**Notes on The Categorical Imperative**

**Distinction between Hypothetical Imperative and Categorical Imperative**

**Hypothetical Imperative = Conditional Command.**

**An Example: If I want to go to New York, then I ought to take a suitable means because one who truly wills an end necessarily wills the suitable means to that end.**

**Aristotle, Mill, and Kant all recognize that happiness is a necessary end for us as finite rational beings. We all need oxygen; the satisfaction of our needs is a key part of our happiness.**

**However, Kant argues that the means to happiness are not known with necessity.**

**We don’t know that a long life will make us happy.**

**We don’t know that great knowledge will make us happy.**

**We don’t know that anything will necessarily make us happy.**

**So, Kant concludes that we cannot base morality on our desire for happiness.**

**Kant will grant to Aristotle and Mill that reflection can suggest various counsels such as temperance, prudence, and courtesy which do on the average promote well-being or happiness and satisfaction.**

**However, Kant does not see Aristotle and Mill as able to show why some actions and feelings have no Golden Mean, that is, able to show why some actions and feelings are inherently evil in themselves.**

**So, we can understand Kant wanting to give us the categorical imperative.**

**Categorical Imperative = Unconditional Command**

**There is only one possible example, namely, the Command of Morality**

**Neither Parental Commands, nor Military Commands, nor Presidential Commands are absolute. For if such commands are violations of humanity dignity, for example, crimes against humanity such as slavery, they morally should be disobeyed.**

**The two famous formulations of the Categorical Imperative are:**

**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.**

**Dr. O’Meara’s Comments: There is no contradiction between the statements; “I may rob,” and “You may not rob.” This would be a contradiction; “I may rob,” and “I may not rob.” There is a conflict between “I may rob,” and “You may not rob.” What is wrong with such a conflict? What is wrong is that such different maxims treat humanity merely as a thing, to be used, abused, and thrown away.**

**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?**