

Some Versions of the Categorical Imperative from Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)

C.I.1: (Formal)

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

Interpretation:

Let  $U$  be a procedure which takes a maxim  $M$  (subjective plan of action) and universalizes it. Then  $U(M)$  defines the deontic categories in the following way:

$U(M)$ entails a contradiction	✧	$M$ is forbidden
$U(\text{not-}M)$ entails a contradiction	✧	$M$ is obligatory
Neither $U(M)$ nor $U(\text{not-}M)$ entails a contradiction	✧	$M$ is permissible

C.I.1A: (Analogical)

**Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.**

Interpretation: *What would be the consequences of an act if the maxim were universalized and became a causal law in an imaginary world (the kingdom of ends), the inhabitants of which all acted on maxims which were analyzed according to the subjunctive consequences of the action as spelled out in this interpretation?*

C.I.2.: (Material)

**Act in such a way that you always treat humanity ...[yours or another person's]... never merely as a means but always at the same time as an end.**

Interpretation: *Humans have a special moral status or intrinsic value, and ought never to be valued as less significant than things that have merely instrumental value. Things of instrumental value are just tools, and though they can be traded off with one another, they can never be more important than intrinsically valuable things.*

**Some questions that relate the categorical imperative(s) to everyday moral intuitions:**

1. What seems to be wrong in acting on a maxim that one would not endorse in the event that another person were to act in the same way? Do duties to friends and loved ones have the formal property of universalizability?
2. Kant seems to have a reason for thinking that humans have this special status or intrinsic value. What do you think it could be? What other things have intrinsic value, and why? Is human 'dignity' the same thing as 'intrinsic value'?
3. If you can identify the moral intuitions that underlie the formal and material versions of the categorical imperative, which ones seem to be more basic? Are these versions related, and how?
4. Does the analogy with natural laws in C.I.1A help to fix your intuitions about systematically allowable behavior?