

Humanity, Personality and Dignity

“The will is thought as a faculty of determining itself to action *in accord with the representation of certain laws*. And such a faculty can be there to be encountered only in rational beings. Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the *end*, and this, if it is given through mere reason, must be equally valid for all rational beings... The subjective ground of desire is the *incentive*, the objective ground of volition is the *motive*; hence a distinction between subjective ends, which rest on incentives, and objective ones, which depend on motives that are valid for every rational being... The ends that a rational being proposes as effects of its action at its discretion (material ends) are all relative... and can provide no necessary principles valid universally for all rational beings and hence for every volition, i.e. practical laws...

But suppose there were something whose *existence in itself* had absolute worth, something that as an *end in itself* could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it and only in it alone would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, i.e. of a practical law.

Now I say that the human being, and in general every rational being, *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* to the discretionary use of this or that will... All objects of inclinations have only a conditioned worth; for if the inclinations and the needs grounded on them did not exist, then their object would be without worth. The inclinations themselves, however, as sources of needs, are so little of absolute worth... that rather to be free of them must be the universal wish of every rational being... The beings whose existence rests not on our will but on nature nevertheless have, if they are beings without reason, only a relative worth as means, and are called *things*; rational beings, by contrast, are called persons, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves...

If, then, there is supposed to be a supreme practical principle, and in regard to the human will a categorical imperative, then it must be such from the representation of that which, being necessarily an end for everyone, because it is an *end in itself*, constitutes an *objective* principle of the will, hence can serve as a universal practical law. The ground of this principle is: *Rational nature exists as an end in itself*. The human being necessarily thinks of his existence in this way; thus to that extent it is a subjective principle of human actions. But every other rational being also represents his existence in this way as consequent on the same rational ground as is valid for me;* thus it is at the same time an objective principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, all laws of the will must be able to be derived. The practical imperative will thus be the following: *Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always as at the same time an end and never merely as a means*” (Groundwork 4:427-429).

* This proposition I here set forth as a postulate. In the last section one will find the grounds for it.