

Review Discussion

Kant's Theory of Value: On Allen Wood's *Kant's Ethical Thought**

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Many students take away a familiar and rather cartoonish image from studying Kant in college – that of an austere moralist who would have it that a righteous human life consists exclusively in an obligation to a supreme moral law (something which seems to involve arcane ‘universalizability tests’ for ‘maxims’ of action), that the claims of such obedience are unconditional, or trump, override, any other consideration about the human good, and that Kant’s theory claims that persons deserve moral approval if and only if they act strictly on the basis of the acknowledgment of that duty alone, with no primary regard (at least as the main motive in so acting) for the consequences of such action for their own or for anyone else’s benefit, flourishing, happiness. In this way, pure reason would have been shown capable of determining ‘all on its own’ what ought to be done, in no way relying on any substantive, empirical claim about human nature. Allen Wood’s *Kant’s Ethical Thought* is a vigorous, challenging, and scrupulously researched defense of Kant against such a traditional interpretation. (It proceeds, that is, on the largely correct assumption that the statement of the traditional interpretation itself already counts as a *prima facie* indictment.) Wood’s Kant hardly ignored (as is frequently charged) the issue of the moral life as a whole, or the substantive value that underlies it, or the anthropological and historical facts without which the theory remains formal and empty, or the role that moral commitments and difficult judgments must play in a real (emotionally responsive, historically and socially situated) human life, and this Kant developed quite a sophisticated account of human nature, education, and human history in filling out that sketchy college cartoon. The ‘rule-fetishism’ attributed to Kant, together with the casuistic universalizability tests associated with it, and the insistence on some pure and very likely impossible motivation in morally worthy action, are rejected here in favor of a more substantive moral ideal that itself cannot be fully articulated without invoking

* Allen Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 436 + xxiv pp. ISBN 0-52164056-3 hc, 0-521-64836-X pb, \$54.95, pb \$18.95. Referred to as *KET* hereafter. I am indebted to Allen Wood for extensive and very helpful correspondence, clarifying his position and defending it from the objections made in this article.

a wide variety of historical and anthropological claims, and in favor of a theory of motivation and moral worth far less rigoristic and more nuanced than Kant has been given credit for. If Wood is right about these points, and especially about the centrality of a theory of human nature in Kant's basic argument about our basic obligations, several aspects of the traditional reading of Kant's practical philosophy will have to be modified or abandoned.

Wood's interpretation rests on a claim about a major theoretical issue, and then on implications drawn from it concerning the relevance of Kant's anthropological and historical considerations to the basic moral theory, and so the relevance of this ethical side in Kant to some of the most famous objections to his moral theory.¹ These two dimensions correspond to the two parts of the book. The theoretical issue comes to a head mainly in Chapters Four and Five of the first part, and involves a proposal to re-focus our attention completely to where it should have been all along in Kant's argument; not on the first two formulations of the categorical imperative, the Formula of Universal Law (FUL), and the Formula of the Law of Nature (FLN), and so on the kind of puzzles some philosophers seem to love, but on the Formula of Humanity (FH) and the Formula of Autonomy (FA) and the (FRE) Realm of Ends.²

We also hear from Wood that for Kant, moral action is not concerned with bringing about states of affairs, and in that sense is certainly not 'consequentialist', but that it would be a mistake to infer from this that therefore, by contrast, our focus ought to be solely on dutiful obedience to a universal law. It has always seemed difficult to understand what sort of a practical reason such a duty provides, what exactly is wrong in not obeying it, or even why acting on maxims that have a certain form is so morally important. This does not arise as a problem if Wood is right in insisting so strongly on the priority of FH [the formula of Humanity as an End in Itself] for applying the principle of morality (*KET*, p. 141), and if a moral life is re-described as a matter of *expressing* a kind of respect or reverence for a substantive value, such as 'humanity, or our rational capacity to set ends'. Wood's book is an extensive defense of such a proposal about the right relation between center and periphery in Kant's account.

There have been several value theory or non-deontological readings of Kant in the last few years, many similar to Wood's but none quite so attentive to Kant's substantive claims about human nature, or quite so worked out systematically.³ His book thus presents an opportunity for a consideration of this entire direction in Kant studies, one that seeks to replace the traditional emphasis on deontology with a substantive value theory, and therewith the theories of practical rationality and teleology such an approach requires.

In general, these strategies have a common spirit. In response to the rigorism and formalism objections (often in response to renewals of these charges by Williams and MacIntyre), the tactic is not to defend rigorism or

formalism, but to claim that Kant has been misinterpreted, that he is not a rigorist or formalist in the first place, and is not subject to Aristotelian or neo-Humean or Hegelian criticisms because he has anticipated and incorporated in his philosophy their worries. If it's sociality, character, virtue, emotions or historical change you are worried about and you believe Kant has neglected or misunderstood the issues, think again. They are quite central to Kant too, if his full position is understood.

This strategy of co-opting the old objections raises many interpretative questions. Philosophically, the issue is rather straightforward: why should the fact that humans have the capacity to set ends on the basis of reason, or have the capacity to commit themselves to and adhere to reasons, give anyone else any sort of practical reason to do or forbear from doing anything, or especially why should such a capacity be the object of something like 'reverence'? This is obviously an even more difficult question when, as Kantians, we must also show that this sort of expression constitutes a reason that is an obligating, or always overriding reason, that we are obligated to respect such a capacity as having an inestimable, incomparable worth. Once this is settled, the next question is what respecting such a capacity amounts to, what general policies are unavoidable, if that ('humanity') is the 'self-subsistent end' we must always respect. To answer this question about ethics, we must turn to Kant's views about human nature, society, and history, the subject of some of the most insightful and helpful sections of Wood's book, Part Two.

On the way to this basic question and its implications however, Wood offers several interpretations of a number of the themes that Kant presents so famously and so rapidly in the first two sections of the *Groundwork*, interpretations all more suited to Wood's 'substantive value' view of Kant than the traditional 'moral law' interpretation, and I want first to raise several questions about those details.

I. Part One

Acting from Duty and Over-determination

Kant claims that only actions done from duty alone deserve moral praise, or our 'esteem' (*Hochschätzung*). This has led some to conclude, understandably but too hastily, that Kant must therefore also be saying that acts *not* done from duty alone have *no* worth or moral significance at all. If this were true, it might lead to Schiller's criticism – that it looks as if I should arrange *disliking* my friends, so that my beneficence to them will then be worthy – or to Hegel's claim about what appears to be a paradox in morality – that since I should strive to be able to do my duty by diminishing the force and pull of non-sensible inclinations away from the righteous, I seem to be striving for a

state where I will be unable to earn any moral credit. Why shouldn't I rather invite and encourage riotous temptation, all the better to manifest what is truly worthy of respect in human beings?

The error of course stems from concluding that Kant means to pose such a strict contradictory to 'acting from duty alone'. Wood presents an economical, clear version of what has by now become a standard defense of Kant. First, we must realize that Kant is not equating a 'good will' simply with 'acting from duty alone', and this will of course mean that there can be instances of a good will that are not instances of acting from duty alone. This is clearly right. A holy will, for example, a will which must never constrain itself, is certainly good, but never requires obedience. And Kant frequently encourages us to develop habits of mind and temperament that will make it possible simply to incline towards what is according to duty, without having always to act from duty. Much of his educational theory concerns the cultivation of such dispositions and he could not have meant to discredit the development of such dispositions and habits because they make 'acting from duty alone' less likely or necessary. On the contrary, he obviously intended us to conclude: the more of this (avoidance of having to act from duty), the better. And finally, acting from duty alone is meant to be a very rare, special occurrence in human life, not at all the quotidian standard. Kant appeals to it in *G* mostly if not exclusively for epistemological reasons. He simply points out that when there are good reasons to ascribe powerful, 'immediate' inclinations to perform an action, it is very hard to 'make out' any possibly dutiful motive. The thought experiments all ask us to consider a situation where no positive incentive to act can be imagined, all so that we might then note what a different and distinct thing it is to imagine the act performed anyway, motivated in such unusual cases by duty alone.

This last claim has been the source of much recent controversy in Kant scholarship and Wood takes a strong position, one quite contrary to what he himself had defended in his previous books, *Kant's Moral Religion* and *Hegel's Ethical Thought*. When Kant mentions how hard it is to separate out 'acting from duty alone' from a co-present, immediate sensible inclination to perform the same action, some commentators have taken him to be initiating a kind of psychological hunt, within this complex 'over-determination' of motives, for the one that 'truly' determined why the subject performed the act. We know we cannot assign moral worth until we find this out, and when the act seems so over-determined, where we have plenty of incentives to act and could easily be said to be acting 'from' any of a number of motives, we must try to find a way to convince ourselves that the agent would have acted anyway, if he *were* only motivated by duty alone, if the cooperating inclinations had not been present or had been different. As Wood himself has shown so well in other places, this kind of hunt is hopeless. If we can only assign worth on its basis, then we will never be able to, and the category is worthless.⁴

Getting to this point, though (the over-determination problem), is also understandable and not quite as hasty as the acting from duty/good will conflation. Kant does not seem to have two equal kinds of *moral* praise, 'esteem' on the one hand, when by chance, say, the only possible incentive in some case could be the demand of duty, and 'praise and affirmation' of some other sort for a 'good will'. There is no question that Kant ranks such esteem as higher praise, the gold standard (and this right away suggests Schiller's problem, since, if it is higher praise, there is no reason to think we should not try to do what we can to merit it)⁵ and the sort of approval granted in the latter case, although mentioned as such approval by Kant, is nevertheless obscure (*KET*, p. 27). Wood does not say why, in such 'good will, but not acting from duty' cases, such approval should be anywhere in the *moral* neighborhood.⁶ He suggests that it is *praiseworthy* because at least what is 'according to duty' was done. (Cf. *KET*, p. 31, and p. 32 on 'moral approval' again.) This 'approval' could just amount to: since we find it so difficult to act from duty, it is *better* to rely on education to create inclinations that lead us to act according to duty. That is certainly better than acting against duty and is in that (extremely miserly) sense, *praiseworthy*; it is better than evil. But any stronger sort of approval will lead us towards the counterfactuals and parallelogram of forces Wood and others want to avoid. If, in our socialization and education, we have come to anticipate with pleasure a good reputation and are therewith strongly inclined always to do the right so as to be thought well of for that reason, there is of course an attenuated sense in which we can call such actions good. They are in accordance with duty. But in *that* sense, so are the same actions when motivated by more obvious egoism, or a desire simply to seem righteous, and the minimal character of such approval ('not evil') is much clearer. If Kant is going to re-introduce some morally relevant sense of worthiness, the only criterion would seem to be something like, 'would have *also* acted thus *without* such cooperating inclinations', returning us to the subjunctive world Wood wants to avoid. Again, there might be all sorts of pragmatic reasons to praise an instance of patriotism that happens not to be done out of duty, but it is, ironically, when the rewards of praise and approbation become very *effective* that a Kantian must start to worry about whether the subject could perform the acts without such inclinations, just as Kant does in fretting about fanaticism in what he regards as Schiller's sentimentalism, if not 'checked by duty'.

Wood's full position is then quite complex. On the one hand he wants to say that Kant is not trying, and need not try, to tell us precisely what a good will is, or how to detect it, distinguish it from a will that is not so good. On the other hand he wants to claim that 'acting dutifully', if motivated by morally unproblematic ends, *does* warrant 'praise' if not esteem (say, given that the shopkeeper acted honestly and had a policy of acting honestly, *even if* motivated by considerations of prudence. This would also help explain the

cases Kant cites where we do praise the non-morally motivated act, beneficence out of sympathy, and patriotic acts). This though again seems to slide quickly from 'not meriting blame' to meriting *praise*. And while one might argue that just dealing (or sympathetic beneficence) should be praised as a way of encouraging it, that is very different from saying the shopkeeper himself merited praise.

This issue is also connected to two others that are very difficult to discuss economically. One is whether the shopkeeper's ability to set an end of cultivating a good reputation by honest dealing is itself (that capacity) already worthy of a kind of respect as an instance of 'reason setting an end', an issue we will arrive at in a moment. The other is endlessly complicated. Before we can decide about the shopkeeper we must be able to formulate what his maxim was. If we say that his maxim was fair dealing, and his incentive was securing a good reputation, we might say that he deserved praise for his maxim, and we can leave the incentive out of it, unless it was for a bad end. (This is Wood's position.) But a maxim is supposed to be the subject's reason to act, what is produced when 'Why did you do that?' is posed. We would then have to say that the maxim was something more general, more explanatory, like, 'to do what is possible to secure a good reputation for honest dealing'.⁷ If that is so (and I think it is), it is much harder to count such a 'will' as an instance of a 'good will'.⁸

What I am suggesting is that Wood's proposed distinction between a possibly good will and action done from duty is still too crude, that the mere distinction between a will acting according to duty, even if sensibly so inclined and not 'from duty', and the clear case of acting from duty, does not yet give us enough information to properly distinguish a 'good' will. Someone might even have been brainwashed or in some other way trained to respond in certain ways, or the sensible inclinations that move him might be so low and common and irrelevant to our moral vocation (even if not evil) that it would be odd to consider actions so motivated expressions of a good will, and not just 'not an evil will'. Is there some further condition that must be fulfilled before the sensible inclinations qualify a will as 'good' and not merely 'not bad'? When Wood deals with similar cases, say a case of truth-telling for base motives (*KET*, p. 35), he notes that Kant would want to praise the truth-telling but blame the 'vicious end'. But this distinction stands in direct contradiction with Wood's own principle (y) on p. 23: 'The goodness of any good other than a good will depends on its being combined (in the right way) with a good will; *any such good becomes bad when combined* (in the relevant way) with a bad will' (my emphasis). (And thus it is now easy to see why the 'over-determination' party believed that our only hope was to find a way of saying that the actual, sensibly motivated action was really, or mostly, or would have been if it was needed, 'from duty'.)

Finally, Wood himself helpfully points to the passages that might suggest difficulties with his interpretation. In the *Religion* book, Kant lists as a degree of *evil* our being so weak that we require non-moral incentives before we will do what duty demands. This would seem to suggest that we must always be able to demonstrate that we did or would act from duty, in order to avoid the charge of this degree of evil.

Wood points out that this passage just describes an agent who *must* have such help, or could *never* act from duty. It does not claim anything about what we should say when there is both the motive of duty, and an inclination. But Kant's claim does introduce exactly the kind of question that eventually must raise the over-determination issues Wood wants to avoid. Strictly speaking, the case in point does describe *what is on Wood's terms* an act done according to duty, where there were either only nonmoral inclinations, or nonmoral inclinations and an accompanying motive to act from duty. And so according to everything Wood has told us, and avoiding entirely the over-determination issue, this should *ipso facto* count as an instance of a good will. Kant though of course counts it as a degree of evil. And the question Kant clearly poses as criterial is just the sort Wood wants to avoid: *would* the agent have performed the act if there had not been such motives? If this is an issue, then it is *always* possible to ask, even in cases of acting from duty: would the agent have acted had there been strong sensible aversions present? If not, then while he so acted and deserves some sort of credit for acting according to duty, this was just a feature of moral luck and he merits no moral esteem? And if this is so, then even in cases of intense sensible aversion to doing what one ought, when one does what one ought, it can still be asked whether this success in doing one's duty was itself a feature of luck and not strictly speaking due to the agent.⁹

Practical Reason

According to Kant, practical reason, which he also simply calls the will, is the 'faculty of principles of action', and Kant holds the view so controversial for naturalists, Humeans, skeptics, and the like, that some such principles can enjoy an a priori status and therewith determine an action (provide a reason for doing something) independent of any contingent desire or want. Wood's strategy in defending Kant's position is to argue that naturalists and skeptics about such a status have not realized that they must concede, on pain of incoherence, that a condition for *the possibility of any nonmoral action* is also precisely the 'desire-independent, acting directly on reasons' capacity that they are out to deny.

But he shows this by stressing a point in Kant that is itself controversial and without fully resolving the controversy. In cases of instrumental reasoning, where we desire the attainment of some end, and have certain beliefs about

how to attain it, the principle governing such action (which formulates what we ought to do) is famously called by Kant a 'hypothetical imperative'. Wood's argument depends on the emphasis that Kant gives to the 'imperative' character of such a principle. In other words, the course of action that ought to be followed is one we can fail to follow. We can come to believe that the best means for attaining *X* is *Y*, or that pursuing *W* would make the attainment of *X* either impossible or very unlikely, and yet, under the press of a more accessible pleasure, pursue *W* or, out of 'weakness of will' (*KET*, p. 52), fail to pursue *Y*. We have to count these as failures of practical rationality', and this alone, Wood claims allows us in successful cases to say that 'we adhered to a rational principle', the normative force of which cannot be itself said to depend on a prior desire (wanting to be a good hypothetical imperative follower, say) but which can be said itself, 'on its own', as a rational principle to which we are committed simply as agents, to create a desire.

Before the Kantian specifics are introduced, this is though already close to begging the question for most naturalists or skeptics. The latter would concede (Hume certainly did, say) that the acknowledgment of some piece of information (that *Y* is the best means to get *X*) can 'create' a desire for *Y*, or that the realization that *W* will impede the pursuit of *X*, 'create' an aversion to *W*. But there is no particular reason, at least not without further ado, to explain this by appealing to a subject's adherence to any principle about 'what a rational agent should do'. The usual image is that such beliefs about efficiency and impediments act more like gates or shunts (or dams) for desire;¹⁰ the point being that all the motivational force (our motive for acting) still remains the desire for *X*. It might get re-routed 'on the way to getting *X*' because of some fact we learn, or it might get blocked once we realize that *W* can't lead to *X*, but there is no reason to think some principled *adherence* to a hypothetical imperative is at work.¹¹

What does happen in cases of failure is also more controversial than Wood allows, concerns the very possibility of hypothetical imperatives, and is made much more difficult by Kant's doctrine of maxims. That is, since Kant seems to make acting on reasons (maxims) criterial for action (for an event being counted as an action), there is reason to expect that the familiar Socratic paradoxes will arise in cases of apparent weakness. If I tell myself I have formulated policy *P* (to pursue *X* and to avoid the impeding *W*) and yet seek out *W* anyway, this could either be counted as a case of weakness and a failure of practical rationality (implying an original, motivating adherence to a pure practical principle), or the *discovery* that my policy was *not P*, but something like *P'*, where the immediate satisfactions of *W* occasionally, in some circumstances, turn out to be worth more to me. There is no failure of practical rationality; there is just a failure of knowledge or ignorance about my overall good or my own principle.¹² (If there were a *wholesale breakdown*

in practical rationality, we couldn't count the event an action.) There is rather just the shattering of the illusion that I had the policy I took myself to have. This is of course paradoxical, but some reason has to be given for preferring the weakness to the disillusionment model, and the *prima facie* problem for the weakness view (keeping the action an action) is serious. (In denying that desires can serve as motivational explanations all by themselves [see below] Wood and Kant themselves have created this problem. If to act is to act on reasons, *principled* allegiances to some and not other satisfactions, based on a view about the objective goodness of the ends, then failure to follow an explicit project should not be called weakness, as if desire pulled us away – desires can't do that – but a realization about what we *actually count* as worthwhile, or as *real* adherence to *another* maxim.)

To establish that it is something like a failure of practical rationality that is happening in such weakness cases, and not the discovery of what was worth more to me, Wood mounts a more general attack on what he calls the 'prejudice' or 'dogma' of naturalists that only desires can motivate action. This cannot be the case, he argues for Kant, because desires cannot be said 'on their own' to motivate at all. If they did, it would have to be by 'pushing' and causing, and we would not have action at all. Wood thus adopts a version of a view (which Kant clearly did hold, at least in the *Religion* book) that, contrary to the naturalists, desires can motivate only if I count them as sufficiently motivating. Some anticipated pleasure can play a role as motivating an action of mine, only if I make its satisfaction into a maxim, count it, in other words, as pleasant enough, or worth enough to me, for me to pursue it. (All of which is so far quite plausible, simply in view of the fact that one can experience plenty of desires, some very intense, which one would never act on, or even be tempted to act on.)¹³

But what are we then to say about which maxim we count as a sufficient reason to act? How do we make such decisions? If desires can motivate only as 'incorporated' into maxims, how then does a consideration of such possible satisfactions play any role in our decision? (Again, commitment to rationality as a factor in our self worth seems to have no real work to do. Practical reflection reflects *from* a base or 'motivational set' that cannot itself be the product of reflection simply because reason alone cannot adjudicate such disputes or, relying wholly on itself, set ends to pursue. Wood wants to say that the basis for such a decision must be a determination of the 'objective goodness' of the end [cf. *KET*, pp. 128–9].) If we are persuaded that whatever over-determination there might be cannot be a matter of various individual 'forces' tugging and pulling, then by contrast and just as implausibly, our inner mental life begins to look like a debating society, wholly a matter of 'maxim deliberation', wherein I try to adjudicate which principle of action ought to have rational authority, whether there is really a 'more compelling reason' to eat the dessert than to watch my cholesterol. It seems likely that we

will very soon reach a point where, according to Kant, there can be no basis in reasoning alone to adjudicate such matters, and we are on the verge of taking all the emotional life out of conflict and confusion in life and this is phenomenologically quite odd. In cases where we do not follow a long term plan and act instead for the sake of short term pleasure, would we now have to say that what we did was to count (erroneously) as more ‘rationally compelling’ the maxim that short-term pleasure is really worth more than long-term gain? What does imprudence mean on the ‘incorporation’ view except this?¹⁴ And how can it be ‘reason’ adjudicating possible ends to pursue when Kant denies that reason (alone) is capable of ranking kinds of lives or states of being. Setting and pursuing ends may indeed be a matter of *reasoning*, but a good deal more is implied when we claim that reason ‘sets’ the ends of life.¹⁵

Perhaps Wood is thinking of the kind of argument Thomas Nagel provided in *The Possibility of Altruism*, designed to show why no one could have a policy of imprudence, or could be at all concerned about short-term goals and *not* be concerned about the long-term possibility of satisfying such short-term goals.¹⁶ Whatever the full argument, the thesis itself, the claim that *reason can be directly practical in nonmoral cases*, is the foundation on which Wood’s entire book rests. As indicated before, Wood wants to claim that a ‘substantive value’ underlies all of Kant’s ethical position: ‘humanity’, or the ‘rational capacity to set ends’. Moral life consists in expressions of respect for, and avoiding disrespecting, this capacity. It is thus extremely important to know what is meant by ‘reason sets our ends’, before we ask why the possession of such a capacity should give anyone else a reason to do anything. Wood’s claim is that while sometimes reason sets an end in response to a desire (and even here it is important to say that an agent sets the end, it is not set ‘by’ the desire) even in such cases, the desire can fade in intensity, no longer motivate as a felt need or impetus, and yet the subject can still hold to her original policy to seek the end. In such cases, she must be adhering to a norm (of instrumental reason), or acting on the capacity of reason to set and direct us towards, ends.¹⁷

This seems to me an overstatement of the fact that the mere experience of a desire need not impel me to do anything. This can easily be granted. But then we face the question: what then happens when an end is set, and what is the moral significance of this capacity? Wood’s claim that the subject subscribes to a *normative principle that the end should be pursued for the sake of what is believed to be some objective good for the subject* makes it sound like the reason I may have begun with – satisfaction of my desire – has, now that the desire has faded, transformed itself somehow into a direct and independent commitment ‘to a norm’, and it suggests that reason can do something that Kant tirelessly insists that it cannot do: determine the objective goodness of a kind of life or state of being.¹⁸ This issue will return below.

Formal Law and Substantive Value

One of the most interesting aspects of Wood's treatment of Kant is the scope of the criticisms that he is willing to concede to Kant's detractors. This is best on view in the third Chapter, as Wood prepares for his own positive reconstruction. To some extent, he simply grants the Hegelian formalism objection, even if not for Hegel's reasons (which aren't very good), and as an aspect of an otherwise basically sympathetic interpretation. That is, Wood argues, it is not true that Kant can derive his first formulations of the moral law (FUL and FLN) from the 'concept of the categorical imperatives (CI)', that is, from the very notion of a practical law that commands unconditionally. Strictly speaking, CI only commands that one adopt only those maxims that 'conform to law', but this does not tell us which laws, or, beyond simple avoidance of contradiction and claim to universality, what makes a practical law a practical law. We can already see, Wood argues, what is most deeply at stake for Kant in his assertion of FUL and FLN, when we notice that what matters in the famous tests themselves is the invocation of the concept of 'the will of a rational being' (*KET*, p. 81). We are asking ourselves in these tests, either what sort of universalized version of a maxim could *be* a universal law for such a will (the 'Contradiction in Conception' test) or what sort of universalized version of a maxim we could, without self-contradiction (given the end set in our maxim itself) *will* to be a universal law (the Contradiction in Willing test). But we have no idea yet why the appeal to 'what *could* be willed' in either sense is so important (it certainly is not derivable from CI itself), or even why failing to respect such a condition is wrong; why, somehow, our failing to respect what could be rationally willed, is the core of moral failure. Wood is thus clearing the ground for his own version of the strength of Kant's basic theory, that, for example, the 'worth of humanity *provides us with an overriding reason grounding objective principles* or categorical imperatives that is not dependent on our empirical desires but proceeds solely from our own rational faculties' (*KET*, p. 77, my emphasis). We will need the concept of a rational nature as end in itself, and finally the notion of rational will as making universal law, before the full dimensions of this objective value theory are on the table, and before the claim that FUL and FLN are mere 'preliminary' formulations of such a theory, that Kant's examples using such tests are therefore quite flawed, incomplete, and finally inconclusive, can be defended.

There is much of value in Wood's detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the second section of the *G* here, and he is surely right to concede that these formulations are not derivable from CI, that they work only with contentious assumptions, that they generate plenty of false positives and false negatives, and at the best they show only permissibility (and impermissibility),¹⁹ and cannot get us to positive obligations. But Kant's

famous critics seem to have stopped reading *G* in the middle of the second section, and so never argued against the fullest and richest dimension of the theory, the theory of objective value. (This also means that, contrary to some of Kant's own formulations, many aspects of the heart of his case are not derived purely a priori, and Wood does not count that as an objection, but as a strength of the theory as a whole.) It also means that Wood must defend claims like: the basic principle of Kantian morality is *both* a categorical imperative *and* an 'objective value' (*KET*, p. 78), a combination that many critics deny is even possible; and that we should stop 'trying to pretend that FUL [the Formula of Universal Law] and FNL [the Formula of the Law of Nature] are sufficient for moral deliberation' (*KET*, p. 97) and concede that these are only preliminary versions of the Formula of Humanity as End in Itself, and the Formula of Autonomy and the Realm of Ends [those 'objective values' again]. The core of that theory is presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Kantian Values

Wood's view is that, so far, up until the *G* discussions of FH and FAE, Kant has only described a necessary condition, the form a maxim must be able to assume if it is to count objectively as morally appropriate. But he has not yet, as he puts it himself, 'connected' such a principle with a 'rational will', and has not intended to claim a complete picture of what is involved in our adherence to a moral principle. The fact that the maxims must be able to take this form was only meant to be the preliminary to a wider argument about what 'subjectively', for the agent, counts as a reason to adhere to such a restriction. Otherwise, if what a good will was in some sense 'after' was itself simply the satisfaction of such a formal condition, we would certainly be back to the traditional legalist deontologist, with all the traditional formalist and rigorist objections. The object of the analysis here, doing something 'because it is the morally right thing to do', can be partially analyzed by attention to the form which the maxims of such an agent would assume, but this would only be partial, would not yet concern the agent's reasons for taking on such a restriction. What the agent must be presumed to be 'positively' striving for, what value she is keeping faith with, requires a deeper and fuller account. If this (conforming to a formal requirement) is what we were after, the most that could be said is that we were just striving to make our actions 'permissible', and 'because it's permitted' is never a sufficient ground for doing anything' (*KET*, p. 113).²⁰

But what is important now is brought out clearly in the distinction Kant draws between 'the ground of legislation' as lying 'objectively [in] the form of universality' and 'subjectively in the end' (i.e. the end in itself) (*G*, p. 431; *KET*, p. 113, my emphasis). The full concept of an action always requires this introduction of an end in order to account for the subjective motivation of any

agent acting in a morally permissible or obligatory way. This is not an end to be produced, or a material end which gives us a reason to act because of the desires that the attainment of that end would satisfy, but a 'self-subsistent end' (*selbständiger Zweck*), respectful adherence to which 'produces' desires and aversions in anyone so adhering to such a policy, just by virtue of the fact that the agent has committed herself to that principle.

Understanding the issues this way helps introduce Kant's strong claim at *G* 428. 'Supposing, however, that there were something whose existence in itself had an absolute worth, which, as end in itself could be the ground of determinate laws, then in it and it alone would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, that is, a practical law.' But if an analysis of the concept of an action requires attention to the end sought, and a moral action requires a self-subsistent end of inestimable worth, how in the world could Kant demonstrate that there *is* something of such worth, and also in a way that can explain our duty to respect such an end?

The answer cannot of course lie in any sort of realist metaphysics, as if pure reason, or some sort of intuitional faculty, could reveal the presence of values, especially such a distinct one, in the world. So Kant must pursue a different strategy. Again, the questions are: what is such a morally worthy end in itself, and what sort of argument could support the claim that such a value has some sort of inescapable claim on us and our actions?

'Humanity' is Kant's answer to the first question, understood as 'the rational capacity to set ends'. And an 'inference from the objective goodness of the end to the unconditionally objective goodness of the capacity to set the end' (*KET*, p. 127) is the argument appealed to as the answer to the second question. Both answers raise several questions.

It is true that Kant writes as if he wanted to identify human nature essentially with 'the capacity to set ends'. The ends we pursue, especially the comprehensive general ends that emerge as the result of pragmatic reflection, organization and hierarchical ordering, are not set for humans by nature, in a purely instinctual way, and in *that* sense we can say that '*we* set such ends'. We have no naturally determined niche and must set our own. In order to have general goals, we must deliberate and resolve on some to the exclusion of others. But we are also finite creatures and set any such end in a quite limited context, always – and this is the crucial point – in response to and in the service of ('always already') a desire for happiness. (Cf. Wood's formulation on *KET*, p. 119: 'humanity in this highest [pragmatic or prudential] aspect involves "rational" or "comparative" self-love . . .') We have already seen that, for Wood, such planning requires the formulation of some sort of rational plan which we must hold to (thereby, in Wood's view, already demonstrating – quite surprisingly, without requiring any of the baroque complexities of the *Second Critique* on the 'fact of reason' – that reason can be practical all by itself). He also argued that our holding to such a plan

expresses ‘an esteem for myself’, or an ideal self worth that itself helps to demonstrate how reason by itself can set and keep faith with such an end in a way not just responsive to desires, but which originally directs and helps create motivating desires. And so the same issue raised at the end of Section I above rises to prominence here once again.

The simplest way to restate the point would be to note that the practical activity of reasoning goes on in a human condition so limited as to render any true self-determination (rational end-*setting*) by a pragmatic reason impossible. Our talents, capacities, needs, desires, weaknesses and so forth form the background without which I would have no pragmatic decisions to make. It would be far too unfair to Kant to take this point about finitude to imply (as his claims sometimes seem to) a simplistic, egoistic, hedonism in nonmoral deliberation and action, as if I am always acting directly ‘for the sake of my pleasure’ in the formulation of any policy. Of course I do not care for my children in order to receive the pleasure and satisfaction such attention brings *me*. I care for them because I am concerned with *their* welfare as my end, not mine. But it is also misleading to infer that their well-being is thereby an ‘intrinsic’ value or a good in itself that reason alone can ‘set’. I do not reason out that their welfare is an objective good. I cannot help the needs and feelings I have in a family life, and I formulate my pragmatic plans about my children not because of any rational reflection on ‘why one ought to do things for children’ (there is no objective measure of possible material ends, according to Kant), but because of the needs, emotional ties and love that I experience as requiring a plan in the first place, and in the service of which I act. And I don’t have to be *experiencing* an emotion such as great sympathy for their suffering to be able to say that many of my actions are intended to alleviate their suffering, all because of my inextricable attachment to them. It is also not the case that I can say that in so acting for them, I reveal ‘an esteem for myself which . . . is what holds me to my rational plan’ (*KET*, p. 119). This is just as implausible as the ascription of a crude hedonism to Kant. My holding through thick and thin, and through the temptations of egoism, to a plan for the well-being of my children surely does not manifest an end set purely by reason, and what holds me to my plan is surely not how attached I am to my worth as a rational end-setter; all even though a lot of reasoning is going on as I determine what to do. It is my love for my children, expressed and effected in as rationally reflected a way as possible. But these latter reflections are not the ‘source’ of the ends, and my keeping faith with the ends has to do with their matter-of-fact importance to me, not any ultimate sense of my own self worth.

This means that the question Wood himself raises – why does Kant say that what deserves respect is humanity, this general capacity to set ends, and not ‘personality’, our capacity to legislate wholly autonomously a purely practical law and submit ourselves to it – is doubly difficult.²¹ If Buck

comes to adulthood wanting to be a rodeo cowboy and begins a life-plan directing him to that goal, whence the 'awe' we are supposed to feel at his ability to forgo short-term pleasures for *that* long term end? It surely cannot stem from our acknowledgment that such a life goal has been 'set' by reason (see the last paragraph), and even Wood says, somewhat startlingly, 'Kant, however, proposes to ground categorical imperatives on the worth of any being having humanity; that is the capacity to set ends from reason, *irrespective of whether its will is good or evil*' (KET, pp. 120–1, my emphasis). We are, though, not wholly setting ends from reason and it is puzzling to esteem a capacity that can also be used for evil ends.²² (There is no question in such a case that 'I' set the end to be pursued; it certainly doesn't 'get set' in any other way. Or that I try to reason out 'what would be best for me' in such end-setting. But, again, this is all a long way from 'reason' setting the end, by determining 'objective goodness'. I start out in such deciding with a vast number of contingent commitments, needs, desires, beliefs [some of them likely self-deceived], and interpretations, all of which have not been part of any rational determination of objective goodness. So if I believe that God wants me to manifest His glory by exhibiting my talents in as public a way as possible, and I can ride well, I might set the end of rodeo cowboying. But what Wood's position in this case requires – the idea that reason is determining objective goodness, not to mention the awe I am supposed to feel before it all – is quite a stretch.)

Perhaps there is a better argument supporting this claim of an end-in-itself. Since the critical aspect of Kant's philosophy requires him to claim that any assertion about ultimate value is 'indemonstrable', he can have recourse only to a kind of practical argument, one that shows that *in* deliberating, deciding and acting at all, 'we already do (and that we must) value this way', or esteem rational nature as an end in itself. So, somewhat tortuously, we do not show that an object *has* a property; we show that in acting we *take* it (and must take it) to have this property. This position is of course consistent with the claim that it really doesn't have such a property and what we go about assuming or having to assume is nevertheless false. This way of proceeding already has obvious weaknesses.

Wood's interpretation of this argument is a variant of Korsgaard's 'regress from conditions' take on this issue (a variant that Wood claims supplies the argument missing in Korsgaard's account [KET, p. 127].) There are three essential steps to this argument. First, there is the claim that the setting of any end must ascribe *objective* goodness to that end. If this can be established, then, second, we can show that such objective goodness cannot be discovered as a real property. A state or project can be called good only by virtue of the quality of the reasons available to justify such ascription or conferring of value. But, third, if the source of all value is this capacity to confer value rationally, then that capacity itself cannot be said to be valuable in this way; it

must be a good in itself, and, by virtue of the links of inference we have already seen, it is clear that we would be allowed to claim that in acting at all, the objective value of rationality as an end-in-itself is, perhaps implicitly, being acknowledged.

It remains quite unclear, though, how Wood would have us take the original premise. If, upon due reflection, I conclude that being a rodeo cowboy would be 'best' for me, insure the compossibility of what I desire most, would make me happiest and least frustrated, it does not seem at all plausible to claim that this can be the result of such deliberation only if I have reason to claim that rodeo cowboy-ing is the best human life, full stop. Wood comes close to attributing that position to Kant, claiming in effect that if they are to count as true (justifying) reasons, then the reasons relevant to what I decide to do cannot be 'agent-relative', but must be 'agent neutral'. I suspect that this is because he has already assumed that in nonmoral cases, reason alone is setting ends, and has already rejected the picture of the restricted, limited, finite, hardly self-legislating from the bootstraps up, frail creature described above (the creature that we actually are). But while value might be conferred as a result of some deliberation that involves reasoning, in finite, sensibly affected situations, it surely cannot be wholly set by appeal to reasons alone, but must be responsive in various ways to on-going commitments, traditions one has inherited and carries on almost habitually, desires and lacks already in play. (Surely it is sufficient to characterize such ends as rationally set if I maintain that anyone in my unique position would decide likewise. But this is far away from what Wood is claiming about objective value.)²³ If not responsive in this way, since Kant has also critically eliminated the possibility of objective criteria to fix kinds of lives as really higher and lower, there would be no basis for reason to set a value or not.²⁴

Thus when Wood concludes that Kant 'holds that the objectivity of the will's prescriptions comes from the rational capacity to set *ends having objective value*' (*KET*, p. 129, my emphasis), he is saddling Kant with a great deal of baggage; too much, as I see it, for the position to hold up. If end-setting is as finite as claimed above, then it is not really reason alone which is able to confer value on ends, and so while acting in a practically rational way commits an agent to a kind of commitment to the value of rationality itself (in the sense that anyone *prudentially* responsive to such commitments, desires, and needs is committed to reason itself having some value in a satisfying life), we are nowhere near a defense of the claim that humanity is an *inestimable* end-in-itself. If rational nature *were* 'the prescriptive source of all objective goodness', then it *would* be the case 'that the most fundamental object of respect or esteem' must be such rational nature. But it is not; how could it be in Kant's critically limited universe?²⁵

This is of course why it is so important to be careful about what 'reason sets our ends on the basis of a determination of objective goodness of those ends'

means. That is the heart of the claim that reason is the absolute and sole source of all human value and that claim is the heart of the argument about why I have a reason (am bound) to respect unconditionally the rational capacity in all others to set ends. If reasoning is just one of the factors involved in ends getting set, the consistency claim would just show that I cannot consistently attribute a role and importance to reasoning in my own case (whatever role it has, however great or small) that I deny to others. If, on the other hand, reason is the 'absolute condition of all value', there is no such variance possible. Reason in all of us has the status of an absolute value.

I have been maintaining that the claim that 'reason sets ends on the basis of determining objective goodness' is misleading and cannot be Kant's position, because I take 'objective goodness' in what is its common cognitivist meaning (that some end is objectively better or objectively worse than others, full stop). Whereas Wood wants Kant to say: take out the full stop, and you will see that reason can determine what is objectively *better or worse* for me, and it will also be easier to see that nothing else could determine which end I pursue other than reason in that sense. At which point I insist that this is far afield from objective goodness, and even in the 'for me' sense, there cannot be an 'objective' answer to this question, as objective is normally understood. What makes rodeo cowboying better for me must be completely relativized to what I regard as more important in life (fame, the truth, the will of God), and then, even my determination of what should be the most important in *that* sense must again be relativized to considerations that I count as weighty in this sense. I just cannot see how one would be entitled to call all of this 'setting ends on the basis of a determination of objective goodness'. It is clear how Wood wants to describe it, and why, but I cannot get around the above relativization and come out on the other side with any usable notion of objective.

Having come this far at least can be said to reveal the complexities in a version of Kant as a substantive value theorist. This is because the very idea that an objective end-in-itself, our rational nature, gives us reasons to act, all suggests a familiar teleological kind of reasoning. A certain state of being or mind is better, and so gives us stronger reasons to pursue it, just in case it can be said to further or promote what it must be assumed we are seeking to realize or fulfill: our distinct natures. But the Kantian, or Wood's Kantian, veers off here. The reason-giving character of such an end does not come from some overall benefit (i.e. happiness, contentment). Rather, we are obligated to respect such an end, unconditionally, apart from any reason connected to benefit. This is of course what non-Kantians have always had so much trouble understanding, especially when the Kantian project is framed more substantively and somewhat teleologically (with the language of ends). We get this far, in the Aristotelian neighborhood, as it were, with a substantive value identified (end setting determined by reason), but then *its*

intrinsic value is not defended teleologically or by any appeal to natural purposes or any kind of contentment. Somehow the value-conferring capacity itself has its value conferred.

In sum, the position ascribed to Kant and articulated by Wood makes very clear how the whole position is supposed to fit together. What is morally important is somehow bringing about ‘more respect for each as an equally entitled end in itself’, doing what we can to see to it that that occur, and this is much more important than trying to arrange my psychological inclinations so that I can resist inclination and do my duty for duty’s sake. Kant tries to make an epistemological point with his examples about the latter, but he tries much harder to help us understand how human beings, sensibly inclined and finite beings that they are, can do what they can to bring about the state of ‘greater respect for each as an end-in-itself’ and why they might hope that some progress in this direction is possible. Fair enough, but this clarity also makes clear where such a position begins to veer off from Kant’s own arguments about *why* we must respect others as ends in themselves, indeed why we are *duty* bound to do so, and why relying on anything other than the call of duty in such respect is morally dangerous.

II. Part Two

The Role of Anthropology

Wood’s most important final remark in Part One is his account of the ways in which Kant understood various empirical claims about human nature, and the development of human being within a lifetime and across generations, to be an integral part of his ‘ethical thought’. There can be, according to Kant, an ‘anthropology from a practical point of view’. Broad empirical generalizations about human nature and development might be relevant to an account of human being, when such human being is *also* assumed to be free and capable of acting morally. The old Hegelian formalism criticisms to one side, it is, after all, still possible to claim that we know, at this point in the argument, very little indeed about what actually *counts* as respectful treatment in a relevant sense, or especially what would count, given the particular sorts of practices and beliefs of a stage of, or in a particular sort of, civilization, as the proper respect for another’s autonomy, and how also to determine the possibility of mutual and reciprocal end-satisfaction, given the assumption of a set of one sort or another sort of facts. Wood is quite right that Kant has views about these matters, and right that they have, until recently, been neglected, or have been marginalized (as if these matters concern only the empirical conditions favorable to the doing of moral duty, as in the influential interpretations of Paton and Gregor).

The question at issue though concerns the precise role that Kant's anthropological and historical claims can be said to play in the complete version of the moral theory itself. Kant's sometimes, let us say, colorful views about human nature are not, after all, in any obvious sense relevant to the claims that pure reason can be practical, that morality is a matter of pure reason's being practical, nor directly relevant to the specification of the form, the matter, and the 'complete determination' involved in pure reason being so practical. Kant *is* concerned, as a clear element of his moral theory, with what he calls the 'incentive' of morality, and this account of the feeling of 'respect' and the role it plays in moral motivation does involve psychological claims about how our affective natures actually function. And he also has views about how, under what conditions, finite, happiness-seeking creatures like us could better keep faith with our moral vocation over an entire life, or concerned with beliefs, or 'postulates', about God, the freedom of the will, and immortality, but Wood does not discuss these connections to Kant's psychological presuppositions. He deals instead with a much more extensive and ambitious set of claims, culled from Kant's lectures on anthropology and lectures on ethics, as well as passages from the *MM*.

There are several options here, several ways to understand the role that Kant's most general anthropological and historical views might play in his moral theory.²⁶ These views certainly could be intended by Kant to play a role in a general case against any empirically based theory of morality. (Given who we really are, according to Kant, how 'crooked' or 'radically evil' and weak, the empirical facts about human beings could support no possible system of anything even remotely resembling morality.)

But the question Wood raises is motivated by a greater ambition. Here is one formulation.

It will obviously require empirical knowledge of human nature to determine which ends suitably honor the rational nature of human beings and which ends are contrary to the respect we owe to human dignity. Further, no attempt to determine the laws that will unite the ends of rational beings into a realm can afford to ignore what ends such beings are empirically disposed to accept (*KET*, p. 195).

However, there is no particular reason to think that what, in a particular society at a particular time, actually comes to count in a community as a sign of respect for such dignity, or what comes historically to count as the 'ends such beings are empirically disposed to accept', need have any moral significance at all. As Wood himself honestly points out, what Kant personally thought about the empirical and historical realizations of his moral theory include views that range from the ludicrous to clear cut cases of racist, prejudiced, sexist, and other morally unacceptable commitments. And there are no doubt many contemporary practices sincerely understood by participants to *be* marks of respect (say in protecting women from 'the male

gaze' and a form of 'reification' by keeping women in purdah) that are in themselves morally unacceptable. If this means that we must again rely on an independent pure moral criterion with enough substance or content *already* to direct judgment and action about such cases, then Kant's rather pessimistic and sometimes cynical account of human nature and historical change just provide possible examples of the exercise of such judgment, and no major alteration of the traditional view of Kantian formalism has occurred. Just as one might expect, morality in Kant is, strictly, the result of pure practical reason, and even when socialized habits in a just political order incline well-brought up citizens to the right thing, such pure reason must always be available (and is always available, in any society) as a check or court of final appeal. If, however, we mean something much stronger, that we never know what the moral claims amount to except when given content by what we know of human nature in time, then it would appear that we have no clear way to make the distinctions that, above, we clearly need to be able to make as Kantians. In sum, we can only claim either that the moral theory must be considered independent from the ethical practices taken to follow from it in specific circumstances, leaving the determination to a matter of judgment, for which no clear rules can be given (and this would correspond to the traditional interpretation of Kant as a moral theorist, not an ethical judge), or we would have to provide some reason to think (or as Kant often puts it, to 'hope') that the empirical results of history and the changing formative elements of human dependence and social organization (and so the meaning of rational self-determination and the changing notions of what count as respect) are all in fact leading to ever more morally approvable results, that we can trust the development of human nature more and more securely, that what we are coming to count as respect more and more is such respect. Kant does have some version of the latter option. And so Wood is right; he is not only talking about empirical means for the realization of morally determined ends. He is trying to talk about the substantive requirements of respecting humanity and working towards establishing the kingdom of ends. But it is by no means clear how this direction can be squared with his account of the role of pure practical reason.

One way to put the problem is the following: Wood has shown us what it means in Kant, in Kant's own terms, to take seriously the Hegelian claim that morality as an institution is not complete, cannot be 'actual' (*wirklich*), except in terms of some particular 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*), in terms of some determinate set of some society's assumptions and interpretations about the fundamental value that Wood claims is Kant's. (As in Hegel, moral motivation would also in Kant have to be a matter of being socialized or habituated in such a well-ordered society, and not primarily a matter of a solitary, even noumenal, individual constantly checking pure practical reason.) But there is no such thing as a half-hearted Hegelianism. If one

travels this far, one has to face the daunting task of understanding something like historical rationality, a much more controversial way of understanding the relation between individual and social whole, an account of the distinctiveness and 'un-overcomeable' quality of the modern notion of freedom and right, and the specter of claims like 'philosophy [and morality] is its own age comprehended in thought', and so forth.²⁷ Without further qualification, such a slippery slope will end with a very different notion of reason (more like participating in a historical practice than methodologically determining universalizability) and even a very different sort of freedom (being in a certain sort of self-related and other-regarding state, rather than having some determining power).²⁸

Wood's ambitious claim about the indispensability of Kant's anthropological and historical views raises many other, similarly broad, even more difficult questions. The first is obviously the epistemological status of the claims about history's purposive development. The substantive Kantian claims – that the basic human condition is one of 'unsocial sociability', or of a need for cooperation that also engenders the discord of envy, pride, and greed that undermines such cooperation, and that this condition has a natural purpose, the perfection of our distinct natures, of our capacity to set ends through reason (and so that this end is not happiness)²⁹ – raise the question of the status of teleological principles in general. While Wood claims that the justification of such claims is that they 'maximize intelligibility' (*KET*, p. 219) no Kantian argument is defended against the counter that it is simply untrue that such a teleological principle in general, and the rational perfectibility claim in particular, are *necessary* to understand human history, to render it 'intelligible'. There are plenty of 'one damn thing after another' theories of history around nowadays that do not seem unintelligible.

In other words, it is true, as Wood says, that for Kant the purpose of history is the development of the 'species capacities' of human beings, especially their capacity to set and pursue their own ends. Whatever purpose is ascribed to historical change cannot be directed at or realized by individuals, especially given their very limited life spans. This, together with the fact that Kant does not believe that this historical development is a result of consciously held ideals, but occurs in some sense 'behind the backs of individuals', leads him to call Kant's position a sort of 'historical materialism'. This is, while intriguing (see especially the account on *KET*, pp. 294–5), also misleading, since the core doctrine of freedom in Kant, autonomy, is not *conditioned* by any greater productive capacity of the species and seems in itself independent of such technological and political advances. The problem of the sort of link (if any) between the development of these non-moral powers and the source of our equal moral worth (personality) is, I am trying to argue in several different ways, the unsolved problem in Wood's book.³⁰

The same issue arises in Wood's emphasis on Kant's theory of the ethical commonwealth. 'Since the origin of evil is social, 'so must be the struggle against it' (*KET*, p. 314). We will not be able to effect the inner conversion necessary for moral goodness without the help of others. And again, while it is true that such a common struggle would be necessary for the attainment of the highest good, this still does not show (nor could it) that there is any condition, social or otherwise, for the possibility of moral goodness itself. As is clearest in the second Critique's discussion of incentives, moral progress can have nothing to do with the experience of moral duty itself, with any capacity to appreciate better or more directly acknowledge, moral duty. Any such improvement can only be a matter of *decreasing* the motivating power and influence of immoral ends and incentives, and that sort of assistance does not touch on or qualify the moral theory itself.³¹

At this point, however, it is difficult to press the issue further. No book can discuss everything, and, despite these disagreements, there is no question that Wood's *Kant's Ethical Thought* is one of the most distinctive, provocative, and philosophically rich studies to have appeared in several years. I have been ignoring some of its most valuable and original contributions (especially about Kant's understanding of sociality, the ethical commonwealth, and moral progress; or, one might say, the Kantian theory of *Sittlichkeit*) in order to concentrate on three foundational issues:

- (1) What it means in Kant for 'reason to set ends' in nonmoral cases.
- (2) What the moral significance of this capacity is, given how we describe it. (That is, what that capacity might give me reasons to do or forbear from doing.)
- (3) How to deal with complexly motivated cases, given the great importance Kant lays on moral worth being tied to a subject's maxims.

This sort of criticism however is compatible with a deep agreement with Kant (and Wood) about the moral ideal itself (equal moral status as an end-in-itself) and concerns only Kant's reasons for claiming that it is a binding ideal, and his account of what it is to 'respect' it. The practical 'regress' argument considered above seems to me to have as little chance for success in that regard as committing Kant to a full blown teleology, a mysterious Sartrean moment of 'election', the *Groundwork*'s 'deduction', or the *Faktum der Vernunft* 'demonstration' in the second Critique.³² However, at this point, we inevitably reach that *ratio essendi* for which the moral theory serves as such a complex *ratio cognoscendi*: Kant's theory of freedom. To resolve questions like those sketched above, we also need to know much more about the core concept of freedom at issue, and as Hegel reminds us and as Kant already appreciated (as Wood has shown), a great deal more about what counts as the 'actuality' or realization of such freedom in the world.

NOTES

- 1 There are scores of controversial ways of distinguishing morality from ethics. I mean something pretty general, along the lines of the difference between questions about what we are forbidden to do, what we are obligated to do, what sort of treatment we owe all others just as persons, all on the one hand, and questions about what is the best way to live, what goals are the most worth striving for, what it is to develop and maintain a good character, etc., on the other hand.
- 2 Wood's study relies heavily on an analysis of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, the *Metaphysics of Morals* itself, and various of Kant's lectures in practical philosophy. References to Kant's texts in the following are to *Immanuel Kants Schriften, Ausgabe der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902). Page numbers to this edition, for the most part to the *Grundlegung* (referred to as *G*) are to volume 4.
- 3 The most influential has been the interpretation of Barbara Herman. Cf. also the work of Marcia Baron, Felicia Munzel, Andrews Reath, Nancy Sherman, to some extent Christine Korsgaard, and Tom Hill. For a more general discussion of the rigorism objections, see my 'Rigorism and the New Kant', forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the IX International Kant Kongress*.
- 4 Compare what Wood says about this issue, *KET*, p. 22. This is all complicated by the fact that Kant, on the one hand, is quite prepared to admit that we probably never know our own or others' motives well enough ever to apply the criterion of moral worth, and, on the other hand, is quite interested in distinguishing somehow mere legality, or acting in conformity with duty, from morally worthy actions done from duty. The possibility of the latter must be defensible if the basic claim of Kant's theory is to be defended – that *pure* reason can be practical. This Kantian strategy of defending the possibility of morality, while denying that we will ever be able to recognize an instance of it, is clearly what drove to frustration his successors in the idealist tradition.
 So, while it is true that 'not meriting moral worth' does *not* mean 'meriting blame', and true that many critics miss this point, nevertheless, the over-determination and rigorism problems attending the moral worth problem itself are not thereby eliminated. For example, Kant clearly has to worry in some sense that education in moral virtue might be *so* empirically successful in training our sentiments that we almost instinctively respond to morally salient elements of our experience with the right reaction. We cannot, though, in the Kantian world, respond like this, like trained pets, and deserve approval. But the only thing that saves his account from this paradox (habituate the emotions, but not 'too much') are the claims about radical evil, and so the claim that such a completely successful result is just empirically impossible; so impossible that we need not worry about it, should go ahead and try as vigorously as we can to tame the passions in education, without worrying that we will succeed too well. That seems an ad hoc and question-begging response.
- 5 One might claim that this does not follow; that *Hochschätzung* might indeed be higher praise, but not imply that achieving the state wherein it becomes relevant should be a *goal* of action. Great courage under fire, say, is an admirable trait, but one would not conclude that I ought to seek out circumstances when I might demonstrate it. But this just introduces a longer story.
- 6 Compare the *Groundwork*, 'For, in morals the proper and inestimable worth of an absolutely *good will* consists in the freedom from *all* influences from contingent grounds which only experience can furnish' (*G*, p. 426, my emphasis). It is true that in this passage Kant is talking about what is 'prejudicial' to the purity of moral practice, but it would take quite a stretch to read this passage as only about rhetorically effective ways of praising action. It appears to mean just what it says: that moral worth is exhausted by acting strictly ('freedom from *all* influences') according to duty.
- 7 In other discussions, Kant does not say, for example, that someone's maxim might be 'to lie', and his end or incentive might be 'to extricate himself from difficult circumstances'. The former cannot count as a maxim, and the proper statement of the maxim is: 'whenever you need to lie to extricate yourself from difficult circumstances, lie'.

- 8 Wood himself later, chapter 4, 3.2, seems to want to identify the good will with an 'acting from duty' will (*KET*, p. 120). That, at least, is the only way his argument defending Kant's claim that humanity (not personality) is an end in itself would work (because otherwise the categorical imperative would depend on something 'doubtful', or an 'acting from duty alone' will.) He does this again at *KET*, p. 133. In fact, on this page, Wood himself cites passages where Kant does not ground the equal respect we deserve in the mere capacity to set ends rationally, but unequivocally grounds such respect on the capacity for morality. I don't understand how Wood can cite these passages in the context of a discussion that is trying to argue against the claim that we deserve respect for our personality, but more broadly for our 'humanity'.
- 9 Throughout his treatment, Wood sensibly tries to avoid making a successful disentangling of psychological motives and intentions a criterion for the success of Kant's theory. See 7.3, where he rightly concedes that the 'false positives' objections to FUL and FNL are justified, and rejects the defense that fixes the 'level' of our 'real' intention in order to get the required result. The philosophical intuitions are sound, I am claiming, but ultimately too much in Kant is being discarded for him to remain Kant.
- 10 This 'parallelogram of forces' picture is obviously crude, but the Humean points can be formulated primarily in terms of the motivational limitations of reason, without a clear position (crude or otherwise) on what exactly constitute motives to act.
- 11 Or adherence to a more general principle of rationality. Cf. Wood's account with the discussion in Thomas Hill's 'Kant's Theory of Practical Reason', in *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 127 ff., especially, 'When, for example, I forgo the temptation to eat the piece of pie which someone else has been saving, I do feel averse to eating it but the reason I acknowledge is not that I have a feeling of aversion but that the pie belongs to someone else' (pp. 137–8).
- 12 Wood mentions a version of such ignorance at *KET*, p. 110, but he construes it only as self-deceit and so, in some way, I suppose, something we are morally responsible for. The case of a maxim we take to be one on which we are acting, but which, for reasons other than self-deceit, is not the real maxim, raises different issues.
- 13 Actually, it is not all that clear what status desires are supposed to have in relation to practical reason. The difficulty arises with the very strong principle, '*Nihil appetimus, nisi sub ratione boni*' (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Ak, Bd. 5, p. 59, my emphasis) ('We desire nothing except under the reason that it is good'). Cf. Wood's gloss. (*KET*, p. 128). The trouble with his gloss is that Kant does not say: we *actually set an end*, come to *will* to achieve the end only under the reason that it is good. He says we only *desire* it under this condition, which, as Wood realizes, is a counter-intuitive claim, to say the least, and seems to suggest an extremely weak notion of 'good'.
- 14 These remarks bear on Allison's discussion of the implications of the incorporation thesis for the over-determination problem. *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), cf. pp. 117–26.
- 15 We can of course want or wish for something that we don't will to pursue. But that distinction need not mean that wanting it badly enough for one actually to form the resolve to pursue it must therefore be a result of 'reason setting the end'. (This is the inference that Wood often makes.) Reason cannot determine objective goodness in Kant, and if I determine that some goal is 'objectively good given my desires and preferences' what explains what I ultimately do is surely not my resolve not to violate the 'what a rational being would do' norm, but the direction my wanting the end has taken, given what reason tells me about means.
- 16 See Wood's remarks on Nagel in footnote 18, *KET*, p. 367. I am not sure why he (Wood) does *not* believe that there are no agent-relative reasons that can really count as reasons (justifying) and that there are only agent-neutral reasons. See *KET*, p. 128.
- 17 Here is an example of what Wood is thinking of: 'Suppose I set the end of meeting a student in my office at eight a.m. I realize that I won't be able to make this appointment unless I get up and dressed at seven am. The alarm rings at seven am. I find that I have no desire to employ the means to my end, and in fact I don't even *feel* any immediate desire for the end anymore. But setting an end is not just a function of *feeling desire*, it is laying down a normative principle for myself as a rational agent. I haven't rescinded my commitment to

- the end just because I don't have a desire for it at the moment. And still standing under that end as a norm, I recognize that the analytical imperative that I must take the necessary means is still binding on me as a rational agent too. So I rub the sleep out of my eyes, get dressed and go meet the student. No doubt in the course of reflecting on my rational commitments, there arose desires to meet the student, to get up, shave, pull on my pants, etc. But those desires were the result of an active commitment on my part to rational principles, they were not the original springs and principles moving me on this occasion. Notice that there is no moral reason involved in this example. I might be meeting the student in order to take a bribe for giving him a grade in my course or for some other morally indifferent or wicked end. The point is that what moved me fundamentally was commitment to an a priori practical principle, and not a felt desire. All the felt desires came about through my recognition of the principle and my determination to follow it'. (Correspondence, 12/99; my emphasis.) This example makes clear, I think, that Wood is concluding *from* the absence of a roaring emotional inclination to something like 'the only other kind of motive' that could explain my commitment, a rational commitment. As explained in the text, I find it fantastic to claim that the reason our bribe taker rolled himself out of bed is that he *recognized the rationality of doing so, and that he was committed to such rationality*. To the extent that is true, it simply involves his realization that getting out of bed is the only way he can accomplish the end he wants to happen ('wants' as a 'calm passion', regardless of what emotions are roaring through him).
- 18 Wood's position is that 'reason can determine the end to be pursued' and do so on the basis of a determination of 'objective goodness', all while conceding Kant's 'anti-Platonism', let us say, about value. As we shall see, the key issue is what it means to say (or what happens to the claim of 'objectivity', when we say) that reason can determine objective goodness for me, with respect to just my life.
- 19 I have one quibble with this claim. Wood disputes Herman's point (originally O'Neill's, I believe) that a determination of impermissibility is logically equivalent to an obligation. One may not (let us assume) have a maxim of never helping others, of non-beneficence. Herman and others assume that can only mean: I am therefore obligated to have *some* policy of aid. Wood replies that this ignores the possibility that I may just adopt no maxim with regard to beneficence, and thereby succeed in avoiding any *maxim* of non-beneficence. But it seems to me that Herman is as entitled to empirical premises here as Wood. One can assume that human life involves such complex inter-dependencies that there is, empirically, no option other than a strict disjunction (with respect to a general or policy maxim): either to aid or not aid; that there are never situations where such a choice is not ultimately necessary. If this is so, not 'not aiding' has to be 'aiding' and Herman is right. More colloquially, what would it mean not to have adopted a policy of *non-beneficence*, except that one aided? See 'Mutual Aid and respect for Persons', in Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) (hereafter *TPMJ*), pp. 45–72.
- 20 I note again, as in the previous note, that it is not entirely clear what justifies Wood's thinking of such a limitation as one unacceptable to Kant. One might easily rest content with a notion of morality that in no general sense told one 'what to do', or what policy ends to have, and only specified what we may not do and are morally permitted to do in the pursuit of nonmoral ends. Even when Kant introduces the notion of 'ends that are also duties', or obligatory ends, a consistent, 'weak' reading of what he means is possible – that Kant is just ruling out as impermissible a policy of absolute egotism and absolute indolence. Again, he would not be telling us what to do, just what is impermissible (what policy maxims) are permissible in what we are after. Likewise, if saying that in all actions we must respect others as ends in themselves only amounts to a similar sort of prohibition of certain policies, specified objectively in terms of the forms of our maxims, we will not have advanced very far away from the traditional Kant.
- 21 I remain unsure how exactly Wood wants us to consider the relation between these two expressions of value. By the time we are deep into chapter five, they are simply *both* mentioned as of utmost importance to Kant, as if he had, I suppose, a dual theory of value. See *KET*, p. 179 on 'the substantive values that ground Kant's ethical theory'. Moreover see Kant's discussion in *G*, p. 438. When he discusses what he calls 'humanity' or 'rational

- nature as an end in itself' and argues that it is a 'supreme limiting condition in the use of all means' (thereby also showing that, contrary to Wood, Kant is not averse to characterizing morality as having to do primarily with the impermissible), he also makes clear that the capacity he regards as intrinsically so valuable is 'giving *universal laws*', and very clearly states, 'Morality is thus the relation of actions to the autonomy of will, i.e. to possible universal lawgiving by maxims of the will'.
- 22 If the idea is to try to find the ultimate value that underlies Kant's project and can help explain what is going wrong when the demands of pure practical reason are ignored, or could help out a Kantian theory of moral deliberation (could help us understand when two courses of action are required but only one could be done, which is more choice-worthy or more valuable), then Barbara Herman's approach seems to me more consistent. She takes as strictly as possible Kant's expressed answer to this question: that the only unqualified good is a good will. 'Full conformity to what pure practical reason requires' is the ultimate *value* and FH 'adds no independent value content to the idea of conformity to the principles of practical rationality'. 'Leaving Deontology Behind', in *TPMJ*, p. 216, n.17. (Herman must still ask about the source for *this* claim of value. Why does the fact that we can rationally set ends or fully conform to what rational nature requires, give anyone a reason for unconditionally respecting that capacity?)
- 23 See the claim on *KET*, pp. 128–9 about 'the judgment by reason that the end is good', but then Wood's qualifications, 'at least relative to our desires and conditionally on the judgment that they should be satisfied'. In correspondence, Wood has claimed that he does not want to maintain that a kind of Platonic reason fastens onto an objective good, and concedes that in non-moral self-legislation, we are not *wholly* autonomous and that we reason 'from' restricted standpoints. But the point of importance for him is that ends do not just *get set* instinctively. The key claim is that *we* must set ends *as* deliberating agents (even if in a finite and restricted way); nothing will do it 'for us'. And thus we must do nothing that is inconsistent with holding everyone to be an agent *in this sense*, as an end setter, not an instinct driven end-pursuer.
- 24 This is also an issue for Hill's interpretation. One of the crucial issues of what it means for the exercise of practical reason (in moral as well as non-moral cases) to be independent of sensible causes, Hill urges us not just to think of this as a metaphysical issue, but as one internal to moral psychology itself. 'In other words, it is not just that we treat our choices as not causally determined; it is that we treat the task of rational deliberation as not always settled by information about our inclinations'. 'Kant's Theory of Practical Reason', *op. cit.*, p. 138. We would need, though, to know a lot more about how a deliberation could arrive at a conclusion in such cases, more about what else *would* settle such cases. Kant, I think, must say something general here about happiness, and that does not seem to allow the sort of internal independence that Hill is asserting.
- 25 One can detect Wood's own uneasiness with this argument in the closing sentences of §5, where Wood raises again the merely provisional nature of these arguments and claims Kant's purpose will be served if he presents some sort of at least plausible argument. Perhaps the reconstructed argument is in some sense a good one, or not wholly implausible, but it also seems subject to fatal limitations.
- 26 One of the signal achievements of Wood's account is his demonstration that the right way to understand Kant's account of immorality is not by invoking a simplistic notion of hedonism or egoism, but by understanding the primarily social character of such propensities, that we do not just prefer ourselves, but we do so *by* measuring or own good *against* others. See *KET*, pp. 288 ff.
- 27 Another way to put this point would be to note that, while the limited context of this discussion might suggest that the real issue with Wood's Kant was 'Humean', or concerned the independent (from reason) role of the passions in motivating action, this impression would be misleading. Habituation and socialization in different sorts of societies could produce quite different affective dispositions, sentiments and propensities. Determining then the possibility for the crucial condition for freedom – a rational determination of action – might have to take in a good deal more, might require a far wider scope and a theory of the rationality of institutions (one different from what might be available to a

- methodological individualism). This would obviously take us far deeper into Hegel's case than is possible here.
- 28 I have tried to defend such an alternative conception of practical rationality, and such an alternative account of the nature of freedom in 'Hegel, Ethical Reasons, Kantian Rejoinders', and 'Hegel's Ethical Rationalism', both in Robert Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and in 'Hegel, Freedom, the Will: *The Philosophy of Right*, §§1–33,' in *Hegel: Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. Ludwig Siep (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 31–53, and in 'Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel's Compatibilism', in *The European Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1999), no. 2, pp. 194–212.
- 29 Another achievement of Wood's book is his demonstration of the complexity and intrinsic interest of this, one might dare to say, dialectical claim (that our propensity for evil is in some way also responsible for the development of the capacities to combat and at least partly overcome such a propensity). Cf. *KET*, p. 403.
- 30 As Wood has pointed out to me, this sort of objection raises its own difficulty: what was Kant trying to say in his remarks about the value of humanity? My claim is that Kant realized full well that he had to appeal to such a value in order to develop a substantive moral position. Otherwise Kantian morality might consist wholly in avoiding moral harm, not completely neglecting talents, or completely ignoring the suffering of others. But that does not mean that Kant was entitled to such a claim, or that it came without costs for the overall consistency of his position. Kant's difficulties are most clearly on view in his political philosophy. Or so I argue in my 'Dividing and Deriving in Kant's *Rechtslehre*', in *Immanuel Kant, Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), pp. 63–85.
- 31 This is all certainly not the end of the story. It is not on the face of it at all problematic for Kant or a Kantian to hold that there are certain acts or practices we are duty-bound to perform, that it is not impossible for us to perform such acts just because we are duty bound to do so, but that such a 'purely from duty' occurrence would be extremely rare in a finite human life. We might then wonder about how to foster morally significant emotional responses like pity, sympathy, compassion and so forth, or indignation about justice, and the kind of community necessary for the collective effort at such fostering, without at all violating the spirit of Kant's moral project. I have tried to suggest that such a direction might create problems for Kant, especially given his views about the unconditional nature of moral obligation, but the most pressing interesting issue would be to understand how Kant would distinguish in such corollary practices between morally more and less appropriate, and on what basis such a continuum could be defended. Wood's book is a very welcome first step in thinking about such issues.
- 32 It is also compatible with a general agreement about Kant's reliance on a claim about autonomy as the right way to begin thinking about the nature of this commitment. We are bound to such an ideal because we have bound ourselves to it, although the story about why and the identity of this 'we' might be much longer than the one Kant gives.

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