

How does FUL/N (the formula of the universal law of nature) generate duties?

Step 1: The individual moral agent intends to engage in an action that is based on a maxim. (Kant seems to think that all action is based on maxims; we don't just spontaneously do stuff!)

Step 1a: The agent formulates the maxim. The maxim includes the action and the motive to the action or the end or purpose to be served by the action.

Step 1b: The agent does not just go and do the action-based-on-the-maxim (which she could do) but asks whether it is *right* for her to do that action-based-on-that-maxim.

Step 2: To determine the answer to 1b, the agent universalizes the maxim in her imagination. She thinks about what the world would be like if everyone in her circumstances acted according to that maxim (i.e., as Kant puts it, if her maxim were to become "a universal law of nature").

Step 3: She then thinks about whether she could will such a world. You might think that completes the universalization procedure—if she can will it that world then her maxim passes the test, if she can't then it flunks the test. But Kant seems to have one more step in mind.

Step 4: Can the agent not only will the world in which her maxim is universalized, but also continue to will her original maxim while doing so? If she can't do so, then there is a "contradiction," or inconsistency, in her will. This is irrational—she can't will two contradictory things. And so her original maxim flunks the test. (If she can will the two simultaneously, then her maxim passes the test and she can act according to it. It is morally permissible to do so.) And this is how morality is based on reason alone.

Step 4a: Kant thinks there are 2 quite distinct ways that there can be a contradiction in the will

- (1) "contradiction in conception": the mere idea of the universalized state cannot even be conceived of in tandem with the original maxim. [Kant thinks this applies to the suicide and the deceptive promise examples on 81-82.]
- (2) "contradiction in will": the universalized state can be conceived of coherently, but no one who thinks about it honestly and comprehensively can actually will that that state should come about while also willing her original maxim. [Kant thinks this applies to the developing talents and helping examples, on 82-83.]

Step 5: Notice that the FUL "test" seems to have 2 possible outcomes: Either it is all right to act according to the original maxim (the maxim "passes the test"); or it is not all right (the maxim "flunks the test"), that is, it is wrong. But duties are generally stated as affirmative actions that one must perform. How does Kant get from the maxim either passing or flunking to the idea of affirmative duties that one must perform?

Another question: The FUL/N test seems to apply only to the individual moral agent and her maxim. How does this fit with Kant's idea that a moral law must be universal, applicable to all?