

## Kant's Ethical Theory Explained

<p><b>The Good Will</b> - The only good thing was the good will, a will that did its duty of following the right course of action. "A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes... it is... good in itself."</p>	<p><i>Kant said that no outcome was inherently good - pleasure could result from evil acts like child abuse, for example. Also, no virtues were inherently good - kindness could lead to wrong actions like buying cigarettes for an underage child.</i></p>
<p><b>Deontology - Duty:</b> there is an objective moral law that it is our duty to follow.</p>	<p><i>Kant gives moral absolutes that can be discovered by reason and moral imagination. These rules should be recognised and agreed upon by all rational people. One criticism is that they simply aren't.</i></p>
<p><b>Free Will, God and Immortality</b> - Kant presumes that we can act freely and that there is an afterlife and God. These cannot be proved through experience. In fact, they are things Kant says must be true for experience to make sense.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If I couldn't act freely, I wouldn't have a sense that I ought to do certain actions.</i></li> <li>• <i>Accepting that something is a good action presumes that the world is designed so that doing good leads to happiness, so there must be a God.</i></li> <li>• <i>I cannot achieve the good in this lifetime, so there must be an afterlife.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>A criticism of Kant is that this doesn't get round the naturalistic fallacy (you can't jump from is to ought). Just because I feel free, doesn't mean I am.</i></p>
<p><b>Synthetic A Priori</b> - Some things are known from experience (the sun is hot) - a posteriori. Some are known without experience (1+1=2: we don't test this to check that it's true) - a priori. Generally, a priori truths are analytic (true by definition) and a posteriori truths are synthetic (they actually say what the world is like). Kant says moral truths are synthetic a priori - they say what the world is like, but don't need to be proved by looking at the world.</p>	<p><i>This is a ground-breaking claim. Science says that anything we know about the world (synthetic truths) are known through experience (a posteriori). However, Kant says we can use reason to work out things that must be true about the world in order for our experiences to make sense. As well as those listed above (free will, God and immortality), Synthetic A priori truths include all moral rules. You can't prove that it's wrong to lie by observing what happens when people lie. However, Kant says that if lying were right, it would make talking pointless. The fact that we can communicate meaningfully means that lying must be wrong 'a priori'.</i></p>
<p><b>Reason</b> - just as with Natural Law, Kant uses reason to work out moral rules.</p>	<p><i>Kant knew that there could be no certainty when dealing with empirical evidence. He also knew you couldn't move from 'is' to 'ought' as facts show what is not what ought to be. He believed that reason could determine moral rules prior to experience, and that the good will (above) would be fostered by acting rationally.</i></p>

<p><b>Categorical Imperatives</b> - these are rules that would be followed by any rational moral agent. They are duties - you should do your duty because it is your duty.</p>	<p><i>Moral absolutes are easier to follow than consequentialism - you don't have to think about whether to lie, steal or kill, as these would be contrary to your duty. A criticism is that this doesn't account for the consequences of actions. However, consequences aren't predictable or calculable, and aren't good in themselves (as explained above).</i></p>
<p><b>CI - Universalisability:</b> to work out if you should follow a maxim, make it into a universal rule. <i>I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.</i></p>	<p><i>This seems in line with our thinking about morality. When I say "You should not steal sweets," I couldn't add "But it's okay for me to steal pens". A moral rule is a rule that applies to everyone. Kant says our duty is to act in a way that we would want everyone else to. It is just like the golden rule "Treat your neighbour as you would like to be treated" found in the teachings of all world religions.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Self Contradiction</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>When you universalise some rules, such as "It is right to kill a person", you get a situation that wouldn't work. If it was a law of nature, we'd all be dead, so we couldn't act that way!</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Contradiction of the will</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>When you universalise other rules, you get a law that no-one would want. For example, "It is right to harm a person". It would be possible (not self-contradictory) to live in a world where people hurt each other all the time. However, you couldn't will (or want) to live in such a world. It would be a contradiction of the will.</i></p>
<p><b>CI - Law of Nature:</b> <i>Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.</i></p>	<p><i>Kant stated the Categorical Imperative another way - act as if your action would become a law of nature. Rather than merely imagining a universal rule that we ought to follow, you are imagining a law of nature that just happens. You should get the same result, but it's somehow easier to live with a universal law that you could always break, than a law of nature that we have no control over. Really this is just an illustration of the weight these rules are meant to have.</i></p>
<p><b>CI - Ends in themselves:</b> <i>So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end in itself, never as means only.</i></p>	<p><i>This gives a different feel to the CI. Kant imagines a society where we use reason to make universal rules. Could we make rules that valued anything more than people themselves? (e.g. pleasure). It wouldn't make sense for a person to make a rule that used people as a means to some 'greater good', as they wouldn't be valuing their own self.</i></p>