

## Abstract

### Treating Others Merely as Means

Kant embraces the principle that it is wrong for us to treat others merely as means. In contemporary Kantian ethics, this Mere Means Principle, as I call it, plays the role of a moral constraint: it limits what we may do, even in the service of promoting the overall good. But substantive interpretations of the principle generate implausible results in relatively ordinary cases. On one interpretation, for example, you treat your opponent in a tennis tournament merely as a means and thus wrongly when you try, through defeating him, to win first place. An unintended implication of another interpretation is that a police officer treats a white-supremacist merely as a means if in order to prevent race-based attacks on law-abiding citizens, he arrests him. These results are in my view unfortunate; for they discredit a principle that to many of us seems to capture an important aspect of everyday moral thinking and to constitute a promising candidate for a valid moral constraint. The paper aims to present a reconstruction of the Mere Means Principle that has more plausible implications regarding relatively ordinary cases than do the rival accounts examined. It presents a sufficient condition for an agent's treating another merely as a means. This condition is intended to be Kantian, but not necessarily one that Kant endorses.