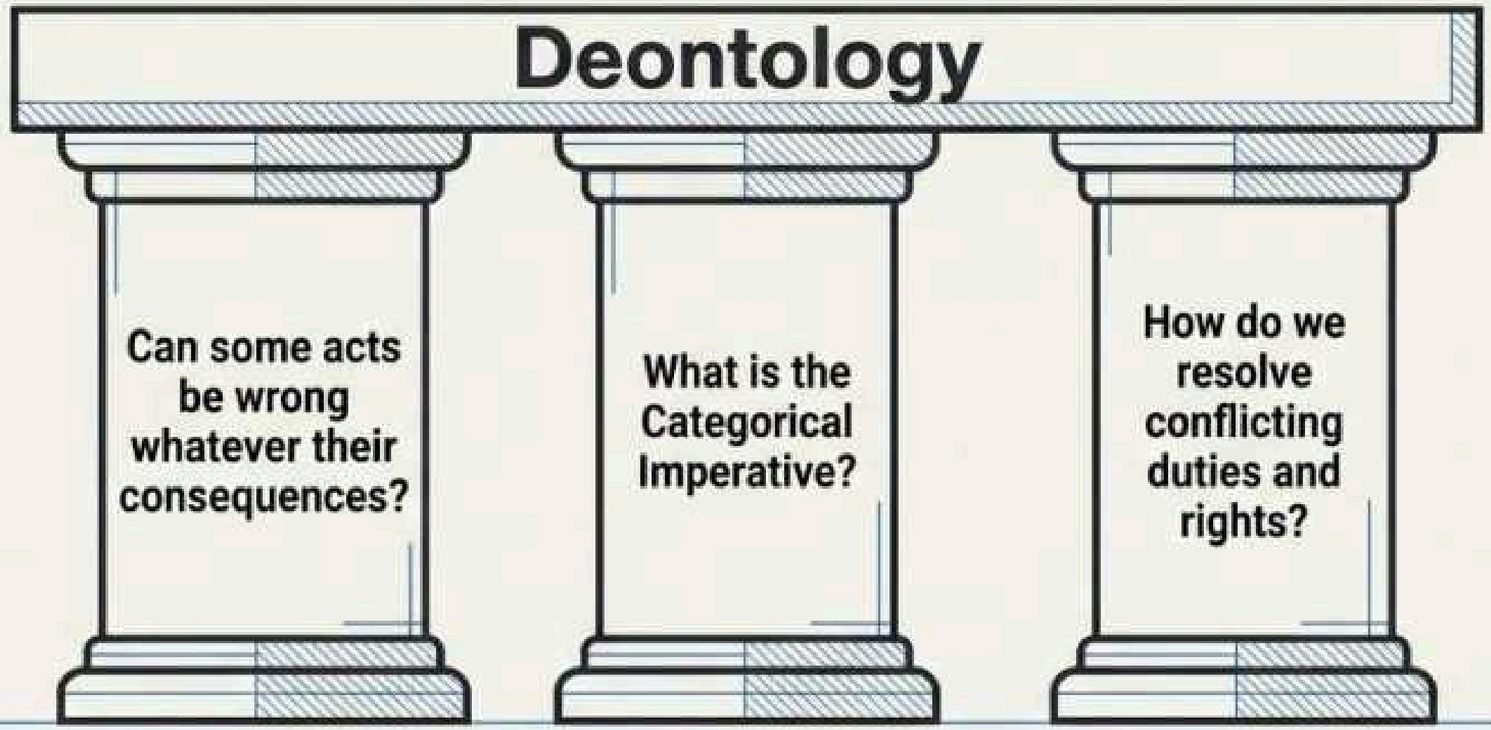
3.1 The Three Pillars of Deontology



Deontology: The family of theories where morality consists, at least partly, of duties that constrain what we may do.

Gemini Notebook

3.2 THE NATURE OF CONSTRAINTS

Bringing about good results



e.g., punishing an innocent person.

Honoring constraints

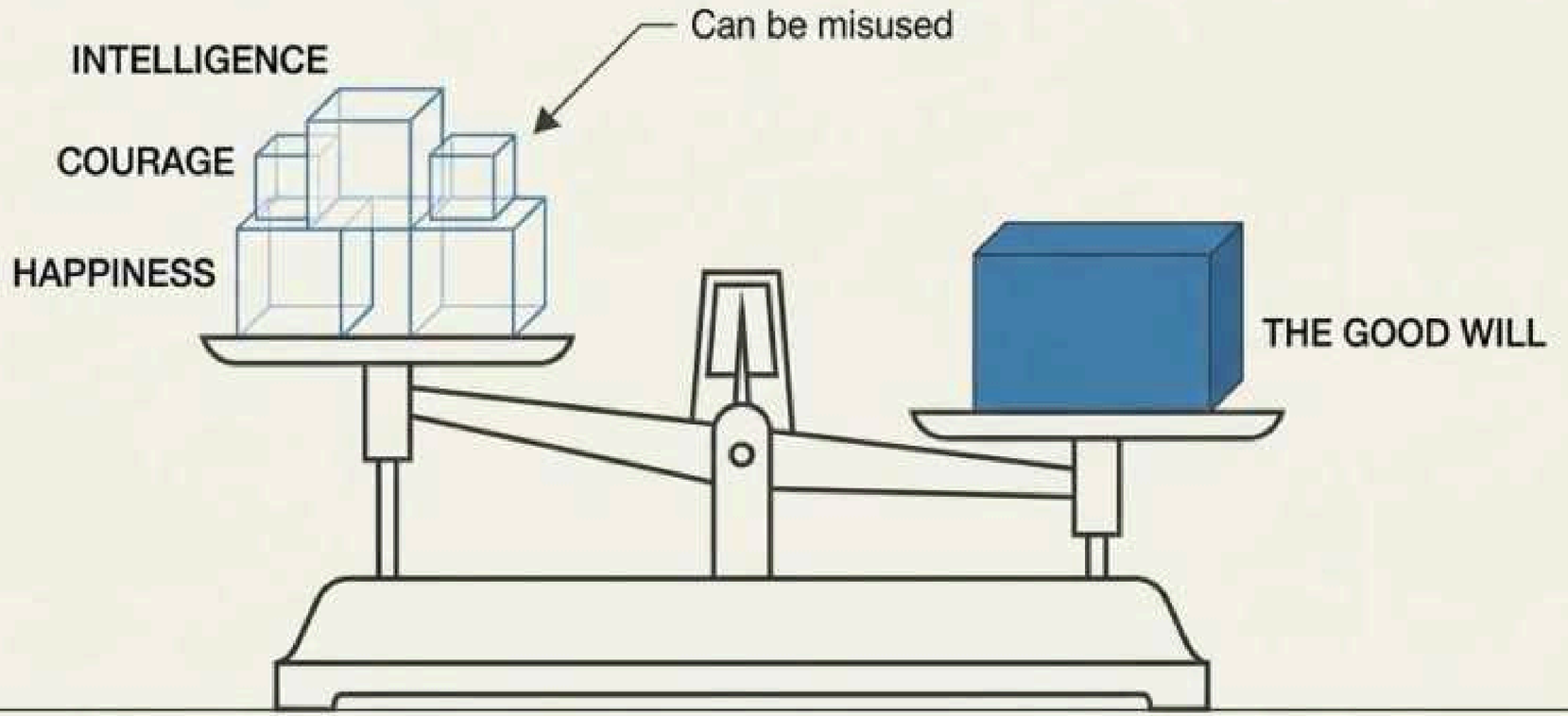
- Promises
- Family
- Those we have wronged

Root: *Deon* (Greek) = Duty.

Rule: Deontology tells each of us what we must not do, rather than what we must bring about.

Gemini Notebook

3.3 THE UNQUALIFIED GOOD



Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Königsberg, Prussia. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785.

Nothing in the world (or beyond it) is good without qualification except a good will. It is good in itself, even if it fails to achieve its aim.

Gemini Notebook

3.4 MOTIVE DICTATES MORAL WORTH

The Shopkeeper Example: Two identical actions, two different motives.

Acting in Accordance with Duty	Motive: Honesty is good for business.	Moral Worth: None.
Acting FROM Duty	Motive: **Honesty because it is right.**	Moral Worth: **Absolute.**

The Critic's Question: Is this too austere? Is acting from kindness worth less?

Gemini Notebook

3.5 THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

HYPOTHETICAL IMPERATIVE

Condition: If you want to be healthy



Command: You should exercise

(Depends on desires)

CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Subject: Rational Being



Command: Do this, full stop.

(Independent of desires or cultural approval)

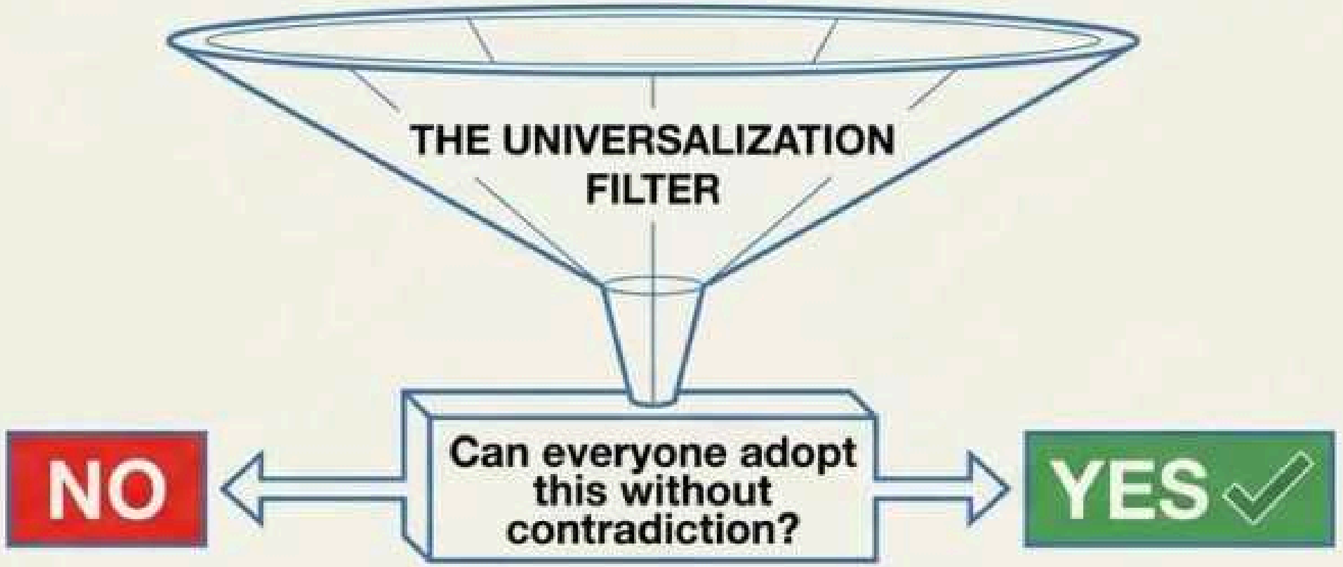
Morality binds rational beings as such. It cannot depend on what we happen to want.

Gemini Notebook

3.6 FORMULATION I: UNIVERSAL LAW

Maxim = [Action] + [Circumstances] + [End]

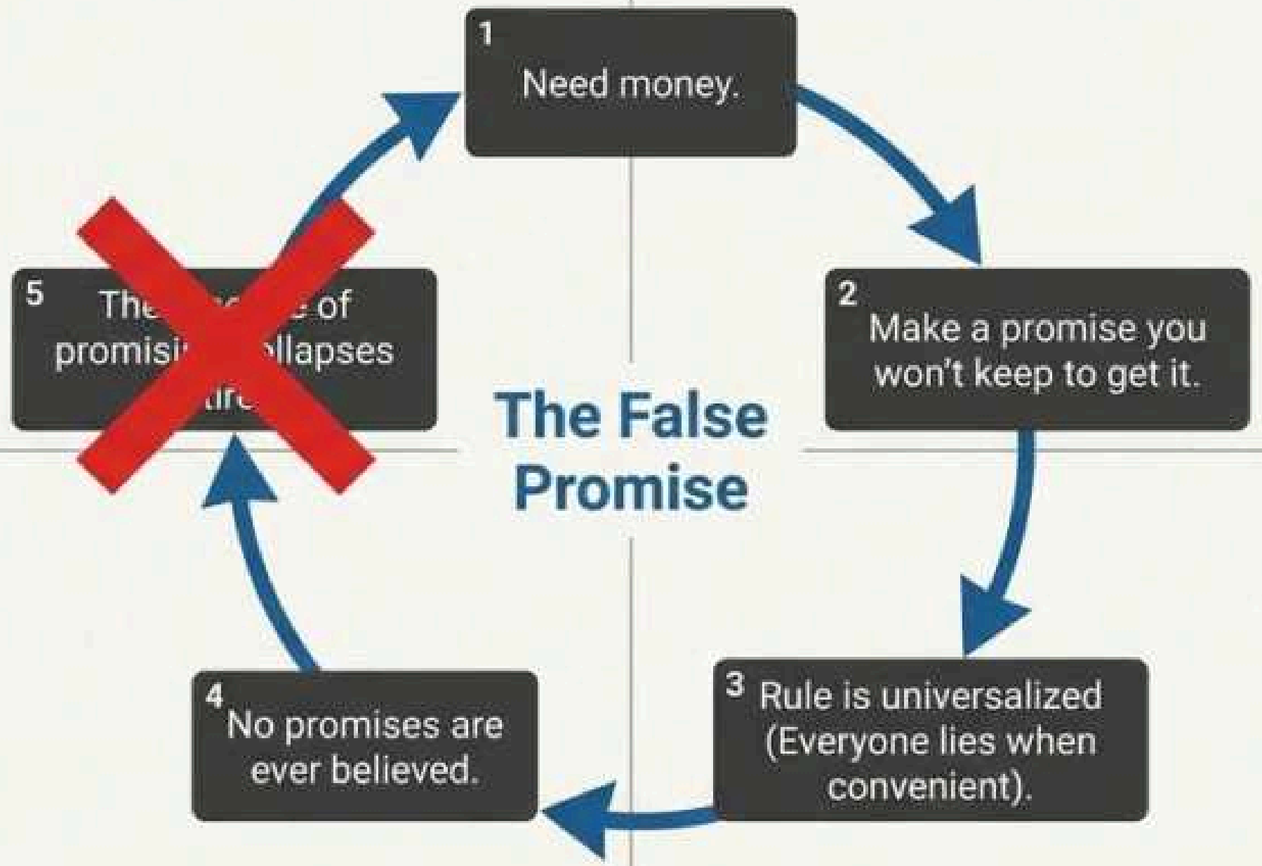
A maxim is simply your underlying principle of action.



"Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to become a universal law."

Gemini Notebook

3.7 THE ANATOMY OF A PERFECT DUTY



Because the maxim logically undermines itself when universalized, false promising is strictly forbidden.

Kant defines this as a **Perfect Duty**—one that allows for absolutely no exceptions.

Gemini Notebook

3.8 IMPERFECT DUTIES AND THE ROOM FOR CHOICE

PERFECT DUTIES

Strict, no exceptions

IMPERFECT DUTIES

Choice in when and how



BENEFICENCE (HELPING OTHERS)



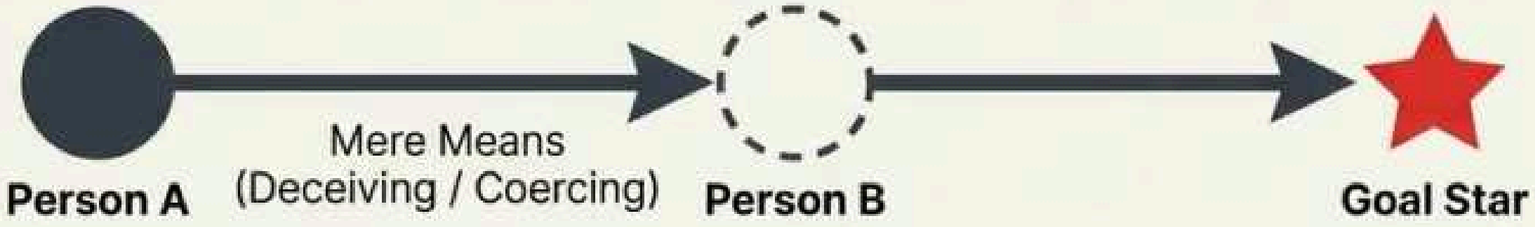
DEVELOPING TALENTS

We cannot rationally will a world in which no one ever helps anyone, because we ourselves sometimes need help. Therefore, we have a duty to help (beneficence), but we retain agency over the application.

Gemini Notebook

3.9 FORMULATION II: HUMANITY

WRONG





The Rule: Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means.

The Insight: People have dignity, not a price. To use someone as a mere means is to treat them in ways they cannot consent to.

Gemini Notebook

3.10 CONSENT AND **MERE MEANS**

THE SURGEON

Scenario: Taking organs from 1 healthy patient to save 5.

Diagnosis: Patient is used as a mere means; never asked; rational agency completely bypassed.

THE TAXI DRIVER & TEACHER

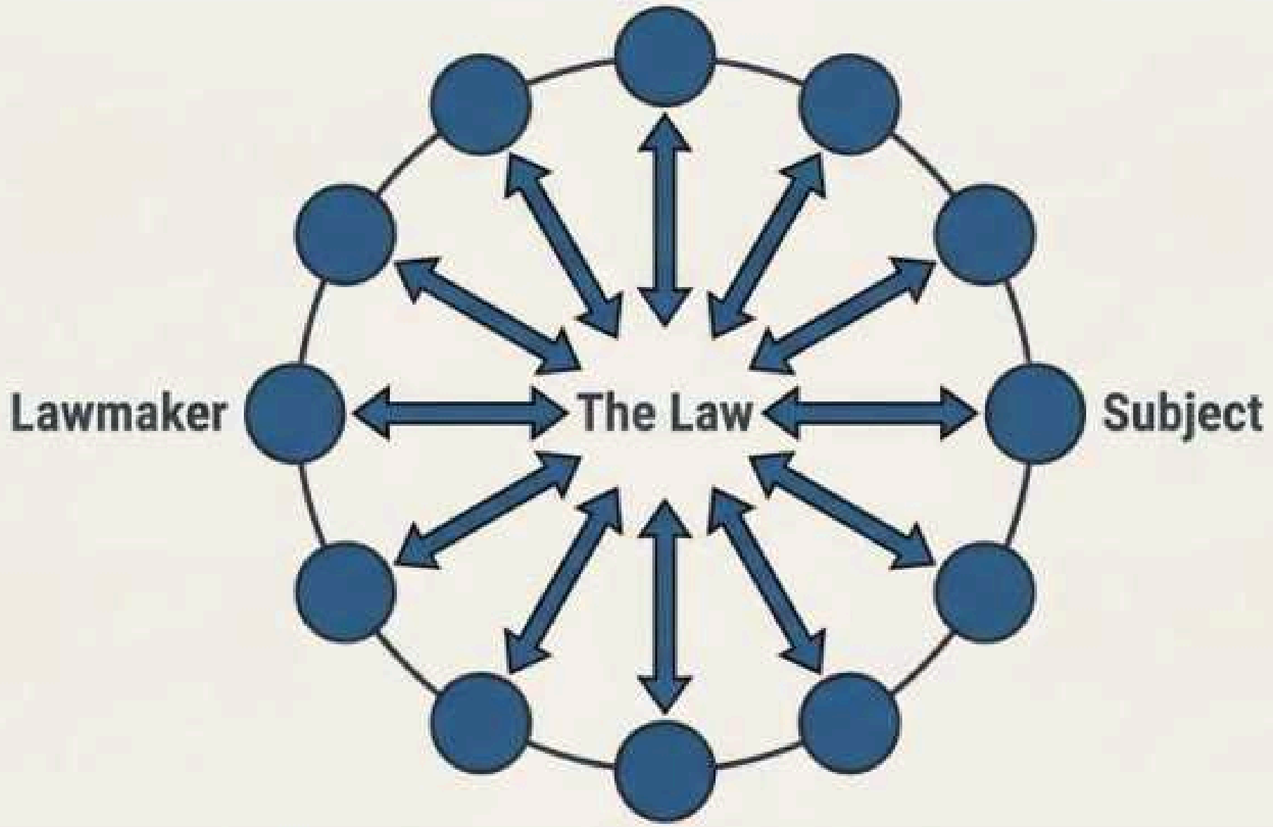
Scenario: Paying for a ride or an education.

Diagnosis: Used as a means, but WITH consent and respect for their rational agency.

We interact and use each other daily, but morality forbids doing so in ways that deny the other's autonomy.

Gemini Notebook

3.11 FORMULATION III: THE KINGDOM OF ENDS



The Rule

Act as a member of an ideal community in which everyone is both lawmaker and subject.

The Foundation

Morality is founded on autonomy—self-government by reason. We are bound by laws we give ourselves as rational beings.

The Legacy

This directly links Kantian ethics to later theories of democracy, consent, and the social contract.

Gemini Notebook

3.12 THE MURDERER AT THE DOOR

A murderer asks where your friend is hiding.

DEFENDERS' INTERPRETATIONS:
Kant meant legal honesty, or the murderer forfeits claims to truth.

KANT'S STANCE (1797):
Do not lie.

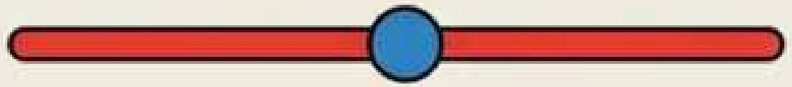
REVISERS' STANCE:
The theory must be revised to allow exceptions for grave cases.

Kant's extreme rigor causes famous trouble. His strict adherence to perfect duties creates profound friction with common moral intuition, leading to centuries of debate.

Gemini Notebook

3.13 SYSTEM ERRORS: CRITIQUES OF KANTIANISM

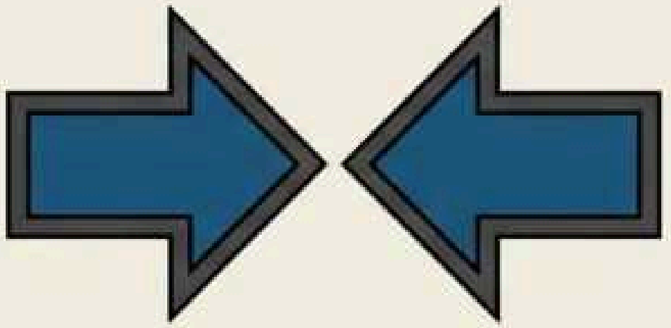
UNIVERSALIZATION FLAWS



Too permissive (cleverly describing a maxim to pass)

Too strict (forbidding harmless acts)

DUTY COLLISIONS



Example: Honesty vs. Loyalty. The system lacks a built-in tiebreaker.

MOTIVE VS. RESULTS

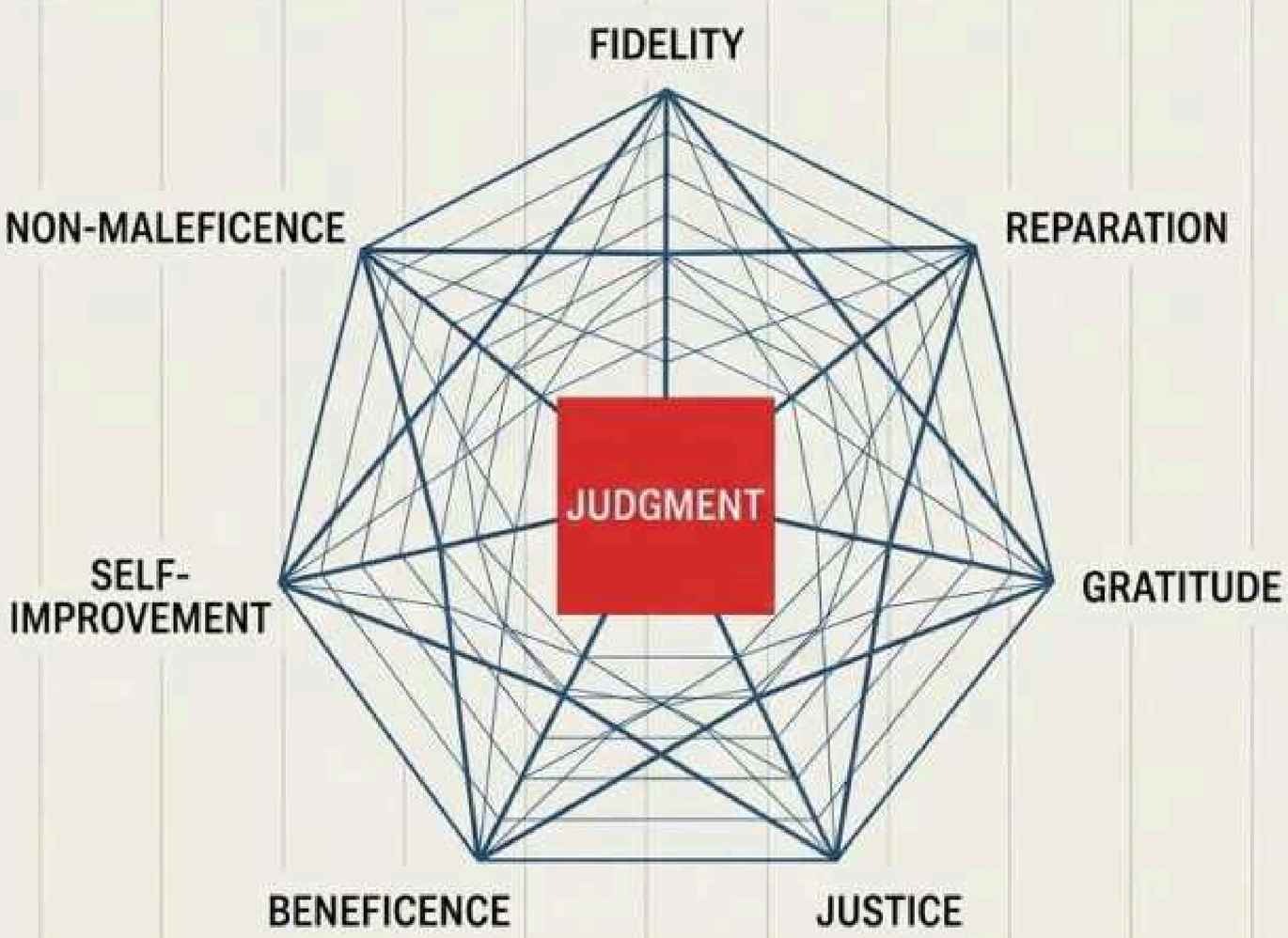


Insisting motive is everything uncomfortably ignores real-world consequences.

Modern Kantians, such as Christine Korsgaard, have actively worked to answer these points and patch these theoretical gaps in the system.

Gemini Notebook

3.14 ROSS'S PRIMA FACIE DUTIES



Context: Sir David Ross, The Right and the Good (1930).

The Shift: A more flexible deontology. Each duty is binding unless outweighed by another.

The Debate: There is no master formula. Critics worry this leaves us with no guidance; defenders say this is just how real morality works.

Gemini Notebook

3.15 RIGHTS AS TRUMPS



THE CONCEPT

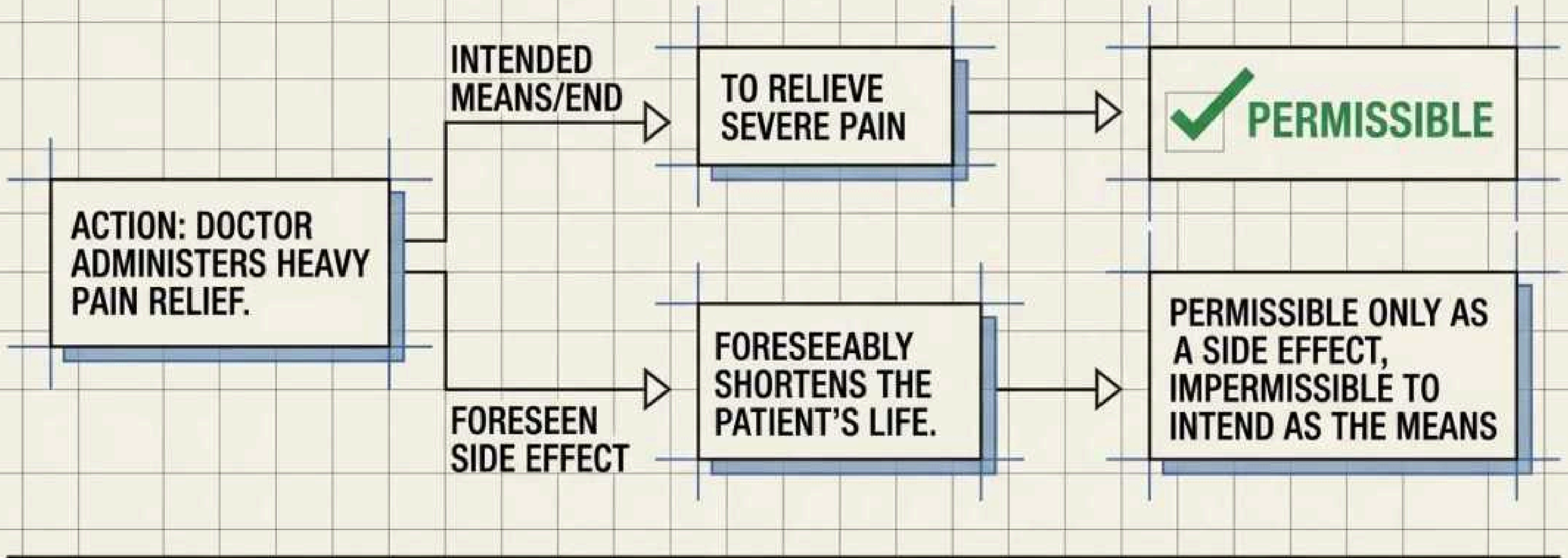
Rights act as ‘trumps’ (Ronald Dworkin’s phrase) against appeals to the general good. A right is a claim others must respect, overriding utilitarian math.

HISTORICAL BLUEPRINT

Grounded in natural rights language of the American Declaration (1776), the French Declaration (1789), and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Gemini Notebook

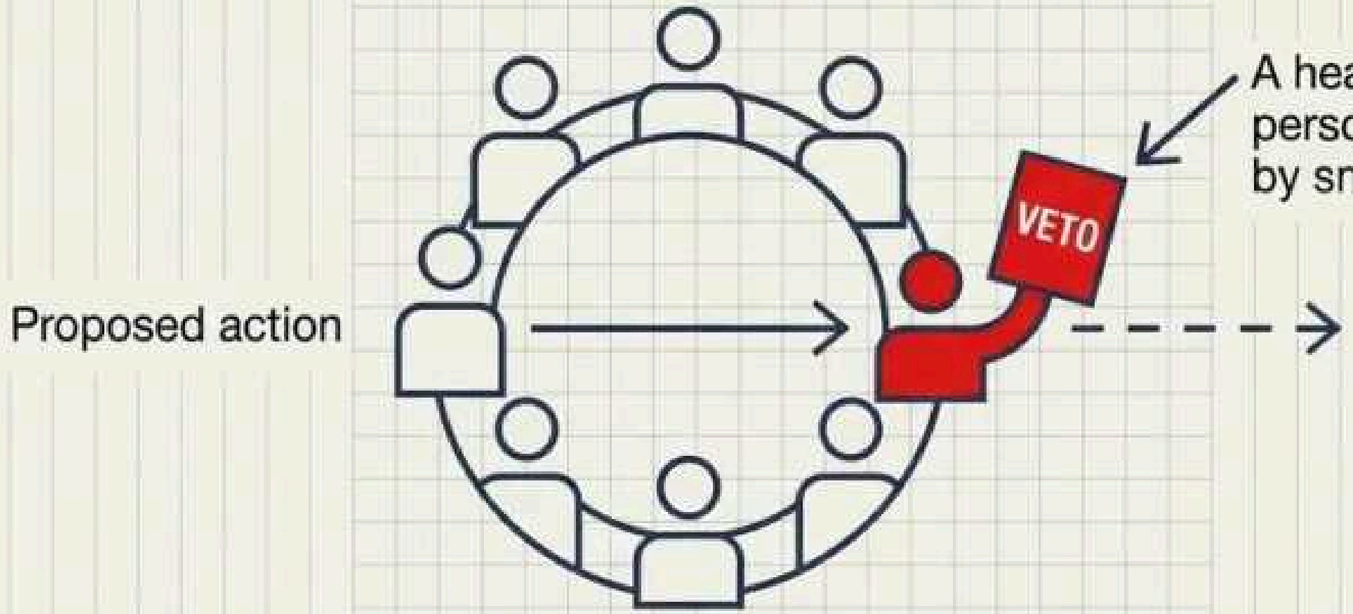
3.16 THE DOCTRINE OF DOUBLE EFFECT



ROOTED IN THOMAS AQUINAS. THE MORAL WEIGHT HINGES ENTIRELY ON THE RAZOR-THIN LINE BETWEEN FORESIGHT AND INTENTION. CRITICS ASK: CAN THIS LINE REALLY BEAR SO MUCH MORAL WEIGHT?

Gemini Notebook

3.17 CONTRACTUALISM AND REASONABLE REJECTION



- **Context:**
  Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998).

- **The Rule:**
  An act is wrong if it would be forbidden by principles that no one could reasonably reject.

- **The Goal:**
  Morality must be justifiable to each individual person, rejecting simple utilitarian made addition.

Gemini Notebook

3.18 EXERCISE: TESTING YOUR MAXIMS

1	Choose a promise you made or a rule you follow.
2	Formulate it as a **Maxim** (I will do [Action], in [Circumstances], for [End]).
3	Will it as a **Universal Law** (Does it logically self-destruct?).
4	Check **Formulation II** (Is anyone being used as a mere means?).

If the rule passes, notice how you know. If your feelings and the formula disagree, you have found the kind of case that moral philosophers work on.

Gemini Notebook