

1 Copyright © Jonathan Bennett (as found on <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/>) [Brackets]  
2 enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though  
3 it were part of the original text. Occasional ●bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations,  
4 are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Four ellipses . . . indicate the  
5 omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. In the title, ·Groundwork·  
6 stands not for the foundation that is laid but for the work of laying it. First launched: July 2005 \* \* \* \* \*  
7 Jones: [..] indicates places where I've eliminated text.

## 8 **Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals By**

9 **Immanuel Kant** Chapter 1: Moving from common-sense knowledge to  
10 philosophical knowledge about morality Nothing in the world - or out of it! - can possibly  
11 be conceived that could be called 'good' without qualification except a GOOD WILL.  
12 Mental talents such as intelligence, wit, and judgment, and temperaments such as  
13 courage, resoluteness, and perseverance are doubtless in many ways good and desirable;  
14 but they can become extremely bad and harmful if the person's character isn't good - i.e.  
15 if the will that is to make use of these ●gifts of nature isn't good. Similarly with gifts of  
16 fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health, and the over-all well-being and contentment  
17 with one's condition that we call 'happiness', create pride, often leading to arrogance, if  
18 there isn't a good will to correct their influence on the mind . . . Not to mention the fact  
19 that the sight of someone who shows no sign of a pure and good will and yet enjoys  
20 uninterrupted prosperity will never give pleasure to an impartial rational observer. So it  
21 seems that without a good will one can't even be worthy of being happy. Even qualities  
22 that are conducive to this good will and can make its work easier have no intrinsic  
23 unconditional worth. We rightly hold them in high esteem, but only because we assume  
24 them to be accompanied by a good will; so we can't take them to be absolutely ·or  
25 unconditionally· good. ●Moderation in emotions and passions, self-control, and calm  
26 deliberation not only are good in many ways but seem even to constitute part of the  
27 person's inner worth, and they were indeed unconditionally valued by the ancients. Yet  
28 they are very far from being good without qualification - ·good in themselves, good in  
29 any circumstances· - for without the principles of a good will they can become extremely  
30 bad: ·for example·, a villain's ●coolness makes him far more dangerous and more  
31 straightforwardly abominable to us than he would otherwise have seemed. What makes a  
32 good will good? It isn't what it brings about, its usefulness in achieving some intended  
33 end. Rather, good will is good because of how it wills - that is, it is good in itself. Taken  
34 just in itself it is to be valued incomparably more highly than anything that could be  
35 brought about by it in the satisfaction of some preference - or, if you like, the sum total of  
36 all preferences! Consider this case: Through bad luck or a miserly endowment from  
37 stepmotherly nature, this person's will has no power at all to accomplish its purpose; not  
38 even the greatest effort on his part would enable it to achieve anything it aims at. But he  
39 does still have a good will - not as a mere wish but as the summoning of all the means in  
40 his power. The good will of this person would sparkle like a jewel all by itself, as  
41 something that had its full worth in itself. Its value wouldn't go up or down depending on  
42 how useful or fruitless it was. If it was useful, that would only be the setting ·of the  
43 jewel·, so to speak, enabling us to handle it more conveniently in commerce (·a diamond  
44 ring is easier to manage than a diamond·) or to get those who don't know much ·about  
45 jewels· to look at it. But the setting doesn't affect the value ·of the jewel· and doesn't  
46 recommend it the experts.

1 [...] This good will needn't be the sole and complete good, but it must be the  
2 condition of all others, even of the desire for happiness. So we have to consider two  
3 purposes: the unconditional purpose of producing a good will, and the conditional  
4 purpose of being happy. The former requires the cultivation of reason, which - at least  
5 in this life - in many ways limits and can indeed almost eliminate the latter goal, namely  
6 happiness. This state of affairs is entirely compatible with the wisdom of nature; it  
7 doesn't have nature pursuing its goal clumsily; because reason, recognizing that its  
8 highest practical calling is to establish a good will, can by achieving that goal get a  
9 contentment of its own kind (the kind that comes from attaining a goal set by reason),  
10 even though this gets in the way of things that the person merely prefers. So we have to  
11 develop the concept of a will that is to be esteemed as good in itself without regard to  
12 anything else, the concept that always takes first place in judging the total worth of our  
13 actions, with everything else depending on it, a concept that is already lodged in any  
14 natural and sound understanding, and doesn't need to be taught so much as to be brought  
15 to light. In order to develop and unfold it, we shall take the concept of duty, which  
16 contains it. The concept of a good will is present in the concept of duty, not shining out  
17 in all its objective and unconditional glory, but rather in a manner that brings it under  
18 certain subjective restrictions and hindrances; but these are far from concealing it or  
19 disguising it, for they rather bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth all the more  
20 brightly. I shall now look at that contrast.

21 My topic is the difference between doing something from duty and doing it for  
22 other reasons. In tackling this, I shall set aside without discussion two kinds of case - one  
23 for which my question doesn't arise, a second for which the question arises but is too  
24 easy to answer for the case to be interesting or instructive. Following those two, I shall  
25 introduce two further kinds of case. (1) I shan't discuss actions which - even if they are  
26 useful in some way or other - are clearly opposed to duty, because with them the question  
27 of doing them from duty doesn't even arise. (2) I shall also ignore cases where someone  
28 does A, which really is in accord with duty, but where what he directly wants isn't to  
29 perform A but to perform B which somehow leads to or involves A. For example: he (B)  
30 unbolts the door so as to escape from the fire, and in so doing he (A) enables others to  
31 escape also. There is no need to spend time on such cases, because in them it is easy to  
32 tell whether an action that is in accord with duty is done from duty or rather for some  
33 selfish purpose. (3) It is far harder to detect that difference when the action the person  
34 performs - one that is in accord with duty - is what he directly wanted to do, rather than  
35 being something he did only because it was involved in something else that he directly  
36 wanted to do.

37 Take the example of a shop-keeper who charges the same prices for selling his  
38 goods to inexperienced customers as for selling them to anyone else. This is in accord  
39 with duty. But there is also a prudential and not-duty-based motive that the shop-keeper  
40 might have for this course of conduct: when there is a buyers' market, he may sell as  
41 cheaply to children as to others so as not to lose customers. Thus the customer is honestly  
42 served, but we can't infer from this that the shop-keeper has behaved in this way from  
43 duty and principles of honesty. His own advantage requires this behaviour, and we can't  
44 assume that in addition he directly wants something for his customers and out of love for  
45 them he charges them all the same price. His conduct of his policy on pricing comes  
46 neither from duty nor from directly wanting it, but from a selfish purpose. [Kant's

1 German really does say first that the shop-keeper isn't led by a direct want and then that  
2 he is. His point seems to be this:- The shop-keeper does want to treat all his customers  
3 equitably; his intention is aimed at precisely that fact about his conduct (unlike the case  
4 in (2) where the agent enables other people to escape but isn't aiming at that at all). But  
5 the shop-keeper's intention doesn't stop there, so to speak; he wants to treat his  
6 customers equitably not because of what he wants for them, but because of how he wants  
7 them to behave later in his interests. This involves a kind of indirectness, which doesn't  
8 assimilate this case to (2) but does distinguish it from a fourth kind of conduct that still  
9 isn't morally worthy but not because it involves the 'indirectness' of (2) or that of (3).]

10 (4) It is a duty to preserve one's life, and moreover everyone directly wants to do  
11 so. But because of the power of that want, the often anxious care that most men have for  
12 their survival has no intrinsic worth, and the maxim Preserve yourself has no moral  
13 content. Men preserve their lives according to duty, but not from duty. But now consider  
14 this case: Adversities and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away this unfortunate  
15 man's relish for life. But his fate has not made him passively despondent or dejected.  
16 He is strong in soul, and is exasperated at how things have gone for him, and would  
17 like actively to do something about it. Specifically, he wishes for death. But he preserves  
18 his life without loving it, not led by any want or fear, but acting from duty. For this  
19 person the maxim Preserve yourself has moral content.

20 [...] So much for the first proposition of morality: For an action to have genuine  
21 moral worth it must be done from duty. The second proposition is: An action that is done  
22 from duty doesn't get its moral value from the purpose that's to be achieved through it  
23 but from the maxim that it involves, giving the reason why the person acts thus. So the  
24 action's moral value doesn't depend on whether what is aimed at in it is actually  
25 achieved, but solely on the principle of the will from which the action is done,  
26 irrespective of anything the faculty of desire may be aiming at. From what I have said it  
27 is clear that the purposes we may have in acting, and their effects as drivers of the will  
28 towards desired ends, can't give our actions any unconditional value, any moral value.  
29 Well, then, if the action's moral value isn't to be found in the will in its relation to its  
30 hoped-for effect, where can it be found? The only possible source for it is the principle  
31 on which the will acts - and never mind the ends that may be achieved by the action. For  
32 the will stands at the crossroads, so to speak, at the intersection between its a priori  
33 principle, which is formal, and its a posteriori driver - the contingent desire that acts on  
34 it - which is material. In that position it must be determined by something; and if it is  
35 done from duty it must be determined by the formal principle of the will, since every  
36 material principle - every contingent driver of the will - has been withdrawn from it.

37 The third proposition - a consequence of the first two - I would express as  
38 follows: To have a duty is to be required to act in a certain way out of respect for law.  
39 (1) As for what will result from my action, I can certainly prefer or be drawn to it, but I  
40 can't have respect for it; to earn my respect it would have to be something the will does,  
41 not merely something that its doings lead to. (2) Similarly, I can't respect any want or  
42 preference: if the preference is mine, the most I can do is to endorse it; if it is someone  
43 else's I can even love it - i.e. see it as favourable to my interests. What can get respect  
44 and can thus serve as a command is something that isn't (1) a consequence of my  
45 volition but only a source for it, and isn't (2) in the service of my preferences but rather  
46 overpowers them or at least prevents them from being considered in the choice I make;

1 ●this something is, in a word, law itself. Suppose now that someone acts from duty: the  
2 influence of his preferences can't have anything to do with this, and so facts about what  
3 he might achieve by his action don't come into it either; so what is there left that can lead  
4 him to act as he does? If the question means 'What is there objectively, i.e. distinct from  
5 himself, that determines his will in this case?' the only possible answer is law. And if the  
6 question concerns what there is in the person that influences his will - i.e. what  
7 subjectively influences it - the answer has to be his respect for this practical law, and thus  
8 his acceptance of the maxim I am to follow this law even if it thwarts all my desires. (A  
9 maxim is a subjective principle of volition. The objective principle is the practical law  
10 itself; it would also be the subjective principle for all rational beings if reason had full  
11 power over the formation of preferences.) So an action's moral value doesn't lie in ●the  
12 effect that is expected from it, or in ●any principle of action that motivates it because of  
13 this expected effect. All the expected effects - something agreeable for me, or even  
14 happiness for others - could be brought about through other causes and don't need ●the  
15 will of a rational being, whereas the highest good - what is unconditionally good - can be  
16 found only in ●such a will. So this wonderful good, which we call moral goodness, can't  
17 consist in anything but the thought of law in itself that only a rational being can have -  
18 with the will being moved to act by this thought and not by the hoped-for effect the  
19 action. When the person acts according to this conception, this moral goodness is already  
20 present ●in him; we don't have to look for it ●in the upshot of his action. [...]

21

## 22 **Chapter 2: Moving from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysic of** 23 **morals**

24 [...] It is indeed absolutely impossible by means of experience to identify with  
25 complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action - however much it  
26 might conform to duty - rested solely on moral grounds and on the person's thought of  
27 his duty. It sometimes happens that we make a considerable sacrifice in performing some  
28 good action, and can't find within ourselves, search as we may, anything that could have  
29 the power to motivate this except the moral ground of duty. But this shouldn't make us  
30 confident that our ●sense of duty was actually the true determining cause of the will,  
31 rather than a secret impulse of ●self-love masquerading as the idea of duty. For we like to  
32 give ourselves credit for having a more high-minded motive than we actually have; and  
33 even the strictest examination can never lead us entirely behind the secret action-drivers -  
34 -or, rather, behind the pretended action-driver to where the real one secretly lurks -  
35 because when moral worth is in question it is not a matter of visible actions but of their  
36 invisible inner principles. ·

37 The claim that the concept of duty is an empirical one is not only false but  
38 dangerous. Consider the people who ridicule all morality as a mere phantom of human  
39 imagination overreaching itself through self-conceit: one couldn't give them anything  
40 they would like better than the concession that the concepts of duty have to come wholly  
41 from experience (for their laziness makes them apt to believe that the same is true of all  
42 other concepts too). This concession would give them a sure triumph. I am willing to  
43 admit - out of sheer generosity! - that most of our actions are in accord with duty; but if  
44 we look more closely at our thoughts and aspirations we keep encountering ●the beloved  
45 self as what our plans rely on, rather than ●the stern command of duty with its frequent  
46 calls for self-denial. One needn't be an enemy of virtue, merely a cool observer who can

1 distinguish ●even the most intense wish for the good from ●actual good, to wonder  
2 sometimes whether true virtue is to be met with anywhere in the world; especially as one  
3 gets older and one's power of judgment is made wiser by experience and more acute in  
4 observation. [Kant was 60 years old when he wrote this work.] What, then, can stop us  
5 from completely abandoning our ideas of duty, and preserve in us a well-founded respect  
6 for its law? Only the conviction that

7 Even if there never were any actions springing from such pure sources, that's not  
8 the topic. Our concern is not ●with whether this or that was done, but ●with  
9 reason's commanding - on its own initiative and independently of all appearances  
10 - what ought to be done.

11 [...] One couldn't do worse by morality than drawing it from examples. We can't get our  
12 concept of morality initially from examples, for we can't judge whether something is fit  
13 to be an example or model of morality unless it has already been judged according  
14 principles of morality. ·This applies even to ●the model that is most frequently appealed  
15 to·. Even ●Jesus Christ must be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is  
16 recognized as being perfect; indeed, he says of himself 'Why callest thou me (whom you  
17 see) good? There is none good (the archetype ·or model· of good) but one, that is, God  
18 (whom you don't see)' [Matthew 19:17; the bits added in parentheses are Kant's]. But  
19 ·don't think that with God the father we have at last found the example or model from  
20 which we can derive our concept of morality·. Where do we get the concept of God as the  
21 highest good from? Solely from the idea of moral perfection that reason lays out for us a  
22 priori and which it ties, unbreakably, to the concept of a free will. ·Some have said that  
23 the moral life consists in 'imitating Christ', but· imitation has no place in moral matters;  
24 and the only use of examples there is ●for encouragement - i.e. showing beyond question  
25 that what the law commands can be done - and ●for making visible ·in particular cases·  
26 what the practical rule expresses more generally. But they can never entitle us to steer  
27 purely by examples, setting aside their true model which lies in reason.

28 [...] When the thought of an objective principle constrains a will, it is called a  
29 'command' (of reason), and its verbal expression is called an 'imperative'.

30 All imperatives are expressed with an 'ought', which indicates how an objective  
31 law of reason relates to a will that isn't constituted so as to be *necessarily* determined by  
32 it - namely, relating to it as a *constraint*. An imperative says that it would be *good* to  
33 do or to refrain from doing something, but it addresses this to a will that doesn't always  
34 do something just because it is represented to it as *good* to do. Practical good is what  
35 determines the will by means of the thoughts that reason produces - and thus not by  
36 subjective causes but objectively, on grounds that are valid for every rational being just  
37 because it is rational. This contrasts with the thought that it would be *nice* to act in a  
38 certain way; the latter influences the will only by means of a feeling that has purely  
39 subjective causes, which hold for the senses of this or that person but not as a principle of  
40 reason that holds for everyone.

41 Objective laws of the good would *apply to* a perfectly good will just as much to as  
42 to any other; but we shouldn't think of them as *constraining* such a will, because it is so  
43 constituted that it can't be determined to act by anything except the thought of the good.  
44 Thus no imperatives hold for God's will or for any holy will. The 'ought' is out of place  
45 here, for the volition is of itself *necessarily* at one with the law. Thus, what imperatives  
46 do is just to express the relation of ●objective laws of volition ●in general to the

1 ●subjective imperfection of the will of this or that ●particular rational being - the will of  
2 any human, for example.

3 All imperatives command either ●hypothetically or categorically. The ●former  
4 expresses the practical necessity of some possible action as a means to achieving  
5 something else that one does or might want. An imperative would be categorical if it  
6 represented an action as being objectively necessary in itself without regard to any other  
7 end.

8 Since every practical law represents some possible action as ●good, and thus as  
9 necessary for anyone whose conduct is governed by reason, what every imperative does  
10 is to specify some action that is necessary according to the principle of a will that has  
11 something good about it. If the action would be good only as a means to something else,  
12 the imperative is hypothetical; but if the action is thought of as *good in itself* and hence as  
13 necessary in a will that conforms to reason, which it has as its principle, the imperative is  
14 categorical.

15 The imperative thus says of some action I could perform that it would be good,  
16 and puts the practical rule into a relationship with my will; ·and it is no less an imperative  
17 if· I don't immediately perform the ·commanded· an action simply because it is good -  
18 because I don't know that it is good, and/or because I do know this but my conduct is  
19 guided by other maxims that are opposed to the objective principles of practical reason.

20 A **hypothetical** imperative merely says that the action is good for some purpose  
21 that one *could* have or that one actually *does* have. In the ●former case it is a problematic  
22 practical principle, in the ●latter it is an assertoric one. The categorical imperative, which  
23 declares the action to be objectively necessary without referring to any end in view . . . .  
24 holds as an apodictic practical principle.[...] ·

25 After those two kinds of hypothetical imperative [skill and prudence]· we come at  
26 last to one imperative that commands certain conduct immediately, and not through the  
27 condition that some purpose can be achieved through it. This imperative is categorical. It  
28 isn't concerned with what is to result from the conduct, or even with what will happen in  
29 the conduct (its ●matter), but only with the ●form and the principle from which the  
30 conduct follows. What is essentially good in the conduct consists in the frame of mind -  
31 ·the willingness to obey the imperative· - no matter what the upshot is. This may be called  
32 'the imperative of morality'.[...]

33 If only [one could give a] definite concept of happiness, then whoever wills the  
34 end wills also (necessarily according to reason) the only means to it that are in his power.  
35 Unfortunately, however, the concept of happiness is so indefinite that, although each  
36 person wishes to attain it, he can never give a definite and self-consistent account of what  
37 it is that he wishes and wills ·under the heading of 'wanting happiness'·. The reason for  
38 this is that all the elements of the ●concept of happiness are empirical (i.e. must be drawn  
39 from experience), whereas the ●idea of happiness requires ·the thought of· an absolute  
40 whole - the thought of a maximum of well-being in my present and in every future  
41 condition. Now it is impossible for a finite being - even one who is extremely clear-  
42 sighted and capable - to form a definite ·and detailed· concept of what he really wants  
43 here ·on this earth·. ·Consider some of the things people say they aim for·! ●Wealth: but  
44 in willing to be wealthy a person may bring down on himself much anxiety, envy, and  
45 intrigues. ●Great knowledge and insight: but that may merely sharpen his eye for the  
46 dreadfulness of evils that he can't avoid though he doesn't now see them; or it may show

1 him needs ·that he doesn't know he has, and· that add to the burden his desires already  
2 place on him. ●Long life: but who can guarantee him that it wouldn't be a long misery?  
3 ●Health: but often enough ill-health has kept him from dissolute excesses that he would  
4 have gone in for if he had been perfectly healthy! In short, he can't come up with any  
5 principle that could with complete certainty lay down what would make him truly happy;  
6 for that he would need to be omniscient.

7 So in his pursuit of happiness he can't be guided by detailed principles but only  
8 by bits of empirical advice (e.g. concerning diet, frugality, courtesy, restraint, etc.) which  
9 experience shows are to be usually conducive to well-being. It follows from this ●that  
10 imperatives of prudence can't strictly speaking command (i.e. present actions objectively  
11 as practically necessary); ●that they should be understood as advice rather than as  
12 commands of reason; ●that the problem: Settle, for sure and universally, what conduct  
13 will promote the happiness of a rational being is completely unsolvable. There couldn't  
14 be an imperative that in the strict sense commanded us to do what makes for happiness,  
15 because happiness is an ideal not of reason but of imagination, depending only on  
16 empirical grounds. ·This means that whether a person will achieve happiness depends on  
17 countless many particular facts about his future states·; and there is absolutely no  
18 chance of picking out the actions that will produce the right infinite totality of  
19 consequences that will constitute happiness.

20 [...] When I have the general thought of a hypothetical imperative, I can't tell just  
21 from this thought what such an imperative will contain. To know that I have to know  
22 what the condition is. But when I have the thought categorical imperative, I know right  
23 away what it will contain. For all the imperative contains is the law, and the necessity that  
24 the maxim conform to the law; and the law doesn't contain any condition limiting it  
25 (-comparable with the condition that is always part of a hypothetical imperative-). So  
26 there is nothing left for the maxim to conform to except the universality of a law as such,  
27 and what the imperative represents as necessary is just precisely that conformity of  
28 maxim to law. So there is only one categorical imperative, and this is it: Act only on that  
29 maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal  
30 law. Now if all imperatives of duty can be derived from this one imperative as a  
31 principle, we'll at least be able to show what we understand by the concept of duty, what  
32 the concept means, even if we haven't yet settled whether so-called 'duty' is an empty  
33 concept or not. The universality of law according to which effects occur constitutes what  
34 is properly called nature in the most general sense . . . . i.e. the existence of things  
35 considered as determined by universal laws. So the universal imperative of duty can be  
36 expressed as follows: Act as though the maxim of your action were to become, through  
37 your will, a universal law of nature.

38 I want now to list some duties

39 1. A man who has been brought by a series of troubles to the point of despair and  
40 of weariness with life still has his reason sufficiently to ask himself: 'Wouldn't it be  
41 contrary to my duty to myself to take my own life?' Now he asks: 'Could the maxim of  
42 my action ·in killing myself· become a universal law of nature?' Well, here is his maxim:  
43 For love of myself, I make it my principle to cut my life short when prolonging it  
44 threatens to bring more troubles than satisfactions. So the question is whether this  
45 principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. If it did, that would be a  
46 nature that had a law according to which a single feeling ●created a lifeaffirming push

1 and also •led to the destruction of life itself; and we can see at a glance that such a  
2 'nature' would contradict itself, and so couldn't be a nature. So the maxim we are  
3 discussing couldn't be a law of nature, and therefore would be utterly in conflict with the  
4 supreme principle of duty.

5 2. Another man sees himself being driven by need to borrow money. He realizes  
6 that no-one will lend to him unless he firmly promises to repay it at a certain time, and he  
7 is well aware that he wouldn't be able to keep such a promise. He is disposed to make  
8 such a promise, but he has enough conscience to ask himself: 'Isn't it improper and  
9 opposed to duty to relieve one's needs in that way?' If he does decide to make the  
10 promise, the maxim of his action will run like this: When I think I need money, I will  
11 borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that the repayment won't ever  
12 happen. Here he is - for the rest of this paragraph - reflecting on this:- 'It may be that  
13 this principle of self-love or of personal advantage would fit nicely into my whole future  
14 welfare, so that there is no prudential case against it. But the question remains: would it  
15 be right? To answer this, I change the demand of self-love into a universal law, and then  
16 put the question like this: If my maxim became a universal law, then how would things  
17 stand? I can see straight off that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, and must  
18 contradict itself. For if you take law saying that anyone who thinks he is in need can  
19 make any promises he likes without intending to keep them, and make it universal so  
20 that everyone in need does behave in this way, that would make the promise and the  
21 intended purpose of it impossible - no-one would believe what was promised to him but  
22 would only laugh at any such performance as a vain pretence.'

23 [...] All of the material ends that a rational being voluntarily sets before himself  
24 as things to be achieved through his conduct are merely •relative, for their value comes  
25 solely from how they •relate to the particular way in which the subject's faculty of desire  
26 is constituted; and from this we can't get any practical laws, i.e. any universal and  
27 necessary principles that hold for all rational beings and for every act of the will. So the  
28 only imperatives that these relative ends support are hypothetical ones. But suppose there  
29 were something whose existence in itself had absolute value, something which as an end  
30 in itself could support determinate laws. That would be a basis - indeed the only basis -  
31 for a possible categorical imperative, i.e. of a practical law.

32 There is such a thing! It is a human being! I maintain that man - and in general  
33 every rational being - exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be used by  
34 this or that will at its discretion. Whenever he acts in ways directed towards himself or  
35 towards other rational beings, a person serves as a means to whatever end his action aims  
36 at; but he must always be regarded as also an end. Things that are preferred have only  
37 conditional value, for if the preferences (and the needs arising from them) didn't exist,  
38 their object would be worthless. That wouldn't count against the 'objects' in question if  
39 the desires on which they depend did themselves have unconditional value, but they  
40 don't! If the preferences themselves, as the sources of needs, did have absolute value,  
41 one would want to have them; but that is so far from the case that every rational being  
42 must wish he were altogether free of them. So the value of any objects to be obtained  
43 through our actions is always conditional. Beings whose existence depends not on our  
44 will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only relative value as means, and  
45 are therefore called 'things'; whereas rational beings are called 'persons', because their  
46 nature already marks them out as ends in themselves (i.e. as not to be used merely as



1 means) - which makes such a being ●an object of respect, and ●something that sets limits  
2 to what anyone can choose to do. Such beings are not merely subjective ends whose  
3 existence as a result of our action has value for us, but are objective ends, i.e. things  
4 [Dinge] whose existence is an end in itself. It is indeed an irreplaceable end: you can't  
5 substitute for it something else to which it would be merely a means. If there were no  
6 such ends in themselves, nothing of absolute value could be found, and if all value were  
7 conditional and thus contingent, no supreme practical principle for reason could be found  
8 anywhere.

9       So if there is to be a supreme practical principle, and a categorical imperative for  
10 the human will, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of something that  
11 must be an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective  
12 principle of the will that can serve as a universal law. The basis for this principle is:  
13 rational nature exists as an end in itself. Human beings necessarily think of their own  
14 existence in this way, which means that the principle holds as a subjective principle of  
15 human actions. But every other rational being also thinks of his existence on the same  
16 rational ground that holds also for myself;11 and so it is at the same time an objective  
17 principle - ·one that doesn't depend on contingent facts about this or that subject· - a  
18 supreme practical ground from which it must be possible to derive all laws of the will. So  
19 here is the practical imperative: Act in such a way as to treat humanity, whether in your  
20 own person or in that of anyone else, always as an end and never merely as a means. Let  
21 us now see whether this can be carried out. To return to our previous examples: First,  
22 someone thinking of committing suicide will, if he is guided by the concept of necessary  
23 duty to oneself, ask himself Could my suicide be reconciled with the idea of humanity as  
24 an end in itself? ·And his answer to this should be No·. If he escapes from his  
25 burdensome situation by destroying himself, he is using a person merely as a means to  
26 keeping himself in a tolerable condition up to the end of his life. But a man is not a thing  
27 [Sache], so he isn't something to be used merely as a means, and must always be  
28 regarded in all his actions as an end in himself. So I can't dispose of a man by maiming,  
29 damaging or killing him - and that includes the case where the man is myself. (This basic  
30 principle needs to be refined so as to deal properly with questions such as 'May I have  
31 one of my limbs amputated to save my life?' and 'May I expose my life to danger in  
32 order to save it?' I shan't go into these matters here; they belong to morals and not to the  
33 metaphysic of morals.