FOUNDATION OF KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS REINTERPRETATION. A QUINTESSENTIAL HUMANISTIC DOCTRINE

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Kant's Life and Work

Immanuel Kant,[1] considered the founder of modern philosophy, was born in Königsberg, East Prussia, (which today is Kaliningrad in Russia) on April 22, 1724. He came from a Protestant family of Pietists. Kant attended the University of Königsberg and became an instructor at the university. For fifteen years he lectured and wrote on various topics in metaphysics, logic, natural sciences: physics, astronomy, geology, meteorology.

In 1770 he became a university professor of logic and metaphysics. In 1781 he published his important work, Critique *of Pure Reason,* which was a starting point for a new field of studies and extensive writing. Second edition which contains many revisions was published in 1787. His reaction to critique to his first edition is found in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783). Both these works represent his transcendental idealism (also termed "formal" or "critical"). This doctrine maintains that our theoretical knowledge is limited to systematization of spatiotemporal appearance. Subsequently Kant published almost every year a new book: *Idea of a Universal History* (1784), *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment* (1790), *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), *Perpetual Peace* (1795), *Metaphysics of Ethics* (1797), *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798).

Kant differentiated between pure reasons and practical reason. Pure reason or pure theoretical reason does not depend on any experience thus it can make determination of the realm of nature *a priori*. Pure practical reason (or *Wille* = will) determines the rules for the faculty of desire and will independently of sensibility. It deals with the realm of freedom and of what ought to be. It is opposed to the faculty of cognition and of feeling and it deals with laws which have unconditional character (in one aspect of his theory) and apply to a being with absolute freedom, that is, the faculty to choose (*Willkür*) to will or not to will to act. Thus Kant argued that human freedom does not derive from the empirical knowledge of ourselves as part of the spatiotemporal nature. But Kant also argued that there is this empirical and spatiotemporal realm but it does not exhaust the reality. Its principles Kant terms as "metaphysics of experience" and they do not define the ultimate reality hence the term used for his philosophy – "transcendental idealism."

What he meant by this can be exemplified by his treatment of mathematics. Mathematical principles are transcendental, *a priori*, that is the philosophical argument that these principles apply in experience. The mathematical proof of these principles is

not in itself transcendental. In other knowledge we may start with proposition that there is experience and then we discover *a priori* principles necessary for that specific knowledge. The metaphysical *a priori* judgments Kant labels as "synthetic." He claimed, however, that this synthetic *a priori* character was mysterious in terms how can we know that the proposition is necessary and objective. And Kant emphasizes that synthetic judgments rely on intuition (*Anschauung*) and this is not part of their definition. Intuition is a technical term for Kant and is defined as a representation that has an immediate relation to its object. Intuitions can be sensible (sensuous) or passive, but can be also "intellectual" and can have a singular or general object.

The other type of propositions Kant labeled as analytic which are defined as the ones whose predicate is "contained in the subject" that is what is contained in the concepts of the subject term and the predicate term. And they are known through concepts alone. Concepts are representations of representations referring to what is common to a set of representations. But we do not have ready definitions for *a priori* or empirical concepts. He seems to rely on an intuitive process connecting subject with the predicate.

In analysis of the outer world Kant came to the conclusion that we do not perceive the objects as "things-in-themselves" (*Dinge an sich*) (*noumena*) apart from our intrinsic cognitive relation to our representations (that is as unknown and beyond our experience or knowable in some non-sensible way). Rather we find in objects through our faculties of representation something that determines how objects must be, at least as objects of experience or *phenomena*. In our faculty of sensibility receiving impressions we find not only contingent contents but also two pure "forms of intuition": space which structures all outer representations, and time, which structures all inner representations. And this explains why synthetic *a priori* propositions of mathematics apply with certainty to all objects of our experience which necessarily conform to our representations. Thus mathematics and metaphysics of our notions of space and time can reveal an evident proposition that there is one infinite space.

Kant's doctrine is not an empirical one, but a metaphysical thesis which enriches empirical explanations with an *a priori* postulate. But this postulate itself is explained as being "constitution of human sensibility."

Sensible representations, impressions, structured by these two forms of space and time have to be grasped in concepts in order to yield knowledge and then intuitions and concepts are combined in judgment. Otherwise "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." Any judgment involves a unity of thought comprising all representations that can be judged by us as subject to a unity of thought which is termed by Kant as *apperception*. Kant contrasts it with the mere temporal representations in our mind.

This need for concepts and judgments suggests that our constitution may require not only the intuitive forms, but also conceptual forms i.e., "categories" or "pure concepts of understanding." The evidence for this comes from the transcendental deduction of the categories or the objective validity of the "pure concepts of understanding." They are structures of our sensibility and we cannot imagine anything given to us without them.

Nevertheless, Kant admits that the representations once given need not to be combined in terms of such pure concepts. He proposed that a list of putative categories could be produced from a list of necessary forms of the logical table of judgments. This table is a collection of all possible judgment forms organized under four headings: 1. quantity (universal, particular, singular); 2. quality (affirmative, negative, infinite); 3. relation (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive); 4. modality (problematic, assertoric, apodictic). Kant develops next an intricate network of "metaphysical deductions" of the categories and matching with the form of judgment.

Kant's life was highly organized and regular to the extent that, according to the anecdote, housewives could adjust their clocks by the regular afternoon walk which was his daily routine.

Kant had broad philosophical and scientific interests. He examined Leibnitz, Wolff, Baumgarten, Crusius, Hume, Rousseau; he was keenly interested in the progress of science and studied the works of Newton and Kepler. His personality and intellectual attitude were characterized by Johann Gottfried Herder, his disciple in these words: "He was indifferent to nothing worth knowing. No cabal, no sect, no prejudice, no desire for fame could ever tempt him in the slightest way from broadening and illuminating the truth. He incited and gently forced others to think for themselves; despotism was foreign to his mind. This man, whom I name with the greatest gratitude and respect, was Immanuel Kant."[2] Kant died in Königsberg, February 12, 1804.

Introduction

Kant's writings on ethics (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)**,** *Metaphysics of Ethics* (1797)) are the most important since antiquity. Kant argues, following the ancient Stoics, that our moral obligations in the final analysis derive from reason by recognition of the natural moral law, and not from either god, or communities, nor from inclinations or desires. But being a practical realist, Kant differentiates several levels of motivation and of the operation of the behavioral rules preserving human autonomy and free choice in our moral decisions. Thus his theory, just as its sources (Aristotle's psychology and the Stoic doctrine), is deeply humanistic. He considered himself a philosopher of the Enlightenment and believed that one should submit everything to the test of criticism and that our reason is the source of its own principles.

There are many parallels in Kant's thought with the ideas developed by the ancient Stoics (Zeno of Citium, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Cicero, and others) and Eastern thought developed in Indian culture and in China. His thought is thus an elaboration on the themes of the ancient philosophers.[3] Previously we have reviewed moral philosophy of the Stoic school in a series of six articles published in the *Houston Freethought Alliance Newsletter* (issues 101-106, 2008).[4] In this paper we shall present the moral philosophy of Kant as a culminating point in an effort of the human mind to grasp the issue of human behavior in society. What is important for this analysis is to keep in mind

that the philosophical intuitions we find in various schools in the West and in the East can be reevaluated today in a more precise way due to the progress in the natural sciences, and especially from the evolutionary perspective. This does not mean that such perspective was absent in the previous search, especially in the ancient Greek or Indian thought. The naturalistic outlook represented in the ancient schools and philosophical intuitions today is confirmed by studies of our biological nature. Yet we humans are not automata which follow the prescribed pattern of input/output operating in the mechanical, even highly adaptive systems defined by science. With the rise of sentient and rational life appeared a new quality in nature, namely, freedom.[5] Still this freedom should be controlled by reason though we are not always motivated by moral law. Modern science provides today some insight into the mechanisms operating in human behavior at several levels which we will discuss at another occasion.[6]

We will attempt to present Kant's moral philosophy and emphasize its various aspects which are usually ignored by philosophers.

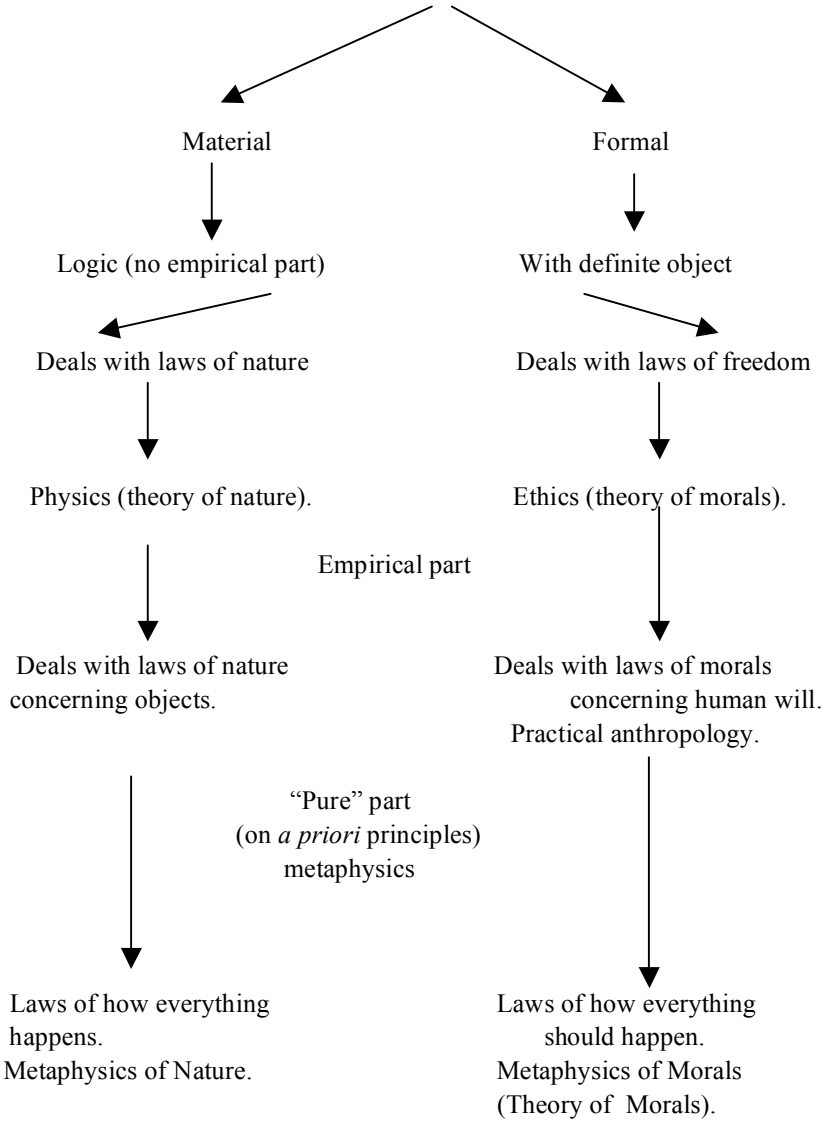
Condition of Morality

Kant begins his treatise, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785),[7] with the classification of our rational knowledge (Table 1). In the Preface to his work Kant specified the task of a moral philosopher as clarifying the "principle of morality" on which the rational agent can act insofar as his action is morally good; to justify this principle, that is, to show that this principle is actually binding upon an imperfect agent such as a human being; to apply this principle to build an exposition of human obligations, i.e., duties. In this first work out of the three treatises devoted to moral philosophy[8] Kant dealt with the first task of the moral philosopher. He was not interested in constructing an ethical doctrine or writing a casuistry of morals, but searched for an axiom or principle which might be used for building a **general theory of laws of freedom** (in contrast to the laws of nature, concerned with physical nature), the science of which he called ethics or theory of morals. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) Kant defined more precisely what ethics is, namely, as the science of how one is under obligation without regard for any possible external lawgiving, that is, as doctrine of virtue.[9] Just as natural philosophy (physics) has its empirical part so does moral philosophy because it has to determine the human will as it is affected by nature. Kant calls this anthropology.

Thus the **laws of moral philosophy are those according to which everything should happen, allowing for conditions under which what should happen often does not.** Though the title contains the word metaphysics it is not about the understanding of ultimate reality, or the metaphysics of nature, but a rigorous search for an establishment of the **supreme principle of a possible pure will which cannot be derived from observations of actual behavior of men but can be established by reason.** For Kant

defines metaphysics as "a system of *a priori* knowledge from concepts alone ... a practical philosophy, which has not nature but freedom of choice for its object" and as such it requires metaphysics of morals which "every man also has it within himself, tough as a rule only in an obscure way."[10]

Table 1
CLASSIFICATION OF RATIONAL KNOWLEDGE



Kant starts his considerations with an analysis of the **conditions for attaining happiness** – namely, of **being worthy to be happy** i.e., of **having a good will** that is striving for moral perfection. Our moral obligation in the Greek and Judaic traditions is to achieve this "purity of heart" or "kingdom of god," which means good will. "Nothing in the world – indeed nothing even beyond the world – can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will." This is a spontaneous feeling of respect for moral law and an innate sense of "ought." This postulate is an empirical one derived from the observation of universal human nature. The function of reason is the establishment of this "good will." Good will is good because of its willingness, that is, it is good in itself without regard to anything else. In saying this Kant describes nothing other than **common moral consciousness** and derives the principle for moral action. Charles Darwin observed that in the time of Kant the origin of this moral consciousness was questioned. Darwin was among the first who gave a naturalistic explanation for its origin. He stated in his *The Descent of Man* (1871)[11] :

> I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. This sense as Mackintosh[12] remarks, 'has a rightful supremacy over every other principle of human action;' it is summed up in that short but imperious word *ought*, leading him without a moment's of hesitation to risk his life for that of a fellow-creature; or after due deliberation, impelled simply by the deep feeling of right or duty, to sacrifice it in some great cause. Immanuel Kant exclaims, 'Duty! Wondrous thought, that workest neither by fond insinuation, flattery, nor by any threat, but merely by holding up thy naked law in the soul, and so extorting for thyself always reverence, if not always obedience; before whom all appetites are dumb, however secretly they rebel; whence thy original?'[13]
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> This great question has been discussed by many writers of consummate ability; and my sole excuse for touching on it, is the impossibility of here passing it over; and because, as far as I know, no one has approached it exclusively from the side of natural history. The investigation possesses, also some independent interest, as an attempt to see how far the study of the lower animals throws light on one of the highest physical faculties of man.
>
> The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable – namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affection being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers have become as well, or nearly as well developed as in man.

We can now add to Kant's postulate that, precisely, modern science confirms Kant's intuition and provides a biological, naturalistic, evolutionary explanation for the existence of this moral consciousness.

Kant insists that in deciding what we ought to do our variable desires are not important – for an **action to be truly moral it has to be done in the belief and because of the belief that it is right, i.e., out of respect for moral law**. For the **true moral value** of our action it is not sufficient that it arises from some good inclination, disposition or temperament even according to duty – it has to arise from a **sense of duty, or good will**. Whether the action succeeds in its purpose or not, if it is done with a good will, it is morally acceptable. The consequences which we consider in passing moral judgment are those intended consequences, implicated in the motive of the action.

It is important to indicate at this point that Kant and all philosophers until the post-Darwinian times considered as truly (strictly) moral the actions produced by conscious rational and reflective analysis. This view arose from Origen's account of the Stoic analysis of the motion of objects and action of animals and humans.[14] Origen reported that the Stoics differentiated human beings from all other natural things by a particular kind of movement (action) unique to them. What distinguished those things from others that are moved from without is that they have a certain kind of cause (*aitía*) of motion in themselves. Things like plants and animals have an internal cause of motion, "nature" (*logos* for Stoics) and "soul" (in Origen's view); inanimate objects must have an external agency to be moved along; they move by thrust of external force. Plants and animals by virtue of having "soul" (and "nature") are capable of self-movement or action. In the case of animals, sensory stimulation is a necessary condition of the impulse to self-movement. Those lacking intelligence move and act according to a prescribed pattern. Human beings do not move or act in a set fashion—because the faculty of reason (*logos*) enables them to judge (*krinō*) their sensory presentations—to reject or accept and to be guided. Origen calls this third kind of movement (action) self-movement of which only rational animals are capable, motion (action) "through themselves."[15] We are deserving of praise when we choose the noble and avoid the base, but when we follow the opposite course we are blameworthy. Origen reasons: It is neither true nor reasonable to lay the blame on external things and release ourselves from the accusation making ourselves analogous to wood and stones inasmuch as they are drawn along by external things that move them; such is the argument of someone who wants to set up a counterfeit notion of autonomy. For if we should ask him what autonomy is, he would say that it obtains "if there are no external causes, when I intend to do something in particular, that incite to the contrary."[16]

The Stoics believed that human beings are capable of self-movement without actually initiating their own motion. The beginning of motion of external objects, and self-movement, consists of the response of a sentient creature to those external causes. Moreover, it is clear that the faculty of reason, which informs assent to sensory presentation, makes the self-movement of human beings different in kind from that of any other living being. Origen's account of the difference in motion (action) between humans and other animals gave rise to the concept of morality as a behavior conditioned

by a rational, reflective act. Origen said: "our nature as human beings furnishes the souls for considering the noble and the base and for judging between them. Even though we have no control over the fact that something external causes in us a presentation of this or that sort—the decision (*krisis*) to use this occurrence in one way or another is the function of nothing other than the reason within us."[17]

Many actions, even if they produce good results, that are done in accordance with the law do not belong to the realm of moral actions in this strict sense if they are done with some ulterior motives. Thus truly morally good action will not only be in accord with the law but also because the law is acknowledged as absolutely and universally binding. Kant formulated thus the condition of morality in three propositions (Table 2) :

1. "... the first proposition of morality is that to have moral worth an action must be done from duty as obedience to the moral law.
2. The second proposition is: An action performed from duty does not have its moral worth in the purpose which is to be achieved through it but in the maxim by which it is determined. Its moral value, ... depends on the principle of volition by which the action is done ...
3. The third principle: ... Duty is the necessity of an action executed from the respect for law." Respect is understood to be the consciousness of the submission of the will to a law. Maxim means the subjective principle of volition whereas practical law is the objective principle that would serve all rational beings also subjectively if reason had full power over the faculty of desire.

Moral Law or Categorical Imperative

Kant next derives the **concept of moral law** from consideration by pure reason and will. Everything in nature works according to laws. But only a rational being has the capacity of acting **according to the conception of laws**, i.e., according to principles.

This conception of law derives from the Stoic philosophy as a natural capacity to act in accordance with "right reason" through the impulse to virtue. We find such formulation of the "natural law" in Cicero's *Republic*:

> True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. **And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither has any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely.** We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. **And there will not be different**

Table 2
THREE PROPOSITIONS OF MORALITY
(Condition of Morality)

1.	Done from duty.
2.	Moral value is in the maxim by which action is determined and not in the purpose; Depends on the principle of volition.
3.	Duty is a necessity of an action from the respect of law i.e., consciousness of the submission of the will to a law.
MAXIM:	Subjective principle of volition. Subjective principle of acting, must be distinguished from the objective principle, i.e., the practical law.
PRACTICAL LAW:	Objective principle of volition serving all rational beings also subjectively if they were governed by reason.

> laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master an ruler, that is God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly considered punishment…[18]

We do not need to be alarmed by the use of the term "God" by Cicero. For the Stoics used this term for the totality of what existed – Nature. The concept and existence of God as divinity of nature was important in the Stoic philosophy. **But again it is not the detached and transcendental God of the Hebrews, Plato or Aristotle.** Chrysippus reasoned that if there is something capable of producing, which human reason is incapable of, it must be better than man, "And what name rather than God would you give to this?"[19]

Cicero in the *Laws* explains why this natural law is called law by differentiating understanding of it by the "populace" and by the "learned men;" and at the same time he explains the etymology of the term "law" :

> Well then, the most learned men have determined to begin with Law, and it would seem that they are right, if, according to their definition, **Law is the highest reason, implanted by Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind, is Law.** And so they believed that Law is intelligence, whose natural function it is to command right conduct and forbid wrongdoing. They think that this quality derived its name in Greek from the idea of granting to every man his own, and in our language I believe it has been named from the idea of choosing. For as they have attributed the idea of fairness to the word law, so we have given it that of selection, though both ideas properly belong to Law. Now, if this is correct as I think it to be in general, then the origin of Justice is to be found in Law, for **law is a natural force; it is the mind and reason of the intelligent man, the standard by which Justice and Injustice are measured.** But since our whole discussion has to do with the reasoning of the populace, **it will sometimes be necessary to speak in the popular manner, and give the name of law to that which in written form decrees whatever it wishes, either by command or prohibition. For such is the crowd's definition of law.** But in determining what Justice is, let us begin with that supreme Law which had its origin ages before any written law existed and or any State had been established.[20]

It is clear that Cicero defines natural law as "law" by analogy to the human positive law. And such is its popular understanding. However, in reality it **is natural force, mind and reason inherent in human nature regardless of the underlying and accepted metaphysics, recognized by "the most learned men" which directs our behavior on an individual and social level.** It is natural because it is proper for human nature: "that animal which we call man, endowed with foresight and quick intelligence, complex, keen, possessing memory, full of reason and prudence, has been given a certain distinguished status by the supreme God who created him; for he is the only one among so many different kinds and varieties of living beings who has a share in reason and thought, while all the rest are deprived of it." And further: "But those who have reason in common must also have right reason in common. And since right reason is law, we must believe that men have Law also in common with gods. Further, those who share Law must also share Justice."[21]

Kant **equates this capacity to act according to the conception of laws with will**. But since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, **will is nothing else but the practical reason** that governs human behavior through a conception of law.

In human beings, however, **reason by itself does not sufficiently determine the will which is also subjugated to subjective conditions which do not always agree with objective ones.** But the **pure conception of duty and of moral law has the highest influence**. Kant emphasizes that moral theory that is put together from a mixture of incentives, feelings, inclinations and partially from rational concepts makes the mind vacillate between motives and leads only accidentally to good and often to bad. **The conception of an objective principle to which we refer in governing our actions is a command of reason and the formulation of it is an imperative, an expression containing an "ought"** (Table 3).

If the **action is good as a means to something else, the imperative is hypothetical**, thus it is **conditional upon circumstances** and advisable only. Such a goal cannot be universally held by all men at all times. Further, the hypothetical imperatives can be divided into **technical** (**imperative of skill**), belonging to art and into **pragmatic (imperative of prudence**), belonging to welfare of the being.

The moral imperative (in the strict sense) is unconditional, i.e., it is categorical. It is our **moral consciousness that we ought to do our duty regardless** of our inclinations and cannot be derived from psychological study. Now the question arises: How is it possible, i.e., how is the constraint of will possible? This principle is formulated by pure reason from the concept of "ought." Thus the idea of obligation itself must dictate a criterion for deciding what our obligations are. A moral imperative commands unconditional conformity of our subjective maxim to a law, while the law contains no reference to specific ends on which it depends. With this are associated **three principles of the will.**

Three Principles of the Will

1. The principle of universality

The maxim should contain no condition which would prevent it from being itself a **law and universally imperative**, i.e., valid for all men as rational beings regardless of their specific desires. Thus Kant postulates the **principle of universality**; the principle of the will that determines its conformity to the law is that one should never act in a way that one could not also will that this maxim should be a universal law. This principle of universality in the imperative form is the categorical imperative: **"Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."** In terms of the law of nature the same principle is formulated: "**Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature."**

2. The principle of humanity.

Since every rational being exists as an end unto himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, a supreme practical principle can be

Table 3
PRINCIPLES OF VOLITION (ACTION)
(IMPERATIVES)

A.	HYPOTHETICAL (Conditional)
	Principles of volition
	Rules of skill (as in science)
	Technical
	Pragmatic (for happiness as an end)
	Counsels of prudence
B.	CATEGORICAL (Unconditional)
	Laws; Commands of morality
	Unconditional
	Objective
	Universally valid
	Binding even against inclinations
	Belonging to free conduct
	Absolutely necessary

derived that the moral agent should act as if he were a lawgiving member of a realm of ends, i.e., of persons each of whom is an end unto himself and an end unto all others. Thus Kant formulates the **principle of humanity**: **"Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."** This principle of humanity is the supreme limiting condition on freedom of action for each man.

3. The principle of harmony with universal practical reason.

Moreover, we should act in harmony with the idea of the will of every rational being as making universal laws, and therefore should endeavor to further the ends of others**: "For the ends of any person, who is an end unto himself, must as far as possible also be my end, if that conception for an end in itself is to have its full effect on me"** and hence the third principle of the will as the supreme condition of its **harmony with universal practical reason** can be formulated as**: the idea of the will of**

every rational being as making universal law. Thus the principles of universality and of humanity constitute the grounds for all practical judgment.

Autonomy of the will, the dignity of man and harmony

From moral law Kant derives a conception of the **autonomy of the will**, **the dignity of man and harmony**. The will is not only subject to the law but also the lawgiver. Moral law can obligate unconditionally only if it is a law given by man as sovereign in the realm of ends unto himself as a subject in this realm. **Man thus has the dignity of a lawgiver** – the laws he obeys are the laws he gives himself. The being that gives the laws to himself is not merely bound to the law but is freely bound by his own lawgiving activity. This is why Kant calls moral law **autonomous** (from the Greek words self, *auto,* and law, *nomos*). The necessity of acting according to that principle is a duty which pertains to each member in the realm of ends (a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws in a society). This duty rests on the relation of rational beings to one another, and reason therefore relates every maxim of the will as giving laws to every other will and also to every action toward itself. The imperative form of this **principle of autonomy** is: **"Act by a maxim which involves its own universal validity for every rational being."**

A being that takes the law from another lawgiver – god, a tyrant, his own cupidity – must be led to obedience by fear or hope. He is not then free but **heteronomous**. His actions are not truly moral[22] (in the strict sense) because all his maxims are hypothetical and he cannot act out of respect for a universal law which takes no account of the contingent and divisive interests of individuals.

The three formulations of the imperative (from the principles of universality in two forms, humanity, and harmony) represent three aspects of one moral law that brings the action to intuition as much as possible. These formulations are summarized in Table 4. The will is unconditionally good which follows this maxim of moral law. But a rational being cannot expect that every rational being be true to it; so Kant reformulates the law into still another, **practical version: "Act according to the maxim of a universally legislative member of an only potential realm of ends"** (where "realm of end" refers to a society as a union of rational beings through the common laws). But it still commands categorically and Kant emphasizes that it suffices that the dignity of humanity as rational nature and respect for the idea should serve as the inflexible precept of the will. Moreover, the worthiness of every rational subject to be a legislative member consists of independence of the maxims from such incentives. Hence morality is the relation of actions of possible universal lawgiving by maxims of the will. Action compatible with the authority of the will is permitted. **The will whose maxims necessarily are in harmony with the laws of autonomy is an absolutely good will**.

The dependence of a will not absolutely good on the principle of autonomy is obligation. And the **objective necessity of an action from obligation Kant calls duty.**

In the concept of duty we usually think of subjection, yet there is dignity in it so far as the person who fulfills his/her duties is a legislator of the law and is subject to it for that reason. Also no fear or inclination to the law may give moral sanction in the strict sense of the word to the action. **Thus autonomy of the will is the supreme condition of morality**: **"Never choose except in such a way that the maxims of the choice are comprehended in the same volition as a universal law."** If the will seeks the determination of the law outside itself in the property of any of its objects, heteronomy results and becomes the source of **spurious principles of morality** based on hypothetical imperatives in the terminology of Kant (see the list below in Table 5). An example will illustrate this. According to the rule of heteronomy and hypothetical imperative – "I should not lie if I wish to keep my reputation. According to the rule of autonomy and categorical imperative – "I should not lie even though it would not cause me the least injury."

Table 4
FORMULATIONS
OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

1. From the principle of universality:
   Act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law

2. From the concept of nature:
   Act as though the maxim for your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature

3. From the principle of humanity (human as a rational being as an end unto himself):
   Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only

4. From the principle of autonomy of the will:
   Act by a maxim which involves its own universal validity for every rational being

But Kant, being a realistic man, admits that among all spurious principles he would admit as most tolerable the principle derived from the concept of moral sense because it preserves the idea of a will good in itself. He defines this moral sense as “The subjective effect which the law [his moral law of the categorical imperative] has upon the will to which reason alone gives objective grounds." These are imprecise formulations

but Kant probably meant by moral sense the unconscious “feeling” of what is right and wrong. It derives from a verity of inner psychological sources and external influences from others due to our living in a society. Generally moral sense expresses our evaluation of the behavior of others and our expectations of reciprocity which was grasped well by Friedrich Nietzsche.[23] Moral consciousness on the other hand is an expression of the natural, evolutionary, and biological “moral faculty” postulated by modern science and which constitutes the intuitive basis for our conscious and reflective moral judgment (strictly moral).

Table 5
Kant's List of Conditional (or Spurious) Principles of Morality from the Principle of Heteronomy

Empirical	Rational
a. from the principle of happiness based on a physical or moral feeling; b. as a concept of moral sense, the moral feeling; (it has no uniform standard, but preserves the idea of the good will in itself).	from the principle of perfection a. an ontological concept of perfection as a possible result; b. a theological concept of independent perfection (the will of god as a determining cause of our will; a desire for glory and dominion, feelings opposed to morality).

Possibility of the Categorical Imperative

So far Kant dealt with the question: "What is morality, such that we could say that an action with such and such characteristics would be moral?" Now Kant has to deal with another question: "Can such an action actually take place?" Answers to both questions cannot be given by citing examples; they have to be answered by reason. The key to the answer to the second question lies in freedom of the will – otherwise morality is impossible, because something else would determine it and the categorical imperative would become a hypothetical imperative. **Thus freedom cannot be a law of nature, rather an autonomy of the will that is the property of the will to be law to itself**. For reason must regard itself as the author of its principles and thus practical reason or the will of a rational being must regard itself free, and independent of foreign influences. Kant, following in principle Aristotle's reasoning, explains this freedom through his

theory of knowledge that there is something else in man behind the appearance of man, namely the **ego or consciousness in itself or the pure activity of reason which is free from causal determination in the world of appearance** i.e., things which we perceive. **Thus man can be apart from physical nature and free from its laws when reason exclusively determines his action, but also is a part of the world of sense under the laws of nature** and as such not free. Freedom is expressed by the categorical imperative and the hypothetical imperative expresses inclinations in the world of sense. Kant summarizes this by saying: "As a rational being and thus as belonging to the intelligible world, man cannot think of the causality of his own will except under the idea of freedom, for independence from the determining causes of the world of sense (an independence which reason must always ascribe to itself) is freedom. The concept of autonomy is inseparably connected with the idea of freedom, and with the former there is inseparably bound the universal principle of morality which ideally is the ground for all actions of rational beings, just as natural law is the ground of all appearances."

Accordingly, Kant differentiated three levels of behavioral rules operating in the living world (Table 6): 1. **the instinctive rules** to which belong human urges satisfying our physiological and biological needs, as well as behavior of lower social animals. They are controlled by genes or epigenetic rules. 2. **the heteronomous** rules (hypothetical imperative, where the action is a means to something else or the will is subjected to extraneous motivations) which Kant divided into two types. A. One type, empirical, is associated with desires, fear, and other motivations. Here belong also the rules produced by the so-called moral sense which is responsible for subconscious or vaguely perceived, non-reflective actions and reactions. They may operate as well in higher animals. Modern science enlarges this intuition of Kant indicating that there is an subconscious, quasi instinctive component in human behavior which may be controlled genetically and/or a result of habituation.[24] Also behavior of higher animals like apes may be controlled by this unconscious mechanism. It cannot be termed “moral,” however, using the Kantian definition of morality (morality in the strict sense). Once these rules are consciously recognized they constitute the basis for moral reflective behavior (morality in the strict sense). Nevertheless higher animals have a certain subconscious recognition of rules of behavior common with humans which we prefer to classify as proto-morality. B. The second type, rational, refers to heteronomous rules which are produced by reflection; however, they are motivated by extrinsic values like achieving perfection or theological considerations. 3. **the autonomous rules** (categorical imperative) which are attained by conscious reflection representing the categorical imperative. These are moral rules in the true strict sense of morality proper only to humans.

This classification of the behavioral levels derives from the Stoic doctrine[25] and corresponds to the stages of moral development of man through which community life and virtue are recognized as pre-eminently “things belonging to man” in their terminology and are related to the autonomous behavioral level (categorical imperative of

Kant). In modern times such Stoic view of moral development of man in the Kantian modification was wholly confirmed by modern psychology and philosophy. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) suggested six stages of moral development of children through three levels – the pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional, each subdivided

Table 6

LEVELS OF BEHAVIORAL RULES

I.	INSTINCTIVE
	e.g. food, procreation, fear of the unknown
	social life in social animals
	(governed by genes and epigenetic rules only)
II.	HETERONOMOUS
	A. Empirical:
	1. From fear, desire; from the principle of happiness
	from the concept of moral sense
	(based on inclinations; all inclinations summed up in the
	Idea of "happiness")
	2. Subconscious proto-moral from the moral faculty
	B. Rational motivated by extrinsic values:
	From the concept of perfection
	Ontological or transcendental, theological
III.	AUTONOMOUS
	Categorical Imperative (Autonomous moral law)
	A law for the will of every rational being
	It only can have as its subject itself considered
	giving universal law.

into two stages. The first two levels correspond to the heteronomous behavioral level of Kant. **Level 1**: stage 1 – morality is understood as obedience and punishment and avoidance of harm to others; stage 2 – morality is understood as satisfying one's own interests and letting others do the same; **Level 2**: stage 3 – morality is understood as playing the role of being a good person, i.e., meeting expectations, following the rules, and being concerned for others; stage 4 – morality is understood as doing one's duty, maintaining the social order and the welfare of the society. In the **third level** in stage 5 morality is understood as the basic rights, values, and legal contracts of a society. Positive laws and duties are calculated on overall utility (utilitarian morality); in stage 6 **morality is understood as an accord with universal, self-chosen principles (e.g., justice, equality and respect for the dignity of all human beings) which confer**

validity to maxims and actions. This level corresponds completely to the autonomous behavioral level (categorical imperative) in Kant's classification.

This scheme was adopted by Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), a popular contemporary German philosopher-sociologist, with only a small modification.[26] Habermas develops Kantian ethics into a discourse of social consensus. Since Habermas considers modernity as a process in which subjects liberate themselves from traditional roles and values, and create a new social order through communication and discourse, it follows that they create new **"normativity"** out of their own discourses. And he understands "normativity" as new **meanings and understandings which are shared and rational i.e., based on mutual recognition of validity claims.** The issue here is the emergence of secular morality from the Judeo-Christian tradition, namely the question of how to live one's life. Habermas contends that gradually a normative ethics as an exposition of detailed norms based on religious tradition was replaced by competing conceptions of the good and transformed from a set of commands to a system of principles and valid norms which are universal and unconditional. Though they are a legacy of the religious tradition, they function in a new social order. This consideration would refer to the existing morality in practice.

Similarly, one could consider history of the moral theory, and Habermas emphasizes that Kant was the first among moral philosophers who pointed to the modern conception of morality, namely, the **"formula of the universal law,"** maxims which are incorporated into the will: "Act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time will it to be a universal law." In Kant's ethics moral actions are expressions of a free act, and based on establishing the validity of moral norms by each individual. Habermas, as a sociologist, criticizes Kant for this individualistic twist and considers morality a collective process of reaching a consensus: "The emphasis shifts from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in agreement to be a universal law." But this critique is not justified, he simply overlooked Kant's principle of universality at the same time he contradicts himself by introducing **"moral discourse"** which is equivalent to the Kant theory of morals and **concerns norms which are absolute and are either unconditionally valid or non valid** and hold across competing cultural traditions. They are evaluated either as right or wrong, just or unjust, and are deontological, and their validity is unconditional. But the detailed rules of behavior conditioned by social situations Habermas labels as **"ethical discourse"** and claims that in many situations it is difficult to separate these two discourses. Habermas, nevertheless insists on the priority of moral discourse and moral norms which always trump the ethical values, just confirming Kant's theory of the moral. This is due to the fact that in this discourse values are cut off the justification process; moral norms are not cultural values but they are communicative ideals of universal validity; moral discourse is not rooted in any particular cultural tradition but belongs to the post-conventional level of the understanding of morality.

Categorical imperatives are possible because the idea of freedom makes man a member of the intelligible world. **If one were a member only of this intelligible world, all actions would be always in accordance with the autonomy of the will. But since**

man is at the same time a member of the world of sense, his actions ought to conform to the autonomy of the will as belonging to the intelligible world, which, according to reason, should dominate the sensuously affected will. Anyone who is accustomed to using reason is conscious of the good will which constitutes the law for his bad will as a member of the world of sense and acknowledges the authority of this law even while transgressing it. The moral "ought" is one's own volition as a member of the intelligible world. It is conceived as an "ought" only insofar as one regards himself at the same time as a member of the world of sense.

Kant next asserts, however, that philosophy has no knowledge of this supersensible world; it only can indicate its possibility and thus defends the foundations of morality.

To summarize briefly Kant's foundations of morals:

Kant believed that ethics not only can but has to be validated without appeal to god's will or god's orders. Otherwise it would not be moral law in the proper sense, that is, ethics would not be autonomous and thus would not be ethics properly so called. He believed that moral law was to be validated not only independently of utility, pleasure, happiness, natural desires, or positive law (law created by humans for regulating society), but independently of god's will as well. This is a specification of Kant's general concept of moral actions: if we were acting in conformity with moral law not because it is moral law but because god wants us to do so, or because we risk divine retribution in the afterlife, we would not act morally in the strict sense. This principle of autonomy is so conceived that it excludes from moral motivations in the strict sense not only the fear of hell and purgatory, but even the pure readiness to subordinate one's will to god's orders; the motive for doing god's will is not a moral motive. Kant states that only good will is good in the moral sense of the word, the strict sense. Moreover, there is only one motive which is morally good and that is the will to act according to duty as expressed in a general principle. Thus an act is morally (in the strict sense of the word) praiseworthy if it is done out of a sense of duty as such, and not, for instance, from mere inclination or compassion. If what is my duty happens to coincide with what I will spontaneously, my act is morally empty (in the strict sense); a duty should be performed merely because it is duty and not for any other reason. Kant also realized that people being what they are may act from various motives. Thus the rational act performed out of a sense of moral duty is the supreme ideal of moral acts.

It is the task of modern investigation into the evolution of the human psyche to illuminate ultimately the co-ordination between nature and freedom, between the human being as part of the natural world and a free agent, and between the moral and natural ends of mankind.[27]

Kantian morality has a supreme normative principle, the Categorical Imperative, recommending us to act in such a way that we would wish the particular rule governing a given action to become a universal law. This principle has a formal character and it states the condition on which any particular moral rule may claim to be valid.

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[1] General description of Kant's philosophy is summarized in Robert Audi, general editor, The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 398-403.

[2] Quoted by Lewis White Beck in his translation of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* edited and translated with notes and introduction by Lewis White Beck, third edition, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. xxii.

[3] The ancient moral philosophy of the Stoics is till valid. It acquired in Kant's elaboration more precise generalization. But this philosophy still inspires more detailed elaborations and application to modern conditions of life, especially by combining the concepts developed by Kant with general outlook of the Stoics. Such an approach reached the level of a new height of logical analysis in the work of Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[4] Marian Hillar, The Stoic Ethics: Natural Development, Rationality, and Responsibility. In *Houston Freethought Alliance Newsletter*, issues 101-106, 2008.

[5] Daniel C. Bennett, *Freedom Evolves*, (New York: Viking, 2003).

[6] Some discussion of the issues of modern science and its relation to philosophical intuition we presented previously in Marian Hillar, *Moral Philosophy and Modern Science. Modern Science Provides a Biological Basis for Human Behavior and Validates Philosophical Speculation*, published in Houston Alliance Newsletter, issue 99, January 2008, pp. 5-6, and in a seminar presented to the Ideas Club, Humanists of Houston, March 23, 2008. Houston, *Philosophy and Modern Science*.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* Translated, with Introduction, by Lewis White Beck. (New York: London: Macmillan Publishing Company, Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1988). Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Ethics." In *A Companion to Ethics*. Peter Singer, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 175-185.

[8] Those three treatises are : the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

[9] Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, introduction, trnbaslation, and notes by Mary Gregor, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1991), XVII, 410.

[10] Ibidem, II, 216.

[11] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, in *The Origin of Species and The Descent of Man*, (New York: The Modern Library, no date). Chapter 4, pp. 471-472.

[12] Mackintosh, *Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy,* 1837, p. 231.

[13] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Ethics*, translated by J .W. Semple, (Edinburgh, 1836), p. 136. This quote comes from Kant's work *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). The full quote is: "Duty! Thou sublime and mighty name that dost embrace nothing charming or insinuating but requirest submission and yet seekest not to move the will by threatening aught that would arouse natural aversion or terror, but only holdest forth a law which of itself finds entrance into the mind

and yet gains reluctant reverence (though not always obedience) – a law before which all inclinations are mute even though secretly work against it: what origin is worthy of thee, and where is the root of thy noble descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations and from which to be descended is the indispensable condition of the only worth which men alone can give themselves?" Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* edited and translated with notes and introduction by Lewis White Beck, third edition, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. 90.

[14] Origen (185-ca 254) succeeded Clement of Alexandra in the school of Alexandria. Clement was the patriarch of Alexandria who at first supported Origen but expelled him later for being ordained without the patriarch's permission. Origen then moved to Palestine and died there. He wrote commentaries on all the books of the bible. In a treatise, *First Principles* (*Peri Archon*), he formulated one of the first philosophical expositions of Christian doctrine in which he interpreted scripture allegorically. He was a Neo-Pythagorean and Neo-Platonist, and like Plotinus believed that the soul passes through stages of incarnation before reaching god. For him even demons would be reunited with god. He considered god the First Principle, and Christ, the Logos, as subordinate to him. Origen's view was declared anathema in the sixth century.

[15] *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* Collegit Ioannes Ab Arnim (Stutgardiae: In Aedibus B.G. Teubneri, MCMLXIV). Vol 1-4. (abbreviated as SVF). SVF 2.989, 879. Origen, *De principiis*, (*On the First Principles*), translated with introduction and notes by G. W. Butterworth, (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973). III, 1, 2, 3.

[16] SVF 2,990.

[17] SVF 2.992.

[18] Cicero*, The Republic*, in *De re publica*. *De legibus*, with an English translation by Clinton Walker Keyes, (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, William Heinemann, Ltd, 1988). Bk III. XXII.

[19] Chrysippus, in Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods* (*De natura deorum),*translated by Horace C. P. McGregor, (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1986), II, 16.

[20] The Greek term for law is no,moj (nomos) which Cicero derives from ne,mw((nemo), to distribute, to grant, and the Latin term lex Cicero drives from *lego*, to choose. Quote from *The laws*, in *De re publica*. *De legibus, op. cit.,* Bk I.VI.18-19.

[21] Cicero, *The Laws*, in *op. cit*., Bk I.VII.22-23.

[22] The term moral here as well as throughout the text does not designate an action morally acceptable or good as the colloquial usage of this term would indicate. It refers to the realm of actions which we designate as morality, i.e., actions affecting interpersonal relations.

[23] Marian Hillar, "Friedrich Nietzsche: Social Origins of Morals. Critique of Christian Ethics, and Implications for Atheism in His *The Genealogy of Morals.*" In *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism,* Vol. 16 (1), Spring-Summer, 2008, pp. 59-84.

[24] This aspect of human behavior was amply discussed and elaborated by the Stoics. In modern times Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the early philosophers who recognized the importance of social pressures on a society for the development of moral rules. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Francis Golfing, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

[25] SVF 1.197.

[26] Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, 1984), Vols. 1, 2. Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*,

translated by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1990 [1983]).

[27] Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal. Evolutionary Psychology of Everyday Life.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Mary Midgley, "The Evolution of Ethics." In P. Singer, *op. cit.,* pp. 3-13. Michael Ruse, "The Significance of Evolution." In P. Singer, *op. cit.*, pp. 500-510. Marc D. Hauser, *Moral Minds. How Nature Designed Our Universal sense of Right and Wrong*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006). Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ed., *Moral Psychology, Vol. 1: The Evolution of Morality: Adaptations and Innateness. Vol. 2: The Cognitive Science of Morality: Intuition and Diversity. Vol. 3: The Nuerosceince of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development,* (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: The MIT Press, 2008).