

The prohibition on 'using persons merely as means' is one of Immanuel Kant's best-known and most influential ideas. It is widely understood as meaning that there is an absolute moral limit to how we may use persons in the service of specific ends, no matter how desirable or otherwise important these ends may be. Within Kantianism and Kant scholarship, however, the idea that we ought not use persons 'merely as means' has a remarkably awkward status. Kantian ethicists either regard the prohibition as philosophically so problematic that it is better left to the side, or they interpret it in such a way that it does not add anything distinctive beyond the general Kantian idea that we ought to act on universalizable maxims. In this paper I aim to develop a plausible conception of what it is to use someone merely as a means, and I argue that this account has both interpretive and philosophical advantages over other interpretations.