The main question which Kant's moral theory was designed to answer is: '**what is the nature of morality?**' this question can also be put in different ways: '**what is a moral action as contrasted with a non-moral one?**' or again, 'what is the difference between a person who acts morally and one who does not?' Kant believe that this question, or set of questions, could be answered that the key to it lay in distinguishing between **acts done from 'inclination' and acts done from a 'sense of duty'.**
People often indulge in a certain course of action because they are forced to. For instance, if I am waylaid by a thief, I will be forced to turn my money over to him if I have any, or if I refuse, I am forced to suffer the consequences. In such a case, we would not ordinarily describe my actions as being 'voluntary actions', or 'actions done because I wanted to'. Nor would we say that I was 'doing my duty'. In this instance. Not a free agent; I am properly described as not acting either 'inclination' or 'from duty' but rather as 'being compelled to do it.' Hence, it is a requisite of any act being done from 'inclination' or 'duty' **that it be the act of a free agent.**
Now**,** obviously, individuals often free in the above sense - nobody is forcing them to behave in a certain way, or otherwise constraining their behaviour. For instance I am free tonight either to go to a movie or to stay at home and book, or even to continue to type this chapter. In a significant sense is up to me which of these I will do. But which of these *ought* I do? If I have promised my publisher to finish this chapter tonight, then I am under an 'obligation' to continue to work on it. On the other hand matter is not pressing, if there exists no 'demand' on me, we could say that it is a matter of 'taste' or 'inclination' which I should do. I s do that which I want to do, or which it pleases me to do, provided, of course, that no obligation exists which it is my duty to do. Now, be seen from this example, **'inclination' is to be distinguished 'obligation'. An obligation is that which one ought to do despite inclinations to do otherwise.** Once under an obligation, one ought to attempt to fulfil it. If no obligation exists, then it becomes a matter of inclination or of taste which one should do.
Now some philosophers have held that in matters of morality should act upon one's inclinations. He/she should do that act pleases him/her, or which he/she wants to do in those circumstances but Kant strongly rejects such an account of morality. He feels that a **person is acting morality only when he suppresses his/her feelings and inclinations, and does that which he/she is obliged to do**. Thus 'doing one's duty', is doing something which one is not inclined or will do, but which he/she does because he/she recognizes that he/she to do it; an obligation exists and he/she must fulfil it. Thus a person does something merely because he/she is afraid *not* to do it (such as the fear of being imprisoned for not repaying a debt) is not a moral person: nor is a person moral who repays a debt merely because he/she to, or inclines towards doing that rather than something else. It when a person recognizes that he/she *ought* to repay a debt because she has incurred an obligation that he/she is genuinely a moral person. **Thus morality, as Kant sees it, is closely bound up with one's duties and obligations.**
One further point must be made before we can proceed to elements of Kant's moral theory. It is important to distinguish which are 'in accord with duty' from those done 'from duty', as Kant puts it. The former are not moral acts, but the latter are. For in most parents are inclined to take care of their children; they may inclined because they are fond of them, or because they fear police action if they neglect them. But anyone who takes care of one's children for these reasons is not acting morally. One is acting 'in accord with duty'. One would be acting from duty only if one recognize that one has a special obligation to one's children because they are one's children. A person who understands the nature of this obligation and acts upon it is moral; otherwise one is not. Kant explains brilliantly in the following passage from his *Theory of Ethics.*

I omit here all actions which are already recognized as inconsistent with duty, although they may be useful for this or that purpose, for with these the question whether they are done *from a duty* cannot arise at all, since they even conflict with it. I also set aside those actions which really conform to duty, but to which men have no direct inclination, performing them because they are impelled thereto by some other inclination. For in this case we can distinguish whether the action which agrees with duty is *from duty* or from a selfish view. It is much harder to make distinction when the action accords with duty, and the subject has besides a *direct* inclination to it. For example, it is always a matter of duty that a dealer should not overcharge an inexperienced purchaser; and wherever there is much commerce the prudent tradesman does not overcharge, but keeps a fixed price for everyone, so that a child buys of him as well as any other. Men are thus *honestly* served; but this is not enough to make us believe that tradesman has so acted from duty and from principles of honesty; his own advantage required it; it is out of the question in this case to suppose that he might besides have a direct inclination our of the buyers so that, as it were, from love he should give no advantage to one over another. Accordingly, the action was done neither from duty nor from direct inclination, but merely a selfish view.
On the other hand, it is a duty to maintain one's life; and in addition, everyone has also a direct

inclination to do so. But on this account the often-anxious care which most men take for it has no intrinsic worth, and their maxim no moral import. They preserve their life *as duty requires*, no doubt, but not *because duty requires.* On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away the relish for life; if the unfortunate one, strong in mind, indignant at his fate, rather than desponding or dejected wishes for death, and yet preserves his life without loving it - from inclination or fear but from duty - then his maxim has a moral worth.

As can be seen from the above quotation, Kant differs sharply from the utilitarians in stressing that the **essence of morality is to be found in the motive from which an act is done.** All such motives reduced to one - keeps promises by accident, or who repays debts to avoid punishment or who feels that it is to his/ her who feels that it is to his/her advantage in the long run to do so, is not moral. He/she is moral if and only if he/she understands that he/she must keep promises and repay debts because its he/her duty to do so - regardless of the consequences which doing so or not doing so will bring. Thus, a good person is a person of 'good will', i.e., a person who acts from a sense of duty. As Kant puts it in a famous phrase, 'nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a good will.'
In criticizing utilitarianism for confusing the results of people's actions with the motives for committing such actions, Kant develops a distinction between **'prudential action'** and **'moral action'**. A person who repays debts because he/she fears the legal consequences acts from sense of prudence; he/she is not a moral person. He/she would be moral only if he/she acted from the sense that he/she has incurred a monetary obligation and thus is 'duty bound' to repay it Kant's criticism and utilitarianism is contained in the following passage:

A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition, that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favour of any inclination, nay, even of the sum total of all inclinations. Even if it should happen, that, owing to special disfavour of fortune, or the niggardly provision of a step motherly nature, this will should wholly lack the power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add to nor take away anything from this value...let the question be, for example: may I when in distress make a promise with the intention not to keep it? I readily distinguish here between the two significations which the question may have: whether it is prudent or whether it is right, to make a false promise? The former may undoubtedly often by the case. I see clearly that is not enough to extricate myself from the present difficulty by means of this subterfuge, but it must be well considered whether there may not hereafter spring from this lie much greater inconvenience than that from which I now free myself, and, as with all my supposed cunning, the consequences cannot be so easily foreseen by the credit once lost may be much more injurious to me than any mischief which I seek to avoid at present, it should be considered whether it would not be more prudent to act herein according to a universal maxim and to make it a habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it. But is soon clear to me that such a maxim will still be based on the fear of consequences. Now it is a wholly different thing to be truthful from duty, and to be so from apprehension of injurious consequences.

In short, we may summarize Kant's answer to the question: 'what is a moral action as contrasted with a non-moral one?' as follows: a moral action is one done from a respect for duty, and correspondingly, a moral person is a person who acts from duty, not from inclination or even with accord with duty.
With the above distinctions, Kant has outlined the sphere of morality for us. He has indicated the difference between behaving morally and not behaving morally; but his outline does not complete his system of morals. A person may still not know what his/her duty will be in a given situation. Is there any test for determining what one's duty will be in a particular set of circumstances? Kant answers that there is. Since human beings are rational creatures they ought to behave in a rational way, and for Kant this means that one ought always to behaves if one's course of conduct were to become a universal law. That is, every action must be judged in the light of how it would appear if it were to be a universal code of behaviour. This is why lying, even if it is expedient, cannot be accepted as moral under any circumstances; for if we were to regard lying as a universal law to which people ought to conform, we could see that morality would be impossible. On this point, Kant writes as follows:

The shortest way, however, and an unerring one, to discover the answer to the question whether a lying promise is consistent with duty, is to ask myself, should I be content that my maxim (to extricate myself, from difficulty by a false promise) should hold good as a universal law, for myself as well as for others? And should I be able to say to myself, 'everyone may make a deceitful promise when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot otherwise extricate himself?' then I presently

become aware that while I can will the lie, I can by no means will that lying should be my fu ture actions to those who would not believe this allegation, or if they over-hastily did so, would pay me back in my own coin. Hence my maxim, as soon as it should be made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself. I do not, therefore, need any far-reaching penetration to discern what I have to do in order that my will may be morally good. Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for all its contingencies, I only ask myself: canst thou also will that thy maxim should be a universal law? If not, then it must be rejected and that not because of a disadvantage accruing from it to myself or even to others, but because it cannot enter as a principle into a possible universal legislation, and reason extorts from me immediate respect for such legislation.