

## On maxims and principles

Are there significant/ worthwhile distinctions to be made here? It's not an issue that I've thought about, so some very quick untutored reflections:

- A maxim is a rule for action (Kantian-like?). It is highly normative and directive. It tells one what to do under certain kinds of conditions or in certain kinds of situation, which may be quite general. Once a situation of a certain kind presents, the maxim comes into play, with no room for manoeuvre.
- A principle stands further back. It is 'all things being equal' idea, that has some recommendatory force but which is much more open (than a maxim). The individual is still left to puzzle things out. After all (Isaiah Berlin and all that) principles can clash.
- Maxims are focused on human action. Principles have a wider scope and context: while still possessing an action element, they have a wider horizon; a wider context.
- Maxims are directions; Principles are considerations.
- A principle could be a meta-principle: eg 'Matters of justice should supervene matters of freedom'. There is no direct equivalent for maxims.
- Maxims are the practical playing out of principles in bounded settings.
- So both maxim and principle contain an 'oughtness' but at different levels.
  - 'Be kind to all animals in all settings' is a maxim.
  - 'Animals are deserving of rights' is a principle.

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