

what one calls ‘duty’ is an empty concept, we can at least indicate what we are thinking in the concept of duty and what this concept means.<sup>42</sup>

Because the universality of the law in accordance with which effects happen constitutes that which is really called *nature* in the most general sense (in accordance with its form), i.e., the existence of things insofar as it is determined in accordance with universal laws, thus the universal imperative of duty can also be stated as follows: *So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.*

Now we will enumerate<sup>43</sup> some duties, in accordance with their usual division into duties toward ourselves and toward other human beings, and into perfect and imperfect duties:\*

[Ak 4:422] (1) One person, through a series of evils that have accumulated to the point of hopelessness, feels weary of life but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it might be contrary to the duty to himself to take his own life. Now he tries out whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. But his maxim is: ‘From self-love, I make it my principle to shorten my life when by longer term it threatens more ill than it promises agreeableness’. The question is whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. But then one soon sees that a nature whose law it was to destroy life through the same feeling<sup>44</sup> whose vocation it is to impel the furtherance of life would contra-

[Ak4:421] \*Here one must note well that I reserve the division of duties entirely for a future *metaphysics of morals*; the division here therefore stands only as a discretionary one (to order my examples). For the rest, I understand by a perfect duty that which permits no exception to the advantage of inclination, and I do have *perfect duties* that are not merely external but also internal, which runs contrary to the use of words common in the schools; but I do not mean to defend that here, because for my aim it is all the same whether or not one concedes it to me. [Cf. *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:240, 391–98, 413, and the detailed taxonomy of duties of virtue, Ak 6:417–68. The “use of words common in the schools,” according to which perfect duties are externally enforceable actions, is based on Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694), *De Jure Naturale* (1672), I.1.19–20. But Pufendorf’s distinction was anticipated by Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and had been taken up also by, among others, Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) and J. G. Sulzer.]

42. *sagen wolle*

43. *herzählen*, which could also be translated “reckon” or “calculate”

44. *Empfindung*

dict itself, and thus could not subsist as nature; hence that maxim could not possibly obtain as a universal law of nature, and consequently it entirely contradicts the supreme principle of all duty.

(2) Another sees himself pressured by distress into borrowing money. He knows very well that he will not be able to pay, but he also sees that nothing will be lent him if he does not firmly promise to pay at a determinate time. He wants to make such a promise; yet he has conscience enough to ask himself: “Is it not impermissible and contrary to duty to get out of distress in such a way?” Supposing he nevertheless resolved on it, his maxim would be stated as follows: ‘If I believe myself to be in pecuniary distress, then I will borrow money and promise to pay it back, although I know this will never happen’. Now this principle of self-love, or of what is expedient for oneself, might perhaps be united with my entire future welfare, yet the question now is: “Is it right?” I thus transform this claim<sup>45</sup> of self-love into a universal law and set up the question thus: “How would it stand if my maxim became a universal law?” Yet I see right away that it could never be valid as a universal law of nature and still agree with itself, but rather it would necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law that everyone who believes himself to be in distress could promise whatever occurred to him with the intention of not keeping it would make impossible the promise and the end one might have in making it, since no one would believe that anything has been promised him, but rather would laugh about every such utterance as vain pretense.

(3) A third finds in himself a talent, which could, by means of some cultivation, make him into a human being who is useful for all sorts of aims. But he sees himself as in comfortable circumstances and sooner prefers to indulge<sup>46</sup> in gratification than to trouble himself with the expansion and improvement of his fortunate natural predispositions. Yet he still asks whether, apart from the agreement of his maxim of neglecting his gifts of nature with his propensity to amusement, it also agrees with what one calls ‘duty’. Then he sees that, although a nature could still subsist in accordance with such a universal law, though then the human being (like the South Sea Islanders) would think only of letting his talents rust and applying his life merely to idleness, amusement, procreation, in a word, to enjoyment; yet it is impossible for him to **will** that this should become a universal law of nature, or that it should be implanted in us as such by natural instinct. For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all the faculties in him should be

[AK 4:423]

45. *Zumutung*

46. 1785: “and he prefers it that he indulge”