

Nonconsequential Theory (Rule- or Duty-based Theories)

Immanuel Kant

[Immanuel Kant](#) believed that nothing was good in itself except good will.

Kant defined will as:

- the uniquely human capacity to act according to principles.

Kant's Duties

- **Perfect Duty**—one that we must always observe—refers to negative obligations, or proscription (things we must always refrain from doing).
- **Imperfect Duty**—one that we must observe only on some occasions—refers to positive obligations, or prescription.

Kant's Categorical Imperative

"We should act in such a way that we could wish the maxim of our action to become a universal law."

Maxim means the principle on which the action was based — the type of principle that people formulate in determining their conduct.

Many see this as a reformulation of the "Golden Rule"

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Kant meant 3 things by this imperative:

- The rule that results from using this guideline must be consistently universal and categorical.
- Always act so as to treat yourself and others as ends in themselves and never completely as means to an end.
- For a rule of conduct to be a moral rule, it must apply equally to those who legislate it.

Strengths of Kant's theory

- The categorical imperative takes the guess work out of moral decision making.
- Kant's ethics introduce a needed humanistic dimension into decision making.

Weaknesses in Kant's theory

- Provides no clear way to resolve conflicts of duties.
- No compelling reason that the prohibition against certain actions should hold without exception.

Modern Interpretations

Integrity, as defined by Stephen Carter,

requires three steps:

- discerning what is right and what is wrong;

- acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost;
- saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right from wrong.

Theories of Obligation:

from William David Ross

1. Duties of fidelity are based on your prior acts.

For example, if you promise (explicitly or implicitly) to perform some action or to abstain from performing some action, then you are obliged to perform that action or to abstain from that action.

Also included under fidelity is the duty of reparation.

If you perform a wrong action with respect to another person, then you are obliged to "undo" the wrong.

2. Duties of gratitude are based on the acts of other people toward you.

For example, if any person performs some service (or favor) for you, then you have some obligation to the person who performed the favor.

Gratitude applies to relationships between friends, relatives, or employer/employee (among others) .

3. Duties of justice are based on the need to distribute pleasure or happiness in a manner that is in accordance with the merits of the people concerned.

For example, if any person merits a distribution of pleasure or happiness and you can bring that distribution about (or prevent such a distribution that is not merited), then you are obliged to do so.

4. Duties of beneficence are based on the fact that there are other people in the world whose virtue, intelligence, or happiness we can improve.

For example, if you can make some person better with respect to virtue, intelligence, or pleasure, then you are obliged to do so.

5. Duties of self-improvement are based on the fact that we should improve our own condition of virtue, intelligence, or happiness.

In other words, if you can make yourself better with respect to virtue or intelligence, then you should do so.

6. Duties of non-injury are duties of not injuring others.

If you are in a position to avoid or prevent hurting someone, then you are obliged to avoid or prevent injury.