**The Categorical Imperative**

**Formula 1: So act that the maxim of your action may be a universal law for every rational being.**

A maxim is a guide for action. For example, when I am hungry, I should eat.

The maxim needs to be held without contradiction. One who wills the end of an action wills necessarily the means to the action. I cannot, should not, take up a means that will contradict my end. For example, if I will robbery of a bank as a means to getting money, I cannot, should not, will that means because the very means, when universalized, will contradict my end or purpose of getting money. For if others could rob banks, then my money gained in a robbery would not be secure.

If I could hold the maxim without contradiction, there is a second test: I must also test the maxim to see whether or not I could as a being who desires happiness actually will all the effects of that maxim without contradiction. There is no self-contradiction in holding that everyone should take care of themselves and nobody need help others. However, I cannot as a rational person, looking into the future, will that maxim to be universal because there may very well be a time in my life when I cannot help myself but I am in desperate need of help from others.

**Formula 2: So act as to treat humanity, whether in yourself or any other being, always as an end in itself, never only as a means.**

If I value myself as a male, then logically I should value all other males.

If I value myself as of German descent, then logically I should value all Germans.

But it is not my gender or ethnic descent that is at the heart of my being

Rather it is my humanity, my consciousness in reasoning and making free choices that makes me a human being.

So, if I value myself as a human being, then logically I should value all human beings (and any other mammals who have self-consciousness, rationality, and freedom).

I necessarily value myself, my consciousness, rationality, and freedom, whenever I consciously choose to value anything, for example, like basketball or tennis.

So, I should value all human beings and other beings with such attributes.

Is this principle of respect for the value of person a better formulation that the Golden Rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you?

**Formula 3a: So act that through your maxims you could be a legislator of universal laws.**

This sounds very similar to the first formulation. However, in this case we focus on our status as universal law ***givers*** rather than universal law ***followers***. This is of course the source of the very dignity of Humanity Kant speaks of in the second formulation. A rational will that is merely bound by universal laws could act accordingly from natural and non-moral motives, such as self-interest. But in order to be a legislator of universal laws, such contingent motives, motives that rational agents such ourselves may or may not have, must be set aside. Hence, we are required according to this formulation to conform our behavior to principles that express this autonomy of the rational will — its status as a source of the very universal laws that obligate it. As with the Humanity formula, this new formulation of the CI does not change the outcome, since each is supposed to formulate the very same moral law, and in some sense “unite” the other formulations within it. **Kant takes each formulation that succeeds the first in its own way to bring the moral law “closer to feeling”. The autonomy formula presumably does this by putting on display the source of our dignity and worth, our status as free rational agents who are the source of the authority behind the very moral laws that bind us**.

Also, think of our reverence for royalty. Back in the Middle Ages, the monarch was the source of law, the law-giver, for all in the kingdom, and people rejoiced in the reign of the monarch (when things and laws went well).

Also, think of the idea of God, as the Intelligent Creator who established the laws of nature and the laws for human nature, morality, and think of the great reverence for God that people traditionally have held.

As rational law-givers and law-obeyers, we could have great reverence for ourselves.

**Formula 3b: So act as a legislator and obeyer of universal laws to create a kingdom of ends.**

**A kingdom of ends could also be translated as a Republic whose laws universally respect all humans, both in preventing harming them and in assisting them in their pursuit of goods that they themselves cannot achieve.**

**The best known set of laws are**[**Isaac Asimov**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Asimov)**'s "**[**Three Laws of Robotics**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Laws_of_Robotics)**". These were introduced in his 1942 short story "**[**Runaround**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Runaround_(story))**", although they were foreshadowed in a few earlier stories. The Three Laws are:**

1. **A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.**
2. **A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.**
3. **A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.**

**In later books, a zeroth law was introduced:**

**A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.**