respect for personhood in oneself and others, and gives rise to the Ideal of a community of rational beings who act according to laws which direct them to treat humans always as ends in themselves. Thus, there arises a systematic union of rational beings under common objective laws. This union is in Kant's terms a kingdom of ends.

According to formula IV, every rational being ought to regard himself as the legislator of universal laws. This is possible because of the capacity of our autonomous will. Hence every rational being must prevent his maxims from contradicting the moral law. Where maxims are not already, by their very nature, in harmony with the objective principle of rational beings as makers of universal law, the necessity of acting on this principle is practical necessitation, that is, duty.[4] Duty is based on the realization that rational beings can be the legislators of universal laws. This leads naturally to the concept of a kingdom under self-governed laws. It also leads to the concept of a kingdom of ends because the self-imposed laws command that every rational being must treat himself and all others as ends in themselves. Given the foregoing, we can see why the formula of the kingdom of ends runs as follows:

> Every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxims always a law-making member in the universal kingdom of ends.[5]

3. The Relationship Between the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends and the Previous Formulae of the Categorical Imperative.

Kant's views about the relationship between the formula of the kingdom of ends and the previous formulae of the categorical imperative are expressed clearly in the following passage:

---

[4] Gr., 434=76.

[5] Gr., 438=83.

> the aforesaid three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom merely so many formulations of precisely the same law, ... its purpose is to bring an Ideal of reason nearer to intuition (in accordance with a certain analogy) and so nearer to feeling.
>
> All maxims have, in short,
>
> 1. a form, which consists in their universality; ...
> 2. a matter—that is, an end; ...
> 3. a complete determination of all maxims by the following formula, namely: 'All maxims as proceeding from our own making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature.' This progression may be said to take place through the categories of the unity of the form of will (its universality); of the multiplicity of its matter (its objects—that is, its ends); and of the totality or completeness of its system of ends.[6]

I have argued in the previous chapters that formula I (or the formula of the universal law) expresses the formal aspect of the moral maxim, i.e., maxims of our actions must be universal and objective. Formula II (the formula of the universal law of nature), I have argued, is a typic of formula I, maxims of our actions must be chosen as if they are universal laws of nature. Formula III (or the formula of the end in itself) supplies the matter for our moral maxims, since it tells us that a rational being exists as an end in himself and also as the subject of all objective and subjective ends. I have also pointed out that formula I and formula III are equivalent in the sense they both serve the same purpose and are both criteria for moral maxims. These two formulae both emphasize the rational aspect of our human nature. In formula I rationality is thought of as

---

[6]Gr., 436=79-80

enshrined in universal laws. In formula III it is thought of as enshrined in humanity. Formula IV turns out to be somewhat different from formula I and III. It does not supply a criterion for moral maxims. Instead it states the conditions under which moral actions are possible. It also states that our recognition of rationality in human nature is not a mere fantasy, but is something made manifest through our autonomous will. At this point it should be clear that the formula of the kingdom of ends follows from a combination of the formula of universal law and the formula of end in itself. It presents us with both the form and the matter of our morally good actions. Moreover, it leads us to an Ideal which we see it is possible to realize through moral progress. Formula V shows that we are dealing not with isolated laws and isolated ends, but with a system of laws and a system of ends. Formula V is thus a complete determination of all moral maxims. The complete determination of all maxims may be said to pass through the unity of the form of will (its universality) and the multiplicity of its matter (its objects, i.e. its ends) to the totality or completeness of its system of ends. This totality combines both the form and the matter. In one respect, the formula of the kingdom of ends does set out a moral criterion for our maxims, but this is not Kant's main purpose in bringing in this Ideal. In the above cited passage, he explicitly states that the purpose of the formulae of the categorical imperative is "to bring an Idea of reason nearer to intuition." In the footnote on the same page, he says that the Idea of the kingdom of ends is a

practical Idea used to enable us to bring into existence that which does not exist, but which can be made actual by our conduct—and indeed to bring it into existence in conformity with this Idea.[7] The purpose of this Idea is to present to us the prospect of an Ideal community which is the result of our own actions. By acting morally, i.e., by acting according to the commands of the categorical imperative, we will bring the Ideal of a kingdom of ends nearer to realization. Hence we see that although formula V is closely connected with formulae I, III and IV, it nonetheless differs from them. Whereas formulae I and III set out criteria for moral maxims, formula V is the prospective outcome which is realizable by actions that accord with the commands of the categorical imperative. Thus Kant calls formula V the complete determination of all maxims.

4. Head and Member of the Kingdom of Ends.

> A rational being belongs to the kingdom of ends as a <u>member</u>, when, although he makes its universal laws, he is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as its <u>head</u>, when as the maker of laws he is himself subject to the will of no other.[8]

Shortly after introducing the concept of a kingdom of ends, Kant differentiates between a member and a head of the kingdom of ends. In so far as humans are only partly rational, they belong to the kingdom of ends as members. This indicates that

---

[7]Vide Gr., 436n=80 .

[8]Gr., 433=75.

even though humans can make objective laws for the kingdom of ends, they are themselves also subject to these laws in the form of categorical imperatives which cast duties upon them. Kant also assumes that a rational being could belong to the kingdom of ends solely as its head. Such a head would be a law-maker for the kingdom of ends who was not himself subject to the laws via the constraints of duties. Kant says that such a head exists only 'if he is a completely independent being, without needs and with an unlimited power adequate to his will'.[9] This is possible only in the case of a fully rational being, i.e., a Holy being—God. Such a being would necessarily act rationally in virtue of His completely rational nature. He has no human desires and impulses, and so His actions would spontaneously be in accord with the moral law. Thus He is above duty and obligation and in this sense He would not be subject to the laws which are given by Himself.

The concept of a supreme head for the kingdom of ends is introduced in the *Groundwork* without any further explanation. But it coincides with Kant's views on the finiteness of human beings and the infiniteness of God. Humans are finite and hence they can only be members of the kingdom of ends. Only if they attain to a stage of holiness, can they also exist as head and member of the kingdom. But for humans, according to Kant, holiness is only an Ideal which we can never attain. On the other hand, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the existence of God (the supreme head of the kingdom of ends) is one of

---

[9] Gr., 434=75

the three postulates of the pure practical reason. It is considered indispensable along with the concept of *summum bonum*. Kant holds that although we cannot demonstrate the existence of God, the Idea of God nonetheless gets objective validity through a moral approach. Thus for Kant the existence of God is a postulate of practical reason. It is a matter of practical faith, not of theoretical cognition. The difference between a supreme head and a member of the kingdom of ends once again brings us to realize the finiteness of human beings. It sets out a perfect feature for human beings to strive after through their own moral activities. On the other hand, the Idea of God is necessary for the realization of the kingdom of ends. We will see clearly in the following section.

5. The Realization of the Kingdom of Ends.

We have already shown that for Kant rational beings exist as members of the kingdom of ends. The Ideal of the kingdom of ends is the Ideal of a community of rational beings making and obeying the same universal moral law. The duty of all rational beings is to act as law-making members of this kingdom. But such a kingdom of ends would be actualized only if those maxims which the categorical imperative prescribes as rules for all rational beings were universally followed.[10] This means that the Ideal of a kingdom of ends is possible only if all

---

[10]Vide Gr., 438-84.

rational beings always act in accordance with the commands of the categorical imperative. Hence, a kingdom of ends remains only as an Ideal because of the imperfectness of the human nature. The kingdom of ends, the concepts of virtue and full personhood, are Ideals of pure practical reason towards which we strive. They have no perfectly adequate embodiment in the world. This does not mean that all these Ideas are mere chimeras of our minds, they can be actualized only through the attainment of moral perfection in an endless process. Given human mortality and human limitations, there seems no way to finally attain this Ideal. Hence, it seems the moral Ideal will remain just an Ideal. But this conflicts with our sense of justice and this is why Kant brings in the postulates of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. The existence of God guarantees such Ideal can be realized. If justice is not realized in this life, it will be realized for each soul in its immortality.

For Kant, what the realization of the kingdom of ends entails can be seen if we place it in the context of the idea of the kingdom of nature.[11] This should not surprise us. As we pointed out in Chapter IV, Kant's views of nature shared the optimism of other eighteenth century writers. He considers nature as having an inherent unity. He says we should think of this mechanical system as if it is governed by a divine head under teleological laws. This divine head can also be thought

---

[11] Gr., 438=84.

of as the head of the kingdom of ends. He is the law-giver to both the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of ends. Thus a kingdom of ends could become actual only if nature itself were a kingdom governed by teleological laws and only if it were so designed that it would promote and guarantee the success of our moral endeavours. In spite of the fact that moral agents are autonomous, they still need the co-operation of other rational beings and also the co-operation of nature to make the realization of the kingdom of ends possible. As Kant writes in the following passage:

> Yet even if a rational being were himself to follow such a maxim strictly, he cannot count on everybody else being faithful to it on this ground, nor can he be confident that the kingdom of nature and its purposive order will work in harmony with himself, as a fitting member, towards a kingdom of ends made possible by himself.[12]

There is one point that especially needs emphasizing here. By saying that a rational being needs the co-operation of other rational beings and nature in order to actualize the kingdom of ends, Kant does not mean that morally good actions are only of instrumental value, or that they are of value only because they promote this kingdom. Morally good actions are actions which are good in themselves. The kingdom of ends is a community which ought to exist even if it does not now happen to exist. Hence, the question of whether the phenomenal world is or is not in co-operation with our moral actions is entirely irrelevant

---

[12] Gr., 438=84.

to this Ideal.[13] However, if we are to establish a genuine kingdom of ends on earth, then a kingdom of nature viewed as purposive is needed in order to assure that a kingdom of ends can be actually realized. Kant puts these matters well in the quoted passage with which we close this chapter.

> Teleology views nature as a kingdom of ends; ethics views a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature. In the first case the kingdom of ends is a theoretical Idea used to explain what exists. In the second case it is a practical Idea used to bring into existence what does not exist but can be made actual by our conduct—and indeed to bring it into existence in conformity with the Idea.[14]

---

[13] See also W.T. Jones: 'Purpose, Nature, and the Moral Law.' from *The Heritage of Kant*, Ed., by George Tapley Whitney and David F. Bowers, (Russell and Russell Inc), 1962, pp. 229-242.

[14] Gr., 436n=80n.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

My aim, in writing this thesis, is to give a clear exposition of the relation between Kant's different formulations of the categorical imperative. Having given that exposition I will now discuss the following items in this final chapter:

1. How many formulae of the categorical imperative did Kant intend to offer?
2. Is there any one formula superior to the others?
3. The conclusions resulting from this essay.

I have mentioned in chapter III that there is a bewildering range of opinions by commentators on the number of formulae of the categorical imperative. The question of how many formulae of the categorical imperative is itself ambiguous. Take, for example, A.R.C. Duncan's comment that this question may be taken to mean either, (a) How many formulae did Kant think he had offered? or, (b) How many formulae can be suggested by an ingenious reader?[1] Duncan himself considers that only the former question is of importance. Of the latter question, Kant himself does not consider that he has exhausted all the formulae of the categorical imperative.

---

[1]Vide Duncan, A.R.C.: *Practical Reason and Morality*, p.172.

In the passage which concludes the sub-section in which he formulates the various formulae of the categorical imperative, he simply says: "the aforesaid three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom merely *so many formulations of precisely the same law.*"[2] Someone who is interested in the formulae themselves might be able to suggest more. Hence, our question is not focused on how many formulae of the categorical imperative can be formulated, but on Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative.

There is no doubt that Kant has given us five different formulae of the categorical imperative. These are, the formula of the universal law (Formula I), the formula of the universal law of nature (Formula II), the formula of end in itself (Formula III), the formula of autonomy (Formula IV), and the formula of the kingdom of ends (Formula V). My view is that it is of no importance just how many formulae there are in Kant's *Groundwork*. What is important is that we have to make clear how these various formulae are related to each other and the reason why Kant brings in each formula. From this, we will see whether there exists any formula superior to the rest and we will find out the significance of each formula in Kant's ethical theory.

The formula of the universal law of nature is the weakest among all Kant's formulae. As I have pointed out

---

[2]Gr., 436=79. My italics.

in Chapter IV of this essay, formula II is only a typic of formula I. Its real significance is to provide a typic for the estimation of maxims according to moral principles and also to provide a necessary condition for moral maxims. If a maxim is not so constituted as to stand the test of being made in the form of a universal law of nature, it is morally prohibited. But formula II nonetheless provides a sufficient criterion for our moral maxims. This is because what is possible in nature may not be legitimate in the moral realm. Hence, the only function formula II can serve is to supply the moral law with a mediation principle which enables us to make use of the moral law as a practical criterion for testing our maxims. From this point, it follows that formula II is less important than the other formulae. But on the other hand, the formula of the universal law of nature reveals something significant about Kant's ethics. It also tells us about Kant's view of nature. Kant regards nature as purposive as though it is governed by a supreme head. A rational agent, who is also part of nature cannot will to contravene the purposes of nature. Otherwise, he will contradict (in a non-logical sense) his own nature as a rational and sensuous being in the natural world. Nature has given humans all kinds of natural capacities and the powers of intellection; this gives rise to the idea that it is obligatory to fulfill one's natural perfections. Given Kant's views on the purposiveness of nature, we can understand his ethical theory more

thoroughly. E.g., nature has given man his sensuous and rational nature. A human being, *qua* sensuous being, has as his function the pursuit of happiness; but *qua* rational being, it is his aim to pursue all objective ends independent of his inclinations and desires. It is also in nature's design that one must subordinate one's sensuous nature to one's rational nature so as to fulfill nature's striving towards a harmonious, perfect community. For a rational agent to neglect the purposes of nature would be to deny the significance of his own existence, and accordingly would help to destroy the very structure of nature.

Kant's teleological view of nature is seen more clearly if we consider his idea of the historical development of nature. He holds that nature has a definite plan; accordingly, history progresses towards the fulfillment of this plan. It progresses, that is, towards the establishment of a universal community in which moral goodness will triumph within the progress of history. So nature leads mankind towards the development of a harmonious kingdom and to a well-disciplined good-over-evil community. Given this conception of the historical purpose of nature, we see that Kant's formula II is closely connected with the formula of the kingdom of ends and the Ideal of pure practical reason. The formula of the universal law of nature, though it appears less important than the other formulae of the categorical imperative, nonetheless plays its part in Kant's ethical theory. If we confine

ourselves to the establishment of criteria for our moral maxims, formula II by itself does not set out a necessary and sufficient condition for us. In this sense, we may say that formula II is only a subsidiary formula, its significance is to supply a necessary condition for our moral maxims.

We will now examine the other four formulae of the categorical imperative and indicate their significance in Kant's ethics. Let us turn first to formula I—the formula of universal law. This formula states the very essence of moral maxims. According to Kant, desires and inclinations are only particular and contingent; they do not qualify to be the only reasons for action. Morally permissible maxims must be necessary and universal. Hence, the formula of the universal law tells us that desires and inclinations of self-interest must be subordinate to an impartial and objective principle, a principle that is valid for all rational beings. Accordingly, a maxim is morally permissible only if it can be prescribed as a universal law. Now, formula I only assumes duty is an objective fact, but is there any being that can take up the responsibility to follow what duty commands? The formula of the end in itself, formula III, tells us only that human beings have the ability to follow duty's commands. A human being is both a sensuous and a rational being. From his sensuous nature, a person is continually beset by inclinations, but given his rational nature, he can struggle against this sensuous nature and subordinate it to the activity of

Practical reason. Humanity, so far as it is capable of morality, has absolute value in itself and is thus worthy of respect. Thus formula III draws attention to the intrinsic value of human beings. We are bound to respect humanity in ourselves and others; we must also treat ourselves and others never simply as means, but as ends in themselves. Hence, this formula limits our pursuit of ends by appealing to the notion of dignity in oneself and others, which forbids the pursuit of subjective ends and enjoins objective ends, which it is our duty to attain.

By stating both that rational will must be subject to universal law and that humanity is worthy of respect, formula I and formula III both supply the criteria for our moral maxims. They are equivalent in the sense that as criteria for our maxims they both have the same moral implications. A maxim, if it is considered as morally permissible, must pass the criteria set out by either formula I or formula III. Hence, formula I and formula III lead us to an understanding of the essence of moral maxims and they guide us to a way of moral living.

In approaching the formula of autonomy, it is obvious that this formula is logically different from the previous ones. The real significance of this formula does not lie in supplying criteria for our maxims, but it is the fundamental presupposition of the possibility of morality. Without the assertion of the autonomy of the will, duty and rationality

are nothing but fantasies of our mind. Formula IV asserts that reason is able to set its own necessary purposes without having to be guided by the contingent occurrence of desires and inclinations. That is, rational will is not merely subject to the universal law but it is itself the legislator of universal law. Hence, Kant calls the principle of autonomy the sole principle of ethics. Though Kant does not make this clear, we should notice that the principle of autonomy need not take the form of a categorical imperative. It is the condition under which all the formulae of the categorical imperative are possible. It expresses the essence of the moral law. It is a principle on which a rational agent as such would necessarily act if reason has full control over his sensuous nature. It appears as a categorical imperative because a rational human being may be tempted to transgress the moral law. Considered as the condition of morality, formula IV is the most important formula of them all. On the other hand, this formula can also be a guide to moral maxims; it shares the same function as that of formula I and formula III. It bids us to act only on a maxim which can become a universal law, while also pointing out that we remain law-makers since the moral law emanates from our own rational natures. However, the practical value of formula IV lies in the fact that it brings out the necessary presuppositions of morality and thus makes the formulae of the categorical imperative applicable to human lives.

Finally, we come to Kant's last formula of the categorical imperative—the formula of kingdom of ends. Even though this formula is significantly different from the previous formulae, there are nonetheless close connections between them. For example, formula II is based upon Kant's teleological viewpoint of Nature. By pursuing these natural purposes, we are progressing towards a systematic perfect community. And this systematic community is a necessary condition for the existence of a truly moral community, a realized kingdom of ends. Similarly, respecting humanity in oneself and others and being the law-maker of universal laws also lead us to the Ideal of the kingdom of ends. Hence, the real significance of formula V is that it reveals to us a moral Ideal which it is possible to realize only through moral progress by means of right conduct. This Ideal gives us hope for the creation of a better world by means of moral progress throughout the development of history, and it leads us to strive to realize the *summum bonum* which is held before us as the Ideal of a kingdom of ends.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

KANT'S WORKS

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. N.K. Smith. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

_____. *Critique of Practical Reason*, Trans. with an introduction by L.W. Beck. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.

_____. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Trans. and analysed by H.J. Paton. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.

_____. *Lectures on Ethics*, Trans. Louis Infield. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

_____. *Doctrine of Virtue*, Trans. Mary J. Gregor. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

_____. *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.

_____. *Education*, Trans. Annette Churton. Ann Arbor Paperbacks: The University of Michigan Press, 1960.

_____. *On the Old Saw: That may be Right in Theory But It Won't Work in Practice*, Trans. E.B. Ashton. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974.

_____. "What is Enlightenment?", In *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?*, Trans. L.W. Beck. The Library of Liberal Arts: Indianapolis, New York, 1959.

STUDIES OF KANT'S ETHICAL THEORY

Beck, L.W. *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.

Broad, C.D. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967.

Deslpand, Michel. *Kant on History and Religion*. McGill: Queen's University Press, 1973.

Duncan, A.R.C. *Practical Reason and Morality.* Toronto and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1957.

Field, G.C. *Moral Theory.* New York: E.P. Dotton and Co., 1921.

Gregor, Mary J. *Laws of Freedom.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963.

Hutchings, Patrick A.E. *Kant on Absolute Value.* London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972.

Jones, Hardy E. *Kant's Principle of Personality.* Madison Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971.

Kemp, John. *The Philosophy of Kant.* London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Körner, S. *Kant.* Baltimore: Penguin, 1955.

Paton, H.J. *The Categorical Imperative.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

Ross, W. David. *Kant's Ethical Theory.* London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Singer, Marcus George. *Generalization in Ethics.* New York: Knipf, 1961.

Teale, A.E. *Kantian Ethics.* London: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Ward, Keith. *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972.

Williams, T.C. *The Concept of Categorical Imperative.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Wood, Allen W. *Kant's Moral Religion.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970.

ARTICLES

Atwell, John E. "Are Kant's First Two Moral Principles Equivalent?" In *Journal of the History of Philosophy,* Vol.7, no.3. (July 1969), pp.273-284.

Beck, Lewis White. "Apodictic Imperative." In *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Trans. Lewis White Beck with Critical Essays eds. Robert Paul Wolff, pp.134-162. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.

Dietrichson, Paul. "What does Kant mean by 'Acting from Duty'?" In *Kant Studien*, Vol.53 (1961-62), pp.277-288.

_____. "When is a Maxim fully Universalizable?" In *Kant-Studien*, Vol.55 (1964), pp.143-170.

Gotshalk, D.W. "The Central Doctrine of the Kantian Ethics." In *The Heritage of Kant*, eds. George Tapley Whitley and David F. Bowers, pp.183-196. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.

Gupta, R.K. "Kant's Problem of the Possibility of the Categorical Imperative." In *Kant-Studien*, Vol.64 (1973), pp.49-55.

Jones, W.T. "Purpose, Nature, and the Moral Law." In *The Heritage of Kant*, eds. George Tapley Whitney and David F. Bowers, pp.229-242. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.

Potter, Nelson, Jr. "Paton on the Application of the Categorical Imperative." In *Kant-Studien*, Vol.64 (1973), pp.411-422.

VITA

Surname: TSE Given Names: GRACE CHUNG-YEE

Place of Birth: HONG KONG Date of Birth: MAY 18, 1949

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG, HONG KONG	1968	to	1974
THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA	1974	to	1975
		to	

Degrees, Diplomas, etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. *(Honours, 1st class)*	1972	The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
M. Phil.	1974	The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Honours and Awards:

The Chinese University of Hong Kong Graduate Scholarship, 1972/73

Harvard-Yenching Scholarship, 1973/74

University of Victoria Fellowship, 1974/75

Publications:

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis (the title of which is shown below) to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make *single copies only* for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis

THE INTERRELATIONS OF KANT'S FORMULAE OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Author 

Signature

GRACE CHUNG-YEE TSE

Name

August, 1975

Date