Kant
Universalizability Principle

Review
According to Kant, the universalizability principle is a fundamental principle that tells us what our duty is.

It says that you should only act on a maxim that you can consistently will to be a universal law.
Universalizability Principle

Review
According to Kant, the universalizability principle is a fundamental principle that tells us what our duty is.

It says that you should only act on a maxim that you can consistently will to be a universal law.

To apply this principle:
- determine your maxim
- conceive of a world in which everyone acts on that maxim by law.
- can you consistently will that they do so?
Universalizability Principle

- Based on Reason:
  - Reason tells us what's right and wrong
  - Reason causes us to act morally (overcomes irrational inclinations.)
- Commonsensical
- Easy to apply
What's the purpose of Moral Philosophy

If Kant's view is common sense and easy, why do we need it?

--

What's the purpose of moral philosophy if it just agrees with what we already know?
What's the purpose of Moral Philosophy

If Kant's view is common sense and easy, why do we need it?

What's the purpose of moral philosophy if it just agrees with what we already know?

Kant's answer: Moral Philosophy helps us to overcome self interest and see that the concerns of morality aren't superficial.

Lenhart's addendum: Moral Philosophy also probes the nature of morality and gives a rationale and explanation to our common sense.
Is Kant a frothing Moralist?

Kant often offers examples of people and asks us to judge them. Is he overly concerned with moral judgements? Is he disturbingly moralistic?
Is Kant a frothing Moralist?

Kant often offers examples of people and asks us to judge them. Is he overly concerned with moral judgements? Is he disturbingly moralistic?

Kant is way into morality. But he isn't as prone to judgment of others as he can sometimes appear.
Is Kant a frothing Moralist?

"There cannot be cited a single certain example of the disposition to act from pure duty."

Kant basically thinks that discerning the motives of others is very, very hard.

Indeed, even our own motives are opaque.

Morality is about our deepest motives, which cannot necessarily be seen, even by ourselves.
Is Kant a frothing Moralist?

Kant's philosophy is (arguably) really intended to help guide each person, not to help us judge others. Moral philosophy is a remedy for our self-interest that can help our reason overcome our inclination. Hence, the value of moral philosophy is in helping each person do right, not in helping us say who is a bad person.
Imperatives are principles of rational action. They say something about what is possible to do and possible not to do.
Oughts (Imperatives)

Imperatives are principles of rational action. They say something about what is possible to do and possible not to do.

"You ought to one ounce of hops to five gallons of wort to balance the sweetness of beer" is an imperative.

You could do that. You could not do that.

It's both possible to do and possible not to do.

Imperatives are instructions or commands.
Oughts (Imperatives)

There are two kinds of imperatives. The first kind is a hypothetical imperative.

If a person wills some end and certain means are a required to achieve that end, then using those means is required of the person. There's an imperative that follows from what I've willed.

Example:
If a person wills that the sweetness of the beer be balanced, he is required to adopt the means of adding an ounce of hops to the wort.
However, sometimes we find that the means to the end we have are unachievable, or that we don't want them, or whatever. In that case, we can reject our end instead of our means.

Suppose I have no hops...

As a rational person, I can either reject the end of balancing the sweetness of beer OR I can add hops. I have a choice between rejecting the end and adopting the means.
Oughts (Imperatives)

There are two kinds of imperatives. The first kind is a hypothetical imperative. The second kind is a categorical imperative.

A categorical imperative is one that applies regardless of one's ends. Consequently, I cannot simply reject my ends in order to avoid the rational obligation of a categorical imperative.
Oughts (Imperatives)

There are two kinds of imperatives. The first kind is a hypothetical imperative. The second kind is a categorical imperative.

According to Kant, morality is a categorical imperative. You must always act according to the moral law.

The Universalizability Principle is one formulation of the categorical imperative.
A Problem about the U. Principle

We apply the universalizability principle by
- formulating a maxim of action
- conceiving a world in which everyone act on it.
- consistently willing that such a world exist.

This is not such a simple recipe, and I want to focus on the first step, which seems pretty problematic.
A Problem about the U. Principle

We apply the universalizability principle by

- formulating a maxim of action
- conceiving a world in which everyone act on it.
- consistently willing that such a world exist.

How do we describe our action within our maxim? It seems that there will always be more than one way to correctly describe what we are doing.
A Problem about the U. Principle

Consider lying to someone to get a loan...

Should I describe my action as *lying about my ability to payback the loan so that I will receive it.*

or as

*doing something of little consequence so as to bring pleasure to myself.*

How I describe my action determines whether the principle says my action is right or wrong.
A Problem about the U. Principle

This seems to show that the U. Principle doesn't do what it's supposed to do, i.e., provide an objective basis of determining what's right and wrong.

Perhaps for cases everyone agrees about, we know what sort of description to use.

But is the categorical imperative helpful to Harry Truman as he tries to decide whether to drop the atomic bomb? Does it help in cases where you and I disagree about what is right or wrong to do.
A Problem about the U. Principle

Sometimes it could have absurd results...

Consider getting food for my dog.

Is my maxim to procure some dog food so that my dog can eat

is my maxim to go the Feedstore at Dodge and Ft. Lowell at

4pm on Nov. 18th.

I can consistently will the former, but not the latter. So the latter is morally wrong by the principle. But that's nuts.
New Formulation of C. Imperative

However, there may be another way of looking at Kant that avoids this problem.

Kant offers a second formulation of the categorical imperative.