

Abstract

Treating Oneself Merely as a Means

Each of us is morally required not to lie, not to kill himself, and not to defile himself by lust (e.g., masturbate), according to Kant. Kant attempts to derive these “perfect duties to oneself” from one version of the categorical imperative, namely the Formula of Humanity. In particular, he tries to show that if an agent acts contrary to the duties, then he treats himself merely as a means. I develop a new interpretation of treating oneself merely as a means—one which, I try to show, improves our understanding of Kant’s attempt to derive the duties in question. Suppose that an agent’s pursuing an end involves his treating himself as a means. If it also involves his thwarting his pursuit of some end he is rationally compelled to have, then he treats himself merely as a means, according to the interpretation.