

KANT AND THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

PHIL 102

Ethics, Politics, & Law

Spring Quarter 2007

Lecture Seven

The Categorical Imperative

- **I. Kant [1724-1804]**
- **Deontology – Moral duty**
- **Irrelevance of consequences**
- **Imperatives**
 - Hypothetical
 - Categorical
- **One single categorical imperative**
- **Three different versions**



The Categorical Imperative

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

The Categorical Imperative

- **The Golden Rule**
- **Inconsistency in attitude**
- **Impossibility of universalization**
- **Lying**
 - **Depends on general truth telling**
 - **What would happen if everyone lied?**
 - **Could no longer tell lies**
 - **But also could no longer tell the truth**
 - **Universalization is impossible – lying is wrong**

The Inquiring Murderer

- **The story**
- **What you believe if you tell the truth**
- **What you believe if you say nothing**
- **So, should you lie?**
 - **The categorical imperative, again**
 - **Kant's other [weak] argument**
- **Seems wrong**
- **Problem of specifying the maxim**
 - **Too general – doesn't admit exceptions**
 - **Too specific – admits too many exceptions**

Categorical Imperative [Second Version]

**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.**

KANT'S TERMINOLOGY

- **Humanity**
 - What's so special about humans?
 - Personhood
- **Treating a person as a means**
- **Treating a person as an end (in herself)**
- **Treating a person as a means, only**
- **Respect for persons**

Examples

- **False promises**
- **The lecherous professor**
- **Criminal punishment**
- **Personal privacy**
- **Nuclear weapons**