

April 7, 1980

In his Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant discusses three formulas by which the moral law can be expressed. The first two formulas are the following:

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

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.²

For purposes of convenience, the first formula can be called the "universal law" formula, and the second can be called the "humanity" formula. The purpose of this paper is to show what the two formulas have in common and in what respects they differ, so that the relation between them can be understood.

Each of the formulas is a categorical imperative, or an unconditional command that constrains a will that is subjectively affected by the psycho-physiological propensities of human nature to the "practically necessary" kinds of action that holy wills always necessarily perform. Each formula is not the moral law itself, but rather a way of expressing the relation of the moral law to rational beings affected by subjective hindrances. That is, the maxims or subjective rules of action (expressing what

men want to do) of men do not always conform to the moral law or an objective principle of action (expressing what men ought to do and what holy wills always in fact do). The categorical imperative serves as the "canon of the moral estimation of our action generally."³ Each formula provides a standard and an instrument by which the moral fitness of human maxims can be judged, by determining whether the subjective rules of action of men could become objective laws of action of rational beings in general. With the aid of either formula, one can determine, more specifically, (whether one's maxims agree or conflict with any particular duty or practically necessary kind of action.) That is, either formula can be used to determine (whether a maxim agrees or conflicts with strict or 'imprescriptible' duties,) such as those of keeping promises and preserving one's life, and of broad or 'meritorious' duties, such as those of developing one's talents and helping others in need. Finally, each formula lays down the condition that the human will must fulfill in order to become good, or worthy of the estimation of the Divine Sovereign and the happiness He distributes.

If the universal law formula and the humanity formula share all of these properties and functions, how do they differ? Each formula relates to a specific property of maxims.⁴ The universal law formula relates to the 'form'

* Re 'human' form, may be different: ○ a possible interp. of it wld hold tht to treat X as an end is not just to act in a certa way toward X, but also to so act w/ certa motives & /or intentions.

Picky point: I don't think a max. ever agree or conflict w/ a duty. (Acting on a max. may agree or conflict w/ some requirement of duty.)

Don't see this: seems to confuse duty w/ moral worth. One cld act always in accord w/ 1st form., at least, w/out ever doing so for the rt reason.*

Surely not for its mw?

Lambert - 3

of a maxim, with respect to its possible universality or the capability of the maxim of holding as a law valid for all rational beings. The humanity formula relates to the 'material' of a maxim, or to the content or 'end' expressed in it, with respect to the possibility of this end being restricted by reference to 'persons' or "rational natures" as ends-in-themselves. Apparently, one can adequately evaluate a maxim for its moral worth either by inserting its form into the universal law formula or by inserting its content into the humanity formula. Though Kant cautions the reader that it is best to use the "rigorous method" of the universal law formula for evaluating the moral worth of maxims, the use of the humanity formula can work also and gain a hearing for the moral law by bringing it closer to intuition.⁵

One wonders, however, whether Kant's offering of the humanity formula as a concession to intuition does not compromise his basic view of the moral worth of action and of the goodness of will. For the moral worth of an action "concerns not the material of the action and its intended result, but the form and the principle from which it results;" and "what is essentially good in the will consists in the intention of its willing, the result being what it may."⁶ But the humanity formula refers specifically to the 'material' of a maxim, or to the end of an action in

I'm not sure there is a problem. What gives my act mw. is tht I do it @ I recognize it as duty. By what criterion I decide my duty - tht's another qtn. Perhaps w/ reference to some end tht it serves.

so far as it could or could not be restricted by an end-in-itself. How can the apparent moral relevance of the 'material' and 'ends' referred to in the humanity formula possibly square with Kant's removal of all ends and material principles of action from consideration in arriving at the universal law formulation?⁷

A weak answer would be that the material of a maxim and the ends expressed in it are just not relevant in inserting the form of the maxim into the universal law formula. In the same way, the form of the maxim is just not relevant in inserting the material of the maxim into the humanity formula. A more adequate answer would be that a certain sense of the form of maxims is always morally relevant, even in determinations utilizing the humanity formula, while a certain sense of the material of maxims is never morally relevant in utilizing any of the formulas. The humanity formula provides a certain standard or formal relation between subjective ends and an end-in-itself as their limiting condition, by which (the corresponding relation of ends expressed in a maxim) can be evaluated. With respect to the material or relation of ends expressed in the maxim itself, the nature of the particular, subjective, or arbitrary ends of action in themselves ¹⁵ are never morally relevant (Kant's exclusion of purposes, results, inclination, subjective incentives, or

"what is it that is expressed in a max.?" a relation of ends? or "ends"? In either case, I don't understand - tho I understand that a max. expresses an end.

"material principles"). Only the relation of these ends to a possible end-in-itself or person can be the morally relevant material of a maxim. —

the relevant material of a max. then is th relation (?) & guess I need an example of a max, w/ some expl of these remarks.

Notes

1. Kant, Immanuel, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals. Translated by Lewis White Beck. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969, p. 44.
2. Ibid., p. 54.
3. Ibid., p. 47.
4. Ibid., p. 62.
5. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
6. Ibid., p. 38.
7. Ibid., p. 19.

How about giving me some further account of what you say in the final par. — I just don't follow. And do you have a response to my ~~other~~ other remarks, above?

Let me see this version again too, please.

By the way, yr qtn (4A) is a gd one, & plenty for a short paper. What I meant to ask, tho, was "Can one derive th 2^d form. fr th first? Can one show tht they are

intensionally equiv — or something?"