Kantian ethics

**Good Intentions** How can we demonstrate the importance of intentions in one’s moral evaluation? 

**THOUGHT EXPERIMENT (TE)** Compare identical situations in which all the consequences are identical, but vary the intentions. If intentions are morally relevant, then our moral evaluations should vary as the intentions vary. 

A shopkeeper charges fair prices, and as a result, attracts lots of customers. S/he charges fair prices because s/he 

1. wants higher profits; 
2. naturally does what is fair. 
3. wants to act morally. 
4. wants to act morally, despite the desire to charge higher prices.

(a) Rank the shopkeeper in each situation in terms of moral praiseworthiness. 
What are your criteria of your ranking? 
(b) Who has the best moral intentions? Why?

Which is most important in moral evaluations: intentions or consequences? 

**TE:** Compare and contrast the following two situations:  
(a) Someone has Divinely Pure intentions (Loves you Divinely) all the time towards you, but all his/her actions toward you are diabolical, and have totally diabolical consequences for you.  
(b) Someone has Diabolical intentions (Hates you Diabolically) all the time toward you, but all his/her actions toward you are divine, and have totally divine consequences for you. 

If you had to spend time with either one, whom would you choose?

What does the TE prove? 

Good or bad intentions do not necessarily affect the moral quality of actions, and their consequences. 

How would Kant respond to “The road to Hell is paved with good intentions”? 

Why do we want people to have good intentions? 
They increase the chances of good consequences.

Do good intentions always absolve us of all the bad consequences of those intentions? 

What are some limits to praising a person on the grounds that s/he had good intentions? 
Even if bad results are not intended, (a) could they have been anticipated? 
(b) am I still responsible for what happened? Should I have been able to anticipate the bad consequences? Should I have known better?

Results: Even a person’s genuinely good intentions are not enough to justify praising morally that person. 

How do we know that we (a) have good reasons/motives? (b) are not acting only in self-interest? (c) are acting according to duty?

**Categorical imperative (CI):** *act only on the maxim that you can will as a universal law.*
Maxim: all deliberate actions can be expressed as a general rule. I can make lots of money by cheating in a card game; I cheat. Personal rule/maxim: Whenever I can make lots of money by cheating in a card game, I cheat. General/Universal maxim: For everyone, whenever one can make lots of money by cheating in a card game, one cheats. According to Kant, such universal cheating would annul the game, and so I would not be in a situation to make lots of money in the card game. Because of this “inconsistency” [self-defeating action], I should not cheat in the game.

Which kind of moral evaluation is most effective in convincing us not to cheat?
(a) This Kantian inconsistency.
(b) The cheating breaks a tacit agreement (promise) not to cheat.
(c) The negative consequences of getting caught: lose money, lose reputation, others mistrust me.

Problems: 1. Is there really an inconsistency?
2. We can formulate our maxims to avoid the “inconsistency”: For everyone, whenever one can make lots of money by cheating in a card game AND NOT get caught, one cheats. Since no inconsistency, the cheating is permissible. So, the CI is not sufficient to identify what is morally permissible or what we ought to do.
3. Is the CI necessary? Can a moral act be permissible when it is forbidden by the CI?
Situations: It’s cold; I wear a sweater. Personal rule/maxim: Whenever it’s cold, I wear a sweater. General/Universal maxim: For everyone, whenever it’s cold, one wears a sweater. Can I be consistent (rational) in willing (wishing, hoping…) universal maxim? There might not be enough sweaters for everyone: I might not have one. Is this an inconsistent result?
3. Even if the CI worked, it would only tell us what is permissible.

CI: Never treat a person simply/merely as a means. Treat all persons as ends.
Fundamental qualities of personhood: autonomy: reasoning + self-rule. To treat someone merely as a means is not to respect their autonomy. What are the nec. & suff. conditions for respecting one’s autonomy: (a) Give all the relevant information needed to make a decision. Problem: Criteria of relevance? The person’s self-interest?
(b) No coercion. Problem: There are degrees of influence.
(c) Keeping agreements, promises.
(d) Giving what one deserves (justice); not exploit.