

Schopenhauer's many criticisms of Kant's ethical theory (may not be complete list!)

1. 52: Kant assumes without defense that the form that ethics should take is to give laws about what *ought* to happen even if it never *does* happen.
2. 52-55: The idea that ethics is about laws or imperatives for the will ("thou shalt") actually rests on a religious foundation—God's commandments. It is thus foreign to philosophical ethics.
3. 55-56: "ought" only makes sense in the context of rewards and punishments. There cannot be a "categorical imperative." All commands are "conditioned" on rewards and punishments.
4. 56: thus a command-centered ethics is based on the agent's self-interest, whereas Kant had said he had banished eudaimonism from ethics. (He thinks he did but he didn't.)
5. 58-60: there can't be duties to oneself
6. 61: Kant should not have applied the distinction between a priori and a posteriori to ethics but left it in metaphysics where it is a brilliant contribution. Doing so leaves him saying that ethics cannot be based on human experience of any kind (inner or outer)
7. (62: Kant did not represent the moral law as a fact of consciousness. Post-Kantian "philosophasters" are screwed up by doing so. [This is not a criticism directed at Kant.] Criticism repeated on 71-72. (But says that Kant got confused on this point in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. See 19 below.)
8. 62: By trying to ground ethics in pure a priori concepts, Kant is grounding it in nothing of any substance. (On 70, S quotes Kant as admitting that this seems to be true and a problem (though Kant thinks he solves it).) (Repeated on 76.)
9. 63: Kant has no basis for saying ethics should apply to all *rational* beings, and anyway we don't understand what this means. Rationality cannot exist apart from humans. It cannot exist by itself. Ethics is for human beings.
10. 64f: the a priority of space, time, and causation, i.e. of categories/forms of experience, is not analogous to the alleged a priority of the moral law, since former is about what experience has to be like, while latter has nothing to do with experience and may never appear in experience.
11. 66: Kant's view of the indifferent or cold-hearted person acting from duty, and his view that sympathetic feelings get in the way of a clear focus on duty as the moral motive, are offensive to "genuine moral feeling" (and Christian morality). The former person can only be motivated by a fear of punishment, not by anything moral.
12. 67 (and elsewhere): misuse of "necessity" in relation to ethics. Can't say an act is "necessary" unless it actually happens, and has to happen.
13. 73-74: Kant actually establishes the moral law through a train of thought involving the law having to conform to pure universality. This is actually theoretical reason at work. [I don't really get this one!]
14. 74-75: The moral law as Kant understands it—the categorical imperative especially its FUL formulation—cannot be the basis of ethics. An agent would not look around for a law for her will—i.e. for whether her maxim could be universalized—unless she was prompted to do so by *another* moral motive that forced itself on her. That motive would be the foundation of ethics, but Kant does not recognize this other motive as being part of his moral system (although in his discussion of the 4 examples he tacitly recognizes that the agent is seeking to test her maxim because she is already committed to—i.e. motivated to—doing the right thing.
15. 74-75 [related to previous]: The moral motive has to be real and grounded in human experience. It has to be capable of standing up to human egoism, a very powerful motive.
16. 75 [related to previous]: The thought process someone goes through to test whether she can universalize her maxim while retaining her original goal cannot motivate someone to behave morally. The person will do what that thought process tells her only if she is antecedently already committed to morality. [Can we interpret Kant as saying that the universalization test is *not* meant to supply the motive to morality but only the formula that tells us what the right thing to do is?]

17. 76 [again, related point]: human beings can be motivated only by empirical motives (S: don't know about "rational beings"). So the basis of Kantian ethics in the non-empirical pure concepts of reason lacks real substance.
18. 76: therefore, freedom, which is supposed to be demonstrated by the existence of morality (at least in the sense that it must be postulated), cannot rest on such an insubstantial foundation.
19. 77-78: In *Critique of Practical Reason* (written when S thinks Kant is going downhill, either because of too much fame, or senility), morality is presented as a "fact of pure reason." This makes no sense—facts are the contrary of pure reason. Fichte takes this to absurd lengths, upping the alleged solidity of the foundation of moral law, the assumption that morality must take the form of a law, and the epistemic access we have to the world beyond sense experience, the world of noumena (which Schopenhauer follows Kant in saying we can say nothing about within our categories of times, space, causality, etc.)
20. 80-84: reason is a different thing than morality, so Kant is wrong to say that morality just is (practical) reason, or that morality is derived from reason.
 - a. All peoples prior to Kant have understood reason as the capacity for abstract thought.
 - b. 83: Persons who are said to be "rational" or "reasonable" are deliberate, systematic, and consistent in their thought and action. Such persons can be completely selfish, immoral and evil. [note: Schopenhauer is not denying that reason can be put in service of good ends also, or that rational people can be moral people. He is just saying these are 2 different things.]
 - c. And an irrational person in this sense can be moral, as when a person acts out of compassion for someone in need when in doing so they give away something for which they have a greater need.
 - d. On 83-84, Schopenhauer suggests that Kant's false exaltation of reason as a source of morality stems from the idea that it gives forth a priori categorical imperatives, and this is connected with his identifying it with a theoretical reason that is capable of knowledge of the realm beyond experience (even though in *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant also said it was impossible to know this realm).
21. 89-92: Egoism is at the root of the formula of the supreme principle of morals ("FUL").
 - a. The supreme principle depends on what I can will to be universal.
 - b. But when Kant spells that out, it turns out to depend on what is to the agent's advantage, because the willing is understood to be in terms of imagining ourselves on the receiving end (which he calls the "passive") of the action in question—e.g. having a deceitful promise made to us, or not receiving help from others.
 - c. So morality rests on "reciprocity" and hence is egoistic.
 - d. So the principle of morality is not categorical but hypothetical. If I do not believe I will need help because I regard myself as self-sufficient (of "superior bodily and mental strength"), then I can will the universalizing of a "not helping" maxim.
22. 92-94: Kant's derivation of the 2 kinds of duties (perfect and imperfect) is forced and unconvincing, although the division of duties is a valid one.
 - a. How can Kant say that willing universal non-help or selfishness is "inconceivable" when that situation is the one we see before our eyes every day in the animal kingdom and among humans as well? [note: Kant does not say the non-help maxim is inconceivable, only unwilling; so I am not sure I am describing this argument accurately.]
23. 95: Kant's formula of the "end-in-itself" is strange. There can't be an "end in itself." It is as contradictory as a "friend in himself".
 - a. Nor can there be "absolute worth." Worth is always comparative, and is relative to an individual who values the thing said to have worth.
24. 95-97: Criticizes Kant's saying that animals can be treated as means because they lack reason.
 - a. 96. Kant argues that cruelty to animals is wrong only on the grounds that it weakens our morality toward other human beings.
 - b. 97: Yet this formula does involve insight into the way people treat each other, constantly on the lookout for how others can be useful to us, and thus wary when others extend themselves to us that they are looking at us in that way.