

# Kant

## Kantian Ethics: Key Concepts

- from last hour) Acts and omissions
- Kant: The “good will”
- Kant: The “categorical imperative”

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## Questions You Should Be Able to Answer

- How does the criticism about the difference between acts and omissions relate to an act's *intent*?
- What is Williams' criticism of consequentialism and how does it relate to acts/omissions?
- What does Williams mean by “integrity”?
- What does Kant mean by a “good will”?

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## Questions (continued)

- What is Kant's idea of a *person as moral agent*?
- What is the “categorical imperative” and why can it be thought of as a “super-rule”?
- What are 2 formulations of the categorical imperative?
- How do Kant's ideas of “respect for persons” and a “kingdom of ends” fit with his theory and conflict with utilitarianism?

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# Kant

## Acts and Omissions

- Twenty innocent Indians are going to be killed. You can save 19 by killing one. Should you?
- Your terminally ill patient wants to die but is lingering in pain. Should you kill her?
- You spend \$100 on a running shoes that could have saved 100 starving children. Is that as bad as killing?

Keep in mind that the term "acts and omissions" doesn't mean anything by itself. (I'm just using it as a shorthand here.) The question is whether there is a *morally relevant DIFFERENCE* between acts and omissions. Always include this whole idea when you are writing about this.

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## The "Good Will" and Kant's Concept of a Person as Moral Agent

Events in the world	Actions of persons as moral agents
Cause  EVENT	ACTION  Intentions, purposes

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## Kant's "Good Will"

- A will oriented toward following correct moral rules.
- NOT related to psychological desires or inclinations.
- Often requires opposing one's own strongest desires to do the moral thing "for the sake of morality."

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# Kant

## Categorical Imperative: 2 Formulations

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For a rule to be a *moral* rule, it must be one that

- you *could will to universalize*.
- treats persons as ends in themselves and not mere means.

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## “Could will to universalize”

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- Rules out actions that would be *logically impossible* for everyone to follow.
- Example: Never help others but always be helped by others.
- Also ruled out are action *possible* for everyone to follow, but you “could not will” everyone to follow. Like what?

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## “Treat others as ends, not mere means”

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- Basically: don't use people
- Practical: informed consent for treatment and experimentation.
- Captures idea of inherent dignity of each person that cannot be traded off.
- Kant's vision of perfect society as a “kingdom of ends.” (Queendom?)

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# Kant

## Criticisms of Kant's Ethics

- It is too abstract to generate rules that can guide concrete action.
- Kant's ethics has no way to resolve conflicts of rules (or rights)
- Kantian rules are too rigid. (They fail to consider consequences!)

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## Think About

- Which ethical theory seems more sound: utilitarianism or Kant's ethics?
- How might a medical researcher get people to participate in experiments to help other people and still follow Kant's ethics?
- Kant himself talks about rules, not rights. But how might someone use the spirit of Kant to talk about human rights?
- What would be a *nonconsequentialist* approach that, unlike Kant, would consider consequences of an action?

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