

## Chapter 10 The Nature of Moral Codes

### 1. Life

While morality *per se*, virtue *per se*, and sin *per se* are ideas with no ontological significance, it is clearly evident that real phenomena we come to classify as moral, virtuous, or sinful do exist in the world. These phenomena are all products of human activity and, as such, therefore must have a basis in human nature. There is, in other words, something about being a human being that gives rise to actions classifiable in terms of these category labels.

Despite a number of core moral commonalities<sup>1</sup>, it is also evident that from Society to Society and culture to culture we find some great moral differences among them. Moral customs obviously have great importance for living in any Society, but these differences point out a necessity for understanding the roots in human nature of moral phenomena. If God created you and put you here; and if it is in your nature to develop moral judgments and moral ideas; and if life is an apprenticeship for afterlife – and, therefore, an *opportunity* presented to you – it logically follows that clues to divine purposiveness are to be sought in the human nature of moral code development.

But what specifically are we to understand by the word "life" in this context? We have come to a point at which further theological exploration and understanding cannot do without a Critical real explanation (*Realerklärung*) of what is meant by "life." Critical metaphysics provides one – in contrast to the situation we saw earlier for the case of biology – but you might find this *Realerklärung* jolting at first because it goes against concepts of the idea of "life" you formed during your childhood [Piaget (1929), pp. 194-206] and have used uncritically all your life.

The first point that must be re-emphasized is that we cannot turn to science for a real explanation of the term "life" because it has none. We saw this earlier in this treatise in the "definition" of "life" found in the *Dictionary of Biology* [Thain & Hickman (2004)]. This dictionary definition of "life" should properly be called a definition of "biological life" because it applies and pertains only to how biologists and other scientists *use* the term to identify what is – and what is not – a topic of biology. It is a definition that is "occupational" rather than Critical. This definition was in terms of "complex physico-chemical systems whose two main peculiarities are (1) storage and replication of molecular information in the form of nucleic acid, and (2) the presence of (or in viruses perhaps merely the potential for) enzyme catalysts" [Thain & Hickman (2004)]. As I commented before, this definition is *designed* to encompass all things that *by convention* people have long agreed to call "living things." It is, in other words, nothing but a definition by fiat. There is *nothing whatsoever* found in our understanding of molecules, chemistry, biology, or physics that depends *in any way* on the idea of "life." Life is a label used in science to *classify* particular systems of physical matter [Wells (2006), chap. 12]. It delimits professional topics of biologists and other scientists but it is in no way a real explanation of what "life" is. It is instructive to set next to biology's "definition" the "definition" found in the *Dictionary of Psychology*:

**life** 1. The collective total of those properties that differentiate the living from the non-living. The unsatisfying circularity of this definition will have to suffice for now. It is said with truth that biologists only began making progress when they gave up trying to define this term. [Reber & Reber (2001)]

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<sup>1</sup> Every known Society regards the unlawful killing by one of its members of another of its members as immoral (criminal homicide); almost all Societies establish rules for the lawful possession of items of property and regard the unlawful taking of another person's item of property as immoral; every known Society establishes ideas of justice and regards actions contrary to these ideas as moral transgressions (moral faults and crimes); every Society develops ideas of recompense for moral faults and crimes, and regards the members of its Society as having not merely a right but a Duty to compel compensation for moral faults and crimes.

Closely allied with the usage of the term "life" in biology is another term: "organism." If you try to look up this term in Thain & Hickman you might be surprised to discover that it isn't in there. Although this word appears frequently in biology and medical textbooks and papers, it in fact has *no rigorous and generally agreed to technical definition*. Instead it has a longstanding and commonly accepted *usage convention*. By the 1950s this convention was being explained by *Encyclopædia Britannica* as follows:

It is first essential to understand what is meant by a living organism. The necessary and sufficient condition for an object to be recognizable as a living organism, and so to be the subject of biological investigation, is that it be a discrete mass of matter with a definite boundary, undergoing continual interchange of material with its surroundings without manifest alteration of properties over short periods of time and, as ascertained either by direct observation or by analogy with other objects of this same class, originating by some process of division or fractionation from one or two pre-existing objects of the same kind. The criterion of continual interchange of material may be termed the metabolic criterion, that of origin from a pre-existing object of the same class the reproductive criterion. [*Encyclopædia Britannica* (1957), vol. 3, "biology", pg. 598B]

Why this "definition"? Because it broadly covers things *already* being called "living." Since 1957 the qualification "living" organism set out in the encyclopedia has faded away. Scientists today abbreviate it to just "organism" and use this term to classify an object *as an object of biology and medicine*. Again this is definition by fiat. Its most frequent semantic usage in these fields carries the "definitions"

An organism is defined as "(1) a complex structure of interdependent and subordinate elements whose relations and properties are largely determined by their function in the whole, and (2) an individual constituted to carry on the activities of life by means of organs separate in function but mutually dependent; a living being." [June & Miranda (2017)]

Note that "definition" (2) is nothing but a fiat that simply declares "organism," "individual," and "living being" to be synonyms. Again it is instructive to set this pronouncement side by side with "organism" as this term is explained in the *Dictionary of Psychology*:

**organism** Loosely, any living thing, be it plant or animal, bacterium or virus. This sort of definition is only moderately satisfying for it results in little more than a list of those entities regarded as being organized. Ideally, we should have a clear definition of what is meant by *living*, and thus dispense with the list – and also eliminate arguments over just what things deserve to be listed; not all would put viruses on it. The difficulty, however, is that attempts to define LIFE themselves make for lists . . . As there is currently no agreed-upon criterial set of features for determination of that which is living, there is no rigorous definition of that which qualifies as an organism. [Reber & Reber (2001)]

All of the *habitual usages* of the terms "living organism" and "life" we find employed in the physical-natural sciences can be traced back to those lingering adherences of "life" concepts human beings develop during childhood. The more erudite-sounding pronouncements we find used in science still owe their origins to the work of Aristotle [Aristotle (c. 335-332 BC), Bk. II] and were deduced from Aristotle's usage of the word "organic" (οργανιχόν). Indeed, the English word "organism" was first coined in 1703 and took on its present day usage in 1834. The real indefinability of the word "life" is another of the myriad of problems all ontology-centered ways of "looking at the world" eventually run into.

What is needed to find a way out of this difficulty is to turn to epistemology-centered metaphysics. When the developmental psychology of the child is examined scientifically, what we find is that the child's conception of "life" arises from inferences of analogy the child makes *using himself* as his ultimate standard of reference [*op cit.*, Piaget (1929)]. The one thing in the world of which *you* are *absolutely certain* the terms "life" and "living" truthfully apply to is *yourself* – your *I* of transcendental apperception. Quoting Protagoras' *dictum* again, "Man is the measure of all things." It was in accordance with this first ground that Kant was able to deduce a *practical Realerklärung* of "life."

We find an early reflection on Kant's deduction in a handwritten note he wrote sometime in the late 1760s:

Life is the capacity to begin a state (of oneself or another) from an inner principle. [Kant (1764-68) 17: 313]

Kant wrote this near the end of his pre-Critical period (that is, before he hit upon his "Copernican turn" in metaphysics). The idea he expresses here – that of "beginning a state from an inner principle" – he would later develop in terms of the important idea of what he called a *Kraft*, i.e.: (1) in the context of a human being, the ability of a person to Self-determine his own accidents of *Existenz*. In Critical metaphysics, the human being as *homo noumenon* is regarded as the substance in which inhere all appearances of his *Existenz* as *homo phaenomenon*; (2) in general, the matter of an ability in terms of what the ability is able to do; (3) in many usages, *Kraft* refers to the ability of a person to do or to cause to be done something in particular that stands as the Object of that particular *Kraft*. Carpentry would be an example.

"Life" so regarded is the idea of a being capable of being an agent (the object of a concept predicated to contain the cause of an effect). The idea of regarding "life" in terms of such a *Kraft* is an idea consistent with the article of faith that human beings are in some way made as an image of God. You will recall that the agency of God is an idea that appears almost universally in the theology every major religion and as a belief even in primitive religions such as that of the BaMbuti Pygmies of the Congo.

Although Kant did not bequeath to us any lecture or treatise in which he lays out the lines of his deduction of the *Realerklärung* of "life," it seems to me highly likely that his deduction came out of applying his "Copernican turn" to Aristotle's metaphysics of life. I find in Kant's work a great many things that follow directly from converting Aristotle's ontology-centered theory into an epistemology-centered theory. In the case of "life," Aristotle's deduction [Aristotle (c. 335-332 BC), pp. 68-73] presupposes something he called *entelechy* ("to have perfection"). The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* tells us

In Aristotle, [entelechy] is the realization of the potential of a thing, or the mode of being of a thing whose essence is fully realized, as opposed to being merely potential. In later usages, the entelechy became treated as the informing spirit that gives life to something; sometimes as well the active power generating motion in material things. [Blackburn (1996)]

In Kant's epistemology-centered practical Standpoint, his *Realerklärung* of "life" follows logically from this:

**Life** is the capacity of a being to take action in accordance with the laws of appetitive power. [Kant (1788) 5: 9]

This is a Critical *Realerklärung* which has practical objective validity as a functional rule grounding our judgments that attribute theoretical life to individual things. Recall that appetitive power is: (1) the practical ability of an Organized Being to take an action and thereby be the efficient cause of the actuality of the object of that action; (2) the capacity of an Organized Being to be, through its representations, the cause of the actuality of the objects of those representations. This capacity is related to desires but is not to be viewed as something caused by desires. Rather, it is viewed as the cause of the actuality of the object of representation, whether that representation is linked to the clear representation of an object or is merely an affective representation in which one says "a desire" subsists (e.g. a condition or state presenting a feeling of satisfaction).

Perhaps the most initially jarring thing about this explanation of Critical life is the rather obvious fact that it predicates the necessity that a phenomenon of mind be part of the *Existenz* of a living being. We do not, for instance, regard a plant as a thing that has a mind. Neither is any imputation of a mind necessary

to understand an amoeba [Wells (2006), chap. 11, pp. 951-960]. These are two examples among many of things we are accustomed and habituated, by common practices of language and suppositions of lingering childhood adherences to our early notions of "life," to *labeling* as "living things." Critical metaphysics warns us, "hey, not so fast." We need a stronger reason to say something is "alive" or "a living thing" than a mere labeling convention. This is where Protagoras' *dictum* and the *I* of transcendental apperception are pertinent.

The one thing in all the world *you* are **certain** "is alive" is *yourself*. You are your own reference point and standard for judging other things to be living or not-living, and this reference is *absolute*. You *know* you are alive because, as Descartes put it, "I think, therefore I am." You might not be so certain that I am alive because you cannot "read my mind" and very probably have never met me. If we did meet, though, you'd probably give me the benefit of the doubt and allow that I am also a living being. The degree of certainty we have in cases of other creatures decreases as we go down the "evolutionary scale" because it becomes harder and harder for us to tell if other creatures do or do not exhibit some sort of behavior we *must* attribute to a phenomenon of mind. A "representation" (*parástase*) is "something in me that refers to something else"; how sure can we be that an ape, a dog, a cat, a mouse, an ant, &etc. can or do make mental representations? Among many higher animals – primates, canines, felines, etc. – we observe many behaviors that appear to support, fairly strongly, that some of their actions and behaviors seem explainable *only* if we make the hypothesis that they do have an ability for some kind of mental representation. In contrast, an amoeba or a bacterium or a plant exhibits nothing science finds unable to explain in a satisfactory way through physical causality and laws of physics and chemistry. Thus, in their cases no mental ability needs to be attributed to them. This does not take from them their status of "biological lifeforms" because *biology's* dictionary definition of biological life is a *made* definition based upon millennia old *conventions* of what we *choose to say* is a living entity. They remain objects of biology; but this is not the same thing as saying they possess Critical life.

Critical theory does not leave us bereft of scientific methods of examining whether or not, say, a bumble bee meets the criterion of having a *Kraft* of mental representation. One of the fundamental acroams of Critical theory is the principle of thorough-going mind-body reciprocity. This principle holds that *kinesis* in the body accompanies *kinesis* in the phenomenon of mind and vice versa because body and mind must be regarded as co-existing logical divisions of the Self. The Critical limitation of mind-body reciprocity is called *nous-soma* reciprocity and is represented in the model of the Organized Being by the logical division of *psyche*. Mental objects are supersensible but neuroscience is learning how to correlate sensible appearances of *soma* (for example, measurable brain activities) with psychological self-reports a subject makes regarding his or her *mental* experience. Science is still a long way from completing an objectively valid doctrine of this, but year by year scientists come a little closer and a little closer to one. Even from where we are today, a chimpanzee or a dog exhibits somatic appearances that more heavily favor making an hypothesis that they *do* possess a mental ability (although probably not the same as a human's). On the other hand, an ant or a nudibranch mollusk has a brain comprised of only a few hundred neurons and it is far from clear that their observable behaviors *cannot* be entirely explained from physical cause-and-effect relationships (i.e., they seem more likely to be explainable as physical-natural automata without any need to introduce any capacity for mentality into our understanding of their natures).

All this is not without some interesting implications for questions of theology. Questions of evolution and the question of "when does a human life actually begin?" are two that come readily to mind. We will have an opportunity to explore these a bit later in this treatise.

## 2. Obligation, Duty, and Deontological Morality

Morality, virtue, sin, etc. are ideas belonging to and arising from the phenomenon of mind. They are, for this reason, pertinent and applicable only to *living* beings – specifically, human beings. We do not think a toaster really is "evil" if it burns the toast; we do not think a weed is "acting immorally" if it grows in our

flower bed. From the time a child grows out of its stage of moral realism and enters the stage of rule cognizance, moral judgments are rendered based upon a person's actions *and* intentions imputed to be behind these actions<sup>2</sup> by the person rendering the moral judgment. Moral judgments, in other words, are judgments of actions originating from the actor's psychological causality of freedom. Strictly speaking, it is the action, not the person performing the action, that is the object of a moral judgment. If that person is said to be "an immoral person," this only means he is a person who has been observed to frequently or habitually or egregiously commit acts most other people judge to be immoral. Kant wrote,

An act is called a *deed* so far as it stands under laws of Obligation<sup>3</sup> and hence so far as the subject, in doing it, is regarded from the freedom of his choice. By such an act the agent is regarded as the *author* of its effect and this, together with the act itself, can be imputed to him if one previously knows the law by virtue of which an Obligation rests on these.

A *person* is that subject whose acts are liable to an attribution. *Moral* personality is therefore nothing other than the freedom of a rational being under moral laws (whereas psychological personality is merely the capacity to be conscious of one's identity in different conditions of one's *Dasein*), from which it follows that a person is subject to no other laws than those he gives to himself [Kant (1797) 6: 223].

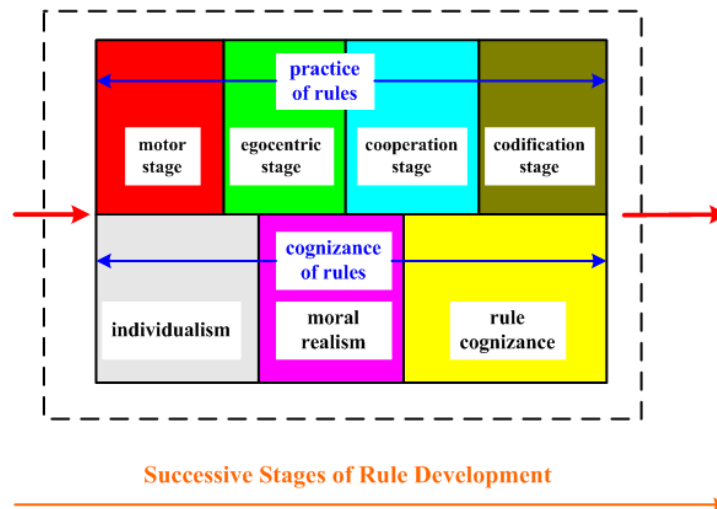
*Laws* of Obligation are rules a person constructs in his manifold of rules structured in such a way that acting according to them is evoked as an imperative in the process of appetition. To *know* the law, on the other hand, means one has constructed an idea (in the manifold of concepts) of this practical rule structure. When this idea excludes all personal inclinations<sup>4</sup> from serving as the *ground* of the action, this knowledge is called the idea of a **Duty**. An Obligation is a practical *parástase*; a Duty is a theoretical *parástase*. One cannot act contrary to one's laws of Obligation because these rules immediately affect the synthesis of appetites by appetitive power in practical Reason. One *can* act contrary to a Duty because a Duty is a concept and concepts are not immediately determining for practical appetition.

It is an over-generalization to say every Obligation is of a "moral" nature. For example, many – almost all, in fact – of the sensorimotor habits developed by an infant during its stage of sensorimotor intelligence (the first two years of a child's life [Piaget (1952)]) are expressions of learned constructions of Obligation in its manifold of rules. In terms of the stages of a child's development of moral judgment (figure 1), these Obligations are constructed during the motor stage of the child's practice of rules and fall into the individualism stage of its cognizance of rules. The child's habitual practice of these practical rules is highly schematized; Piaget called them "rituals" the child performs [Piaget (1932), pp. 29-35]. One could call its practical rule structure an "Obligation of assimilation." There is nothing in their character that an adult would call a "moral" Obligation. A **compulsion** (*Zwang*) is an effect wherein a person determines himself to do something that he would not otherwise do in the absence of some external circumstance, and Obligations of this kind are to be regarded as Self-compulsions. The actions a very young child exhibits during child's play are mainly of this kind, and the whimsical character of these actions often seems to an adult observer to have few or no "rules" discernable by the adult *or* by the child.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the stage of moral realism is characterized according to objective outcomes of actions [Piaget (1932), pp. 121-196]. To a little child, an accident – for example, dropping a plate and breaking it – is "naughty" (immoral) whereas to an older child this same action is "not naughty" if the person "didn't do it on purpose."

<sup>3</sup> *Verbindlichkeit*

<sup>4</sup> An inclination is an habitual sensuous appetite. An inclination is regarded as a necessitated appetite for a particular object of Desire. The adjective "sensuous" denotes sensibility with *materia in qua* of outer sense or of feelings through immediate receptivity. Inclinations have their grounds in corporeal human nature (*homo phaenomenon*) rather than in intelligible (mental) human nature (*homo noumenon*). To eat when you're hungry is an appetite of inclination. To stop and render aid to a stranger who has had an automobile accident is not an inclination at all but is instead an intellectual appetite – what Kant called an *appetitus per motiva* [Kant (1783) 29: 895] – arising from the power of human spontaneity and concepts reintroduced into sensibility from your manifold of concepts.



**Figure 1:** Successive stages of rule development in the child's development of moral judgment.

How often when you ask a young child, "Why did you do that?" does the child answer, "I don't know"? Rules in the manifold of rules are non-cognitive and unconscious. This does not prevent them from being practical Obligations, but their completely non-cognitive character stops us from regarding them as being "moral" Obligations. Parents' principal tasks and challenges in child upbringing include leading the child to accommodate and develop its structure of practical rules in such a way that its Obligations, or many of them, conform to norms of mores and folkways expected in their Society.

In general, a Critical **moral Obligation** is an overall orientation of judgmentation in the self-determination of appetites such that the action is necessitated by a practical moral imperative. An imperative is the formula of a precept of Reason and a precept of Reason is the representation of an objective principle so far as it is necessitating for a person's determination of will. Moral imperatives directly pertain to determinations of "right vs. wrong" and "good vs. evil." Santayana wrote,

What ethics asks is not why a thing is called good, but whether it is good or not, whether it is right or not to esteem it. Goodness, in this ideal sense, is not a matter of opinion but of nature. For intent is at work, life is in active operation, and the question is whether the thing or the situation responds to that intent. So if I ask, Is four really twice two? the answer is not that most people say so, but that, in saying so, I am not misunderstanding myself. To judge whether things are really good, intent must be made to speak; and if this intent may itself be judged later, that happens by virtue of other intents comparing the first with their own direction.

Hence good, when once the moral or dialectical attitude has been assumed, means not what is called good but what is so; that is, what ought to be called good. For intent, beneath which there is no moral judgment, sets up its own standard, and ideal science begins on that basis, and cannot go back of it to ask why the obvious good is good at all. Naturally, there is a reason, but not a moral one; for it lies in the physical habit and necessity of things. The reason is simply the purposive essence of animals and of the universal flux, which renders forms possible but unstable, and either hurtful or helpful to one another. That nature should have this constitution, or intent this direction, is not a good in itself. It is esteemed good or bad as the intent that speaks finds in that situation a support or an obstacle to its ideal. As a matter of fact, nature and the very existence of life cannot be thought wholly evil, since no intent is wholly at war with these its conditions; nor can nature and life be sincerely regarded as wholly good, since no moral intent stops at the facts; nor does the universal flux, which infinitely overflows any actual synthesis, altogether support any intent it may generate. [Santayana (1906), pp. 215-216]

Santayana called this natural backdrop "pre-rational morality" [*ibid.*, pp. 210-232].



**Figure 2:** Analytic formulas of theoretical (A) and practical (B) *officium* manifested in actions.

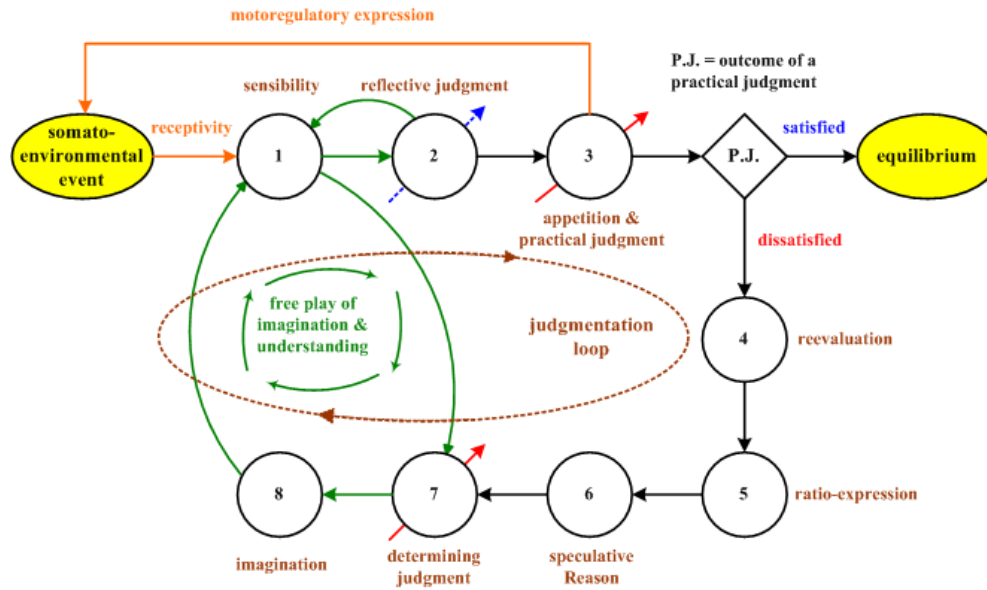
An Obligation, I just said, is an *orientation* of judgmentation. But judicial orientation is a determination according to a subjective principle of holding-to-be-binding, and a subjective principle serves in the role of an integrating function in the synthesis of Meaning. It is a general rather than a specific function. But all *actions* always act *in the particular*. The idea of Obligation is not enough by itself for us to correctly understand moral appetitions because we need to understand as a formula how a person commits himself to those particular determinations out of his general orientations. Kant's deontological doctrine becomes rather technical at this point and introduces some additional technical terms. The general concept, under which the others stand, is the concept of *officium* [Kant (1793-4) 27: 579-587]. This concept must be understood in terms of two matter-and-form formulas, one taken from the theoretical Standpoint of Critical metaphysics, the other from the practical Standpoint (figure 2). Kant appears to have taken his starting point for this, and for the term *officium* itself, from Cicero (44 B.C.). He tells us,

Nowadays we understand by ethics only the doctrine of the morality of our acts in particular and, under the theory of justice, that of their legality. Cicero, on the other hand, deals, in the *De officiis*, with the whole of moral philosophy. In modern times we divide philosophy into (a) theoretical, and (b) practical philosophy, i.e., the science of the laws of things and likewise of the laws of acts. The former embraces logic, as the formal, and physics as the material part. The latter, on the other hand, is divided into:

- (1) the *morally-practical*, i.e., the doctrine of Duties or moral philosophy, ethics, and the theory of virtue, and
- (2) the *technically-practical*; the latter signifies the *teaching of skill*, including that of using natural things for our designs, but particularly covers the *technically-practical doctrine of prudence*, i.e., the skill of using free men for our intentions. This is interwoven, even by Cicero, into his morals. [Kant (1793-4) 27: 482]

In the theoretical Standpoint (figure 2A), the matter of *officium* is called duty (*Verpflichtung*) and its form is called obligation (*Obligation* in German). Note that both terms are written in the lower case to distinguish them from the terms in figure 2B. A duty is a necessitated action connected in a form of obligation. The obligation, like the duty, is a concept residing in the manifold of concepts and has its origins from the manifold of rules by means of ratio-expression. A duty is composition (matter) for the *nexus* (form) of obligation, and in this sense one can regard an obligation as a formula into which duties are plugged, in a manner of speaking, as meaning implications for actions. Thus, duties and obligations represent actions in the particular.

From the practical Standpoint, a Duty is composition (matter) in a practical Obligation, and Obligation is the *nexus* (form) of a Duty. These two Objects belong to the synthesis of judgmentation as a *process* and take their informative representations from the manifold of rules and the manifold of Desires rather than the manifold of concepts. They are *materia circa quam* of orientation for which duty and obligation stand in the role of *materia in qua* of specific actions. Duty and Obligation get their *moral* character from having the *ground* of actual action expression residing in the manifold of rules and synthesis of appetite rather than from the manifold of Desires. The expressions of reflective judgment are impetuous; the legislation of practical rules and the veto power of practical Reason *regulate* the impetuousness of the power of reflective judgment. For your convenience of reference, figure 3 repeats the diagram of information flow in synthesis in judgmentation and the motivational dynamic.



**Figure 3:** The synthesis flow in judgmentation and the motivational dynamic. The arrows denote accommodations in the manifolds of Desires (reflective judgment), rules (practical judgment), and concepts (determining judgment).

Because Duties find specific actual expressions in duty-obligation *parástase* of *officium*, we encounter a logical necessity for a division of moral precepts into two categories or classifications: *private* moral imperatives; and *social* moral imperatives. Kant called concepts of the first kind *Duties to oneself*. Concepts of the second kind he called *reciprocal Duties*. The logical necessity for making this division arises because people usually only regard Duties of the second kind as "moral" Duties. However, the possibility of reciprocal Duties depends on the individual's constructions of Duties of the first kind. Kant remarked in his handwritten notes,

Moral custom is founded on the rule of acts from the viewpoint (station) of the common participant or representative:

1. of the participant in nature with regard to himself;
2. of the participant in freedom with regard to others. In the latter case, from the viewpoint of either the representative of the choice of others or of their welfare.

The common is either the property or the things that have a certain property. *Universalitas interna or externa*<sup>5</sup>. Moral feeling is that through which the common objective *principia*<sup>6</sup> of judgmentation become subjective resolution, thus that through which absolute rules become maxims. [Kant (c. 1764-1800), 19: 163-164]

There are people who make the mistake of reifying the idea of "morality" and thinking of it as a thing outside of the person. Some religious people place it "in God"; others think the phenomenon of human moral judgment implies morality is "something greater than the individual" and for this reason as something higher than or above or outside the individual human being. The Neo-Platonists of ancient Greece held to such a doctrine in their "theory of emanation" [Seelye & Smith (1886), pp. 181-183]. Hegel likewise made this error of reification [Hegel (1830), pp. 18-20]. But this *is* an error, completely lacks objective validity, and is born out of logical over-generalization in ontology-centered metaphysics. Without Duties to oneself, Duties to others (reciprocal Duties) could never come to be conceptualized and the phenomenon of human moral judgment would never appear at all. We must, therefore, examine both

<sup>5</sup> "generally applicable to the private or the external"

<sup>6</sup> "principles"



facets of Duties if we are to understand deontological morality and deontological ethics.

### 3. Duties to Oneself

Traditionally, the ideas of Obligations to oneself and Duties to oneself have not been regarded as topics of morals or ethics at all. Most theories of ethics begin with moral customs and the ethics of social situations and circumstances. Still, religions all around the world *do* recognize Duties to oneself, to one or another degree, in their doctrines and scriptures. In Christianity, for example, Paul wrote,

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your body. [1 Corinthians 6:19-20]

Paul wrote this within the context of telling the Corinthians prostitution is a sin, but Christian doctrine has long interpreted this passage much more broadly, e.g., avoiding gluttony, drunkenness, etc. It also holds suicide to be a sin, as Paul wrote earlier in this same epistle:

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that is what you are. [1 Corinthians 3:16-17]

Clearly this passage prohibits murder in the same breath, and Christian doctrine regards suicide as the murder of oneself. According to Paul, Duties to oneself are to be regarded as Duties to God.

Sacred writings, from every religion that *has* sacred writings, all contain what can properly be called moral lessons. For the great majority of people in the world, these lessons and the doctrines taught about them are the only formal instruction in ethics and morals they ever receive. Only a relatively tiny handful of people ever take, e.g., a college course in ethics and no present day publicly funded school that I have heard of has a required course in morals or ethics included in its curriculum. It is therefore not surprising that most people regard morals as part of and arising from religion. But, while religions attempt to impose Duties to oneself on their faithful, a greater number of their moral lessons pertain to Duties to others – social morality. Theoretical ethics in modern times for the most part focuses its attention on the latter when it tries to appeal broadly to people regardless of what their religious faith might be.

However, all this is not always the case. In his lectures on ethics, Kant made addressing the idea of Duties to oneself one of his early orders of business:

The first topic . . . is our Duties to ourselves. These are not taken in juridical regard, for justice regards only the relationship to other people. Justice cannot be observed in regard to myself, for what I do to myself, I do with my own consent and commit no breach of public justice when I take action against myself. We shall be speaking here of the use of freedom in regard to oneself. By way of introduction, it should be noted that no part of morals has been more defectively treated than this of Duties to oneself. Nobody has framed a correct concept of such Duties; it has been deemed a trifle and ultimately thought about only as a supplement to morality, and believed that once a man has fulfilled all his Duties he may finally also think about himself. In this portion, therefore, all philosophical morals are false. . . .

Far from these Duties being the lowest, they actually take first rank and are the most important of all; for even without first explaining what Duty to self is we may ask, If a man debases his own person, what can one still demand of him? He who violates Duties to himself throws away his humanity and is no longer in a position to perform Duties to others. Thus a man who has performed his Duties to others badly, has not been generous, kindly or compassionate, but has observed Duty to himself, and lived in a seemly fashion, may still in himself have a certain inner worth. [Kant (c. 1784-85) 27: 340-341]

Kant is correct here about Duties to oneself being of "first rank" if by this one only means that they are conceptualized prior to reciprocal (social) Duties and that the latter are made possible by the foundations of the former. If one overgeneralizes this statement the logical endpoint of that overgeneralization is a system of ethics similar to that of the Epicureans of ancient Hellenic civilization. Marías describes their system in the following way:

All the teachings of the Epicureans are directed toward ethics, the type of life that the wise man should live. Epicurus considers pleasure to be the true good; in addition, he says it is pleasure that shows us what suits our nature and what is repugnant to it. . . .

At first sight, Epicureanism and Stoicism appear to be at opposite poles; but the similarities between them go deeper than the differences. In the first place, Epicurus makes very definite demands of pleasure; pleasure must be pure, unmixed with pain or discontent; it must be lasting and stable; finally, it must leave man master of himself, free, imperturbable. This eliminates sensual pleasures almost completely, and opens the way for other, more subtle and spiritual pleasures – above all, for friendship and the joys of human companionship. Violent passions are excluded from Epicurean ethics because they overcome man. The ideal of the wise man is thus that of the serene man, moderate in everything, governed by temperance, free from worries, maintaining a perfect balance in all circumstances. Neither adversity nor physical pain nor death disturbs the Epicureans. . . . Thus, this is an ideal of great asceticism which, in its deepest roots, coincides with the Stoic ideal. The withdrawal from public office, the isolation from the community, is even stronger in Epicureanism than in Stoic circles. The two schools have a different point of departure: in one case, virtue is to be attained; in the other case, pleasure is to be sought. But in this twilight period of the ancient world the type of life that results is the same and is defined by two traits of human weariness: self-sufficiency and imperturbability, being sufficient unto oneself and being disturbed by nothing. [Marías (1967), pp. 95-96]

There is much to be said in favor of such ideals as self-sufficiency, moderation, temperance, serenity, and so on. Even the notion of comfortable asceticism has its merits. However, the Epicurean school defined "pleasure" as "the absence of pain" [Cicero (45 BC), BK I, pp. 40-43], and I think I would not arouse too much protest by making the remark that other people are often one of the principal sources of "pain." There seems to be no shortage of literature and discussion of stress, "compassion fatigue," "burnout" and other psychological problems reported among social workers, healthcare workers, teachers, medical first responders and others in what are called "the caring professions." Marías noted "withdrawal from public office" and "isolation from the community" as two characteristics of Epicureanism. Both of these tend to be in opposition to ideals of social morality. One might say that *lack of moderation in being moderate* is a risk factor in regard to Duties to oneself. Aristotle wrote,

[Virtue] is a mean state between two vices, one of excess and one of defect. Furthermore, it is a mean state in that whereas the vices either fall short of or exceed what is right in feelings and in actions, virtue ascertains and adopts the mean. [Aristotle (date unknown), pp. 94-95]

Although Duties to oneself precede and prepare you for reciprocal Duties, their possibility has a prerequisite, namely, the construction of practical rules in the manifold of rules. Now, the representation of practical rules is an unconscious process and practical rules are themselves never presented in sensibility. Their constructions come about through experiencing dissatisfactions and satisfactions in reestablishing equilibrium after disturbances to equilibrium. Cognizance (conceptualization) of practical rules happens much later when it happens at all. Many practical rules never "come to the attention" of a person at all because no later occasion arises where reequilibration requires another accommodation to the manifold of rules [Wells (2016)]. A person simply does specific things in specific ways without ever giving a thought to why he does so or even necessarily noticing that he does so. William James wrote,

Why do men always lie down, when they can, on soft beds rather than on hard floors? Why do they sit

round the stove on a cold day? Why, in a room, do they place themselves, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, with their faces toward the middle rather than to the wall? Why do they prefer saddle of mutton and champagne to hard-tack and ditch-water? Why does the maiden interest the youth so that everything about her seems more important and significant than anything else in the world? Nothing more can be said than that these are human ways, and that every creature *likes* its own ways, and takes to following them as a matter of course. Science may come and consider these ways, and find that most of them are useful. But it is not for the sake of their utility that they are followed, but because at the moment of following them we feel that that is the only appropriate and natural thing to do. Not one man in a billion, when taking his dinner, ever thinks of utility. He eats because the food tastes good and makes him want more. If you ask him *why* he should want to eat more of what tastes like that, instead of revering you as a philosopher he will probably laugh at you for a fool. The combination between the savory sensation and the act it awakens is for him absolute and *selbstverständlich*<sup>7</sup>, an '*a priori* synthesis' of the most perfect sort, needing no proof but its own evidence. It takes, in short, what Berkeley calls a mind debauched by learning to carry the process of making the natural seem strange so far as to ask for the *why* of any instinctive human act. To the metaphysician alone can such questions occur as: Why do we smile when pleased, and not scowl? Why are we unable to talk to a crowd as we talk to a single friend? Why does a particular maiden turn our wits so upside-down? The common man can only say, "*Of course* we smile, *of course* our heart palpitates at the sight of the crowd, *of course* we love the maiden, that beautiful soul clad in that perfect form, so palpably and flagrantly made from all eternity to be loved !" [James (1890), vol. II, pp. 386-387]

Of course, James is incorrect to say "nothing more can be said than that these are human ways"; not all of his examples are as universal as he seems to assume<sup>8</sup>; and these "ways" are *a priori* syntheses but only insofar as they are practical products, not conceptualized products, of achieving reequilibration under the regulation of the categorical imperative of pure practical Reason. His examples are observed often enough that I think you probably get James' basic idea. Certainly, Santayana was not shy about offering to "say more" about these "ways":

When consciousness awakes the body has, as we long afterward discover, a definite organization. Without guidance from reflection bodily processes have been going on, and most precise affinities and reactions have been set up between its organs and the surrounding objects. . . . It is as the system exercises its natural activities that passion, will, and meditation possess the mind. No syllogism is needed to persuade us to eat, no prophecy of happiness to teach us to love. On the contrary, the living organism, caught in the act, informs us how to reason and what to enjoy. The soul adopts the body's aims; from the body and from its instincts she draws a first hint of the right means to these accepted purposes. Thus reason enters into partnership with the world and begins to be respected there; which it would never be if it were not expressive of the same mechanical forces that are to preside over events and render them fortunate or unfortunate for human interests. Reason is significant in action only because it has begun by taking, so to speak, the body's side [Santayana (1905), pg. 62].

Strictly speaking, the manifold of rules is not a structure of moral rules *per se*. Nonetheless, it can be validly said of it that onto part of its structure the person grafts a personal and private "moral code." In Critical terminology, *Self-respect* is the first and pure *a priori* interest of practical Reason to act for the practical perfection of the structure of the manifold of rules in absolute coherence with the formula of the categorical imperative. A person's private moral code is the structure of practical rules in the manifold of rules constituting the practical representation of the person's imperatives of Self-respect. Not all of these imperatives would be called "moral" in the connotations we usually have for the word "moral." For example, a person regarded by most others in his Society as having an antisocial personality disorder is a person who has constructed some particular practical imperatives that general Society regards as immoral but which nonetheless govern the antisocial individual's actions with all the force of a moral law so far as

<sup>7</sup> self-evident; obvious

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes it is "the youth" who interests the youth "so that everything" about *him* "seems more important and significant than anything else in the world." Perhaps James never read Plato's *Symposium*.

he or she is concerned. For the sake of specificity, I will briefly cite the case of a psychiatric patient called Krista:

Like most antisocials, Krista appears to lack a conscience. Her statement "No one ever felt guilty for what they did to me" is probably partly true and partly manipulative, intended to evoke pity, give insight into her past, and justify her absence of remorse all at the same time. She sneers at religious faith and instead puts forward her own moral principle: "Do unto others before they do unto you." With no obvious prosocial impulses and no internal moral restraints on action, Krista is free to do whatever she wants, whenever she wants. The only barrier is society itself, and the only constraints she respects are those that society can enforce through its police presence and the threat of punishment, or those that others can enforce through their own threats of harm or revenge. [Millon & Davis (2000), pg. 105]

People like Krista provide us with perhaps the most direct empirical evidence that Kant was mistaken in making his hypothesis of a universal "moral law within me." How Krista came to construct her practical rule structure in such a way that it is totally incompatible with the moral customs of every known Society (save, perhaps, a society of criminals<sup>9</sup>) is a matter for psychiatrists to speculate upon. The point I wish to make here is that Krista regards her own behaviors as "right" and "not-evil," and she thinks you and I would, if we had the chance, treat her exactly the same way she treats other people.

However immoral you might think another person's private moral code might be, for that person the maxims of action he/she follows with regard to Duties to oneself has all the compelling force your own have for you. That human beings conceptualize the idea of "morals" at all is a consequence of living in Societies and self-constructing Duties to themselves that lead to consenting to behave according to reciprocal Duties and some overarching social compact.

This does not mean "all morality is relative" in the context in which some moral relativists use that phrase. The meaning sometimes given to the phrase "moral relativism" is that no person is or can ever "really" be correct about any value he holds or in the moral judgments he makes. It is to posit that no moral judgment is "truly" moral merely because that judgment is not esteemed by the universal agreement of all people. Blackburn describes philosophical relativism in general as

the permanently tempting doctrine that in some areas at least, truth itself is relative to the standpoint of the judging subject ('beauty lies in the eye of the beholder'). . . . Relativism is frequently rejected on the grounds that it is essential to the idea of belief or judgment that there are standards that [truth] must meet, independently of anyone's propensity to accept it. [Blackburn (1996), 'relativism']

Blackburn (and others) describe William James (and others) as "sophisticated relativists" because of the position James' philosophy of pragmatism takes on the meaning of the word "truth." There have been epic philosophical battles waged and polemics fired by each side at the other over relativism vs. non-relativism philosophies. If a philosopher calls your argument "sophisticated" he isn't paying you a compliment. The crux of the debate over relativism was well-enough described by James:

Most of the pragmatist and anti-pragmatist warfare is over what the word 'truth' shall be held to signify, and not over any of the facts embodied in truth-situations; for both pragmatists and anti-pragmatists believe in existent objects, just as they believe in our ideas of them. The difference is that when the pragmatists speak of truth, they mean exclusively something about the ideas, namely their workableness; whereas when anti-pragmatists speak of truth they seem most often to mean something about the objects. [James (1909), pg. xv]

So, too, it is for controversies over moral relativism. Perhaps by now you have already recognized the root of the controversy? The two sides are arguing from ontology-centered ways of looking at the world.

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<sup>9</sup> One of the many things that brought Krista to the attention of law enforcement was that she robbed people at knife-point. She had not sought the aid of a psychiatrist; her psychiatric case was court-ordered.

What we have here is another transcendental illusion – a transcendental antinomy lodged in "is" vs. "is-not" arguments. The "anti-pragmatists" (as James called them) argue from a Hegelian supposition – i.e., from the supposition that positing Hegelian "Absolute Truth" is objectively valid; the "pragmatists" not only reject this supposition but carry this rejection forward to say something like "Absolute Truth does-not exist." Both are ontological declarations, the one predicated on the Quality of the category of reality, the other on the category of negation [Wells (2009), chap. 8-9, chap. 10 pp. 856-860]. Objective validity in this matter, however, requires the predication of the category of limitation, i.e., "truth is not-Absolute" – a predication that can only be made from an epistemology-centered way of looking at the world (see figure 4 for the 2LAR diagram of Kant's categories of understanding).

The nominal explanation of the word "truth" is nothing more and nothing less than the congruence of a cognition with its object [Kant (1787) B: 82]. What, then, does it mean to say that a person is "correct" or "incorrect" about a moral judgment? Kant points out that to say either is utterly meaningless if one ignores the human Nature of the acts of judging objects, the laws the process of judgmentation follows, transcendental criteria that judgmentation employs, and the degree to which the judgment is held-to-be-true [Kant (1787) B: 82-86; Kant (1800) 9: 49-57, 65-81].

When individual cognition concerns an object of physical Nature, it is possible for many individuals to compare and critique each others' concepts and their logical consequences and thereby arrive at empirical consensus about the object. This doesn't mean there is a guarantee that future experience will not overturn that consensus, but it does mean a concept is established in which coherence of the cognition and the object is found so far as we yet know. When individual cognition concerns a noumenal object of a mathematical nature, it is likewise possible for many individuals to compare and critique each others' concepts and arrive at a consensus of logical truth. This, in point of fact, is a stronger consensus because the objects of mathematics are *defined* objects and are therefore *made* necessarily coherent in their conception.

But when the object is a noumenon called "moral," what is its epistemological standing? Here is where we must draw a logical (and therefore mathematical) distinction between what I called private moral codes and public moral codes. Consensus among different individuals can be possible for the latter because a public moral code can be jointly agreed to and set to service as a norm. This is what Santayana was getting at when he said "rational ethics is a politics of will." Its public then consists of all individuals who consent to its definition. As for the practical objective validity of the notion of "moral *per se*," this is a human trait and the ground can therefore only be vested in our social atom and, specifically, in the *homo noumenal* aspect of being-a-human-being.

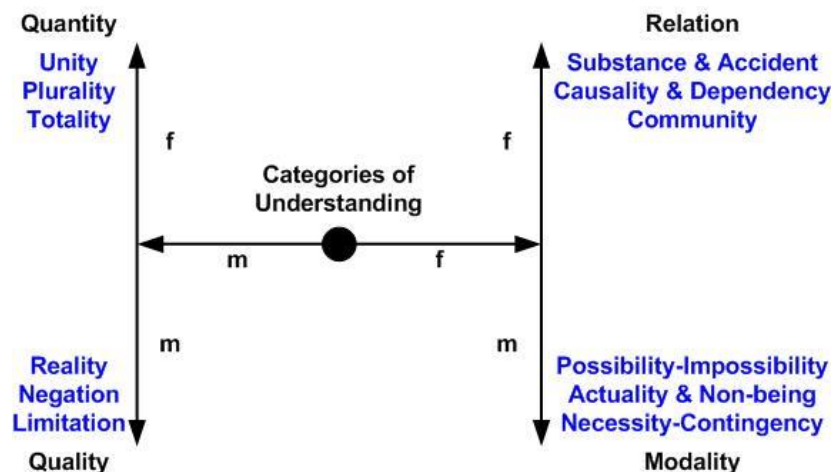


Figure 4: 2LAR structure of the Critical categories of understanding.

This practical ground is the birthplace of the possibility of public moral codes and private moral codes alike and is manifested in appearances by estimations and expressions of values. An absolute moralist errs by reifying "truth" and thereby requiring it to be a Hegelian Absolute existing somewhere "above" or "outside" the people who hold-concepts-to-be-true if morality is to exist at all. The standard he sets is too ambitious. By the standards of radical moral relativism, it should logically follow that criminal actions carried out by people such as Krista should not be imputed to *be* evil nor should humane actions carried out by "good Samaritans" be imputed to *be* good. If, however, one means by moral relativism *only* that *public* morality is particular to a specific Society, deontological ethics would not argue against this view. It does, however, require us to recognize the *Existenz* of private moral codes to be objectively valid as basic determiners of human actions from the practical Standpoint of Critical metaphysics.

While there is tremendous diversity found among individuals' private moral codes – enough so that it seems pointless to multiply examples – we can identify two types of Relation that pertain to individuals' Duties to themselves: Duties to your personality; and Duties to yourself in regard to your external situation. The first pertains to what we can call the person's inner circumstances, by which I mean Duties to one's personality pertain to tenants and maxims by which a person *respects himself* as an individual and sets terms and conditions for himself by which he is willing to pledge obligations and bind himself to duties. A person's self-respect (in German, *Achtung*)<sup>10</sup> is the representation of a value and, in particular, of a value prejudicial to what Kant called self-love<sup>11</sup> in the determination of one's appetitive power. For example, if you value "being an honest person" so much that if you did anything dishonest it would fill you with self-loathing, this means that you make your tenets of honesty tenets of self-respect. Duties to your personality directly bear on *what kind of person you choose to make yourself become*. Kant said,

The purpose of humanity in my own person is my perfection and the Duty relating thereto, to develop establishment of all I find in me. [Kant (1793-4), 27: 543]

Duties to your personality have nothing to do with other people and everything to do with your perfecting of yourself. They are what *categorically* make you "who you are" and do so independently of your external circumstances and situations. Taking Krista as an example again, she chooses to make herself what the rest of us would call a criminal and a sociopath. If, as Thomas Jefferson wrote, "all men are created equal," this doesn't mean they necessarily *stay* that way insofar as moral personality is concerned. If God created you and put you here, then he also created you with the power to choose who you become.

Duties to yourself in regard to your external situation make up the *nexus* of tenants of action pertaining to how you deal with the contingencies of external Nature so far as these contingencies affect *your* well-being. Other people are among these contingencies. For example, if you catch a cold you might choose to stay at home until you feel better *or* you might choose to load up on cold medicines and go to work rather than lose a day's pay or a day's sick leave. If you choose the latter, your coworkers aren't likely to appreciate it, but these kinds of Duties are Duties to yourself, not to them. Of the three Relations to Duty, this one is perhaps the easiest to understand and, quite likely, are the kinds of Duties you encounter most often. Duties of this type have a great bearing on what kind of person *others* see you as being, not as you see yourself as being.

In terms of logical Relation, these duties are hypothetical rather than categorical. In terms of formal logic, hypothetical Relations are relations combining two propositions as antecedent and consequent. The significance of this is that Duties to yourself in regard to your external situation are constructed upon foundations of Duties to personality. Suppose I hold-it-to-be-binding to "be an honest person." Further suppose you are the checkout clerk at a store and you unintentionally give me back too much change when I pay for my purchase. Further suppose that if I took this excess change, no one would know about

<sup>10</sup> Note that self-respect is not the same thing as Self-respect. The latter is a pure and *a priori* interest of practical Reason. The former is empirical, i.e., an outcome of experience.

<sup>11</sup> Self-love is determination of a choice on a subjective ground of happiness.

it until the store folks tallied the cash register at the end of the day – by which time no one would know it was during *my* transaction that the error occurred. Lastly, suppose I do not hold myself to any obligation to *you*. The obligation I hold to *myself* in regard to my personality would nevertheless act as an imperative of Duty *requiring* me to say, "Oh, you gave me too much change back," and to return the excess to you. This is an example of what I mean when I say Duties to the situation of your person are constructed upon foundations of Duties to personality.

As I said earlier, Duties to oneself are rarely regarded by most people as Duties at all. By custom, people save this label for the third Duty Relation, which is discussed next. However, morality pertains to judging actions as "right vs. wrong" or "good vs. evil" and to the appetitions that accompany these *practical* judgments. This means that Duties and Obligations to oneself *are in fact* held-to-be conditions of regarding actions and judgments as "moral" actions and judgments. Because they pertain to what she holds-to-be "right" or "good" actions, Krista's maxims of behavior do constitute *for her* a private moral code regardless of the fact that the rest of us regard them as quite the opposite. In other words, she has a private moral code *but not* one that is congruent with reciprocal Duties and Obligations or with the idea of a Community of humanity.

In this treatise I do not present some long recitation of Duties to oneself as Kant did in *Moralphilosophie Collins* [Kant (c. 1784-5) 27: 369-412]. In the first place, *your* Duties to yourself are *yours*; they are not necessarily mine or anyone else's (although there are a great many that a great many people do commonly hold-to-be-binding). In the second place, there is merit found in the American idiom: *Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes*<sup>12</sup>. This idiom is a reminder that empathy has a place in Societies (and thus the idiom pertains to reciprocal Duties as well as Duties to oneself). In the third place, maxims of Duties to oneself are easily and frequently under-generalized (Aristotle's vice of lack) or over-generalized (Aristotle's vice of excess). Kant pointed this out in *Moralphilosophie Collins*.

What I will do, on the other hand, is mention two classes of maxims pertaining to Duties to oneself that, provided they are not under- or over-generalized, are relevant to the possibility of developing reciprocal Duties. These are maxims of prudence and maxims of self-reliance [Wells (2012), chap. 7]. Kant said of prudence,

The imperative where I presuppose an assertoric end is the imperative of happiness, and this I can presuppose in everybody because we all wish to be happy. The imperatives which teach us how to reach happiness are the imperatives of prudence. *Skill* is dexterity in knowing the means to any desired ends. The influence of men is always directed here to the particular skill, so that to use a man for one's own arbitrary purpose is prudence; for example, the clockmaker is skilled if he makes a good clock, but prudent if he knows how to dispose of it effectively<sup>13</sup>; proper prudence is the means to promote or look after one's own happiness. That is the practical imperative. Pragmatic is that which makes us prudent and practical that which makes us skilled; or, pragmatic is that which I can make use of for my freedom. [Kant (1785) 29: 606-607]

Maxims of prudence are not necessarily maxims of duties to oneself because happiness can be either sensual (in which case it is not a Duty at all) or intellectual (as in the satisfaction you might feel from fulfilling some Duty). Maxims of prudence generally are subordinate to some higher maxim as a means of fulfilling that higher maxim. In addition to what Kant said above, maxims of prudence can equally well be aimed at the avoidance of unhappiness. The slender bridge between maxims of prudence and reciprocal Duty is hinted at by Kant in the phrase "to use a man for one's arbitrary purpose is prudence." The bridge between the two is grounded in the fact that the alliance of individuals to form a civil Society is motivated at its roots by prudence acting on behalf of Duties to oneself. Self-preservation

<sup>12</sup> This saying is derived from an 1895 poem by Mary T. Lathrap originally entitled *Judge Softly* and later retitled *Walk a Mile in His Moccasins*.

<sup>13</sup> i.e., how to find a customer for it and close the transaction.

and *mutual* advantage are both immediate products of civil association in a Community. As Emerson said,

Prudence does not go behind nature, and ask, whence it is. It takes the laws of the world, whereby man's being is conditioned, as they are, and keeps these laws, that it may enjoy their proper good. . . . On the other hand, nature punishes any neglect of prudence. [Emerson (1841), pp. 108-111]

Mutual advantage had from association in a civil Community, on the other hand, is conditioned by self-reliance. A person who is overly-reliant upon other people for his own well-being makes himself a burden to these others and, at some point, this burden comes into conflict with others' Duties to themselves and gives back nothing in return. At this point, mutual advantage becomes absent and the relationship is made one-sided. Considered from this perspective, over-reliance on others indicates lack of prudence.

On the other hand, excessive self-reliance hinders civil Community because it turns its back on mutual advantage, without which there would be no civil Community. Carried to Aristotle's vice of excess, self-reliance favors one making himself an outlaw from Society and favors actions that drive others away from it. There are some people who construct maxims of self-reliance that are so rigidly absolute that they loath any thought of needing to rely on anyone else for anything. Krista seems to be an extreme example of this. Maxims of excessive self-reliance are at the same time maxims of imprudent caution. Emerson said,

In the occurrence of unpleasant things among neighbors, fear comes readily to heart, and magnifies the consequence of the other party; but it is a bad counselor. Every man is actually weak and apparently strong. To himself, he seems weak; to others, formidable. You are afraid of Grim; but Grim also is afraid of you<sup>14</sup>. You are solicitous of the good will of the meanest person, uneasy at his ill will. But the sturdiest offender of your peace and of the neighborhood, if you rip up his claims, is as thin and timid as any; and the peace of society is often kept because, as children say, one is afraid and the other dares not. Far off, men swell, bully, and threaten: bring them hand to hand, and they are a feeble folk. [*ibid.*, pg. 116]

Prudence and self-reliance, then, are not in themselves maxims of Duty to oneself and both are vulnerable to both lack and excess. Virtue<sup>15</sup> in both is sought by seeking for a mean between their vices of lack and their vices of excess.

#### 4. Reciprocal Duties

The third type of Duties are those that are reciprocal, i.e., Duties of one person to the situation of another person. These are those Duties that would be generally recognized as moral in a Society's moral customs. Rousseau wrote,

The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked. Then only, when the voice of duty takes the place of physical impulses and the right of appetite, does man, who so far had considered only himself, find that he is forced to act on different principles and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although in this state he deprives himself of some advantages which he got from nature, he gains in return others so great, his faculties are so stimulated and developed, his ideas so extended, his feelings so ennobled, and his whole soul so uplifted that, did not abuses of this new condition often degrade him below that which he left, he would be bound to bless continually the happy moment which took him from it forever, and, instead of a stupid and unimaginative animal, made him an intelligent being and a man. [Rousseau (1762), pg. 19]

<sup>14</sup> Grim was a nineteenth century slang term for an angry neighbor.

<sup>15</sup> Deontological virtue is the individual's constant disposition (unwavering attention) to carry out his duties. [Kant (1793-4) 27: 492]



Communities can only exist when the people living in them can live together in relative peace and harmony, when individuals can feel more safe and secure than they could living in the anarchy of a state of nature, and when they can know that at need they may call upon the aid and succor of others living in their Community and receive it. In return, however, a member of a Community must obligate himself to providing this aid and succor to others in the Community when they call for it. It is a *quid pro quo* understanding and agreement that establishes mutual trust and conventions by means of a social compact to which the people in the Community jointly consent and bind themselves to uphold.

This brief description is, of course, only the tip of the iceberg, the general principle and aim of all social contracting. Communities and Societies are complex phenomena of social interactions; a multitude of detail contributes to their successes and failures; and, furthermore, within all but the most simple of them (e.g., the family) one finds many Relations of mini-Community existing within the general Community. The youngest children generally know of only one community – that of their families – and only begin to discover the larger Community through the process of their socialization. With older children and adults, each individual generally gains membership in multiple mini-Communities defined by relationships of commerce, religion, occupation, extra-familial friendships, and other associations [Wells (2012)]. Making the situation more complicated still, as the size of a Community grows experience teaches us that there will be some individuals living within the geographic or political community who do not bind themselves to its social contract, do not commit themselves to the reciprocal Duties the compact requires as a condition of membership, and who instead demand of the Community the benefits of membership in it but withhold from it commitments it requires from its members in return. These individuals are those who constitute the outlaws and criminals living *within* but not as practical participants *of* the Community.

All the most basic and fundamental manmade laws – do not steal, do not murder, do not commit perjury, respect the property rights of others, do not falsely accuse others of crimes, etc. – arise out of the reciprocal Duties necessary for the possibility of maintaining the *Existenz* of the civil Community. Other actions not proscribed by civil, criminal, and common laws (e.g., do not contribute to malicious gossip) are part of the Community's unlegislated social customs. Deontologically, anything that violates the terms and conditions of the social contract is *unjust*. *Justice* is the negating of anything that is unjust. It is **not**, as the legal profession maintains, the fair and proper administration of laws. The legal code of a Society exists to *serve* justice, not to *define* it. Indeed, *some laws are unjust* because they violate the terms and conditions of the social contract. Emerson wrote,

In dealing with the State, we ought to remember that its institutions are not aboriginal, though they existed before we were born; that they are not superior to the citizen; that every one of them was once the act of a single man; every law and usage was a man's expedient to meet a particular case; that they all are imitable, all alterable; we may make as good; we may make better. Society is an illusion to the young citizen. It lies before him in rigid repose, rooted like oak trees to the center, round which all arrange themselves the best they can. But the old statesman knows that society is fluid; there are no such roots and centers; but any particle may suddenly become the center of the movement and compel the system to gyrate round it . . . Republics abound in young citizens, who believe that the laws make the city; that grave modifications of the policy and modes of living and employments of the population, that commerce, education, and religion may be voted in or out; and that any measure, though it be absurd, may be imposed on a people if only you can get sufficient voices to make it a law. But the wise know that foolish legislation is a rope of sand which perishes in the twisting; that the State must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen; the strongest usurper is quickly got rid of; and they only who build on Ideas build for eternity; and that the form of government which prevails is the expression of what cultivation exists in the population which permits it. The law is only a memorandum. [Emerson (1844), pp. 275-276]

Reciprocally binding Duties of one person to the situation of another develop out of commonalities of self-interest. They are rooted in the private Duties to oneself in regard to a person's own situation and serve these private Duties by safeguarding them. As Rousseau put it,

Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and, as there is no associate over which he does not acquire the same rights as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has. [Rousseau (1762), pg. 14]

Human beings possess no *instinct* of Society and no *innate* inclinations to form them. Moral customs and the reciprocal Duties which define and delimit them are learned. Thus socialization as social learning and morality as moral learning are in essence one and the same at their practical roots.

How does this pertain to theology? Consider: (a) if divine purpose is fulfilled by humanity overall, and not by individuals, and finds its expression in divine Community; (b) if every person makes himself the person he chooses to become; (c) if every person unchosen for membership in divine Community has unchosen himself; and (d) if life is an apprenticeship for afterlife and its lessons of virtue and morality are necessary preparations for afterlife *Existenz* for a being possessing free will; then the development, understanding, and perfection of reciprocal Duties through reciprocal duties and obligations is a means by which every person has the opportunity *to qualify himself for afterlife* and the opportunity to unchoose himself for membership in divine Community. If God created you and placed you here, he did so in such a way that it is up to you to discover the significance and import of social morality as a system of moral laws, to discover necessitation for perfecting your own moral code through perfecting Obligations and Duties of citizenship in Communities, and gave you the *freedom* to choose or refuse this citizenship.

## 5. Kant's Categories of Actions and Moral Characterization

At the beginning of this treatise, I promised you that I was not going to try to convert you to any specific religion. Neither do I presume to tell you what is or isn't moral. My experience is not your experience, and I am too much aware of my own imperfections of moral understanding to adopt an attitude of moral realism and preach to you about the subject in specific doctrinal terms as if I were a prophet.

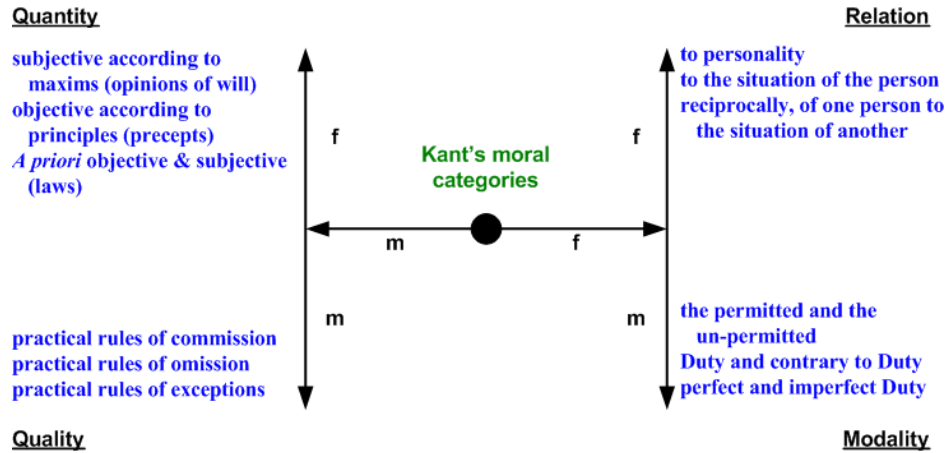
But for persons of faith who choose to make divine Community an article of faith, it follows as a matter of straightforward logic that reciprocal Duty *to other apprentices of life* necessitates a moral commitment to aiding others' educational Self-development insofar as educational Self-development can help prepare oneself for an afterlife *Existenz*. There are limits to what any individual is justified in doing here. If God is not a divine *ruler* but, instead, is a supreme and supremely sublime benevolent leader, is any person justified in assuming for himself attitudes and postures of a ruler over others? I think the answer to this question must logically be "no, he cannot." But one *can* try to help others understand morality *deontologically*, and that is my aim in this chapter.

All ideas of a supernatural morality, like ideas of supernature itself, have for their objects noumena that lie far beyond the horizon of possible human experience. It follows that we cannot have any claim to ascertaining objectively valid *knowledge* these noumena. At most one can hold-to-be-true some opinions about them *as matters of faith* and hold-to-be-false other opinions *again as matters of faith*.

But the *phenomenon* of human moral nature, unlike noumena of moral supernature, is a different matter. Human nature is open to observation and study. It can be treated empirically and, moreover, scientifically. This includes human behaviors and practices for perfecting one's moral understandings and moral code. Human perfection is a process and its completion in a final state seems to be without definable ending. It can be said of morality what Solon, one of the Seven Sages of the ancient world, said of happiness and men:

Until he dies, call him not happy but fortunate. [Herodotus (c. 445 BC), vol. I, chap. 32, pg. 38]

In like fashion, until he dies do not call a person moral but faithful. Morality is best served by aiming to understand human deontological morality and putting this understanding into practice.



**Figure 5:** Kant's representation of categories of actions. Analysis of actions in terms of these categories establishes relationship between an action and an individual's private moral code subsisting in his manifold of rules.

A formal understanding Kant's deontological theory begins with understanding a Logical structure of actions as these are exhibited in human behavior. Figure 5 presents this structure in 2LAR form. Every action is a fourfold combination made up of one action category from each of the four heads in figure 5. Kant called these twelve categories "the categories of freedom" [Kant (1788) 5: 66]. Their combination is used to determine judgments of if and how action is of a moral, immoral, or amoral character. He wrote,

These *categories of freedom*, for this is what we are going to call them in lieu of those theoretical notions which are categories of Nature, have an obvious advantage over the latter because [the latter] are only forms of thought which only put a mark on undetermined Objects in general, for every intuition possible for us, by means of general notions; [the former], on the contrary, go to the determination of a free choice (to which no fully corresponding intuition can be given but which – as does not happen by notions of the theoretical use of our faculty of knowledge – has as its ground a pure *a priori* law); hence, instead of the form of intuition (space and time), which does not lie in Reason itself but must be drawn from elsewhere (namely from sensibility), these, as practical elementary ideas, have as their ground the *form of a pure will* in them and therefore within the capacity of thinking itself; by this it happens that, because all precepts of pure practical Reason have to do only with *determination of will*, not with natural conditions (of practical capacity) for *fulfillment of its intent*, the practical *a priori* ideas in respect to the highest principle of freedom at once become knowledge and do not have to wait for intuitions in order to receive meaning; and this happens from the noteworthy grounds that they themselves produce the actuality of that to which they refer (the disposition of will), which is not the business of theoretical concepts. But one must well note that these categories bear upon only practical Reason in general and so progress in their order from those which are as yet morally undetermined and sensuously conditioned to those which, being sensuously unconditioned, are determined only through moral law. [Kant (1788), 5: 65-66]

The *a priori* law to which Kant refers here is the categorical imperative of pure practical Reason. The twelve categories of freedom are not primitive functions of appetite or of practical judgment the way that the categories of understanding are for determining judgment. This is clear because these categories are *characterizations* of actions – therefore concepts – and, because they claim to be a description of the power of human will and therefore descriptions of a noumenon, they belong to the class of concepts we call ideas. Elementary functions they are, but not *primitive* functions.

At root, the twelve categories in figure 5 categorize reasons for a person's behavior and so describe the grounds for his synthesis of appetites in practical Reason. I call them Kant's "moral categories" because analysis of these grounds allows us to understand what relationship, if any, actions have to interpreting the practical manifold of rules in terms of an individual's moral code.

A. The categories of Quantity. I provide more exposition of the meanings of Kant's moral categories in chapter 6 of Wells (2012). For this treatise briefer statements of their meanings should, I hope, be sufficient for theological purposes. In the case of the moral categories of Quantity, Kant was vague to the point of being irritating in his explanations of them. Perhaps this is just as well, though; his confounding of the categorical imperative with his idea of "*the moral law within me*" seems to me more likely than not to have resulted in any concise definition he might have given being incorrect. What I present to you here is the outcome of reexamining these categories epistemologically after ridding them of the transcendent notion of any singular and mystical "*the moral law within me*."

The first Quantity in Kant's moral categories, the *opinion of will*, is an action according to a maxim. A maxim is a constructed rule of action the person himself has made merely to achieve reequilibration in response to some disturbance he has experienced. It is peculiar to the person himself, thus is subjective [Kant (1797) 6: 225]. It is "right for him" but not necessarily "right for you." This is what Kant means by it being an "opinion of will." Most casual habits fall into this category. To give a trivial example, while dressing I always put my left sock on first then my right sock. If you, on the other hand, reverse this order, or have no particular habitual order, I consider it "not-wrong" that you do it your way<sup>16</sup>.

The second Quantity, the *precept*, is an action grounded in an objective principle. That the principle is objective means that concepts contribute essentially to the action. A precept may or may not have a moral standing according to a context by which it is either held-to-be *imperative* or in which it is *not*-held-to-be imperative [Kant (1785b) 4: 414-417]. Because any moral connotation is context-dependent, all moral precepts are *theoretically hypothetical* imperatives because they are held-to-be-necessitated (made necessary from a condition) in the judgment of the person. Merely technical imperatives, e.g. the proper procedure for staining your deck, rarely have any moral connotation. An imperative of prudence, on the other hand, can have what amounts to a "moral force" if its meaning implication happens to evoke a *practical* hypothetical imperative in the manifold of rules. We often do not say such an imperative is a moral custom (*Sittlichkeit*), but the fact remains that such imperatives are important instantiations of what Kant called Duties to oneself. For example, the legal codes of most Societies hold that it is not-murder (unlawful taking of another person's life) if you kill someone while defending your own life or that of another from his actions. Killing him was not the *ground* for your action; a Duty to yourself was. Kant said of rules of prudence,

The rules of prudence presuppose no special inclination and feeling, but only a special relationship of understanding to them. The rules of moral custom proceed from a special, eponymous feeling, upon which understanding is focused in this way by them. [Kant (c. 1764-1800) 19: 93]

The third moral category of Quantity, *laws*, is where Kant encountered difficulties arising from his "*the moral law within me*" problem and his failure to distinguish between practical imperatives and theoretical imperatives [Wells (2012), chap. 6]. The third category can be regarded as a synthesis of the first two. This means that the person has both a subjectively sufficient reason and an objectively sufficient reason for holding-to-be-binding whatever action is prescribed by a "law." Now, an unconditioned rule in the manifold of rules (a practically hypothetical imperative) does have the "force" of a natural law (so long as the rule remains unconditioned) because if it is evoked the person *does* act according to it. However, all such rules in the manifold of rules are constructed by the person himself and are outcomes of his own experience. Therefore, we cannot say that any such law is universal (necessary for every person). *Kant knew this, too*. We know he did because he insisted that (theoretical) imperatives carried merely the force

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<sup>16</sup> This example is trivial but there are some practical lessons to be had from the idea. If you are a manager, foreman, or supervisor, it is a wise management maxim to avoid telling your subordinates *how* to do their jobs. You can tell them what your expectations for the outcome are, but so long as these expectations are met, *how* a subordinate meets them is "not-wrong." Violating this maxim is one of the many ways by which so-called "scientific management" leads to failure [Leavitt (1972), pp. 266-274].

of an "ought to." But, by definition, no *natural law* expresses an "ought to" and this is enough for us to conclude that there is no universal "*the moral law within me.*" What Kant called moral "laws" would better be called "moral legislations." Mistaking one of these for a natural law is, in a practical context, an example of moral realism in action. It is a childish mistake.

It should be clear that, as theoretical tenets, these ought-to rules are personal. It is a great mistake to reify any such rule so as to make the object of the action, or even the action itself, the seat of whatever is "moral" in the tenet. The first is the logical subreption of consequentialist ethics. The latter is the logical subreption of virtue ethics. Every person, in a manner of speaking, "writes his own rulebook" in his manifold of concepts and the rules he writes in it are "practical" rules only inasmuch as they pertain to deciding upon actions he thinks he ought to take. Laws are reckoned by the individual to be concepts that are constituents of a private legal code embodying his notions of what is right or what is wrong, what is good or what is evil. Every person is his own legislator of his personal "legal code." Taken only so far as this goes, there is nothing that could particularly be called "moral" about such a code other than the esteem with which the individual regards his own laws. However, the degree to which he values these imparts a sense of "justness or unjustness" that factors in to the manner in which the individual holds-to-be-binding his Self-constructed legal system.

If the person thinks a tenet is right for himself but he does not hold you to an expectation to follow this same rule, then the tenet is a theoretical maxim. If you do not hold with it, he might question your intellect but he will not impugn your character. If, on the other hand, he not only holds himself as being bound by this tenet but he also expects you to hold yourself to be bound to it – i.e. that you should bind yourself to it – then he holds his maxim to be a *moral law*. If you now disappoint his expectation and violate the tenet, he does impugn your character. There is, he will think, "something morally wrong with you." If you take open offense at his presumption, he is also likely to additionally impugn either your intelligence, your "barbarous lack of culture" or both because he thinks you ought to know that his tenet has to be binding on everyone (and for that reason he does not think of it as "his" tenet). The third moral category of Quantity thus pertains to the scope of what he thinks is its applicability. But in *life* the only moral "laws" for which real objective validity can be predicated are those of a people's social compact.

B. The categories of Quality. Of the twelve categories, these three are the most straightforward to understand. A rule of commission is simply a "do it" assertion. A rule of omission is a "do-not do it" assertion. A rule of exception is the synthesis of the first two categories. It asserts either "do it *unless* there is a condition under which it should not-be-done" or "do-not do it *unless* there is a condition under which it should-be-done." The third category is a limitation of an action based on contexts and conditions under which the action is or is-not carried out.

When putting moral implications to these rules, one compares the *tenet* of acting with a moral context. A tenet is a rule of commission when (1) it is congruent with the moral context if you take the action; **and** (2) it is incongruent with the moral context if you do not. A tenet is a rule of omission when (1) it is congruent with the moral context if you do **not** take the action; **and** (2) it is incongruent with the moral context if you **do** take the action. A tenet is a rule of exception if it has delimited conceptual boundaries such that in *some* moral contexts you must do the action in order for the moral principle to be congruent with the moral context while in *other* moral contexts congruence requires you to forego the action.

This seems straightforward enough. But what about situations we describe using phrases like "damned if I do, damned if I don't" or "choose the lesser of two evils"? College philosophy courses in ethics seem to love to pose problems of these sorts to challenge the students. One can call these "no win situations." I think it's pretty likely you've run into situations of this sort yourself from time to time. Here is where it is important to understand that a rule is an assertion made under a general condition. In "no win situations" it is not a question of "which rule do I follow?" but, rather, "what *condition* conditions the rule?" The *rule* is yet to be determined. If the situation brings two or more previously constructed rules into conflict with one another, the situation calls for making disjunctive inferences of Reason needed to *resolve* this

conflict. One can look at a rule as something that *solves* a problem; a "no-win situation" is a situation requiring you to *re-solve* it in light of new complications.

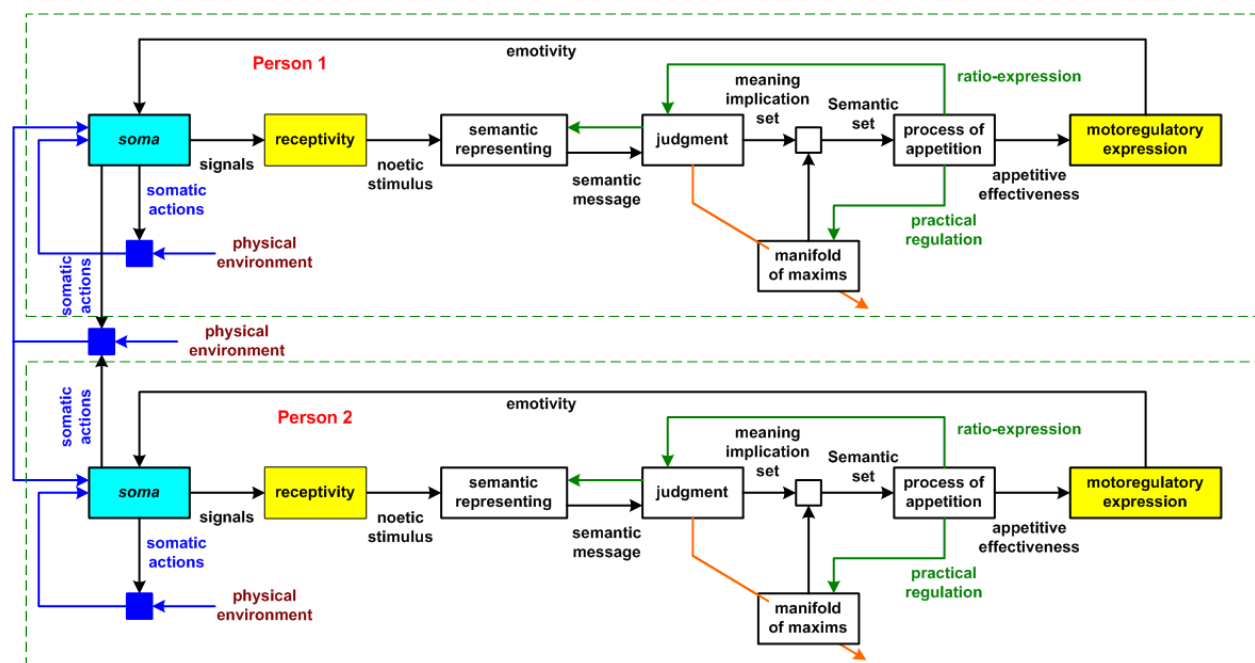
Personally, I question the usefulness of many of the no-win problems posed in ethics classes because the lesson often leaves the students with no guidance about how one might go about trying to resolve them. It is a kind of Platonic approach to pedagogy. Plato's dialogues are famous for asking questions that are left unanswered: What is Beauty? What is Good? What is Truth? What is Justice? etc. I think a lesson is pointless unless it teaches the students possible methods and approaches to re-solving ethical dilemmas. It is true enough that there is value in demonstrating to students that many things do not have cut-and-dried answers. But there is more value still if the lesson helps them learn *how to try to resolve* such questions.

C. The categories of Relation. Most of the explanation of these categories of action was covered in the earlier sections on Duty. Little more is required to generalize these Relations to actions generally regardless of whether or not there is a moral context involved. An action in *Relation to personality* is one by which the actor determines the accidents of his own personality. They ground the capacity of a person to make himself the person he chooses to be.

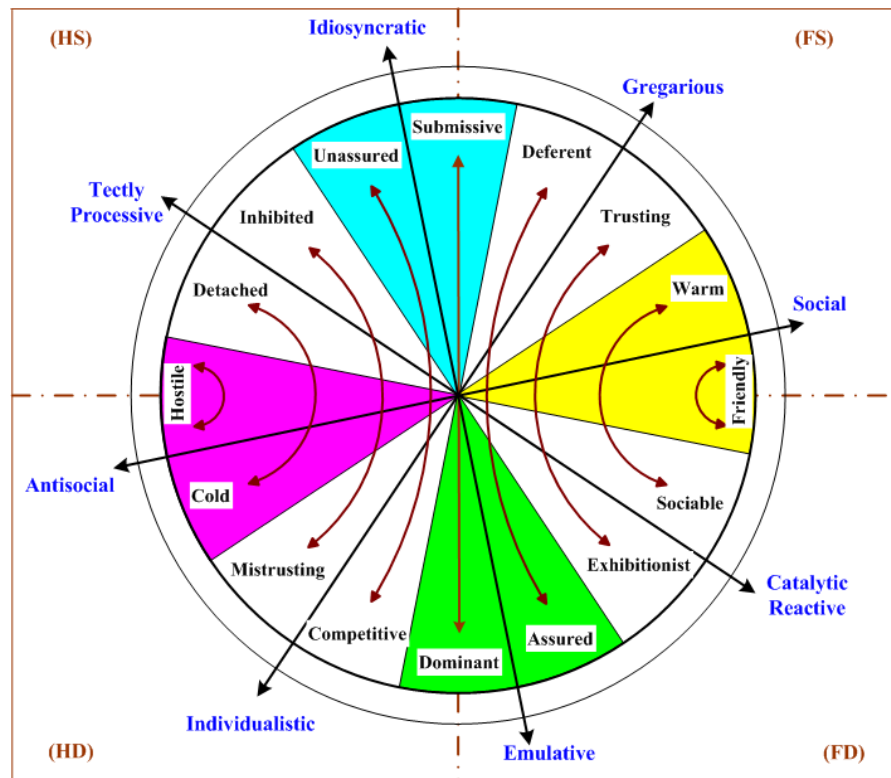
*Relation to the situation of the person* pertains to Relations of causality & dependency (see figure 4). An action in Relation to the situation of the person pertain to how the person deals with the contingencies of external Nature so far as these contingencies affect his own personal well-being.

***Relation reciprocally of one person to the situation of another*** is an action directed at relationships of Community, i.e., toward the idea that one's actions co-determine the actions of others that come back in some way to affect the actor himself. Perhaps the most frequent examples of this in daily life are found in interpersonal behaviors of two interacting persons. Let us take a brief look at this.

Figure 6 depicts a model of human-natural processes active during two-person interactions. This model is called a Weaver's model of interpersonal communication and interaction [Wells (2011)]. It illustrates how each person's perceptions of the actions of the other affect his judgments of the meanings of the other person's action expressions and his decision making in his own determinations of how he will react in response. Psychologists call this "impact messaging" [Kiesler *et al.* (1997)].



**Figure 6:** Two-person Weaver's model of interpersonal communication and interaction.



**Figure 7:** Circumplex model of normal complementarity relationships in person-to-person interpersonal interactions [Wells (2012), chap. 8].

Kiesler *et al.* wrote,

The broadest notion of reciprocity or complementarity is that interpersonal acts are designed to invite, pull, elicit, draw, entice, or evoke restricted classes of reactions from those with whom we interact, especially from significant others. Reactions by others to these acts are not random, nor are they likely to include the entire range of possible reactions. Rather, they tend to be restricted to a relatively narrow range of interpersonal responses. [Kiesler *et al.* (1997), pg. 223]

All else being equal and barring a history of past interpersonal interactions that have previously led to the formation of contrary maxims (see figure 6, manifold of maxims), the typical reaction of one person to the behavior expressed by another is one of complementarity. Figure 7 illustrates the complementarity relationships in typical interpersonal interactions [Wells (2012), chap. 8]. Referring to this figure, if your behavior projects a "message" of "being friendly" by your physical expressions, the typical response you're most likely to get from the other person will also be a "friendly" expression; if you project a "warm" expression in your behavior, the most typical reaction you're likely to get in response from the other person is a "sociable" expression; if you project a "hostile" expression, you're probably going to get a "hostile" reaction; &etc. in accordance with figure 7. Reactions other than complementarity reactions can be produced by the other person's memory of your past interactions, by your "reputation" he has learned from other people, or by his training in interpersonal skills. But barring factors like these, complementarity is the most typical reaction one person has to the behavioral expressions of another.

Relation reciprocally of one person to the situation of another pertains to an actor's meaning implications (expressed through the impetuous emotivity of teleological reflective judgment in behaviors) and others' reactions to it. An actor is not necessarily cognizant of the appearances of his own behavior. If you habitually scowl and frown then even if you don't *mean* to convey a bad mood most other people will

interpret your dark expressions as "cold" and, more often than not, give you back a "detached" reaction in return. Clinical psychologists whose work involves behavior modification therapy are often trained to "steer" the patient's interpersonal reactions into more desirable habitual directions by exploiting the psychological phenomenon of interpersonal complementarity [Kiesler (1983)].

The second person's response to the first person's expression evokes a counter reaction by the first person. His counter reaction evokes another reaction from the second person, and so on until this series of interpersonal transactions co-determines both individuals' attitudes, thoughts and actions in regard to each other. Because they co-determine each other, their actions are said to be *reciprocal*.

There is little room to doubt Kant envisioned the third category of Relation primarily in terms of morality theory. However, as the psychology of interpersonal relationships serves to illustrate, as a more general action Relation this category applies to a much wider scope of cases including those in which little to no social morality implication is involved.

D. The categories of Modality. Modality categories are not predications made on an object (in the present case, an action). Rather, they pertain to judging individual's *Self*-determination of the manner or mode in which he holds his judgment. A judgment of Modality is a judgment *of his judgment* of an object.

The category of *the permitted and unpermitted* is straightforward enough. Kant wrote,

An act is *permitted* which is not contrary to Obligation; and this freedom, which is not restricted by being set against any opposing imperative, is called an authorization . . . From this it is obvious what *forbidden* is. . . . An act that is neither required nor prohibited is merely *permitted* because there is absolutely no restraining law restricting one's freedom (authorization) with regard to it and, so too, no Duty. Such an act is called morally-indifferent [Kant (1797) 6: 222-223].

Permitted or unpermitted actions are permitted or forbidden "in the mind of the actor," not in that of someone else observing his actions. *You* might think, "He can't do that!" but, obviously, if he does then *he* thinks he can. The category has nothing to do with whether or not a person is physically capable of some action. It has to do with whether or not the action is regulated by any imperative in his manifold of rules. Note that it is Obligation, not Duty, that Kant referenced in the quote above.

The category of *Duty and contrary to Duty* is a moral category because it is a determination of relationship between an action and the individual's manifold of rules structure. It characterizes what is assertoric within the *context* of duty-concepts such that the person's concepts of a duty and an obligation *cohere* with his life experience. Kant said,

*Duty* is that action to which someone is bound. It is therefore the matter of Obligation, and it can be one and the same Duty although we can be bound to it in different ways. [Kant (1797) 6: 222]

Finally, the category of *perfect and imperfect Duty* pertains to knowing the manner in which a duty or an obligation is necessitated by meaning implications in a person's choice to take an action or not. A duty-concept is held-to-represent an **imperfect Duty** if the only obligation involved in the situation is an obligation one makes solely to oneself. No other person can *compel* an individual to obey his own maxims. Rather, a person is Self-compelled by his own concepts of obligation.

A **perfect Duty** is one that involves a social compact of some sort in which the contracting parties have exchanged a pledge of mutual obligations and, through this exchange, each has *granted* the other a **right** to compel compliance with the social compact. Every notion of justice, of legal systems, of civil rights, and of civil liberties rests upon this moral category of perfect Duty. A perfect Duty always involves *social* Obligation; an imperfect Duty involves only Obligation one makes *to oneself*.

It follows as a corollary that no person can *place* an obligation or a duty on another person without their consent because obligations and duties are always and only *Self-imposed*. One person might *intimidate*



another person into doing something, but in such a case the intimidated person is acting under a maxim of prudence rather than out of any social Duty. Intimidation is the great error often made by churches of every faith. "Do this or suffer in Hell" is a *threat* attempting to intimidate the individual. I think it is rather cynical to pretend it is anything other than this. In particular, one deludes oneself in claiming such a threat is "really" only good advice a person should heed "for his own good." In the first place, *you* do not *know* for a fact that a Hell of any sort actually exists. But, more importantly, if a person grounds his action in it "being for his own good," this grounding bases his action on Obligation to himself and *not in Obligation to a Community*. If I make it an article of faith that divine purpose is fulfilled by humanity overall, and not by individuals; and that it finds its expression in divine Community; then it follows that when my actions are grounded in their being "for my own good" these actions stand in no relationship with divine Community or with divine purpose. To harmonize with divine purpose, my action must be grounded in it "being the morally *right* thing to do" rather than it being merely the expedient or prudent thing to do.

It might also be the latter, but the action must not be *grounded* in the latter if it is to harmonize with divine purpose. An action can be "the right thing to do" even when it is not at all the expedient thing to do, and even when it might be the dangerous thing to do. "Courage" does not mean you are not afraid; if you are not afraid then you have nothing to be courageous about. Courage means doing the right thing despite being afraid of doing it. Understood in this way, courage is a virtue, cowardice is a vice.

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