

**KANT'S CONCEPTION OF PRACTICAL REASON**

by

**Jamsheed Alam Siyar**

B.A., Tufts University, 1999

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Jamsheed Alam Siyar

It was defended on

September 30, 2010

and approved by

Barbara Herman, Professor, Philosophy and Law, University of California Los Angeles

Nicholas Rescher, Professor, Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh

Sebastian Roedl, Professor, Philosophy, University of Basel

Kieran Setiya, Associate Professor, Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh

Michael Thompson, Professor, Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh

Dissertation Director: Stephen Engstrom, Professor, Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh

Copyright © by Jamsheed Alam Siyar

2010

## **KANT'S CONCEPTION OF PRACTICAL REASON**

Jamsheed Alam Siyar, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2010

My dissertation develops a novel account of Kant's moral philosophy by focusing on his conception of pure reason. As is well known, Kant contends that morality has its source in pure reason, and that the authority of moral considerations derives from this source. Yet recent commentators have shied away from Kant's account of reason, emphasizing instead aspects of his view that seem to make it more accessible. In particular, influential constructivist readings have stressed the role of rational agents as autonomous subjects that "construct" the principles or values they commit themselves to. I argue that to properly grasp Kant's distinctive conception of moral constraints, and his conception of rational agency, we must look to his underlying account of reason.

My dissertation divides into two parts. In the first part, I reconstruct Kant's account of the practicality of pure reason, i.e. reason's capacity to determine the will a priori, and show how all norms of practical reason are systematically derived from this capacity. In particular, I show: (1) that all possible moral constraints derive from pure reason's determination of the will and that each such constraint must be systematically related to all the others; and (2) that the norms of instrumental rationality equally depend on reason's capacity to determine the will a priori. In the second part, I broaden the focus to consider the relations between the theoretical and practical exercises of reason. I develop the formal parallels between the two exercises of reason and show how each exercise is governed by a corresponding rational interest. I then elaborate Kant's

notion of a rational interest to show that for Kant reason is fundamentally practical—in the sense that reason’s theoretical exercise is in important respects shaped by its practical concerns. A key upshot of this argument is that we cannot fully grasp Kant’s account of practical reason unless we consider the relation between theoretical and practical reason. Once we consider this relation, however, we see that Kant takes morality, i.e. reason’s legislation of the moral law, to be the grounding principle of all rational activity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>NOTE ON SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0 THE FACT AS ACT: A READING OF THE FACT OF REASON.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3.0 THE REALM OF ENDS .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>4.0 THE WHOLE OF KNOWLEDGE: REASON IN THEORETICAL COGNITION.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>5.0 THE INTERESTS OF REASON AND THE PRIMACY OF PRACTICAL REASON.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>176</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is quite severely indebted to my adviser, Steve Engstrom. Since Steve was my dissertation director, it is of course to be expected that I am most intellectually indebted and most grateful to him. But the point has a certain further relevance in my case. When I started graduate school, I would have laughed off the suggestion that I would write a dissertation on Kant's ethics. It is really a testament to Steve, as a philosopher and as a mentor, that I have come to appreciate Kant as perhaps the richest source of philosophical insight and inspiration. Steve, quite simply, opened up philosophical worlds for me that I did not know existed.

I am also extremely grateful to my other mentors. I perhaps did not take as much advantage of their wisdom as I could have. Nevertheless, Sebastian Roedl, Kieran Setiya, and Michael Thompson all patiently read through multiple drafts of several chapters and unfailingly helped me clarify my thinking. They also, through the respective examples they set, helped me understand what it means to be a good philosopher. Barbara Herman asked me the questions at my defense that I wish my dissertation had answered, and that I hope to someday answer.

Karl Schafer came to Pittsburgh when my dissertation project was already well under way. Nevertheless, I (and my dissertation) owe him a great debt of gratitude. Karl has been a constant source of support and inspiration—he read numerous chapter drafts, posed exactly the right challenges, offered extremely helpful suggestions, and helped dispel acute anxieties.

The friends who have helped and supported me through graduate school—without whom I quite literally cannot imagine these years of my life—are far too numerous to list. I will limit myself here to mentioning Evgenia Mylonaki and Graham Hubbs, without either of whom my life and my philosophy would be immeasurably poorer. Graham and I started graduate school together, and our first few years of graduate school were a deeply shared experience. I learnt as much philosophy in long—indeed interminable—conversations with Graham as I did in any seminar room. Graham was also a constant source of support in all matters non-philosophical, and while I may have gotten through graduate school without him, it would have been an incomparably poorer experience. I got to Evgenia a little later, but her effect on my thought and my life has if anything been even more profound. Looking back, I don't think I had ever properly understood what a philosophical question is—that is, what philosophy is—until I had the good fortune to talk philosophy with Evgenia. She also—sometimes—convinced me to change my mind. Her profound effect on my life is I hope as evident to her as it is to me.

In addition to the people already mentioned, Matthew Boyle, Matthew Chrisman, and James Shaw provided invaluable help with Chapter 2 in its guise as a writing sample. What is good and right about this dissertation is largely thanks to one or more of the people mentioned here. What is bad and wrong rests squarely on my shoulders.

I got to know Brittany during my last years of graduate school. Brittany changed everything, in ways that it would be neither possible nor proper to explain here. Finally, I am most grateful to my parents, Rashida and Farrukh, who have supported me and believed in me through everything in life. My success in any endeavor reflects as much on them as it does on me.

Just as I completed my dissertation, I lost someone very dear to me—someone with whom I had hoped, expected, and wanted very much to share this. This is for him.

\*

Portions of this dissertation were written with the support of an Andrew Mellon Dissertation Year Fellowship and a Provost's Development Fund Dissertation Year Fellowship, both administered by the University of Pittsburgh. I am very grateful for these sources of funding, as well as for the teaching support I regularly received through the Department of Philosophy.

## NOTE ON SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

References to the works of Kant, with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, are according to the German Academy edition pagination: *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Koeniglichen Preussischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften. 29 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1900-). References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given, as per standard practice, by the pagination of the first ("A") and second ("B") editions of 1781 and 1787, respectively. Where both A and B page numbers are provided, the passage cited is included in both editions; otherwise the passage occurs only in the edition cited. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* include just the A and B page numbers, and no reference to the title. For all other texts, full citations include the title of the work (in abbreviation) and the Academy edition page number (though not the volume of the Academy edition, which is provided below). For all quotations, emphasis is as in the original, unless otherwise noted.

I have used the following abbreviations in referring to Kant's works. The translations I have used are also provided below.

- G* *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. (Ak. 4) Edited and translated by Mary Gregor as *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- KpV* *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft*. (Ak. 5) Edited and translated by Mary Gregor as *Critique of Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- KrV* *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*. (first (A) edition, 1781 (Ak. 4); second (B) edition, 1787 (Ak. 3)). Translated by Norman Kemp-Smith as *Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1965.
- KU* *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. (Ak. 5) Edited by Paul Guyer; translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews as *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- MS* *Metaphysik der Sitten*. (Ak. 6) Edited and translated by Mary Gregor as *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- R* *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*. (Ak. 6) Edited and translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni as *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Die reine Vernunft ist in der Tat mit nichts als sich selbst  
beschaeftigt, und kann auch kein anderes Geschaefte haben.

*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft (A680/B708)*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

My dissertation investigates two fundamental tenets of Kant's philosophy. The first is his well-known thesis that the moral law, and hence morality as a whole, has its source pure reason. The second is his somewhat less remarked-upon claim that there is ultimately a single rational faculty that has theoretical and practical exercises. In this introduction, I want to spell out why I think it is important, indeed necessary, to read these two Kantian claims in conjunction and to determine the proper relation between them. Only by doing this, I will argue, can we fully grasp the distinctive character of moral constraints in Kant's philosophy, and the place he assigns them within the overall mental economy of rational subjects such as ourselves.

The first point to note is that if, as Kant contends, moral constraints have their source in reason and derive their authority from this source, then grasping the proper character of moral constraints will require investigating Kant's account of pure reason. In particular, the binding force of moral considerations must in some way derive from reason's determination of the power of choice. For it is precisely pure reason's capacity to determine choice that makes morality possible, according to Kant. This capacity is what Kant terms the practicality of pure reason, and he insists that it is just this capacity—pure reason's capacity to determine one's choices—that makes the moral law binding on rational subjects such as ourselves. Hence, the faculty of pure practical reason is fundamentally the *moral capacity* for Kant: it is the faculty that makes morality both possible and necessary by legislating the moral law as binding for all rational

beings. Hence, my dissertation proposes to develop Kant's account of moral—and more generally practical—constraints through an investigation of reason qua fundamental moral capacity. Indeed, that pure practical reason just is the moral faculty in Kant's picture is the guiding thought of my dissertation as a whole. This thought forces the recognition that if we are to properly grasp Kant's account of the moral law and of moral and practical constraints more generally, we must look precisely to his account of the moral capacity, i.e. to his account of pure practical reason. This is what I propose to do in this dissertation.

It is worth noting here that insofar as my focus throughout is on the faculty of reason—particularly on the faculty of pure practical reason—it is not on the conditions of agency as a whole, nor on the individual human agent. While there may seem to be drawbacks to this approach, by Kant's own lights it is methodologically sound. To see this, consider Kant's explicitly stated procedure in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There Kant begins with the thought that empirical knowledge requires the deliverances of sensibility as well as the cognitive faculty proper. When he sets out to investigate the necessary conditions of empirical cognition, however, he *isolates* each of these and investigates it on its own.<sup>1</sup> Grasping how sensibility and the understanding combine to produce empirical cognition is only possible once we have independently determined the constitutive characteristics of each of these capacities—this at least is the lesson of Kant's avowed method.

Similarly, morality requires the contribution of both the rational faculty and our sensible natures. For instance, it is by evaluating the promptings of sensible desire against the practical laws of reason that we can pursue the constitutive components of happiness in a manner that passes moral muster. Nevertheless, following Kant's procedure in the first *Critique*—and indeed

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A22/B36. Kant follows an analogous method in the second *Critique*, though he is less explicit about his methodology there.

in the second—we can usefully isolate the rational faculty as that which provides the most important constitutive conditions of moral agency and investigate it separately from the sensible capacities with which it is necessarily joined in beings such as ourselves. This is what my dissertation aims to do. A full study of Kant’s account of morality and human agency would further require an account of our sensible nature and how it operates in conjunction with reason; it would need to investigate the role of the feeling of respect, the Kantian concept of happiness, etc. My dissertation does not undertake any of this, for it is focused on the role of pure reason alone.

While this focus limits the scope of my project, it allows for a sustained and in-depth investigation of precisely the faculty that constitutes morality and indeed human agency as such. For as I will argue below, for Kant reason is not only the moral capacity per se, but also the capacity that makes possible human agency as such in that it supplies all the norms and principles relevant to our agency. Now the most basic norms that govern agency, on Kant’s picture, just are the fundamental moral norms. In other words, Kant takes morality to lie at the basis of human agency as a whole; hence, the moral faculty must necessarily be the capacity that constitutes and governs human agency in general. Investigating Kant’s conception of pure practical reason, then, does not just allow for a better grasp of his account of morality; it also brings into sharper focus the manner in which his conception of human agency as a whole is grounded in the norms and principles that have their source in the moral faculty proper. The investigation thus shows how for Kant human agency is fundamentally *moral agency*.

Nevertheless, my focus on Kant’s conception of the rational faculty per se sets my project apart from most of the recent scholarship on Kant’s practical philosophy. Influential readings of Kant’s ethics in the past several decades have focused on the *individual human agent* as the

source of moral norms and constraints.<sup>2</sup> While this focus on the individual as autonomous legislator has been beneficial in dispelling what were previously common misconceptions of Kant’s ethics—e.g. that his view is rigoristic or demands implausible self-sacrifice—it has bred problems of its own. In particular, the conception of human agents as legislators of moral norms lends itself quite naturally to an implausibly voluntaristic reading of Kant’s theory and runs afoul of a common-sense realism about our experience of moral phenomena.<sup>3</sup> In effect, the attempt to present Kant’s theory in a more palatable light—to foreground his conception of human subjects as autonomous agents—has come at the expense of rendering inexplicable the necessary constraints that must bind such subjects. Indeed, interpretations of this sort downplay key philosophical strengths of Kant’s theory insofar as they abstract from his underlying account of pure reason and its role in constraining the choices and actions of individual agents. As I will show, a change of focus from the individual agent to the pure rational faculty that is shared by all agents and lies at the basis of their agency helps to dispel the charge of voluntarism and to restore a common-sense realism about moral norms and constraints.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, I aim to show that we can deepen our grasp of Kant’s conception of morality and highlight its philosophical strengths if we focus on his account of the rational faculty qua source of morality. However, the rational faculty is, according to Kant, a deeply *systematic* faculty. The unity of a system—i.e. the integration of all possible cognitions of a given type under a set of appropriate first principles—is the distinctively rational form of unity. Kant insists that the

---

<sup>2</sup> See in particular the essays in Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, and Rawls, “Some Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy”. Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, and Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*, among other works, also have a similar focus.

<sup>3</sup> Korsgaard in particular has been criticized along these lines. See, e.g., Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature”, and Shaver, “Korsgaard on Hypothetical Imperatives”. Recent work has begun to address this problem. See in particular, Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 90-92, and Reath, *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory*, chaps. 4 & 5.

<sup>4</sup> At the same time, since such a reading accounts for these norms and constraints through the activity of reason, it does not present them as brute, unanalyzable facts, and hence dissolves a key motivation for the reading mentioned in the text. See chap. 2 below.

attempt to fashion systematic unity under principles is the distinctive mark of rational activity in general.<sup>5</sup> In the practical context, the concern with systematic unity implies that reason must fashion the thorough integration of all practical cognitions under the moral law, since precisely the latter is the fundamental governing principle of practical cognition in general. This systematic unity manifests itself in the subject's consciousness as the representation of the realm of ends—the representation that encompasses all possible objects of practical cognition and is itself a specification of the moral law. Analogously, reason in the theoretical sphere attempts to secure the systematic unity of theoretical cognition by subsuming judgments of the understanding under maximally general principles.

Reason's deep concern with systematic unity, however, has a further implication that has been less noted. For it implies that reason must determine systematic relations among *its own exercises*. More specifically, given that reason's two overarching exercises are its theoretical and practical employments, reason must determine a systematic relation between them—a relation that places these employments under a common governing principle. Failure to do so would mean that the form of rational unity is inapplicable to reason's own endeavors, that while reason aims to determine systematic unities *within* its exercises, it fails to do so *among* them. And this, in turn, would violate the very form of reason's exercise. Kant explicitly acknowledges the rational necessity of integrating the theoretical and practical employments under a common principle in the introduction to the *Grundlegung*.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, reason's focus on forming systematic unities renders this question necessary because reason must reflexively apply its form of cognition to its own exercise.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A302/B359; A645/B673.

<sup>6</sup> G 391: "I require that the critique of a pure practical reason, if it is to be carried out completely, be able to present at the same time the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle [*Prinzip*], since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application."

Hence, an investigation of pure reason qua source of the moral law necessarily leads to an investigation of the systematic relations reason determines among its various exercises—crucially between its theoretical and practical employments. The necessity of the latter investigation becomes evident once we consider the following two points. First, only such an investigation can determine the place of the moral law, and of moral constraints generally, within the entire scope of rational endeavors, and hence within the life of a rational being. That is, we can determine how a rational being must integrate standing moral constraints within its entire range of activities and concerns precisely by seeing how reason unifies its exercises. As I will show, Kant does indeed provide an account of how reason must systematically relate its two employments. Indeed, he argues that they must be brought under a systematic unity which itself has the moral law as its governing principle. Hence, Kant conceives of the moral law as grounding not only the practical exercise of reason but as the ultimate ground of all rational activity. This implies that Kant conceives of rational beings per se as fundamentally moral beings. Indeed, we can say that Kant conceives of reason as fundamentally the moral faculty in two senses. First, as already noted, reason just is the moral faculty in that it is the source of moral norms and constraints. But secondly, reason's function qua source of morality is in fact its deepest and most basic function, the one that ultimately governs all acts of the rational faculty.

The second reason for considering the unity of reason's employments is the following. A comparison of the practical and theoretical exercises of reason brings to the fore the unitary *form* of rational exercise—a form that most clearly manifests itself precisely in reason's concern with fashioning a systematic unity of cognition. Thus, by considering the systematic unities that reason respectively pursues in its theoretical and practical employments, we can make explicit the formal identity of reason's exercise in the two cases. Noting this formal identity in turn

allows us to grasp more clearly the distinctively rational character of moral constraints in general. Specifically, it shows how such constraints are always grounded in pure rational principles, and how they are systematically related to all other moral constraints. Hence, by examining Kant's account of reason as the source of morality together with his conception of reason as a single faculty with multiple employments, we both clarify the deeply rational character of moral constraints and specify the place of such constraints within the life of a rational being as a whole. In this manner, my dissertation as a whole serves to highlight the centrality of the moral law in the life of a rational being in general.

Given that my basic concern is with the pure practical capacity of reason, this is precisely where my dissertation begins. Kant's considered view is that pure reason "announces" its capacity to be practical through a "fact of reason."<sup>7</sup> An account of the so-called fact of reason will thus constitute an account of reason's pure practical capacity. Kant characterizes the fact of reason as the subject's consciousness of the moral law. Yet, Kant's doctrine of the fact of reason has tended to puzzle interpreters: how can a brute, unanalyzable "fact" be the source of unconditionally binding moral principles? I argue on philosophical and textual grounds that the fact of reason is to be understood as an act of reason, the act whereby reason demonstrates its capacity to determine the will. Thus, a subject's consciousness of moral constraints can be traced to the fundamental act of practical reason. The argument also shows that for Kant, all norms of practical reason, including the norms of instrumental rationality, are grounded in this

---

<sup>7</sup> This is Kant's "considered" view insofar as Kant appears to give a somewhat different account of reason's practicality in the *Grundlegung*. There is considerable controversy over exactly what Kant's argument in the *Grundlegung* is, and hence what relation it bears to the second *Critique* argument. I will be entirely ignoring these controversies since, as I will show, the second *Critique* argument has itself been widely misunderstood. See O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, chap. 3, Henrich, "The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant's Doctrine of the Fact of Reason", and Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, chaps. 12 & 13, for contrasting takes on this issue.

fundamental act. I argue that my reading better explains Kant's account of the fact of reason than Rawls's influential constructivist interpretation. Rawls's account emphasizes the role of subjects constructing principles of action, and takes the fact of reason as a brute datum; hence, it fails to account for the grounding role the fact of reason plays. My account can capture this role because it shifts the focus from individual agents to the activity of reason that constitutes them as such.

In the second chapter, I turn from a consideration of maxims and practical laws to Kant's account of ends—the goals, projects, etc. that a subject sets itself when it adopts practical principles. I argue that Kant's account of ends is best understood with reference to what Kant terms the realm of ends: a systematic union of all rational beings as ends-in-themselves and of the ends that each such being may set itself. Consideration of the realm of ends shows that the faculty of reason is in the first instance the end in itself; rational beings count as ends in themselves qua bearers of reason that rationally determine their own existence. Further, a subject's representation of an ends is necessarily grounded in its recognition of the existence and exercise of reason as the fundamental end in itself. I argue that my reading better captures Kant's conception than Christine Korsgaard's well-known constructivist reading of the way in which humanity functions as an end in itself for Kant. In particular, I argue Korsgaard misinterprets Kant's account, for he takes pure reason—rather than agents' choices—to determine what has value and hence to constrain agents' choice of ends. A general lesson of the first two chapters is that so-called constructivist readings tend to obscure the way in which reason governs an agent's self-conception by dictating the constraints of rational agency.

In the second part of my dissertation, I show that in Kant's picture the practical exercise of reason lies at the basis of all rational activity: the fact of reason is the fundamental act of

reason per se. In the third chapter, I develop an account of the unity of rational activity by noting the formal parallels between the theoretical and practical exercises of reason. I explain the positive role reason can and must play in theoretical cognition in terms of reason's primitive theoretical representation: the idea of the systematic whole of theoretical cognition that includes within it all possible theoretical cognitions. This idea, when employed regulatively, governs the totality of reason's legitimate positive role: the systematization of knowledge that itself approximates to the governing idea. Comparing the role of this theoretical idea with that of the realm of ends reveals how the deep generic form of rational activity governs all acts of practical rationality. This form, I argue, reveals the necessary systematic relations between the totality of moral constraints, i.e. they show how every moral constraint is always part a systematic unity of such constraints. These relations are often ignored by recent work on Kant's ethics because much of this work neglects his account of theoretical reason.

In the fourth and final chapter, I argue that this generic form of rational activity is necessarily related to the practicality of pure reason. Kant argues that the theoretical and practical exercises of reason are both guided by the corresponding interests of reason: it is reason's interest in the whole of cognition and the realm of ends that respectively accounts for acts of theoretical and practical rationality. And interest, Kant claims, is an essentially practical notion: the practical interest of reason is the basic rational interest that determines the other interests of reason. Hence, it is only given the practical interest of reason that we can make sense of the role of reason in theoretical cognition. Indeed, a close reading of how Kant specifies reason's theoretical interest reveals that this interest, and the corresponding exercise, is shaped by the practical dictates of reason. It is in this sense that the practical exercise of reason has "primacy" over the theoretical: the latter is shaped by the unconditional dictates of the former.

Thus, morality, i.e. reason's legislation of the moral law, serves as the grounding principle of all rational activity.

## 2.0 THE FACT AS ACT: A READING OF THE FACT OF REASON

Kant's primary task in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, as articulated by him in the text's preface, is to show that pure reason is practical; the practicality of pure reason in turn is to establish the validity of the moral law for us and hence to ground our status as moral beings<sup>1</sup>. The practicality of pure reason, Kant argues, is demonstrated by the fact of reason. Hence, the account of the fact of reason is crucial to Kant's conception of the ground of morality and of our nature as moral beings. Now in introducing the fact of reason, Kant characterizes it in the following terms: "Consciousness of [the moral] law may be called a fact of reason because one cannot reason it out from the antecedent data of reason, ... and because it instead forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic a priori proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical" (*KpV* 31). He goes on to clarify that "it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving" (*KpV* 31). In subsequent passages, Kant further characterizes this fact as "autonomy in the principle of morality" and as "consciousness of freedom of the will" and indeed as the moral law itself (*KpV* 42, 47).<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I will attempt to provide an account of the fact of reason and thus to elucidate Kant's conception of the practicality of pure reason and of the validity of the moral law. My central claim will be that the fact of reason is just the fundamental practical act of pure

---

<sup>1</sup> *KpV* 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *KpV* 55, 91, 104.

reason, and that this act consists in the legislation of the moral law as binding for the wills of rational beings; *consciousness* of the moral law, I will argue, is nothing further than the act of legislation itself. Specifically, I will first elucidate the sense in which the fact of reason qualifies as a synthetic a priori proposition, and then show in what sense this synthetic a priori proposition is properly characterized as consciousness of the moral law. The argument will further show that for Kant the practicality of pure reason is a condition of the practicality of reason at all.

The argument will proceed as follows. First, I will consider one plausible way of cashing out the proposition constitutive of the fact of reason and accounting for how it qualifies as synthetic a priori (§1). In the next section, I will argue that this proposal, though initially plausible, cannot be tenable (§2). I will then spell out what I take to be the proper characterization of the synthetic a priori proposition constitutive of the fact of reason (§3), and highlight its strengths in relation to Rawls' influential interpretation (§4). The argument of the third section will put me in a position to adequately account for the characterization of the fact of reason as consciousness of the moral law (§5).

1. Prominent recent interpretations of Kant's doctrine of the fact of reason have tended to focus on Kant's characterization of this fact as consciousness of the moral law, attempting to cash out Kant's doctrine in light of how moral constraints present themselves in the thought of deliberating agents.<sup>3</sup> Here, I will follow a different method of exposition: I will first try to show how the fact of reason qualifies as a synthetic a priori proposition, and in light of this I will specify the sense in which it is properly characterized as "consciousness of the moral law." My reason for adopting this approach is twofold. First, as I will argue below, I think focus on the

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy", and Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, chap. 13. See §4 below for discussion of Rawls's account.

characterization of the fact of reason as *consciousness* of the moral law, as well as the very term *fact* of reason, has tended to obscure the *kind* of thing Kant means to be talking about when he talks of the fact of reason. This obscurity is I think at least in part a function of certain preconceptions that attach to terms such as “consciousness” and “fact.” For obvious reasons, there is considerably less danger of possibly misleading preconceptions with regard to the idea of a synthetic a priori proposition, indeed as we will see a synthetic-practical a priori proposition, than with regard to the notions of consciousness and a fact. Secondly, trying to determine the content of the proposition in question and in particular seeing why a certain sort of specification will not work, will throw considerable light on Kant’s conception of a will in general and his conception of the validity of hypothetical imperatives in particular. Hence, the approach I will be adopting should give us a better sense of the way in which, and the extent to which, what Kant calls the fact of reason shapes the character of the will in general.

In this section, I will present a reading of the fact of reason qua synthetic a priori proposition that relies on a widespread conception of how Kant understands the workings of the will. Roughly, the thought is that we take as given instrumental rationality and whatever norms govern it, and we specify the will in these terms. We then get a further, pure rational determination of the will in that the will is subject to the a priori norm constituted by the categorical imperative. This determination of the will, according to the reading at issue, is the synthetic a priori proposition that is the fact of reason. Now such a reading would have to spell out in greater detail exactly how the relevant determination of the will counts as a synthetic a priori proposition.<sup>4</sup> However, my interest in this reading is in what it takes to be its starting point: the will as defined in terms of instrumental rationality. Thus, my primary focus will be on

---

<sup>4</sup> Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, chap. 3, provides one way of fleshing out such an account. The conception of the will at issue here can be found, inter alia, in Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Ethics*, chap. 1.

spelling out this conception of the will, and I will only schematically lay out how this conception can be used in an account of the fact of reason qua synthetic a priori proposition. My contention will be that while the conception at issue forms a proper part of Kant's account of the will, it *cannot* be used in an account of the fact of reason, because it *presupposes* the fact of reason: as I will argue in the next section, Kant conceives the norms of instrumental rationality as applicable only in the context of pure rational practical norms. Nevertheless, I think it is useful and instructive to consider this alternative account because it captures a quite common conception of the will or practical reason, one that appeals to several Kant commentators and practical philosophers more generally, and moreover one that can easily seem to lend itself to an account of the fact of reason.

To begin the account, we can turn to the general characterization of synthetic a priori propositions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to the definition there, to be synthetic a proposition must have a predicate which is not already contained in the subject concept, and to be a priori it must be necessary and universally valid, where the necessity of a proposition implies its (strict) universal validity, and vice versa (cf. B4-5; A6-7/B10-11). Hence, we need an account of how the fact of reason constitutes a necessary and universally valid proposition in which the subject concept is enlarged or further determined by means of the predicate concept.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, if this definition is to be of service, we first need to figure out what the subject and predicate concepts involved in the fact of reason are. In other words, we need a preliminary characterization of the proposition constitutive of the fact of reason. Now such a characterization is not immediately forthcoming from the discussion in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. However, help can be gleaned from the *Grundlegung*, where Kant similarly

---

<sup>5</sup> It will turn out that because we are here dealing with a *practical* synthetic a priori proposition, the characterization in the text will have to be modified in significant respects. See §4.

characterizes the categorical imperative as a synthetic a priori proposition and goes on to give some indication of the content of the proposition in question. The first order of business, then, will be to see what the synthetic apriority of the categorical imperative seems to consist in, as per the *Grundlegung* account. The argumentative maneuver throws up an obvious question as to the relation between the synthetic apriority of the categorical imperative and that of the fact of reason. Yet, given that the categorical imperative is just moral law as it applies to finite, pathologically affected beings, and given that the fact of reason is evidently closely connected, indeed partially identified, with the moral law, we might reasonably suppose the relation to be fairly direct.<sup>6</sup>

Now Kant analyzes the synthetic apriority of the categorical imperative in the following manner:

I connect a priori, and therefore necessarily, the act with the will without presupposing any condition taken from some inclination.... Hence [the categorical imperative] is a practical proposition which does not analytically derive the willing of an action from some other willing already presupposed (for we possess no such perfect will) but which connects the willing of an action immediately with the concept of the will of a rational being as something which is not contained in this concept.” [G 420n]

This passage suggests that the concept of the will of a rational being does not already contain the actual willing of an action, or of some particular kind of action, and that the categorical imperative is a synthetic proposition precisely in that it “connects” such an actual willing with the concept in question, it determines the will in the relevant manner. Furthermore, it effects this connection, or determination of the will, independently of any empirical condition, and hence is an a priori proposition. To flesh out this account we need two things. First, we need an account of the concept of the will of a rational being prior to its enlargement by the

---

<sup>6</sup> My positive account skips this argumentative detour (cf. §3), but as I will make clear, in one sense at least I take the very same proposition to be constitutive of the categorical imperative and the fact of reason (cf. §5).

categorical imperative, i.e. a specification of this concept independent of the categorical imperative and the enlargement it effects. Second, we need an account of the enlargement or further determination of this concept effected by the categorical imperative, an account of the kind of willing it makes possible, and of how this qualifies as an a priori determination.

Considering the context of the *Grundlegung*, we might tell the following story. The will, quite generally, is the capacity to move oneself to act on some representation in pursuit of the object of that very representation.<sup>7</sup> Thus, I may be moved by the thought of eating an orange to acquire and eat an orange. Of course, I will be so moved only if I enjoy eating oranges, and I know that I enjoy eating oranges; indeed it is primarily the thought of the enjoyment that I (think I) will derive that moves me.<sup>8</sup> Equally obviously, I can know that I generally enjoy eating oranges, and so will likely enjoy eating the one at hand, only on account of having eaten oranges in the past. In other words, the representation of eating an orange and thereby experiencing pleasure, like any representation involving a sensory pleasure derived from a sensibly given object will be empirically acquired, through past encounters with objects of the same kind. If such a representation serves as the motivating force for the action, or as the condition upon which the willing of a particular action is connected to the will, the determination of the will is empirically grounded in that the motivating condition, or ground, is itself empirically acquired. Thus, my willing to eat the orange is empirically grounded in that my thought of the enjoyment I will derive, the motivating condition, is itself empirically acquired. Further, since the possession of any empirical representation is contingent upon the particular history and circumstances of the bearer of the representation, any willing dependent on such a representation must itself be

---

<sup>7</sup> See the definition of the faculty of desire at *MS 211*. The will, as we shall see, is a specification of the faculty of desire; what this specification involves will be at issue in the argument.

<sup>8</sup> There may of course be strange cases where this does not hold, but such cases are irrelevant for my concern here, which is to outline Kant's account of a familiar (and wide) range of cases.

contingent. If in the past I had found eating oranges to be distasteful, the thought of eating an orange would not now move me to eat one, since I would lack the requisite motivating ground. To put the point generally, any willing in which an empirical and hence contingent representation serves as the motivating ground must itself lack universal validity.

The account of such conditional willing, willing which takes the thought of some sensible pleasure as its condition, constitutes an account of what Kant calls the lower faculty of desire. More specifically, it constitutes an account of the lower faculty of desire as it operates in *beings with a power of cognition*, i.e. beings who can discursively represent their objects of desire.<sup>9</sup> Kant's thought is that suitable encounters with certain empirically given objects, e.g. the eating of an orange, produce in the subject a feeling of pleasure; the experience of this pleasure can, and often does, lead the subject to be moved by the representation of the same kind of object to effect a similar encounter with another such object, e.g. to effect another eating of an orange, and so on in a self-reinforcing manner.<sup>10</sup> In other words, suitable encounters with appropriate objects can generate in the subject through the pleasure such encounters provide a habitual desire for the kind of object in question. Kant terms such empirically based habitual desires inclinations, and the inclinations constitute the lower faculty of desire: the exercise of this faculty consists in the operations of the inclinations. The crucial point again is that in the willing associated with the lower faculty of desire, an empirically acquired representation serves as the condition of the willing, or as that which moves us to act: we pursue the object of the representation on account of

---

<sup>9</sup> As this characterization suggests, a lower faculty of desire is equally attributable to beings *without* a power of cognition, e.g. non-rational animals. For every such faculty, some representation of sensible pleasure is a necessary motivating condition. The case of interest for me—which is my focus throughout this section—is that of beings for whom a *discursive* representation of the object serves as a necessary condition of willing.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *MS* 211-12; *KpV* 21-22.

the pleasure we have learned to associate with such objects. Thus, all such willing is empirically grounded and lacks universal validity.

Implicit in this account of the lower faculty of desire is the conception of this faculty as a kind of causality exercised by the subject for the purpose of realizing a pleasurable object (cf. *MS* 211). The appeal to the concept of causality here implies nothing more than that the subject moves itself to act in a particular manner thereby effecting a change in the world and is thus the cause of the change in an obvious sense; the representation that moves it to act and effect the relevant change is the condition of the exercise of its causal power. However, if the subject is to effectively act, it must use appropriate means to bring about that which its exercise of causality is in pursuit of. As a finite being, the use of means is necessary for the subject to be able to effect any change. And this necessity gives rise to a set of norms instructing subjects to take the appropriate means to the objects they will. Kant terms such instrumental norms hypothetical imperatives, and he argues that the connection articulated by hypothetical imperatives, the connection between willing an object and willing the means necessary for that object, is analytic:

Whoever wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means that are indispensably necessary to his actions and that lie in his power. This proposition, as far as willing is concerned, is analytic. For in willing an object as my effect there is already thought the causality of myself as an acting cause, i.e. the use of means. [*G* 417]

The underlying thought here is that when a subject exercises its causal power on the basis of a representation, it conceives of itself *as* acting on the basis of the relevant representation to bring about the object of that representation.<sup>11</sup> Such self-consciousness on the part of the acting subject is implicit in the very idea of the subject's exercise of its causality, for in such an exercise

---

<sup>11</sup> For reasons that will become clear, I am avoiding talk of ends at this point. I provide a brief account of what ends are for Kant in §2. The full account of ends will have to wait until the next chapter.

the subject represents the object being pursued as the effect of its own action. Going back to the example above, it is the thought of *my eating* of an orange that moves me. Thus, it follows from the nature of the motivating representation that in being motivated, the subject conceives of itself as acting to bring about the object represented by the motivating representation, hence as acting *cause*.

Kant's further thought is that in conceiving of itself as acting cause, the subject must also conceive of itself as using the necessary means it can to realize the object it represents as its effect. To act in pursuit of some effect is nothing more than to use the means appropriate to bring about the effect in question, so that the commitment to use the appropriate means is part of the subject's self-conception as acting cause. If I have the end of eating an orange and so conceive of my eating an orange as to be brought about by my acting, I must also conceive of myself as, e.g., willing to go to the store to get some oranges if necessary. In this way, the willing of means, i.e. the subject's self-conception as committed to acting in the appropriate manner, follows analytically from the its willing the end, specifically its self-conception as cause of what is thereby effected. To put it another way, the commitment to the necessary means is part of the subject's commitment to pursue the willed object in that the subject's self-conception as acting cause includes within it the thought of the necessity of taking the relevant means.<sup>12</sup>

However, Kant's parenthetical remark adds a wrinkle to this picture insofar as it suggests that the analytic connection that grounds hypothetical imperatives requires "the decisive influence of reason" in order to be established in the context of action. The phenomenon Kant is

---

<sup>12</sup> This way of describing the relation between willing the end and willing the means may seem to make it difficult to account for cases of weakness of will, at least of the sort where a subject wills some end but fails to take the necessary means. Such cases are beyond my present concern. However, I would argue that the relevant commitment is the *indeterminate* commitment to take the means—it is merely the commitment to do what turns out to be necessary. This leaves open the possibility that the subject, once it determines what the necessary means are, fails to commit itself to these.

gesturing at is common enough: I want to eat an orange, there are oranges in my kitchen, and yet I fail to get myself out of bed. What is interesting about Kant's formulation is the implication that the connection between committing myself to bringing about some effect and committing to use the appropriate means grounds a rational requirement. In other words, to be rational is in part to follow through on the connection in question in appropriate circumstances, and failing to follow through is a failure of rationality. Now it is not evident *given the account so far* why this connection grounds a *rational* requirement. We can provisionally explain Kant's thought by noting that effectively taking the appropriate means to the objects one wills is commonly taken to be *the* norm of instrumental rationality. Thus, Kant can be seen as appealing to the common idea that (at least part of) reason's job in the practical sphere is to determine the necessary means to the objects we will, and that it is incumbent on us to take these rationally determined means. Kant's point that the ground of these requirements is an analytic connection can then be seen as an account of the norm of instrumental rationality, one that appeals to the subject's self-consciousness as acting cause.<sup>13</sup>

Now this is a perfectly good (if incomplete) account of the lower faculty of desire and of the hypothetical imperatives that may arise as a function of its exercise. According to Kant, subjects can, and often do, choose and pursue objects on the kinds of grounds outlined above, and when they do, they are properly conceived of as exercising their lower faculty of desire. The problem, as I see it, lies in using this account to explain the way in which the categorical imperative qualifies as a synthetic a priori proposition. The proposal, to come back to the main line of argument, would be that the subject's causal power as constituted by the lower faculty of

---

<sup>13</sup> The account in the text is provisional because while it is right as far as it goes, to fully grasp why hypothetical imperatives are rational requirements we first need an account of ends (cf. §2). A full account of hypothetical imperatives lies beyond the scope of my present concerns.

desire and governed by the rational norm underlying hypothetical imperatives is precisely what functions as the “subject concept” in the proposition constitutive of the categorical imperative. The scare quotes are meant to register that what’s at issue here is not a concept per se, but rather a faculty and its exercise. And again, this should not be worrisome, since we are here dealing with a practical proposition and so should expect the first *Critique* definition to apply in a modified manner. The proposal, in other words, is that “the concept of the will” in the passage quoted above refers to a faculty that requires a sensibly given representation whose object is pleasurable as a condition of its exercise. Further, the one and only rational norm relevant to this exercise articulates the connection between committing oneself to realize the object corresponding to the motivating representation and committing oneself to use the appropriate means.

The categorical imperative, then, is seen as “enlarging the concept of the will” in that it further determines the faculty in question. Specifically, it further determines the will, or the subject’s causal power, such that it renders possible objects of the will that are not empirically grounded as well as action in service of such objects. Thus, the categorical imperative makes possible a new kind of willing, one in which a kind of action is willed a priori, i.e. independently of any empirical grounds. Indeed, the willing made possible by the categorical imperative must be as priori just because it does not rest on any empirical and hence contingent ground. But now as a priori, such willing is necessary and universally valid: it is incumbent on all practically rational subjects to conform to the willing contained in the categorical imperative. Thus, the willing in question is the source of a further and stronger rational norm on the causal power of the subject: practical rationality can now be seen to involve not just implementing hypothetical

imperatives but also conforming to the categorical imperative.<sup>14</sup> Even without a positive account of such a priori willing, it is easy to see that given the prior specification of the will, the categorical imperative would constitute a synthetic a priori practical proposition.<sup>15 16</sup>

Further support for this picture in general and its application to the fact of reason in particular might seem to present itself in Kant's discussion in the Preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Here, Kant argues that the text has the title it does rather than the title *Critique of Pure Practical Reason* because: "It has merely to show *that there is pure practical reason*, and for this reason it criticizes reason's entire *practical faculty*" (*KpV* 3). Kant elaborates on this thought when he writes that the question pursued in the *Critique* "is whether pure reason of itself alone suffices to determine the will or whether it can be a determining ground of the will only as empirically conditioned" (*KpV* 15). Given prior familiarity with the *Grundlegung*, it is natural to identify the "empirically conditioned" use of practical reason with the effecting of the connections necessary to derive hypothetical imperatives in the service of action directed toward empirically grounded objects. The practicality of pure reason, on the other hand, would consist in reason's capacity to determine the will a priori as governed by the categorical imperative. The passages above might be taken to imply that Kant's starting point is the empirically conditioned use of practical reason qua independently specifiable, more or less corresponding to the concept of the will of a rational being as delineated above. The task of the second *Critique* is then seen as that of showing the practical use of reason to be further determined so as to include the

---

<sup>14</sup> That this norm is a *rational* norm follows from Kant's insistence that the categorical imperative has its source in reason, though we do not yet have an account of why this is so (cf. §5 below).

<sup>15</sup> Allison defends a picture such as this when discussing Kant's purported distinction between practical and transcendental freedom (cf. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, chap. 3). I would argue that the purported distinction falls along with this picture, but that argument is well beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Engstrom, "Allison on Rational Agency").

<sup>16</sup> I have left this paragraph deliberately vague because my criticisms of the proposal under scrutiny focus on its identification of the "subject concept". Hence, its positive account of a priori willing is irrelevant for my purposes.

practicality of *pure* reason. Further, the practicality of pure reason is in one way or another attributable to the fact of reason in the second *Critique*, just as in the *Grundlegung* it is a function of the categorical imperative. Hence, the fact of reason is taken to be synthetic and a priori in exactly the same manner as the categorical imperative.<sup>17</sup>

2. This account of the synthetic apriority of the proposition constitutive of the categorical imperative and the fact of reason, compelling and well supported though it seems, is extremely hard to validate in light of other fundamental Kantian doctrines. Specifically, the problem lies with squaring the above account of what goes in place of the subject concept of the relevant proposition with Kant's repeated characterizations of the will and with an adequate account of the binding force of hypothetical imperatives, or of their status as rational norms. Taking these in order, if we look more closely at how Kant characterizes the will, we will see that it is impossible to specify "the concept of the will of a rational being" without already presupposing the practicality of pure reason. Further, a full account of the connection underlying the bindingness of hypothetical imperatives requires an account of ends, and the concept of an end also turns out to imply the practicality of pure reason. It thus emerges that for Kant the practicality of pure reason is a condition of the empirically conditioned use of practical reason, so that the latter cannot serve as the "subject concept" of the fundamental synthetic a priori practical proposition.

To begin then, consider Kant's characterization of the will as "the capacity to act according to the representation of laws, i.e. according to principles" (*G* 412); or: "The faculty of desire whose inner determining ground, hence even what pleases it, lies within the subject's

---

<sup>17</sup> One would still have to show how the categorical imperative and consciousness of the same are equivalent, but this is a general problem for any interpretation, not specifically for this one. Indeed, so far as I can see, the solution I offer below is consistent with this interpretation (cf. §5 below).

reason is called the *will*' (*MS* 213).<sup>18</sup> The second passage explicitly states that the will by definition is a capacity the determining condition for which can only be supplied by reason, and a fortiori not by an empirical representation associated with the feeling of pleasure. Indeed, the passage states that even the pleasure associated with the will has its basis in the rational capacity, and not in the encounter with an empirical object; it thus suggests that the determining grounds of the will lie solely in reason.

Exactly this conception of the will is also contained in the first passage, and this becomes evident once we get into focus what the relevant laws and principles are. Since we are here concerned with laws and principles that lead to action, at issue are *practical* laws and *practical* principles, for these Kant argues are the determining grounds of action.<sup>19</sup> Now Kant identifies practical laws with objective practical principles and distinguishes these from subjective practical principles, which he terms maxims. As the contrast is standardly put, practical laws are what all subjects ought to conform their choice and action to, while maxims are those principles that subjects in fact act on.<sup>20</sup> Hence, while practical laws are identical for all subjects, maxims might and typically do differ from one subject to another. As this characterization suggests, maxims have the form "I will X", where the scope of "X" may for present purposes be left unspecified.<sup>21</sup> Practical laws, by contrast, are fully general in that they contain no reference to individual subjects; as they are apprehended by pathologically affected finite subjects such as ourselves, they have the form of imperatives.

---

<sup>18</sup> See also the characterization of "the higher faculty of desire" at *KpV* 24.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *KpV* 19, 27; *G* 421n.; *MS* 225.

<sup>20</sup> Here and throughout, I am limiting my attention to subjects to whom at least some norm of practical rationality applies. This is not to rule out the possibility of subjects of whom this does not hold: consideration of this possibility falls outside the scope of this discussion.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the sample maxims Kant provides at *G* 422-23.

Now to gain a better grasp of the terms of this distinction and the relation between them, it helps to introduce a distinction Kant had not yet made explicit in the *Grundlegung*: that between the will narrowly defined [*Wille*] and the power of choice [*Willkuer*]. For Kant argues: “Laws proceed from the will, maxims from [the power of] choice” (*MS* 226). In other words, practical laws have their source in the will narrowly construed, whereas maxims constitute exercises of the power of choice. The will in the narrow sense is exactly what was characterized in the passage quoted above as having its “inner determining grounds” in reason.<sup>22</sup> Hence, objective practical principles, or practical laws, properly speaking have their ground in pure reason itself. Indeed, their objective validity, that they are binding for all subjects as such, presupposes that they have an a priori and hence pure rational ground. It is in view of this close connection that Kant identifies the will with pure practical reason itself.<sup>23</sup>

As for the power of choice, Kant distinguishes between two sorts or specifications of this power: “animal [power of] choice” [*tierische Willkuer*], which is determined by sensible impulses, and “free [power of] choice” [*freie Willkuer*], which is determinable by pure reason. Moreover, these specifications are jointly exhaustive with respect to the power of choice: the latter can either be a capacity that is determined by sensible impulses or a capacity that can be determined by reason, and it must be one to the exclusion of the other. Now as the very name suggests, an animal power of choice would not be the source of any *principles* of action: its exercise would not consist in the adoption of maxims.<sup>24</sup> Hence, maxims are properly understood as having their source in the *free* power of choice. So we can put Kant’s point by saying that

---

<sup>22</sup> For the rest of this section, unless otherwise noted, I will use “will” to refer to the will narrowly defined.

<sup>23</sup> *MS* 213, 226. See also *G* 412, *KpV* 55.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *MS* 226-27, *R* 21-22. But see also *R* 26n., where Kant seems to attribute maxims to a being whose power of choice is not determinable by pure reason. I think this passage is irreconcilable with fundamental Kantian doctrines (cf. fn. 33 below).

while the will qua pure reason legislates laws, objectively valid principles binding for all subjects, it is the function of the free power of choice to produce and enact maxims, principles the relevant subject does act on.

However, the distinction as presented so far potentially obscures the very close relation between maxims and practical laws insofar as it stresses the two different “sources” for the two sorts of principles. Note that as indicated above, Kant holds that the free power of choice is “that [power of] choice which can be determined by pure reason” (*MS* 213). Kant further argues that “freedom of choice” cannot be identified with the so called liberty of indifference but rather must be seen as consisting precisely in its determinability by the practical laws of pure reason (*MS* 226). In other words, freedom properly consists in the positive capacity to effect the pure rational determination of choice, where the grounds of determination are the practical laws of reason. These passages imply that in the defining case, the adoption of a maxim on the part of the subject consists in the subject’s power of choice being determined by the subject’s faculty of pure reason: maxims have their source in a capacity the proper exercise of which consists (in part) in its being determined by objectively valid practical principles. Given the difference in form between laws and maxims noted above, the present point suggests the following: when the power of choice is determined by pure reason, the resulting maxim will have *the same predicative content* as some corresponding practical law. In other words, the determination of the power of choice by pure reason consists in the adoption of objective practical principles as subjective practical principles by individual subjects.<sup>25</sup> Hence, if the power of choice operates as per its definition, even the principles that subjects do act on ultimately have their source in pure

---

<sup>25</sup> This point needs further elaboration, specifically with regard to the scope of laws and possible maxims. I will defer this question until the next chapter’s discussion of the scope of ends, and simply note for now that the point holds quite plausibly for the most basic maxims a subject may adopt.

reason. Thus, Kant's *Grundlegung* characterization of the will as "the capacity to act *according to the representation of laws*" refers to a capacity the determining grounds of which lie in pure reason: the characterization is fully consistent with the more articulated conception of the *Metaphysics of Morals*.<sup>26</sup>

Several aspects of the conception just outlined will prove important for the positive account to be developed below. The immediate point, however, is that the conception renders untenable the proposal considered in the previous section. First, given that Kant had not yet explicitly made the distinction between the will and the power of choice in the *Grundlegung*, there is the preliminary question as to how we are to understand "will" in "the concept of the will of a rational being". In terms of the proposal under consideration, it would clearly not do to identify "the will" with the will strictly speaking since the latter, as we have seen, is essentially identical with pure practical reason. Equally, however, "the concept of the will" cannot be seen as referring to the free power of choice, for it is again part of the specification of this capacity that it is determinable by the laws of pure reason. In other words, the free power of choice is not a capacity that can be specified independently of the practicality of pure reason, as the proposal under scrutiny would require.<sup>27</sup> Hence, it appears that there is no practical capacity in Kant's picture that can be specified independently of the practicality of pure reason, which capacity might then be further determined by the pure reason. And this means that the proposal forwarded in the previous section is essentially unworkable.

---

<sup>26</sup> Since Kant in the *Grundlegung* does not explicitly make the distinction between the will and the power of choice, I am leaving it open whether the characterization should be taken as referring to one or the other or both taken together. The important point for my purposes is that no matter how we settle this question, the capacity in question presupposes that pure reason is practical.

<sup>27</sup> It might be suggested that we identify the will in the *Grundlegung* passage with the power of choice, without specifying the latter as free (or not free). I think this suggestion is worth pursuing though I will not take it up here. Note though that we will then be talking about an indeterminate concept, not a capacity any being could possess. Hence, this suggestion would lead to an account quite different from the one I am arguing against.

We can reach the same conclusion if we go back to Kant's discussion of hypothetical imperatives: here again we will see that we cannot avail ourselves of hypothetical imperatives qua rational requirements without presupposing the practicality of pure reason. Recall that Kant's claim about the connection underlying hypothetical imperatives is: "Whoever wills the end, wills ... the means ...." The willing of appropriate means is taken to be analytic given the willing of an end. Evidently, properly grasping the relevant connection requires an account of what an end is, and what willing such a thing may involve. Now Kant defines an end as "an *object* of [the] free [power of] choice, the representation of which determines it to an action (by which the object is brought about)" (MS 384). In other words, an end is a representation of that capacity which is determinable by pure reason. Further, Kant regularly suggests that ends and practical principles are coeval concepts: to adopt a practical principle is at the same time to set oneself an end.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, we can think of the end as precisely what is represented in the predicate of a maxim, as whatever goes in place of "X" in "I will X". The characterization of ends as objects of the power of choice supports precisely such a reading of ends since as we have seen the exercise of this power consists in the adoption of a maxim. Hence, the exercise of the power of choice consists in an act that is at the same time the adoption of a maxim and the setting of an end, where the end is what is represented in the maxim as to be brought about through the subject's acting.<sup>29</sup>

Given the equivalence between maxims and representations of ends, each concept specifying the exercise of the free power of choice, representations of ends must be grounded in the practicality of pure reason for just the reasons that maxims are. Obversely, talk of ends, like

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *G* 427, *KpV* 58-59, *MS* 384.

<sup>29</sup> Here I am providing the briefest sketch of the concept of an end so as to properly account for the connection underlying hypothetical imperatives. I present my full account of ends in the next chapter.

talk of maxims, excludes the possibility of an independent account of the empirically conditioned use of practical reason. If we then take seriously Kant's thought that the connection underlying hypothetical imperatives obtains given the willing of an end, and hence that hypothetical imperatives depend on such willings, it turns out that one also cannot avail oneself of hypothetical imperatives to provide an independent account of empirically conditioned practical reason. Indeed, the point is precisely the one reached above that there is no such independent account to be had in Kant's picture: the present considerations merely show that any such purported account can no more invoke hypothetical imperatives than it can find a referent for "the concept of the will of a rational being".

Positively, and anticipating somewhat, maxims and ends are equally representations that apply only to those subjects in whom pure reason is practical, and the mention of either of these kinds of representations presupposes that we are talking about precisely such subjects. Indeed, we can see talk of maxims or ends as indicating just what class of beings, or alternatively what kind of practical capacity, we are talking about. Whether we approach the practical capacity via the concept of a maxim or that of an end, we are led to the very same conception whereby this practical capacity is ultimately grounded in the practicality of pure reason and the representations that have their source in the latter.<sup>30</sup> Further, the present considerations yield the positive point that hypothetical imperatives qua rational requirements are grounded in the act of setting an end and hence are ultimately grounded in the practicality of pure reason. In other words, the rationality of taking the appropriate means to the ends one wills is derivative upon whatever more fundamental rational constraints may be attendant on the willing of an end qua exercise of a power whose determining grounds lie in pure reason. More generally, given that

---

<sup>30</sup> I will elaborate on this conception in §5 below.

the ground of the subject's practical capacity as a whole lies in the practicality of its pure reason, the ground of all practical rational norms lies in the latter, and the account of all such norms presupposes the account of the latter.<sup>31</sup>

Now it may be objected that the argument presented here is inadequate in that it fails to account for the *Grundlegung* passage that provides the primary support for the proposal forwarded in §2. However, I think even here one finds only apparent support for the proposal. Consider that the passage in question occurs shortly after Kant's definition of the will as "the capacity to act according to the representation of laws," a capacity which we have seen to presuppose the practicality of pure reason. It is at least highly unlikely that Kant would now propose a concept of the will that contradicts this definition. The proper way to understand this passage, I think, is to think of it as initially specifying the will so as to leave it indeterminate whether its exercise already presupposes the practicality of pure reason.<sup>32</sup> The passage then stresses the *practicality* of the categorical imperative in directly determining the causal power of the subject—rather than, say, its *content* making possible a special or additional kind of determination of the will. It is precisely this aspect of Kant's conception—the efficacious role of pure reason as the determining ground of the power of choice—that I will explicate in the next section. Here, I want to note that such a reading of the passage renders it consistent with the considerations adduced in this section: throughout Kant takes the practicality of pure reason to be a condition of practical reason's empirical use, and in the contested passage he emphasizes the categorical imperative as a manifestation of this practical capacity.

---

<sup>31</sup> Since my primary interest here is in giving an account of the practicality of pure reason, I will not have anything more to say about the broader category of rational norms, nor in particular about hypothetical imperatives. What I wanted to make clear is that we cannot have an adequate account of hypothetical imperatives unless we first have an account of the practicality of pure reason, which is what I will try to provide in the next section.

<sup>32</sup> See fn. 27 for a suggestion as to how one might begin to flesh out this thought.

3. Argumentatively, then, we are back where we started: having seen the untenability of the conception forwarded in §1, we still need an account of the synthetic a priori practical proposition constitutive of the fact of reason. We can make a fresh start by turning to a much discussed footnote in the *Religion*. Here Kant claims: “from the fact that a being has reason it does not at all follow that, simply by virtue of representing its maxims as suited to universal legislation, this reason contains a faculty of determining the power of choice unconditionally, and hence to be ‘practical’ on its own” (*R* 26n).<sup>33</sup> Kant’s thought appears to be that the thought of *reason* as such does not contain the thought of the practicality of pure reason: investigation of the faculty of reason would not yield practicality as one its determinations. Now it is not immediately evident how to interpret talk of “reason” here, but supposing there were some plausible interpretation, the fact of reason would count as a synthetic a priori practical proposition precisely in that it would further determine the faculty of reason as of itself practical: reason would serve as the “subject concept” that is determined a priori as a practical power.

To spell out this thought, let us provisionally specify reason in terms of its role in theoretical cognition, viz. the organization of theoretical knowledge through acts of inference.<sup>34</sup> Given this specification, reason has no connection with the subject’s practical capacity, however this may be further characterized. Hence, in keeping with the argument of the last section, not only would the subject so considered lack the power of a priori practicality, the very representations of maxims and ends would fail to apply to it: its practical capacity could only be the source of non-rational sorts of representations. This theoretical rational faculty is then determined as also practical, as containing the determining grounds of the subject’s causal

---

<sup>33</sup> I am ignoring the fact that, as far as I can see, the mention of “maxims” in the passage is inconsistent with Kant’s argument as spelled out in the previous section (cf. also *KpV* 32; quoted below). I find the considerations adduced above decisive, and would suggest that Kant is here using “maxims” in a looser, non-strict sense.

<sup>34</sup> See A298-302/B355-359; esp. “the universal concept of the faculty of reason” at A302/B359.

power, and this is the determination constitutive of the fact of reason. Now it is easy to see how this determination counts as synthetic and a priori. It is synthetic in that it is a determination of the faculty of reason through which reason gains a power that it lacked as per its prior specification, the power to supply the determining grounds of the subject's power of choice. Further, the determination in question is a priori since the faculty of reason is of itself determined to be practical: as the quoted passage explicitly states, reason gains the power to be “‘practical’ on its own”, i.e. without any external and *a fortiori* contingent condition. In other words, the determination is a priori in that it is a determination of pure reason to be practical. Thus, the fact of reason is constitutive of a proposition that determines pure reason to be practical, and as such it qualifies as a synthetic a priori proposition.

However, for the full account of the proposition in question, indeed for a proper grasp of its synthetic apriority, we must turn to the manner in which the proposition itself is practical. The key point here is that fact of reason is constitutive of a synthetic a priori determination that is in turn constitutive of the practicality of pure reason. But now this synthetic a priori determination must itself be an act of reason. No other faculty could provide the ground of this determination, for if it did, the determining grounds of the pure practical reason would ultimately lie in this other faculty. In other words, if the fact of reason is to account for the practicality of pure reason, or to constitute reason as *of itself* practical, then this “fact” must consist in an act of pure reason itself. We can get at this same point more intuitively by going back to the quoted passage and noting that Kant characterizes the practicality of reason as its “faculty of determining the power of choice unconditionally”. This faculty, or power, is precisely that of providing the determining grounds of choice: the practicality of pure reason, then, is just its capacity to determine the power of choice according to pure rational grounds, i.e. according to

the practical laws that have their source in pure reason. Thus, the fact of reason can be characterized as the positive capacity of pure reason to provide the determining grounds of choice. If we then conceive of this capacity as itself grounded in a determination, this determination must again be attributable to pure reason itself, and for precisely the reason that only so can we secure the determining grounds of choice as lying in pure reason. In other words, the pure rational capacity to determine choice cannot itself have extra-rational grounds, on pain of ceasing to be pure rational capacity. Hence, the determination constitutive of the practicality of pure reason must be an act of reason: the very act of reason that grounds its capacity to provide the determining grounds of choice.

Now it might seem odd to characterize the fact of reason as an act of reason. However, the textual evidence also suggests that the “fact” should be construed as an act. For Kant consistently uses “*Faktum*” or “*factum*” to characterize the “fact” of reason, and he explicitly glosses “deed” as “*factum*” (*MS 227*), which suggests that the “*Faktum der Vernunft*” is really a “deed of reason”.<sup>35</sup> Further, in first posing the problem pursued in the second *Critique* as to whether pure reason is practical, Kant claims that if “pure reason ... is really practical, it proves its reality and that of its concepts by what it does” (*KpV 3*). In presenting the fact of reason as the solution to this problem, Kant argues that through the fact reason “announces itself as originally lawgiving”, suggesting that the fact of reason constitutes the act through which pure reason demonstrates its practicality. Thus, textual as well as argumentative considerations lead to the conclusion that the fact of reason consists in the act whereby pure reason determines itself as practical.

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *KpV* 31, 47, 55; *MS* 230. Willaschek, “Die Tat der Vernunft”, provides extensive exegetical support for the view that the fact of reason is indeed an act; see also Engstrom, Introduction to *Critique of Practical Reason*, xlii.

Thus, the fact of reason must be understood as an act of pure reason: an act that is at the same time reason's self-determination to be practical and its determination of the power of choice. Now we have seen the sense in which the fact of reason counts as an act of pure rational self-determination: it is the act through which pure reason determines itself as practical. However, its characterization as the determination of choice is at first puzzling. The determination at issue cannot be the pure rational determination of the *exercise* of the power of choice, as in a case where a subject adopts a maxim on ground of its conforming to a practical law. It cannot be this sort of determination because the fact of reason qua constitutive of the practicality of pure reason consists merely in the pure rational determinability of the power of choice. The determination of concern here is equivalent to the free power of choice qua capacity and is as such presupposed by the pure rational determination of the exercise of choice.

I suggest that we see the determination in question as pure reason's determination of the power of choice *as* the free power of choice. The point here is not that there is first a power of choice (as an actual capacity) and then a determination of this power as free: rather, that the power of choice in some subject is a free power of choice is equivalent to pure reason being practical in that subject, or the proposition constitutive of the fact of reason being true of the subject.<sup>36</sup> The act of determination constitutive of the fact of reason must itself be seen as a practical act in that the very existence of a free power of choice in some subject is in effect a demonstration of the practicality of pure reason. Thus, the determinability of the power of choice by pure reason, that there is in some subject a free power of choice, is itself attributable to the practicality of pure reason: indeed, to what we may describe as reason's ur-practical act. It is reason's ur-practical act in the sense that the determination of the free power of choice as such

---

<sup>36</sup> A parallel mistake would be to think that there is first reason qua actual capacity and then its determination as practical.

provides the ground for the pure rational determination of the exercise of this power. Further, the textual evidence cited above also suggests that we interpret the fact of reason as a practical act. Specifically, the characterization of the fact of reason as that through which reason “announces itself as originally lawgiving” suggests that the act is itself a demonstration of practicality: for reason to announce itself as lawgiving (for choice and action) is for it to demonstrate its practicality. And since this demonstration is a demonstration of its *capacity* to determine choice, it serves as the ground of its determination of choice in its exercise. Thus, it is well conceived of as the original demonstration of pure rational practicality, or what I am calling reason’s ur-practical act.

To avoid confusion, it is worth noting two points about the act I am taking the fact of reason to consist in. First, this practical rational act is *sui generis* in the following manner. As noted above, a practical act of pure reason generally consists in the determination of the power of choice in its exercise, i.e. in a subject’s adoption of a maxim. The rational determination of the exercise of choice, i.e. adopting a maxim, provides a condition of and hence makes possible doing what the maxim specifies as to be done. On the other hand, the determination of the power of choice qua free power provides the condition of and hence makes possible the pure rational determination of the *exercise* of choice. Thus—if all goes well—what follows from in the general case is the *undertaking of actions* across time that satisfy the maxim, whereas what follows from the fact of reason is (in the first instance) the *adoption of maxims* satisfying the determination contained in the fact of reason. It is precisely the fact that this determination serves as a condition of acts of maxim-adoption that constrains us to regard the fact of reason as a pure practical act of reason and at the same time as *sui generis*. In other words, given that the fact of reason grounds reason’s faculty of providing the determining grounds of action, it must

itself be attributable to pure practical reason and hence count as a practical act of pure reason. Since, on the other hand, it is the determination of the power of choice as such, rather than of its exercise, it is a practical act *sui generis*.

The second point is that the fact of reason qua act is to be understood as a self-sustaining activity rather than along the lines of a one off action. This, however, is a feature it shares with acts of reason in general. For example, suppose a rational determination of my choice whereby I adopt a maxim of the form “I will lead a healthy life.”<sup>37</sup> For as long as I hold on to this maxim, it will be grounded in the act consisting in the rational determination. Thus, the rational determination will continue for as long as I hold on to the maxim and will in effect manifest itself as my holding on to the maxim. Conversely, my giving up of the maxim would consist in the rational determination being lifted, so to speak. Hence, the act of rational determination must sustain itself for the duration that the corresponding maxim is effective in my life: we can helpfully think of the act in question as ongoing rational *activity*, an activity that manifests itself in that I continue to represent the maxim as such. Turning then to the fact of reason: I noted above that fact of reason qua act grounds the rational determinability of choice. Now the latter, i.e. the free power of choice per se, necessarily sustains itself as a capacity: its very status as a capacity implies its self-sustaining character. Yet, this capacity qua capacity can be redescribed as the continuing of the pure rational determination that is its ground. In other words, it is precisely in that the determining act sustains itself as pure rational activity that the free power of choice exists as such. Or again, the free power of choice can be regarded as the manifestation of the self-sustaining character of the original pure practical act of reason. Hence, we can describe

---

<sup>37</sup> As should be clear, the point applies to maxims irrespective of their generality. A maxim, if it is that, as specific as “I will now head to the store” will be self-sustaining for the appropriate duration. Though I cannot develop the point here, the theoretical judgments of reason must be equally self-sustaining; hence, the self-sustaining character mentioned here is a fully general feature of the acts of reason.

the fact of reason in terms of the capacity it grounds: as the faculty of pure reason to determine the power of choice, or simply as the practicality of pure reason in general.<sup>38</sup>

Now we still need to see how the synthetic apriority of the fact of reason and its practicality are to be understood in conjunction. In the argument so far, I have glossed the synthetic apriority of the fact of reason in terms of its determination of the faculty of reason as practical, while characterizing its practicality in terms of its determination of the power of choice. However, as noted above, these are only two ways of specifying one act of determination: the determination of reason to be practical of itself just is the determination of the power of choice as a free power of choice. Hence, the fact of reason is well described as a “synthetic-practical proposition a priori”<sup>39</sup> in which the synthetic act is itself an exercise of a priori practicality. To put the point another way, what makes the proposition synthetic and a priori is that it is constitutive of an exercise of pure practicality, so that an account of the former is at the same time an account of the latter. Thus, to say what the determination of reason as of itself practical consists in, we must invoke the determination of the power of choice as free. This, then, is the reason why the canonical characterization of a synthetic a priori proposition in terms of concept amplification must be modified when applied to a practical proposition. We might of course theoretically entertain the possibility of adding to the concept of reason the concept of its causality, but then we would not be talking about the fact of reason: we would have in view a theoretical proposition, precisely what the fact of reason is not. That said, I take it to be clear enough how talk of a synthetic a priori proposition is appropriate in this context

---

<sup>38</sup> There is the following disanalogy between the general case and the fact of reason. In (most) cases of maxim adoption, the rational determination at issue can be revoked without this affecting the very nature of the free power of choice. In the case of the fact of reason, by contrast, the revoking of the rational determination would be the end of the freedom of the power of choice.

<sup>39</sup> Kant characterizes the categorical imperative as such at *G* 420.

given that the pure determination of a capacity serves the function here that a priori concept amplification does in the theoretical case.

If I am right that the fact of reason is constitutive of an act of pure rational self determination, we have further reason to start with some specification of reason, rather than of the will, say, in spelling out the fact of reason qua proposition. My thought is that if what we want to get in view is a self-determining act of pure reason, the starting point must be a specification of this very faculty minus the act in question. Only if we have the rational faculty already in view can we see the fact of reason as a further determination of this faculty, and so also as the latter's self-determination. Conversely, if we were to start from a nominally or really distinct capacity such as some specification of the will in abstraction from the practicality of pure reason, then whatever account of the fact of reason we arrived at would obscure its status as an act of rational self-determination. Precisely an account of the sort I am advocating seems implicit in Kant's characterization of the fact of reason as that through which "pure reason ... announces itself as originally lawgiving". This characterization, which forms part of the canonical discussion of the fact of reason, similarly suggests that we start with pure reason (in some specification) and that the fact of reason is constitutive of the determination of pure reason as "originally lawgiving", or as practical of itself.

Now the account as I have presented it rests on provisionally specifying the faculty of reason prior to its determination as practical as essentially theoretical reason. Before turning to the task of further fleshing out the account of the fact of reason, I want to briefly provide some support for this specification. First, I think such a specification has considerable intuitive plausibility. On Kant's picture, reason has exactly two general areas of concern: theoretical

cognition and a priori determination of choice:<sup>40</sup> since the latter is precisely the content of the determination constitutive of the fact of reason, one might quite naturally take the faculty prior to this determination as being concerned solely with theoretical cognition. Further, such an account appears to be supported by Kant's comments in both the first and the second *Critiques*. Kant repeatedly claims that while freedom remains a problematic concept for theoretical reason, its reality is proved by the practicality of pure reason.<sup>41</sup> Freedom, in this context, is the independence of choice and action from natural, or empirical, causes; this, positively considered, amounts to the determination of the power of choice solely by reason, and the latter is precisely what is established by the fact of reason (cf. *KpV* 33).<sup>42</sup> The place of freedom in the theoretical and practical exercises of reason suggests that we start with the specification of reason as a theoretical capacity, and that the thought of freedom qua non-empirically grounded causality is available given this specification but only as a problem, as a possibility that we can neither affirm nor deny. The fact of reason then supplies an a priori determination of this specification of reason in that it proves the possibility of freedom by demonstrating its reality. Thus, the proposition constitutive of the fact of reason moves us from reason as a purely theoretical faculty to reason as also a pure practical faculty.

4. Before spelling out the argument further, it will be helpful to briefly compare the view presented here with Rawls's justly famous reading of the fact of reason.<sup>43</sup> Rawls, echoing Kant,

---

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., *KpV* 120.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *KpV* 5, 30, 49; A557-58/B585-86.

<sup>42</sup> Again, what is at issue here is the determination of the *capacity* as free. This provides the ground for the determinability of the capacity in its exercise by pure reason, and so does not rule out the possibility of choosing and acting against reason.

<sup>43</sup> I will be relying on Rawls's account in "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy"; all parenthetical references in this section are to this paper. Substantially the same account can be found in Rawls's *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 253-272.

argues that the fact of reason is “the fact that in our common moral consciousness we recognize and acknowledge the moral law as supremely authoritative and immediately directive for us” (102). While it would be hard to dispute this claim, at least insofar as it is a reading of Kant’s doctrine, it is also difficult to gain much insight from it: the “fact” invoked here is precisely what seems to call for explanation. More helpfully, Rawls proposes that the fact of reason is bound up with “how we represent to ourselves our free and equal moral personality in everyday life”, and with “our conception of persons as reasonable and rational, and as the basic units of agency and responsibility”, where the (latter) conception is in fact what is manifested in the (former) representation (96). Rawls’s thought seems to be that it is a basic fact about us that each of us represents herself and others as free and equal, reasonable and rational, basic units of responsibility, and that this basic fact is what Kant is gesturing at in speaking of the “fact of reason.” Further, this thought plays a crucial role in Rawls’s “constructivist” interpretation of Kant’s moral philosophy: the basic representations mentioned here guide the “construction” of the rules and principles of moral conduct for those who fall under the scope of these very representations.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the representations in which the fact of reason is taken to consist play the sort of grounding role with respect to moral conduct generally that Kant clearly means to assign to fact of reason.

Now it would be idle to dispute that the representations and conceptions Rawls highlights are closely linked to Kant’s doctrine of the fact of reason. The point, however, is that these representations themselves call for a rational grounding or explanation: to take them as basic is to leave obscure how they are generated in the practical thought of (individual) subjects or why they have any grip on these subjects. To answer these questions, I suggest, it is necessary to

---

<sup>44</sup> Cf. “Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy”, 98-102.

ascend from the representations present in the practical thought of individual subjects to the selfsame practical activity of pure reason in these subjects. To put the point another way, if rational agency, in Kant's view, is first constituted by the fact of reason, then to understand the fact of reason, we cannot rest content with a conception of persons as rational agents: we must seek to grasp *how* rational agency is first constituted, what accounts for the status of some being as a person, and this requires that we focus on the faculty of reason and its pure practical exercise. The concept of a person, as Kant understands this, presupposes the fact of reason in that a person is precisely a being in whom reason demonstrates its capacity to be practical. Hence, the fact of reason is so to speak prior in the order of explanation to the concept of a person and to the associated representations that Rawls appeals to. An adequate account of the fact of reason, then, cannot invoke the sorts of representations and conceptions Rawls employs.

In part, Rawls appears to be misled by Kant's use of the term *fact* of reason, treating it as a sort of datum, or a fact in the ordinary sense. Yet, as we saw in the last section, both textual and philosophical considerations strongly suggest that the fact of reason is no such thing but rather an act of (self-)determination on the part of the rational faculty. More importantly, Rawls' reading points to a larger gap in the constructivist interpretation of Kant. Rawls is right to suggest that with the fundamental practical principles in hand, rational subjects "construct" the content of morality in the sense that in a given set of circumstances they derive appropriate specific duties from these principles and thus flesh out what morality requires (in the given circumstances).<sup>45</sup> However, as Rawls himself recognizes, the fundamental practical principles are not themselves happily thought of as in any sense constructed. And the constructivist approach on its own does not provide any account of these principles. Indeed, it is difficult to

---

<sup>45</sup> I spell out my account of this process in more detail in chap. 2.

see how it *could* account for these principles since it takes them and the conceptions they make available, such as that of free and equal persons, as its starting point. It takes the relevant principles and conceptions as so to speak the materials with which to construct a more substantive morality. Yet, Kant's principal focus in most of his writings on practical philosophy is precisely on the fundamental practical principles, indeed on *the* fundamental principle of pure practical reason. It is only by grasping what the practicality of pure reason consists in that we can account for the fundamental principles and thus ground any moral requirements at all, including those "constructed" by agents in specific circumstances. Hence, the constructivist approach, while helpful for understanding key aspects of Kant's practical philosophy, cannot by its very nature provide a full account of Kant's view. Indeed, it must be supplemented by a distinctively *non*-constructivist account of the fundamental practical laws that, according to Kant, ground rational agency as a whole.

5. I have so far argued that the fact of reason is a practical act of self-determination on the part of pure reason; an act that is a demonstration of pure reason's practicality and at the same time originally constitutive of this practicality. What remains to be shown is how this act is equivalent to the consciousness of the moral law, as per Kant's canonical characterization of the fact of reason. My focus here will be limited: I will not be taking up the very large and difficult question of why the categorical constraint generated by the practicality of pure reason has the particular form it does.<sup>46</sup> Rather, I will attempt to elucidate the nature of the *consciousness* of the moral law and its relation to the practicality of pure reason. In other words, my concern will

---

<sup>46</sup> As will hopefully be evident, explaining the nature of the consciousness involved is independently helpful in that it helps us grasp the particular manner in which the relevant constraint has a grip on subjects. See Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, chap. 5, for an insightful reading of the form of the moral law.

be the relation between the constraint grounded in the practicality of pure reason and the manner in which this constraint figures in the practical thought of subjects. I will argue that there is in fact no gap between the constraint and its consciousness: that, on the other hand, the constraint consists in that it is (practically) cognized by subjects. This will yield the further result that the act of self-determination constitutive of the fact of reason is at the same time the cognition of the constraint thereby imposed.

The key to the account is provided by the following claim of Kant's: "[Moral laws] hold as laws only insofar as they can be *seen* to have an *a priori* basis and to be necessary" (MS 215). The context makes clear that Kant is referring to moral or practical laws as opposed to the theoretical laws that govern the natural world. He is evidently asserting here that moral laws, objective practical principles, qualify as such only as a function of their being cognized as such. To appreciate why this is so, we need to develop the conception of the practical capacity outlined in §2. According to this conception, maxims function as the starting points of action in the sense that as principles they are relatively the most general rules the subject uses in determining itself to act, and from these more specific rules can be derived depending on the particular context of action. Further, to ascribe a maxim to a subject is to ascribe to the subject cognition of the maxim qua practical principle, i.e. qua sufficiently general rule determinative of action. This point follows from our earlier discussion, in §1, of the conditions of the subject's exercise of its causal power. Maxims, as the first determining grounds of action, are simply the most general type of representations that figure as conditions of the subject's exercise of its causality, its capacity to effect change through acting. In other words, adopting a practical principle is the most fundamental act by virtue of which the subject first becomes an acting subject. Given the point above about the necessity of self-consciousness on the part of the acting subject, for a

practical principle to function as such, it must be cognized by the acting subject as such. Thus, all practical principles attributable to a subject are cognized by the subject as the starting points of action, as (at least) subjectively valid practical principles: indeed, the status of the practical principle as such depends on the corresponding act of cognition.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, as noted in §3 above, the capacity to act on maxims entails the capacity to act according to practical laws. Kant affirms this point, and hints at the conception that grounds it, in the following passage:

[The will is the capacity of rational beings] to determine their causality by the representation of rules, hence insofar as they are capable of actions in accordance with principles and *consequently* also in accordance with a priori practical principles (for these alone have that necessity which reason requires for a principle). [*KpV* 32; emphasis added]

In other words, Kant takes it to follow from the fact that a subject can act according to practical principles that it can also act according to a priori or objective practical principles. The thought underlying this point is that it follows from the very nature of principles that only a priori principles count as such in the primary sense.<sup>48</sup> We can put the point by saying that principles as such are representations of reason, so that in the first instance a principle is a representation that has its source solely in reason: it is an a priori, objectively valid representation. Further, it is precisely in virtue of the rational source of principles in general that we can talk of maxims, subjective practical principles, only in the case of beings whose practical capacity is fundamentally grounded in the practicality of pure reason. Practical principles in general come into view only as a function of the a priori practical principles that have their source in pure

---

<sup>47</sup> This point does not run afoul of Kant's apparent insistence, especially in the *Grundlegung*, that subjects may often be unaware of their maxims (cf. *G* 407). As I will show below, to attribute cognition of a maxim to a subject is not to claim that the subject can straightforwardly acknowledge the maxim as such. On the other hand, subjects can on reflection become aware of (at least some of) the maxims on which they act.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. A299-302/B356-59.

reason. It is then a function of the rational source of principles as such that talk of maxims is indicative of that sort of practical capacity whose ground lies in pure reason. It follows from this that to be able to act on any principles at all, even merely subjective ones, a subject must be able to act on ground of its cognition of objectively valid, or a priori, practical principles. This suggests that cognition of practical laws is conceptually prior to maxim adoption, and hence that the subject's fundamental practical act, that through which it first becomes an acting subject, is its cognition of a practical law as such, viz. as binding on its exercise of choice.

To see that this is indeed Kant's position, consider a case in which pure reason determines the power of choice in its exercise, i.e. a case where the subject adopts a maxim on ground of its corresponding to a practical law. Paradigmatically, in such a case the subject cognizes the practical principle at issue as subjectively *and* objectively valid, and indeed as adopted, made subjectively valid, on ground of its being objectively binding. More intuitively, in such a case, the subject adopts the maxim precisely because it recognizes the corresponding law as a law. This point again is an application of the general point about the necessity of self-consciousness on the part of the acting subject: since the subject must cognize the practical principles it acts on as such, it must also be able to cognize those maxims that are grounded in practical laws as precisely such. My claim here is not that the subject is always aware of the determining grounds of its maxims, but rather that *when* the power of choice is determined by pure reason, the subject *can* cognize the resulting maxim as grounded in a law, and when this occurs, its adoption of the maxim is grounded in its cognition of the law qua law. But now exactly such a case conforms to the definition of the free power of choice: the pure rational determination of choice on the one hand constitutes the defining exercise of this power and on the other hand consists in the subject's adoption of a maxim on the basis of recognizing the corresponding law *as a law*. In

such a case, the grounding act of practical cognition is the cognition of an objective practical principle as such: this act of cognition is conceptually prior to, indeed provides the rationale for, the practical-cognitive act constitutive of adopting the corresponding maxim. Hence, a case of maxim adoption that conforms to the character of the capacity responsible for generating maxims is a case in which the cognition of a practical law as such is prior to the adoption of the maxim. Precisely for this reason, we can conclude that on Kant's conception, the fundamental or original act through which the subject becomes an acting subject is the cognition of an *objective* practical principle *as such*: the adoption of a maxim is consequent on this.

Now there might still be some resistance to the thought that any subject that self-consciously acts on subjective practical principles must also cognize practical laws: some such subject may, at the extreme, flatly deny that it recognizes any such law. It will, therefore, help to note a more general aspect of Kant's conception of practical cognition, one that will moreover allow a better grasp of the particular case of consciousness of the moral law. Consider Kant's oft-noted remarks in the *Grundlegung* about the untrustworthiness of the self-attribution of motives (*G* 407). Kant's immediate concern is to point out that the motives or reasons professed by subjects for their actions often do not correspond to the considerations that actually motivate them. Commentators regularly cite these remarks to argue, correctly, that subjects' maxims are often opaque to them.<sup>49</sup>

This same point can however be put in a more paradoxical yet more revealing way: subjects' practical cognition, their cognition of what they are to do, is not necessarily (fully) transparent to them. Kant's point in the relevant passage is to argue that a subject's concern or regard for itself may lead it to obscure *from its own view* the considerations it takes to be decisive

---

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 85, Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 108, and Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 189.

for its choice. Yet, this possibility of obscurity, i.e. the possibility of a subject's being in the dark about considerations directly relevant to its choice, extends equally to considerations that it *does* act on and to considerations it *is to* act on. That is, a subject's self-regard may obscure from its view considerations that it ought to act on just as it might disguise the nature of the considerations that it does act on. Nevertheless, just as there is *ex hypothesi* a maxim the subject is acting on, whether or not it is acknowledged by the subject, so also, on Kant's view, we can attribute the practical cognition of a principle to a subject even if the subject is not in a position to acknowledge the cognition as such. Hence, that some subject may (explicitly or implicitly) deny one or more objective practical principles does not of itself preclude attributing to the subject practical cognition of those very principles. On the other hand, Kant's conception of practical principles and of their cognition requires that we attribute cognition of practical laws to subjects that act on maxims.<sup>50</sup>

To recap the main result of this section so far: for Kant, the practicality of a practical principle is constituted by the practical-cognitive act through which the subject determines itself to act on its basis, and because practical laws serve as the determining grounds of the power of choice, the practical cognition of laws as such is prior to the act constitutive of maxim adoption. These points together imply that the practicality of practical laws, hence their status as practical laws, depends on their being cognized as such, and further that such acts of practical cognition lie at the basis of the subject's exercise of its practical capacity. Suppose we now help ourselves to Kant's thought that *the* moral law, the principle instructing subjects to only adopt such maxims as can hold as universal laws, is the fundamental or original objective practical principle, that on which all other practical laws rest. We can then infer from the above that the

---

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Kant's discussion of a subject's *Gesinnung* at R 23-26.

practical cognition of this fundamental practical law is the first condition of the subject's exercise of its practical capacity. In keeping with the point made above, this cognition need not be explicit on the part of subjects: rather, it is necessarily attributable to any subject that acts on the basis of maxims at all. If the subject's practical capacity as a whole is grounded in its cognition of practical laws as such, and if the latter in general is grounded in the cognition of the most basic practical law, then the subject's practical capacity as a whole is grounded in its cognition of *the* moral law.<sup>51</sup> Given the above supposition, we can further infer that the practicality of the moral law, its status as an a priori or objective practical principle depends on the practical cognition of the same. Hence, the moral law is first constituted as such precisely in that it is cognized as such.

If we take Kant's talk of consciousness of the moral law to refer to the practical cognition of the same, we see that consciousness of the moral law is not something distinct from the moral law itself, but is rather constitutive of the moral law as such.<sup>52</sup> Further, this is the only way to make sense of talk of consciousness of the moral law as it figures in the characterization of the fact of reason, for we are to be conscious of the moral law as binding for the wills of all rational beings, and this is equivalent to practically cognizing the moral law qua objective practical principle. On any other conception of the consciousness in question, it is not clear that what we have in view is consciousness of the moral law at all. Kant's formulation of the moral law in the second *Critique* lends further support to this picture, for he formulates it thus: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal

---

<sup>51</sup> For the rest of this paper, I will use "the moral law" to refer to the familiar principle that Kant variously characterizes as "the categorical imperative" (*G* 421), "the fundamental law of pure practical reason" (*KpV* 30), etc. I will not be concerned with the differences between the various formulations.

<sup>52</sup> The practical cognition at issue here will be sui generis in a way that roughly tracks the manner in which the fact of reason is sui generis: strictly speaking, the cognition of the moral law is not of it as to be done, but it is, if all goes well, the ground all cognition of what is to be done, i.e. of all practical cognition (cf. §3).

law” (*KpV* 30). In other words, Kant formulates the moral law as a categorical imperative, or in the form in which the law applies to, and hence appears to, pathologically affected finite beings such as ourselves. This is precisely the form in which we cognize the moral law as a constraint on all our choice and action. Thus, consciousness of the moral law consists in the practical cognition of a categorical constraint on our causal power. Given the identity between the law and its cognition, it is clear that the fact of reason qua consciousness of the moral law and the moral law itself express the same synthetic a priori proposition.

This suggests that we go wrong if we treat Kant’s talk of consciousness of the moral law as referring to the common moral consciousness exhibited by agents engaged in everyday moral deliberation.<sup>53</sup> What Kant’s texts suggest on further investigation is that this consciousness is better understood as the implicit practical cognition that underlies ordinary moral deliberation even when the deliberating agent may not recognize it as such in the process of deliberation. Bringing this cognition to explicit awareness may then require a process of reflection on the part of agent. Further, Kant could be seen as providing a model for such reflection through the structure of the *Grundlegung*, which Kant explicitly characterizes as starting with the common moral consciousness of deliberating agents and uncovering the categorical imperative as the ground of this consciousness through a process of reflection. Thus, the structure of the *Grundlegung* similarly suggests that consciousness of the moral law qua explicit act of practical cognition is not pre-reflectively present in common moral consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Such a misconception seems quite prevalent among commentators. See, e.g., Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, 232-33, and Rawls, “Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy”, 102. For a more recent—and more self-conscious—defense of such a view, see Kain, “Practical Cognition, Intuition, and the Fact of Reason”.

<sup>54</sup> This is not to suggest that a specifically *philosophical* process of reflection, such as the *Grundlegung* provides, is necessary to bring the practical cognition of the moral law to explicit awareness. My claim is rather that *some* process of reflection is required and that the *Grundlegung* provides one such, albeit philosophical, process.

Given that “consciousness of the moral law” as a characterization of the fact of reason refers to the practical cognition of the moral law in the above sense, we can further note the sense in which this consciousness is at bottom just the a priori act of self-determination discussed above (§3). Indeed, the consciousness or practical cognition of the moral law just is the a priori act of self-determination in another guise (assuming again that the moral law is the fundamental pure rational practical principle). It will help to recall here that the fact of reason qua act of rational self-determination can equally well be characterized as the pure rational determinability of choice and that this determinability consists in pure rational principles serving as the determining grounds for the power of choice. Now if the moral law is the fundamental practical principle of reason, it must at the same time serve as the fundamental determining ground of choice: the pure rational determinability of choice must be at bottom its determinability by the moral law itself. Thus, the fact of reason qua act of rational self-determination constitutes the moral law as the fundamental ground of the subject’s causal power in that it asserts practical laws generally as the determining grounds of choice.

Further, I argued above that the fact of reason can be described as a faculty because it is an act in the sense of a self-sustaining activity, and this activity manifests itself as the faculty in question. It follows that it is the self-sustaining activity of reason that constitutes the moral law as the fundamental determining ground of choice. In other words, in that pure reason determines itself to be practical, it asserts the moral law as the first determining ground of the power of choice. The point here is that the act of rational self-determination has the form of the practical cognition of the fundamental practical rational principle because the act in question just is the assertion of practical laws to be the determining grounds of choice. The fact of reason (qua act) consists in the assertion that (the content of) the moral law is to be done (i.e. to be followed).

Further, since the act in question is in effect a necessarily self-sustaining activity, the practical cognition is equally necessary and ever-present: insofar as reason sustains its self-determination to be practical of itself, it asserts the moral law as the first determining ground of choice. This assertion has the character of a necessary practical cognition in the sense that the self-sustaining rational activity translates into the consciousness that the determination of choice must always conform to the moral law. We can hence say that the fact of reason qua act of rational self-determination manifests itself precisely as consciousness of the moral law.

To gain a better grasp of the relation between the fact of reason qua act of rational self-determination and qua consciousness of the moral law, we can consider the following point. Kant contends that the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of the freedom of the will, whereas freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law (*KpV* 5fn.). As Kant makes clear, it is the consciousness or cognition of the moral law that functions as the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, which we can take to be equivalent to the practicality of pure reason.<sup>55</sup> This remark of Kant's dovetails nicely with my central contention that the fact of reason essentially and in the first instance consists in the act of self-determination in which reason asserts its practicality.

This act of rational self-determination manifests itself, for the reasons just noted, as the (necessary) consciousness of the moral law. If we now consider the practicality of pure reason in terms of a given subject's practical consciousness, it presents itself precisely as consciousness of the moral law. Thus, the fact of reason qua the fundamental assertion of the pure reason's practicality first manifests itself in the subject's mind as consciousness of the moral law and is naturally identified with the same. In other words, the subject first becomes conscious of the fact of reason in that it cognizes the moral law: the moral law, in a manner of speaking, functions

---

<sup>55</sup> Kant repeatedly asserts that freedom "in the positive sense" just is the practicality of pure reason. See, e.g., *KpV* 33, 105.

as the *ratio cognoscendi* of the pure practical act constitutive of the fact of reason. This very act, on the other hand, can be well described as the *ratio essendi* of the subject's consciousness of the moral law. Hence, if the fact of reason is indeed essentially the act of rational self-determination that—given its nature—necessarily manifests itself in the minds of individual subjects as consciousness of the moral law, then we can make good sense of Kant's claim that the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom and that the former is the *ratio essendi* of the latter. I suggest these considerations provide further support for my contention that the fact of reason is essentially the pure rational activity in which reason determines itself to be practical of itself while also showing why it is first characterized as consciousness of the moral law.

I want to end this discussion by briefly noting the relation of the fact of reason, as interpreted here, to the practical exercise of pure reason in general. A practical act of pure reason in general, as noted above, consists in the determination of the power of choice (in its exercise). Any such determination will have some practical law as its ground, and hence will ultimately be grounded in the moral law: the moral law functions as the ultimate ground of all pure practical exercises of reason.<sup>56</sup> Given that consciousness of the moral law as the fundamental constraint on choice is just the manifesting of the fact of reason, practical acts of the rational faculty in general, i.e. determinations of the power of choice, are each and every one grounded in the fact of reason. Indeed, they are nothing other than assertions of the very authority of reason that it first asserts in the fact of reason. To put the point another way, the practicality of pure reason in no case amounts to anything more than what is contained in the fact of reason, since it consists in nothing more than the determination of choice (in its exercise) on the basis of grounds that are asserted as authoritative by the fact of reason. It is in this sense

---

<sup>56</sup> Since we are here talking about practical exercises of pure reason, the choice of maxims on extra-rational grounds, and a fortiori the choice of maxims contrary to the moral law, falls outside the scope of my claims.

that the act constitutive of the fact of reason is the only act attributable to practical reason, or as Kant puts it, is “the sole fact of pure reason.”

6. I have argued in this chapter that a subject’s cognition of rational constraints on its power of choice is ultimately traceable to the fundamental practical act of reason, and that this fundamental act is what Kant refers to when he speaks of the “fact of reason.” Thus, the fact of reason is the fundamental demonstration of pure reason’s practical capacity, a demonstration that presents itself in an individual subject’s practical consciousness as its being beholden to a necessary law. Most fundamentally, the law that the subject finds itself beholden to is nothing other than pure reason’s authority over the subject’s entire practical capacity. Hence, the subject’s consciousness of this authority manifests itself as the subject’s practical cognition of the moral law *in the form that most explicitly foregrounds the very concept of law*. In other words, the fact of reason qua fundamental demonstration of reason’s practicality is immediately connected with a subject’s consciousness of the fundamental practical law *qua law*. Correspondingly, my discussion of the fact of reason here has focused on representations of practical principles, i.e. laws and maxims, for precisely these representations are formally closest to the universal law formulation of the moral law.

Yet, we have seen Kant stress that every practical principle, whether maxim or law, has an *object* which the principle in question aims at and which is realized through action based on the principle. These objects are the *ends* that a subject sets itself through its choices and attempts to achieve through its actions. The key point, however, is that there is a perfect symmetry between the principles of choice and action and the ends of choice and action. In effect, the act whereby a subject adopts a maxim is simultaneously the act whereby it sets itself

an end. Further, Kant holds that the practical laws of reason prescribe necessary ends, ends that we can characterize as ends of reason. Hence, to properly grasp Kant's account of practical reason, we must consider not only the fundamental act of reason whereby the subject is bound by the moral law, but also the possible and necessary ends that this very act of reason gives rise to. Crucially, the very fact that pure reason is of itself practical gives rise to a relatively determinate *system* of ends. For the nature and scope of possible ends depends on the practical laws that have their source in pure reason and are to serve as the determining grounds of the power of choice. Further, the scope of possible ends is strictly speaking identical to the scope of possible rational constraints on choice. Hence, we can grasp the full system of rational constraints generated by the practical cognition of the moral law precisely by developing Kant's account of ends. The next chapter will be devoted to developing these points. In particular, I will be concerned to show that the representation of the *realm of ends* constitutes the complete system of the rational constraints on a subject's power of choice.

### 3.0 THE REALM OF ENDS

In the second section of the *Grundlegung*, Kant lays out what he characterizes as various formulations of the one and only moral law, and he suggests that the most complete characterization of the law is provided by the formula of the realm of ends (*Reich der Zwecke*) (*G* 436). The representation of the realm of ends is the thought “of a whole of all ends in systematic connection (a whole both of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of his own that each may set himself),” or alternatively, the thought of “a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws” (*G* 433). A rational being conceives of itself as a *member* of the realm of ends when it represents itself as simultaneously subject to and legislator of the common objective laws that bind all rational beings in a systematic union (*G* 433). Thus, Kant describes the representation of the systematic union of all ends as one, possibly the most complete, specification of pure practical reason’s fundamental thought.<sup>1</sup> Here I will argue that for Kant the representation of the realm of ends functions as the object of pure practical reason, and in its capacity as such it guides the totality of reason’s practical activity. As I will spell out, the representation of the realm of ends is the representation of the complete system of practical cognition, and it is in this sense that it is the most complete specification of reason’s fundamental thought. The representation of the realm of ends thus bears a necessary and direct relation to the practicality of pure reason: the fundamental act of pure reason—the fact

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kant’s mention of “the necessary unity of all possible ends” at A328/B385.

of reason as characterized in the last chapter—ultimately aims at nothing other than the realization of the realm of ends.

Further, there is independent reason to investigate the role of the realm of ends in Kant's conception of practical rationality. Curiously, there has been relatively little discussion of the realm of ends in recent Kant scholarship: interpreters of Kant have tended to focus on the two other main formulations of the moral law, the formula of universal law and the formula of humanity, in order to elucidate key aspects of Kant's moral philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The relative neglect of the realm of ends has I believe obscured important features of Kant's moral theory. In particular, recent focus on the so-called formula of humanity has emphasized the status of rational agents as *legislators* of practical laws while obscuring the manner in which the same agents are simultaneously *subject* to these laws. Since a rational being's representation of itself as a member of the realm of ends is precisely its self-conception as simultaneously subject to and legislator of common objective laws, focusing on it allows us to properly capture the self-conception of the subject as simultaneously legislator *and* subject. In this manner, I will argue, investigating the role of the representation of the realm of ends helps correct the imbalance fostered by influential recent readings. It also, I will try to show, generates a picture of practical subjectivity that, particularly with regard to subjects' necessary representations *of each other*, constitutes an attractive moral-practical conception.<sup>3</sup>

The argument will proceed as follows. I will first show that the representation of an end is necessarily related to the practicality of pure reason in that it depends on the general capacity

---

<sup>2</sup> However, see Rawls, "Some Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy", and Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, chap. 7. Something like the thought of a realm of ends can also be seen as guiding Scanlon's conception of moral community in *What We Owe To Each Other*.

<sup>3</sup> I will however not attempt to defend Kant's view against competing conceptions. My aim is to present an interpretation of Kant in a manner that highlights the philosophical strengths of this position (see esp. §4).

to treat pure rational grounds as decisive for one's choices (§1). I will then argue that, given Kant's picture, subjects with this capacity must accept reason's authority over their choices (§2). Next, I will consider Kant's notion of an end in itself and show how pure reason's authority over the power of choice requires that a subject represent all rational beings as ends in themselves (§3). I will highlight the strengths of my reading by contrasting it with Christine Korsgaard's influential interpretation of the value of humanity (§4). I will then show that by virtue of recognizing reason's authority over its choices, a subject must represent the ends of other subjects as objectively binding (§5). Finally, using the considerations presented in the previous sections, I will show how and why the representation of the realm of ends plays a necessary and fundamental role in the mind of a subject setting itself an end, i.e. why the subject must represent itself as a member of the realm of ends (§6).

1. We can begin our investigation by provisionally characterizing an end as follows: an end is some goal a subject adopts, be it a material object, state of affairs, action, etc., that it then works to bring about through acting in its pursuit.<sup>4</sup> This characterization allows ends to be particular or general. On the one hand, I may make it my goal to eat some vanilla ice cream after dinner, and so make my way to the store to buy some. On the other hand, I may commit myself to live a healthy life, and then presumably I will avoid unhealthy foods, will regularly exercise, etc.<sup>5</sup> In each case, I may be said to have set myself an end, whether the quite specific end of eating ice cream tonight, or the rather more general one of living a healthy life. And in each case, the

---

<sup>4</sup> It is in view of Kant's canonical definition of an end that I have characterized an end in general as what is to be brought about (see below). Kant also talks about existent ends, or ends in themselves; I will discuss these in §4, and I will suggest there that a notion analogous to that of bringing about applies even to these.

<sup>5</sup> It is of course a common phenomenon that people set themselves goals that they then fail to pursue: a phenomenon that is commonly characterized as *akrasia* or weakness of will. This sort of case falls outside the scope of my concerns, as I will primarily be concerned with the conditions of setting oneself an end and not those of following through on the ends one sets oneself.

relevant representation, whether of eating ice cream or living healthily, moves me to bring about the corresponding object. The guiding thought here is that an end generically is an object of choice and pursuit, the representation of which moves the subject to act so as to bring about the corresponding object. Hence, ends can be as varied as the goals, projects, etc., to which subjects can and do commit themselves.

While this is a perfectly intelligible notion of an end, it is not Kant's. Kant takes an end to be a special sort of object of choice, viz., one that is *rationally determined*. In this section, I will spell out the notion of rational determination as this figures in Kant, and so delineate the distinctively Kantian concept of an end. In later sections, we will see that representing an end in this specific sense—i.e. rationally determining one's choices—requires the end-representing subject to undertake a distinctive set of commitments.

To start on this task, consider Kant's canonical definition of an end in the *Metaphysics of Morals*: “An **end** is an *object* of [the] free [power of] choice, the representation of which determines it to an action (by which the object is brought about)” (MS 384).<sup>6</sup> Here the concept of an end is defined in relation to a part of the subject's practical capacity: in particular, its “free [power of] choice.” The stress is on *free* choice, for Kant holds that non-rational animals also possess a power of choice, specifically an “animal [power of] choice.” Any such power will have its own appropriate objects of choice that the relevant animal will pursue and, if all goes well, also bring about (MS 213). However, the objects of an animal power of choice would not count as ends: “to have any end of action whatsoever is an act of *freedom* on the part of the acting subject, not an effect of *nature*” (MS 384). Thus, representations of ends depend on a subject's having a free power of choice.

---

<sup>6</sup> I elaborate on the conception alluded to in this paragraph and the next in the previous chapter, see esp. §2.

The distinguishing characteristic of a free power of choice, what licenses its designation as free, is that it “can be determined by *pure reason*” (*MS 213*). Now pure reason can determine choice insofar as it supplies the determining *grounds* of choice: the considerations on the basis of which a subject decides, or at least can decide, what to choose. These determining grounds are the a priori practical principles, or practical laws, that have their source in reason.<sup>7</sup> Hence, for reason to determine choice is for a subject to take practical laws (or some relevant subset thereof) as decisive when considering whether to adopt some object of choice. For instance, suppose I choose to regularly exercise, and I make this choice because I recognize that exercising is necessary for preserving my health and that there is a practical law instructing me to preserve my health. In this case, my choice is based on rational grounds, specifically the practical principle instructing preservation of health, and hence is rationally determined. The free power of choice, then, is a capacity to choose on the basis of the practical laws of reason, and an end is the sort of motivating representation that can have these laws as its determining grounds. Hence, a subject that sets ends for itself is a subject that has the capacity to recognize practical laws as such and to choose on their basis: reason’s ability to determine choice is internally related to the very possibility of representing ends.

Two points of clarification. First, my claim at this point is not that only those objects of choice that are determined by pure reason count as ends; rather what matters is that the capacity for choice be determinable by reason. For instance, suppose I have a free power of choice: I can recognize practical laws as such and can treat them as decisive for what I choose. Then, if I were to set myself the goal of torturing small animals, this goal would count as my end even if it runs counter to the dictates of pure reason. Nevertheless, and this is the second point, Kant argues

---

<sup>7</sup> The most fundamental practical law is of course the moral law itself. Further, any relatively more specific injunction that the moral law renders necessary itself qualifies as a practical law (cf. *KpV* 19, 30).

that the free power of choice is free just insofar as it is determinable by the laws of pure reason, and not on account of a so-called liberty of indifference. In other words, freedom of choice properly consists in the positive capacity to effect the pure rational determination of choice, where the grounds of determination are the practical laws of reason. Hence, it would be a serious mistake to take the characterization of this capacity to be elliptical in the sense of specifying a power that can be determined by rational as well as extra-rational grounds indifferently. Choice based on extra-rational grounds, while certainly possible, subverts the nature of the capacity.<sup>8</sup> Hence, pure rational principles count as *the* determining grounds of free choice. Further, the very possibility of representing an end is grounded in the positive capacity to rationally determine one's power of choice by treating pure rational principles as the decisive considerations for one's choices.

Now these pure rational principles that are to determine choice can be redescribed as representing ends of a sort. For instance, suppose there is a practical law instructing subjects never to kill any subject (leaving out of consideration here special circumstances such as a subject acting in legitimate self-defence, etc.). Then, never killing a subject serves as a practically necessary end for all subjects.<sup>9</sup> In general, the predicative component of a practical law can be seen as the representation of an object that it is incumbent on all subjects to adopt, i.e. as a practically necessary end for all subjects.<sup>10</sup> We might say that pure practical reason has its own ends which are at least conceptually distinct from the ends that serve as objects of the power

---

<sup>8</sup> In such a case, we can say the subject determines its power of choice by taking extra-rational considerations as decisive for its choice, but these considerations do not themselves *determine* the power of choice (cf. R 24). See also §2 below.

<sup>9</sup> Here and throughout, I use "subject" and "rational subject" interchangeably. Further, I make the assumption that any rational subject is a subject capable of representing an end as such. One might reject this assumption and instead take the argument as a whole to apply only to end-representing subjects.

<sup>10</sup> Analogously, the subject's adoption of an end can be reconceived as its willing of a maxim, with the representation of the end taking the place of X in the maxim-schema 'I will X'.

of choice. The distinction in question is that the ends of choice for some subject are those that the subject in question does adopt, while the ends of pure reason are those that it is incumbent on the subject, as on all subjects, to adopt, although a given subject may not in fact adopt one or more of these. For ease of reference, let us designate the latter sort of ends “ends of reason,” and note that such ends do not obviously fit the definition with which we started since they may not actually function as objects of choice for some subjects.<sup>11</sup>

Consider, however, what I will call the good case. This is the case where a subject’s power of choice operates as per its characterization: where it is determined by pure reason. In this case, the practical laws of reason that are to serve as the determining grounds of choice do effectively determine choice. As a result, the subject represents these laws, or equivalently the ends of reason, as its own ends, indeed its most basic ends. The key here is that the subject determines its choice on the basis of practical laws precisely because it treats the corresponding ends as its own fundamental ends. Thus, e.g., it is because the end of never killing any subject functions as an object of choice for me that I would reject any putative object of choice that would conflict with this end. Further, in given circumstances I might adopt some other, more determinate end if this is necessary for me to sustain my commitment to never killing. In this manner, the ends of reason serve as the determining grounds of the subject’s power of choice in that they are decisive for which *further* ends the subject adopts.<sup>12</sup>

The point becomes clear if we consider the optional or merely permissible ends a subject may adopt. Suppose I fit the description of the good case and I am considering whether or not to

---

<sup>11</sup> The point of describing these rational grounds in terms of ends will become clear below (§4). I will there argue that when the subject’s power of choice is determined by pure reason, all its ends in effect function as ends of reason, so that the distinction between the two types of ends becomes merely conceptual.

<sup>12</sup> The formulation in the text is inexact: it is the *representations* of the ends that serve as determining grounds. Here and elsewhere, I will let the inexact formulation stand if the context makes the point clear. I would further argue that Kant’s *Grundlegung* definition of an end as “the objective ground of [the will’s] self-determination” should be understood along the lines suggested here (*G* 427).

adopt a policy of eating vanilla ice cream in given circumstances. I will, then, consider whether the policy in question is licensed by the ends of reason, which are already functioning as ends of choice for me, and I will choose accordingly. Further, I will adopt the policy on the basis of such consideration precisely because I have adopted the relevant ends of reason as ends of my own. It is because I am, e.g., already committed to the end of reason requiring me to preserve my health that my ice cream eating policy will be sensitive to the corresponding rational considerations. Thus, ends of reason will be decisive in specifying the *circumstances* in which I choose to eat vanilla ice cream, and in this sense will determine my policy as a whole.<sup>13</sup> In general, all my objects of choices will be determined by pure rational grounds in just the sense that I will always take these grounds as decisive for my choices. This feature of the case entitles us to call it an instance of the good case. The designation of this case as “good” indicates that my power of choice is here determined as per its proper characterization: pure rational principles always function as the decisive considerations—the determining grounds—of my choices. In general, any case where the internal relation between rational determination and the representations of ends is upheld, where choices are in fact rationally determined, qualifies as an instance of the good case for just this reason.

Now two concerns might naturally arise about the account I have developed of Kant’s conception of an end. I will briefly respond to the first concern here before turning to the second—much more serious—concern in the next section. The first concern, then, is that on my reading, Kant’s account of choice is implausibly intellectualistic. The account might be thought

---

<sup>13</sup> I will presumably adopt this or any other policy of eating ice cream only if I derive sensible pleasure from eating ice cream. My point is that ends directed at sensible pleasure are rationally determined insofar as pure rational grounds are decisive for their adoption. Consider a policy of eating ice cream that specified the appropriate circumstances for eating ice cream in a manner not sensitive to considerations of health. This would be a *different* end from the one considered in the text even though it would in one sense be directed at the same sensible pleasure, and *this* end would not be rationally determined.

to be overly intellectualistic insofar as it seems to require that subjects self-consciously adopt policies such as that of never killing a subject or of eating ice cream in given circumstances. Such an objection represents a misunderstanding of my proposal. All that my reading requires is that ends such as the ones mentioned above function as standing policies of a given subject: in relevant circumstances the subject acts on the basis of the given end, and further upon reflection the subject can recognize that it is indeed acting on this basis. Thus, the view does not require that at some point in my life I say to myself, “I will from now on eat ice cream in such and such circumstances.” Rather, it is that I regularly and self-consciously engage in acts of ice cream eating, and if the occasion arises, I can, perhaps after giving it some thought, say what my policy is and why I follow it, thus spelling out its determining grounds. Hence, my reading does not commit Kant to the implausibly intellectualist view mentioned above.

2. The more serious concern arises from my reliance on the good case.<sup>14</sup> I have specified Kant’s conception of an end with reference to what I have called the good case, viz. a case where a subject treats the practical laws of reason as decisive when considering which optional ends to adopt. That practical laws play this role, I have argued, is what accounts for the representation of an end being *rationally determined*, and rational determination, I have claimed, accounts for the very possibility of representations of ends. This characterization of ends raises the following question: To what extent does this account apply to subjects such as ourselves, subjects whose choices do not always conform to the constraints definitive of the good case? Indeed, there are two different but related questions here. First, in what way or to what extent does the account

---

<sup>14</sup> The full significance of focusing on the good case will become apparent in §6, where I will argue that to choose as a member of the realm of ends is precisely to choose as per the good case, so that focusing on the good case isolates the self-conception of the subject qua member of the realm of ends.

apply to *subjects* who do not satisfy the good case, who at least sometimes choose contrary to the dictates of pure reason? Secondly, what are we to say about the putative *ends* that are not determined by rational grounds—about cases where a subject exercises her power of choice contrary to the dictates of reason, say?

Here's the preliminary answer to the second question. Rationally indefensible ends are, at the least, oddly Janus-faced. On the one hand, they are objects of a rationally determinable power of choice and so would seem to count as ends. On the other hand, they are precisely not grounded in the rational determination of choice, and thus represent deviant exercises of this power. The Janus-faced quality of such ends is reflected in the fact that a subject who holds some such end must herself disown it qua rational subject: insofar as she identifies herself with her practical rational faculty, she cannot countenance the putative end. Thus, the subject herself must be of two minds about her own end: neither can she fully endorse her end, nor does she fully disown it.

We are led, then, to the first question: What are we to say about the subject caught in this bind? To dramatize the problem, consider a sort of skeptic: one that does not outright reject pure rational principles, but questions their necessary validity.<sup>15</sup> That is, the skeptic at issue does not deny the presence of pure rational principles in her practical consciousness; she questions, however, whether she should treat these principles as decisive when considering what ends to adopt. Thus, she questions whether she should identify with her rational capacity for determining choice. We might roughly liken this case to that of a person who, living under some political authority, acknowledges that this authority makes demands of her but questions whether she should consider these demands really binding. In a sense, the subject in question accepts that

---

<sup>15</sup> My point here is not to refute skepticism of this or any other sort, but rather to further clarify Kant's position. It is useful to imagine this sort of skeptic precisely because it helps to clarify Kant's account.

*qua citizen* she is bound by the positive laws issued by the state, but she questions whether she should endorse her status as a citizen and so also questions the validity of the positive laws (at least insofar as they apply to her). Analogously, the moral skeptic at issue accepts that *qua practical-rational subject* she should treat the practical issuing from reason as decisive for her choices. At the same time, she questions whether she should endorse and identify herself with her status as a practical-rational subject.

However, the analogy, or rather its limits, reveal the untenability of the skeptic's position. We can reasonably assume that the subject questioning political authority has, or believes herself to have, grounds on which she bases her skepticism (whether of some particular authority or of political authority in general). It is of course quite conceivable that there could be *some* such grounds: grounds that would justify the subject's questioning—or even rejection—of political authority. In general, it is this possibility of countervailing grounds that accounts for the gap between (mere) political power and political authority.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, at least as per Kant's picture, there just is no consideration that would speak for a subject's distancing herself from her practical-rational capacity: it would be in effect incoherent of her not to identify with this capacity. This becomes evident if we note that in Kant the notion of a capacity is narrower and more determinate than the notion of what is possible. A capacity is always a capacity *for* something: the free power of choice, i.e. the rational faculty of determining choice, is just the subject's capacity for choice and action. On the other hand, that inclinations can, as Kant puts it, "influence" choice, leading the subject to adopt ends on their basis, does not constitute a capacity of the subject.<sup>17</sup> The latter sort of occurrence is comparable to a strong aversion leading a subject to adopt some belief. In each case, we get a subversion of

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, bk. 1, chap. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *G* 413; see also *MS* 213, *R* 36.

a capacity, in one case the capacity for choice and in the other the capacity for cognition, rather than its proper exercise.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, the proper exercise of a capacity is necessary for realizing what the capacity is for. The exercise of cognitive capacities makes possible cognition. Further, only through the sustained proper exercise of these capacities can subjects actualize their (potential) status as cognizers. In other words, it is by properly exercising its cognitive capacities that a being becomes a subject to which we can attribute a developed and functioning capacity for cognition. If a subject were to consistently subvert this capacity, say by regularly taking its wishes and aversions as grounds for beliefs, it would ultimately undermine the functioning of its cognitive capacities, and thereby also its status as a cognizer. In the present case, what is at issue is the subject's agency: the subject becomes an acting subject, an agent, precisely in that it properly exercises its capacity for choice. And for Kant, the subject's capacity for choice just is the causal power of its rational faculty, the proper exercise of which consists in the pure rational determination of choice.<sup>19</sup> Given that the proper exercise of this capacity constitutes the subject as an agent, to determine choice in opposition to its internal principles, i.e. the practical principles of reason, is in effect to undermine one's own agency. To question the validity of the rational grounds of choice is thus to put into question one's status as an agent. To put the point positively, insofar as subjects such as ourselves conceive of themselves as agents, they must endorse and identify with the practical principles that are to serve as the determining grounds of choice. Thus, a subject's existence qua agent requires that she treat the good case as a necessary

---

<sup>18</sup> This should not be taken to mean that the subject is absolved of her responsibility for her choice (or, in a different sense, her belief). The subject still exercises her capacity for self-determination, albeit in a manner that subverts this capacity, and is hence accountable for this exercise.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the argument of the previous chapter. Obvious support for the claim can be found in Kant's frequent identification of will and practical reason (cf. *G* 412, *MS* 213).

ideal, for just this case represents the full realization of her capacity for practical self-determination.<sup>20 21</sup>

Given that the subject must identify with her rational capacity for determining choice, it is also incumbent on her to disown the particular *choices* that lack rational grounding. We saw above that the subject must be of two minds with respect to any such choice. The point now is that since she must identify with her self-conception qua practically rational, she must reject an exercise of choice that violates this self-conception. Thus, the subject's representation of herself as capable of choice, i.e. as agent, requires that she disown rationally indefensible choices. Consequently, the subject must also disown the *objects* so chosen: in her own self-conception as a rational agent, she cannot countenance such objects as legitimate objects of her power of choice, i.e. as ends. Hence, only such objects as would be chosen in the good case count as ends strictly speaking, as objects of choice that can be recognized as such by a rational being in its capacity as such.<sup>22</sup>

To recap: since any subject such as ourselves must herself represent pure rational principles as the determining grounds of her power of choice, she must represent precisely her rationally determined objects of choice as her ends. Hence, on Kant's picture the account of ends developed above with reference to the good case is directly applicable to subjects such as ourselves. In effect, subjects such as ourselves must represent the good case as a practical ideal: as what they must satisfy if they are to fully realize their agency, or their status as practical-rational subjects. Indeed, that such subjects must disown their rationally indefensible choices

---

<sup>20</sup> Thus, Kant's conception of rational agency bears a close affinity to Aristotle's thought that the proper exercise of agency for human subjects consists in a form of rational excellence. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097a15-1098a20.

<sup>21</sup> The conception of the agent outlined here bears an obvious debt to Korsgaard's reading of Kant. See in particular Korsgaard, "Morality as Freedom".

<sup>22</sup> We can, if we like, continue to call rationally indefensible objects of choice "ends," but this appellation would be derivative and parasitic on the strict notion of an end. Since, I will be limiting my attention to the strict notion of ends, I will also be using "ends" accordingly.

reflects the fact that they must treat the good case as a practical ideal. Given this, I will in the following restrict my focus to just the class of ends that result from the rational determination of choice, i.e. I will be limiting myself to a discussion of the rational subject insofar as it satisfies the good case.

3. So far I have argued that for Kant, the representation of an end in general is grounded in the capacity to rationally determine one's choices. I have further argued that a subject must identify with its capacity to rationally determine its choices and so must conceive of precisely its rationally determined choices as its (genuine) ends. Combining these two points, we can say that *by its own lights* a subject adopts an end just insofar as it rationally determines its power of choice: the subject must *itself* conceive of its ends as rationally determined objects of choice. In this section, I will develop an account of what Kant calls an *end in itself*. This account builds on the considerations forwarded in the previous two sections and further highlights the central role of the rational faculty and its exercise with regard to representations of ends in general. Once Kant's conception of an end in itself is in view, I will be able to complete the account of ends qua objects of choice and to spell out the necessary role the representation of the realm of ends plays.

Kant defines an end in itself as "something whose existence has in itself an absolute worth, something which could ... be a ground of determinate laws" (G 428). He further claims: "man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will" (G 428).<sup>23</sup> In other words, beings that are capable of setting ends for themselves are beings that count as ends in themselves. Kant's thought appears

---

<sup>23</sup> The terms "ends in themselves" and its cognates are mostly prominent in the *Grundlegung*. However, the underlying conception of humanity is a deep and abiding feature of Kant's moral philosophy.

to be that the very capacity that makes possible representations of ends—the capacity to rationally determine our choices—renders beings with this capacity ends in themselves. Indeed, as I will argue in this section, this capacity and its exercise is fundamentally *the* end in itself.

To grasp Kant's thought here, it will help to first return to Kant's conception of ends qua objects of choice and to note key differences between the representation of such an end and that of an end in itself. Consideration of these differences will in turn allow us to appreciate the deep unifying features of all possible representations of ends.

Consider, then, that the representation of an end insofar as it is grounded in a pure rational determination of choice is a representation of a distinctively *rational value*. We can put the point by saying that the representation of an end signals that some object of choice has a worth that becomes available specifically through the exercise of the rational faculty. The concepts of value and worth are meant to register that the object in question is represented by the subject as something to be realized: as we might quite naturally say, the subject considers the object to be worth realizing. The key point, however, is that the worth of ends in particular is distinctive in that it derives from the pure rational determination of choice. Thus, an end is represented as to be done<sup>24</sup> in virtue of the rational grounds that license or necessitate it. In this sense, representations of ends are representations of *rational* worth.

To illustrate, consider again the ends of never killing and eating ice cream in given circumstances. When I adopt the end of never killing a subject, I do so in that in virtue of the relevant rational grounds, I recognize this as a rationally worthy course of (in)action and adopt it

---

<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, talking of ends as “to be done” is grammatically infelicitous. I have two reasons for adopting the phrase. First, I prefer it to a phrase such as “to be pursued” because when I adopt an end, I in effect commit myself to *doing* what I represent as my end: I commit myself to *eating* ice cream, *living* healthily, etc. Secondly, as the examples indicate, I take ends in the first instance to be specifications of ongoing *activities* or *policies* a subject commits herself to, rather than particular outcomes or states of affairs. Hence, speaking of ends as “to be done” is more appropriate than speaking of them as “to be realized” or “to be effected.”

as such. Similarly, given that I adopt the end of eating ice cream on ground of the rational principles licensing this course of action, I recognize this policy as rationally worthy of choice and *thereby* adopt it as an end. That is, I adopt the policy in question as shaped by the determining grounds of choice, so that I represent it as worth choosing just insofar as it is rationally licensed. Thus, I choose it *as* rationally worthy: to represent an end is to represent (an instance of) rational worth.<sup>25</sup>

Further, rational worth is by its nature objective.<sup>26</sup> The rational grounds relevant to determining choice are practical laws that have their source in pure reason, a capacity shared by all rational beings *per se*. Hence, all rational beings *qua* capable of choice are equally and identically bound by these grounds. Rational grounds are thus *objective* constraints: their power to constrain derives not from some arbitrary aspect of a given subject but from the shared faculty of pure reason. Since the worth of ends derives from these objectively constraining grounds, ends themselves are represented as objectively worthy, i.e. as worth realizing on account of being determined by objective constraints. Hence, given that I rationally determine my choice, I take it that the end I have thereby adopted is objectively worthy in just the sense that it is to be done in virtue of perfectly general grounds, and not on the basis of some idiosyncrasy of mine. In sum, the representation of an end is the representation of some object *qua* to be done because it is rationally and hence objectively worthy.

Now ends in this sense, i.e. ends as objects of choice, apparently differ from ends in themselves in the following two ways. First, an end *qua* object of choice is something (state of

---

<sup>25</sup> Again, that I adopt the policy *qua* rationally worthy is shown by the way the appropriate circumstances for eating ice cream are specified (cf. fn. 12). Similar considerations would plausibly apply to the end of not killing: if my policy is indeed rationally determined, I must presumably recognize that certain circumstances fall outside the scope of the “never”.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 127-30.

affairs, course of action, etc.) that a subject pursues and attempts to realize. An end in itself, on the other hand, is an existent thing, specifically a type of being, and it counts as an end simply in virtue of being the sort of thing that it is: an end in itself, unlike the ends discussed so far, is not represented as *to be done*.<sup>27</sup> Second, an end in itself according to Kant has “absolute worth,” and this is not necessarily true of ends of choice. For if a thing possesses absolute worth, its worth is necessary and hence inalienable from the thing in question; indeed, it is the necessary and inalienable character of the worth that leads to its characterization as *absolute*. However, such inalienability does not generally hold of ends of choice. For instance, consider again my ice cream policy: as a rationally determined end it has objective worth. Nevertheless, I may choose to give up this policy, in which case the relevant end would cease to obtain, and the representation of objective worth would correspondingly lapse. Or consider a somewhat different case where due to a change in circumstances, e.g. having to do with my health, my policy becomes one that I cannot adopt so long as I continue to treat practical laws as decisive for my choice. In this case, I cannot represent my policy as a possible rationally determined end at all, and so cannot represent it as a possible bearer of objective worth. Absolute worth is unlike (mere) objective worth in that if something has absolute worth it cannot under any circumstances lose this worth nor can any rational being negate this worth through an act of choice.

However, the distinction between these two sorts of ends is at best inexhaustive. For consider what I characterized above as ends of reason. These are unlike ends of choice in that it is incumbent on every rational subject to adopt them. Hence, the ends of reason are *necessarily* constitutive of objective worth: as with ends in themselves, no subject can negate the worth of such ends through an act of choice. In this manner, the ends of reason possess inalienable and

---

<sup>27</sup> However, I will argue that there is a sense in which an end in itself is “to be (continually) realized,” so that this distinction is less strict than it appears. The same is true of the second distinction.

absolute worth. On the other hand, such ends are unlike ends in themselves in that they represent actions, policies, etc. that rational subjects are rationally required to undertake: they represent *what is to be done* rather than *what exists*. Thus, ends of reason are instances of what is to be done that nevertheless have absolute worth: they are in one respect like ends in themselves and in the other like ends of choice. This dual character of the ends of reason holds the key to the notion of an end in itself and its relation to ends of choice.

The key is simply that, for Kant, the rational faculty is authoritative for the power of choice in rational subjects. I can represent an end of choice such my ice cream eating policy as objectively worthy precisely insofar as I determine it on the basis of pure rational grounds. Hence, my representation of objective worth depends on my treating pure rational grounds as authoritative for my choices, i.e. as practically necessary constraints on my power of choice. Of course, what makes ends of reason practically necessary constraints is that they are dictates of pure reason and pure reason is authoritative for my power of choice. That is, the unconditional worth of the ends of reason, their status as necessary constraints, is a reflection of the fact that pure reason is the faculty that is to determine my power of choice. In effect, what I represent as practically necessary or unconditionally worthy is just the pure rational determination of choice.

This is the sense in which pure reason exists as the end in itself: the existence and exercise of reason qua authoritative for choice is to be represented as the fundamental end, i.e. as the necessary constraint that makes possible representations of ends as such. Indeed, reason is represented as an *end* just in that it is represented as a *constraint*, and it is represented as an end *in itself* in that in virtue of its practical laws, it functions as the *most fundamental* constraint on choice, the constraint that grounds the representation of all other constraints.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the

---

<sup>28</sup> I will argue in §5 below that all ends must be represented as constraints, indeed as objective constraints (in a sense

representation of reason as the end in itself is manifested in the recognition of rational dictates as necessary constraints on choice.

Further, given that the end in itself is the existence and exercise of reason qua authoritative for choice, it is *dynamic*. For reason effectively functions as the end in itself just insofar as its authority over choice is continually sustained and developed (and in the ideal case, perfected) through the rational determination of choice. In other words, every rationally determined choice reaffirms reason's existence as end in itself. For instance, I affirm reason's existence and exercise as the end in itself when I adopt the policy of never killing as an end of my own; I do so because I adopt the policy in question *as* a pure rational dictate. Given that a subject's optional ends are rationally determined, the point applies to these as much as to necessary ends. When I adopt an end such as my ice cream eating policy, I again affirm the existence and exercise of reason as the end in itself. For in doing so I treat pure rational principles as the decisive considerations for my choice and so reaffirm reason's authority over my power of choice. Thus, every rational determination of choice, whether it consists in the adoption of an optional or a necessary end, reaffirms and develops reason's status as the fundamental end in itself. For each such case further realizes reason's inherent authority over the power of choice.

The existence of the subject qua rational being consists in these sustained and developing self-determinations through which reason's authority over choice is realized. That is, "man, and in general every rational being" counts as an end in itself precisely because every such being has the capacity to determine its existence through exercising its rational faculty. This thought is borne out by the so-called formula of humanity, which states: "Act in such a way that you treat

---

explained below). This is the sense in which the representation of reason as a necessary constraint makes possible representations of *further* constraints.

humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means” (G 429). Kant further notes: “the ground of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself*” (G 429). This suggests that “humanity” in the above formulation is equivalent to rational nature, or at least that humanity is to be treated as the end in itself because rational nature is constitutive of humanity. Thus, Kant’s thought here is that the rational faculty and its exercise functions as the end in itself in the primary sense. Rational beings, and so also human beings, count as ends in themselves precisely in virtue of bearing reason and so having the capacity to rationally determine their existence. Hence, when we speak of a rational being as an end in itself we mean that rational nature exists and must be treated as the end in itself in this particular subject.

At the same time, insofar as I conceive of myself as an end-representing subject, I must represent myself as an end in itself. I figure in my own thought here simply as a rational subject exercising reason to determine my choice: as, so to speak, a representative of reason’s practical exercise. Consequently, my thought of the rational faculty as the end in itself must translate into a conception of myself as an end in itself: as a being rationally determining its existence through its adoption of ends. For instance, when I adopt the ice cream eating policy *qua rationally licensed*, I implicitly recognize pure rational grounds as authoritative for my choice. And I thereby manifest a recognition of myself as a rational being exercising reason to determine choice. In other words, I recognize myself as instantiating the fundamental end, viz. the existence and exercise of reason qua authoritative for choice. Hence, when I represent an end, I implicitly represent myself as an instance of the end in itself, and in this sense as simply an end in itself.

It further follows from this that if I represent *any* subject as representing a rationally determined end as such, I must also represent *that subject* as an end in itself. For again, insofar as I represent some subject as an end-representing subject—specifically as a subject representing a rationally determined end as such—I represent it precisely as exercising *its* rational faculty so as to determine its power of choice. Hence, on pain of inconsistency, I must represent the given subject as an end in itself in just the sense and for just the reason that I represent myself as such. Thus, it follows from the fact that a subject must represent the rational faculty and its exercise as the end in itself that it must also represent all subjects as ends in themselves, at least insofar as it represents all subjects as themselves representing ends.<sup>29</sup>

It bears stressing that the representation of any subject as an end in itself is of the subject *qua* rational being determining its own existence. In this sense, although the representation of an end in itself is of an existent thing, it is also the thought of an activity, or rather of the subject as engaged in a distinctive activity. The subject's status as an end in itself is to be continually realized and effected through its rational determinations of choice. That is, it is through the adoption of ends such as never killing and eating ice cream in given circumstances that I sustain and (partially) realize my existence as an end in itself. At the same time, since these are exercises of reason in the determination of choice, I also sustain and develop the existence of reason as the fundamental end in itself. Further, we will see in (§5) below that when the subject (partly) determines her existence as a rational being by adopting a rationally determined end, the end comes to function like any other constraint of practical reason. Hence, although representations of (mere) objective worth are unlike representations of unconditional worth in

---

<sup>29</sup> We will see in §5 below that given an end-representing subject's commitment to its end, it follows from the above that the end-representing subject must represent all subjects with the *capacity* to represent an end as ends in themselves.

that they can be negated by an act of choice, while operative they function in just the same manner. These considerations blur the distinctions between ends in themselves and ends of choice that I introduced earlier in the section. Nevertheless—and this is their point—they illuminate the deep unitary root of the notion of an end in the existence and exercise of the rational faculty. The considerations show that the representation of an end is a fundamentally *rational* representation: a representation that has its source in reason, specifically in the practical exercise of reason, and whose presence manifests the effective authority of reason over a subject’s power of choice.

4. To appreciate the strengths of my account, it will help here to contrast it with Korsgaard’s influential reading of how humanity functions as an end in itself for Kant. Korsgaard’s argument, which she presents in “Kant’s Formula of Humanity,” forms the centerpiece of her overall “constructivist” interpretation, which is driven by the thought that agents create or “construct” value in the world by setting themselves ends.<sup>30</sup> Korsgaard argues that such a constructivist account—which she argues can be found in Kant—provides an attractive conception of rational agency and can better explain the existence of value than moral realism, which seems to take the existence of value as a brute fact about the world. However, because this account makes value dependent on agents’ choices, it appears overly voluntaristic, and has been (rightly) criticized as such. It is precisely in her discussion of how humanity functions as an end in itself for Kant that the notion of agents constructing value through their choices comes

---

<sup>30</sup> See esp. “Kant’s Formula of Humanity”, 119-128. In the text, I am primarily concerned with Korsgaard’s account qua reading of Kant. However, if I am right about Kant’s view, it offers a powerful alternative to the constructivist view forwarded by Korsgaard in numerous subsequent texts. See, e.g., *Sources of Normativity*, and “Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy”. Unless otherwise noted, all references in this section are to Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity”.

to the fore. Hence, contrasting Korsgaard's reading with my account should make it clear that Kant's view is not constructivist in the relevant sense and hence does not have the unpalatable implications generated by the constructivist reading. Indeed, Kant's conception of choice and value provides for a compelling alternative to constructivism.

Korsgaard takes Kant to identify "humanity" with the capacity for rational choice, where this capacity is taken to be roughly equivalent to the will, or the subject's practical rational capacity, broadly conceived.<sup>31</sup> She argues that the capacity for rational choice serves as the ground of value in that it "confers" value on its objects: by exercising their capacity for rational choice, subjects *make* valuable what they thereby choose and what independently of this choice has no value. Further, it is part of the subject's self conception that her rational choices have this value conferring status on their objects. Thus, rational choice serves as the ground of value and is treated as such by the subject making a choice. Korsgaard's underlying thought here is the following: given that my representations of my objects of choice are constitutive of value, this value must be grounded in or derive from my rational choice of these objects, for nothing else could ground this value.<sup>32</sup> Now since the capacity for rational choice serves as the ground or source of value, it must itself be of unconditional value, and must be treated as such by the subject. Thus, "the human being's capacity for the rational choice of ends" is and must be treated as an end in itself.<sup>33</sup>

As Korsgaard stresses, the key move in the argument is precisely that subjects *make* valuable what they choose *through* their rational choices: if some object were not chosen, it

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 123, esp. Korsgaard's identification of "rational nature" with the power of rational choice. In effect, Korsgaard seems to include both practical reason and the power of choice within what she terms the power of rational choice, yet her focus is on actual exercises of choice.

<sup>32</sup> I am leaving out Korsgaard's argument for the last part of this claim because what is important for my purposes is the view she arrives at and not her argument for this view. See 120-123 for the argument.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 124.

would have no value. Such conferral of value through choice is supposed to provide the alternative to conceiving of the existence of value as a brute fact about the world. However, exactly this feature of the view makes it implausibly voluntaristic. It seems evident that subjects choose what they do *because* they think of their objects of choice as somehow (already) valuable.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the exercise of choice, it seems, cannot be the locus of the creation of value. Further, not even the *capacity* for choice can serve as ground of value. Again, it seems that subjects exercise their capacity for choice in response to recognizing that some possible object of choice is in fact valuable, i.e. worth choosing: the capacity here is thus the capacity to *recognize* what is possibly of value.

Since I take the end in itself to be (in the first instance) the pure rational faculty, there is no voluntaristic implication. A subject can represent ends as objectively worthy only insofar it exercises its rational faculty in the proper manner: pure reason of itself dictates what can or cannot be, must or may not be, objectively worthy. Hence, individual subjects and their choices do not *confer* value on the objects so chosen. An individual subject for its part can only *recognize* a possible object of choice as (necessarily or possibly) objectively worthy, and it can do so insofar as it treats practical laws as authoritative for its choices. Even in the case of an end such as my ice cream eating policy, it is not my choosing it that makes the policy objectively worthy, but rather *that my choice is determined by the dictates of pure reason*. Thus, the grounds that constrain my choices are also the grounds of the value of the objects chosen. We could perhaps say that pure reason qua authoritative for choice “confers” value on rationally determined objects of choice. Better, we can say that since pure reason is the source of the

---

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* 92, Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature”, and Shaver, “Korsgaard on Hypothetical Imperatives”, for criticisms of Korsgaard along these lines. My own reading is indebted to Wood’s account.

practical laws that are determining grounds for the power of choice, reason itself is the ultimate ground of all representations of objective worth.

Thus, Kant's view takes value to be neither a brute fact about the world nor something that can be constructed through agents' choices. Rather, it traces the existence of value to the faculty of reason: a faculty shared by all rational beings but independent of the will of any individual agent considered just as such. For Kant, the possibility of value depends on the constraints that pure reason necessarily imposes on rational beings in the form of practical laws. Indeed, the recognition of these laws as authoritative for choice is the fundamental representation of value, i.e. of what is to be done, and it makes possible all other representations of value. Subjects can, in other words, recognize possible instances of value only insofar as they first recognize practical laws as the necessary and fundamental representations of value. Thus, Kant's view, unlike moral realism, *accounts for* the existence of value: it does so by conceiving of reason as authoritative for choice and hence as the source of representations of value. At the same time, according to Kant reason functions as the source of value in that it supplies practically necessary *constraints* on choice. Hence, Kant's view, unlike the constructivism forwarded by Korsgaard, avoids voluntaristic implications.

5. I return now to the main line of argument: the as yet unfinished task of showing why an end-representing subject must represent itself as a member of the realm of ends. To complete this task, I will in this section build on the conception spelled out above of an end qua rationally determined object of choice. Specifically, I will argue that in virtue of rationally determining its power of choice, a subject must represent its ends as essentially communicable to all other subjects capable of representing an end. As a result, it must represent all such subjects, along

with itself, as ends in themselves. Once these points are in view, I will be able to show in the next section that an end-representing subject as such must conceive of itself and the ends it sets itself as part of a systematic unity of all possible ends, i.e. as part of the realm of ends.

Recall that insofar as I represent a rationally determined end, I represent it having rational and hence objective worth. That is—as noted above—I represent my end as to be done just in virtue of the perfectly general rational grounds that I take to be decisive for its adoption. I will now argue that I must also represent my objectively worthy end as *recognizable as such* by all other subjects—this is just what my representation of communicability consists in.

Now, when I represent my end as to be done, I represent it as binding me to certain courses of action, precluding other actions, etc. Thus, my ends function as *constraints* for me in that they determine what I can or must do (at least if I am to be consistent). I may of course give up an end such as that of eating ice cream at a future point; yet while I have the end, I must see myself as bound to do what is necessary to realize it.<sup>35</sup> Thus, I must represent my ends as constraints that I have adopted, constraints that structure the possible space of choice and action for me. Further, given that my end is rationally determined, I take it to be generally recognizable that my end functions as a rationally determined constraint. That is, I take it that *other subjects* can also recognize my end as an objective constraint, for I take it that they as well as myself can cognize its determining grounds—the source of its objective worth—through the exercise of reason.

---

<sup>35</sup> The point here can be captured by saying that representations of ends provide grounds for narrow constraints specifying the necessary means. There is no wide constraint in the offing here because subjects *first* choose ends on the basis of rational considerations and are *consequently* bound to take the necessary means. That a subject may later change its mind does not affect this structure of determination and so does not ground the possibility of wide constraints. Cf. Broome, “Normative Requirements”, for the terminology of wide v. narrow constraints.

Indeed, in representing an end, I in effect demand recognition for it from other subjects: since the end functions as an objective though self-imposed constraint for me, I must demand that this constraint be recognized as such. The thought here is simply that if I am committed to some end, e.g. my ice cream eating policy, I must act in certain ways to realize it. In this context, I cannot be indifferent to the attitudes and actions of others, for these may either help or hinder my pursuit of my end. Hence, if I am in fact committed to realizing my end, i.e. if I represent an end at all, I must demand that the worth of my end, its status as to be done, be recognized by others. For instance, my ice cream eating policy entails the demand that where practically possible, others not hinder my actions in its service. Further, at least in principle, the actions and attitudes of any other subject could have some bearing on my pursuit of my end. Hence, my demand for recognition must be fully general: it must be directed to rational beings per se. In representing an end, I must demand that this end in effect function as a *law* for all rational beings. I must demand, in other words, that all other subjects recognize and represent my end as constraining their actions just as I represent it as constraining my actions.

In this manner, representing an end qua rationally determined requires me to represent myself as in (potential) relation with other subjects: the thought of myself as one subject among many follows from the thought of an end.<sup>36</sup> It bears emphasis that my representation of other subjects is necessarily related to my representing a rationally determined end as such. The representation of other subjects is contained in my demand for recognition, and this demand follows from my representation of the end as rationally worthy. Since I am demanding precisely that my end be recognized as such, I must represent the beings to whom I issue this demand as *capable* of recognizing my end as (indeed) to be done. Hence, other subjects figure in my

---

<sup>36</sup> I am not claiming that one of the conditions of representing of an end is that there be a plurality of subjects, but rather that given a plurality of subjects, representing an end requires representing oneself as part of this plurality.

thought as potential representers of my end, as beings who can see that I have adopted a legitimate objective constraint. Indeed, my demand is precisely that were some appropriate situation to arise, the other subject(s) concerned exercise their rational faculty so as to recognize my end. As indicated above, the demand can have substantive consequences. For instance, it might translate into a demand for space to exercise what Kant calls outer freedom, insofar as this is necessary for my pursuit of my end; in given circumstances, it might give rise to the demand that another subject assist me in my pursuit.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, the basic demand shows that I must represent other subjects as beings that can represent ends: as, in general, rational beings that can exercise their rational faculty so as cognize the determining grounds of choice as such. Thus, representing an end entails the thought of the other subject qua end-representer, and so also potential representer of my end(s).

On the other hand, my demand for recognition requires that I represent myself as capable of *defending* my choice: as able, if need be, to display its objective worth by spelling out the grounds on which it rests. For ease of exposition, suppose a situation where the worth of my ice cream eating policy is called into question. I must then (if I honor the challenge) spell out the rational grounds on which I have adopted this end: the rational requirements regarding, say, health and well-being that I have treated as decisive in shaping the policy. Given that the policy as a whole is indeed determined by rational grounds, and I spell these out, its worth can be recognized by whoever poses the challenge in their capacity as a rational subject. That is, insofar as the subject posing the challenge recognizes the relevant rational grounds through exercising

---

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *MS* 237, 386. None of this implies that the objective worth of the end, and hence the demand, is unconditional. For instance, the demand corresponding to my ice cream eating policy may be overridden by various sorts of weightier concerns. However, where the demand applies, it is perfectly objective, and this holds for even the most trifling ends.

*her* rational capacity, she recognizes my end as rationally determined and so *can* also recognize it as an objective constraint.

Suppose that my interlocutor *does* accept my end as an objective constraint. Then, I will have effectively defended my end, and my demand for recognition will have been met. It is important to note here that in defending my end, I appeal only to the pure rational grounds that license it and on whose basis I determine my choice. Given the nature of these grounds, my interlocutor cognizes them in exactly the same manner as I do, through acts of her rational faculty formally identical to mine. Considered simply as a rational subject, she necessarily recognizes these grounds as such and so can also recognize my end as to be done. If she does recognize my end as to be done, my interlocutor and I come to be co-representers of my end through the formally identical cognition of the relevant rational grounds.<sup>38</sup> Each of us then represents the end as an objective constraint valid for each of us: my end comes to function “as far as possible as [her] end” (*G* 420). In effect, the end comes to function as a mutually recognized and mutually binding law for us.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the exact content of my demand is satisfied through the communication of the end.

Of course, the situation of the challenge merely dramatizes the quite general possibility of spelling out the determining grounds of a choice. Any rational being can in principle serve as an interlocutor for any other subject and with reference to any end. Thus, representations of ends necessarily have a communicative aspect built into them, and the end-representing subject must see itself as in potential communication with other end-representing subjects generally. If and

---

<sup>38</sup> That is, my interlocutor represents *my* end of eating ice cream as constraining *her* choices. Crucially, it is not that she adopts a parallel policy of eating ice cream. To become a co-representer of someone else’s end is to represent their pursuit of their end as constraining the choices I can make. This point is somewhat obscured in Thomas Hill’s otherwise illuminating discussion of how ends constrain subjects. Cf. Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*, 45-6.

<sup>39</sup> The nature of the corresponding constraints will differ: I am constrained to act to realize my end; my interlocutor is constrained to not interfere with my pursuit, and if necessary to aid me in it.

when such communication is successfully realized, it consists precisely in the co-representation of the end in question. In the absence of actual communication, the end-representing subject must see all other subjects as *potential* co-representers of its end: any of them *could in principle* recognize its end as to be done. In this manner, by demanding recognition for its end and hence conceiving of itself as capable of defending it, the subject conceives of itself and all other subjects as in potential communication, each in its capacity as a rational being capable of representing ends.

Nevertheless, the possibility of communication as I have presented it so far only establishes the *possibility* that optional or merely permissible ends such as my ice cream eating policy can constrain rational subjects generally. Hence, it might be thought, it does not show that other subjects *must* recognize my ends as objective constraints, i.e. that they must *meet* my demand for recognition. And since rational grounds merely license optional ends as opposed to making them incumbent on all subjects, it might seem that an interlocutor can recognize some end of mine as rationally licensed and yet refuse to accept it as valid for her.

However, this is not a genuine possibility. This becomes clear once we see that insofar as I demand recognition for my end, I must represent both myself and the subjects I address the demand to as ends in themselves. And consequently, I must represent all rationally determined ends, whether my own or other subjects', as objectively binding constraints. The first point to note is that my demand for recognition is in a sense just the demand that I be recognized as an end in itself. For in demanding that my rationally determined end be recognized as an objective constraint, I in effect demand that my exercise of reason be recognized as imposing an objective constraint, i.e. that I be recognized as a being that can exercise reason so as to impose objective

constraints. Thus my demand is just that I be recognized as a subject rationally determining its existence, and hence as an end in itself.

Yet, this demand to be recognized as an end in itself constrains me to represent *all other subjects* as ends in themselves. That I must so represent all other subjects follows from the point noted above that insofar as I represent any subject as representing a rationally determined end as such, I must represent it as an end in itself (cf. §3). In the present context, my demand is just that other subjects so exercise their rational faculty as to recognize my rationally determined end as such. Hence, I demand of other subjects the very act whereby I claim for myself the status of an end in itself: an act whereby subjects are to rationally determine their existence in that they recognize my end as a constraint on their choices. In this manner, in demanding recognition of another subject I must represent it precisely as a rational being capable of rationally determining its existence through the recognition of practical laws, hence as an end in itself. Generally, since the subject must represent the class of potential recognizers of its end as identical to the class of representers of ends, it must represent all members of this class as ends in themselves. Since the subject's conception of itself as an end in itself follows directly its self-consciously adopting a rationally determined end, its withholding of this status from any subject capable of recognizing its end would involve it in a straightforward inconsistency.

It bears stressing here that it is the *capacity* to rationally determine one's choices that is crucial, not whether some subject *in fact* so determines its choices. For whether or not a given subject in fact respects the authority of reason over its power of choice is and must be irrelevant for the subject demanding recognition for its end. I demand from rational subjects per se recognition for my end, irrespective of any contingent fact about any of these subjects; I must then represent these subjects as ends in themselves irrespective of what may or may not be

contingently true of them. My commitment to my end and hence my demand for recognition cannot lapse if confronted by a subject who for one reason or another rejects reason's authority over choice. Yet, that I must still demand that my end be recognized as such means that I must represent the subject concerned as *capable* of being a co-representer of my end. In other words, I must represent the other subject as a rational being that can exercise its rational faculty so as to represent my end as such. I must then represent the rational faculty and its exercise as the end in itself *in the subject in question*. Precisely in this sense, I must represent the given subject as an end in itself.<sup>40</sup> Thus, by virtue of representing reason as authoritative for its choices and hence representing its ends as to be done, a subject necessarily represents itself and all other subjects as ends in themselves.

Crucially, to represent some subject as an end in itself is in effect equivalent to representing the ends of that subject as objective constraints. Again, I represent a subject as an end in itself in that I represent its rationally determining its existence through the exercise of reason as the end in itself. Hence, to treat a subject as an end in itself I must these very rational determinations, i.e. the ends it chooses, as rational constraints that are binding for me, i.e. as objective constraints. Indeed, this is just a reflection of the fact the subject's demand for recognition for some end is simultaneously a demand for recognition of herself as an end in itself. When I assert my status as an end in itself, I ask that my rational determinations of what is to be done be treated as such. Correspondingly, in representing other subjects as ends in themselves, I must treat *their* rational determinations of choice, i.e. their ends, as authoritative

---

<sup>40</sup> Some readers of Kant, perhaps impressed by the opening paragraphs of the *Grundlegung*, have tended to doubt or deny this point; cf., e.g., Dean, *The Value of Humanity in Kant's Moral Theory*. However, the point is clearly entailed by the formula of humanity (as well as the formula of autonomy). We can accommodate Kant's point that nothing is "good without limitation except a **good will**" by noting that a good will is nothing other than the perfection in exercise of reason's authority over choice. As several formulations of the categorical imperative make clear, however, it is reason's authority that is decisive, rather than its perfect exercise.

for rational beings generally and hence for myself. It is worth noting that this constraint involves nothing beyond what is entailed by representing the rational faculty and its exercise as the end in itself: in representing the objective worth of an end, I merely recognize the worth of rational self-determination. Nevertheless, this amounts to a substantive constraint since it implies that I must view any end adopted by any subject as a constraint on my choice and action, as limiting what are (legitimately) my possible ends. Thus, for me to treat a subject as an end in itself is just for me to represent her optional ends as objective constraints I stand under.

Further, given that optional ends form objective constraints in that I represent rational beings as ends in themselves, I must in effect represent all practically possible ends as objectively worthy. The fact that each such end is licensed by reason and that I must represent reason and its exercise as necessarily worthy makes it the case that I must regard as objectively worthy any end that a subject may set herself. Precisely in this sense, an optional end is just the sort of thing that *can be* authoritative for and constrain the behavior of rational subjects generally. If some such end is never actually chosen, it does not come to actually constrain the behavior of any subject, but it can come to be a constraint at all only because it must already figure in the subject's thought as a possible constraint. Hence, my stance as a rational subject must be that for every other rational subject I treat whatever ends they have chosen as objective constraints. More fundamentally, my stance must be that other subjects' exercise of their rational faculty, i.e. their existence as rational beings, is a standing constraint on me. Thus, I simultaneously represent rational subjects as ends in themselves and their ends as constraints applying to me: indeed I represent the latter in that I represent the former. This last point is perfectly general: any subject that sets itself an end and thereby demands recognition for it must—if it is to be consistent—represent all other end-representing subjects as ends in

themselves and the ends they may set themselves as objectively binding. For just this reason, there is no legitimate possibility of end-representing subjects refusing to meet the demands for recognition that they issue to one other. And this in turn means that subjects' rationally determined ends of choice must come to function just like ends of reason: universally binding constraints that every rational being must represent itself as binding for its own choices and actions.

6. I can now complete the argument by showing how the account of the end-representing subject developed above corresponds to a subject's self-conception as a member of the realm of ends. Kant, as noted, characterizes the realm of ends as "a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws" (*G* 433). And he argues: "A rational being belongs as a *member* to the realm of ends when he gives universal laws in it but is also himself subject to these laws" (*G* 433). We can explain Kant's thought here by combining the main points of sections 3 and 5, i.e. by putting the subject's representation of itself as an end in itself together with its representation of the necessary communicability of ends.

What we have so far is that by virtue of rationally determining their choices, a subject conceives of itself as imposing objective constraints on others in the form of ends. At the same time, and for the same reason, it must see itself as bound by the ends of others. Further, the subject's representation of all ends as objective constraints is a reflection of its recognition of all rational beings as ends in themselves, i.e. of subjects' rational self-determinations as giving rise to standing constraint on all its choices. The question, then, is how these representations amount to the representation of "a systematic union" of all subjects? The answer lies precisely in the

relations of demands and recognitions of ends that end-representing subjects necessarily represent.

The “common objective laws” binding the totality of subjects together just are the ends through the representation of which subjects enter into relations of mutually recognizing these very ends as to be done.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, it is these relations of mutual recognition through which ends come to function as objective laws binding all subjects equally. More precisely, my demand that my end be recognized as to be done and my corresponding recognition of ends in general as to be done just is my representation of ends as common objective laws. Since every subject qua rational being represents ends in this manner, every subject sees itself as systematic related to all others subjects qua end-representing rational beings. Thus, every subject conceives of itself as at the same time *legislator* of its own ends and *subject* to the ends legislated by others. The subject’s representation of itself as legislator of laws, i.e. its own ends, is thus inseparably connected to its representation of itself as subject to laws, viz., the ends of other subjects.

Now I can represent myself as legislating objective constraints only insofar as I recognize reason’s authority over choice. Hence, my self-conception as simultaneously legislator and subject rests on my more fundamental self-conception as subject to the laws of reason. Similarly, I can see myself as subject to others’ ends just insofar as I recognize *these ends* to be rationally determined, so that I represent other subjects as equally subject to rational laws. In other words, I represent other subjects as recognizing practical laws as the determining grounds of *their choices* and *hence* as legislating objective constraints in the form of ends. What I then

---

<sup>41</sup> The points made in this paragraph could equally well be made in terms of subjects recognizing each other as ends in themselves, whereby subjects recognize the wills of other subjects as binding for their own wills (Cf. §3). In the text, I have chosen to make the argument using subjects’ representations of ends because it is these representations that strictly speaking make up the mutually recognized laws that subjects must conceive themselves to be bound by.

represent is the community of all rational beings as fundamentally subject to the ends of reason and *consequently* as legislators of their own ends and subject to the ends of others.

Given that I recognize other subjects' ends as rationally determined and so as constraints on my choices, my own determinations of choice will be sensitive to those of others. My ends will be thus necessarily consistent with the ends of all other subjects, the latter being constraints under which I choose the former. In practice, this will roughly mean that my choices take into consideration the ends of those close to me in time and space. The deeper point, however, is that a subject's representation of reason and its exercise as the fundamental constraint on its choices ensures the consistency of all ends, for it ensures that the subject treats all rational determinations of choice, its own and others', as valid constraints. Thus, the ends of all subjects form a consistent whole: they can all be pursued and realized together. Indeed, the dual self-conception of the subject and the co-realizability of all ends mirror each other: precisely in that a subject sees itself as simultaneously subject and legislator, it represents its ends as jointly realizable with the ends of all other subjects.

In this manner, the inherent communicability of rationally determined ends gives rise to the systematic union of rational subjects, i.e. to the representation of the realm of ends. I think of myself and all other rational beings as members of the realm of ends in that I represent each of us as subject to the practical dictates of reason and hence as simultaneously legislators of and subject to ends. This means that the representation of the realm of ends is equivalent to the representation of the good case as generalized over all subjects, and that the subject must treat the realm of ends as an ideal to be realized. I will take up these points in order.

The defining characteristic of the good case is that a given subject adopts the ends of reason as its own basic ends and so treats these as decisive considerations for what further ends it

adopts. If we now think of all subjects as conforming to this case, every end that each subject sets for itself will function as a “common objective law” for all subjects, for every end will be a necessarily recognizable instance of objective worth that (in part) puts all subjects in systematic connection with each other. Thus, the generalized good case is just the world where every subject always determines its choice as a member of the realm of ends: choosing as per the good case is choosing qua legislator in and subject of the realm of ends. Thus, the specification of the subject that we isolated by reference to the good case is the self-representation of the subject qua member of the realm of ends, and it is precisely the latter we have had in view throughout.

As for the second point, consider Kant’s claim: “[T]he idea of the necessary unity of all possible ends ... must as an original, and at least restrictive condition, serve as standard in all that bears on the practical” (A328/B385). We can grasp how the realm of ends must serve as the “standard,” i.e. the ideal of the practical exercise of reason, as follows.<sup>42</sup> When I demand recognition for my choice, I represent myself as conforming to the good case insofar as the relevant choice is concerned: as rationally determining my choice, and as demanding recognition in light of this. At the same time, in that I represent other subjects as potential co-representers of my end, I represent other subjects generally as members of the realm of ends. My representation of any subject as a potential co-representer of others’ ends derives from my representation of that subject as recognizing reason’s authority over choice. Hence, for me represent a subject as a potential co-representer of my end is for me to represent her as a member of the realm of ends. Thus, my demand for recognition can again be reformulated as the demand that all rational subjects represent themselves members of the realm of ends: as subject to the laws of reason and

---

<sup>42</sup> Note that the point here is different from the defense of the good case forwarded in §2. There, the point was that the subject must treat practical laws as authoritative for its *own* power of choice; here it is that the subject must, so to speak, represent these laws as authoritative for all subjects.

hence as simultaneously legislators of and subjects to ends. In this way, the very representation of an end, every determination of choice, implicitly invokes the realm of ends as the ideal, i.e. as the world where every end is recognized as such by all subjects.

7. I want to end here by briefly considering how the representation of the realm of ends just is the complete system of practical cognition. This will allow me to show, in the next chapter, how the representation is the practical specification of the general form of rational unity. This will then allow us to see how focusing on the realm of ends brings to the fore the distinctively rational character of practical constraints.

We can note first that the representation of the realm of ends can equally well be conceived of as a system of maxims: the very maxims in the willing of which the subject adopts the corresponding ends. Thus, the representation amounts to a systematic unity of all practically possible maxims and of the beings who will these maxims. At the same time—in keeping with the equivalence between ends and maxims—the subjects constituting the realm of ends are themselves represented in their maxims. For a subject's recognition of other subjects as ends-in-themselves can be reconceived as a set of maxims the subject adopts. This becomes clear once we consider that a subject's willing of a maxim is in essence its cognizing *what it is to do*, e.g. that I am to live a healthy life, or that I am to eat ice cream in such and such circumstances. When a subject recognizes another being as an end-in-itself, it in effect cognizes that it is to act toward that being in certain ways. In particular, as I have argued here, it cognizes that it is to treat the ends of the other subject as laws that constrain its own choices. Hence, subjects qua members of the realm of ends must adopt maxims to the effect that they will treat themselves and all other subjects as ends-in-themselves. The realm of ends, then, is perfectly equivalent to a

system of maxims, maxims that represent each member of the realm as an end-in-itself and that further specify the possible ends that each member may set itself. Indeed, a subject's self-conception as a member of the realm of ends consists just in this set of maxims, for this set of maxims exhaustively captures the ends a subject must recognize in conceiving of itself as a member of the realm of ends.

Yet, a system of maxims is precisely a systematic unity of practical cognition. According to Kant, practical cognition (for beings like ourselves) consists in the cognition of what *one ought to do*—as opposed to theoretical cognition, which consists in the cognition of *what is*.<sup>43</sup> Given that we are considering the case where subjects do indeed conform their choices to practical laws, and hence choose and do as they ought, we can capture Kant's point by saying that practical cognition consists in the cognition of *what to do*. Hence, maxims are essentially instances of practical cognition. The set of all practically possible maxims constitutes the systematic unity of practical cognition for it exhaustively specifies for every subject what that subject is to do. This systematic unity is governed by subjects' cognition of the realm of ends as the practical ideal, for as I have argued, it is this cognition that lies at the basis of every rational determination of choice. In other words, a subject's cognition of the system of practical cognition governs the choices of the subject, and these choices in turn serve to help realize the system of practical cognition. The representation of the realm of ends thus serves as the ground of its own realization.

Now as I show in the next chapter, this structure is the fundamental form of rational exercise—one that is equally present in the practical and theoretical employments of reason.

---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Bix-x.

Indeed, the governing role played by a representation of systematic unity marks out a sphere of activity as distinctively *rational* activity.

#### 4.0 THE WHOLE OF KNOWLEDGE: REASON IN THEORETICAL COGNITION

The Transcendental Logic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant lays out his account of the discursive power of cognition proper, is divided into the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic. The standard portrayal of the respective concerns of these parts is as follows: the Analytic sets out the concepts and principles that are constitutive of empirical knowledge and shows them to be so constitutive; the Dialectic, by contrast, is devoted to exposing and debunking the cognitive power's illegitimate claims to a priori cognition. The concern throughout the *Critique*, however, is with *theoretical* cognition or theoretical knowledge, that is knowledge the object of which is given from outside the cognitive power itself (cf. Bix-x). Hence, the concern of the Dialectic is specifically to debunk illegitimate claims to a priori theoretical cognition, and that of the Analytic is to set out the representations constitutive of precisely theoretical empirical cognition. This standard portrayal is perfectly accurate. However, the respective concerns of the Analytic and the Dialectic may be equally well described by noting that the topic of the first is that part of the cognitive power that is specifically the source of concepts, what Kant calls the understanding, whereas the topic of the second is reason, or the rational faculty proper. Thus, the difference between the two parts of the Transcendental Logic is that each concerns itself with a different faculty of the power of theoretical cognition. The two characterizations are roughly equivalent in that Kant takes the

understanding to be the source of the representations that are constitutive of empirical knowledge, and he locates the source of the illegitimate cognitive claims in reason.

Yet, since the Dialectic is the part, and the only part, of the *Critique* whose topic is the rational faculty proper, it is part of the Dialectic's concern to lay out the general character of the rational faculty and to show what positive, legitimate exercise this faculty is capable of in theoretical cognition. In other words, while it is true that the bulk of the Dialectic is devoted to exposing and debunking illegitimate claims to rational theoretical cognition, this debunking does not exhaust the task of the Dialectic. The rational faculty is a proper part of the power of cognition, and as such it must have *some* legitimate role to play in theoretical cognition, and precisely the Dialectic must spell out this role. My concern here is to explicate the legitimate exercise of reason in theoretical cognition. I will begin with a quite general characterization of reason in theoretical cognition (§1), and then by focusing on reason's primitive theoretical representation and its so-called "logical use," I will lay out the legitimate function reason plays (§2). Next I will show that this function, essentially the systematization of empirical knowledge, consists in the "regulative employment" of rational representations (§3). I will further argue that this theoretical enterprise of reason is grounded in reason's theoretical interest, and that consideration of this interest is necessary to understand the nature of reason's exercise and the status of its representations (§4). The picture that thus develops of reason's role in theoretical cognition turns out to be generically isomorphic to its role in practical cognition, and this generic isomorphism in turn helps to bring into focus the distinctively rational character of practical cognition (§5).

1. Kant sets out his generic conception of the rational faculty as it figures in theoretical cognition in the Introduction to the Dialectic. Hence, we can usefully turn here to get a general and preliminary account of the role played by reason in relation to the knowledge gained by the understanding. Kant defines reason as the “*faculty of principles*” (A299/B356), where what this implies is that principles are the specific sort of representations whose source is the faculty of reason, as for example the source of concepts is the understanding. Further, Kant identifies the drawing of mediate inference, i.e. the act of inference constitutive of a syllogism, as the act characteristic of reason (A303-04/B359-60). These two specifications of reason are related in that Kant conceives of syllogistic inference as proceeding from principles: principles supply the major premises of syllogisms, and precisely this cognitive function qualifies a representation as a principle. Thus, principles and syllogisms are logically interdependent, and insofar as reason is the faculty of principles, syllogistic inference is constitutive of its exercise.

Hence, we can get at Kant’s distinctive view of the rational faculty by looking at the related functions of principles and syllogisms. The function of a syllogism is to subsume particular bits of knowledge under more general truths such that the particular bits of knowledge are explained or grounded through their relation to the more general truth: Caius’ mortality is explained through the fact that all instances of Caius’ kind are mortal, and this fact can further explain and ground Socrates’ mortality, Plato’s mortality, etc. In other words, the principle constitutive of the major premise of a syllogism serves an explanatory function with respect to the more particular bit of knowledge that serves as the syllogism’s conclusion. The principle serves this explanatory function in that qua general bit knowledge it provides a rational ground from which the (more particular) conclusion can be derived. In providing this explanatory structure, the principle reveals inferential connections between relatively general and particular

bits of knowledge, inferential connections that are displayed in the drawing of the relevant syllogisms. Generally, then, reason's constitutive representations and acts play an indispensable role in the furthering of theoretical knowledge in that they introduce explanatory structure and inferential unity into it. Specifically, they introduce such structure and unity in that rational representations constitutive of principles provide rational grounding for the knowledge gained by the understanding. As Kant puts it, rational cognition is "[k]nowledge from principles," gained through syllogistic inference (A300/B357).

Thus, reason's role in theoretical cognition as a whole depends on the generality and cognitive status of its distinctive representations: principles can ground bits of knowledge only insofar as they are (at least relatively) general cognitions. Kant further argues that the term principle lends itself to both a strict and a relative use (A300/B356). In the latter sense, any representation that serves as the major premise of a syllogism counts as a principle: for a representation to serve in this role is equivalent to the representation functioning as a principle. However, a general empirical truth, e.g. that humans can't fly, may well serve as the major premise of a syllogism, and yet insofar as the relevant proposition is empirically grounded, it could not be said to have its source in reason: in an obvious sense, its source lies at least partly in the evidence of the senses. If principles strictly speaking are representations of reason, representations whose source lies in the rational faculty, principles strictly speaking cannot include such empirically grounded cognitions. In the strict sense then, a principle would be a non-empirical or a priori representation generated by reason and as such would be necessary and universally valid. Further, since such a representation would provide an explanatory ground for some domain of our knowledge, it would itself have to constitute a bit of knowledge. In other words, the representation would have to constitute a truth about the object it represents, and thus

would have to be objectively valid. In identifying reason as the faculty of principles, Kant is identifying it as the source of such a priori representations.<sup>1</sup>

Now a genuine principle, being universally valid, would have unlimited scope of application: it could ground any bit of knowledge gained by the understanding. Much as the Second Analogy, as a pure principle of the understanding, is applicable to *all* events in the sensible world, a principle of reason would be applicable to all judgments arrived at by the understanding. In other words, rational principles would constitute the conceptually most prior grounds of theoretical knowledge, just as the pure principles of the understanding form the ultimate grounds for all empirical judgments.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the status of genuine principles as first explanatory grounds follows from their cognitive function. For the grounding of theoretical knowledge can be considered fully successful only if the grounds provided do not themselves need to be further grounded: not simply the conditions of our theoretical knowledge but rather the *totality* of such conditions must be supplied. By definition, this totality of conditions would itself be unconditioned, in the sense of not allowing of any further conditions or grounds, and as such would include the first explanatory grounds of theoretical knowledge. Since rational principles are precisely the representations responsible for grounding theoretical knowledge, they themselves must constitute its conceptually most prior grounds. Hence, rational principles must

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course it turns out that there can be no such objectively valid principles for theoretical knowledge, and the point of the Dialectic is to debunk precisely such claims to a priori theoretical cognition. My point here, however, is to show what a genuine theoretical principle would be, if there were to be any. On the other hand, the characterization generically, i.e. without reference to theoretical cognition, fits *practical* principles (cf. §5).

<sup>2</sup> I bring up the principles of the understanding only to help provide a preliminary characterization of the cognitive function of genuine rational principles, were there to be any such. However, mention of the former might prompt the following question: Given that the principles of the understanding are indeed a priori principles applicable to all theoretical cognition, why cannot they perform the very function I am here attributing to rational principles? The answer is that the character of the principles of the understanding—specifically their use of schematized concepts—makes it impossible for them to be the sort of grounds reason necessarily demands. The latter, as we shall see in detail below, contains a thought of the unconditioned, which the principles of the understanding are inherently unfit to provide.

be synthetic a priori propositions that neither require nor even admit of any further grounds in order to serve their distinctive cognitive function. Indeed, the role constitutive of the rational faculty in theoretical cognition depends on this since only representations of this sort can provide genuine rational cognition. Kant can be seen as expressing precisely this thought in noting that rational representations are necessarily unconditioned a priori principles.<sup>3</sup>

Further, principles in the strict sense must not only be unconditioned, a priori representations, they must also purport to be *of* the unconditioned: they must purport to represent the unconditioned. Given that genuine rational principles must be synthetic a priori propositions that provide the ultimate grounds for empirical knowledge gained by the understanding, they must represent the unconditioned as that which grounds the conditioned empirical judgements. In other words, a principle in the strict sense must not only contain the unconditioned *in cognition*, it must also represent the unconditioned *in the object* of cognition. We can understand this dual occurrence of the unconditioned in terms of Kant's Copernican Turn. The fundamental thought constitutive of the Copernican Turn is that the objects of cognition must conform to our cognition of them.<sup>4</sup> Familiarly, the idea is that the power of cognition itself supplies the formal conditions that makes possible the cognition of objects. In the case at hand, the relevant formal condition is just the unconditioned in cognition: what must be secured is the status of the cognition as first rational ground of empirical cognition as such. As such, the principle must be a representation of the unconditioned: what is represented must share the characteristic form of the representation, its status as unconditioned. We might put the point by saying that the rational demand for the unconditioned in cognition necessarily, by virtue of the thought that objects must

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A307-08/B364-65, A322/B379.

<sup>4</sup> Bxvii. See also A92/B124-5.

conform to the cognition of them, translates into a demand for the cognition of the unconditioned.

Our focus so far has been on rational principles and their cognitive function. Yet if reason is to be the source of representations constitutive of principles that purport to be of the unconditioned, it must also be the source of concepts suitable for figuring in the relevant principles. For a principle as a judgment must rely on some concept where the concept is such as to form the ground of the cognition constitutive of the judgment. Thus, an empirical judgment must be grounded by a schematized or empirical concept, so that the concept is suitable to the type of judgment in question. An unconditioned a priori judgment, by analogy, must take as its basis an unconditioned a priori concept, what Kant terms an idea. Just as empirical concepts are necessary for the cognition of objects given in experience, an a priori unconditioned concept would be needed to secure a judgment that takes some specification of the unconditioned as its object. This again is just an application of the Copernican turn. It follows that for reason to fulfil its role in theoretical cognition it must generate a priori concepts that themselves serve an explanatory function with respect to the theoretical knowledge gained by the understanding. In keeping with the function of rational principles, such concepts must themselves serve as unconditioned grounds for theoretical knowledge. Thus, we can see how specific rational concepts, what Kant calls transcendental ideas, arise by considering how the generic thought of the unconditioned can be variously specified in theoretical cognition. This in turn will bring to light the content of the various rational principles grounded by these concepts.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> My focus here will largely be confined to a level of generality that abstracts from the transcendental ideas. However, some discussion of the ideas is useful, even necessary, to see how the thought of the unconditioned is specified in reason's theoretical exercise. Further, the ideas will be relevant in the next chapter.

Kant argues that the specifications of the unconditioned can be discovered by considering the relations involved in a given act of cognition, for it is precisely the terms of the relations that require explanatory grounds. Hence, the grounds called for correspond systematically to the relata of any cognitive act (cf. A333-34/B390-91). We can see the point here by considering that an act of cognition consists of a subject cognizing an object as such and such: I may for instance cognize the object before me as a table. Thus, the act bears essential relation to a cognizing subject and to an object cognized. Further, Kant argues the object cognized may be thought of either as an object of experience, i.e. as appearance, or as object of thought in general: I may represent the thing before me as a table with spatio-temporal qualities or I may consider it abstractly as an indeterminate thing. An act of cognition then bears relation to the cognizing subject, to the cognized object qua spatio-temporal existent, and to the same object qua indeterminate thought-entity. Explanatorily grounding the judgment would require finding the conditions for each of the relata involved, i.e. finding the grounds with respect to the cognizing subject and with respect to the two specifications of the object.

Now if reason's cognitive function demands that we find the totality of conditions up to the first explanatory grounds for any given judgment, given the plurality of relations and corresponding grounds involved the demand will be for the unconditioned with respect to each of the relations. In other words, reason will demand the unconditioned with respect to the cognizing subject, the cognized object as appearance and the same as indeterminate object of thought. In this manner, reason's demand for the grounds of theoretical knowledge issues in rational concepts of the unconditioned subject, the totality of conditions for the appearance, and the unconditioned ground of any object in general. These specific concepts of the unconditioned in turn form the basis of the unconditioned rational principles that are to ground theoretical

knowledge so that the rational principles generated by reason concern themselves precisely with the unconditioned subject and the unconditioned with regard to the two specifications of the object. To provide the totality of conditions for any bit of theoretical knowledge would be to supply just these first explanatory grounds, and these very grounds would constitute the full rational grounds for any bit of knowledge.

To sum up, reason's cognitive function in the theoretical sphere is to cognize these unconditioned concepts and principles *qua* fundamental rational grounds of empirical knowledge and hence derive empirical knowledge in its totality *from* these grounds. Such a derivation would constitute complete and genuine rational cognition. Of course, it is exceedingly well known that Kant takes this cognitive function to be unsatisfiable: there can be no theoretical cognition of an unconditioned ground. The Analytic has shown that all discursive theoretical cognition requires sensible content: unless some intuition corresponds to a given concept, the concept cannot issue in the cognition of an object. Yet, insofar as the concepts of reason and the principles containing them involve the representation of the unconditioned no sensible content could possibly correspond to them. And this means that no concept of reason could form the basis of a genuine act of cognition, nor could any principle be constitutive of the same. My reason for rehearsing this well known Kantian doctrine is that it points to a deeper problem: what, if any, positive role can reason play in theoretical cognition if what would be its distinctive representations and its distinctive contribution are, as it seems, not to be had?

2. In order to answer this question, it will help to first reformulate it at a more generic level of description. Specifically, we can usefully abstract from the specific representations of pure reason and uncover a more primitive idea of the unconditioned—an idea that in effect contains

the more specific representations—and reformulate the problem with referenced to this primitive idea. I will show that the rational representation in question holds the key to explaining the legitimate, positive role reason plays in theoretical cognition.

To arrive at the primitive representation of the unconditioned, we focus purely on reason's general cognitive function of providing explanatory grounds for theoretical knowledge. Consideration of this general function of itself yields the thought of the totality of such grounds irrespective of the particular forms the grounds may take. Such a representation of the unconditioned (in cognition) would comprise all explanatory grounds for any bit of theoretical knowledge and would represent them as such. In other words, the representation would be of the entirety of theoretical knowledge as inferentially related under unconditioned rational representations, and would thus contain as parts the rational representations constitutive of the specifications of the idea of the unconditioned. Since the specific representations of the unconditioned would jointly unify theoretical knowledge as a whole, these representations would themselves stand in systematic interconnection. Indeed, these very representations and the relations between them would provide for the full systematicity of theoretical cognition.

This generic representation of the unconditioned unity of theoretical knowledge may itself be seen as the most primitive rational representation insofar as it directly expresses reason's general function with respect to theoretical cognition and contains within it all specifications of the unconditioned. The representation in question would thus constitute the first and final ground of all theoretical knowledge in that it would show how any bit of knowledge is systematically related to all its grounds. Hence, the representation in question comprises *the complete system of theoretical cognition*; as such, we can think of it as the idea of the whole (or system) of theoretical cognition. It is important to note that although this idea represents an

ideal, indeed the most complete ideal, of theoretical knowledge, it is not directly a representation of an object that lies outside of thought, in the way that say the representation of some thing in itself is. In other words, the idea of the whole of cognition is not *of* the unconditioned in the sense specified above. (On the other hand, *what it represents* would contain as parts representations of the unconditioned, and would thus itself be *of* the unconditioned.) Since this point has important consequences both for the function of this representation and for reason's role in theoretical cognition generally, it will help to focus for now on the unconditioned *in* cognition, precisely what the idea represents.

To arrive at a fuller characterization of this primitive rational representation and its role, we can focus on the following two texts. First, there is Kant's characterization of what he calls the "universal concept of the faculty of reason", where reference to the relevant idea is implicit (A302/B359). The universal concept is that of reason as the faculty which "secures the unity of the rules of understanding under principles"; or which supplies "to the manifold knowledge of the [understanding] an a priori unity by means of concepts, a unity that may be called the unity of reason" (A302/B359). The a priori unity of reason mentioned here would consist in bringing theoretical judgments constitutive of cognition under a priori rational principles that ground them. Assuming that there are no in principle limits to the resulting unity, i.e. that the relevant principles cover all possible theoretical cognitions, the unity of reason referred to here would just be the complete system of theoretical knowledge. The two are strictly equivalent because if some set of rational principles jointly grounded all possible theoretical knowledge, the totality of theoretical cognition would thereby be systematically unified. Hence, the unity of reason referred to above is just the systematic unity thought of in what in the primitive rational representation: the complete system of theoretical cognition.

In the present context, two aspects of Kant's characterization deserve mention: the designation of the concept in question as "the *universal* concept of ... reason" and the characterization of the associated unity as the "unity of reason". The former is relevant insofar as it suggests that this concept, and hence the systematization of knowledge, encapsulates the most general function of reason in the theoretical sphere. Reason just *is* the faculty that introduces systematic unity in the knowledge gained by the understanding. Further, this unity is, at least in principle, unlimited in that it constitutes a system that neither needs nor admits of further grounds. Relatedly, the designation of this unity as "the unity of reason" underscores that the unity characteristic of a system constitutes rational unity *per se*, just as the unity of the manifold in experience is the unity of the understanding. Hence, the exercise of reason and the representation of systematic unity are coeval: any exercise of reason must consist in or be grounded in the thought of systematic unity. We might then say that Kant takes the thought of the system of theoretical knowledge to be reason's fundamental theoretical thought, that which grounds and structures the rest of its theoretical activity.

The second, and explicit, mention of the idea of the whole of knowledge occurs in the Appendix to the Dialectic. Kant here characterizes the idea thus: "the form of a whole of knowledge—a whole which is prior to the determinate knowledge of the parts and which contains the conditions that determine *a priori* for every part its position and relation to the other parts" (A645/B673). Again, two points bear noting. First, Kant's characterization of the representation as "the *form* of a whole...", which again suggests that the relation between the representation and the whole of knowledge is not strictly the relation between a representation and its object, what is represented. Rather, the representation provides the governing form of reason's theoretical activity, which in turn provides the content to this form. In this way, the

whole of knowledge is always internal to this formal representation.<sup>6</sup> The second point to note is the *priority* of the whole with respect to (knowledge of) the parts, i.e. with respect to bits of knowledge gained by the understanding conceived of as parts of a system of knowledge. Again, this suggests that the thought of the whole of knowledge per se is prior to, indeed the ground of, the more specific representations of the unconditioned, since the latter would be proper parts of the former. Theoretical reason thus starts with a formal representation, and its activity consists in providing the content for this formal representation, i.e. in discovering the systematic connections between bits of cognition. Putting these two points together, we can say: in that the representation in question provides the form of theoretical rational activity it guides the totality of this very activity, and this activity in turn provides content to the representation.

Hence, the idea of the whole of knowledge is the fundamental thought of the unconditioned in cognition, and as such is the most basic manifestation of the distinctive concern of reason in the theoretical sphere. Yet, focusing on this idea does not of itself solve the problem of reason's role in theoretical cognition. The determinate whole of knowledge, as opposed to the idea of its form, would constitute the unconditioned totality of theoretical cognition. As such, it would contain (would-be) synthetic a priori rational principles, and so also be *of* the unconditioned. Thus, the whole of knowledge itself is, like the principles encountered above and for the same reason, in principle unattainable. Given the point about the Copernican Turn above, this means that the unconditioned in cognition is just as unattainable as the unconditioned of cognition, since the former would necessarily translate into the latter. In sum, reason's fundamental concern with respect to theoretical cognition, determining the content of its

---

<sup>6</sup> I elaborate on this point in §5, where I compare the representation of the whole of knowledge with that of the realm of ends.

fundamental representation, is unsatisfiable, so that we are once again left with the problem of determining reason's legitimate positive role in theoretical cognition.

The key to this problem's solution can be found by further consideration of the formal representation of the whole of knowledge. In particular, we must consider the role this representation plays in what Kant describes as the logical employment of reason. The logical employment, qua exercise of the rational faculty, is articulated and governed by a representation constitutive of a principle, though as we shall see, the principle counts as such only in an attenuated sense. Kant formulates the principle thus: "the principle peculiar to reason in general, in its logical employment, is:—to find for the conditioned knowledge obtained through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion" (A307/B364). Now what this principle expresses is just the thought of the unconditioned whole of theoretical knowledge: it is thus another formulation of reason's fundamental theoretical thought. The crucial difference is that the rational unity is here explicitly articulated as a task to be accomplished through the theoretical exercise of reason. In other words, although the concern is once again with the totality of conditions or explanatory grounds of theoretical knowledge, the grounds in question are represented not as cognized but as to be sought (and ideally discovered).

The point here becomes more clear if we consider the contrast Kant draws between the logical and the pure employments of reason. Kant suggests that both employments of reason are governed by the same above-mentioned principle; the difference lies in the way the principle is interpreted in each. Specifically, the logical employment interprets the principle as a "logical maxim", whereas the pure employment takes it to be a "principle of *pure reason*" (A307/B364). Now given the evident closeness of the logical principle to the primitive idea of the whole of knowledge, we can express the distinction as one between two possible interpretations of the

primitive idea (rather than of the logical principle itself). Specifically, the logical principle interprets the primitive idea as a *maxim* or directive that prescribes the systemization of knowledge. Hence, the logical principle, precisely by concerning itself with the grounds of theoretical cognition, aims at securing unconditioned unity *in* theoretical cognition. The pure interpretation of the primitive idea, by contrast, aims to cognize the *object* corresponding to the (putative) unconditioned totality of cognition. It does so in that it purports to cognize the objects corresponding to putative rational principles. In this manner, the two possible interpretations of the primitive idea correspond to the two basic ways in which the thought of the unconditioned figures in reason's theoretical exercise.

More important, the logical and the pure employments respectively exhaust reason's legitimate role in theoretical cognition and its illegitimate claims. In other words, the two possible interpretations of the primitive idea respectively ground the two overarching modes of theoretical rational exercise. In view of this, it will help to briefly consider the pure rational interpretation of the idea and the contrast it presents to reason's legitimate logical use.

In general, the pure employment of reason consists in reason purporting to cognize the unconditioned grounds for the (conditioned) bits of knowledge gained by the understanding. As Kant puts the point, reason here assumes that given some bit of knowledge, "the whole series of conditions, subordinated to one another—a series which is therefore itself unconditioned—is likewise given, that is, contained in the object and its connection" (A308/B364). In this manner, reason claims to cognize the conditions of knowledge, specifically the synthetic a priori principles that constitute the first grounds, or unconditioned conditions, of all our knowledge: principles of the sort discussed in (§1). What I want to note here is that these illegitimate cognitive claims of reason, the very claims that are investigated and debunked in the body of the

Dialectic, are properly seen as grounded in the pure rational interpretation of the primitive theoretical rational representation. In other words, the basic act of the pure employment of reason, reason's fundamental illegitimate act, is its pure rational interpretation of the idea of whole of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation at issue consists in taking the thought of the whole of knowledge to be constitutive of synthetic a priori cognition. More precisely, the idea in question is conceived of as grounding an objectively valid principle in which the unconditioned grounds of knowledge are represented as available for theoretical cognition through rational concepts. This fundamental principle then makes possible and grounds the specific claims to cognition of the unconditioned, e.g. putative principles that take as their object the simple subject or the supreme being.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the pure employment of reason as a whole, consisting in illegitimate claims to a priori theoretical rational cognition, is grounded in the use of the primitive idea as the basis of a putative act of rational cognition.

The logical employment of reason, by contrast, abjures the claim to objective validity and to synthetic a priori rational cognition.<sup>9</sup> Positively put, when the primitive idea is interpreted as a logical maxim, it simply instructs us to introduce systematic unity into our knowledge by seeking the conditions or explanatory grounds of bits of empirical knowledge, finding new instances and applications of these grounds, and so on. In this manner, by continually searching for and discovering increasingly general explanatory grounds of our knowledge, as well as subsuming further bits of knowledge under these grounds, we pursue the systematization of our theoretical knowledge. Given the distinguishing characteristic of the employment, the grounds

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A308/B365, where Kant characterizes the various unconditioned principles of reason as "arising from this supreme principle."

<sup>8</sup> I have left the characterization of the pure interpretation quite vague because my primary interest is in the logical interpretation and my point here is simply to indicate the nature of the contrast.

<sup>9</sup> The claims made in this section with regard to objective validity need modification. Here, my purpose is simply to emphasize the contrast between the two employments and to stress that the logical employment makes no claim to a priori cognition and in that sense lacks objective purport. Cf. §4 below.

adduced will in each case be further bits of empirical knowledge. At the same time, given their explanatory function, they will be increasingly general and thus able to ground more and more comprehensive domains of knowledge. Hence, reason when employed logically interprets the idea of the whole of knowledge as setting itself a task, the task being the piecemeal systematization of our knowledge using materials supplied by the understanding. However, the logical employment in no way commits us to the claim that the complete series of conditions, or the final explanatory grounds of our knowledge, can in fact be discovered. Indeed, the logical interpretation of the primitive idea does not rule out the possibility that the world may be such that knowledge of it could never amount to a systematic unity. We are instructed to search for the conditions of bits of knowledge *up to and including the first unconditioned conditions*; yet this instruction carries with it no guarantee of success. As we will see more fully below, reason when employed logically, still demands the complete systematic unity of knowledge, but it does not presume either that it can cognize the fundamental principles that would ground such unity nor that the world is cognizable through such principles.

It is worth noting two aspects of the logical employment that show its distinctively rational character while underscoring its fundamental relation to the primitive idea. First, the acts that comprise the logical employment are syllogistic inferences in which principles in the relative sense function as major premises. Thus, relatively general empirical truths are adduced as explanatory grounds of particular judgments, whereby the latter are “cognized through principles” (relatively speaking). Hence, the logical employment yields what has the form of rational cognition. Further, although it has this form only in an attenuated sense since the principles in question are not genuinely such, as the empirical truths that serve as the relevant major premises become relatively more general, what is cognized through them approximates

ever more closely rational cognition per se. In this manner, reason can gradually approach its distinctive form of cognition through successive acts of the logical employment. More importantly, that the logical employment aims at and introduces this approximation displays its specifically rational character. On the other hand, the syllogistic inferences at issue form parts of the whole of knowledge, bits of the determinate content supplied by rational activity governed by the formal representation. The successive, piecemeal systematization of knowledge, the finding of explanatory grounds, etc., is precisely the manner in which reason can (at least partially) gain “determinate knowledge of the parts” while not making any illegitimate cognitive claims. And once reason is barred from making the latter claims, piecemeal systemization is the only method available to it for each achieving at least an approximation to systematic unity in theoretical cognition. In other words, the manner in which the primitive idea of whole of knowledge structures the *legitimate* domain of theoretical rational activity is precisely in and through the logical employment of reason.

Secondly, as noted above, the logical employment as a whole is governed by a principle in an attenuated sense: a genuine rational representation that is not a cognition. The so-called logical principle, like the idea of the whole which it grounds, has its source in reason and is hence a priori; on the other hand, since it is merely a maxim, it is not constitutive of cognition. Thus, the idea functions as an a priori rational representation which cannot issue in any a priori cognition, indeed any cognition at all. On the one hand, the principle cannot issue in any theoretical cognition because no intuition can correspond to the thought of the unconditioned that it essentially contains. On the other hand, the principle also cannot issue in a *practical* cognition: a rational determination of the will whereby the subject commits itself to  $\varphi$ . Although the way the logical principle functions bears a certain similarity to practical cognition in that it involves

reason setting itself a task, there is no determination of the will involved. Rather, the logical principle is fully internal to the theoretical exercise of reason: it prescribes nothing more than theoretical acts of reason that concern themselves solely with (empirical) theoretical cognition. Hence, unlike in a case of practical cognition, there is no commitment here on the subject's part of the sort 'x is to be done', or that the subject is to be the cause of some  $\phi$ -ing.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the logical principle forms the basis of no cognition whatsoever, and precisely because of this counts as a principle in an attenuated sense.

Nevertheless, the a priori character of the logical principle, in particular its concern with the unconditioned conditions of knowledge, exhibits its source in reason. That is, that the logical employment is governed by a representation that makes essential mention of the unconditioned shows its distinctively rational source and character. Indeed, the principle represents just the ideal of rational unity: the systemization of knowledge under representations that serve as (first) grounds of this knowledge. As such, the logical principle is just a propositional articulation of the primitive idea of the whole of knowledge, an articulation that in effect sets the determination of this primitive idea as a task. In doing so, the logical principle articulates the manner in which the rational faculty can legitimately concern itself with empirical knowledge and play a positive role in theoretical cognition. Thus, the acts of the rational faculty governed by the logical principle, acts that make up the logical employment, are at bottom grounded in reason's primitive representation of rational unity and aim at the realization of this unity. To put the point somewhat fancifully, the logical employment of reason is reason's (legitimate) method of self-

---

<sup>10</sup> As I will show below, in that the logical principle governs rational activity aimed at making actual the systematic unity of cognition, it bears a similarity to practical principles, which generally govern activity aimed at realizing their objects. Thus, while the logical principle cannot strictly be constitutive of either theoretical or practical cognition, it shares formal features with each of these. Cf. fn. 16 and esp. §5.

realization: it is how reason can make actual its basic capacity for systematic cognition in the theoretical sphere.

Crucially, the logical employment is the only legitimate method of pursuing and determining rational unity: it is exhaustive of reason's legitimate role in theoretical cognition. Any legitimate act of the rational faculty, consisting in the systematization of cognition through the use of some general empirical cognition, falls under the scope of the logical employment since it forms part of the overall pursuit of systematic unity. Thus, in that the logical employment limits itself to empirical knowledge while extending its scope to all such knowledge, it covers the entirety of the positive role that reason can play in theoretical cognition. On the other hand, any theoretical act of reason that lay claim to a priori rational cognition would thereby fall outside the scope of the logical employment. Furthermore, precisely in that it lay claim to rational cognition, any such act would be an instance of the pure employment of reason and hence grounded in the pure interpretation of the primitive idea. Thus, the primitive idea of rational unity grounds every possible theoretical act of reason, each of which is grounded exclusively by either the pure or the rational interpretation of this idea and correspondingly forms part of either the pure or the logical employment. And when reason limits itself to interpreting the primitive idea logically, it allows itself a legitimate and positive role in theoretical cognition, a role that is informed and governed by this very idea.

3. Now the contrast most often invoked to account for the legitimate use of reason's concepts and principles in the theoretical sphere is that between a constitutive and a regulative employment: unlike the concepts and principles of the understanding which are constitutive of

experience, the representations of reason are supposed to play a merely “regulative” role.<sup>11</sup> What I would like to show now is that the regulative use of these representations consists precisely in the function they serve in the logical employment. I will try thereby to validate my claim that the logical employment is exhaustive of reason’s legitimate role in theoretical cognition, while also outlining the role played by specific rational representations in this employment.

Kant introduces the constitutive/regulative distinction with regard to the principles of pure understanding: he argues that while what he calls the mathematical principles are constitutive of appearances, the dynamical ones are regulative for them (A179-80/B222). Kant’s thought is that the dynamical principles, in particular the analogies of experience, articulate rules whereby the existence of certain objects is asserted without the rule thereby making the relevant object available in experience. Thus, the second analogy asserts that there must be a cause for a given event, but does not thereby present the cause in experience. In this sense dynamical principles do not constitute the objects whose existence they posit. Yet, such principles provide a way of seeking the objects whose existence they assert and of cognizing them as such: the second analogy, through the particular causal laws it grounds, provides a method of seeking the cause of a given event and representing it as such. Further, insofar as the second analogy asserts the existence of a lawful cause for every event, it implicitly directs us to seek the cause of the relevant event. By thus specifying a rule for seeking the cause and in effect instructing to seek it, the second analogy *regulates* the search for objects of empirical cognition.

---

<sup>11</sup> This is no more than a rough rendering of Kant’s account. As we will presently see, and as has been widely noted, the so called mathematical principles are constitutive of appearances, while the Analogies are regulative for appearances and constitutive of experience.

In general, then, a principle, or indeed any representation, qualifies as regulative just in case it posits the existence of some object or set of objects and specifies a method of seeking cognition of the relevant object(s), without itself providing the object in experience. A principle counts as constitutive, on the other hand, precisely in that it is necessary for constituting an object qua appearance, e.g. as of a determinate quantity. Yet as we have implicitly noted, the constitutive/regulative distinction is relative in that a representation is always regulative (or constitutive) *with respect to some x*. Thus, while the analogies are regulative for appearances, they are constitutive of experience or empirical cognition: the second analogy, for instance, is constitutive for the cognition of causal relations. When we cognize some object of experience as *the cause of* some event, we constitutively deploy a causal, i.e. dynamical, principle. In this manner, the dynamical principles generally regulate the search for the appropriate objects of cognition but are constitutive of empirical cognition itself.

Turning now to rational principles and concepts, we must first ask with respect to what they are to be regulative. The answer is clearly that they are to be regulative for empirical cognition as a whole. That is, rational representations guide and regulate the progress of empirical cognition in that they articulate rules through the application of which new bits of empirical cognition may be gained and systematically related to other cognitions. As a first illustration, consider Kant's characterization of the cosmological principle qua regulative in the Antinomy of Pure Reason. Kant argues that when this principle is regarded as regulative, the total series of sensible conditions that it asks for "can only be *set as a task*" (A508/B536). He elaborates: "[The principle] cannot tell us *what the object is*, but only *how the empirical regress is to be carried out* so as to arrive at the complete concept of the object" (A510/B538). Thus, the cosmological principle used regulatively does not itself determine an object of experience qua

condition of given conditioned, but rather instructs that the series of conditions be sought. In doing so, it also specifies a rule whereby empirical cognition may be extended, viz. through regressively seeking the empirical conditions for a given object. Further, when an object is cognized in accordance with this rule, it is cognized *as* a condition of the given conditioned object, so that this cognition is systematically related to the existing body of cognition.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, rational principles generally formulate rules for the extension and unification of empirical knowledge.

Given this characterization of the regulative function of principles, it should be evident that the logical employment at bottom consists just in the regulative use of the primitive idea of rational unity. This idea of rational unity, when interpreted logically, instructs us to seek ever more general explanatory grounds for theoretical knowledge and to bring ever more bits of knowledge under these. Thus, the idea functions as a general rule regulating the furthering of theoretical cognition towards the goal of rational unity. Indeed, in that the idea of the whole of knowledge includes as parts of it the first unconditioned grounds of empirical cognition, it serves as the ideal limit for theoretical cognition as a whole. Hence, the idea qua regulative principle is the most generic articulation of reason's regulation of the knowledge of the understanding: precisely the primitive idea takes the unity of empirical cognition *as a whole* as its object. Now the application of this rule, the actual guiding and regulating, takes the form of the logical employment as a whole. That is, when we follow the generic directive, e.g. cognizing some bit of knowledge as falling under some more general principle, we engage in precisely the acts that make up the logical employment of reason. In this manner, the logical employment considered

---

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that even here, there is no determinative or constitutive use for the cosmological principle. The object is cognized as *an empirical condition*, and hence through the constitutive use of the principles of the understanding. Rational representations in general can have no constitutive use since they involve the thought of the unconditioned and no object corresponding to them can be given in experience.

generically is just the formulation of what it means to apply the primitive idea of rational unity as a regulative principle.

To flesh out the picture somewhat, it will help to look briefly at Kant's discussion of the regulative use of rational representations in the Appendix to the Dialectic. Kant's guiding thought in this text is that though rational representations cannot be employed constitutively in the cognition of an object, as representations grounded in the very nature of the rational faculty, they must have some legitimate use in theoretical cognition (A642-43/B670-71). This legitimate use, Kant argues, consists precisely in their ability to introduce rational or systematic unity into empirical cognition (A643-44/B671-72). Since rational representations in general are complementary specifications of the generic thought of rational unity, they can, if interpreted regulatively, provide complementary, systematically related rules for extending and unifying empirical cognition. Thus, specific rational representations have a positive role to play that follows from and fits within reason's generic function with respect to theoretical cognition. In the Appendix, Kant spells out this positive role in his account of "the hypothetical employment of reason" and the function of transcendental rational concepts in theoretical cognition. I will briefly look at each in turn to show how the regulative use plays out in the two cases and how each forms a part of the logical employment as a whole.

The hypothetical employment, according to Kant, "has ... as its aim the systematic unity of the knowledge of the understanding" (A647/B675). He characterizes the hypothetical employment as governed by "the principles of *homogeneity, specification, and continuity* of forms" (A658/B686). The first of these postulates the existence of common higher genera which range over differentiated species, the second on the other hand postulates further specific differentiation, and the last the existence of ever more closely related species. Kant suggests that

although these principles, like the principle governing the logical employment, may be represented either as logical maxims or as objectively valid rational principles, qua constitutive of the hypothetical employment they are logical principles with a regulative use.<sup>13</sup> As such, the principles specify a set of inter-related rules or tasks. They spell out, so to speak, complementary directions in which cognition can be extended: toward the common genus under a set of objects falls, toward yet undiscovered species that manifest a given genus, toward the inter-relations between these species, etc. By following these rules, we can both extend empirical cognition, e.g. by discovering some as yet undiscovered species, as well as organize it, e.g. by cognizing given species *as* species of a common genus. Further, since the principles are rational representations concerned with empirical cognition as a whole, their prescriptions of generic unity, specific differentiation, etc., are indefinitely iterated. The hypothetical employment hence consists in finding ever higher genera, ever more specific differences, etc., so that the employment introduces rational unity over an indefinitely expanding range of empirical cognition.

As is evident, the representations governing the hypothetical employment function as specifications of the idea of the whole of knowledge: they posit specific sorts of explanatory grounds, generic kinds, and particular kinds of things falling under these. In that the principles guide the acquisition and unification of the knowledge of the objects they posit, they function regulatively in just the manner the generic representation does. Indeed, just as the principles of homogeneity, etc. are derivative of the primitive rational representation, so is their function in theoretical cognition. That is, the hypothetical employment introduces a specific, complementary forms of rational unity through the regulative use of its governing

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. A666/B694 where Kant characterizes these principles as deployed in the hypothetical employment as “*maxims of reason*.” I will defend the claim that Kant assigns no more than a logical status to these principles in §4 below.

representations; it thus forms part of the overall regulation of theoretical cognition by the primitive idea. Given that this regulation takes the form of the logical employment, the hypothetical employment forms a proper part of the logical employment.

Similar considerations apply to Kant's account of the positive role played by the transcendental ideas in theoretical cognition. The representations at issue here are those enumerated in §1 as specifications of the thought of the unconditioned: representations of the unconditioned subject of cognition, the complete series of conditions for objects qua appearances, and the unconditioned ground of an object in general. Given that the putative claims to rational cognition grounded by these ideas have been comprehensively debunked, these ideas must have some other, non-constitutive role to play. Kant suggests that these ideas when regarded as "rules of the empirical employment of reason, lead us to systematic unity...; and that they thus contribute to the extension of empirical knowledge" (A671/B699). He further claims that this function gains for them a transcendental deduction "as *regulative* principles of the systematic unity of the manifold of empirical knowledge in general" (A671/B699).

As these passages make clear, Kant conceives of these ideas as playing a legitimate positive role in theoretical cognition insofar as they are represented as regulative principles. For instance, Kant argues that although the transcendental concept of the self cannot itself determine any object, it plays a positive role insofar as it serves as a rule for the unity of the appearances of inner sense (A682-84/B711-13). In other words, the transcendental concept of the self regulates the *empirical* unity of thought. Such legitimate application of the representations to empirical cognition constitutes their "transcendental deduction". More to the point, such use of the transcendental ideas derives from the regulative use of the primitive idea and forms part of the logical employment for the very reasons adduced in the discussion of the hypothetical

employment. Hence, the logical employment, or rather reason's logical, regulative use of its most basic thought of unity, allows reason to find proper complementary roles for all its representations and so to pursue its distinctive unity.

4. My concern so far has been to show how the rational faculty proper makes a positive, even indispensable, contribution to theoretical cognition while not overstepping the bounds of legitimate cognition. I have argued that the nature of this contribution falls entirely within the scope of what Kant calls the logical employment of reason, and I have glossed the *logical* character of this employment in terms of a priori rational representations lacking objective purport in its context. This creates an apparent puzzle, for Kant, in the course of discussing the positive use of rational representations, grants them "objective but indeterminate validity" (A663/B691). In the same context, Kant also suggests that the regulative use of such representations, their role in the logical employment, generates the rational expectation that the objects postulated by them are there to be encountered in the world. Now in addition to the unclarity inherent in the notion of "objective but indeterminate validity", the claims in question seem to run counter to the thought that the logical employment, as also the logical use of representations, abjures claims to objective purport. The resolution of this puzzle requires appeal to Kant's notion of an "interest" or "need" of reason. Further, the notion of an interest of reason not only resolves the tension in the account but also clarifies the basic character of reason's theoretical exercise. To fully bring into view reason's function in theoretical cognition then, we need to consider this key clarificatory aspect of Kant's account.

In general, interest for Kant is a rational attitude concerned with the existence of something: reason thus takes interest *in the existence of* some object. As such, the concept has

most straightforward application in practical contexts: reason in its practical exercise, e.g., takes an interest in bringing about the highest good. Given that the present concern is the unity of theoretical *cognition*, existence in the standard sense is not at issue. Nevertheless, Kant's thought is that the concept of interest can be usefully deployed here since reason is after all concerned to *make actual* the systematic unity of theoretical cognition. Hence, there is a rough parallel between the paradigmatic practical interest in the existence of an object and the theoretical interest in the actuality of a system of cognition.<sup>14</sup>

Reason, then, takes an interest in actualizing the unconditioned whole of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> This is unsurprising since the whole of knowledge is just the specification of rational unity in theoretical cognition: reason interests itself in (the achieving of) its own distinctive unity. The key point, however, is that the object of reason's interest coincides with the object corresponding to reason's most primitive theoretical thought. This suggests that reason's primitive thought is itself an expression of its interest, or alternatively that the interest is part of the thought itself. The appeal to interest is simply a way of making explicit that reason does not take a neutral attitude to its fundamental representation of unity: it pursues this unity through its characteristic acts and the pursuit, i.e. the very *exercise* of reason is a manifestation of its interest. Hence, to conceive of reason's entire theoretical exercise as structured by the idea of the whole of knowledge is already to conceive of it implicitly as guided by the corresponding interest.

---

<sup>14</sup> My point here is to give a brief, preliminary characterization of what the concept of a rational interest signifies for Kant. As I will show, discussion of the concept of rational interest is necessary to grasp reason's role in theoretical cognition, and that is my reason for introducing it here. However, Kant consistently characterizes the source and character of interest as paradigmatically practical, going so far as to claim that "all interest is ultimately practical" (*KpV* 121). This raises a serious puzzle: if interest for Kant is a specifically practical notion, talk of a theoretical or speculative interest of reason seems *prima facie* inconsistent. Given my concerns in this chapter, I will suppress this problem here; I will discuss it in the next chapter, where I will also provide a more detailed account of Kant's conception of rational interest.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A666-67/B694-95. The "one single interest of reason" involves balancing demands for maximal unity, maximal manifoldness, etc., so as to arrive at the unconditioned whole that embodies the completion of rational unity.

Indeed, Kant introduces the notion of rational interest to account for the fact that a priori rational representations have a legitimate use even though they cannot be constitutive of cognitions (cf. A666/B694). Thus, the stress is on the *explanatory* function of the notion of interest: we have already seen *that* ideas and principles have a positive use and what this use comes to; the appeal to interest is to show *how* this use comes about. Hence, Kant explicitly assigns interest the role of grounding rational representations and guiding their use in the exercise of reason.

As this suggests, the point here applies to rational representations generally. I argued above that reason's representations quite generally are representations of systematic unity, and thus are specifications of what is constitutive of the rational faculty as such. If the interest of reason is nothing other than the attitude reason takes towards thoughts of rational unity, the interest is properly conceived of as grounding rational representations generally. In other words, given that the interest of reason just is reason's concern with attaining the whole of theoretical knowledge, any representation that guides or structures the pursuit of this whole is a manifestation of the rational interest. Thus, the interest at issue is constitutive of the rational faculty and the whole of its theoretical activity. More important, the notion of interest makes explicit that it is internal to rational representations generally that they call for the pursuit of their objects. More precisely, the appeal to rational interest shows that reason necessarily strives for and pursues the objects it represents a priori. As complimentary articulations of rational unity, and thus specifications of the basic theoretical interest of reason, ideas and principles necessarily have a positive role to play, the role of guiding cognition to the very objects they represent and thus satisfying the overall interest of reason.

Now in that the interest internal to rational representations renders them necessary to theoretical cognition as a whole, their use is subjectively grounded in the nature of the rational

faculty itself. Since every act of reason rests on the interest manifested in rational representations, the use of such representations is warranted by the fact that the underlying interest is a necessary condition of rational activity. Yet if reason's exercise is grounded by reason's interest and is in pursuit of the object of this interest, it must represent the object in question as in some sense attainable: the rational pursuit of an object requires that the object be represented as at least possible. Given that reason's interest is in the whole of theoretical knowledge, reason must represent the systematic unity of knowledge as possible. This implies that we must rationally expect the world to be such that the knowledge we gain of it can constitute the unity of a system.<sup>16</sup> Further, insofar as the pursuit of systematic unity depends on the discovery of common higher genera, further differentiated species, etc., we are rationally required to assume that these are there to be discovered. Expecting the world to be such as to conform to the rational representation of it is necessary if we are to conceive of the object of reason's interest as itself possible. And the very existence of the rational interest forces this conception of its object. Hence, although the regulative use of representations, and correspondingly the logical employment of reason, lacks objective grounding, it still constrains us to conceive of the world as conforming to the rational representations in general and the primitive thought of systematic unity in particular. This constraint, like the necessary role of ideas in theoretical cognition, is a consequence of the interest that grounds reason's exercise.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting here that the principle implicitly grounding this assumption is ultimately a practical one, viz. that ought implies can. Specifically, because reason *must* pursue systematic unity in theoretical cognition, it must also assume that it *can* (in principle) bring about such unity. The implicit involvement of this practical principle should be unsurprising because, as noted, the concept of interest is a paradigmatically practical one. Hence, considerations grounded in a rational interest exhibit features generally associated with the practical exercise of reason. Again, I will spell out the full implications of this point with regard to the theoretical employment of reason in the next chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Once the role played by the interest of reason in reason's theoretical activity is in view, it further becomes clear that the illegitimate synthetic a priori claims of reason are also grounded in this interest. For it is precisely the object of reason's interest that is posited as an object of theoretical cognition in reason's illegitimate claims. Thus, we can

Given this account of how rational representations and the underlying rational interest constrain our conception of the world, we can clarify the sense in which these representations have objective but indeterminate validity. To say that we are rationally constrained to see the world as conforming to representations of rational unity is already to imply that the relevant representations possess a sort of objective purport. We are rationally required to assume that the objects corresponding to these representations are present in the world and available for cognition. On the other hand, no claim is made that the objects corresponding to these representations can be cognized as such: when the idea of the highest genus is used logically, for instance, no given object is cognized *as* the highest genus. Thus, when logically applied, rational representations themselves cannot be used to determine any object of cognition: they cannot form the basis of any objective determination. Precisely in this sense their objective purport is indeterminate. To put the point another way, a rational representation such as that of the highest genus applies, or is assumed to apply, always and only indirectly. Given possession of this concept, I am constrained to search for and cognize things given in experience as a successively *higher* genera, thus systematizing cognition and at the same time approximating the concept in question. Such indirect applicability in theoretical cognition is what the objective but indeterminate validity of rational representations consists in: they form the basis of acts of cognition without themselves determining the object of cognition.<sup>18</sup>

Now my account of the sense in which rational representations have objective but indeterminate validity assumes that this status must be secured for them *within the logical employment*. There is a *prima facie* a compelling rationale for this assumption. Recall Kant's

---

see the rational interest as grounding *every* exercise of reason, legitimate as well as illegitimate.

<sup>18</sup> “[T]he principles of pure reason must also have objective reality in respect of [the] object [of experience], not, however, in order to *determine* anything in it, but only in order to indicate the procedure whereby the empirical and determinate employment of the understanding can be brought in complete harmony with itself” (A665-66/B693-94).

claim that reason's basic representation of systematic unity qua principle allows of just two interpretations: as a logical precept instructing us to systematize our knowledge in a piecemeal fashion or as a pure principle that purports to cognize a priori the unconditioned grounds of knowledge. Further, in that the latter interpretation makes a claim to a priori rational cognition, it leads directly to the illegitimate dialectical inferences of reason. Hence, it seems that on pain of making precisely the sorts of claims that the body of the Dialectic is meant to refute, we must accommodate the objective but indeterminate validity of rational representations within the logical employment. More generally, Kant's basic division of the possible employments of theoretical reason suggests that whatever legitimate role and function rational representations might have, it must be governed by the logical interpretation of the representation of systematic unity and hence must fall within the logical employment. However, key passages in Kant's text might seem to contradict this reading of the objective but indeterminate validity of ideas. These passages from the Appendix seem to postulate the need for transcendental principles of reason *in addition to* logical principles, which would evidently imply a transcendental and not merely logical employment of reason.<sup>19</sup> However, a close look at the relevant passages and their context shows that there is no such contradiction, and that the *prima facie* rationale stands.

The key passage to consider here is the following, where Kant describes what the claim to a fundamental transcendental principle of reason would involve:

But to say that the constitution of the objects or the nature of the understanding which knows them as such, is in itself determined to systematic unity, and that we can in a certain measure postulate this unity *a priori, without reference to any such special interest of reason*, and that we are therefore in a position to maintain that knowledge of the understanding in all its possible modes (including empirical knowledge) has the unity required by reason...—that would be to

---

<sup>19</sup> Henry Allison, e.g., reads Kant as affirming the need for transcendental principles over and above the corresponding logical ones: cf. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 431-437. As I will presently argue, nothing in Kant's text forces such a reading, and the problems associated with asserting transcendental rational principles suggest that we should avoid attributing such an affirmation to Kant if at all possible.

assert a *transcendental* principle of reason, and would make systematic unity necessary, not just subjectively and logically, as method, but objectively also. [648/B676; italics added]

The first thing to note is that the transcendental principle invoked here is evidently similar to, if not identical with, the pure rational principle encountered above as a possible interpretation of the primitive idea of rational unity. Given that the pure principle is the ground of reason's dialectical inferences, it would be at the very least odd if Kant were to now suggest that such a transcendental principle can or must be asserted. Yet, this is what Kant seems to do. After discussing the logical precept of homogeneity, Kant claims: "It is, indeed, difficult to understand how there can be a logical principle by which reason prescribes the unity of rules, unless we also presuppose a transcendental principle whereby such a systematic unity is *a priori* assumed to be necessarily inherent in the objects" (A650/B679). The analogous claim following discussion of the maxim of specificity seems even stronger: "But it is easily seen that this logical law [of specification] would be without meaning and application if it did not rest upon a *transcendental* law of specification...." (A656/B684).<sup>20</sup> Thus, Kant seems to affirm that the logical maxims discussed earlier need corresponding transcendental rational principles as grounds if they are to have any application to empirical knowledge.

However, the evidence is uncertain at best. If we look back to the original passage, we see Kant claiming that postulating systematic unity in nature "*without reference to any ... special interest of reason,*" amounts to asserting a transcendental rational principle. This suggests that the assumption of systematic unity *on the ground of the theoretical rational interest* is not the assertion of a transcendental principle in the sense at issue. This makes sense: if we assume systematic unity on the basis of reason's interest, we have an assumption based on and sustained

---

<sup>20</sup> At A660/B688, Kant makes a similarly strong claim about a transcendental law of continuity.

by a subjective ground. Since the ground in question is necessary, internal to the exercise of reason as such, so is the assumption; yet, qua subjectively grounded, the assumption does not amount to an assertion of objective determination. As Kant's language suggests, a transcendental principle would assert (some specification of) systematic unity as just such an objective determination: rational representations would thus purport to have objective *and determinate* validity. Further, Kant's language throughout his discussion of these principles is on balance tentative: after discussing all three purported transcendental principles, he writes that "they *seem* to be transcendental" (A663/B691; italics added). He further notes that his concern is to secure "some sort of objective validity" for these purported principles, leaving it (as yet) unclear what sort of objective validity is to be secured and on what ground. Indeed, in the discussion as a whole, Kant seems to treat the apparent need for transcendental principles as a problem.<sup>21</sup>

Kant provides the solution to this problem in the second part of the Appendix, "The Final Purpose of the Natural Dialectic of Human Reason". Here, he secures the indeterminate objective validity of pure rational representations, their indirect applicability to empirical knowledge, precisely on the ground of reason's interest in systematic unity. Thus, Kant writes that in positing rational concepts as somehow objectively valid, "our sole purpose is to secure that systematic unity which is indispensable to reason" (A681/B709). In other words, it is reason's demand for systematic unity, its basic theoretical interest, that licenses and necessitates the assumption that rational concepts and principles must be (indirectly) applicable to the natural world. If we then take seriously Kant's claim that the assertion of a *transcendental* rational principle involves the claim of objective validity *without reference to the rational interest*, it

---

<sup>21</sup> See A642/B670-A668/B696, *passim*.

seems clear that Kant is nowhere asserting such a principle. What he does seem to be claiming is that once we have the theoretical interest of reason in view, we must grant to the principles governing and specifying the logical employment itself a status that is more than merely logical in that it involves a sort of objective purport. We misunderstand the nature of this objective purport as well as its ground if we take it to consist in the assertion of a transcendental principle. It thus turns out that Kant's discussion of the transcendental principles is cautionary: the point is to secure objective purport while denying the apparent necessity of doing so through reference to transcendental principles.

My interpretation is deeply informed by what I presented above as the *prima facie* rationale: given what Kant consistently says about putative transcendental principles of pure reason, I think we should avoid introducing any such principles in his view if at all possible. Further, if my argument holds, the textual evidence ultimately supports the reading suggested by the *prima facie* rationale.<sup>22 23</sup> However, the picture of the theoretical exercise of reason that thus results constitutes a modification, indeed an extension, of the claim initially attributed to the logical employment. Specifically, a consideration of the role of interest shows that this employment does after all involve a claim to objective purport. This extension of the claim is justified by what we have seen to be the ground of the logical employment: the rational interest

---

<sup>22</sup> I think Allison's reading is unsatisfactory because it on the one hand neglects the key role played by the concept of the rational interest, and on the other does not take seriously the commitments incurred by the assertion of a transcendental principle. Indeed, these are two manifestations of an apparent failure to note reason's singular and exclusive concern with its distinctive form of unity, a failure that in turn obscures the sorts of rational justification that this concern can provide.

<sup>23</sup> I think the considerations I have presented in the text are decisive. Nevertheless, it may be held that I have not satisfactorily accounted for the passages where Kant appears to affirm the need for transcendental principles in addition to logical ones. As I have noted, I fail to see *how* such principles could be affirmed within the Kantian system. However, even were I to grant the possibility of such an affirmation, it would not seriously affect the central thesis of this section: viz. that it is a rational interest that grounds the representations and acts of reason through which reason attempts to actualize its own distinctive form of unity. No possible grounding for putative transcendental principles would undo the interest-governed and rational unity-oriented theoretical activity of reason.

in the completion of systematic unity. Hence, we can consider the extended claim to be implicit in the logical employment throughout, and as becoming explicit once the role of the rational interest is in view. We can take Kant's original account of the logical employment, provided in the Introduction to the Dialectic, as provisional; the account is fleshed out when Kant, in the Appendix, spells out the positive role of the rational faculty in theoretical cognition. This spelling out clarifies the logical character of the employment in that it brings to light its subjective ground while simultaneously showing its necessary claim to a sort of objective purport. Hence, the theoretical interest of reason, and the logical principle and the employment that it grounds, provides a necessary positive role for the rational faculty in theoretical cognition—that of seeking to actualize the systematic unity of cognition.

5. In the last chapter, I argued that the representation of the realm of ends necessarily figures in the practical consciousness of the subject: it specifies the *object* of its practical rational activity. I want to end here by noting certain key parallels (and a crucial difference) between this representation and the idea of the whole of knowledge, parallels that manifest the deep rational character of the representation of the realm of ends and of the subject's practical rational activity in general.

We can first note that both the representation of the realm of ends and the idea of the whole of knowledge are representations of the systematic unity of cognition. For the representation of the realm of ends is in effect the representation of the whole of practical knowledge. Representations of ends constitute knowledge of what to do. For instance, if I have the end of living a healthy life, I cognize living a healthy life as something to be done, and this practical cognition on my part forms (if all goes well) the ground of my actions that constitute

my living a healthy life. Further, if another subject recognizes this end of mine as such, she too cognizes my living a healthy life as something to be done, and this too counts as a practical cognition that grounds any actions she may take to help me achieve my end.<sup>24</sup> As this general possibility of recognition illustrates, representations of ends are bits of (practical) cognition that can be shared by any and all subjects that choose to concern themselves with the given ends. Moreover, recognition of ends as such presupposes recognition of the rational faculty and the bearers of the rational faculty as ends in themselves. More fully, the subject cognizes the rational faculty as of unconditional and inalienable worth, and on this basis also cognizes rational subjects generally as possessing such worth: precisely in this sense are subjects represented as ends in themselves. As before, this is a practical cognition on the subject's part: it is in effect knowledge of what to do, specifically knowledge of what to do so as to maintain and further the unconditional worth that rational subjects as such are recognized as having. As the unity encompassing all and only representations of ends, both chosen ends and ends in themselves, the representation of the realm of ends is then just the whole of practical cognition: the systematic totality of knowledge of what to do.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, the representations of the whole of knowledge and of the realm of ends are formally identical: each represents a systematic unity of cognition, one theoretical and the other practical.<sup>26</sup> Considering Kant's characterization of the universal concept of reason, we can then say the representation of the realm of ends manifests the deep thought of rational unity in

---

<sup>24</sup> Of course, if I am sufficiently diligent and fortunate, the other subject may not need to undertake *any* positive actions to help me achieve my end. But even in this case, she would in general refrain from actions that might undermine or impede my pursuit of a healthy life.

<sup>25</sup> The points made in this paragraph rely on the argument of the previous chapter. Indeed, they are no more than a summary restatement of the argument in terms of practical cognition.

<sup>26</sup> There is of course a formal difference between theoretical and practical cognition: one is causally efficacious and the other is not. My point here is rather that the two representations in question share a form in that each is a specification of rational unity. The difference at issue is manifested in the nature of the specifications.

practical consciousness. This further highlights the importance of the representation of the realm of ends in the practical consciousness of the subject: it is the representation that most fully displays the rational source and character of its agency. It does this in that it specifies what its agency, qua *rational* agency, is directed toward: what is, in other words, the end of its agency as such. Thus, noting the formal identity between the representations of the realm of ends and of the whole of knowledge helps to show both the centrality of the former and its deep root in the specifically rational consciousness of the subject.

Secondly, the theoretical and practical representations at issue play formally identical roles in their respective domains. Just as the primitive theoretical idea structures and guides the totality of reason's theoretical activity, the thought of the realm of ends can be seen as governing reason's practical activity as a whole. For just as every act of theoretical reason helps approximate to the systematic unity of theoretical cognition, every act of practical reason, i.e. every pure rational determination of the power of choice, in effect aims to help bring about the realm of ends. In other words, practical rational activity as a whole is properly conceived of as directed toward the realization of the fundamental thought of practical rational unity. Identically, the entirety of theoretical rational activity is directed toward the determination of the fundamental theoretical representation of rational unity. Evidently, the role each representation plays follows from both being fundamental representations of rational unity: their formal identity qua specifications of rational unity translates into the formal identity of their respective roles.

Nevertheless, the formal identity of the roles of these two representations is not complete. Hence, we can here usefully note the one key difference between them, a difference that will in turn point us a further, deeper parallel. As a representation of practical reason, the representation of the realm of ends is to be the cause and ground of its object, i.e. of the *existence* of the realm

of ends. That is, insofar as subjects choose and act on ground of this representation, they in effect help to bring about the corresponding object.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the idea of the whole of knowledge is not, indeed cannot be, the ground of the existence of any object. Since the idea is concerned with the unity of *cognition*, its relation to the *object* of cognition is necessarily indirect. As Kant notes: “We may not say that this idea is a concept of the object, but only of the thoroughgoing unity of such concepts, insofar as that unity serves as a rule for the understanding” (A645/B673). In other words, the “object” of this representation is not an object of cognition at all, but rather cognition itself, specifically the unity of theoretical cognition.<sup>28</sup> And while the idea does ground the unity of cognition, this unity is not itself an existing thing: it is always *of* that which exists. In that the idea of the whole of knowledge grounds the unity of cognition, it grounds nothing further than its own actualization. Hence, the two representations differ in that one grounds the existence of an object distinct from itself, while the other bears no such relation to a distinct object.

Yet, that the idea of the whole of knowledge is to be the ground of its own actualization, i.e. of the system of theoretical cognition, points to a structural parallel between it and the representation of the realm of ends. As suggested above, the idea of the whole is not strictly speaking a theoretical representation, and the activity it grounds does not straightforwardly comprise instances of theoretical cognition, which consists in bringing given appearances under concepts. Rather, insofar as the idea guides the activity through which this whole is itself (partly) actualized, it bears an analogy to practical representations of reason. The analogy is precisely that just as a practical representation is the ground of the realization of its object, the

---

<sup>27</sup> I elaborate on this point, and indeed on the conception of the realm of ends as a whole, in the previous chapter.

<sup>28</sup> I have glossed Kant’s talk of the “unity of concepts” in terms of the unity of cognition because as should be clear from the preceding, it is just the use of concepts in cognition that is at issue.

idea of the whole is the ground of the actualization of itself qua pseudo-object. Hence, what you get in this case is the theoretical specification of the fundamental practical relation between a representation and its object—a specification that is theoretical in that it abstracts from the connection to real existence and constitutes the relation purely within the realm of cognition. Further, this relation is constituted so as to include within it the entirety of theoretical cognition: the quasi-practical activity at issue seeks to actualize the complete system of theoretical cognition. Thus, the relation between the primitive idea and the system of cognition is isomorphic to the relation between the representation of the realm of ends and its object.

Now this isomorphism and the practical aspects of the primitive idea are explained by the fact this idea manifests a basic rational interest. Specifically, because the idea manifests a rational interest and interest itself is a fundamentally practical notion that the rational activity seeking to seeking to systematize cognition exhibits fundamentally practical aspects. This, then, points to the final crucial parallel between the representation of the realm of ends and the idea of systematic cognition: each governs a sphere of rational activity that is grounded in and manifests a fundamental rational interest. Kant writes: “The interest of [reason’s] speculative use consists in the *cognition* of the object up to the highest a priori principles; that of its practical use consists in the determination of the *will* with respect to the final and complete end” (*KpV* 120). As we saw above, the speculative or theoretical interest grounds the totality of reason’s theoretical exercise. The point now is that exactly the same holds true for reason’s practical exercise. Consider first that the “final and complete end” must be equivalent to the realm of ends for precisely the realm of ends contains within it all (practically) possible ends. Hence, to determine choice with respect to the complete end would just be determine it on ground of the

representation of the realm of ends.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the practical interest of reason lies in that the power of choice is determined on ground of the representation of the realm of ends so as to help bring about the corresponding object, i.e. the realm of ends itself. And this holds for *all* determinations of choice: since every rational determination of choice in effect has the realm of ends as its object, every such choice manifests the corresponding interest. It follows that the entire practical exercise of reason, all rational determinations of choice, are grounded in and guided by the underlying interest of reason in the practical specification of rational unity. Hence, reason pursues nothing but its own distinctive type of unity in both the theoretical and practical spheres, and each of its acts, whether theoretical or practical, manifests its interest in the corresponding unity.

Now what all these parallels show is the deep rational form of practical rational activity: a form that comes to light when we focus on the realm of ends. That morality, and perhaps more controversially agency itself, is grounded in pure reason is of course a famous tenet of Kant's doctrine. When commentators investigate this topic, they tend to focus on the apriority of the moral law. While investigation of the moral's law apriority is a necessary topic in Kant scholarship and can provide valuable insight into Kant's theory, the parallels under consideration here reveal how the specifically rational character of rational agency manifests itself in all the acts that make up rational agency as such. In other words, what the foregoing shows is how the pure rational source of morality and of agency more generally structures and governs the practical life of the subject as a whole. It does this in that the rational form of practical

---

<sup>29</sup> In the context of the second *Critique*, "complete end" is most plausibly taken to refer to the highest good, the subject's happiness on condition of its virtue, generalized across all subjects (cf. *KpV* 110f.). However, this is equivalent to every subject always choosing as a member of the realm of ends—this in effect is virtuous choice—and having its happiness granted. Since happiness is a necessary end for every subject, the *representation* of the generalized highest good, i.e. of the complete end, just is the representation of the realm of ends. See chap. 4, §1, where I spell out this equivalence in greater detail.

rationality, i.e. reason's interest in systematic unity, governs every rational determination of choice or every adoption of an end. In this way, the form of rational unity itself governs all the acts that together make up the practical life of the subject.

To recap, the comparison between the theoretical and practical exercises of reason reveals the generic commonalities between the two exercises (the concern with systematic unity, the role of rational interest, etc.) It thus brings into focus the unity of reason's exercise, in one sense of unity. But further, and more importantly, these generic commonalities in turn highlight those aspects of the practical exercise of reason in virtue of which we can and must talk of *a practical exercise of reason* at all. Thus, by accounting for Kant's claim that theoretical and practical reason are just two employments of one faculty, in the sense of sharing an identical form, we gain deep insight into just why the practical employment of the rational faculty counts as such. At the same time, the very parallels I have been discussing raise the question of a *different* sense of unity between the theoretical and practical employments of reason. The question, namely, of how—indeed whether—these two employments are themselves systematically related. Given that systematic unity just is reason's distinctive form of unity, one would expect reason would establish a systematic relation between its own exercises and thus fully unify its activities. My next and final chapter will be devoted to accounting for this sort of unity in reason's theoretical and practical employments.

## 5.0 THE INTERESTS OF REASON AND THE PRIMACY OF PRACTICAL REASON

I argued in the last chapter that the theoretical and practical employments of reason count as such in virtue of sharing the generic form of rational activity. Specifically, reason in each case fashions a fundamental representation of systematic unity appropriate to the employment, and this representation governs the acts of reason that make up the relevant employments. Precisely the concern with *systematic unity* marks out a range of activity as a distinctively *rational* activity. Yet, the very existence of two spheres of rational activity—theoretical and practical—raises the question of the relation between them. As we shall see, Kant himself raises the question of the relation between the theoretical and practical employments on numerous occasions, though he does not give it the sort of sustained treatment one might wish for. Yet, the question is a necessary and crucial one because it arises from the very nature of reason itself, specifically from the fact that the rational form of unity just is systematic unity. And reason must secure this sort of unity for its own employments as necessarily as it strives to secure it *within* its employments. Hence, the question has deep significance for Kant's conception of the overall structure of rational activity.

When Kant does consider the question of the relation between reason's two basic employments, he argues that the practical employment has a sort of priority over the theoretical. Kant calls this the "primacy" of the practical employment over the theoretical, and the thesis of

the primacy of the practical will be my main focus in this chapter. Kant's argument for the primacy of the practical, which he presents in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, turns on a consideration of *rational interest*. Moreover, there is good reason to think that the concept of rational interest plays a central role in Kant's thought, especially regarding questions about the exercises of the various rational faculties and the relations between them. For in addition to the primacy argument, Kant makes essential use of the concept of interest when, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he establishes a legitimate theoretical use for the transcendental ideas of reason. And in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant accounts for the distinctive character of judgments of taste by arguing that they are characterized by a lack of interest. Hence, it appears that Kant consistently appeals to the notion of rational interest in order to settle questions about the distinct exercises of reason and their relations to one another. Keeping with this order of explanation, I will approach the question of the relation between the theoretical and practical employments of reason through a consideration of the rational interests that attach to each. My point here is not to develop a systematic account of Kant's conception of rational interest. Nevertheless, we will see that a consideration of how rational interests generally relate to the corresponding employments of reason is necessary to properly grasp why Kant holds that the practical employment of reason must have primacy over the theoretical.

The argument will proceed as follows. In the first two sections, I will spell out Kant's general account of interest by focusing on the theoretical and practical interests of reason and the relation these interests bear to the corresponding employments of reason. An important outcome of this account, I will show, is that Kant is committed to the claim that the presence of *any* rational interest presupposes the practical exercise of reason. Hence, even the theoretical interest and the corresponding exercise must in some sense presuppose their practical counterparts. In

the third section, I will argue that Kant implicitly upholds this claim in the first *Critique* itself, and hence that he implicitly upholds the thesis of the primacy of the practical in his account of theoretical reason. Sections four and five will then be devoted to spelling out the central, second *Critique* argument for the primacy of the practical. I will here show exactly why, on Kant's conception, the practical interest of reason *must* serve as the determining ground of all other exercises of reason. We can thus properly grasp the necessary systematic relation reason determines between its two basic spheres of concern.

1. It will help to begin with a provisional characterization of the notion of interest in terms of the role this notion plays, or appears to play, in Kant's overall picture. Such a characterization is controversial because Kant's various characterizations of interest are *prima facie* inconsistent. On the one hand, what one might take to be the canonical characterizations of interest assert an internal relation between interest and the faculty of desire. The strongest statement of this thought can be found in the third *Critique*:

The satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Hence such satisfaction always has at the same time a relation to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground. [KU 204]<sup>1</sup>

However, Kant in the first *Critique* speaks of an interest associated with the theoretical employment of reason.<sup>2</sup> Given that this employment appears to be independent of the operations of the faculty of desire, one would expect the same of the corresponding interest. In that case, however, the apparent internal relation between interest and the faculty of desire would not hold. Conversely, it seems that if we follow the third *Critique* and hold on to the internal connection

---

<sup>1</sup> See also *MS* 212 and *G* 414fn. I discuss each of these passages in the next section.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. A666-68/B694-96.

between interest and the faculty of desire, we block the very possibility of an interest of theoretical reason (or of the theoretical employment of reason). Hence, so as to allow for the various interests Kant speaks of—in particular the interest of theoretical reason—we might provisionally abstract from the internal relation between interest and the faculty of desire postulated by the definition above and characterize interest in a more generic manner. Of course, our investigation must show how to (non-provisionally) resolve the apparent tension between the various characterizations of interest, specifically how to reconcile definitions such the third *Critique* one with the possibility of an interest of theoretical reason.

A promising way of approaching the more generic characterization of interest is through the various employments of reason Kant specifies. Simply, the thought suggested by several of Kant's remarks is that for every employment of reason there is a corresponding interest, and indeed that the interest may be seen as guiding or structuring the relevant employment. That is, reason itself has interests corresponding to its employments and each of these interests grounds the corresponding employment.<sup>3</sup> On such a picture, the interests of reason can be as finely or coarsely grained as the specification of the employments of reason. At the fundamental level, however, reason has two interests, one corresponding to its practical employment and the other to its theoretical employment. For, as Kant repeatedly emphasizes, he takes the practical and the theoretical to be the two fundamental employments of reason, each of which may be further subdivided in light of relevant concerns.<sup>4</sup> Thus, reason would have a theoretical interest and a practical interest, each of which would bear a suitably close relation to the corresponding employment. To gain insight into the general relation between an interest and the corresponding

---

<sup>3</sup> While such an approach might be thought to be problematic insofar as it appears to sever the connection between interest and the faculty of desire and instead to postulate a connection between interest and *reason*, I will show below that it is in fact in keeping with the fundamental Kantian conception of interest (cf. §2).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *G* 389, *KpV* 12, *KU* 171.

employment, we can begin by looking at how the practical and theoretical interests function in their respective domains. In other words, investigation of the two basic species of the employment-interest relation will make clear the generic relation. This in turn will throw light on the general, though still provisionally specified, notion of interest.

Now Kant regularly characterizes interests in terms of their objects: an interest is always an interest *in* something, where what it is an interest in serves as the object of interest. Thus, the theoretical interest of reason is in the completion of theoretical knowledge: a systematic unity of theoretical cognition which encompasses all possible theoretical cognition and displays the inferential relations between bits of these. This systematic unity, or whole of theoretical knowledge, serves as the object of the theoretical interest. This all encompassing theoretical interest can be subdivided into an interest in discovering ever more general principles that can unify more and more bits of theoretical knowledge, an interest in discovering more particular bits of knowledge that fall under the general principles, etc. These latter interests, properly characterized as theoretical interests of reason, would be grounded and explained by the more general and basic theoretical interest of reason: the latter count as interests because they serve the more general aim of arriving at the systematic unity of all theoretical knowledge. To put the point another way, it is the concern with systematic unity that makes sense of the search for general principles, particular instances, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Now the (legitimate) theoretical exercise of reason just consists in establishing inferential relations between bits of knowledge, primarily though the use of syllogisms. And this means that we can see the theoretical employment of reason as a whole as guided by the theoretical

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A666-67/B694-95. I discuss these points further in the Chapter 3. As I note there, talk of an “object” in this context must be treated delicately, for the “object” here is simply a unity of cognition, and hence not an object in the usual sense of “object of cognition” (cf. chap. 3, §2). However, I will continue to talk of the object of the theoretical interest, asking the reader to keep in mind that the term here bears a looser sense.

interest of reason. It is the interest of reason in systematic unity that explains and grounds the particular exercises of reason that consist in the use of syllogisms to establish inferential relations between bits of knowledge. Thus, we can see the theoretical employment in general as structured and governed by the theoretical interest of reason: the interest provides the standard, in the form of the object, according to which particular exercises of theoretical reason are to be carried out.<sup>6</sup>

We find a parallel structure if we turn our attention to the practical employment of reason. Here it is not *prima facie* obvious how the fundamental interest is to be characterized. Kant's characterizations suggest that the practical interest of reason is realized in the determination of the power of choice on the basis of rational principles alone.<sup>7</sup> Keeping with our earlier point about interest and its object we might put this point by saying that a practical interest of reason is always in something pure reason represents as necessarily to be brought about. Thus, always acting so as to satisfy the moral law would count as the basic practical interest of reason. That is, the satisfaction of the moral law, its operation as the determining ground of all choice and action, would serve as the object of the practical interest of reason. This is indeed an adequate specification of the basic practical interest of reason; however, to better appreciate the parallel between the theoretical and practical interests, it helps to turn our attention to what Kant characterizes as the object of pure practical reason, the highest good.<sup>8</sup>

Structurally, calling the highest good the object of pure practical reason implies that the exercise of the latter is directed at realization of the former: choice and action as determined by pure reason will, if all goes well, bring us closer to the state of affairs described by the highest

---

<sup>6</sup> The theoretical interest can also be seen to lie at the basis of reason's illegitimate claims to a priori cognition, since these claims concern precisely the objects of the theoretical interest (cf. A728/B826).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *G* 414fn, *MS* 212.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *KpV* 57-67, 110-11.

good. Hence, we may quite naturally specify the practical interest of reason as lying in the realization of the highest good, or equivalently characterize the highest good as the object of reason's practical interest. The point here is that there is no gap between the characterization of something as the object of practical reason and as the object of *the interest of* practical reason: the object of practical reason is by definition what practical reason pursues in its exercise, and such pursuit is accounted for by the interest of reason in the object of pursuit.<sup>9</sup>

Now to see the close parallel between the theoretical and practical interests we must take a short detour and note the equivalence between the representation of the highest good and that of the realm of ends. Let us first consider the highest good. Kant defines this as the perfect union of virtue and happiness, where virtue serves as the condition of happiness (*KpV* 110). Virtue, for Kant, amounts to that condition of the will where all objects of choice have objective worth and the recognition of this worth is the condition of their being chosen. According to Kant, this condition of the will renders the subject deserving of happiness, i.e. of its achieving all of its optional ends. This last point follows because Kant holds that happiness is a necessary end for finite subjects such as ourselves: it is just the formal specification of the totality of the subject's optional ends and as such is sought by the subject insofar as the subject pursues any optional end at all.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the virtuous subject, the end of happiness is represented as to be done on the condition that whatever ends it encompasses have objective worth and so can be constraints binding for all subjects: this after all is what virtue consists in. Hence, the end of

---

<sup>9</sup> It might be objected that I am here conflating the interest of practical reason and the interest of *pure* practical reason. In fact, however, there is no such gap: the interest of the rational faculty in its practical employment (the practical interest) is necessarily the interest of the rational faculty alone in its practical exercise, i.e. it is the interest of pure practical reason.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *G* 415, *KpV* 27. Since my concern here is simply to show the equivalence between the highest good and the realm of ends, I am leaving aside the question as to why the subject must represent an end that formally unites its diverse optional ends. See Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Reason*, chap. 3, for a detailed account of why a single overarching representation must underlie a subject's optional ends.

happiness as represented by the virtuous subject has objective worth and as such deserves to be brought about. Now if it were to come to pass that a perfectly virtuous subject were also perfectly happy, then this would constitute the highest good for that subject. However, Kant also defines the notion of the “complete good”, which is the highest good generalized over all subjects: a world in which all subjects are perfectly virtuous and moreover perfectly happy (cf. *KpV* 111).<sup>11</sup> It is this general representation of the complete good that functions as the object of pure practical reason, for it is precisely in this case that the highest good is most fully realized.

Yet, this representation of the complete good is equivalent to the representation of the realm of ends. The realm of ends is the systematic union of all ends: both rational subjects as ends in themselves and any practically possible ends that they may set themselves. To determine one’s end on ground of the representation of the realm of ends is to determine one’s choice while representing oneself as a member of the realm of ends. This in turn means representing rational subjects generally as unconditional ends and hence whatever (practically possible) ends they may choose as objective constraints applicable to oneself. Given the above point about happiness, every subject qua member of the realm of ends necessarily represents its own happiness as an end and recognizes the happiness of every other subject as an objective constraint it stands under. Further, since only ends chosen on pure rational grounds are countenanced in the realm of ends, virtue in effect functions as the condition of happiness. In other words, insofar as a subject represents itself as a member of the realm of ends, it only chooses such ends as are or can be recognized as bearers of objective worth and its choice rests on this recognition. Hence, a subject that always chooses qua member of the realm of ends is a virtuous subject, and its

---

<sup>11</sup> Kant here characterizes the complete good in terms of the *proportionality* of virtue and happiness, but clearly mere proportionality is not enough: a world full of vicious and moreover miserable human beings would hardly be a realization of anything deserving to be called the complete good.

choices as a whole have as their object its highest good. Generalizing the point, the realization of the realm of ends, i.e. every subject always choosing qua member of the realm of ends and in fact bringing about its ends, just would be the realization of the complete good. Thus, the realm of ends and complete good specify the very same state of affairs, so that the realm of ends in effect functions as the object of pure practical reason.

Getting back to the main line of argument, the realm of ends forms the object of the practical interest of reason just as the system of theoretical cognition forms its theoretical interest. These interests are generically identical in that in each case reason takes an interest in a systematic or rational unity. The realm of ends, were it to be realized, would constitute a systematic union of all possible ends just as the whole of knowledge would be a systematic unity of theoretical cognition. Further, the *representation* of the realm of ends constitutes a system of practical cognition structurally parallel to the whole of theoretical knowledge: in both cases we have a representation of rational unity, the elements of which are respectively acts of theoretical and practical cognition. This is especially clear once we note that the representation of the realm of ends can equally well be conceived of as a system of maxims: the very maxims in the willing of which the subject adopts the corresponding ends.<sup>12</sup> The subject's willing of a maxim is in essence its cognizing *what it is to do*, e.g. that I am to live a healthy life, just as its theoretical judgment consists in a cognition of *what is*. A system of maxims is thus a rational unity of practical cognition generically identical to the system of theoretical knowledge. Hence, we have two formally identical representations of rational unity, one theoretical and one practical, and these rational unities serve as the objects of interest of the corresponding employments of reason.

---

<sup>12</sup> My basic thought here is that a maxim has the form "I will X" where X stands for an end. Hence, willing a maxim and adopting an end are the very same act.

Provisionally, then, we may postulate an internal relation between the employments of reason and its interests, specifically an internal relation between each employment and the corresponding interest.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the interest could be seen as grounding the particular acts that make up the corresponding employment in the sense that these acts could be explained by citing the relevant interest. For instance, the carrying out of a particular syllogism, an exercise of theoretical reason, is accounted for if we cite the rational interest in the systematic unity of cognition that the syllogism in question furthers. Analogously, the adoption and pursuit of some end, whether necessary or optional, can be made sense of in terms of its contributing to the realization of the realm of ends, i.e. in terms of its furthering reason's practical interest. Further, given that an employment of reason just consists of the particular acts that make up that employment, that e.g. the practical employment of reason is exhausted by reason's determinations of the power of choice, we can see the interests of reason as exhaustively grounding its corresponding employments. That is, an employment of reason as a whole is nothing other than the progressive pursuit of the object of the corresponding interest: the theoretical employment just is the systematization of theoretical cognition with the aim of securing complete systematic unity, and the practical employment just is the pursuit of the realization of the realm of ends. Thus, the interests of reason play a fundamental explanatory role in that they exhaustively account for the acts of reason in both its theoretical and practical employments.

---

<sup>13</sup> This point holds quite generally. In the text, my focus is on the overarching theoretical and practical employments; yet, we could specify the employments of reason at a more fine-grained level, and we would find interests of reason corresponding to each of the more fine-grained employments. Cf. A666-68/B694-98.

2. So far I have provisionally characterized interest as a fundamentally *rational* concept: interests correspond to the employments of reason and each rational interest explains and grounds the acts of reason that make up the corresponding employments. Yet by linking interest primarily with reason rather than the faculty of desire, this provisional characterization seems to conflict with the above-mentioned definition of interest in the third *Critique*. The problem, in more general terms, is that interest is evidently a *practical* notion. As the third *Critique* makes clear, an interest always makes reference to the *existence* of some object, where this is understood to be material existence. It is this fact that makes talk of an interest in theoretical cognition *prima facie* odd and appears to give rise to an internal tension in Kant's various remarks about interest. In order to resolve this tension, I will in this section look more closely at Kant's characterizations of interest in his practical philosophy. I will show that at least in the practical sphere, Kant consistently thinks of interest as a *practical rational* concept: an interest always bears a relation to the rational faculty *and* the faculty of desire. Further, the third *Critique* definition can be shown to be alluding to exactly this conception of interest. Of course, this conception might appear to make the problem of a theoretical interest of reason even more acute. As I will argue in the remainder of this chapter, however, the necessity of presupposing practicality is fully general: the presence of the theoretical interest indeed depends on there being a prior practical interest.

To begin on this task, consider again the third *Critique* definition:

The satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Hence such satisfaction always has at the same time a relation to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground.

Part of Kant's suggestion here is that the representation of satisfaction or pleasure constitutive of an interest can bear one of two relations to the faculty of desire: it can either determine desire or

be “interconnected with” whatever serves as the determining ground. To unpack Kant’s point and better grasp the relations at issue, it helps to consider his remarks on interest in the *Grundlegung* and *Metaphysics of Morals*. In the latter, Kant defines interest thus: “a connection of pleasure with the faculty of desire that the understanding judges to hold as a general rule ... is called an *interest*” (MS 212). He goes on to distinguish two sorts of interest: “interest[s] of inclination,” where the representation of pleasure precedes the determination of the faculty of desire, and “interest[s] of reason,” where the determination precedes the pleasure. Similarly in the *Grundlegung*: “The dependence of a contingently determinable will on the principles of reason ... is called an *interest*” (G 414fn). Again, he distinguishes “*practical interest*,” which consists in the determination of the will solely by principles of reason, from “*pathological interest*,” which involves using reason to satisfy sensible desires. Thus, in the case of what Kant calls practical interest (or an interest of reason), the subject determines itself to act in accordance with the practical laws of reason, and it is this pure rational determination that gives rise to the interest in the corresponding object. In the case of pathological interest (or an interest of inclination), the subject’s faculty of desire is determined by the representation of pleasure the subject associates with some object of sensible desire, and this representation of pleasure grounds the interest.

Both these characterizations make clear that an interest always bears a relation to the faculty of desire in that it either directly or indirectly brings about the exercise of this faculty. At the same time, an interest is also necessarily related to the rational faculty. In the case of practical interest, this relation is immediate since it is precisely the rational determination of the will that gives rise to the interest. Equally, however, it makes sense to talk about a pathological interest only insofar as the subject uses its rational faculty to represent its object of inclination.

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant alludes to the connection with reason when he notes that for there to be any interest, and a fortiori an interest of inclination, the understanding must judge that there is a rule-bound or principled relation between the representation of some object of desire and the feeling of pleasure. The *Grundlegung* makes this same point with direct reference to the rational faculty: in the case of pathological interest, “reason supplies only the practical rule as to how to remedy the need of inclination” (G 414fn.).

Kant is clearly alluding to the very same conception of interest in the third *Critique*. The case where the “satisfaction” serves as the determining ground of the faculty of desire is an instance of pathological interest, and the case where it is “necessarily interconnected with” the determining ground is an instance of practical interest. The point about interest’s relation to reason must then apply to the third *Critique* passage: both possible ways of constituting an interest mentioned here must involve some relation to the rational faculty. As before, reason must either directly give rise to the interest by determining the faculty of desire or it must supply the principle connecting a possible object of desire with the feeling of pleasure.<sup>14</sup> Thus, a reference to reason’s role in the constitution of any interest is implicit in the third *Critique* definition. In all three passages, then, Kant conceives of an interest as obtaining when the pursuit of an object of the faculty of desire requires the exercise of practical reason. Hence, we can conclude that the concept of interest bears an internal relation to both the faculty of desire and reason: it applies to objects of the former as determined or represented through the exercise of the latter. More simply, Kant conceives of interest as internally related to *practical reason*. A

---

<sup>14</sup> Kant in the third *Critique* claims that the concept of the agreeable, i.e. of the object of inclination, applies to nonrational animals; however, he does not claim that interest in the agreeable is similarly applicable (cf. *KU* 205-210). This again suggests that interest requires a faculty of desire that can be determined by reason.

practical interest implies the exercise of pure practical reason, whereas a pathological interest indicates the empirical use of practical reason.

Further support for this reading can be found in the second *Critique*. Here, Kant defines interest through the related concept of an incentive: “From the concept of an incentive arises that of an *interest*, which can never be attributed to any being unless it has reason and which signifies an *incentive* of the will insofar as it is *represented by reason*” (*KpV* 79). An incentive, according to Kant, is the sort of motivating principle that can only have application in the context of a rationally determinable will (*KpV* 72). Kant is here claiming that an interest simply is an incentive insofar as this is represented through reason, i.e. it is a rationally articulated motivating principle. In other words, interest is fundamentally a rational representation of what moves a subject to act. Thus, we arrive at the same thought as above: the representation of interest is grounded in the practical deployment of reason. Further, Kant argues that the concept of an incentive applies only in the context of a *contingently* rationally determinable will (*KpV* 72). Hence, incentives, and by extension interests, are present only in the case of beings whose wills are determinable by reason, but where such rational determination is not always successful. Again, this thought is borne out by the distinction Kant repeatedly makes between two sorts of interests or two ways of determining an interest. Practical interests bear witness to the rational determinability of a subject’s will, and the coeval possibility of pathological interests signifies the contingent character of this rational determinability.

To recap: reading the various characterizations of interest in the context of one another and also of Kant’s larger picture, we can arrive at a coherent conception of interest as operative in the case of beings in whom pure reason is practical but in whom this practicality is not always

efficacious. At the fundamental level, then, the concept of interest is grounded in the practicality of pure reason as it exists in finite, sensibly affected beings.

And this brings us back to the problem posed by the theoretical interest of reason. Since this interest is operative in the theoretical employment of reason, it seems to bear no relation to the faculty of desire or to practical reason. Analogously, Kant's identification of the theoretical interest with the completion of theoretical knowledge seems to clash with his more general characterization of interest as concerned with the existence of its object. Since existence for Kant is material existence, it is always and only a concern of practical reason. The nature of our rational concern with the completion of theoretical knowledge cannot be of this sort: it would be incoherent to think of theoretical knowledge as materially existent.<sup>15</sup> One might try to overcome this difficulty by arguing that the speculative interest causes us to pursue the completion of theoretical cognition much as a practical interest causes us to pursue its object, and that this is what licenses talk of a speculative interest.<sup>16</sup> This however will not work because theoretical reason is precisely not a causally efficacious power; or more precisely, reason in its theoretical employment is not causally efficacious. Hence, it is at best unclear whether it makes any sense to speak of the speculative interest of reason as having causal power. To put the point alternatively, to speak of the speculative interest as causing (or moving, etc.) us to pursue theoretical knowledge is to surreptitiously relate the interest to the faculty of desire, to make it out to be an interest of practical reason after all. And then it becomes unclear in what sense we can talk about a *theoretical* interest at all.

---

<sup>15</sup> The very presence of a theoretical interest will ultimately require that the concept of existence be somehow modified so as to fit the theoretical case (cf. §4). The problem for now, however, is that the very presence of the theoretical interest seems inexplicable.

<sup>16</sup> Here, I am using "practical" in a broad sense to cover any interest that requires the use of practical reason. Hence, both interests of inclination and those of reason count as practical in this sense.

To state the difficulty in somewhat different terms: one might naturally expect, and standard readings of Kant assume, that the theoretical exercise of reason is independent of its practical exercise, that there could be a theoretical cognizer that was not also a practically rational agent. However, if talk of interest entails the practicality of pure reason, then a theoretical interest of reason presupposes the practicality of pure reason. And given the relation outlined above (§1) between an interest of reason and the corresponding employment of reason, the very theoretical exercise of reason would presuppose the practicality of pure reason. Contrary to all expectations, in other words, a theoretical cognizer would necessarily be a practically rational agent.

This indeed is what Kant suggests in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant there argues for what he terms the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason, i.e. the subordination of the theoretical employment to the practical. And he bases the claim of primacy on a claim about interest: “all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone” (*KpV* 121). Kant’s claim that the theoretical interest is *conditional* on the practical suggests that the speculative interest of reason is made possible by the interest of pure practical reason: the latter functions as the determining ground of the former. We can provisionally think of the relation between the two interests on the model of the relation between the categorical and hypothetical imperatives of reason. That is, just as the possibility of hypothetical (conditional) imperatives depends on there being categorical (unconditional) imperatives, so also the possibility of the theoretical interest depends on there being a pure practical interest. At the same time, the theoretical interest no more collapses into the practical interest than do hypothetical imperatives become disguised categorical imperatives. In this manner, the connection between interest as such and the practicality of reason is

preserved, while at the same time there is a recognizably a *theoretical* interest that is marked out by its object and the nature of its realization.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, this manner of accounting for reason's theoretical interest might seem to come at an impossibly high price: we would have to conclude that on Kant's picture the theoretical exercise of reason presupposes the practical faculty of pure reason. In face of this, we might be tempted to disregard the second *Critique* passage as something of an aberration. As I will show, however, the thesis that practical reason has primacy over the theoretical is a deep and abiding feature of Kant's view. In the next section, I will lay out evidence showing that Kant is committed to the primacy thesis in the first *Critique*; in the next two sections, I will look closely at the argument presented in the second *Critique*.

Given that my focus for the remainder of the chapter is going to be on the relation between the theoretical and practical interests of reason, I will be focusing on the two overarching interests of reason (unless otherwise noted). These are the interests identified in §1: reason's theoretical interest in the systematic unity of theoretical cognition and its practical interest in the realization of the highest good. As I argued above, any more determinate specification of a theoretical or a practical interest must ultimately be grounded in one of these overarching interests. Hence, any relations there might be among the more determinate interests will ultimately derive from the more basic interests and the relations between them. Thus, if the overarching practical interest does indeed have primacy over the corresponding theoretical interest, then it will necessarily bear the same relation to any more specific theoretical interests. Similarly, assuming the fundamental primacy of the practical, we can expect that determinate practical interests would take precedence over corresponding theoretical ones, were any such

---

<sup>17</sup> I spell out the picture outlined here more in §5 below.

question to arise. Hence, from here on out my focus will be on determining the relation between the interest in the highest good and that in the completion of theoretical cognition.

3. Consider first the Preface to the *Grundlegung*, where Kant lays out the following criterion of adequacy for a critique of practical reason:

I require that the critique of a pure practical reason, if it is to be carried out completely, be able to present at the same time the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle [*Prinzip*], since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application. [G 391]

Kant here explicitly sets out that a critique of practical reason must show how the practical use of reason is related to the theoretical use, specifically how the two are unified through a common principle. It should then come as no surprise that the second *Critique* does explicitly take up this question.<sup>18</sup> Further, while the *Grundlegung* passage does not suggest that this unification must occur in that reason asserts the primacy of the practical, when Kant brings up a similar point about unification in the first *Critique*, he does require that the practical take precedence.

Kant's claim in the first *Critique* about the necessary unity of theoretical and practical reason turns on a consideration of rational interests: "[The] highest ends [of reason] must, from the nature of reason, have a certain unity, in order that they may, as thus unified, further that interest of humanity which is subordinate to no higher interest" (A798/B826).<sup>19</sup> The context of the passage makes clear that the "highest ends" at issue correspond to the interests of reason in

---

<sup>18</sup> It might be objected that since the *Grundlegung* passage refers to a critique of *pure* practical reason, it does not apply to the second *Critique*—a critique of practical reason per se. Yet, as Kant makes clear in the preface to the latter work, he undertakes a critique of practical reason to show "*that there is pure practical reason*," which, once established, does not need itself need a critique. However, there is no reason to think that once the reality of pure practical reason has been established, the task of determining its relation to theoretical reason becomes unnecessary.

<sup>19</sup> I have altered Kemp-Smith's translation so as to use the standard "ends" for Kant's "*Zwecke*" (rather than "aims," as Kemp-Smith has it). I think Kemp-Smith's reluctance to use "ends" here is understandable since otherwise one would be making the apparently odd attribution of an end to theoretical reason. However, such an attribution is no more or less strange than the talk of an *interest* of theoretical reason. The question is precisely how or in what sense theoretical reason could have an end or an interest.

its theoretical and practical employments. Kant's suggestion then is that these interests, or alternatively reason's various endeavors, must be unified, and that the unity of these interests is to be grounded in the highest interest of humanity. Since this claim closely anticipates Kant's argument in the second *Critique*, it is worth noting two salient points. First, that there must be a unity of reason's theoretical and practical exercises follows from reason's fully general demand for systematic unity. Given that reason has multiple interests and corresponding exercises, the lack of a principled unification of these would imply that reason fails to secure its distinctive form of unity for its endeavors. Reason would thus, at the most general level of its exercise, violate its own distinctive demand for unity. It is in this sense that theoretical and practical reason must themselves form a systematic unity "from the very nature of reason." Secondly, Kant's reference to the interest of humanity signifies that the unity of the theoretical and practical exercises of reason must have the practical interest of reason as its fundamental or governing principle. For Kant goes on to identify the highest interest of humanity with the object of reason's practical interest: perfect morality coupled with the happiness of all (finite) rational beings, i.e. the highest good (A804-19/B832-47). Hence, the "common principle" which according to the *Grundlegung* is to unify theoretical and practical reason turns out to be the practical interest itself.

In this manner, Kant's discussion in the first *Critique* anticipates both the criterion of adequacy spelled out in the *Grundlegung* and the ordering based on interest argued for in the second *Critique*. For he suggests that the very faculty of reason, or indeed that there is *one* faculty of reason that engages in a theoretical as well as a practical exercise, requires that these exercises of reason be ordered by reference to the interests of reason. Further, the fundamental practical interest of reason, the highest good, must be the determining ground of this ordering

since the practical interest is reason's highest interest overall. In the first *Critique* itself, then, Kant asserts the necessary subordination of reason's theoretical employment and interest to their practical counterparts *on the grounds of* securing the systematic unity of all rational activity. As we will see below, this is precisely the thesis of the primacy of practical reason that Kant defends more explicitly in the second *Critique*.

Indeed, the very form that reason's theoretical interest takes can be seen as structured by deeper practical concerns.<sup>20</sup> In the Antinomy, Kant argues that the practical and theoretical interests of reason line up respectively with the theses and antitheses of the antinomies (A466-74/B494-502). Kant claims that the theses collectively "are so many foundation stones of morals and religion" (A466/B494). Hence, the practical interest of reason recommends the assertion of the theses. The theoretical interest of reason, on the other hand, aligns itself with the empiricism collectively asserted by the antitheses. Kant's thought here is that given the antitheses' denial of the existence of the necessary being, the noumenal self, etc., all that exists is the *kind* of thing that can be encountered in experience. Given the further denial of the world's having a beginning in time, limits in space, etc. there is an *infinity* of things that can be experienced in the world. Thus, the antitheses infinitely expand the possibility of empirical cognition, and hence the possible field of operation for the understanding. Kant argues that since the antitheses expand the possibility of theoretical cognition in this manner, the theoretical interest of reason aligns itself with the empiricist principle.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> I will present considerations in support of this point for the remainder of this section. Nevertheless, these considerations are inconclusive, and the point itself is inessential for my main thesis. As the next two sections will make clear, we can give a robust and plausible reading of the primacy thesis even if the theoretical interest is not structured by practical concerns in the manner suggested here.

<sup>21</sup> Kant notes that there is a theoretical interest in systematicity that aligns itself with the theses. His point seems to be that the overriding theoretical interest sides with the antitheses.

These conflicting interests of reason do not by themselves resolve the antinomy. Indeed, Kant writes that this conflict of interest “will decide nothing in regard to the contested rights of the two parties” (A465/B493). What is worth noting, however, is that the specification of reason’s theoretical interest in the Appendix does not support empiricism. In other words, what ultimately turns out to be reason’s interest in theoretical cognition does not strictly coincide with the narrower interest in the extension of empirical cognition (though the latter interest is included within the larger theoretical interest). To see this, consider that the theoretical interest in empiricism would prevent the positing of any object that cannot be given in experience. If we only took this interest into account, in other words, it would be neither necessary nor possible to make reference to the transcendental ideas of a noumenal self, a free cause, and a necessary being precisely because they mention of objects that lie beyond the field of possible experience. Yet, the theoretical interest as specified in the Appendix does make reference to the transcendental ideas and the corresponding objects. Kant there argues that given that the transcendental ideas “contribute to the extension of empirical knowledge, ... it is a necessary maxim of reason to proceed always in accordance with such ideas” (A671/B699). Indeed, Kant argues that the necessity of these representations for the extension and unification of empirical cognition constitutes their “transcendental deduction”. Hence, reason’s interest in the systematic unity of theoretical cognition requires that we take account of the transcendental ideas and so also make mention of objects that cannot possibly be objects of experience.

In this manner, the theoretical interest of reason, as ultimately specified in the Appendix, extends beyond the scope of the interest in empiricism with which theoretical reason originally aligns itself. Since the sole function of the transcendental ideas is to guide the extension and unification of empirical cognition, the theoretical interest in effect functions so as to indefinitely

extend theoretical, i.e. empirical, cognition.<sup>22</sup> Reason's overarching interest in systematic unity is thus functionally equivalent to its interest in the empiricist principles. Nevertheless, the two do not strictly coincide precisely because the first assigns a legitimate and necessary role reason's transcendental representations while the second eschews any mention of them. At the very least, then, reason's full-fledged theoretical interest takes within its purview more than would be allowed by the interest in empiricism—the interest originally identified as the theoretical interest of reason. Now this does not yet show that the extension of reason's theoretical interest is (in part or whole) informed by practical concerns; indeed, Kant's reliance on the idea of systematic unity might suggest otherwise.

Two points, however, suggest a connection with the practical interest. The first is Kant's claim about the highest ends of reason. This claim may be taken to suggest that reason keeps the objects postulated by the theses within the purview of the theoretical interest in part because these objects are necessary for the practical interest of reason. For Kant here requires that the interests be *so* unified that they *further* reason's highest, i.e. practical, interest. If, then, the practical interest of reason necessitates a reference to the transcendental ideas, and if the theoretical interest by itself would recommend eschewing reference to these ideas, then the inclusion of these ideas in the full specification of the theoretical interest suggests that reason specifies its theoretical interest as such so as to further its practical interest in some manner. I have provided evidence for the second part of the above antecedent in this section; the next section will be devoted to arguing for the first part. Assuming the latter argument for now, we have good reason to take the specific determination of reason's interest in theoretical cognition to be partly informed by practical concerns.

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf., e.g., A686/B714.

Secondly, Kant argues that highest unity of theoretical cognition is teleological. That is, it is only by systematically integrating all possible theoretical cognitions under explicitly teleological principles that we can fully achieve the sort of unity reason demands of theoretical cognition.<sup>23</sup> These teleological principles are in turn grounded in the idea of a supreme being: the latter, Kant claims, makes the former possible. Further, the appeal to the idea of a supreme being is itself justified by reason's interest in teleological unity. In other words, reason's basic interest in the teleological unity of theoretical cognition leads reason to appeal to the idea of a rational being, as only this idea can license the application of teleological principles to theoretical cognition.<sup>24</sup>

Now teleological representations in general have their natural home in the practical exercise of reason: it is precisely the rational determination of choice that gives rise to teleological representations, most notably representations of ends. In discussing the teleological unity of theoretical cognition, Kant does not explicitly mention practical reason or its governing interest. Nevertheless, the very reference to such representations raises the question of what if any relation they and the unity they are to secure bear to the practical exercise of reason. For if we strictly exclude the reason's practical employment, it is difficult to see how *any* exercise of reason could get a hold on teleological representations. Positively, the inclusion of teleological principles in the theoretical interest of reason suggests that this interest presupposes the practical exercise of reason in some manner. Further, there is good reason to think that the relation here is more than that of mere presupposition. A teleological unity of theoretical cognition would

---

<sup>23</sup> Kant's appeal to teleological principles raises extremely large scale questions about Kant's overall conception of the systematic unity reason aims to achieve in theoretical cognition, in particular questions about the relation between these and the mechanical principles that are to govern natural explanations. These questions are strictly beyond the scope of my discussion—my point here is simply to draw out the implications of the very mention of teleological principles within the context of theoretical cognition.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A699/B727.

amount to a teleological conception of nature—indeed, it is precisely to secure the latter that reason appeals to teleological principles. A teleological conception of nature would in turn secure a conformity between the overall structures of theoretical and practical cognitions. That is, given that practical rational cognition is explicitly teleological, a teleological conception of nature would make it possible to unite the theoretical and practical exercises of reason under the *same kind of principles*. Such unification of the theoretical and practical exercises would promote the very systematic unity of rational interests that we saw Kant argue reason necessarily aims for.

If, as seems plausible, the appeal to a teleological unity of theoretical cognition is indeed motivated by reason's aim of securing the unity of its theoretical and practical employments, it once again appears that the form taken by reason's theoretical interest presupposes reason's practical interest. Specifically, the necessarily teleological unity of practical cognition leads reason to incorporate teleological principles within its theoretical employment and hence to seek a unity of theoretical cognition formally identical to the practical one. Further, the appeal to the idea of the supreme being on teleological grounds is similarly motivated by practical concerns, albeit indirectly. Between the appeal to the transcendental ideas and the assumption of a teleological unity of theoretical cognition, there is I think strong evidence for the supposition that the shape of the theoretical interest is partly informed by reason's practical concerns. More generally, there is strong evidence suggesting that Kant *in the first Critique* implicitly endorses the thesis that reason's theoretical employment is partly structured by its practical interest.

4. Kant's central argument for the primacy of practical reason occurs in the second *Critique* (*KpV* 119-121). Kant begins with the thought that since the theoretical and practical

employments of reason are precisely two employments of one faculty, one must raise the question of the relation between these employments. Specifically, the question that arises is of a possible *ordering* of the two employments: “of the prerogative of one [of the employments] to be the first determining ground of the connection with all the rest” (*KpV* 119). Kant goes on to reformulate the question in terms of interest, which he here defines as “a principle [*Prinzip*] that contains the condition under which alone [a faculty’s] exercise is promoted” (*KpV* 119). The question of an ordering is just the question of primacy: one of the employments has primacy over the other just insofar as it serves as the determining ground of the other. Further, in line with the account developed here, Kant makes it clear that the question of primacy is to be pursued through a consideration of rational interests since the latter govern the corresponding exercises of reason.

Hence, Kant here explicitly takes up the question of systematically determining the relation between reason’s two basic employments—the central concern of our discussion. Further, he pursues this question precisely by focusing on whether one of the corresponding interests functions as the ground of the other. If, e.g., the practical interest can be seen as grounding the theoretical interest, then the practical employment of reason has primacy over the theoretical. Crucially, the question here is not just one of the bare assertion of primacy: if the practical employment of reason does indeed have primacy over the theoretical, Kant’s argument must show how and why this is the case. The argument, in other words, must provide the ground whereby the practical employment gains “the prerogative” to be the determining ground of the theoretical employment. Only so can Kant show not only that the practical employment has primacy but also why it must. This, as I will presently show, is exactly what he does.

To grasp Kant's argument, we can start by first considering why reason must establish *some* systematic relation between its employments. Kant argues that establishing the primacy of the practical is necessary in order to avoid the conflict that would otherwise necessarily arise between the theoretical and practical employments (*KpV* 121). Before considering why there must be a relation of primacy, we can grasp on general grounds the necessity of avoiding conflict. Kant claims: "Reason, as the faculty of principles, determines the interest of all the powers of the mind but itself determines its own" (*KpV* 120). Focusing solely on the claim of self-determination, Kant's thought is that reason of itself determines its theoretical as well as its practical interest. In order to ensure that it can consistently pursue these interests, reason must ensure that the interests it prescribes to itself do not come into conflict, i.e. that the pursuit of one interest does not hinder pursuit of the other. It does not of itself follow from this that in determining these interests reason must establish the primacy of one over another, much less that the practical must have primacy. However, it does follow that these two interests, and hence the employments they respectively ground, could not be determined entirely independently of each other, for then the possibility of conflict would not be foreclosed. To put the point positively, the very fact that rational interests arise out of acts of rational self-determination implies that these interests must bear some relation to each other, in particular a relation that is adequate to preclude the possibility of conflict between them.

However, it turns out that only relation adequate for foreclosing the possibility of conflict and systematically uniting the employments and interests of reason consists in the practical interest serving as the determining ground of the theoretical. Kant gestures at this point in asserting the primacy of the practical: "Thus, in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and

discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*” (*KpV* 121). We can take Kant’s talk of “one cognition” to refer to the acts of self-determination whereby reason assigns itself a set of consistent interests. Kant’s claim, then, is that reason necessarily determines systematic relations between its employments for only so can it secure its own unity. To put the point another way, reason qua one faculty with multiple employments must determine itself such that these employments form a consistent, unified system, and it does so in that it determines for itself a unified system of interests. The key point, however, is Kant’s suggestion that assuming the necessity of such systematic unity, practical reason must have primacy. That is, the unity of rational interests can only be secured insofar as the practical interest itself serves as the determining ground of this unity.

To see why this is so, we must turn to the role played by what Kant calls the Postulates of Pure Practical Reason. Kant argues that the principles of pure practical reason bear a necessary relation to certain theoretical propositions: “practical reason has of itself original a priori principles with which certain theoretical positions are inseparably connected, while these are withdrawn from any possible insight of speculative reason” (*KpV* 120). The practical principles of concern can be naturally identified with the moral law and the more specific categorical practical rational requirements that can be derived from this.<sup>25</sup> These, after all, are the only a priori principles of practical reason in Kant’s system. For ease of exposition, we can focus on the moral law. The “theoretical positions” at issue, the ones that the moral law is inseparably connected with, are the postulates of pure practical reason. For Kant defines a postulate thus: “by [a postulate of pure practical reason] I understand a *theoretical* proposition, though not one

---

<sup>25</sup> Of course, the more specific requirements at issue are themselves properly classified as moral laws. For the purposes of this discussion, I am using “moral law” to refer solely to what Kant identifies as the “fundamental law of pure practical reason” (*KpV* 30).

demonstrable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid practical law” (*KpV* 122). Thus, it is precisely the postulates of that are simultaneously theoretical propositions and inseparably connected with the exercise of practical reason. Indeed, it is just the necessity of the postulates for the practical employment that requires the subordination of the theoretical interest to the practical. In other words, given the unity of theoretical and practical reason, the presence of a priori practical principles that have a necessary bearing on certain acts of the theoretical employment requires that the practical have primacy over the theoretical.

To see why the postulates require the subordination of the theoretical, consider that they collectively assert the immortality of the soul, the freedom of the will, and the existence of God, i.e. the objects corresponding to the transcendental ideas (cf. *KpV* 132). Thus, the postulates are *uncognizable theoretical propositions*: they assert what *is* rather than what *ought to be*, yet what they assert cannot be an object of theoretical cognition. Instead, the assertion of these theoretical propositions rests on the practical necessity of assuming the corresponding objects. Specifically, the assertion of the postulates rests on their being necessary for the representation of the object of the practical interest, i.e. the highest good, as possible.<sup>26</sup> In other words, practical reason demands the assertion of the postulates because only so can it pursue and promote its interest, and the systematic connection effected by the postulates between the theoretical and practical employments is grounded in a consideration of this very interest. The postulates thus determine the systematic unity of reason’s employments in that they assert the primacy of the practical, since it is precisely reason’s *practical* need that determines *theoretical* assertions on the part of

---

<sup>26</sup> Strictly speaking, the representation in question requires the postulation of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. In the interests of simplicity, I am suppressing the different relation freedom of the will bears to the practical exercise of reason. The present point about the postulates can be adequately grasped in abstraction from the particular considerations that attach to the assertion of the freedom of the will.

reason. Theoretical reason, in other words, must accept and assert propositions that given theoretical considerations alone would be neither necessary nor possible. Hence, practical reason partly determines the exercise of theoretical reason (specifically the part that consists in the assertion of the postulates), and at least to this extent forms the determining ground of reason's theoretical exercise.

Now I noted above that Kant's argument, to be successful, must show not only that the practical employment has primacy but also why it must. To fully grasp the rational necessity of subordinating the theoretical employment to the practical, we must consider again the conflict that would otherwise arise. Kant argues:

without this subordination [of the theoretical to the practical] a conflict of reason with itself would arise, since if they were merely juxtaposed (coordinate), the first would of itself close its boundaries strictly and admit nothing from the latter into its domain, while the latter would extent its boundaries over everything and, when its need required, would try to include the former within them. [*KpV* 121]

This description of the conflict of reason hearkens back to the conflict of interests Kant mentions in the Antinomy. That is, if the theoretical employment were not subordinated, reason's theoretical interest in empiricism would lead reason in its theoretical employment to refuse postulation of the objects corresponding to the transcendental ideas. In effect, theoretical reason would refuse acknowledgement of the theoretical propositions constitutive of the postulates. At the same time, the postulates would be necessary for the practical employment of reason: the fundamental practical interest in the highest good would continue to necessitate the postulation of an immortal soul, etc. In this case, the postulates would be simultaneously necessary (for the practical interest) and impossible to assert (given the theoretical interest).

From the perspective of reason, this situation would of course be intolerable. The key at this juncture is the presence of the moral law as a necessarily binding principle of pure reason.

At the same time, there is no corresponding pure principle of theoretical reason—the principles that reason attempts to legislate in its theoretical exercise are necessarily illegitimate. This creates a fundamental asymmetry between the theoretical and practical exercises of reason, for only in the practical case reason satisfies its basic function of legislating a genuine—i.e. pure—principle. Considering this point in the context of the above-mentioned (hypothetical) conflict, it becomes clear that there is no countervailing theoretical principle that could oppose the necessity of the moral law. There is no theoretical principle, in other words, that could lay claim to being a possible rational principle to which all other rational exercises are to be subordinated. Positively put, the moral law is the only principle of reason that can serve as the highest governing principle of all possible rational exercises because strictly speaking it is the only genuine principle of reason.

Thus, the necessary applicability of the moral law—and practical laws more generally—means that reason can forestall the potential conflict between its employments and unify its interests only by asserting the primacy of its practical exercise. The subordination of the theoretical interest to the practical, manifested in the assertion of a set of theoretical propositions on practical grounds, ultimately reflects the fundamental necessity of the moral law and its *sui generis* status as a pure rational principle. Or, in terms of what I earlier identified as the object of reason's interest, the primacy of the practical reflects the necessity of treating the highest good as the practical ideal. Hence, as already suggested by the first *Critique*, the practical interest—or the moral law as its fundamental manifestation—serves as “the common principle” under which reason integrates all its possible exercises and interests. It is worth stressing here that there is no *further* principle through which reason subordinates its theoretical exercise to its practical. The governing principle (or determining ground) of the systematic unity of rational interests just is

the practical interest itself. This is the sense in which the theoretical is subordinated *to the practical*, and the latter has “the prerogative ... to be the first determining ground of the connection with all the rest.” The net result is just what the fundamentally practical character of interest should have led us to expect all along: the specifically practical interest of reason governs the determination of all possible rational interests.

5. Kant makes this last point particularly stark at the very end of his argument establishing the primacy of practical reason:

But one cannot require practical reason to be subordinate to speculative reason ..., since all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone. [*KpV* 121]

This claim deserves special consideration because it might seem significantly stronger than the argument leading up to it. Specifically, the claims that “all interest is ultimately practical,” and that the theoretical interest is “complete in practical use alone,” might seem to suggest that not only is the speculative interest subordinate to the practical but that it is itself has a practical aspect. Given the close connection between the interests and the corresponding employments of reason, the claims in question would then threaten to collapse the theoretical employment into the practical. In other words, if all interest—including the theoretical interest—is “ultimately practical,” it might seem as if the theoretical employment of reason is at bottom itself a practical exercise or at least merely in service of reason’s practical aims. If this were true, it would at best imperil the status of furthering empirical cognition as a self-justifying rational project, and at worst render incoherent the very idea of a distinctively theoretical employment of reason.

I will argue in this section that the quoted passage has no such unpalatable consequences, indeed that it claims no more than what has already been (at least implicitly) established. First,

however, it will help to spell out exactly what is implausible about Kant's claim if the reading above is right. So far we have seen that reason necessarily *subordinates* its theoretical concerns to its practical ones. This subordination, however, need not imply that reason's theoretical employment is in any way *in the service of* the practical. By analogy, consider that I may engage in an activity such watching films purely for the pleasure I derive from it. This activity may be subordinate to various other concerns of mine, say my commitment to fulfilling my professional duties, in the sense that if the two were jointly unsatisfiable in some situation, my commitment to my professional duties would win out. Nevertheless, it would be implausible at best to suggest that this ordering of my commitments implies that my film watching activity is somehow in the service of my (overriding) commitment to professionalism. Similarly, one would plausibly expect that the subordination of reason's theoretical interest to its practical leaves intact the character of the theoretical interest and exercise—its status as a range of activity that is undertaken for its own sake and not for the sake of some other, fundamentally different concern. Any plausible reading of the passage in question must preserve this sort of independence for the theoretical interest of reason.

In "The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate", Marcus Willaschek lays out one way of interpreting the relevant passage that secures the necessary independence of theoretical reason. He argues that the claim that all interest is ultimately practical should be understood in terms of the conditionality of the theoretical interest. Specifically, he argues that the theoretical interest is "conditional" in that it more or less issues a hypothetical imperative to a subject: "If you want to satisfy your speculative interest, don't stop to inquire until you have gained knowledge of the highest a priori principles."<sup>27</sup> In other words,

---

<sup>27</sup> Willaschek, "The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate", 18-19.

the theoretical interest contrasts with the practical in that it does not make it incumbent on subjects to pursue the extension and completion of theoretical cognition, whereas the practical interest does require that every subject exercise its power of choice so as to realize the highest good. Thus, Willaschek argues, the theoretical interest embodies a conditional demand and the practical an unconditional one. On this reading, the fact that the theoretical interest cannot ground an independently compelling demand and hence must rely on some external, presumably practical motivation to be effective explains the sense in which all interest is ultimately practical.

This interpretation preserves an important measure of autonomy for the theoretical interest since it does not treat the extension of empirical cognition as itself undertaken for the sake of the practical interest. Further, Willaschek's general thought that the requirements issued by the theoretical and practical interests are fundamentally different in character seems certainly right. Nevertheless, his reading of the demand issued by the theoretical interest, especially as regards its hypothetical character, seems unsatisfactorily weak. The problem is that the unification of theoretical cognition through maximally general principles is—as Kant repeatedly notes—a *need* of reason: reason by its very nature must aim to unify cognition under principles. It cannot then be up to the subject to adopt one of various possible attitudes to this rational interest. Insofar as the subject exercises its capacity for theoretical rationality at all, it must in some sense commit itself to the fundamental rational interest. This is because, as we saw above, it is precisely the rational interest that explains and grounds acts of the corresponding employment of reason. Hence, it is reason's interest in the unity of theoretical cognition that ultimately explains a given subject's classification of some object as an instance of a general kind, say. Conversely, it cannot be a matter of individual choice for any subject whether or not it concerns itself with reason's theoretical interest. A subject's very conception of itself as a

theoretical reasoner makes the theoretical interest applicable to it. It also follows, then, that the theoretical interest cannot be conditional in the sense of issuing something like a hypothetical imperative.

While Willaschek's specific reading of the conditionality claim is inadequate, his general thought, viz. that the sense in which all interest is practical should be understood in light of what follows, is I think exactly right. That is, we can properly grasp the sense in which "all interest in ultimately practical" by spelling out how the theoretical interest "is only conditional and is complete in practical use only". Specifically, we should take the quoted conjunction to be making the two following claims. First, that the very possibility of a speculative interest depends on their being a conceptually prior practical interest. And secondly, that the representations essential for the articulation and furthering of the theoretical interest—viz. the transcendental ideas—find their ultimate use within the practical interest. These claims together can account for the thought that all interest is *ultimately* practical without making it the case that the rational activity governed by the theoretical interest is itself surreptitiously practical or in the service of reason's practical aims.

Consider the first claim, viz. that the theoretical interest is conditional in that the possibility of any interest, including the theoretical, is contingent on the existence of the practical interest. This is simply an extension of the point noted above that the concept of interest gains application in the case of beings with a practical rational faculty. Specifically, the claim about the necessity of practical reason for the applicability of the concept of interest is explicitly extended to include the *theoretical* interest. Kant's thought, then, is that the very notion of a rational interest gains a foothold through the practical self-determination of reason. Given this self-determination, reason develops other interests corresponding to its non-practical faculties,

and these interests then ground the exercises and representations of the relevant faculties. More precisely, reason's self-determination as a pure practical power, manifested in the practical cognition of the moral law, brings with it a rational interest in promoting the exercise of reason's practical faculty. This rational self-determination and corresponding interest make possible further self-determinations of reason which simultaneously ground non-practical rational interests and mark out spheres of rational activity corresponding to these interests.

The point here is that it would be a mistake to think of reason as having disparate interests and then setting about unifying them into a system. Rather, reason's interests must so to speak always form a systematic unity under a governing principle. Since the practical interest of reason serves as the determining ground of all rational interests and hence as the governing principle of their unity, the practical must itself be conceptually prior to all other rational interests, specifically the theoretical interest. It is in this sense that the theoretical interest must be "only conditional": the very existence of a theoretical interest of reason presupposes reason's practical self-determination and the corresponding practical interest. In other words, reason's practical interest serves as the *condition of the possibility* of its theoretical interest, indeed as the condition of all other possible rational interests.

If we turn to the second claim, viz. that the fundamental theoretical representations of reason find their full use within the practical interest, we can make sense of Kant's claim that the theoretical interest "is complete in practical use alone". The key here, I think, is the respective roles played by the transcendental ideas in the theoretical and practical employments. In the first *Critique*, reference to the transcendental ideas is justified by appeal to reason's interest in the extension—and ultimately completion—of theoretical cognition. Thus, the theoretical interest of reason licenses and makes necessary the appeal to the transcendental ideas. The discussion of

the postulates in the second *Critique* introduces a new, further use for these ideas: their invocation is now seen to be necessary for the practical interest of reason, specifically for the representation of the highest good as a possible object of rational interest. At the same time, the practical interest in the highest good requires a fundamentally different attitude toward these ideas. For securing the possibility of the highest good requires positing *the existence of the objects* corresponding to the transcendental ideas. The practical use of the transcendental ideas can then be seen as providing an important validation of them precisely in that it posits the objective reality of their objects.

This suggests that the rational function of the transcendental ideas becomes fully apparent only when we bring into view their role in the practical employment of reason. Nevertheless, what is at issue here are *theoretical* representations of reason: representations generated by reason in its theoretical employment precisely so that reason can articulate and provide a determinate conception of its theoretical interest in the completion of cognition. It is then these theoretical representations, and the theoretical interest that grounds their use in the systematization of cognition, that find a further use and validation through reason's practical interest. Hence, we can take the rational role of the theoretical interest, especially as manifested in the transcendental ideas, as being fully revealed in and through the necessary role these ideas play for the practical interest of reason. The theoretical interest is then "complete" only in the practical employment just in the sense that the complete rational function of this interest can only be explicated with reference to the object of reason's practical interest.

Indeed, the structure of Kant's argument supports precisely such a reading. Kant makes the claim that the theoretical interest is "complete in practical use alone" immediately before discussing the postulates. Hence, though Kant does not explicitly say so, it makes the most sense

to assume that the ensuing discussion of the postulates demonstrates and clarifies the claim that the theoretical interest is indeed complete in the practical employment of reason. Further, the discussion of the postulates concerns precisely the practical necessity of assuming the objective reality of the objects of the transcendental ideas, where this practical necessity is a consequence of the rational interest in the highest good. Thus, the postulates in effect show that the transcendental ideas, and the theoretical interest that grounds them, are necessary not just for the theoretical exercise of reason but also for the rational subject to be able to act so as to promote the highest good. In this manner, the postulates spell out the necessary *practical* role of the transcendental ideas, and in doing so fully reveal the function of these ideas in the system of rational interests. Further, only the postulates can reveal the complete function of the transcendental ideas, for we grasp the necessity of these ideas for the practical interest of reason in that we register the practical necessity of postulating their objects. Thus, Kant's discussion of the postulates validates the above suggestion, viz. that the theoretical interest "is complete in practical use of alone" in that the latter reveals the complete rational function of the former.

Hence, we can account for the thought that all interest is *ultimately* practical without incurring the unpalatable consequences mentioned above. Specifically, on the reading developed here, the theoretical employment of reason does not turn out to be *in the service of* the practical interest or its object. To put the point positively, the theoretical interest of reason and the corresponding employment remain autonomous in the sense that reason's interest the systematic unity of theoretical cognition is a rational concern undertaken for its own sake—not as a means to securing the object of reason's practical interest. However, *that there is a theoretical interest* must be accounted with reference to reason's practical self-determination.

To develop the positive point further, all interest is ultimately practical in a two-fold sense. First, the very concept of interest is fundamentally practical, and it is precisely the presence of a rational interest in this fundamental practical sense that allows for further determinations of rational interest. Secondly, the theoretical interest of reason supplies representations that perform an essential role in furthering the practical interest. The rational function of these representations, and so of the theoretical interest that grounds them, is thus fully manifested only in the context of the practical interest. In this manner, rational interest, and hence rational activity as a whole, begins and ends with the practical. To put the point somewhat fancifully, the practical interest of reason is the formal and final ground of the theoretical employment. It is the formal ground in that it is the interest of reason systematic unity of ends that allows for further specifications of systematic unity—such as that of theoretical cognition—and corresponding rational interests. On the other hand, the practical interest serves as the final ground of the theoretical employment in that the representations proper to the latter find an essential and extended function in the practical exercise, and it is this practical function that fully validates their status as necessary rational representations.

I started this dissertation with a consideration of the so-called fact of reason—the fundamental practical act of reason through which reason demonstrates its practicality and thus legislates the moral law as binding for all rational beings. In a sense, this is also where it ends. For it is this act of reason that grounds the practical interest of reason in the realization of the highest good and indeed the entirety of reason's practical exercise. Insofar as the practical interest serves as the formal and final ground of all rational exercises, it is ultimately the fact of reason itself that provides the form and the end for rational activity *ueberhaupt*. It provides the form of rational

activity in that it legislates the moral law as the first and only genuine principle, thus determining rational cognition as cognition from principles. And it determines the end of rational activity in that it determines the highest good—or equivalently the realm of ends—as the fundamental object of rational interest and hence specifies realizing this object as the highest governing principle of all rational activity. We can thus say that the scope of reason’s activity beings and ends with “the sole fact of pure reason.”

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- . *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*. Revised and Expanded Edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Sir David Ross; translation revised J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Ormsun. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Broome, John. "Normative Requirements." *Ratio* 12 (1999): 398-419.
- Dean, Richard. *The Value of Humanity in Kant's Moral Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.
- Engstrom, Stephen. "Allison on Rational Agency." *Inquiry* 36(4) (1993): 405-418.
- . Introduction to *Critique of Practical Reason*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2002.
- . *The Form of Practical Reason: A Study of the Categorical Imperative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Henrich, Dieter. "The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant's Doctrine of the Fact of Reason." Translated by Manfred Kuehn. Chapter 3 in *The Unity of Reason: Selected Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Herman, Barbara. *The Practice of Moral Judgment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Hill, Thomas E., Jr. *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Kain, Patrick. "Practical Cognition, Intuition, and the Fact of Reason." In *Kant's Moral Metaphysics: God, Freedom, and Immortality*, edited by Benjamin J. Bruxvoort Lipscomb and James Krueger, 211-230. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010.
- Korsgaard, Christine. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- . “Kant’s Formula of Humanity.” Chap. 4 in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . “Morality as Freedom.” Chap. 6 in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . “Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy.” Chap. 10 in *The Constitution of Agency: Essays in Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- O’Neill, Onora. *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant’s Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Rawls, John. “Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy.” In *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions: The Three ‘Critiques’ and the ‘Opus Postumum’*, edited by Eckart Foerster, 81-113. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.
- . *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Edited by Barbara Herman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Reath, Andrews. *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Regan, Donald. “The Value of Rational Nature.” *Ethics* 112 (2002): 267-291.
- Rescher, Nicholas. *Kant and the Reach of Reason: Studies in Kant’s Theory of Rational Systemization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *On the Social Contract*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1987.
- Scanlon, T.M. *What We Owe To Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Shaver, Robert. “Korsgaard on Hypothetical Imperatives.” *Philosophical Studies* 129 (2006): 335-347.
- Willaschek, Marcus. “Die Tat der Vernunft: Zur Bedeutung der Kantischen Thesen von Faktum der Vernunft.” In *Akten der Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, edited by G. Funke, 455-466. Bonn: Bouvier, 1991.
- . “The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate.” In *Kant’s ‘Critique of Practical Reason’: A Critical Guide*, edited by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann, 168-196. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Wood, Allen. *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

———. *Kantian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.