Kant’s Deontological Theory
Immanuel Kant, *Deontologism*

“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.”

[Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785)]

(1724-1804)
Immanuel Kant. Deontologism

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Kant’s Central Ideas

(1) The person is the source of value.
(2) This value rests in my ability to act freely.
(3) My actions have value based on my reasons for acting (and not on the consequences of the action).
What is morally good without qualification? (A: The good will.)

What does it mean to have a good will? (A: To act from duty rather than from inclination.)

What does it mean to act from duty? (A: To act from respect for the law — to view the law as objectively necessary.)

What is the law according to which I am to act? (A: Any law generated by the Categorical Imperative, viz.: “act only on that maxim that I can consistently will to become a universal law.”)

And why should I act from respect for this law? (Why is it so binding on me?) (A: Because I made the law myself.)
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Kant’s Deontological Ethics

Five Questions (and answers)

(1) **What is morally good without qualification?**

The Good Will

How we value X:

- final (to value X for its own sake)
- instrumental (to value X for the sake of something else)

The source of X’s value:

- intrinsic (X’s value comes from within)
- extrinsic (X’s value comes from something else)
Kant’s Deontological Ethics

Five Questions (and answers)

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But what is the will?

Everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the concept of laws, that is, according to principles. This capacity is the will.
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In this way does my neighbor differ from my cow.
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The Good Will

In this way does my neighbor differ from my cow.

The cow simply follows its inclinations; that’s all it can do.

My neighbor might follow his inclinations, but he also has the ability to act contrary to his inclinations by following a self-imposed principle or law.

≠
Another way to think about this…

+ maxim = 

+ law/duty =
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Motivations for doing A:

(1) Inclination: (following the appetites)
   (a) indirect: desiring a consequence of A.
   (b) direct: desiring A for its own sake.

(2) Duty (following reason)

My actions must …
… conform with duty (“Doing the right thing…”) … and be motivated by duty (“…for the right reason”)
Conforming with / Motivated by

Actions …

… in conformity with duty but motivated by indirect inclination.
   Being honest because you like the consequences.

… in conformity with duty but motivated by direct inclination.
   Being honest because you like being honest (it makes you feel good, etc.).

… in conformity with duty and motivated by duty.
   Being honest because you see that it is your duty to be honest.
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**Imperatives:**

(1) Hypothetical: “If you want P, then do A!”
(2) Categorical: “Do A!”

Categorical imperatives bind our moral conduct in the same fashion that physical laws control our physical conduct, i.e., as objectively necessary.
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There is one **Categorical** Imperative, with three formulations:

1. **Universal Law**: Act only on that maxim that you can consistently will to become a universal law.

2. **End-in-Itself**: Treat persons always as ends, never merely as means.

3. **Autonomy**: Act so that the will may regard itself as laying down its own universal laws.

(4) **What is the law according to which I am to act?**

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Any law generated by the Categorical Imperative.
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This marks Kant’s emphasis on the **autonomy** of both **reason** and the **individual** human being— the two great foundations of the Enlightenment and the rise of western liberal democracies.

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