

## Robert Johnson

### Command

#### 1. *Meaning and location in Kant's works*

A command is a practical principle that is 1) "objective" or would motivate all rational beings if reason had complete control over their desires, and 2) represents what one *must* do, or "necessitates" the will. Commands are thus the representation of an objective principle to a will that is not necessarily good, a will with subjective imperfections. Objective practical principles would not, that is, be commands for a holy will. They would, instead, represent what it is *good* to do. The idea of a command is central to virtually all of Kant's practical works.

Wichtige Stellen: 4:414, 4:401n, 4:413; 5:80-4

#### 2. *Related keywords in Kant's work*

Apodiktischer Imperativ, Gebot der Vernunft, hypothetischer Imperativ, Imperativ, kategorischer Imperativ, Klugheit, praktisches Gesetz, problematischer Imperativ, unbedingter Imperativ

#### 3. *Philosophical function in Kant's philosophy*

Practical principles can command in two quite different ways, hypothetically and categorically. A principle commands some behavior hypothetically when it represents an action as objectively necessary (or what must be done) to some end. When it represents an action as objectively necessary to some end that a person *could* have or some possible purpose she could have, it commands problematically. 4:415 For instance, the principle "Never take knife to a gun fight" commands problematically, since the end of killing is one

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that a person *could* have, but few if any actually have. When the end is actual, then it commands assertorically. Kant held only one such end, happiness, can be presupposed to be actual in human beings, and he termed the collection of the principles laid down by the pursuit of happiness "prudence". However, no one can say "determinately and consistently with himself" what would truly make him happy; happiness is not an "ideal of reason but of imagination". Thus, it turns out that the principles of prudence are not commands. 4:418-19

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In contrast to both of these ways of commanding behavior, a principle that commands some behavior as necessary *in itself*, apart from any ends it might bring about, then it commands *apodictically*. The Categorical Imperative is a principle that commands behavior *apodictically*. 4:415 Since morality is grounded in the Categorical Imperative, it follows that morality is for us a command of this sort. Moral principles thus represent actions as necessary *in themselves*, apart from the ends they might bring about. Kant held not only that morality commands us, but also that to represent morality in any other way is to "presume with proud conceit, like volunteers, not to trouble ourselves about the thought of duty, and, as independent of command, to want to do of our own pleasure what we think we need no command to do". 5:82 To fail to represent morality as a command is to show disrespect for morality, indeed for the rational will in ourselves and others that is its source.

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