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# The Normative Source of Kantian Hypothetical Imperatives

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## Abstract

This paper offers a critique of Christine Korsgaard's interpretation of Kantian instrumental reason. Korsgaard understands Kantian hypothetical imperatives to share a common normative source with the categorical imperative – namely self-legislating, human rational agency. However, her reading of Kantian hypothetical imperatives is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, Korsgaard's agent-centred approach renders incoherent Kant's analytic-synthetic division. Secondly, by minimising the dualistic framework of Kant's practical philosophy the dialectical character of practical rationality is lost: norms of instrumental reasoning therefore become confused with those of moral reasoning. Thirdly, this in turn curtails the distinct critical authority of pure practical rationality over instrumental choice. The paper argues that we need to understand the normativity of instrumental rationality through the lens of Kant's dualisms. An alternative interpretation is offered which highlights how the norms of hypothetical imperatives appeal to standards of theoretical cognition and practical efficiency rather than the self-legislative demands of pure practical reason.

**Keywords:** instrumental rationality; hypothetical imperatives; pure practical reasoning; categorical imperative; Kant; Korsgaard; dualism

Kant defines instrumental reason in terms of hypothetical imperatives which recommend adoption of the means necessary to an agent's end. More specifically, he states in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* that '[h]ypothetical imperatives declare a possible action to be practically necessary as a means to the attainment of something else that one wills (or that one may will)'.<sup>1</sup> According to Kant, hypothetical imperatives are analytic propositions whereas the categorical imperative is an *a priori*, synthetic principle.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary commentators often invoke Kant's theory of hypothetical imperatives to pinpoint defects within the volitional picture of agency provided by empiricist conceptions of instrumental reason. Since Bernard Williams' seminal paper, 'Internal and External Reasons', many believe that in order for practical reasons to be both normative and motivational they must be linked to an agent's existing subjective motivational set.<sup>3</sup> For many, the Humean picture of instrumental reason is

said to best fulfil this internalist requirement, whereas Kant's account of practical rationality is rejected on grounds of its supposed endorsement of external rather than internal reasons. However, in 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason'<sup>4</sup> Christine Korsgaard argues that Kantian principles of practical reason can satisfy the internalist requirement through Kant's account of human rational agency. Korsgaard contends that hypothetical and categorical imperatives share a common normative source in human rational agency, thus implying the unity of practical reason. Indeed, the claim is that Kantian hypothetical imperatives presuppose a kind of moral commitment traditionally associated with the categorical imperative. This moralized account of instrumental reason purports to show two things: first, Kantian norms of practical reason are *internal* not *external* reasons; second, this Kantian position as stated offers an attractive riposte of empiricist models of instrumental reason and their troubling neutrality towards the moral value of agents' adopted ends.

This paper argues that we should not accept Korsgaard's reading for two main reasons: first, I argue that the dualism in Kant's practical philosophy is necessary for exegetical consistency. Second, defending Kant's dualistic framework has normative significance insofar as it prepares for the critical authority of moral reasoning over and above instrumental rationality. Ultimately, it is important to revisit Korsgaard's approach to show that should her interpretation be accepted, we risk misunderstanding the distinctive power of the categorical imperative's *constraint* on the subjective, self-regarding focus implicit in the instrumental use of reason. In defending Kant's dualism in the practical domain my work finds allegiance with contemporary critiques of constructivist Kantianism, found in the work of John Hare, Patrick Kain, and Karl Ameriks.<sup>5</sup> These three authors have correctly argued that both Kant's metaphysics as well as his dualism are crucial for an accurate understanding of his practical philosophy. However, despite my overall sympathy with their non-constructivist reading, my interpretation seeks to defend Kant's dualistic framework without the religious connotations endorsed by these three commentators.<sup>6</sup>

To support my principal arguments, my reading of Kantian hypothetical imperatives departs from Korsgaard's interpretation on two major points. First, instrumental practical reason's normative source is a combination of standards of practical efficacy as well as good *theoretical* cognition. Aspects of theoretical reason contained in Kantian hypothetical imperatives have been inadequately explored, in part because the unity of practical reason tends to be assumed despite its inconsistency with Kant's dualistic philosophical framework. Second, prudential or skilful normative standards of instrumental reason are independent from the categorical imperative.<sup>7</sup> I claim that Kant's account of desire presupposes rational

capacities that are not to be confused with rational norms of moral reasoning.

Sections I and II examine Korsgaard's reading of Kantian instrumental reason. I show that her worry about motivational scepticism and related agent-centred analysis of rational principles incur several exegetical problems. These include confusing the analytic-synthetic distinction as well as conflating instrumental and pure practical reason. Sections III and IV defend Kant's dualism between moral and instrumental reason by exposing how norms of empirical and theoretical cognition contribute to the normativity of instrumental reason. This illustrates how, unlike moral reasoning, instrumental willing presupposes a stance of openness and receptivity towards the external world. Section V shows how the use of instrumental reason towards specific anthropocentric ends leads to a conflicted dynamic with the objective moral law of pure practical reason. This supports the claim that principle of moral reason has a critical authority over and above instrumental reason.

### I. Korsgaard's Reading

According to Kant, the principles of instrumental and moral reason take an imperatival form. He writes,

All imperatives are expressed by an '*ought*'. By this they mark the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which is not necessarily determined by this law by virtue of its subjective constitution (the relation of necessitation). They say that something would be good to do or to leave undone; only they say it to a will which does not always do a thing because it has been informed that this is a good thing to do.<sup>8</sup>

Rational principles affect human agents through their characteristic 'oughtness', necessity, or 'to-be-doneness'. Both hypothetical and categorical imperatives share this prescriptive quality. On a conventional reading, reason's prescriptivity is explicated with reference to Kant's dualistic philosophical system.<sup>9</sup> Humans are only imperfectly rational given our unavoidable sensible features. This means that principles of practical reason do not in general exercise full control over the human will. Moreover, Kant stipulates that though all imperatives have practical necessity, ones of skill and prudence exert only *subjective* necessity whereas the categorical imperative has *objective* necessity. The former imperatives are applicable to an agent given particular subjective ends, while the latter imperative pertains to all rational beings irrespective of their particular subjective ends. Already this signals that the normativity

of instrumental and moral reason is both different and separate based on the divergent character of their necessity.

Korsgaard's interpretation departs from this more traditional reading in significant respects. Korsgaard contends that moral practical reason grounds the normativity of instrumental reason.<sup>10</sup> She reaches this conclusion through two interpretive strategies which I explain in more detail below. First, she focuses on the common practical necessity and motivational force of the imperativ form; second, she emphasizes how both hypothetical and categorical imperatives are constitutive of human autonomous rational agency. At root, Korsgaard hopes to provide a moralized account of instrumental reason that complements her commitment to a liberal conception of the autonomous agent.

For Korsgaard, Kant's primary question in the *Groundwork* is how *any* imperative motivates agents to act. Specifically, Korsgaard assumes that Kant tackles this question from the perspective of one fundamentally concerned about motivational scepticism; his analysis of all imperatives – be they of skill, prudence, or morality – allegedly begins from an inquiry into how normative principles of reason manage to 'grip' an agent. As mentioned above, Bernard Williams' influential version of internalism outlines how normative reasons must correspond to an agent's subjective motivational set in order to have motivational force. This set may consist of existing beliefs, desires, or conative components; independent of these subjective elements normative reasons have no power to motivate an agent to act. Reasons are normative and have motivational force not by virtue of their intrinsic 'rightness', but because they become attached to an already existing set of subjective commitments. Internalism therefore appears to solve the problem of reason's motivating force and normativity without invoking any metaphysical frameworks outside the individual agent. But in so doing, Williams argues that we would need to endorse a Humean – rather than Kantian – picture of human motivation. Moreover, instrumental rationality would be the paradigmatic example of motivational internalism since the existence of such reasons is parasitic on the adoption of a subjective desiderative end.

Korsgaard accepts the force of the internalist position but she is further preoccupied with deflecting the charge by some that Kant has an externalist conception of practical reason.<sup>11</sup> Korsgaard argues that normative principles of Kantian reason have motivational force by virtue of the necessary constitutive features of practical rational agency itself. Motivating Korsgaard's concern with the internalist/externalist debate is a deeper concern with moral scepticism: if moral principles are presupposed in our everyday use of instrumental rationality, moral reasons then must be both internal and motivating reasons.

## THE NORMATIVE SOURCE OF KANTIAN HYPOTHETICAL IMPERATIVES

For Korsgaard, to will or be volitionally motivated towards an end necessarily involves the self-application of rational norms. We are first-personally committed to an end if we will it; such willing necessarily involves the ‘inward, volitional act of prescribing the end along with the means it requires to yourself’.<sup>12</sup> In the case of means-end reasoning we apply the *instrumental principle* – the rational normative command that ‘if you will the ends, you must will the means’. In other words, Korsgaard argues that in addition to subjective volitional commitment, essential to all practical motivation is the recognition that normative rational principles apply unconditionally to all agents (as well as oneself).<sup>13</sup> To be consistent with the internalist requirement, Korsgaard believes we *subjectively endorse* these normative, rational principles – these principles are *internal* rather than *external* reasons.<sup>14</sup>

On this account the first-personal endorsement of rational principles we give to ourselves amounts to a process by which we confer objective goodness onto a subjective end. This differs from Kant’s own abstract description of hypothetical imperatives. Other than the recognition that humans employ instrumental reason towards broad ends involving technical skill and prudence, Kant remains silent on how individuals define goodness or value in terms of specific ends. But for Korsgaard to will an end implies that an individual does not simply desire or will an object, but actively examines and endorses the *substantive value* of that end in accordance with a rational principle, where we can judge this end as a good thing to will. To support this claim Korsgaard must inject the instrumental principle with substantive, evaluative content. She states, ‘the normative force of the instrumental principle does seem to depend on our having a way to say to ourselves of some ends that there are reasons for them, that they are good’.<sup>15</sup>

This leads to Korsgaard’s second interpretive strategy. When goodness is conferred onto an object of our choice, we see how this act of choice involves our giving ourselves rational principles as relevant laws of choice and action. We subsequently recognize that what we in fact value is our *rational agency* as that through which we determine the object’s goodness. For Korsgaard the goodness of the means is not analytically contained within the willing of an end; rather, the search for the means to an end leads to a regress towards the normative features which are constitutive of rational agency:

[F]or the instrumental principle to provide you with a reason, you must think that the fact that you will an end *is a reason* for the end. It’s not exactly that there has to be a *further* reason; it’s just that you must take the act of your own will to be normative for you. And of course this cannot mean merely that you are *going* to pursue the end. It means that your willing the end gives it a norma-

tive status for you, that your willing the end in a sense makes it good. The instrumental principle can only be normative if we take ourselves to be capable of giving laws to ourselves – or, in Kant’s own phrase, if we take our own wills to be *legislative*.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, Korsgaard’s argument is as follows: the instrumental principle articulates how, when we are volitionally committed to an end which we deem subjectively valuable, we are also committed to the means towards that end. But this leads us to a further regress from the act of conferring normative value onto an end to the normativity and value of self-legislative, autonomous rational agency. In willing the means to our end we recognize that what we actually normatively endorse is the objective rational principle which expresses our self-legislating, rational agency.

In the *Sources of Normativity* Korsgaard inverts the order of this regress argument:

The hypothetical imperative tells us that if we will an end, we have a reason to will the means to that end. This imperative [...] is not based on the recognition of a normative fact or truth, but simply on the nature of the will. To will an end, rather than just wishing for it or wanting it, is to set yourself to be its cause. And to set yourself to be its cause is to set yourself to take the available means to get it. So the argument goes from the nature of the rational will to a principle which describes a procedure according to which such a will must operate and from there to an application of that principle which yields a conclusion about what one has reason to do.<sup>17</sup>

Here, Korsgaard begins with an analysis of autonomous agency and rational will and moves to instrumental reasoning. When one examines further why we value rational agency, it is because we value our autonomy and how we as rational agents legislate and create laws for ourselves. Thus, the means to our ends are normative only insofar as they reflect the normativity of what it is to be an *autonomous rational agent*. Based on how the will functions, rational agents automatically choose and confer value upon subjectively chosen ends according to the criteria of objective, self-given laws.<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of which argumentative strategy she ultimately endorses, Korsgaard’s analysis of instrumental reason hinges on what she views as the constitutive features of Kantian rational agency. The nature of rational agency means that maxims aim to conform to the instrumental principle.<sup>19</sup> This is because principles of practical reason ‘do not represent external *restrictions* on our actions, whose power to motivate us is therefore inexplicable, but instead *describe* the procedures involved in autonomous willing’.



Moreover, ‘they also function as normative or guiding principles, because in following these procedures we are guiding ourselves’.<sup>20</sup> Based on Korsgaard’s constitutive account, all practical principles – and therefore *both* hypothetical and categorical imperatives – are at once descriptions of the procedures of our rational agency, as well as prescriptive standards of how our rational agency should function.

Conventionally, Kantian autonomy is read as identical with the good will which accords with the moral law.<sup>21</sup> Kant writes in the *Groundwork*:

An absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative, will therefore, being undetermined in respect of all objects, contain only the *form* of *willing*, and that as autonomy. In other words, the fitness of the maxim of every good will to make itself a universal law is itself the sole law which the will of every rational being spontaneously imposes on itself without basing it on any impulsion or interest.<sup>22</sup>

If Korsgaard accepts what Kant says here, her claim that the instrumental principle requires us to ‘give oneself a law’<sup>23</sup> must mean that instrumental reasoning in fact necessitates individuals to behave in a morally autonomous sense, typically associated with categorical willing. The ‘mature Kantian view’, writes Korsgaard, ‘traces both instrumental reason and moral reason to a common normative source: the autonomous self-government of the rational agent’.<sup>24</sup> Autonomous self-government therefore describes and binds *all* agents, whether their endorsed ends are moral and objective or instrumental and subjective. If this is true, instrumental reasons – and more importantly moral reasons – would be internal reasons that are both normative and motivational since they reflect how it is to be a being that wills maxims as self-given laws.

Korsgaard’s interpretive analysis of Kantian instrumental reason therefore appears capable of responding neatly to both the charge of externalism against Kant’s account of practical reason and the threat of moral scepticism. The constitutive features of unconditioned human autonomy answer questions surrounding the normative and motivational force common to both instrumental and moral reasons. Moreover, Korsgaard’s account of Kantian instrumental reason reflects her general desire to ground all willing – whether hypothetical or categorical – in the moral requirements of autonomous rational agency, thus responding to the moral sceptic. Even when we reason instrumentally, we engage in our capacity for legislative moral autonomy: on Korsgaard’s account the latter is simply a constitutive feature of our rational agency in general. It is precisely this agent-centred focus and regress strategy which allows Korsgaard to claim that hypothetical imperatives require the legislative demands of the categorical imperative.

## II. Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

As Korsgaard sees it, the nature of Kantian agency – of the autonomy which is constitutive of the will – implies that individual maxims are automatically willed as universal law. This suggests that Korsgaard equates the normativity of all practical reasons with the norms of *morality*. ‘To say that moral laws are the laws of autonomy is not to say that our autonomy somehow requires us to *restrict* ourselves in accordance with them’, Korsgaard writes, ‘but rather to say that they are constitutive of autonomous action. Kant thinks that in so far as we are autonomous, we just *do* will our maxims as *universal* laws’.<sup>25</sup> The categorical imperative is not a law that we may or may not apply; rather, Korsgaard claims that the universality requirement of the moral law is contained within *all* maxim construction – even in the non-moral pursuit of subjectively desired ends. If you are a sort of being who acts on maxims, you are therefore a rational being that always *makes*, and acts in accordance with, universal moral law.

At root Korsgaard’s underlying worry about a self-standing principle of instrumental rationality seems to be the potentially morally indigestible consequences which may follow from it. On the view she wishes to challenge, a principle of instrumental rationality can function independently of the universality requirements of the moral law. To use an example given by G. A. Cohen, it would be like saying that the Mafioso who adopts an end to kill someone is in some way committed to carrying out the means.<sup>26</sup> For the sake of *consistency*, this action would be both normative and rational; and the Mafioso is not *necessarily* required to test their maxim for its moral permissibility. Korsgaard’s moralizing conclusion tries to avoid these harmful consequences: if all rational principles lead to the constitutive features of morally autonomous rational agency, then the Mafioso who adopts this end would automatically will this maxim to kill as universal law, and would be subsequently required to abandon such an objectionable end.<sup>27</sup> Conjoining moral endorsement of rational principles with subjective volitional commitment seemingly avoids any extreme detachment of instrumental reason from moral assessment, and allows these moralized evaluations to be transferred from the means to the end itself.<sup>28</sup>

But to address this worry of detachment through Korsgaard’s strategy does seem problematic for two reasons. First, her reading cannot make coherent sense of the *Groundwork*’s analytic-synthetic distinction. This should indicate that her account of the normative source of instrumental reason is mistaken. Second, she conflates together prudential and moral reasoning and therefore reduces the full moral force of the categorical imperative. The first problem I address in this section, the latter I discuss

after advancing my own interpretive account of the normative source of hypothetical imperatives.

Korsgaard's agent-centred interpretation rests on a generous understanding of analyticity. Kant argues that hypothetical imperatives are analytic,

for in my willing of an object as an effect there is already conceived the causality of myself as an acting cause – that is, the use of means; and from the concept of willing an end the imperative merely extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end.<sup>29</sup>

On a straightforward reading of this passage the means are analytically contained within willing the end. But Korsgaard adopts a different strategy: she extends the analyticity of hypothetical imperatives to incorporate the constituents of 'agency'. She alleges that the constituent features of rational agency – not the predicate, 'willing the end' – perform the analytic work in Kantian instrumental reason. If we analyse the constituents of 'rational agency', we will be able to extract the claim 'ought to ensure that if she has an end she takes the necessary means to it'.<sup>30</sup> Korsgaard claims that

[t]o will an end just is to will to cause or realize the end, hence to will to take the means to the end. This is the sense in which the [instrumental] principle is analytic. The instrumental principle is *constitutive* of an act of the will. If you do not follow it, you are not willing the end at all.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the normativity of instrumental reason relies on what it means to be an *agent* who wills rather than what it means to *will* an end.<sup>32</sup> Korsgaard understands the analytic claim, 'if you will the ends you necessarily will the means', to be an essential part of the analysis of 'rational agent'.<sup>33</sup> Following from this analytic truth she suggests that rational principles – be they instrumental or moral – apply *unconditionally* to all agents.

In order for this to make sense we would have to grant Korsgaard a looser, non-Kantian notion of analytic truth which claims 'that it is analytic that any agent ought to do what *rational* agents do'.<sup>34</sup> Korsgaard seems to have this non-Kantian account in mind, as she writes:

The model suggests that the normativity of the *ought* expresses a demand that we should emulate more perfect rational beings (possibly including our own noumenal selves) whose own conduct is not guided by normative principles at all, but instead *describable in a set of logical truths*.<sup>35</sup>

She echoes this thought in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*:

[S]ince we still *do* make choices and have the attitude that what we choose is good in spite of our incapacity to find the unconditioned condition of the object's goodness in this (empirical) regress upon the conditions, it must be that we are supposing that rational choice itself *makes* its object good.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it is possible to derive the moral law analytically if we were to adopt Korsgaard's conception of analytic truth. If we were to abstract from the material and conditional nature of hypothetical imperatives, we would be eventually left with the unconditional form of the categorical imperative, especially since both are contained within an analysis of the constitutive features of autonomous rational agency.<sup>37</sup> 'Rationality, as Kant conceives it', she writes, 'is the human plight that gives rise to the necessity of making free choices – not one of the options which we might choose or reject'.<sup>38</sup>

We should be hesitant about adopting Korsgaard's looser conception of analytic truth. I take it that Korsgaard's regress strategy relies on a notion of analyticity as one of logical entailment. This may cohere with some remarks Kant makes in the first *Critique*,<sup>39</sup> but it cannot be said to reflect Kant's narrower definition of analyticity in the *Groundwork*. There analytic truth is defined as strict logical containment: meaning that the predicate is contained in its subject. 'Willing an end' contains the concept that one 'ought to will the necessary means';<sup>40</sup> the adoption of an empirical end entails the means towards that end. More specifically, willing the means – or a *hypothetical imperative* – is analytically contained within willing the end. By contrast the categorical imperative is an *a priori*, synthetic proposition that is 'concerned, not with the reason for performing the act of will, but with the cause which produces the object'.<sup>41</sup> Kant's instrumental principle is analytic insofar as it applies only *if* you have adopted an end; in other words, the applicability of the principle is *conditional* on that adopted end. By implication, the instrumental principle acquires its practical content entirely from the adoption of a desired end, not the meaning or constituents of agency: without that end, *the instrumental principle would have no evaluative, material, or practical content*. And more importantly, the analyticity of the instrumental principle relies on one willing an end *whether or not* its material content is judged good or bad from the perspective of morality or self-legislating rational agency.

Kant's main theoretical concern in the *Groundwork*, and indeed throughout his practical philosophy, is to show how synthetic principles, such as the moral law, are possible. This is particularly since the moral law cannot be derived from any empirical intuition. Kant therefore does not share Korsgaard's basic points of departure: it is doubtful that Kant is

similarly worried about practical reason's motivational grip on agents, nor is he preoccupied with disproving moral scepticism.<sup>42</sup> By virtue of its conditioned reliance on the empirical world for practical content hypothetical imperatives are fundamentally less problematic to account for than the categorical imperative.<sup>43</sup> Kant seems to set aside the principle of instrumental reason as a straightforward principle which demands no extra philosophical manoeuvring;<sup>44</sup> the brunt of the analytic work is shouldered by the adoption of a subjectively willed end. Since hypothetical imperatives are analytic, instrumental reason must have a conditioned as opposed to an unconditioned normative source.

### III. Theoretical Sources of Instrumental Reason's Normativity

Korsgaard endorses a wide reading of analyticity because she hopes to avoid the synthetic *a priori*. At root this is to evade Kant's dualistic framework in his practical philosophy – a common move since Rawls' dismissal of Kant's dualisms in *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>45</sup> However, these dualisms play a crucial role in Kant's practical philosophy. To recognize this we must understand two things: first, that instrumental reason shares much with theoretical reason; second, moral reasoning must be independent from instrumental reason in order to be able to exercise critical authority over it. We will see this more fully if the theoretically rational aspects of instrumental reason are explored.

Through his dualisms Kant legitimizes reason in *both* its theoretical and practical use and in turn, he carves out a sphere of instrumental practical reason which is neither pure practical reason nor pure theoretical cognition, but somewhere in between. For Kant instrumental reason is 'practical' in the sense that through its intentionality some kind of change is produced in the phenomenal world. However, instrumental rationality is connected more closely to theoretical reason than pure practical reason in many respects and therefore cannot be conflated with the moral legislation of the latter. Embedded within instrumental desires or impulses are aspects of theoretical cognition which also form part of the normativity of instrumental rationality. First, desiderative ends already presuppose as well as integrate a conceptual grasp of the sensible object in question. Second, the means-end connection – where human possibility or powers are evaluated and judged – presupposes the active synthesis of disparate empirical experience and concepts into laws of nature.

Common among both intellectual components is the use and application of *theoretical* cognition in order to formulate situationally appropriate principles of practical action. Theoretical reason therefore becomes 'practical' when it is animated by the faculty of desire and subsequently outlines means and ends based on possible experience. In a crucial passage from the second *Critique* Kant writes,

[w]hether the causality of the will is adequate for the reality of the objects or not *is left to the theoretical principles of reason to estimate*, this being an investigation into the possibility of objects of volition, *the intuition of which is accordingly no component of the practical problem.*<sup>46</sup>

This suggests that instrumental reason is theoretical knowledge animated by impulse or desire, resulting in the generation and execution of guiding practical rules. As Beck correctly identifies, Kant suggests that instrumental reason should be understood as ‘theoretical reason which is only extrinsically and contingently practical’.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, the moral law as an unconditional *practical* law is discoverable by ‘a reason that is intrinsically practical’.<sup>48</sup>

Overall Kantian instrumental reason integrates different elements from both ancient and modern philosophical traditions. For Aristotle the irrational parts of the soul are ensconced within a broader rational order; passional elements thus possess a propensity towards the rational. Desiderative and emotional parts of the soul are ‘receptive to reason’ and can ‘participate in reason, in the sense that it is submissive and obedient to it’.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, the modern viewpoint typically detaches inclination from reason: reason becomes subservient to the dictates of passion or natural self-preservation. According to this latter picture, human inclinations are unreceptive to rational cognition or instruction. Or in the case of Hume, these rational capacities become naturalized: practical reason – its principles and judgements – are rooted in sympathetic or social propensities instinctive to humans.

For Kant inclinations can never qualify as truly ‘rational’ in the Aristotelian sense. This is because stringent criteria differentiate moral practical reason – the purely rational – from non-moral functions of reason (theoretical and instrumental). Human volitional propensities and their direction through the instrumental use of reason remain rooted in, receptive to, and conditioned by, the causally governed natural world. Moreover, the desiderative elements of instrumental rationality have an uneasy dynamic *vis-à-vis* moral reason unlike its relative cooperation in the Aristotelian soul.

Yet by the same token, the cognitive component to instrumental reason is not subservient to its conative counterpart as is typical of modern conceptions of practical reason. The Aristotelian distinction between animal and human passions can help explain Kant’s point. For Aristotle the souls of both animals and humans contain an appetitive component which responds to sensory experience: this is a state of passive receptivity to the external, sensory world. But unlike animals human passions incorporate active quasi-judgements or states of mind which direct us towards specific objects in particular circumstances. Thus, on the one

hand, human passions are intrinsically receptive: external sensory experience is required in order to provoke some kind of passional response.<sup>50</sup> Yet, on the other hand, intentional action for Aristotle results from a close interaction of receptive passional and active intellectual features. Human purposive action therefore results from the modification and active direction of the passions by the apprehensive capacities of the intellect. The active input of the intellect is the crucial differentiating feature between human passions and animal appetite, which dictates accordingly Aristotle's functional placement of human essence above animals on a hierarchical scale of beings in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7.

Like Aristotle's functional hierarchy, Kant's dualistic vision of human nature imposes limits on human beings from below (that of nature and animals) and above (that of a purely rational, omnipotent being).<sup>51</sup> This dualism also draws upon a distinction between the desires involved in the instrumentally purposive action of humans and the instinctual desiring of animals:

That which can be determined by *inclination* (sensible impulse, *stimulus*) would be animal choice (*arbitrium brutum*). Human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will.<sup>52</sup>

Animals cannot unify their appetitive needs through active thought so as to achieve a degree of deliberative distance from inclination. By contrast, human receptivity to sensible phenomena simultaneously provokes the cognitive capacity for imagination. We necessarily draw upon this capacity of theoretical reason when we desire, will, or choose a particular end out of the conceptual unity encompassed within the thinking individual. This cognitive activity introduces a crucial element of human rational control over inclination absent in animals.<sup>53</sup>

Kant integrates rational activity into means-end reasoning in two distinct but related ways. First, Kant has a cognitivist conception of desire; this is evident in his reference to the *concept*. In the first *Critique* the 'concept' refers to the active process of thought representation, whereby our sensible intuitions must conform to the categories of the understanding. Theoretical knowledge of objects is possible through our sensible receptivity in relation to only empirically given phenomena.<sup>54</sup> The mind is naturally receptive to empirical data; such data then conforms necessarily to *a priori* forms of intuition, space and time. Thus, the 'concept' of phenomenal objects can never extend beyond these conditions; we can know only appearances, never the essences of things in themselves.

Kant incorporates this notion of ‘concept’ into his account of the desiderative faculty: ‘The faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, insofar as the ground determining it to action lies within itself and not in its object, is called a faculty to *do or to refrain from doing as one pleases*’.<sup>55</sup> He states in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, ‘[g]ood and evil [are] always appraised by reason and hence through concepts, which can be universally communicated, not through mere feeling, which is restricted to individual subjects and their receptivity’.<sup>56</sup> Moreover,

[i]f the concept of the good is not to be derived from an antecedent practical law but, instead, is to serve as its basis, it can be only the concept of something whose existence promises pleasure and determines the causality of the subject, that is, the faculty of desire, to produce it.<sup>57</sup>

Which representations of objects are subjectively pleasurable cannot be determined *a priori*;<sup>58</sup> only after experience is accumulated can specific representations be seen as good in a subjective, hedonistic sense. But even more fundamentally, the determination of the hedonistically good and evil *itself* involves theoretical concepts, judgements or tools which supplement sensibly given experience and are distinctive to humans.<sup>59</sup> Thus, for Kant, bound up with the desiderative faculty is a necessary conceptual apparatus: reason is always present in inclinations as the latter cannot even be formed without the prior employment of theoretical cognition.<sup>60</sup>

This leads to my second point. Instrumental reason assesses physical possibilities or constraints in the practical context. Aggregated empirical experience is utilized to consider how the analytic means-end relationship can be realized or hindered.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the very notion of experience presupposes this process: human understanding spontaneously apprehends, associates, recognises, and reproduces sensibly-given appearances in accordance with a law-like form.<sup>62</sup> Means-end rationality cannot function without theoretical reason’s determination and compilation of disparate experiential facts into practically usable empirical laws, which may hinder human desiderative possibilities accordingly. Kant affirms this close connection between instrumental reason and the understanding in the second *Critique*:

Subsumption of an action possible to me in the sensible world under a *pure practical law* does not concern the possibility of the *action* as an event in the sensible world; *for it belongs to the theoretical use of reason to appraise that possibility in accordance with the law of causality*, a pure concept of the understanding for which reason has *schema* in sensible intuition.<sup>63</sup>



In other words, instrumental reason falls partly under the normative domain of theoretical reason: the understanding generates causal laws which help determine the physical possibilities of realizing a desired object. Consequently, it is up to the theoretically rational components embedded in the desiderative faculty to recognize physical constraints, ensuring that the means to a desired object – and the object itself – reflect careful consideration of intervening limits based on one’s understanding of the natural world. Inclination can therefore have an intermediate, not immediate, influence on human action; it always involves theoretical reason’s pre- and post-reflection on possible empirical constraints or miscellaneous causal connections. The imagination can redirect or deter an agent’s desire away from a chosen object accordingly in response to these possible phenomenal restrictions. Indeed, if one fails to respond in a situationally appropriate way the agent has either an insufficient awareness of their surroundings or failed to acquire the relevant and necessary practical experience.

#### IV. Empirical, not Moral Laws

The discussion so far hints at where I believe Korsgaard’s account goes astray. The dichotomy implicit in Korsgaard – either instrumental and pure practical reason must share the same normative source or instrumental reason fails to qualify as practical reason at all – ignores Kant’s subtle inclusion of theoretically rational elements in the faculty of desire. The first implication of my reading is that Kantian instrumental reason involves a mixture of theoretically and practically rational components. Kant confirms this explicitly in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*:

For even if the will follows no other principles than those by means of which the understanding has insight into the possibility of the object in accordance with them, as mere laws of nature, then the proposition which contains the possibility of the object through the causality of the faculty of choice may still be called a practical proposition, yet it is not at all distinct in principle from the theoretical propositions concerning the nature of things, but must rather derive its own content from the latter in order to exhibit the representation an object in reality. *Practical propositions, therefore, the content of which concerns merely the possibility of a represented object (through voluntary action), are only applications of a complete theoretical cognition and cannot constitute a special part of a science.*<sup>64</sup>

Importantly, the will in means-end rationality is marked by a certain dependency: in these situations the will seeks ends which do not originate in pure practical reason. Accumulated empirical experiences and

theoretical knowledge help inform and direct the faculty of desire towards subjective ends. Ultimately, the fundamental distinction between the subjection of the will (that of instrumental reason) and the subjection of nature (that of moral reasoning) lies in whether representations of desired objects of nature derived by theoretical means, intrude on practical choice.<sup>65</sup>

Attention to the theoretical normative source of instrumental reason brings into sharper relief how in the means-end case Kant is concerned primarily with *empirical* – not moral – constraints. The normativity of instrumental reason is partly constituted by the correct application of empirical laws – *not* the moral law of autonomous willing. Although the means-end relationship will vary depending on the contingently willed end, the relevant empirical law is nonetheless formally contained within such willing. As we saw in Section I Korsgaard argues that the instrumental principle requires making universal law for oneself.<sup>66</sup> Yet this directly contradicts what Kant says in the second *Critique*:

All practical principles that presuppose an *object* (matter) of the faculty of desire as the determining ground of the will are, without exception, empirical and *furnish no practical laws*. By ‘the matter of the faculty of desire’ I understand an object whose reality is desired. Now, when desire for this object precedes the practical rule and is the condition of its becoming a principle, then I say (*first*) that this principle is in that case always empirical.<sup>67</sup>

For Kant principles of instrumental reason are subjective and contingent; they depend on its desiderative and empirical components, resulting in a normative source which is neither pure theoretical nor pure practical reason.

Instrumental reasons are necessary only after an object has been represented and its principles can never stand independently of that representation. Whereas the principle of pure practical reason – the moral law – must be obeyed even in light of opposing inclinations, hypothetical imperatives derive their necessity only from the conditional and particular volitional circumstances and can easily change should inclinations point elsewhere. Kant writes,

[F]or an action necessary merely in order to achieve an arbitrary purpose can be considered as in itself contingent, and we can always escape from the precept if we abandon the purpose; whereas an unconditioned command does not leave it open to the will to do the opposite at its discretion and therefore alone carries with it that necessity which we demand from a law.<sup>68</sup>

Principles of instrumental reason reflect the transience of human desiderative needs, as illustrated in cases where the required means to one's chosen end proves to be either unpalatable or infeasible to the human agent.<sup>69</sup> In the case of means-end deliberation practical reason can only issue principles, rules, or recommendations – never laws – because phenomenal considerations (and thus, theoretical cognitive features) must be given due weight. Hence why principles of instrumental reason are conceived as *hypothetical* imperatives: these come into being only *after* a represented object and empirical considerations determine the will.

If I am right about the conditional normative source in the instrumental use of reason, what follows is a conception of practical necessitation that is manifestly weaker than, and indeed unlike, the categorical, law-like demands of moral reason. Korsgaard minimizes this issue of dissimilar practical necessitation by suggesting that *all* imperatives share the same prescriptive 'oughtness'. However, Kant states explicitly that, as dependent on the phenomenal world the 'oughtness' of hypothetical imperatives represents the *subjective necessity* of the will unlike the objective necessity of the categorical imperative. Instrumental choice must apply and consider the causality of those empirical laws generated by the understanding; by implication, hypothetical imperatives are principles that can only *recommend*, not categorically demand, the appropriate practical action to the will.<sup>70</sup> Even the terms Kant uses to describe the different principles of practical reason express their dissimilar necessitation. The practical principles that guide us towards instrumental reason's ends of technical skill and happiness, he classifies as '*rules of skill or counsels of prudence*';<sup>71</sup> both are '*principles of the will*'<sup>72</sup> as opposed to the unconditioned and objective '*commands (laws) of morality*'.<sup>73</sup>

Kant's discussion of the heteronomous will helps clarify this point. In a lengthy passage from the *Groundwork* Kant explains how represented, desired objects combine with *empirical* laws of nature to determine the heteronomous will:

Wherever the object determines the will – whether by means of inclination, as in the principle of personal happiness, or by means of reason directed to objects of our possible volitions generally, as in the principle of perfection – the will never determines itself *immediately* by the thought of an action, but only by the impulsion which the anticipated effect of the action exercises on the will: '*I ought to do something because I will something else.*' And the basis for this must be yet a further law in me as a subject, whereby I necessarily will this 'something else' – which law, in turn requires an imperative to impose limits on this maxim. The impulsion supposed to be exercised on the will of the subject, in accordance with his natural constitution, by the idea of a result to be attained by his own powers

belongs to the nature of the subject – whether to his sensibility (his inclinations and taste) or to his understanding and reason, whose operation on an object is accompanied by satisfaction in virtue of the special equipment of their nature – *and consequently, speaking strictly, it is nature which would make the law*. This law, as a law of nature, not only must be known and proved by experience and therefore is in itself contingent and consequently unfitted to serve as an apodeictic rule of action such as a moral rule must be, but it is *always merely heteronomy of the will*: the will does not give itself the law, but an alien impulsion does so through the medium of the subject's own nature as tuned for its reception.<sup>74</sup>

Kant suggests that the normative principle of instrumental reason can be partly sourced in the theoretical laws of nature; more emphatically, this principle *does not entail the moral law*. In this case the 'will is subject' to the laws of nature, as opposed to 'a nature which is subject to a will' for 'in the former the objects must be the causes of the representations that determine the will'.<sup>75</sup> When Kant argues that the instrumental use of reason presupposes a conception of oneself as an acting cause, he is not arguing that all practical agency stems from the pure autonomous and moral will [*Wille*]. Rather the will as free choice [*Willkür*] functions as the *efficient* cause to practical action. By 'efficient cause' Kant means that we actively see how our free choice [*Willkür*] is connected to desiderative ends within a causal, means-end connection; we have ascertained the will's adequacy to effect change in the phenomenal world as informed by a combination of empirical knowledge and desiderative conditions.

Yet the will conceived of as an 'efficient cause' does not obliterate human agency in any way. As argued so far, the human understanding actively collates particular ideas/concepts into a law-like form. This is applicable to the practical context because reflecting on the causal possibilities towards a desired end reveals 'a further law in me as a subject'. Particularly in the case of morally indifferent actions reason alerts us that we must apply another law which regulates part of our dual nature – as sensibly driven, imperfectly rational beings who are open to, and function within, a natural, mechanistic environment.<sup>76</sup> Both laws of nature and the moral law are practically relevant to the human agent since both correspond and apply to different aspects of humanity's dual constitution. By implication, through the very recognition of which law is salient and applicable to the particular circumstance individuals demonstrate a deliberative, spontaneous component which, on the one hand, progresses beyond the instinctual, unreflective activity of animals, and on the other, is bound and limited by the inescapable experience of human rational contingency.

Thus Korsgaard is partly right to say that when one actively chooses [*Willkür*] an end in the instrumental use of reason one does indeed apply a law to oneself – but crucially this refers not to the moral law of autonomous willing, but to theoretically informed principles which become practical by virtue of their attachment to an end set by the faculty of desire. From the vantage point of humanity's partially sensible nature, the causal laws of nature are perfectly valid; from the viewpoint of our intelligible, noumenal counterpart, these empirical laws are merely impure practical rules or recommendations owing to their inherent reliance on phenomenal nature to fulfil our subjective desires.

Hypothetical imperatives of instrumental reason are therefore normative insofar that they appeal to the sensible, empirical side of humanity's imperfectly rational constitution. Kant confirms this point explicitly in the second *Critique*:

The human being is a being with needs insofar as he belongs to the sensible world, and to this extent his reason certainly has a commission from the side of his sensibility which it cannot refuse, to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to happiness in this life and, where possible, in a future life as well. But he is nevertheless not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to all that reason says on its own and to use reason merely as a tool for the satisfaction of his needs as a sensible being. For, that he has reason does not at all raise him in worth above mere animality if reason is to serve him only for the sake of what instinct accomplishes for animals; reason would in that case be only a particular mode nature had used to equip the human being with the same end to which it has destined animals, without destining him to a higher end. No doubt once this arrangement of nature has been made for him he needs reason in order to take into consideration at all times his well-being and woe.<sup>77</sup>

Norms of instrumental reason possess a motivational hold over agents because ends of skill and happiness are ones that humans naturally seek; it appeals to the sensible part of our human constitution. Their normative authority is not constitutive of the purely rational part of human nature, but is derived from how we function as partly rational, partly sensible beings that are situated within phenomenal conditions.

Thus, we can see how Kant answers Williams' concerns about the motivational grip of hypothetical imperatives without appealing to a conception of autonomous rational agency as suggested by Korsgaard.<sup>78</sup> Instrumental reasons have a motivational 'grip' on the desiderative components which are expressive of our sensible as well as practically rational nature. Kant subsequently implies that, in cases where those

practical principles fail to convince the rational part of the human agent, their appeal to our sensible/desiderative side would ultimately compensate.<sup>79</sup> We can see that the opposite also holds: reason can contribute to our natural, sensible interest in human well-being and happiness, and can help determine its empirical constituents for particular agents.

This shows that theoretically rational components in instrumental choice or desire are generated without appeal to the categorical imperative.<sup>80</sup> Contra Korsgaard's account, the normativity of instrumental reason relies upon the active conceptualization and practical application of causal empirical laws in order to, first, link a desired end (represented object) with the necessary means, and second, ascertain whether or not this theoretical connection is practically realisable. Moreover, if moral autonomy is taken as constitutive of all human rational agency, we fail to capture how theoretical normative sources of instrumental reason express a stance of openness and receptivity to the natural world which can in turn influence human purposive action.

### V. The Dialectical Nature of Practical Reason

Central to Kant's dualism between instrumental and moral reason is a conflicted dynamic between universal morality and the individual pursuit of desire or contingently determined interests. The particularistic application of instrumental reason frequently opposes the universality of the categorical imperative. This open-ended oscillation between the subjective and objective lies at the heart of the *humanistic* use of both spheres of practical reason. Kant therefore affirms two separate and legitimate but discordant spheres of human agency in alignment with our dual features.

The predisposition of humanity and hypothetical imperatives are closely linked: such requirements correspond to ends which are characteristic of dualistic, rational imperfect beings, such as skill and happiness.<sup>81</sup> Subjective ends of instrumental reason are rooted in the natural world, vary arbitrarily between individuals, and therefore cannot be the basis for a conception of universal morality. Kant assumes a close connection between phenomenal experience, hedonistic inclination, and the end of happiness to justify his argument. He writes:

Only experience can teach what brings us joy. Only the natural drives for food, sex, rest, and movement, and (as our natural predispositions develop) for honor, for enlarging our cognition, and so forth, can tell each of us, and each only in his particular way, in what he will *find* those jobs; and, in the same way, only experience can teach him the means by which to *seek* them. All apparently *a priori* reasoning about this comes down to nothing but experience raised by induction to generality, a generality [...] will be so

tenuous that everyone must be allowed countless exceptions in order to adapt his choice of a way of life to his particular inclinations and his susceptibility to satisfaction and still, in the end, to become prudent only from his own or others' misfortunes.<sup>82</sup>

For Kant we can never shed our empirical selves: given our dualistic constitution part of us will always be rooted within the phenomenal world and be interested in our prudential happiness. We need to be receptive to sensibly-given intuitions in order to know what particular inclinations successfully promote our pragmatic interests in happiness; we accumulate subjective prudential experience through the exploration of what desires promote pleasure and satisfaction. Skilful or prudential ends – and our motivation towards them – are not moral in Kant's restricted definition of the term. Despite their non-moral status, these ends are nonetheless necessary for the kind of desiring and partially sensible beings we are.

Instrumental reasoning – including its constituents, application, and purpose – must therefore be an exclusively anthropocentric exercise, particularly since a perfectly rational being is incapable of willing contrary to the moral law. The word 'subjective' has two connotations for Kant: the more straightforward reading suggests a variety of individualized ends but on a deeper level the term stands for the predisposition of humanity in general, characterized by the limited rational capacities which set us apart from divine, non-desiderative beings. In itself the theoretically rational aspects to human desire – the rational capacity to aggregate disparate empirical experiences into the form of law – is 'subjective' since this form of cognition is necessary only to the human understanding. Moreover, the pragmatic interests which are constitutive of the instrumental use of reason already suggest that a perfectly rational, non-appetitive being (such as God) would never need to use reason in such a way. Consider what Kant states in his lectures on philosophical theology, dated 1783–4:

*Holiness* is the absolute or unlimited moral perfection of the will. A holy being must not be affected with the least inclination contrary to morality. It must be *impossible* for it to will something which is contrary to moral laws. So understood, no being but God is holy. For every creature always has some needs, and if it wills to satisfy them, it also has inclinations which do not always agree with morality. [...] For every creature has needs which limit its inclination to make others happy; or at least these needs limit its ability to make such use of these inclinations that it may have not regard at all for its own welfare. But God is independent benevolence. *He is not limited by any subjective ground, because he himself has no needs.*<sup>83</sup>

The anthropocentricity of instrumental reason is further supported by Kant's discussion of the human predisposition in the *Religion*. In describing this predisposition Kant states in a footnote that an individual

might apply the most rational reflection to these objects [of choice] – about what concerns their greatest sum as well as the means for attaining the goal determined through them – *without thereby even suspecting the possibility of such a thing as the absolutely imperative moral law which announces to be itself an incentive, and, indeed, the highest incentive.*<sup>84</sup>

This passage directly contradicts Korsgaard's regress strategy. Kant claims that the human agent can be engaged in means-end deliberation *in isolation of the moral law* and indeed, she may not be even practically cognisant of its normativity. Even more strongly put, the distinction between heteronomy and autonomy signals that Kant believes that an agent can choose *contrary* to the categorical imperative, adopting instead a lesser, non-moral good rooted in empirical grounds of determination. We can choose and pursue an end that is recognisably bad, even though we may acknowledge that there is a better end that we ought to endorse according to the criteria of morality – and this would still qualify as instrumentally rational.

The end of happiness fits this description of heteronomous willing: it is classified as a 'subjective' end because Kant rejects a conception of morality that is defined strictly in anthropocentric terms. Kant criticizes Greek *eudaimonistic* theories because he believes that proponents of these theories confuse prudential self-regard with the objective end of morality.<sup>85</sup> Self-love and individual inclinations are made the basis of morality – or in Kant's words, 'subjective determining grounds of choice [become] the objective determining ground of the will'.<sup>86</sup> The prudential interests we pursue through the instrumental use of reason often divert us away from the true end of morality. Indeed, we often put our happiness before our moral duty; we prioritize the instrumental use of reason over our moral reason, and this leads to a dialectical relationship between the two forms of reason:

Man feels in himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty presented to him by reason as so worthy of esteem – the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, whose total satisfaction he grasps under the name of 'happiness'. But reason, without promising anything to inclination, enjoins its commands relentlessly, and therefore, so to speak, with disregard and neglect of these turbulent and seemingly equitable claims (which refuse to be suppressed by any command). From this there arises a *natural*



*dialectic* – that is, a disposition to quibble with these strict laws of duty, to throw doubt on their validity or at least on their purity and strictness, and to make them, where possible, more adapted to our wishes and inclinations; that is, to pervert their very foundations and destroy their whole dignity – a result which in the end even ordinary human reason is unable to approve.<sup>87</sup>

Another way to understand this is to say that our instrumental reason directs us towards certain natural ends, but in doing so we are aware of how our conditional pursuit of happiness falls short of the moral demand.<sup>88</sup> On one hand happiness is a necessary end to us as humans: this close connection between instrumental reason and the predisposition of humanity is evident in the similar language Kant uses to describe both. Inclinations towards ‘self love which is physical’ exemplify the predisposition of humanity: both the human predisposition and the instrumental use of reason have an acquisitive, self-interested inflection and together, both depict the divisiveness, comparison, and multiplicity of ends among anthropomorphic beings.<sup>89</sup> For something to be ‘objective’ in Kant’s sense it has to apply universally to all rational beings;<sup>90</sup> *a priori*, universal principles are laws which are valid for *all* rational beings without exception. And as the earlier quotation shows, a divine being has no subjective needs or impulses.

All of this appears to point to an irresolvable dialectic within practical reason: given our dualistic constitution humans inevitably seek happiness through hypothetical willing, yet this pursuit is wrought with ills and is inappropriate to our predisposition of moral personality. It is therefore entirely possible – and in fact a distinctly *human* characteristic – to use reason in a way that is contrary to the moral law. In contrast to Korsgaard’s cooperative picture, Kant paints a much more antagonistic relationship between instrumental and moral reasoning. This dialectic is important: in experiencing this tension Kant believes that individuals eventually come to recognize the need to *constrain* the egoistic, subjectivist tendencies which characterize the instrumental use of reason. It is precisely this notion of moral constraint that is lost once the normativity of hypothetical imperatives and the categorical imperative are conflated.

### Conclusion

Some contemporary Kantians might object to my reading of Kantian instrumental reason on two grounds. First, one might be tempted to say that my interpretation of Kant is too Humean: emphasis on the theoretically rational aspects of the normativity of instrumental reason seems too similar to an empiricist belief-desire model of practical motivation. However, this worry is sidestepped once we fully understand how Kant

adopts a cognitivist conception of desire. Above I have highlighted how desire for Kant involves close interaction between passive reception of sensory experience and the active formation of rational concepts. It is not simply the case that means-end deliberation will involve *some kind* of belief and *some kind of* desire – the actual desiderative faculty involves a large degree of rational activity in a theoretical sense.

But while Kant departs from an empiricist model, it is important to note that the normativity of hypothetical imperatives does not *necessitate* moral assessment. This fact highlights an aspect to Kantian instrumental reason which is neglected in contemporary interpretations: namely Kant's acknowledgement that a stance of openness and receptivity to the phenomenal world is a *requisite* for successful practical action. Kant is frequently accused of legitimizing the 'degrad[ation of] nature and the world into mere means'<sup>91</sup> based on the fact that the moral demand is strictly non-empirically rooted. But if we consider carefully how instrumental reason is important in its own right, it seems that Kant acknowledges how part and parcel of the human condition is to be receptive to, affected by, as well as engaged with, the natural world.

Finally, one might object that embracing Kant's dualisms results in a rather ominous gulf between the normativity of hypothetical imperatives and the categorical imperative. On this view, to read practical reason through the lens of Kant's dualisms weakens the overall coherence of his moral philosophy. No material content appears capable of bridging this interminable gulf between our intelligible and sensible natures and their divergent practical manifestations. One strategy would be to go along the interpretive path outlined by Korsgaard: practical reason is unified if the normative source of both instrumental and moral reason is founded on human capacities for creative self-legislating rational agency. Based on its common normative source, both instrumental and pure practical reason interact in an unproblematic and cooperative manner towards individual happiness. In turn, a degree of practical coherence is conferred onto Kant's overall theory.

Though this objection has some force, ultimately such coherence is purchased at a large philosophical cost – namely at the expense of a moral framework which can restrict or critique instrumental reason. Korsgaard's account is in danger of collapsing morality into instrumental reason. The normativity of the moral law becomes too closely connected to prudential or technical considerations. This leads to misleading conclusions about the necessity of hypothetical imperatives: the subjective necessity of these imperatives is indistinguishable from the objective necessity of the moral law. The moral subtlety of Kant's dualisms is therefore lost.

Thus, two important implications emerge out of my interpretive claim that instrumental reason shares much with theoretical reason. First, it

highlights a neglected dimension of instrumental reason: namely how the latter presupposes and requires a stance of openness towards the external world. This not only deflects accusations that Kant's practical philosophy leads to the wholesale devaluation of the natural environment, but also has significance in his political philosophy.<sup>92</sup> Second, it helps prepare for the critical authority of moral reason. Pure practical reason functions as a moral constraint on the potentially unfettered subjective interests of human instrumental reasoning. Understanding Kant's dualism between instrumental and pure practical reason helps us better appreciate his insight that moral reasoning fulfils a vital critical role in relation to human empirical interests.<sup>93</sup>

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### Notes

- 1 Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) trans. H. J. Paton (London: Routledge, 2003) (hereinafter *G*), 414 [93].
- 2 There has been some controversy as to whether hypothetical imperatives *qua* imperatives qualify as propositions at all. Moreover, if we take modern logic as our point of departure, Kant's identification of hypothetical imperatives as analytic could run into further problems with the empirical and changeable nature of its content. But I am not delving into any of these debates between Kantian and post-Kantian logic – my principal concern is to emphasize how for Kant the category of analytic is confined to the empirical. By contrast, the category of the *a priori* synthetic is not.
- 3 Bernard Williams, 'Internal and External Reason', in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101–13.
- 4 Christine Korsgaard, 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason', in Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (eds) *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 215–54.
- 5 See Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), pp. 263–81; Patrick Kain, 'Self-legislation in Kant's Moral Philosophy', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 86 (2004), pp. 257–306; John Hare, *The Moral Gap; Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) and 'Essay Review on Christine Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*', *Faith and Philosophy*, 17 (2000), pp. 371–83.
- 6 See Patrick Kain, 'Interpreting Kant's Theory of Divine Commands,' *Kantian Review*, 9 (2005), pp. 128–49; John Hare, 'Kant on Recognizing our Duties as God's Commands', *Faith and Philosophy*, 17 (2000), pp. 487–505. That said, Kant's notion of the highest good and the postulates of pure practical reason do require *belief* in the existence of the God. While this has religious connotations more importantly is how certain metaphysical ideas are necessary for the moral progress of humans in a practical sense. Kant is relatively agnostic with regards to the actual epistemological reality of God's existence.
- 7 Patrick Kain, 'Prudential Reason in Kant's Anthropology', in Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds) *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 231.
- 8 *G* 413 (37–8).

- 9 See Jens Timmermann, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 47–9.
- 10 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 250.
- 11 See Korsgaard, 'Scepticism about Practical Reason', *Journal of Philosophy*, 83 (1986), pp. 10–11, in particular her rejection of Frankena's reading of Kant. See William Frankena, 'Obligation and Morality in Recent Moral Philosophy', in Kenneth Goodpaster (ed.) *Perspectives on Morality: Essays by William Frankena* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1977), p. 63.
- 12 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 245.
- 13 R. Jay Wallace, 'Normativity, Commitment, and Instrumental Reason', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 1 (2001), p. 7.
- 14 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 247. See Mark Schroeder, 'The Hypothetical Imperative', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 83 (2005), p. 358.
- 15 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 251.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 245–6.
- 17 Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.
- 18 Jens Timmermann, 'Value Without Regress: Kant's "Formula of Humanity" Revisited', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14 (2006), pp. 70–71.
- 19 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 244.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 219.
- 21 Timmermann, *Commentary*, pp. 15–21; also Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960), pp. 37–40.
- 22 *G* 444 (95).
- 23 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 245.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 249, third emphasis added.
- 26 G. A. Cohen, 'Reason, Humanity, and the Moral Law', in Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, pp. 183–4.
- 27 Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, pp. 256–8.
- 28 See Schroeder, 'Hypothetical Imperative', pp. 367–8.
- 29 *G* 417 (45).
- 30 Schroeder, 'Hypothetical Imperative', p. 363.
- 31 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 244.
- 32 Schroeder, 'Hypothetical Imperative', p. 363.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 365.
- 35 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 240, emphasis added.
- 36 Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 122.
- 37 Schroeder, 'Hypothetical Imperative', p. 361.
- 38 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 244.
- 39 See *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Critique of Pure Reason)* (hereinafter *KrV*), A6-7, which reveals a notion of analyticity which includes logical containment as well as loose analyticity or entailment. I thank Alison Mallard for bringing my attention to this passage from the First *Critique*.
- 40 Schroeder, 'Hypothetical Imperative', p. 365.
- 41 *G* 417 (45).
- 42 The main thrust of Korsgaard's problem fails to have any resonance with Kant, since the paradigm operating during and prior to his time presumed that the interplay of cognitive and conative dimensions within instrumental

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reason were motivationally efficacious; its motivational power was never questioned but simply assumed.

- 43 Schroeder, 'Hypothetical Imperative', p. 362.
- 44 Kant states, '[h]ow an imperative of skill is possible requires no special discussion' [*G* 417 (44)].
- 45 See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 226–7.
- 46 *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (Critique of Practical Reason)*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) (hereinafter *KpV*), *Ak* 5: 45, emphases added.
- 47 Beck, *Commentary*, p. 40.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (London: Penguin, 2004), 1102b15, 1102b31033.
- 50 See Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 41–2.
- 51 These delimitations are not concrete but fluid, as Kant's teleology claims that humanity is constantly progressing towards the ideal of perfect morality. Thus, limitations stemming from human dualism change as humanity grow in rationality and morality.
- 52 *Der Metaphysik der Sitten (The Metaphysic of Morals)*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) (hereinafter *MS*), *Ak* 6: 214.
- 53 For example, Kant writes a footnote in the *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View)*. 1st ed. 1798; 2nd ed. 1800), trans. Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 'The irrational animal <perhaps> has something similar to what we call representations (because it has effects that are <very> similar to the representations in the human being), but which may perhaps be entirely different – but no cognition of things; for this requires *understanding*, a faculty of representation with consciousness of action whereby the representations relate to a given object and this relation may be thought' (7: 141, n24, Prussian Academy pagination).
- 54 *KrV* A156/B156.
- 55 *MS* 6: 214.
- 56 *KpV* 5: 58.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 Importantly, although the representations themselves are not subjectively constituted, the relation between pleasure and pain sensations and their representations are. The subjective relation is a crucial point that will be elaborated on below to reject the collapse between subjective and objective reasons in Korsgaard's interpretation.
- 59 *KpV* 5: 61.
- 60 Richard Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason; On the Moral Foundation of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 186, n10. To understand the function of the imagination involves a discussion of the 'I' of apperception but it goes beyond the scope of what I want to claim here. For more on the transcendental unity of imagination and the 'I' of apperception, see *KrV* A 121–5.
- 61 See *G* 444 (93–5).
- 62 That the understanding is a presupposition in the relevant empirical laws in means-end reasoning is further confirmed in the following: '[t]o make system-

atic the unity of all possible empirical actions of the understanding is a business of reason, just as the understanding connects the manifold of appearances through concepts and brings it under empirical laws' (*KrV* A665/B693). See also *KrV* A124–5, A643/B471–A644/B672.

63 *KpV* 5: 68, third emphasis added.

64 *Kritik der Urteilskraft (Critique of the Power of Judgment)*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), *Ak* 20: 197–8, emphasis added.

65 Hence why Kant would define moral reasoning as 'pure practical reason'.

66 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 246.

67 *KpV* 5: 21, second emphasis added.

68 *G* 420 (59).

69 Here there is a clear difference between Kant and Korsgaard, as the latter claims in 'Normativity', p. 250: 'If I am to will an end, to be and to remain committed to it even in the face of desires that would distract and weaknesses that would dissuade me, it looks as if I must have something to *say to myself* about why I am doing that [...] It looks as if the end is one that has to be *good*, in some sense that goes beyond the locally desirable'. I am very doubtful that Kant would expect the same level of 'commitment' in instrumental reason, particularly if the desire for the end disappears or is redirected elsewhere.

70 *G* 414 (47).

71 *G* 416 (44).

72 *G* 420 (59).

73 *G* 416 (44). Also *KpV* 5: 20: 'The first would be hypothetical imperatives and would contain mere precepts of skill; the second, on the contrary, would be categorical and would alone be practical laws. Thus, maxims are indeed *principles* but not *imperatives*. But imperatives themselves, when they are conditional – that is, when they do not determine the will simply as will but only with respect to a desired effect, that is, when they are hypothetical imperatives – are indeed practical *precepts* but not *laws*'. Kant also refers to hypothetical imperatives as pragmatic imperatives, and in his lectures on ethics (C. C. Mongrovius notes) dating from roughly around the same period of the *Groundwork* (1784) he states, '[t]he moral imperative is opposed to the pragmatic, and commands in a different way. Pragmatic and moral imperatives are very often confounded with one another, which happens not only among the ancients, but also even nowadays among the moderns, though the two things are poles apart. Pragmatic imperatives are merely counsels; moral imperatives either *motiva*, rules of virtue, or *leges*, juridical laws'. Kant's *Lecture on Ethics*, Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (eds) trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 29: 610 (Prussian Academy pagination).

74 *G* 444 (93–5), third emphasis added.

75 *KpV* 5: 44.

76 *KpV* 5: 6n.

77 *KpV* 5: 61–2.

78 That said, my view of Kantian instrumental reason appears to accommodate a compatibilist conception of practical freedom.

79 An evident example is simply when the means-ends connection fails to be practically enacted because the desire for the object changes or altogether dissipates.

80 Korsgaard, 'Normativity', p. 244.

- 81 Thus, Kant's account does not discount the possibility that non-human rational beings engage in hypothetical willing, provided that they share the dualistic constitutions of human beings. That said, Kant's discussion of predispositions in the *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (hereinafter *R*), *Ak* 6: 26–7, suggests that the formation of hypothetical imperatives and instrumental reasoning are characteristically *human* exercises of reason.
- 82 *MS* 6: 215–6.
- 83 *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and Gertrude M. Clark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 114, final emphasis added
- 84 *R Ak* 6: 26n, emphasis added.
- 85 This applies especially to his critique of Epicureans. But his account of Stoic happiness is criticized on slightly different grounds. I am not going to engage with the issue of whether or not Kant was indeed justified in his criticisms of Greek *eudaimonistic* theories. For a critical examination of this issue, see T. H. Irwin, 'Kant's Criticisms of Eudaemonism', in Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (eds) *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 86 *KpV* 5: 74.
- 87 *G* 405 (23).
- 88 *KpV* 5: 119.
- 89 *R* 6: 27.
- 90 *G* 421 (51).
- 91 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 158.
- 92 For instance, it sheds some light on how we should understand Kant's property argument in his political philosophy.
- 93 I am grateful to Katrin Flikschuh and Adrian Moore for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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