Kant’s Hypothetical Imperative

by

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Abstract

Kant famously distinguishes between hypothetical and categorical imperatives and the conditional and unconditional necessitation they express. Hypothetical imperatives command conditionally, and they govern our instrumental and prudential reasoning. Categorical imperatives command unconditionally, and they govern our moral reasoning. There is significant disagreement in the literature about how to construe the nature and normativity of Kant’s hypothetical imperatives. In the first part of the dissertation, I consider three, seemingly divergent, contemporary interpretations. I argue, that all three of these views collapse the crucial distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity that was supposed to distinguish between the imperatives. Moreover, on the standard interpretation of the hypothetical imperative’s command, an interpretation that each of these views share, the “material interpretation,” is the logical consequence. The material interpretation understands hypothetical imperatives as deriving from reason’s endorsement of our ends, and thus ends that are set by the categorical imperative. Accordingly, all practical rational failing is a form of moral failing, and so, on Kant’s view, we collapse the practical distinction between stupidity and evil. In the second part of the dissertation, I explain how the standard interpretation of hypothetical imperatives as
anti-akratic rational principles that command agents to will the means to their ends, even in the face of any temptation not to, inevitably leads to the material interpretation. I offer an alternative understanding of hypothetical imperatives, and correlatively of Kant’s conception of willing an end, that avoids this view, and which preserves the distinction between the conditional and unconditional necessitation that Kant thought the two imperatives express, and so also the crucial practical distinction between stupidity and evil.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... iv

Chapter 1 - Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2 - The Wide Scope View ..................................................................................... 7
  Section 2 .............................................................................................................................. 8
  Section 3 ............................................................................................................................ 18

Chapter 3 – The Material Interpretation ............................................................................ 27
  Section 2 ............................................................................................................................ 29
  Section 3 ............................................................................................................................ 47
  Section 4 ............................................................................................................................ 53
  Section 5 ............................................................................................................................ 57

Chapter 4 – A Third Possibility ....................................................................................... 61
  Section 2 ............................................................................................................................ 65
  Section 3 ............................................................................................................................ 75
  Section 4 ............................................................................................................................ 85
  Section 5 ............................................................................................................................ 91

Chapter 5 – The Material Interpretation, Again ............................................................... 96
  Section 2 ............................................................................................................................ 99
  Section 3 ........................................................................................................................... 108
  Section 4 ........................................................................................................................... 114

Chapter 6 – A Practical Principle with Theoretical Content ........................................... 126
  Section 2 ........................................................................................................................... 126
  Section 3 ........................................................................................................................... 139
Section 4.............................................................................................................................. 154

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................. 161
Chapter 1. Introduction

In this dissertation, I aim to understand Kant’s conception of hypothetical imperatives. Kant famously claims that there are two kinds of imperatives—categorical and hypothetical, and that the latter are essentially distinct from the former. Trying to account for the normativity of this kind of imperative has generated significant disagreement in the literature about the scope of its requirement. It is generally agreed that hypothetical imperatives require us to will the means to our ends. Both sides of the debate treat the ‘ought,’ which expresses this practical imperative, as a sentential operator expressing practical necessity, but disagree on how to interpret its scope. According to the narrow-scope view the ‘ought’ has scope only over the consequent of the conditional statement in which it figures. According to the wide-scope view the ‘ought’ has scope over the entire conditional and it tells us that it ‘ought’ to be the case that if we will an end, then we take the means to it. In this case the hypothetical imperative is actually an unconditional imperative with disjunctive content and it requires an agent to will consistently.

In the second chapter I take a closer look at the wide-scope view. I look primarily to Thomas Hill Jr. who offers one of the first and most prominent arguments for the wide-scope interpretation and who explicitly allies himself with Kant. Hill argues that there is, what he calls, “the Hypothetical Imperative,” which is a fundamental rational requirement that is both general and stringent. This imperative functions as a premise in practical syllogisms allowing us to derive particular prescriptions that are unequivocal and stringent rational requirements. It also functions as a prohibition against the kind of duplicity that is involved in both willing an end and failing to take the appropriate means to realize it.

Hill argues that imperatives command unequivocally, and so it cannot be thought that we should have to choose between them. Thus, the imperative must be wide-scope, and what it tells us, he says, “in effect, is ‘Take the necessary means or give up the end.'”

1 Thomas Hill Jr., “The Hypothetical Imperative,” The Philosophical Review, Vol. 82, No. 4 (Oct., 1973), pp. 429-
Given that Hill interprets this imperative as a categorical requirement that applies to all finite rational agents regardless of the ends they happen to have, he must offer some alternative interpretation of the distinction between the Kantian categorical imperatives and hypothetical imperatives. What qualifies an imperative as hypothetical, at each level of generality, is the fact that a particular prescription cannot be derived or justified without appealing to empirical information about an agent’s ends.

In the rest of the chapter I go on to expose what I think are fundamentally problematic implications of this interpretation given his initial interpretive commitments about the nature of the Hypothetical Imperative and instrumental reasoning. We can only derive particular prescriptions from this wide-scope imperative by adding premises to our practical syllogisms that constitute appropriate detaching conditions. Given that the mere fact that an agent has willed an end cannot qualify as such a condition, I explore what I take to be the most plausible alternatives, either the ends that we are morally, or perhaps more neutrally, required to will, or the ends that we are morally (rationally) allowed to will. I provide an argument that shows that on each of these alternatives these imperatives will fail to turn out to be hypothetical according to Hill’s own definition. Moreover, I will argue that if we agree that plausible conditions of detachment will be ends that we, in some sense, ought to will—either moral or merely permissible, then this view faces the identical interpretative task as the material interpretation. Why add unnecessary complication by interpreting the hypothetical imperative as a categorical requirement? Ultimately, Hill’s account precludes a coherent distinction between hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives.

In chapter 3, I consider the consequent-scope, or narrow-scope view, of hypothetical imperatives. Those who endorse the consequent-scope view have tried to offer interpretations that avoid the worrisome implications about practical reason that largely motivate the wide-scope view. Thus, at least according to the various Kantian consequent-scope interpretations, hypothetical imperatives only command the means to ends that we have reason to will. Stephen Engstrom calls this view the “the material interpretation.” Accordingly, the hypothetical imperative is an imperative with conditional form, in which the ‘ought’ holds only over the consequent of the

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conditional. Yet, on this view, detachment is only possible if there is a preceding endorsement of an end or an action by practical reason. Thus, if reason directs us in the use of certain means, it is only because it has antecedently directed us to adopt the respective end and endorsed this end as good. We cannot, therefore, detach practical conclusions that conflict with the Categorical Imperative. If it is the case that the only way of realizing an end is my making use of immoral means, it cannot be thought that practical reason will endorse this end. The imperative is hypothetical, Engstrom tells us, “in that its requirement is conditional upon practical reason’s determination that the end is good.” The picture of the Hypothetical Imperative offered here is something to the effect of ‘If it is the case that one ought to will an end, then one ought to take the necessary means.’

In this chapter, I canvas a few of the most prevalent views in the literature that are committed to this interpretation. I point to several of the interpretive difficulties this view faces and aim to show that it cannot be Kant’s. According to the material interpretation the imperatives to will means are derived from the unconditional categorical imperative that directs us to good ends. The imperative commanding the means must also be unconditional. Moreover, the question now arises whether hypothetical imperatives command the means only to ends that are morally obligatory or also to those that are merely permissible. There is a real question about how an imperative that commands the means to merely permissible ends can be conceived or if there is even such a thing as merely permissible end on this account. Either way, the nature of the ensuing obligation must be categorical. Admittedly, Schroeder argues that the Hypothetical Imperative is not itself a rational requirement, but rather a rule specifying how it is that we come under obligations. On this view, we are left with a picture in which all practical necessity is understood as obligation and is of the same kind, categorical. This picture leaves us unable to account for differences in moral culpability between practically rational transgressions that are immoral and those that are imprudent.

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On both views, if reason is to issue in particular prescriptions to take the means to our ends, then this is on account of its commitment to, and endorsement of, those ends. Both interpretations implicitly agree that if reason is going to prescribe any particular set of means, there must be a ground for the ends that we adopt that is not itself reducible to desire (desire may be necessary, but we require a rational incentive to make the ground sufficient). The possibility of all imperatives, then, is explained by appeal to rational grounds that are, at bottom, necessarily independent of an agent’s empirical incentives/desires.

There is, however, a collection of views in the literature that put forward an alternative possibility. I consider this possibility in chapter 4. They see hypothetical imperatives as having their source in some more limited capacity of practical reason rather than pure practical reason, thus even heteronomous action is governed by hypothetical imperatives. According to this view, all action, if it is thought to be rational, is an expression of some conception of the good, and this need not be a conception of what is morally good. Henry Allison⁵ and Allen Wood⁶ offer just this kind of interpretation of Kant’s conception of instrumental rationality. In this chapter I explain this limited conception of practical rationality, and the conception of freedom that underlies it, and I argue that there is a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of it; it is unclear whether the sufficient condition for rational choice is an empirical or a rational determining. I argue that when pressed to articulate the rational ground(s) that this conception of freedom relies on, defenders of this view face a dilemma: they must confer rational standing to a dubious “liberty of indifference” (*liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*), or they must acknowledge an implicit commitment to a source of value external to practical reason. I argue that this kind of view distorts Kant’s key practical insights—the distinction between heteronomy and autonomy, the conditional and unconditional imperatives, and the difference in rational culpability between imprudence and immorality. They must account for these important philosophical differences in alternative, and less feasible, ways, or abandon them altogether. I conclude that if it is thought that in order to be practical, reason must determine an order of ends, then, like the material interpretation, all practical necessity will be grounded in the necessity of the Categorical Imperative.

In chapter 5, I offer a diagnosis of the problem as well as an alternative understanding of hypothetical imperatives that I take to be the solution. All of these views have thought that failures of hypothetical imperatives must be distinctively practical failures. I argue that if it is thought that hypothetical imperatives require us to will what are believed to be the sufficient means to our ends, there is also good reason to think that those ends must be good (made necessary by reason). And insofar as it is thought that particular hypothetical imperatives must be derived from ends that are good, it appears to be obviously possible that we can have an end and fail to will the means it—for it is of course (perhaps even quite often) the case that we can fail to will the means to the objects required by practical reason. Therefore, these views have seen the hypothetical imperative as having primarily an anti-akratic role. I argue that this is wrong, and that it is, in fact, not possible on Kant’s view to will an end and fail to will the means; willing the means just is what it is to will an end. I offer what I take to be strong theoretical, as well as textual, support for this claim.

In chapter 6, I offer textual evidence and a theoretical framework for my interpretation. I conclude, that properly conceived, hypothetical imperatives are practical expressions of theoretical reason. While each of the interpretations I have considered agrees that hypothetical imperatives contain theoretical content, they also agree that the practical necessity these imperatives express must be a distinctively practical cognition—that is, as having a rational content that is not exhausted by the theoretical cognitions made relevant by our desires. I argue that hypothetical imperatives really are just correlates of theoretical cognition on Kant’s view, and they are given a practical form insofar as they are addressed to the will of an imperfectly rational being, and so insofar as the failures to conform to their dictates will register as practical failures. They represent a set of instructions for constructing an object, and they are directed to a will that is dependent on an imperfect theoretical reason (rather than mere instinct) in order to bring about its material ends—whether these ends are put on the table by empirical desires or a purely formal practical principle.

In this chapter, I look primarily to Kant’s discussion in both the published and the unpublished introductions to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Importantly, Kant insists on paying attention to the important difference between practical principles that have practical content and the practical principles that are “correlates” of theoretical cognitions, and thus, whose content is really theoretical. I argue that we should understand Kant to be talking about hypothetical (what
he now calls “technical”) imperatives. In doing so, we can make better sense of the other texts in which he discusses hypothetical or technical imperatives, as well as preserve consistency among them. But even more importantly, we preserve the crucial distinction between the kinds of imperatives and the practical necessitation they express—the distinction between viciousness and stupidity.
Chapter 2: The Wide-Scope View

1.

I have suggested that an adequate interpretation of the normativity of the hypothetical imperative must capture the sense in which this imperative is binding and issues in particular rational requirements that are normatively binding without transforming these requirements into categorical, or unconditionally binding, rational requirements. A satisfying account must be able to 1) capture the important difference in rational necessity Kant was at pains to capture, and 2) capture the salient difference in rational failing that explains differences in moral culpability.

In this chapter, I want to look at the wide-scope view.

Those who endorse the wide-scope view think there is a general and fundamental principle of practical reason—the Hypothetical Imperative—that requires imperfectly rational agents to either take the means to the end(s) that they will or to give up their end(s). The “ought” on this view, is interpreted as a sentential operator whose scope ranges over the entire conditional, so: X ought(if X wills E, then X takes means to E) or X ought(take the means to E or give up E).

Accordingly, the Hypothetical Imperative is interpreted as a fundamental rational requirement that is categorical—it is directed to all finite agents regardless of the ends they happen to have.

The appeal of the wide-scope view is that it escapes the possibility of the problematic consequence of detaching too much. This problem is thought to afflict the narrow-scope view. According to the narrow-scope view, the ‘ought’ is thought to hold only over the consequent of the conditional imperative. Thus, according to this view, the Hypothetical Imperative is a conditional imperative that states ‘if one wills the end, then one ought to will the necessary means.’ The problem is that if this imperative enters in as a premise in a practical syllogism, then it follows that the mere fact that an agent wills an end allows for a detached conclusion prescribing an agent to take the means to the end that they have willed. This is potentially problematic given the various immoral ends, or ends necessitating immoral means, we might will. The worry is that this leaves us with a picture in which it is entirely possible for reason to issue in conflicting directives.
On the wide-scope view, the ‘ought’ operates over the entire scope of the imperative, and it can never require that one ‘ought’ to make use of immoral means or take the means to an immoral end.\(^7\) It prevents us from deriving a categorical requirement to take the means to an immoral end, once my willing an end is entered in as a premise in a practical syllogism. Without detaching conditions, this formulation of the imperative always has an embedded conditional, and thus it cannot conflict with the Categorical Imperative—it does not of itself direct us to will ends or to take the means to them. It would only conflict with the Categorical Imperative if it directed an agent to will specific ends or take any necessary means to them. On the wide-scope view of the Hypothetical Imperative, this type of conflict is ruled out.

But by interpreting the hypothetical imperative as an unconditional consistency requirement, this view runs up against further difficulties. In this chapter I want to show how the wide-scope interpretation of the hypothetical imperative cannot adequately account for any difference in normativity between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Consequently, if any distinction between the two kinds of imperative is to be maintained, it has to be captured by appeal to something other than normative difference.

2.

Thomas Hill’s argument in “The Hypothetical Imperative” is considered a canonical example of the wide-scope interpretation.\(^8\) I am not sure that this article provides such a straightforward position, but there is certainly much in Hill’s argument that lends itself to this view. I argue that

\(^7\) Or, perhaps less contentiously, it provides a way of accounting for a picture of practical reason which avoids the problematic implication of potentially issuing in conflicting rational directives.

\(^8\) For another example, see Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 16, 47. It’s possible that Jean Hampton, whose view I consider later in the chapter, also agreed with the wide-scope interpretation, see Jean Hampton, *The Authority of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 144, 165. For reasons that will become apparent, I think many of the standard wide-scope views are fairly ambiguous, and they do not offer straightforward endorsement of the wide-scope interpretation. See chapter 3, fn. 84.
Hill expects too much from this imperative, and the particular ways in which his account runs into difficulties will shed light on what is fundamentally problematic about the wide-scope interpretation.

According to Hill, ‘the Hypothetical Imperative’ is a general, stringent, requirement of reason, or a fundamental rational principle, that plays an essential role in practical arguments that issue in unequivocal judgments about what to do. The hypothetical imperative functions both as a general premise in practical arguments from which we can derive particular hypothetical imperatives (and therefore particular unequivocal prescriptions), and also as a general principle proscribing a certain kind of rational failing, or the kind of duplicity involved in our willing, and yet not following through on, our own “morally permissible projects.”

Hill formulates this principle as follows:

\[
\text{If a person wills an end and certain means are necessary to achieve that end and are within his power, then he ought to will those means.}
\]

He explains that this is an imperative because it is a principle that any fully rational being would follow, and that imperfectly rational beings might fail to follow—though they ought to. The imperative is analytic because it derives from the allegedly analytic proposition that ‘whoever fully wills the end wills the indispensably necessary means that are within his power,’ or ‘whoever wills the end, if he is fully rational, wills the means.’ The imperative figures in as a “general premise in arguments for various nonmoral ‘ought’ judgments”:

(1) Whoever wills an end also wills the sole means that are within his power if he is fully rational.

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10 Moreover, Kant certainly seems to think we have merely discretionary ends. See, Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:415, 4:420, 4:428.
11 Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 432. There is a problem with sneaking in “morally permissible” here, and this is a point that I will return to.
(2) Whoever wills an end ought to will the sole means which are within his power. Or, in other words, if a person wills an end and certain means are necessary to achieve that end and are within his power, then he ought to will those means.\(^{14}\)

(3) A is the sole means to B and is generally available (within everyone’s power)

Therefore,

(4) If one wills B, one ought to will A.

(5) Q (a person) wills B

therefore,

(6) Q ought to will A.\(^ {15}\)

Furthermore, it functions as a kind of prohibition against resolving to pursue a certain end and then failing to take the necessary means to it. Hill acknowledges the concern that this could result in conflicting requirements of reason (given the existence of the Categorical Imperative). That is, if one should will an end to which the use of immoral means is required, it looks like we might run up against conflicting requirements of reason. Now it might be tempting, he tells us, to think of the Hypothetical Imperative as issuing only prima-facie rational requirements, over which the Categorical Imperative will take precedence in cases of conflict. But this would be an unsatisfactory picture.

\emph{For imperatives are supposed to tell us that certain acts are necessary, not merely that there is a prima-facie case for them; and as principles of reason, imperatives should never fall into an irreconcilable conflict. That is, one imperative should never demand unequivocally that we do something prohibited unequivocally by

\(^{14}\)Note that both of these are formulated as narrow-scope requirements.

\(^{15}\)Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 431-2. Note: (1) is a rational principle, (2) is the Hypothetical Imperative, (3) is an empirical fact, (4) is a particular hypothetical imperative, (5) is an empirical fact, and (6) is an unequivocal prescription for a particular action.}
another imperative. A rational man should not have to choose between obeying one objective principle or another.\textsuperscript{16}

Hill thinks there is an alternative—a person can always abandon the end. Thus what the Hypothetical Imperative tells us, “in effect, is ‘Take the necessary means or give up the end.’”\textsuperscript{17}

If this is to speak to the concern Hill raises above, then it has to be interpreted as an articulation of the wide-scope view. For unless the imperative is interpreted as a mere consistency requirement, that does not, by itself, issue in any particular unequivocal commands, then this alternative would not rule out the possibility of reason issuing conflicting rational requirements. If this is the case, and Hill is indeed offering an argument for the wide-scope view, then it is not immediately clear that this is equivalent to his earlier formulations. Perhaps Hill thought that the formulations were equivalent, but I think that they cannot be given that one allows for detachment and one does not. Since Hill believes that both the Hypothetical Imperative and the particular unequivocal prescriptions that follow from it are stringent rational requirements, and since these requirements qua rational cannot fall into irreconcilable conflict, it follows that Hill must interpret the Hypothetical Imperative as a wide-scope requirement.

If the imperative is wide-scope it circumvents the problem of potentially conflicting rational requirements, but now it is unclear that it can play the role in practical arguments that Hill thinks it does. Recall that one of the functions Hill assigns to this imperative is its role in practical reasoning—the conclusion of which is a particular unequivocal prescription about what one is to do. As he initially formulates it, I think Hill’s exemplification of the typical structure of a practical argument for our ‘nonmoral ought judgments’ appears to articulate a narrow-scope rendering of the Hypothetical Imperative, both in its general and particular form. This is most obvious from the fact that we get a detached conclusion. But if we take seriously the concern Hill raises above, and his proposed solution, then we should clarify the argument as follows:

\textsuperscript{16} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 435.

\textsuperscript{17} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 436.
(1) Whoever wills an end also wills the sole means that are within his power if he is fully rational. □(E → M)

(2) One ought to ensure that if he wills the end, then he also wills the sole means that are within his power. O(E → M)

(3) A is the sole means to B and is generally available.

Therefore,

(4) One ought to ensure that if one wills B one also wills A. O(B → A) or O(-A → -B)

(5) Q (a person) wills B therefore,

(6) Q ought to will A

But if Hill is committed to offering a wide-scope interpretation, then it is no longer obvious that this argument does what he thinks it does. Notice that (6) no longer follows—at least without adding a missing premise specifying an appropriate detaching condition. And notice that (5) does not qualify, and could not qualify on Hill’s view. Without adding an additional premise, this argument bottoms out in (4). At the very most we derive a particular hypothetical imperative that is also of the wide-scope variety, and the conclusion of practical reason will always be a disjunctive set: either will the end and take the means, or relinquish the end and do not take the means. Premise (5), at least on its own, does not allow us to derive anything further. The motivation for adopting the wide-scope view was precisely because it prevents detachment.

And there is a further problem here. It will turn out that on this view it is not clear why/how the imperative is supposed to be hypothetical. In order to see this more clearly, we should look at what Hill thinks qualifies this imperative as hypothetical.

So far, as Hill admits, it seems to share important similarities with the Categorical Imperative:

*it is a principle that any fully rational being would follow, it expresses a stringent rather than a prima-facie requirement of reason, and to establish its rationality we do not need any contingent premises about what human beings desire. Moreover, the Hypothetical Imperative does not, like particular hypothetical imperatives, “declare a possible action to be necessary as a means to the*
attainment of something else that one wills (or that one may will)’”\textsuperscript{18} The Hypothetical Imperative is a general principle that does not mention particular ends or means; it tells us only that we ought to will the means to our ends, whatever these may be.\textsuperscript{19}

Hill tells us that we need an account of what makes an imperative hypothetical that will appropriately classify imperatives of different levels of generality and different forms as hypothetical. Accordingly, the Hypothetical Imperative, particular hypothetical imperatives, as well as particular unequivocal prescriptions that follow from them should each turn out to be hypothetical.\textsuperscript{20} Each of these is a part of a general pattern of argument for particular prescriptions such as “Jack Glatzer ought to practice his violin.”

If we think of particular prescriptions as imperatives prescribing unequivocally what a particular person ought to do at a certain time, then we can characterize hypothetical imperatives in general as follows. Imperatives are hypothetical if either they support particular prescriptions for a person only in conjunction with premises describing that person’s ends or they cannot themselves be supported without premises describing the ends of the person to whom they are directed.\textsuperscript{21}

What characterizes a hypothetical imperative as hypothetical, then, is the fact that information about an agent’s end(s) is necessary in order to derive particular prescriptions, or in order to rationally defend them. Categorical imperatives, on the other hand, are characterized by their not being hypothetical. Categorical imperatives hold regardless of an agent’s particular ends. “It is

\textsuperscript{18} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals}, in \textit{Practical Philosophy}, ed. and trans. by M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4:414. For ease of reference, all references to Kant’s works will include the academy pagination.

\textsuperscript{19} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 441.

\textsuperscript{20} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 443.

\textsuperscript{21} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 443.
the independence of the commitments of the agent...that makes moral prescriptions categorical (if they are).”

But if the Hypothetical Imperative is interpreted as wide-scope, then it is not clear how it can help derive particular prescriptions, without detaching conditions, even when information about an agent’s ends is supplied. Again, at the most we might think that this imperative can help generate particular hypothetical imperatives that are also of the wide-scope variety. But these will not tell an agent (specifically) what she ought to do, or generate particular prescriptions without detaching conditions. So without detaching conditions, the Hypothetical Imperative and the particular hypothetical imperatives that might be derived from them do not turn out to be ‘hypothetical’ on Hill’s own account. Moreover, it turns out that they have even more in common with categorical imperatives than Hill already admits. For now we should ask, why is this a categorical requirement? And in what sense is it analytic?

We have already noticed that the mere fact that an agent wills an end cannot count as an appropriate detaching condition because then we will run up against the same problem of detachment that motivates the wide-scope view. The most plausible candidate for allowing detachment would be an end that we in some sense ought to will; we might think that two obvious candidates for such ends are our morally obligatory ends or perhaps even our merely permissible ends.

If we consider ends that are morally obligatory, we may concede that detachment must be possible. If we substitute an obligatory end in premise (5), as an end that one ought to will, it seems reasonable to concede that we may yield a detached conclusion expressing an unconditional requirement to take the means to that end. But this particular prescription derives its unconditional normative force from a preceding categorical requirement to will (effect) an obligatory end. In order to see this, we need only consider that on this view, if obligatory ends constitute conditions of detachment, then for any end that we ought to will, it will follow that we derive an unconditional requirement to take the means to this end. But notice that we derive this requirement no matter what ends the agent happens to have or to will. So the particular

unequivocal prescription we derive, does not, on Hill’s account, turn out to be hypothetical. And
neither does ‘the Hypothetical Imperative’ construed as a fundamental general practical principle
of reason; we can omit any premise whatsoever specifying an agent’s actual ends without at all
impacting the practical argument (syllogism). In cases in which it is our morally obligatory ends
that allow for detachment neither the (general) Hypothetical Imperative, the particular
hypothetical imperative(s), nor the particular prescriptions that are derived have anything to do
with the agent’s ends. So dependency on an agent’s ends cannot be what makes these various
argumentative components hypothetical, if they are.

Now consider the possibility of our merely permissible ends. It seems plausible that our merely
permissible ends might qualify as appropriate detaching conditions.  

If they did not, and only
obligatory ends so qualified, then it would seem that our taking the means to any end other than
an obligatory one, would not be required by the Hypothetical Imperative. This imperative would
extend to such actions only insofar as they are consistent action sets. So perhaps we should say
that we ought to will our morally permissible ends, and thus we have another plausible scenario
for detachment. Again, we get a funny consequence. We now detach a conclusion that
commands us to take the means to this end, and it is a categorical requirement. This seems to
imply that once we have willed a morally permissible end, we are not rationally allowed to
change our minds.  

Once Jack Glacier has adopted the end of playing the violin, so long as this
end is permissible, he is now under a categorical requirement to take the means to practice his
violin. And if I adopt the end of seeing all the Italian movies featured in the cinema this month,
presuming this is morally permissible, I am now unconditionally required to see to it that see I
these films.

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23 Recall that for Hill, the imperative only proscribes the “duplicity involved in our willing, and yet not following
through on, our own morally permissible projects,” (“The Hypothetical imperative,” p. 432; bold emphasis added).

24 Although one might think an agent is only rationally bound by the imperative to take the means insofar as the
agent continues to will the end. If the agent relinquishes her commitment to her end, she is no longer practically
required to take the means. One could argue that once we derive a detached conclusion to take the means to an end
that we have (in this case) permissibly willed, maintaining one’s commitment to that end is part of what it will
require to realize it. In this way, we might think we do come under an unconditional requirement to remain steadfast
in our commitment to the ends that we have willed.

25 We will come up against the same problems when we consider the material interpretation. On this interpretation
we will also need to see whether the ends that practical reason endorses are obligatory ends, or also merely
permissible ends. In both cases, we seem to derive unconditional requirements to take the means to these ends.
Depending on how we interpret practical reason’s endorsement of our morally permissible ends, deriving an unconditional requirement to take the means to them will seem more or less plausible. If practical reason merely permits us to take the means to our morally permissible ends, then it seems strange that we should derive an unconditional requirement to take the means to them. We might ask what it is that allows us to detach such a conclusion in these cases, and not in the cases of our morally impermissible ends. Why does reason direct us to such a conclusion in the former cases and not in the latter, unless there is a rational requirement directing us to take the means to our morally permissible ends? If it is the case that there is an imperative that requires us to will our morally permissible ends, whether moral or some other, then we have to explain this requirement. Since the requirement must be categorical, there is little to distinguish it from the case in which we are required to will our morally obligatory ends.

A view that holds that all of our actions are in some (strong) sense governed by the categorical imperative would, and should, welcome this consequence. Such a view would be committed to an interpretation of practical reason such that its every exercise is also an exercise of moral reasoning. Accordingly, morality would extend to every aspect of our intentional activity. I think this view is implausible, certainly as an interpretation of Kant. It would seem to follow from this view that we would be unable to isolate an instance of correct instrumental reasoning that was not also, at the same time, an instance of correct moral reasoning.

At the very least we should notice that however we come down on the plausible conditions allowing for detachment, that is, whether these might be ends that are merely permissible or must, in some sense, be morally obligatory, we find ourselves with the identical interpretative task that faces the material interpretation of hypothetical imperatives. Both views require similar interpretative commitments with respect to how practical reason ‘endorses’ our ends, and whether reason’s ends would be morally obligatory or include our merely permissible ends. Since on the wide-scope view, if practical reason is to issue particular requirements to will means, we need a detaching condition, at this point this view faces the same interpretive tasks, as well as interpretative commitments, as the material interpretation. Why add an unnecessary complication by positing a second-order unconditional practical principle? For now we should ask, from where does its unconditional authority derive? And how does its command differ from the Categorical Imperative?
Kant says of the hypothetical imperatives in contradistinction to the categorical imperative:

When I think of a hypothetical imperative in general, I do not know beforehand what it will contain; I do not know this until I am given the condition. But when I think of a categorical imperative I know at once what it contains. For, since the imperative contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law, while the law contains no condition to which it would be limited, nothing is left to which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such; and this conformity alone is what the imperative properly represents as necessary.26

If the wide-scope view were right, it would seem that we would not know, “at once,” what an imperative contains simply by analyzing the categorical necessitation it expresses. Likewise, we would seem to know what a “hypothetical imperative in general” contains, for it commands independently of any condition. Certainly, Kant thought that it was the very unconditionality of a normative requirement that qualifies it as categorical. And all categorical normative requirements of are the same kind—moral.

I have tried to show that on both of the above interpretations of the wide-scope view, neither the hypothetical imperative nor the particular hypothetical imperatives turn out to be hypothetical on Hill’s account.

If we adopt the wide-scope interpretation and concede that our obligatory ends allow for detachment, then we, in effect, derive a particular prescription that gets its unequivocal normative force from a preceding categorical imperative. If practical reason prescribes that one ought to will a given end, then this is in its capacity as moral reason,27 and the resulting normative force is moral. In other words, if it turns out to be the case that one ought to will a certain end, then this turns out to be the case regardless of the ends an agent happens to have or to actually will—no information about the ends an agent happens to have will be required in


27 Even if we wanted to remain neutral about the source and nature of the obligatory end, it still follows that we will detach a particular requirement that does not derive from plugging in information about an agent’s actual ends.
order to generate the particular prescription. If we concede that our morally permissible ends allow for detachment, then we obtain an unconditional requirement to take the means to our merely permissible ends, and it isn’t clear from where the force of this requirement derives unless we have an unconditional obligation to take the means to our merely permissible ends, which cannot wholly derive from the unconditionality of the consistency requirement since this requirement alone does not allow a detached conclusion.

It is not clear that Hill can get what he wants from this imperative. The Hypothetical Imperative cannot play the role in practical reasoning that he thinks it does and proscribe the duplicity involved in willing an end and not the means to it, while simultaneously holding that reason issues in stringent rational, yet never conflicting, directives. In order to accommodate these interpretive requirements, we see that we lose hold of what Hill thinks qualifies the imperative as hypothetical—the imperative has little to nothing to do with an agent’s ends. Hill adopts the wide-scope interpretation and endorses the view that hypothetical imperatives are in fact categorical, while still attempting to distinguish them from categorical imperatives that derive from the Kantian Categorical Imperative. I have argued that this attempt fails.

3.

Perhaps, then, the imperative is not hypothetical after all. Perhaps the problem is not so much with the wide-scope interpretation, but rather with the assumption that we are dealing with two essentially different types of imperative. Recall that Hill tells us that “to establish the rationality of the Hypothetical Imperative we do not need any contingent premises about what human beings desire,” and “that it is the independence of the commitments of the agent…that makes moral prescriptions categorical (if they are).” It might seem then that the Hypothetical


Imperative, like other moral prescriptions, really just is categorical—(perhaps even a general rational principle that is somehow derivative from the categorical imperative).

Jean Hampton explicitly defends this view. She thinks that when we say that an ought statement ‘holds’, we mean that an imperative (in this case a hypothetical imperative) gives an agent a reason for action, and that it is possible for the agent to be motivated by this reason’s authority alone. In order for an imperative to provide an agent with a reason, in this case an instrumental reason, we must recognize an implicit objective norm that governs instrumental reasoning such that hypothetical imperatives can give agents reasons for action—reasons to take necessary means. If these reasons are to have authority over us, this norm must have authority over us. According to Hampton, such a norm must be categorical:

Note that the authority of this instrumental norm has to be understood non-instrumentally. Because it is the foundation of the idea that we ought to act on means appropriate to our ends it cannot itself be defended consequentially.\(^\text{30}\)

So the authority of a hypothetical imperative, and the instrumental reason it provides, derives from a categorical norm that is implicit in instrumental reasoning.

Hampton thinks that Kant incorporates the motivational efficacy of this authority into his notion of “will.” Willing describes the kind of motivational efficacy that reason provides. So when one wills the means to her ends, she has in fact acted from a hypothetical imperative—that is, because of the rational authority of the instrumental reason that the imperative provides.

\[T\]he Kantian explanation of the motivational efficacy of the hypothetical imperative by virtue of its authority seems to make it just as magical as any categorical imperative. However contingent the hypothetical ought is on a desire, it is still not the same as a desire; to say therefore, that its objective normative authority is what moves us to act rationally is to analyze the “prescriptive force”

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\(^\text{30}\) Hampton, *The Authority of Reason*, p. 140 fn.
of a hypothetical imperative such that it is identical to the prescriptive force of categorical imperatives.\textsuperscript{31}

Hampton suggests that Kant’s analyticity claim can best only be understood with this implicit norm constitutive of instrumental reasoning in mind:

\textit{Sustain action (or commit yourself to means) to achieve the end that your reflection has told you is most important in the circumstances.}\textsuperscript{32}

According to Hampton this norm is implicit in, and constitutive of, instrumental rationality, and when we criticize people as irrational, we are invoking it as our standard. Instrumental rationality is as much about ends as it is about means. She interprets Kant’s analyticity claim as follows:

\textit{to be instrumentally rational is to will the end that is in some way best or strongest in the circumstances, where willing means ‘sustaining a commitment to that end through action.’}\textsuperscript{33}

So instrumental rationality might not tell us what exactly our ends should be, but assuming there is some way of determining this, it does tell us that we ought to sustain our commitment to this (all-things-considered) best end. But how does it do this? The authority of the instrumental reason provided by a hypothetical imperative is derived from the objective authority of this implicit norm; “as a result of that authority, we bind ourselves to our all-things-considered end.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Note that this norm, which is implicitly involved in what it means to be instrumentally rational, is stated in a way that makes it categorical rather than hypothetical. Kant’s position on the nature of hypothetical imperatives must be

\textsuperscript{31} Hampton, \textit{The Authority of Reason}, pp. 162-3.

\textsuperscript{32} Hampton, \textit{The Authority of Reason}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{33} Hampton, \textit{The Authority of Reason}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{34} Hampton, \textit{The Authority of Reason}, p. 165.
construed (contra his explicit wishes) such that understanding the bindingness of a hypothetical imperative is no easier than understanding the bindingness of a categorical imperative. My interpretation cannot save Kant’s belief that the former are more straightforward than the latter; indeed, my argument is that Kant’s belief is wrong. The only way to analyze Kant’s analyticity claim is to do so in a way that locates in hypothetical imperatives the same mysterious objective authority that attends the categorical imperative. Even more strikingly, I have argued that the force of hypothetical imperatives is dependent on, and is at least in part constituted by, the force of some antecedent categorical imperative that is in part definitive of instrumental rationality.35

Although Hampton is not (at least not obviously) adopting the wide-scope view that is here under consideration, her position makes clear that she welcomes its implications. It also makes clear that certain presuppositions about rationality, and the nature of rational requirements, do lead us to locate in hypothetical imperatives “the same mysterious objective authority that attends categorical imperatives.” It does seem that if there are stringent particular hypothetical imperatives that unequivocally command us to take means, then the categorical bindingness of this imperative must derive from a preceding categorical imperative. As I have argued, if those who endorse the wide-scope view of the Hypothetical Imperative also want to maintain that particular ought statements are rationally derivable from this fundamental rational requirement, then they require not only this antecedent categorical consistency requirement, but also some antecedent categorical imperative guiding practical reason’s endorsement of our ends such that its requirements constitute conditions of detachment. Hampton embraces the implication of her argument; the bindingness of a hypothetical imperative is actually categorical—reason is always authoritative: “…the upshot of the preceding arguments is that an ‘ought’ is an ‘ought.’”36

The wide-scope interpretation of the hypothetical imperative does not capture any difference in rational necessity between hypothetical and categorical imperatives—all imperatives turn out to


36 Hampton, The Authority of Reason, p.166.
be categorical. Although this is a consequence that many, including Hampton, may be comfortable with, I think it is problematic. At least for Kant, it is this difference that distinguishes the two types of imperative—the difference between conditional and unconditional necessity. If we lose any meaningful sense in which the hypothetical imperative is in fact hypothetical, then it no longer remains clear what the concept of such an imperative is meant to capture.

If Hampton is correct, and all imperatives of reason are, at bottom categorical, then we are hard-pressed to capture any significant rational difference between hypothetical imperatives and those that are more generally recognized as categorical. How does the same kind of rational necessity pick out different kinds of rational thinking such that we can meaningfully isolate an instance of a failure of instrumental rationality that is not at the same time a failure of moral reasoning? If anything, the most plausible rendition of this view endorses a picture in which hypothetical imperatives are a distinct subset of imperatives (specifying the necessary relations between means and ends) derivable from the Categorical Imperative.

But if this is true, then all practical rational failing seems to be of the same kind. We might fail according to the specific content of different imperatives, but the rational transgression is identical in kind. Notice that on this interpretation, if we are to derive any particular practical conclusion specifying what is to be done, then, as we have already noted, this requires conditions of detachment that are themselves (categorical) rational requirements. In these cases, if we fail to take the means to an end that is rationally required, then we have flouted a categorical rational requirement, and there seems to be no difference between this kind of rational failing and any other rational failing in which we flout a categorical requirement. At least according to the Kantian picture, all rational failing then is moral failing. There seems to be no coherent way to capture any normative difference between stupidity or imprudence, on the one hand, and immorality, on the other.

Furthermore, even if we were to entertain an interpretation of the wide-scope view in which the Hypothetical Imperative functioned merely as a consistency requirement, and did not function as a premise in a practical argument the conclusion of which is an unequivocal particular prescription, we still run up against this same consequence—only now with an added oddity. Since the hypothetical imperative is here interpreted as a categorical requirement commanding us
to either take the means to our ends or to abandon our ends, then given the pair of disjunctive sets we might derive there are always two ways we might satisfy the imperative and two ways we can flout it. We will satisfy this imperative if we either take the means to our ends or omit taking the means and give up the end. We will be in violation of the imperative, however, if we maintain the ends and do not take the means, or if we take the means having given up the end. So, for example, if I have not abandoned my end of murdering my nephew most efficiently, and I have decided against taking the means, then I have flouted this categorical rational requirement. This should strike us as especially counterintuitive.

The main point is that there seems to be no difference in moral culpability between standardly recognized violations of the Categorical Imperative and the violations of this categorical consistency requirement. On this view there is no coherent difference in rational failing between having the immoral end and not taking the means and a case in which one were to have an immoral end and take the means. Both transgressions are equally in violation of a categorical rational requirement. But notice that on this interpretation what the Hypothetical Imperative condemns is not the having of the immoral end, but the practical inconsistency—yet the flouting of the rational requirements in both cases seems to be equally (morally) culpable.

Hill tells us that the distinguishing characteristic of the Hypothetical Imperative is that it cannot be applied without information about an agent’s ends (though certainly it could be applied hypothetically with respect to an agent’s possible ends). The same is true, however, of the Categorical Imperative. We cannot derive particular moral prescriptions without information about an agent’s proposed or possible end.

In order to see this, consider Christine Korsgaard’s ‘practical contradiction’ interpretation of Kant’s formula of universal law. Korsgaard explains that according to the ‘practical contradiction’ interpretation of the contradiction in conception test, the test according to which we test our maxim in order to assess its fitness for universality, the contradiction involved in an agent’s willing of an immoral maxim occurs when in the world in which the agent’s maxim is universalized, the “agent would be unable to act on that maxim to achieve her purpose.”

37 Though, even this could turn out to be problematic on the wide-scope view.
If this interpretation is correct, then it is essential that in testing maxims of actions the purpose always be included in the formulation of the maxim. It is what happens to the purpose that is the key to the contradiction.\textsuperscript{38}

According to this interpretation, when we apply the Categorical Imperative in order to derive substantive moral requirements, we imagine a world in which our maxim, which contains our purpose, is universalized, and look to see if our purpose would thereby become thwarted. If the efficacy of our action depends on its exceptionality, then the maxim is immoral, and we are morally required to refrain from adopting it as our subjective principle. What this interpretation clearly shows though is that in order for the Categorical Imperative to be applied, (empirical) information about an agent’s ends is required. We need not be committed to this particular interpretation to concede the point. All other interpretations of the application of the Categorical Imperative will require the specification of the agent’s end. The specification of the action’s purpose is an essential component of the agent’s maxim—the very thing we test in order to specify the particular requirement of the imperative.

Certainly Hill is correct to point out that in the case of the Categorical Imperative, it is not the information about the agent’s ends that is necessary to establish the rationality of the resulting prescription.\textsuperscript{39} The point being that the normativity of the Categorical Imperative in no way derives from the specification of the agent’s end, even if that information is required for its application. But the application of the Categorical Imperative does rely on a certain type of empirical information—“namely, what the agent in question wills to pursue as an end.”\textsuperscript{40} Since information about the agent’s ends is required in both cases in order to derive particular prescriptions, the salient difference that Hill tries to capture between the Hypothetical and the Categorical Imperative(s), is best understood by focusing on just what establishes the rationality of the resulting prescription. Certainly problematic or possible imperatives don’t require any


\textsuperscript{39} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 444. Of course, on the wide-scope view this is also true for the Hypothetical Imperative.

\textsuperscript{40} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 444.
particular information about an agent’s actual ends in order for us to generate particular hypothetical conclusions. But it is true, that the rationality of the resulting (possible) prescriptions is established only with reference to, and in virtue of those (possible) ends. That is, it is the having of the end that is, at least in part, the ground of the resulting rational requirement. So it is the information about the end (possible or actual) that is, at least in part, responsible for generating the requirement and the resulting normative force. This is not the case with the prescriptions that derive from the Categorical Imperative. We might require information about what an agent wills to pursue in order to find out what particular prescription the Categorical Imperative requires, in order to specify its content, but this information is not in any way responsible for the normative force of the resulting prescription. Rather, it is reason itself that is the sole ground of the particular obligation, or unconditional rational requirement. If information about an agent’s end is required to establish the rationality, or normativity of a particular prescription, then the agent’s end is a condition of that normative prescription.

In order to see this, consider cases in which a categorical imperative has a conditional form. Consider the following: If you want to kill that man, you should seek a therapist. And compare this with a hypothetical imperative that has an identical antecedent: If you want to kill that man, you should slip this tasteless poison in his drink. In both cases information from the antecedent is required in order to specify what it is one is committed to. In the former case, the information in the antecedent is required to specify the content of the normative prescription, but the ground of this requirement is not the agent’s desire or end, rather it is an unconditional law prohibiting the agent from taking another’s life. In the latter case, the resulting prescription is conditional upon the agent’s desire, or the end specified in the antecedent.

When we apply the Categorical Imperative in order to derive a particular normative requirement, we require information about an agent’s ends in order to make that application. But that information is not responsible for the resulting normativity. It merely allows us to see the underlying form of the maxim, and therefore its permissibility or impermissibility. But the reason Hill thinks that we need to appeal to information about an agent’s ends in order to derive

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41 Hill classifies the particular prescriptions as hypothetical since information about an agent’s ends is required in order to rationally defend it.
or to justify a particular (hypothetical normative prescription) is because of the unique way in which we think that information relates with the imperative. If we think that information about the agent’s ends is required in order to rationally justify the resulting prescription, it is because we think that it is the content of that end that in part helps to specify just what is rationally required.

This seems to be an interesting feature of the Hypothetical Imperative as Hill interprets it. It is a stringent rational requirement that seems only to require information about an agent’s ends in order to issue in unequivocal particular prescriptions. But it does not just require that information to be applied, it must borrow something from it—its particular prescriptions must derive some of their normative force from the fact that an agent wills a certain end—no matter if the ground of this willing is inclination or duty. The ground of the resulting requirement is, at least in part, ‘the fact’ that the agent has a given end, coupled with this fundamental principle of practical reason. Whether or not there can be a stringent (unconditional), unequivocal rational requirement that derives from two sources, is an issue I will not pursue here.

Hill’s attempt to distinguish between the two kinds of imperatives by appealing to the unique way in which information about an agent’s ends is required to justify or defend particular hypothetical prescriptions is right, but this, I have argued, speaks against his contention that the requirement is both strict and derivative from a fundamental Hypothetical Imperative that is wide-scope.
Chapter 3: The Material Interpretation

1.

In this chapter, I look at the narrow-scope view of hypothetical imperatives. According to the narrow-scope view, the ‘ought’ has scope only over the consequent of the conditional statement in which it figures. Kantians who endorse the narrow-scope view have tried to offer interpretations that avoid the worrisome implications about practical reason that largely motivate the wide-scope view. Again, the worry is that if the imperative is regarded as a narrow-scope requirement, and the ‘ought’ is an operator whose scope is the consequent of a conditional, then we will detach obligations to take the necessary means from the mere fact that we will an end. Not only does this make it seem as if our mere willing of an end provides us with a reason to act, but it also allows us to detach imperatives that could conflict with other rational requirements. For instance, if I will the end of obtaining ready cash, and making a false promise of repayment is the only means available to realize this end, the narrow-scope imperative enjoins me to make a false promise.

It seems problematic, certainly on a Kantian account, that we could come under rational directives to take actions that could be immoral, or deeply at odds with other practical principles, namely categorical imperatives, simply by willing an end. This worry about detachment leads the Kantians who are sympathetic to a narrow-scope reading to endorse what Stephen Engstrom has called “the material interpretation.” On this view, the Hypothetical Imperative is an imperative with conditional form, in which the ‘ought’ holds only over the consequent of the conditional. Yet, on this view, the agent is only conditionally enjoined to take means to ends that are willed in accordance with the categorical imperative. We only detach imperatives to take the necessary means if the end is endorsed by practical reason. Thus, if reason directs us in the use of certain means, it is only because it has antecedently directed us to adopt the respective end and endorsed this end as practically necessary or good. On this reading, we will never detach practical conclusions that conflict with the Categorical Imperative; if it is the case that the only way of realizing an end is by making use of immoral means, it cannot be thought that this is an end endorsed by practical reason. Engstrom explains
a hypothetical imperative prescribes the necessary means to an end set by practical reason ... if practical reason determines that my health is an ought-to-be – something good, all things considered – then, in light of my knowledge that exercise is necessary for health, it will require I exercise. The resulting imperative is hypothetical in that its requirement is conditional upon practical reason’s determination that the end is good.\textsuperscript{42}

We can formulate the imperative the following way: ‘If one ought to will an end, then one ought to take the necessary means. If practical reason judges an end to be good – all things considered, “then one cannot rationally forego it, and one is thus constrained by practical reason to adopt the necessary means.”\textsuperscript{43}

On this view hypothetical imperatives only bind agents whose ends are determined rationally, and so for Kant, these will (presumably)\textsuperscript{44} be ends willed in accordance with the categorical imperative. Hypothetical imperatives are conditional on categorical imperatives, and the necessity they express is unconditional necessity, grounded in the unconditional necessity of the end, an end that is, on this view, one that an agent “cannot rationally forego.”

Other Kantians that hold a narrow-scope reading of the hypothetical imperatives also implicitly endorse the material interpretation. In section 2., I look at both a classical as well as a contemporary defense of the material interpretation. I begin with H.J. Paton’s view of Kant’s theory of practical reason, as set out in his, now classic book, The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant’s Moral Philosophy. Although Paton does not explicitly endorse the material interpretation, there are compelling reasons to ascribe it to him, and his account can be read as an earlier formulation of the view. His analysis is instructive both because it lays clear the assumptions about practical reason that motivate the material interpretation, but also the tension they give rise to. Next, I consider Mark Schroeder’s view of Kant’s hypothetical imperative as a contemporary example of the material interpretation. Schroeder argues that on Kant’s view

\textsuperscript{42}Engstrom, “Allison on Rational Agency,” p. 408.
\textsuperscript{43}Engstrom, “Allison on Rational Agency,” p. 408.
\textsuperscript{44}In the next chapter I turn to Henry Allison’s view. Allison rejects that the only rational ends are ends that are determined in accordance with the categorical imperative, and argues that Kant thought that even agents who were not bound by morality could frame a rational order of ends for themselves.
hypothetical imperatives are consequent-scope, but they only come into play as assertoric imperatives, and therefore we will only detach conclusions to take the necessary means, when these ends are set by Wille and so willed in accordance with the categorical imperative.

In section 3., I draw out an important implication of this view namely, that hypothetical imperatives only command with respect to our obligatory ends. On a Kantian view, these will be ends required by the moral imperative, and so also duties. In section 4., I highlight three significant consequences and indicate a few of the textual difficulties with trying to square this view with Kant. To conclude, I point out a significant similarity between the wide-scope view and the material interpretation, and show how the analysis of all imperatives as obligations steers us to a categorical imperative. This should surprise no one, given that Kant’s principal move in the opening of the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals* is to analyze the datum of our experience of obligation and find the concept of a categorical imperative.

2.

In his book, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, Paton offers an interpretation of Kant’s theory of practical reason that has had significant and lasting influence in the literature. I argue that Paton’s interpretation falls under the material interpretation.

Since for Kant, all human volition is rational, all actions will have a maxim—they are willed ‘as an instance of a concept or a rule.’ As rational we act in accordance with principles or laws, and thereby have a will. This rational aspect of action differentiates consciously willed action from the merely impulsive.

*In a rational being an animal inclination, in so far as it is conceived through reason, becomes what he (Kant) calls a ‘pathological interest,’ and on this*

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45 Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 82.
interest a material maxim\(^{46}\) is based. As he considers the pathological interest to be directed to the object, or intended results, of the action, he may possibly regard every material maxim as setting forth the kind of action necessary to secure the object. If so, every material maxim may be regarded as stating the means to an end, the means being the action and the object being the end.\(^{47}\)

Many of our maxims (the subjective principles of volition) must take the form: ‘I will do X as a means to Y,’\(^{48}\) and the particular maxims that specify the choice of means to our particular ends, “may be considered as having a more general maxim, the maxim ‘I will use the most effective means to any end I may have.’”\(^{49}\) This more general maxim may be regarded as the controlling maxim, governing our adopting of particular maxims of skill.\(^{50}\) In this respect practical reason is shown in “maintaining the conscious unity of our actions and policies,” a unity we might describe as conforming to “the concept of means and ends.”\(^{51}\)

Similarly, practical reason is shown in the adoption of our material maxims of self-love or prudence. Here reason is concerned not only with the unity of our discrete actions and policies, but also with unifying them in relation to one another with the aim of happiness, and determining the ends by which our happiness might be constituted. Therefore, maxims of prudence, according to Paton are not fully captured by the concept of means and ends. “The maxim of prudence or rational self-love is: ‘I will seek my own happiness,’”\(^{52}\) and according to Paton, it “commonly

\(^{46}\) “Empirical maxims are also called material maxims: they refer to the desired ends which the action attempts to realize, and these ends are the matter of the maxim,” (The Categorical Imperative, p. 61).

\(^{47}\) Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 83.

\(^{48}\) Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 84.

\(^{49}\) Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 84.

\(^{50}\) See also, Paton, The Categorical Imperative, 84: “By itself this more general or higher maxim is empty, and it may not be consciously formulated; but we may nevertheless be said to act according with it if we refuse to act on particular maxims which are opposed to it. In such a case we might be said to act only on maxims which fall under the higher maxim of using the most efficient means to our ends. Needless to say we do not act on this higher maxim in vacuo—we must also desire a particular end and be aware of a particular means.”

\(^{51}\) Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 85.

\(^{52}\) Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 86. Paton thinks this is better interpreted as “a maxim of integration (I will aim at the satisfaction of my desires in a whole organized and systematic life).”
overrides the maxims of skill, though it does not supersede them.”\textsuperscript{53} It is a “controlling maxim,”\textsuperscript{54} and it governs our adoption of means and ends, our maxims of skill, based on their compatibility with, and facilitation of, our happiness.

But although the maxims of skill and self-love, or prudence, are rational principles, our adoption of them as finite human beings is \textit{subjectively contingent}. Since we are constituted such that our inclinations may prompt us to act in ways that are at times opposed to them, these principles, considered subjectively, are not necessary. But if we imagine an agent whose reason has full control over his passions and inclinations, such an agent would \textit{necessarily} act in accordance with these principles,\textsuperscript{55} and so they are, for this reason, also \textit{objective} principles of practical reason valid for every rational agent.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Kant regards the principles of skill and self-love as principles on which any rational agent would necessarily act if reason had full control over the passions. To say this is to say that they are objective principles; and again, in Kant’s language, that they are objectively necessary, even although they may be subjectively contingent. What is peculiar about them is that although they are objective principles, they are so only \textbf{subject to a condition}.}\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Paton thinks that a fully rational agent who seeks a particular end “will necessarily use the most effective means to this particular end, if he seeks the end,” this is therefore the general principle of skill, and it is an objective principle of practical reason. Similarly, the principle of self-love, or prudence, is an objective rational principle because a rational agent whose reason is in full control of his passions will necessarily act on it.

\textsuperscript{53} Paton, \textit{The Categorical Imperative}, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{54} “In this way the maxim of prudence may be our controlling maxim, and we may be said to act on particular maxims only as they fall under that maxim of prudence. But once again we do no act upon this controlling maxim \textit{in vacuo}: it has content only insofar as we desire particular ends and seek to make use of particular means,” (\textit{The Categorical Imperative}, p. 86).

\textsuperscript{55} This is an assumption that many Kantians make, but Kant does not himself provide any argument for it. I return to this point in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{56} Paton, \textit{The Categorical Imperative}, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{57} Paton, \textit{The Categorical Imperative}, p. 90.
But, in addition to the general principles of skill and self-love, there are also the particular applications of them, the particular principles of skill and self-love falling under them.

The general principle of skill—the principle of using the most effective means—is objectively valid for any rational agent. Particular principles of skill (which are only applications of the general principle) are also objectively valid, but only subject to the condition that some particular end is sought. Their conditional character does not detract from their objectivity.\(^{58}\)

The same can be said for the particular principles of self-love, though still objective, they are conditioned by the desires and character of the agent.

On Paton’s interpretation of Kant, it is only the applications of the general principles of skill and self-love that are in fact conditioned, but the general principles from which they are derived are not:

\(I \text{ have followed Kant in speaking of the principles of skill and self-love as conditioned and of the principle of morality as unconditioned, but it may be necessary to add certain qualifications. It is clear enough that particular principles of skill are objectively valid only if a certain end is desired, and that particular principles of self-love are valid only if the character of the agent is such that he will find happiness in acting according to these principles. But these particular principles are all applications of a general principle, of skill or self-love as the case may be. The general principle of using the most effective means to a desired end is not itself conditioned by desire for a particular end: only its application is so conditioned. And the general principle of seeking the maximum satisfaction of desires or the maximum integration of ends is not itself conditioned by the particular character of the agent: only its application is so conditioned.}\(^{59}\)
*Particular* principles of skill and self-love are conditioned both by the desires and ends of the agent as well as by their compatibility with the ‘higher’ principles:

*Principles of skill are conditioned, not merely by the end sought, but also by their compatibility with the higher principle of prudence or self-love. This, however, in no way means that they cease to be objective principles.*\(^{60}\)

And:

*Particular* principles of self-love, though objective, are still conditioned. They are conditioned first of all by the character and desires of the particular agent... *In the second place—if Kant is right—the principles of self-love are conditioned by their compatibility with the principles of morality.*\(^{61}\)

But Paton resists the idea that the general unconditional practical principles of skill and self-love, are somehow *conditioned* by their compatibility with higher ones:

*On the other hand the general principle of skill is, so to speak, taken up into the general principle of self-love. Self-love has in view a more comprehensive end, and in reference to that end it will use the most effective means. Here also it is rather particular principles of skill that are conditioned by the principle of self-love. The general principle of skill is similarly taken up into the principle of morality: a good man will use the most effective means to the attainment of his moral ends, and it is only particular principles of skill which are conditioned by the principle of morality.*\(^{62}\)

Because the general principles are objective principles, and their *objectivity* gives them their *unconditional* character—they are principles that any fully rational being would adopt—Paton is hesitant to say that these general principles are themselves conditioned by the principle of morality. This suggests a tension between Paton’s view of practical objectivity of the principles

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\(^{60}\) Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 91.


\(^{62}\) Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 95.
of skill and self-love and Kant’s view of the distinctively unconditional character of the principle of morality:

**particular** principles of self-love are conditioned by the principle of morality, but it is harder to say whether the **general** principle of self-love is so also. Certainly on Kant’s view the general principle is not opposed to morality: the good man has a right, and even at times an indirect duty, to seek his own happiness. At times, however, a good man, so far as he is good, will necessarily be prepared to sacrifice his whole happiness and his whole life, and this looks as if the general principle of self-love, and not merely its particular applications, **is conditioned by the principle of morality**.

Even if this is so, it seems clear that the general principles of skill and self-love (if we can distinguish these from their particular applications)⁶³ are not conditioned by particular human desires, although their application is so conditioned. So far, both principles seem to have an unconditioned character, and to have it in virtue of being objective principles.⁶⁴

The general principles of skill and self-love appear to be unconditioned in virtue of their being objective principles; qua objective, they are not conditioned by the particular desires and ends of an agent. And they are “taken up into” the principle of morality rather than conditioned by it.

Paton insists that the **particular** principles of skill and self-love are objective despite the fact that they are indeed conditioned by the particular desires and ends of the agent. If their objectivity is supposedly explained by their derivation from the general objective, and hence, unconditional principles, this suggests a tension. If their objectivity is borrowed from the unconditional practical principles, then it would appear that even these particular principles would express unconditional necessity. Given information about the set of an agent’s empirical desires, it would seem that a certain set of ends would be required by the principle(s) of prudence and therefore, a

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⁶³ If we cannot distinguish them from their particular applications, then they would indeed be conditional on the desires and ends of the agent. It’s interesting that Paton casts this doubt on a distinction his own view of Kant’s theory of practical reason really depends on.

certain set of necessary means, required by the principle(s) of skill. The particular precepts of skill and self-love may be conditioned, in a certain sense, by the desires and ends of the agent, but this empirical information is not the ground of the necessity, but information that is necessary in order to apply it. In order to see this, take the most obvious case of an unconditional principle, the categorical imperative. Kant thinks that the content of specific moral commands requires information about our nature as empirical beings, but this information enters into the account, not as a ground of the obligation, but necessary to apply it. In the case of particular moral principles, they are in a certain sense conditioned, but the necessity they express is unconditional—it is a categorical imperative.

If we assume that practical principles have an unconditional character in virtue of being objective, then in order to explain the objectivity of the conditional principles, we’ll need to assume it derives from an objective and unconditional principle. This assumption—that the objectivity of a practical principle is explained by its unconditional character, and therefore that it does not depend on the particular nature or constitution of any particular rational being, and holds equally for all rational beings—gives rise to three related concerns. First, Paton undercuts the moral difference Kant sees between the unconditional and conditional principles since the general principles of skill, self-love, and morality are unconditional (and in virtue of their being objective). Consequently, it is unclear how, or even if, we can account for their supposed hierarchy. Finally, for Kant, at least the particular, principles of skill and self-love are material principles and correlate with material maxims. They depend on contingent aspects of our nature as sensible beings, namely the pathological interest we have in the object of the action, and they are based on our material maxims. Insofar as Paton postulates general and unconditional principles of practical reason, the content of which is dependent on our empirical nature, it’s not at all clear how these could be unconditional principles, principles that would necessarily hold for every rational being.

First, by characterizing the general principles of skill and prudence as *unconditional* practical principles, Paton displaces the crucial moral difference Kant saw between conditional and unconditional practical principles; on this picture, not all unconditional practical principles are
moral principles. For Kant, the very idea of an unconditional principle tells us “at once what it contains.”\textsuperscript{65} And Paton recognizes this:

\begin{quote}
The conditioned objective principles which we have hitherto examined have suggested to us the Idea of an unconditional objective principle....An unconditional objective principle would omit all reference to the desires and character of particular agents: it would omit all reference to particular ends and even to the comprehensive end of the agent’s own happiness. Such a principle, as we have seen, could only be the form of a principle, or a formal principle—the principle, so to speak, of having an objective principle and so of being reasonable. Kant has described it as a principle of law-abidingness, a principle of acting in accordance with universal law as such.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

But then, how could it be that the general principles of skill and self-love are also unconditioned and objective principles? They aren’t merely formal principles. If these other general principles are really unconditioned, why wouldn’t the particular conditioned principles suggest to us the “Idea” of each of these as well—the general principle of skill, the general principle of self-love, as well as the principle of morality? Why does a conditional particular principle of skill, for example, suggest to us the existence of an unconditional, merely formal, principle, rather than the unconditional principle of skill or self-love? Since Kant insists that the very idea of an unconditional principle tells us immediately what it contains, it’s not clear how there could be three different unconditional principles expressing different content. Finally, if it is not on account of their conditionality, it is not at all clear how we should differentiate them, or place them in a rational hierarchy (why, for example, wouldn’t the principle of morality be “taken up into” the principle of prudence, etc.). By doing away with what, for Kant, is a crucial difference between the principles of practical reason, Paton must look for some other way to account for their hierarchy.

One suggestion is that even though these principles are not based on the particular desires and characters of an agent, they do not omit all reference to an agent’s particular ends or to the

\textsuperscript{65} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:420.

\textsuperscript{66} Paton, \textit{The Categorical Imperative}, p. 93.
comprehensive end of an agent’s own happiness. Paton does consider this in a pair of footnotes. He admits that even though the general principles of skill and self-love are not conditioned by agents’ desires, “they are however, conditioned by the fact that men as finite beings, have desires.”\(^{67}\) And similarly, he adds in a following footnote:

> even the general principles of skill and self-love rest on the supposition that we seek ends because of our sensuous desires, and they have no meaning apart from this supposition. The general principle of morality does not rest upon, nor is it conditioned by such a supposition.\(^{68}\)

I think this is important to notice. If Paton is right, and Kant thinks that there are general principles of skill and self-love, then this helps to explain the way in which they are, we could say, conditional, unconditional principles. But then they are unconditional principles whose validity is conditional on the character of finite human agents in whose nature it is to have and seek material ends. We might be tempted to say, they are not the most unconditional, unconditional principles.

But while it may be the case that an objective principle applies to every finite rational will, it is not thereby an unconditional. Kant is explicit about this. Human agents necessarily seek their own happiness, but principles of prudence are nevertheless conditional—they are conditional upon this end even if it is an end that is (contingently) necessary for us\(^{69}\) (necessary in virtue of our contingent nature).\(^{70}\)

\(^{67}\) Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 95. But notice, that they could not be, according to Paton “material principles.” For Kant, material principles presuppose an object, a “matter of the faculty of desire,” and they are “without exception, empirical and can furnish no practical laws” because the desire for the object (matter) is a condition of the practical rule “becoming a principle.” Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5:21.

\(^{68}\) Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 96.

\(^{69}\) Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 96.

\(^{70}\) Cf. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:26-7, where Kant says: “[A] law that is subjectively necessary (as a law of nature) is thus objectively a very contingent practical principle, which can and must be very different in different subjects, and hence can never yield a law because, in the desire for happiness, it is not the form of lawfulness that counts but simply the matter, namely whether I am to expect satisfaction from following the law, and how much ... But suppose that finite rational beings were thoroughly agreed with respect to what they had to take as objects of their feelings of pleasure and pain and even with respect to the means they must use to obtain the first and avoid the other; even then they could by no means pass off the principle of self-love as a practical law; for, this unanimity
Paton notices that the interpretation he offers of Kant’s theory of practical reason, cuts against the grain of Kant’s own thought in significant ways, and he tries to show that perhaps the distinction between morality and prudence was less important than Kant had thought\footnote{Others have offered similar conclusions. For example, again, see Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative” p. 441; and Christine Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason” in The Constitution of Agency (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 26-68, (p. 62, fn. 60); and Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought pp. 67-70.}: \[\text{it would be a mistake to suppose that its [PofM] applications were in no sense conditioned by human desires. Kant holds that the good man will necessarily act, for example, on the principle of seeking the happiness of others, and that the way in which he does this must depend, partly at least, on the desires of others. ...I do not wish to obscure the clear difference, which it is Kant’s great merit to have emphasized, between morality on the one hand and skill and self-love on the other; but if we are entitled to distinguish between principles and their application, the general principles of skill and prudence are in a sense unconditioned: and the application even of the unconditioned moral principle must be in a sense conditioned, although not conditioned by the agent’s desires}\footnote{Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 96.}

But what is the clear difference between them that it was Kant’s “great merit” to have emphasized? Since he cannot appeal to differences in their conditionality, Paton tries to account for the “clear” normative difference between these unconditional principles in some other way:

\[\text{It may be added that one principle is called higher than another because it takes a more comprehensive view. Self-love takes into account more ends than the one considered my mere skill; and morality takes into account other agents and their...}\]
desires, not merely the desires and ends of the one agent considered by self-love.

This may not be the whole difference, but it is a difference; and it helps us to understand how the lower principle may be conditioned by the higher.\(^{73}\)

But is this really the distinction between the principles self-love and the principle of morality that it is Kant’s great legacy to have emphasized—that morality takes into account more ends than self-love and prudence? Of course, if this is the underlying principle of prioritization, it renders the “unconditional principles” conditional on facts about end maximization. Since he cannot appeal to a distinction between their status as conditional and unconditional principles, Paton attempts to offer an explanation that explains their normative hierarchy in a way that is essentially rooted in our empirical nature. His explanation seems to make the underlying ordering principle that explains the hierarchy and structures all rational practical activity into something to the effect of: “maximize end satisfaction.” This effectively means that the underlying thrust of Kant’s moral theory is heteronomy, each of the organizing principles of practical reason seem to carry with them “some interest by way of attraction or constraint.”\(^{74}\)

So far I have focused on Paton’s discussion of the objective principles of practical reason, but the same problems reiterate in his discussion of imperatives. Because the objective principles of practical reason are subjectively contingent, they appear to finite rational wills as principles of obligation or imperatives,\(^{75}\) the “principle, though recognized as objectively necessary, is not subjectively necessary, but necessitated.”\(^{76}\) Kant distinguishes between the imperatives according to whether the necessitation they express is conditioned by an end or whether it is unconditioned.

Where the objective practical principle is conditioned by the end, the imperative is hypothetical. It takes the form ‘Every rational agent, if he wills a certain end,
ought to will the action good as a means to this end."77 The command of reason is here conditioned by the end; and as the ends vary, the action enjoined by reason will also vary ...Where the objective principle is not conditioned by any end, the action is enjoined for its own sake, as good in itself without reference to any further end. The imperative is then categorical: that is to say, it is not conditioned by the hypothesis that some particular end is desired. It takes the form ‘Every rational agent ought to will the action good in itself.’78

Categorical imperatives are imperatives that are not conditioned by the ends of the agent, or by the hypothesis that some particular end is desired, and categorical imperatives are distinguished from hypothetical imperatives in virtue of being unconditional commands.

But recall that our adoption of the general principles of skill and self-love is also subjectively contingent, and so they too will appear to a finite will as imperatives. On Paton’s view, these general imperatives will themselves be categorical. Paton acknowledges that Kant recognized that the different kinds of imperative express different kinds of necessitation, but he explains these differences only hold when they have to do with the particular imperatives of skill, prudence, and morality. He insists that the general unconditional practical principles of skill and self-love express unconditional necessitation:

*Kant speaks of all imperatives both as laws and commands. This may be defended so far as the general principles of skill and self-love (though not their application) are unconditioned.*79

In light of the previous discussion then, these general principles will appear to a finite rational agent as categorical imperatives.

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77 This looks like a statement of wide-scope statement. But, as I argued last chapter, insofar as that view allows for detachment, it will require detaching conditions—ends that we, in some sense, ought to will. This, I argued, is a statement of the material interpretation.

78 Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p.116; bold emphasis added.

For Kant, hypothetical imperatives are thought be analytic, and categorical imperatives synthetic. Paton explains that hypothetical imperatives are analytic because “in the concept of willing an end (as opposed to merely desiring it or wishing it) there is contained the concept of willing the means to the end.” But Paton also suggests that the general principle of skill, though unconditional, is also analytic.

‘Any rational agent who wills the end will necessarily, so far as reason has decisive influence over his actions –will the means which are in his power.’ This proposition, which is still analytic, appears as an imperative to us because reason, though present in us, has no such decisive influence. It then takes the form ‘If any rational agent wills the end, he ought to will the means.’

Paton argues that the general principle of skill is an analytic objective principle, which we represent as a categorical imperative (the general imperative of skill), but whose application issues in particular and conditional hypothetical imperatives. For Kant, however, the analyticity has everything to do with the conditionality of the hypothetical imperatives; the action is commanded based on the presupposition that the agent wills the end. If we conceive of a general imperative of skill that commands categorically, independently of the ends and desires of the agent and so without a presupposed condition, the principle will therefore be synthetic: we need an argument for this principle that proceeds entirely a priori, and both establishes as well as explains the a priori objective principle. Speaking of a categorical and unconditional command, Kant says, that discovering how “such an absolute command is possible, even if we know its tenor, will still require special and difficult toil…”

The same considerations apply to the general imperative of prudence only here Paton explicitly points out that the general imperative of prudence is not obviously analytic:

Kant’s imperatives of self-love are not derived from the fact that all men happen to seek happiness. They are derived from the assumption that this is what a finite

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81 Paton, The Categorical Imperative, p. 124. Notice this is the narrow-scope formulation.
82 Kant, Groundwork, 4:420
rational agent, qua rational, would necessarily do. Only so can the principle be an unconditioned principle (except insofar as it may be overridden by a higher); and only so can happiness on Kant’s theory be an objective and genuine good. It is, however, by no means obvious that this principle is an analytic proposition.

It is not obviously analytic because, qua rational, it is unconditional. I have pointed out that, according to Paton, this should also be true for the general, and unconditional, imperative of skill.

What is instructive about Paton’s analysis is the way in which the trouble arises for him in precisely the way that it does. These sticky points arise in connection with a very specific account of objectivity for all practical principles—an account, that on Kant’s view, explains only the moral principle. In order to explain the objectivity of conditional principles, Paton assumes that they need to derive from unconditional principles. So we see that in order to explain the hypothetical imperative, we need to appeal to a categorical one. It’s clear that these issues arise in connection with a struggle to understand the nature and the normativity of the instrumental and prudential principles. The critical assumption is that all objectivity, with respect to the practical, must hold for every rational being and therefore must be unconditional. But Kant only speaks of moral principles this way, and the other principles express only a “subjectively conditioned necessity. And we see that Paton offers one popular way of understanding this: it derives from specifically objective principles of practical reason, though its application is subjectively conditioned on the empirical desires and ends of the agent.

Leaving aside the complication of introducing unconditional practical principles of skill and self-love to explain the objectivity of hypothetical, conditional imperatives, we can see that Paton’s view is one version of the material interpretation. According to this picture of practical reason, all objective rational principles derive their objectivity from the set of principles that a rational agent would necessarily act on if reason had full control over the agent’s passions. The general principles of skill and prudence are objective, and qua rational, they have an unconditional

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83 The claim that a purely rational being necessarily behaves in a certain way, and independently of particular desires and ends, requires an argument. It’s not self-evident that a purely rational being wills its own happiness.

character. Particular hypothetical imperatives, of skill and self-love, only arise insofar as they are applications of the general imperatives, and insofar as they are consistent with the “higher” principles of practical reason. This rules out the possibility of deriving objective particular precepts to take immoral means, or means to an immoral end, and in this way, the possibility of particular hypothetical imperatives is conditional on practical reason’s endorsement of our actions as moral (but also prudential, and most effective). On Paton’s view, we only yield a particular imperative to take a particular set of means insofar as these imperatives have been ‘conditioned’ by the higher principles. 85

Mark Schroeder offers a more recent defense 86 of the narrow-scope view against the standard, 87 wide-scope, interpretation of Kant’s hypothetical imperatives. Schroeder argues that the only motivation for holding the wide-scope view of hypothetical imperatives stems from the contemporary worry about detachment. 88

Schroeder argues that the problem of detachment should not worry Kantians, for on Kant’s view, it is impossible that a finite rational agent could will an end to which one ought not to take the necessary means. According to Schroeder, Kant does not provide an account of what is to have

85 This is true for both of the higher principles, so it seems that we could not derive a conclusion to take the means even to a morally permissible end, if the end were inconsistent with our prudence. If it were consistent with it, then insofar as prudence is required, the end itself becomes, in a certain sense, obligatory (prudentially required).

86 Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative?”

87 See, Hill “The Hypothetical Imperative,” as well as Hill, “Kant’s Theory of Practical Reason,” The Monist, 72 (1989), pp. 363-383, (p. 365). Schroeder points out that Rawls would seem to agree since Hill cited his lectures, in “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 429. Schroeder also attributes the view to Korsgaard. See, for example, Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p. 46 fn 34. Again, also see Darwall, Impartial Reason, pp. 16, 47; and Hampton, The Authority of Reason, pp. 144, 165. Schroeder agrees that Paton is unclear on this issue. I would also add Allison’s, Kant’s theory of Freedom, as well as Wood’s, Kant’s Ethical Thought. Both argue that there is a general, wide-scope hypothetical imperative that conditions the particular applications, which are consequent-scope. In chapter 2, I argued that this is incoherent unless we have a detaching condition, an end that is obligatory in some sense. I turn to Allison and Wood’s view in the next chapter.

88 Recall that on the narrow-scope reading, if some one has an end, we simply apply modus ponens and derive the conclusion that he ought to take the necessary means. This allows us to “detach ought-statements statements which are patently false,” so the argument for wide-scope takes the form of a reductio and concludes that narrow-scope “must be false.”
or will an end in “wholly non-normative terms” as contemporary naturalists think it is possible to do. 89

Rather, for Kant, “willing an end” is fundamentally normative, it just means “ought to will the necessary means.” On Schroeder’s interpretation, “one simply can’t will an end, unless it could be the case that one ought to take the necessary means,” so the problem the worry envisions just does not arise on Kant’s view, it’s rather one that “Kant will find simply impossible.” 90

On Schroeder’s view of Kant, “bad” ends are set by Willkür and not Wille. 91 They are a product of choice, and ultimately set by nature and determined through our desires, and this is the condition of heteronomy. In order to will an end in the Kantian sense, the object must be willed autonomously, according to incentives “set by wille,” and so already always subject to the constraints set by the categorical imperative. Choices to pursue immoral objects, or objects for which immoral actions are necessary conditions of the existence of the object, are not the product of the will, for Kant, and so Schroeder insists that we cannot will them in the sense “appropriate to hypothetical imperatives.” 92 For Schroeder, all imperatives, hypothetical as well as categorical have their source in Wille, the pure will.

Now Schroeder also claims that this is not to say that hypothetical imperatives do not ever ‘come into play’ with bad ends, but they do so only insofar as they are hypothetical: “if hypothetical imperatives are truly analytic, then they do not discriminate between conceptually possible ends, if you have the end of poisoning, then you ought to take the means.” It’s not, however, possible to will these ends, and so we won’t ever come under an assertoric imperative that commands the necessary means to them. Since they cannot be willed according to a categorical imperative, they cannot be ends for us, and we therefore will never detach a conclusion that commands the necessary means to them. Only autonomous beings, beings capable of being guided by the

89 Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative?” p. 368.
90 Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative?” p. 368.
92 I think this invites the concerns I raise at the end of the chapter.
categorical imperative, have ends in the requisite (Kantian) sense, and the command only applies to our “ends.” On Schroeder’s account of the analyticity argument at Groundwork, 4:417, having an end conceptually entails that one ought to will the necessary means to it, and so it will turn out that “you cannot will ends unless you ought to take the necessary means to them.”

On Schroeder’s view Kant thinks it is only unproblematic to understand how hypothetical imperatives are possible hypothetically, and that he is not claiming that it is unproblematic to understand their possibility as imperatives that apply to us. Accordingly, we cannot come to find out that we in fact stand under any such imperative until a transcendental argument for the categorical imperative is given. It follows, then, that the possibility that we might stand under any such imperative is equally as uncertain as the possibility that we might stand under a categorical imperative.

But if Schroeder’s account of the analyticity of hypothetical imperatives is correct, and willing an end analytically entails ‘ought to will the means,’ then it is not clear how immoral ends, or ends for which we ought not to take the means, are even conceptually possible as “ends,” rather than say “choices” (set by Willkür). If the relevant rational connection between willing an end and the imperative telling us to take the means, is that the concept “willing an end” just means “ought to take the means,” then it is unclear why Kant would think that “if you have the end of

95 Kant certainly seems to think we do stand under at least one assertoric imperative: “There is, however, one end that can be presupposed as actual in the case of all rational beings (insofar as imperatives apply to them, namely as dependent beings), and therefore one purpose that they not merely could have but that we can safely presuppose they all actually do have by a natural necessity, and that purpose is happiness. The hypothetical imperative that represents the practical necessity of an action as a means to the promotion of happiness is assertoric. It may be set forth not merely as necessary to some uncertain, merely possible purpose but to a purpose that can be presupposed surely and a priori in the case of every human being, because it belongs to his essence,” (Groundwork, 4:415-6).
poisoning, then you *ought* to take the necessary means” is an accurate example of a hypothetical imperative, even hypothetically speaking. That is, if a necessary condition for being the kind of beings that have ends is to be capable of guiding ourselves in accordance with the categorical imperative, and if bad ends are set by *Willkür* and not *Wille*, then that would seem to rule out the conceptual possibility of a great many objects *even qualifying as ends* (even as ‘hypothetical’ ones). Only certain actions or purposes will be candidates for being a conceptually possible end (by Schroeder’s own definition). What is analytic on Schroeder’s interpretation is that “willing an end” entails “ought to will the means.” But then even the (hypothetical) *possibility* of these imperatives will turn out to be exactly as problematic to understand as the possibility of the categorical imperative. The analyticity of the hypothetical imperative ‘rides on the back,’ so to speak, of the categorical imperative.

Schroeder concludes that the consequent-scope is not itself a requirement, but a truth about requirements—about when agents come under them. “Consequent-scope” is not itself the requirement that an agent take the means, and so it is not itself a “principle” or imperative of practical reason; it does not apply to finite wills or direct them, but merely “specifies when and how they can come under obligations to do one or another.” But if we only come under hypothetical imperatives when we *will* an end in this special Kantian sense, then the explanation of when and how we come under an obligation to take the means will remain unintelligible without a transcendental argument for our autonomy.

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For both Paton and Schroeder our ends are fundamentally normative. Indeed Schroeder insists that, for Kant, you cannot will an end not endorsed by practical reason. The only ends that we can will are set by Wille. Our faculty of choice (Willkür) can pursue a “bad end,” but it cannot be willed, Schroeder says, “in the sense that I claim is appropriate to hypothetical imperatives, on Kant’s view.”100 For Paton and Schroeder, we can only will ends in accordance with the categorical imperative, and so hypothetical imperatives are generated only with respect to the ends we adopt on the basis of rational incentives, set by pure reason. Schroeder says, “you can’t will ends unless you ought to take the necessary means to them.”101 And for Paton, the particular imperatives of skill and self-love are always conditioned by morality, they will also only apply insofar as the end is consistent with a moral disposition. Hypothetical imperatives govern only with respect to ends set in accordance with morality.

There are two possibilities here. Either these will be ends that are required by the categorical imperative, our obligatory ends, or they will be ends that are merely compatible with it, our permissible ends.

If the ends are obligatory, then given the analytic connection between having an end, and “ought to will the necessary means,” the obligation to will the necessary means, follows analytically from an obligation to will the end. Of course all obligatory ends will analytically entail “ought to will the necessary means.” If reason requires that we have certain ends, ends we cannot rationally forgo,102 it will follow that we ought to will the means because we ought to will the ends. If the imperative is consequent-scope, and the command applies to ends we ought to will, then we will detach a conclusion to will the necessary means.

What about ends that are merely permissible?

100 Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative?” p. 369.
On Paton’s view, it’s not clear that there are any. Insofar as the general unconditional imperatives of skill and self-love are “taken up into” the principle of morality, all “ends” compatible with it, will also be required. Insofar as the ends are not incompatible with our prudence, they will be required by their contribution to it (if not for their contribution, however small, to our felicity, we would not be in any way inclined to pursue them), so we still yield an unconditional requirement to take the means to these ends that seem to be required by the general principle of prudence. Granted, on Paton’s interpretation we have a somewhat easier time explaining this unconditional resulting obligation given the postulation of the unconditional objective principles of skill and prudence. Even if it remains the case that these particular hypothetical imperatives are conditional upon the ends that we will, the imperatives themselves will arise only in a rational context in which practical reason has endorsed the adoption of our ends—only in a context in which there is an underlying ‘objective’ principle that gives rise to them. And this can be so only if it is the case that a fully rational being would act on this principle. If this is so, however, the resulting hypothetical imperative instructing us to take the means to the end that we have willed will also be unconditional. The objective principles on which they are based are, after all, applications of the underlying general principles that are themselves unconditioned.

What about on Schroeder’s view? On the one hand he says that we can’t will ends unless “it could be the case” that we will the means to them. On the other hand his interpretation of Kant’s analyticity argument says that what is analytic is that willing an end in accordance with a moral disposition, incentives set by Wille, conceptually entails that we ought to will the necessary means. If having a permissible end simply entailed that we could will the necessary means, then we haven’t yet explained why we ought to, and we haven’t got an analytic explanation of the ensuing imperative. Rather, it seems that the imperative should then say that ‘if you will an end, you could will the necessary means to it.’ Of course we would be left without an explanation for why we should will the means to it, and moreover, why this would follow analytically from willing an end.

103 Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative?” p. 368; emphasis added.
But Schroeder insists that what is analytically entailed in willing an end, is that you ought to will the necessary means. This has to be on account of the end being good, and so a necessary object of pure practical reason. According to Schroeder’s interpretation of the analyticity argument, if an agent autonomously wills an end, the end is already subject to the rational constraints imposed by the categorical imperative, and the hypothetical imperative follows analytically from these constraints. It follows from his interpretation that “you can’t will ends unless you ought to take the necessary means to them.”¹⁰⁴ On this view, we can’t will wholly non-normative ends, at least not in the sense that is requisite for hypothetical imperatives.

If it is thought that the imperative follows analytically from the constraints set by the categorical imperative, it would appear that we ought to will the means to our ends because these ends are purposes that we ought to will. If this is so, these ends will be non-discretionary: for if we have them, “we ought to will the means to them.”¹⁰⁵ If Schroder’s interpretation of the analyticity argument at *Groundwork*, 4:417 is right, there simply won’t be any permissible ends on a Kantian account, at least we won’t will any in the sense that he claims “is appropriate to hypothetical imperatives, on Kant’s view.”¹⁰⁶

Schroeder actually concludes that the hypothetical imperative (or “consequent–scope”) on this interpretation is not itself a rational requirement, rather it just specifies when and how agents come under obligations. This really makes it abundantly clear that the ensuing obligation is in fact categorical: in the realm of practical necessity, there are only obligations. Consequent-scope tells us how we come under obligations to will means because it analytically derives the obligation from the concept of an end that can be willed. If I am right, this is just an end we are obligated to will, and willing the necessary means is required in order to successfully produce the object.

There is another issue with thinking hypothetical imperatives apply to our merely permissible ends. On the material interpretation, reason commands the means to ends endorsed by practical

¹⁰⁶ Schroder, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 370. Otherwise, how would it follow analytically that we ought to will the means?
Engstrom argues in order for an end to be endorsed by practical reason, it must be something that reason judges, all things considered, to be good. Since for Kant, if something is good, it is a necessary object of practical reason, and therefore a necessary end for all rational beings, this will be an end we cannot rationally give up.\footnote{Engstrom, “Allison on Rational Agency,” p. 408: “…a hypothetical imperative prescribes the necessary means to an end set by practical reason. Thus…if practical reason determines that my health is an ‘ought-to-be’—something good, all things considered—then, in light of my knowledge that exercise is necessary for health, it will require that I exercise. The resulting imperative is hypothetical in that its requirement is conditional upon practical reason’s determination that the end is good.”}

Engstrom points out that as a command of practical reason, an imperative expresses the efficacy of reason.\footnote{Engstrom, The Form of Practical Knowledge, p. 42.} All imperatives, both hypothetical as well as categorical, therefore, express an “interest” that reason itself takes in the action. Kant calls this a pure, or “sense-free,”\footnote{Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:79-80. Kant also calls it a practical, as well as a moral interest, see, Kant, Groundwork, 4:402, 4:413, 4:460; Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:79-80.} interest, and he contrasts it with a “pathological” interest the human will has in the object of the action. The former “indicates only dependence of the will on principles of reason in themselves,” whereas the latter indicates its “dependence on principles of reason for the sake of inclination, namely where reason supplies only the practical rule as to how to remedy the need of inclination.”\footnote{Kant, Groundwork, 4:413.} A condition for the possibility of imperatives, then, is that the agent’s desires (her empirical interests) could be opposed to this interest of her reason, and that she can therefore display “full-fledged irrationality” with respect to its principles.\footnote{Engstrom, The Form of Practical Knowledge, p. 42.} A necessary condition of an imperative is the possibility of conflict between reason and desire.

In the case of merely permissible ends, it must be supposed that reason really has no immediate interest in them (they are not obligatory). If the ends are indeed discretionary, then we lose the notion of “imperative” the standard view is committed to; if reason is not committed to the end, then it won’t be possible for reason and desire to conflict with respect to it. Consequently, it will
not yield a hypothetical imperative. If practical reason only constrains desire, and does not (ever) attend to it, then cases of strictly permissible ends will be irrelevant to it.

Hypothetical imperatives are thought to presuppose an object or purpose of the will that the commanded action is undertaken to effect. The material interpretation argues that even though the commanded action is conditional upon the end, it follows as a requirement or command of reason only if this end has been endorsed by practical reason and is, on the whole, judged to be a good thing (an ought-to-be). This will be an end that we cannot “rationally forgo,” and the imperative to take the means is conditional on the rational necessity of the end.

Now Kant says that hypothetical imperatives are conditioned on the ends of an agent. But notice that on this view, although the particular desires and ends may indirectly figure in the particular content of the command insofar as some empirical information is required to apply any imperative, this empirical component will not itself ground the ensuing imperative. If the ends are obligatory, the imperative applies to the agent independently of the particular constellation of desires and ends (especially local desires) she happens to have. Insofar as information about her desires and ends is relevant at all, it is so only insofar as it is required in order to apply the

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112 This aspect is captured by the employment of theoretical cognition, and is specifically excluded from counting as ‘practical’ cognition in practical thinking. The rational constraints involved in a merely instrumental “thinking,” or in the “rationality of practicality” are merely theoretical.

113 In fact, Kant emphasizes the connection of hypothetical imperatives with our discretionary ends. See for example, Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:415, 4:428. At *Groundwork*, 4:420, Kant says: “…the categorical imperative alone has the tenor of a practical law; all the others can indeed be called principles of the will but not laws, since what it is necessary to do merely for achieving a discretionary purpose can be regarded as in itself contingent and we can always be released from the precept if we give up the purpose; on the contrary, the unconditional command leaves the will no discretion with respect to the opposite, so that it alone brings with it that necessity which we require of a law.” This certainly seems to suggest that Kant thinks we have discretionary ends and that are the basis of hypothetical imperatives. Actually, this passage also resists a wide-scope reading. On the wide-scope view, what precept would we be released from by giving up the purpose? Not the general hypothetical imperative, if it is interpreted as an unconditional, wide-scope consistency requirement. And without detaching conditions, there will be no particular precept to will the means. If we have a legitimate detaching condition, an end that is, in some sense obligatory, then as the material interpretation makes clear, it will seem that we cannot give up the end and so cannot be “released from” the particular precept either.


116 Recall that for Paton, the particular hypothetical imperatives are conditioned on the individual desires and ends of the agent (as well as their compatibility with the higher principles).

117 Such information will be theoretically necessary in order to identify the correct means, it will not explain the practical necessitation.
principle—it is not a condition of it. Insofar as our desires and “non-normative” purposes enter into the command at all, they figure in the command in the same way they would in the moral imperative; they are not a condition of the application of the principle even if the information is necessary for its specification. Kant says,

\begin{quote}
But just as there must be principles in a metaphysics of nature for applying those highest universal principles of a nature in general to objects of experience, a metaphysics of morals cannot dispense with principles of application, and we shall often have to take as our object the particular nature of human beings, which is cognized only by experience, in order to show in it what can be inferred from universal moral principles. But this will in no way detract from the purity of these principles or cast doubt on their a priori source. This is to say, in effect, that a metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology but can still be applied to it.\footnote{\textit{Metaphysics of Morals}, 6:216-7. Of course a “doctrine of happiness,” along with its principles, would be based on experience. Its principles are based quite literally on the contingent nature of the human being. And certainly, with respect to the merely “hypothetical,” (the problematic) hypothetical imperatives, the principle is conditioned on the representation of the desired object, and “what one has to do to make it real,” (\textit{Metaphysics of Morals}, 6:216). Cf. Kant, \textit{Metaphysics of Morals}, 6:221; and Kant, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:31.}
\end{quote}

On this view, it would seem that the same is true for all imperatives.

This view leaves us with a picture of hypothetical imperatives that issue in categorical commands, and which, moreover, derive their normative force from the unconditional general principles of practical reason. Although on Paton’s view we can register distinctive kinds of practical rational failing insofar as we can identify which of the general practical principles has been violated, we are left unable to account for any normative difference between these failings; they are each failings of an unconditional principle. On both views, and on the material interpretation more generally, all practical necessitation expresses obligation.\footnote{Since Kant analyzes the necessity of obligation in the \textit{Groundwork} and finds a categorical imperative, it should not come as a surprise that if we interpret the necessitation of the hypothetical imperatives as obligation, then we will be seeking a categorical imperative in order to explain it.}
On the material interpretation, hypothetical imperatives apply only to practically free beings, and so they only come into play with the ends set by pure reason (Wille)—the obligatory ends that we cannot “rationally forgo.”

According to Kant our obligatory ends are imperfect, or indirect, duties (duties of virtue). They are ends that it is incumbent on us to adopt, and therefore ends that we cannot rationally give up. If this is right, then hypothetical imperatives will most often be grounded in our duties to makes one’s own perfection an end (including our moral perfection, training the inclinations, and making ourselves happy), and to promote the happiness of others.

Of course, these ends of reason, as imperfect duties, are duties of wide obligation, since it is only the maxim of the actions that the law prescribes and not the actions themselves, Kant says “the duty has in it a latitude for doing more or less, and no specific limits can be assigned for what should be done.” We might think that what is in fact obligatory is a general and indeterminate end, and thus reason commands only that we adopt some ends that are constitutive of the happiness of others (or ourselves, insofar as our happiness in also made good by the categorical imperative), and only some of the time. In this case, it would never command the adoption of any particular ends, and so, likewise, the ensuing hypothetical imperative, will be equally as indeterminate: we will only come under the obligation to take some means to our ends, some of the time. If the obligation allows for a certain latitude in how, and when, it is discharged, the derivation of the obligation to take the means will be exactly like that

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120 Of course, according to the material interpretation—at least Schroeder’s version—it seems to be the case that all ends that can be willed are also duties (purposes to which we ought to take the means). The set of ends that can be willed is then no broader than the set of ends that ought to be willed.

121 I say “most often” because it may turn out that if they are thought to govern constitutive means, then they may also come into play with our fulfilling of our perfect duties.

122 “Pure reason can prescribe no ends a priori without setting them forth as also duties, and such duties are then called duties of virtue,” (Metaphysics of Morals, 6:395).

123 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:393. See also, Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:390: “…the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty.”
(analytically entailed by the general rule). The obligation to take the means is conceptually contained in “ethical obligation to ends,” under which there can be many different duties. Thus we see even more clearly that the necessitation expressed in the imperative is just the operation of the categorical imperative, the operation of pure practical reason in us, and the general command to take (some) means follows analytically.

It also comes much closer to the wide-scope interpretation than holders of the material interpretation might think. Recall that on the wide-scope view, the hypothetical imperative is thought to be a fundamental principle of practical reason that categorically commands consistency in willing, whereas, on the material interpretation, the command to will the means derives from a command to will an end. But if “there are many different duties, corresponding to the different ends prescribed by the law, which are called duties of virtue,” and which allow for “playroom” (latitudo) in how we choose to discharge them, it seems that each particular end is one we can in fact rationally forgo. In which case, the hypothetical imperative really might just be a consistency requirement after all. The requirement that we ought to will the means to the ends that are ways of instantiating a certain maxim (“cultivate your powers..”, etc.), will never command any particular means; consistency is required to effect the purposes, which in accordance with the maxim, are made necessary. Of course here, it is not consistency per se, that is a virtue, but the effecting of ends that are also duties for which consistent willing was at least necessary. This follows from a “general consequent-scope imperative to will some means some of the time.”

But this picture isn’t quite right either. Kant says:

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\text{a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another (e.g., love of}
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Insofar as the maxims require that we subordinate our empirical ends to the ends that are also duties, unless there is a competing action made necessary by another limiting maxim of duty, it will not be the case that particular ends of virtue are always at our discretion, and so ones that we can easily (and always permissibly) forgo. Of course ascertaining when one maxim of duty may be limited by another will involve moral perspicuity and practical judgment, but there will be a great many duties of virtue that will not be at our discretion to give up. And if this is so, then we will be under a “hypothetical imperative” to take the means, which we should now readily see is actually a categorical imperative.

Notice that on this view, in the many instances we think instrumental reasoning is straightforwardly guided by hypothetical imperatives, this just won’t turn out to be so.

Suppose, after a long day of work, I set out to reward myself with a Klondike bar. I know that the 7-11 is slightly further than the corner store, but I notice the late time, and I realize that if I want to be sure to secure the Klondike bar this evening, I had better head straight to the 7-11. According to the material interpretation, my activity only counts as the activity of practical reason, and so hypothetical imperatives only apply to me, when I set the end of obtaining ice cream as a part of my happiness/perfection made good by the categorical imperative. This counts as an activity of practical reason because I am committed to fulfilling this end as an end I see as a constitutive part of my happiness/perfection. The hypothetical imperative commands me to go to the 7-11 insofar as this is the action necessary to bring about an end made necessary by practical reason. But here we run into the familiar set of problems.

If the end of getting a Klondike bar contributes to my happiness in such a way that it is an end that I cannot rationally give up (a particular end made necessary by the categorical imperative), then the command to take the means, which is analytically entailed by the requirement to will the end, has the same categorical necessity, and it is a particular instantiation of that imperative. The flouting of the imperative will consist either in not willing the end—never forming the intention

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to set out for ice cream (in which case this is *obviously* a violation of the categorical imperative)—or failing to will the required action (means) even though I have willed the end. If I should decide that I am in fact too tired and so overcome by my current fatigue that I decide not to set out to the 7-11, the practical failing that the flouting of the imperative consists in will be a moral failing—insofar as the particular end is the result of a practical judgment about what it would be, all-things-considered good to do, and I fail to do it, I have failed the hypothetical imperative: I have failed to will the necessary means. If this is an end that I cannot rationally give up, then insofar as I have failed to effect it, I have flouted a hypothetical imperative, which is, on this view, a categorical command of reason—a law.

Moreover, notice that if I do set out to obtain the ice cream, and I fail to notice the hour, or have a mistaken belief about the hours the corner store keeps, and I make my way there only to find that they have closed (and thereby making myself too late for the 7-11), I have *not* failed the hypothetical imperative; for I have willed the means to my end. My specific failure, on this view, represents a failure of theoretical reason rather than a failure of *practical* reason, and it cannot be said that I have violated any practical imperative. For even though I have acted on a theoretically mistaken belief, I have in fact willed to take what I believe to be the necessary means, and so it must be thought that I have conformed to the “hypothetical imperative”—which, on this account, must be understood as the requirement to *will* (determine myself to effect) the means. Insofar as the represented (practical) objective necessity to take the means derives from a command of reason to will the end, it is my *not* willing the means, as opposed to being merely mistaken about them, that the imperative forbids. This will be the case for all actions for which it is thought that hypothetical imperatives govern the agent’s willing (volition) of the actions that are causally necessary to effect them (means).

But if Kant thought that a hypothetical imperative is merely an instantiation of a categorical imperative, then we should expect them to not only come up, but to play a rather prominent role in the *The Metaphysics of Morals* (at least in the “Doctrine of Virtue”), which has to do with the system of duties derived from the application of the categorical imperative to human beings. In fact, in the introduction, after Kant explains that a metaphysics of morals can be applied to anthropology, which would therefore be a moral anthropology (“the other member of the
division of the practical philosophy as a whole”), he goes on to remind the reader that “practical philosophy” can be none other than “moral wisdom.” It has to do with categorical imperatives, the principles of morality:

,No other practical doctrine can furnish instances of such imperatives than that which prescribes obligations (the doctrine of morals). All other imperatives are technical and are one and all conditional.

And rather than emphasizing the importance of the hypothetical, what he now calls the technical imperatives, Kant says instead that a metaphysics of morals has to do only with categorical imperatives. It also seems clear that, for Kant, there are “imperatives” that do not express the efficacy of pure reason, but only of a “technically practical” reason. These other imperatives, which are not categorical and are therefore conditional, belong to another practical doctrine. Far from including the hypothetical, or technical, imperatives in a metaphysics of morals, he dismisses them at the outset as not belonging to a moral philosophy. And he never brings them up again.

5.

I have argued that both the wide-scope view as well as versions of the consequent-scope view that fall under the “material interpretation” fail as plausible interpretations of Kant’s hypothetical imperative.

127 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:217: A moral anthropology “would deal only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals.”

128 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:217.

129 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:222.

130 For example, see Kant, “On the Common Saying: That be Correct in Theory but it is of no use in Practice,” in Practical Philosophy, ed. and trans. by M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8:286; and Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:384, 6:387.
Among other interpretive problems, we saw that these competing alternatives share fundamental assumptions about practical normativity that commit them to identical outcomes with respect to the determinate and specific precepts of instrumental reason. On both views, if reason is to issue in particular prescriptions to take the means to our ends, then this is on account of its commitment to, and endorsement of, those ends.

According to the wide-scope view, practical reason issues an unconditional imperative to will consistently. An agent ought to either take the means to an end that she wills or give up her end. The imperative is an unconditional imperative with disjunctive content, and has nothing to say about which of the alternatives is rationally preferable. We can conform to this rational requirement in one of two ways, and the prescription says nothing whatsoever about whether or not we ought to take any particular means (we can always satisfy the injunction by abandoning the end). In chapter two, I argued that the wide-scope formulation fails to capture any of the rational properties that the notion of a hypothetical imperative was meant to capture. It is itself a categorical imperative addressed to all finite agents regardless of the ends they actually will; its applicability has nothing to do with an agent’s purposes. In order to get a detached conclusion specifying that we ought to take a given set of means, we require a prior commitment of reason to an end. So on this view, \( O(E \rightarrow M) \), requires the further principle, \( O(E) \rightarrow O(M) \), if we are to yield particular prescriptions for any action set that constitute means.

On the material interpretation, the hypothetical imperative is consequent-scope, and tells us that ‘If we will the end, then we ought to will the necessary means,’ and given information about an agent’s end, we can detach a conclusion to take the means. But the command only applies to the ends endorsed by practical reason. So, on the material interpretation, the principle can also be expressed, \( O(E) \rightarrow O(M) \).

Both the wide-scope and material interpretations attempt to account for the way in which an agent’s end-setting, and hence on some level an agent’s desire, generate particular hypothetical imperatives, but their explanation of the imperative as well as its command, ultimately circumvents any role for desire, or our discretionary ends, in the explanation of the necessitation of the imperative. And so both interpretations implicitly agree that if reason is going to prescribe any particular set of means, there must be a ground for the ends that we adopt that is not itself reducible to desire (desire may be necessary, but we require a rational incentive to make the
ground sufficient). The possibility of all imperatives then, and not merely the categorical imperative, as rational principles commanding an action, is explained by appeal to rational grounds that are, at bottom, necessarily independent of an agent’s empirical incentives/desires. Correlatively, both views agree that a possible conflict between reason and desire (specifically) is therefore a condition for the conceptual possibility of imperatives in general. Practical reason is always a source of purely rational grounds. We thus, on Kant’s view, ipso facto, rule out the possibility of instrumental reasoning that is independent of moral reasoning, at least insofar as such reasoning is thought to issue in imperatives that provide practical governance to the faculty of desire.

Since there has been this implicit agreement in this characterization of practical reason, there has been, despite apparent differences, a fundamental agreement among seemingly opposed philosophers on this subject. If we conceive the necessity expressed in all imperatives, the “ought”, under the single modality of a strict necessity that has its source in reason’s independent contribution to our purposive activity, then the actions commanded by hypothetical imperatives, conditional upon practical reason’s determination that the end is good, will turn out to be categorically required. And the distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity becomes otiose, or at best, superficial. If it is thought that reason must set the end in every case in which there is an imperative at play, then in every case that imperative will turn out to be categorical. On Kant’s view, this will be a moral imperative. If the source of all imperatives is pure reason, then all imperatives will be categorical. This practical necessitation itself reaches (analytically) to practical conclusions to take means, and such imperatives appear as if they are a fundamentally different kind of practical imperative. On a more careful examination, however, we see that these imperatives are also commands of pure reason and thus they will also be requirements of duty.

If this is a consequence that appears troubling, then we need to reject the picture of practical reason that supposes that all imperatives stem from ends that are set by incentives of pure reason.

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131 Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, p. 43.
132 Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, p. 43.
133 A similar point is conceded by Paton. See, Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p. 95-6.
If hypothetical imperatives are conceptually distinct from categorical imperatives, then they must be linked to the heteronomous aspect of our practical activity, and they must command independently of the pure moral incentives of *Wille*.

This view is absolutely right insofar as it analyzes the “ought” of obligation—the unconditional moral ought. A principle that is *practically* objective, in the strict sense, is an *unconditional* practical imperative. Such an imperative is not conditioned on our contingent nature as finite empirical beings,\(^{134}\) and it is the categorical imperative, which “alone has the tenor of a practical *law*.\(^{135}\)

\(^{134}\) Nor is it conditioned on “a special tendency that would be peculiar to human reason and would not have to hold necessarily for the will of every rational being,” (*Groundwork*, 4:425).

\(^{135}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:420.
Chapter 4: A Third Possibility

1.

The conclusion of the last chapter was that if reason sets the end in all cases in which there is an imperative at play, then all imperatives will turn out to be categorical. Since Kant identifies categorical imperatives with moral commands, all imperatives will turn out to have their source in the exercise of pure reason, and thus be connected with the self-legislation of an autonomous will. Moreover, I argued that the commanded actions will not turn out to be conditional on a subject’s contingent ends and desires. Practical reason is seen only as constraining our desires and not as attending to them. Were it not for the self-legislation of pure reason in the categorical imperative, reason would have no practical vocation; it would be, as Hume famously declared, the mere “slave of the passions.” On Kant’s view, all rational agency requires a “moral disposition.” As Engstrom puts it, “for Kant, there is an important sense in which we would not be bound by imperatives at all if we were not bound by the Categorical Imperative.”

But some have taken this conclusion to be too strong, and it is criticized as leading to a picture of freedom and agency according to which only moral action is genuinely free. Nonmoral action, and arguably immoral action, on the other hand, would amount to mere behavior, a product of nature rather than a product of reason or will.

There is another view, prevalent in the literature, which tries to weaken the former conclusion by decoupling the identification of all agency with action on a categorical imperative. It argues instead, that for Kant, all agency, even heteronomous agency, is governed by imperatives.

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138 Again there are many, and various, takes on this main line of argument, but here I consider views that hold a conception of Kantian freedom that is not exhausted by the freedom that consists in (A)utonomous willing, where “autonomy” is construed as self-legislation in accordance with the Categorical Imperative. See, for example, Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*; and, more recently Allison, *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Allison credits Rüdiger Bittner with a similar view, although Allison calls “practical freedom” what Bittner calls “autonomy.” See Rüdiger Bittner, *Moralisches Gebot oder Autonomie* (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alper, 1983). See also, Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*; and, more recently, Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
view locates the source of hypothetical imperatives in the “freedom” that is thought to consist in a capacity for the self-imposition of rational principles generally, and this “self-legislation” is not, at least not necessarily, a moral legislation. Every use of practical reason is, in this general sense, “autonomous,” and constitutes an act of freedom, which is conceived as a spontaneous act of self-determination.

Perhaps Henry Allison’s “Incorporation Thesis” best encapsulates this conception of freedom and rational agency. The “Incorporation Thesis” says that in order for an inclination or desire to become a reason for action, we must adopt a principle of action which prescribes the pursuit of the satisfaction of that inclination or desire, and the adoption of this rule must be conceived as an act of spontaneity on the part of the agent ¹³⁹ rather than the causal consequence of a desire. Empirical incentives motivate action only insofar as they are “taken as reasons and incorporated into maxims.” ¹⁴⁰ The practical act whereby a desire or inclination becomes a reason is, much like the adoption of a moral principle, itself an expression of the spontaneous contribution of our rational faculty. Thus, even heteronomous action essentially involves the self-determination of the subject.

This picture locates Kant’s dissatisfaction with the Humean view in his view about the nature of the freedom required for the normativity of all rational agency rather than the consequence of his commitment to a specifically moral agency. If reason is practical, then it never simply identifies the necessary means to ends that are determined solely by desire. All rational agency on the Kantian conception of practical reason, involves the Incorporation Thesis, according to which reason necessarily provides direction with respect to which desires an agent ought to pursue.

Thus all agency, even heteronomous agency, is, in this morally neutral sense, “free.” Allison therefore argues that instrumental rationality has “its own sphere and its own logic,” and even, he is tempted to say, “its own autonomy.” ¹⁴¹

The Incorporation Thesis has received an overwhelmingly receptive response in the literature and has become fairly standard Kantian fare; Allen Wood refers to it as the “crucial Kantian

idea” which denies that “desires can ever suffice to explain actions.” The Incorporation Thesis underlies and supports interpretations that ascribe to Kant a conception of an “elective will,” the idea that our ends are always chosen in accordance with rational principles of some kind, rather than given to us by natural necessity.

In this chapter, I want to look more closely at Allison’s Incorporation Thesis as a view about nonmoral agency, and the attenuated conception of freedom that Allison identifies with the capacity to act on the basis of “all imperatives.” If the Incorporation Thesis is right, then it provides us with an alternative understanding of the nature and source of hypothetical imperatives. Rather than all imperatives having their source in the categorical imperative, this “limited” direction of reason would turn out to be a source of rational ‘obligation’ that is distinct from moral obligation. Insofar as this limited spontaneity of reason makes the pursuit of the satisfaction of certain inclinations normative for us, we can easily account for the normativity of hypothetical imperatives independently of moral imperatives.

In section 2., I lay out the conception of freedom that undergirds the Incorporation Thesis, and that Allison and others take to be characteristic of all rational agency. I highlight a considerable ambiguity at the heart of this thesis: its ambivalence between a conception of deliberation according to which the sufficient condition for agency is a rational determining ground, and one according to which the sufficient condition is an empirical determining ground. In section 3., I argue that when pressed to articulate the rational ground(s) that this conception of freedom relies on, defenders of this view face a trilemma: they must confer rational standing to a dubious “liberty of indifference” (liberum arbitrium indifferentiae), or they must acknowledge an implicit commitment to a source of value external to practical reason, or they must renounce this conception of freedom and acknowledge that heteronomous deliberation is, in the last instance, determined by the agent’s strongest desire. In section 4., I draw out, what I take to be an

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142 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 51, and p. 53.
143 See, for example, Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 448. This thesis is so prevalent that it even permeates Barbara Herman’s defense of Kant’s view of the hedonism of non-moral agency. See Herman, “Rethinking Kant’s Hedonism,” in Fact and Value: Essays on Ethics and Metaphysics for Judith Jarvis Thomson (MIT Press, 2011), pp.129-153 (p.133).
important implication of the Incorporation Thesis. On each of the alternatives presented in section 3., we (again) lose Kant’s distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. Insofar as reason picks out a desire, and makes its object normative for us, this will be an end the agent cannot give up. This is the necessitation that characterizes categorical imperatives, imperatives that do not allow one to change one’s mind. So, on each of these alternatives, we require an extra categorical imperative. The source of the tension lies in two incompatible desiderata that the Incorporation Thesis, as a thesis about nonmoral agency, holds: that a desire could become a reason and a nonmoral requirement via a moment of spontaneity that cannot be explained by nature, and that all motivation is ultimately traceable to an agent’s empirical sources of motivation. I conclude that the Incorporation Thesis does not work as a view about nonmoral agency and that the conception of freedom it advances cannot be Kant’s.

In section 5., I briefly turn to the two influential, and related, motivations for holding the Incorporation Thesis. First, that Kant did not, in fact, hold (or, at least, should not have held) the faulty hedonistic view of nonmoral motivation so often misattributed to him. Second, that the alternative picture, which connects freedom with moral agency and therefore concludes that only moral action is genuinely free, is “absurd.” I argue that, in fact, these are two crucial, and crucially connected, features of Kant’s practical philosophy, and therefore understanding his motivation for holding them is crucial to an accurate understanding of it.

To conclude, I point out that if hypothetical imperatives require the possibility of a conflict between a command of reason and the inclinations, such that reason constrains the will to take

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145 Of course the material interpretation collapses this distinction as well.

146 John Broome has a similar argument against this kind of view in his paper, “Are Intentions Reasons, And How Should We Cope With Incommensurable Values,” in Practical Rationality and Preference: Essays for David Gauthier, ed. by C. Morris and A. Ripstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). His critique is of the view that desires, or non-normative ends, can generate narrow-scope imperatives. Some of the analysis in this paper parallels his argument there. Two objections Broome considers will especially apply here, namely that on the narrow-scope view, by simply willing a non-normative end, an agent would be “bootstrapping” a reason into existence, and the correlative objection that it follows she could not, therefore, change her mind with respect to the pursuit of it. I argue that these objections will apply to two of the horns of the trilemma: they will apply if we choose our desires arbitrarily, or if we adopt them on the basis of our strongest desires.

147 By locating freedom in heteronomous and nonmoral choice, I argue it makes Kant out to be less of a “Humean” about practical agency, and more of a “Kantian” about the nature of freedom, than he really must have been.

148 See Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 2.
the necessary means to an end even in the face of contradicting desires, then they will only apply to ends that are already normative. The only plausible Kantian account of normative ends is one according to which they are framed by the categorical imperative. Therefore, on this conception of imperatives, the material interpretation must be right.

2.

In his book, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, Allison argues that underlying Kant’s general conception of rational agency is an attenuated conception of freedom that the ability to act on the basis of imperatives, both moral and prudential, requires. He thinks that this is the conception of freedom underlying Kant’s view of rational agency at the time that he was writing the first *Critique*, and it involves a capacity to abide by rational principles, and thus a genuine causality of reason, without presupposing the capacity for full moral agency (or transcendental freedom).

The distinguishing feature of this model is the virtual identification of rational agency with action on the basis of an *ought* ... it is intended to cover both moral and prudential deliberation. In both cases the essential point is that deliberation involves an appeal to some rule of reason (imperative), which specifies which course of action is ‘right’ or ‘permissible’ in a given situation for an agent, who, as affected by sensible inclination, does not always do what reason dictates ought to be done.  

This model of practical deliberation sees choice as an expression of a spontaneity of reason that issues in “rules that are not based solely on what one in fact desires at a given moment but rather reflect what one would choose if one were perfectly rational.”

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150 Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 36.
agency is the *spontaneity* presupposed by the capacity to act on the basis of imperatives—a capacity for the self-imposition of specifically practical rules.\(^{151}\)

Allison argues that one of the distinguishing features of Kant’s faculty psychology is the radical realization that reason and the understanding are essentially active faculties. Exactly analogously with *apperception* in the theoretical context, our consciousness of this *spontaneity* is an inseparable component of our rational agency.\(^{152}\) Just as theoretical judgment essentially requires the “active taking up of data by the mind, its unification in a concept or synthesis, and its reference to an object,” essential to our rational agency is a practical self-conception that sees choice and deliberation as actively “taking up” and unifying the inclinations according to specifically practical principles or concepts. In rational agency, the agent must spontaneously, and thus freely, impose an order of “ought-to-bes” on the sensible data—her inclinations.\(^{153}\)

Accordingly, it is a fundamental condition of the possibility of acting on the basis of imperatives in general, and so also of a reason that is practical, that all choice necessarily involves the structure of a “taking as and a framing or positing”.\(^{154}\)

> Both aspects of practical spontaneity are essential to the conception of ourselves as rational agents. I cannot conceive of myself as such an agent without regarding myself as pursuing ends that I frame for myself and that I regard as rational to pursue. Correlatively, I cannot conceive of myself as such an agent without assuming that I have a certain control over my inclinations and, that I am

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151 See also, Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, pp. 53-56.

152 Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 36.

153 “Just as in the theoretical realm the proper, regulative function of reason is to guide enquiry by framing an ideal order involving the systematic connection of phenomena under laws, so too, in the practical realm, its proper function is to guide conduct by framing an order of ought-to-bes. Like its theoretical analogue, this activity is an expression of the spontaneity of reason because it goes beyond what is dictated by the sensible data, which in this case are the desires and inclinations of the agent. Insofar as one x’s because one judges that one ought to x (whether for moral or prudential reasons), one x’s on the basis of rational considerations. The “necessity” to x is, therefore, a rational necessity stemming from “objective laws of reason” (or at least putative laws), not a causal necessity stemming from antecedent conditions…” (Kant’s *Theory of Freedom*, p. 40).

154 Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 36.
capable of deciding which of them should be acted upon (and how) and which resisted.  

Rational agency requires reflective evaluation and judgment about which desires are to be countenanced and which opposed. This involves some conception of which desires, or perhaps more accurately, their objects, are good and worth pursuing.

Rational agents, then, are never wholly determined by their desires and inclinations because all choice presupposes this moment of spontaneity:

The key point here is that even in the case of desire-based actions, a rational agent is not regarded as being determined in a quasi-mechanistic fashion by the strongest desire (roughly the Leibniz-Hume model). On the contrary, to the extent to which such actions are taken as genuine expressions of agency, and therefore, as imputable, they are thought to involve an act of spontaneity on the part of the agent, through which the inclination or desire is deemed or taken as an appropriate basis of action. Moreover, much like the conceptual determination of sensible intuition in the epistemic context, this occurs by subsuming the inclination or desire under a practical rule or principle.

And so central to Allison’s defense of this view is the “Incorporation Thesis,” which holds that for Kant inclination or desire does not of itself constitute a reason for acting. It can become one only with reference to a rule or principle of action, which dictates that we ought to pursue the satisfaction of that inclination or desire ... the adoption of such a rule cannot itself be regarded as the causal consequence of the desire or, more properly, of being in a state of desire. On the contrary, it must be conceived as an act of spontaneity on the part of the agent.

155 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 41.
156 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 39.
157 Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 40; bold emphasis added. See also, p. 39: “Moreover, this insufficiency (of sensible inclination) is not of the sort that can be made up for by introducing further empirically accessible casual factors. The missing ingredient is the spontaneity of the agent, the act of taking as or self-determination.”
Empirical incentives do not motivate by themselves causing action, rather they can motivate action only insofar as they are “taken as reasons and incorporated into maxims,”

we think of reason as determining the will by legislating to it, that is, by providing the laws or principles (“objective determining grounds”) which govern, without causally necessitating, its acts of incorporation or, more simply, its choices.158

In rational agency, the last “court of appeal,” so to speak, in practical deliberation is the spontaneous adoption of a rational principle that endorses an inclination as one that ought to be pursued, rather than simply “being in a state of desire”159 or feeling a general inclination towards something. On Allison’s view, the hallmark of rational agency is the endorsement of an inclination in accordance with a freely adopted rational principle.160

Allen Wood, whose own interpretation of Kant has itself become canonical, and standard reading in Kant scholarship, agrees with Allison, and takes up Allison’s Incorporation Thesis as conclusive. As beings that are pathologically affected, without being pathologically necessitated, our agency must take up the standpoint of practical reflection, and we must make judgments about a course of action that we recognize to be “practically necessary,” and therefore “regard ourselves as having reason to pursue it even in the face of contrary inclinations.”161 To be “a rational agent is to see oneself standing over against one’s desires and to regard them as possible

158 Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 51.
159 Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 40. See also, p. 96: “As Rüdiger Bittner…correctly notes, there is, for Kant, no receptivity of practical reason.”
160 For textual support of this view, Allison relies primarily on two passages. The first is found in the Dialectic of the first Critique, in which Kant claims that from the standpoint of agency, empirical causes (the inclinations and desires) cannot be thought of as “so determining as to exclude the causality of the will.” See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, ed. and trans. by P. Guyer and A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A534/B562. But Allison finds Kant’s “fullest” expression of the Incorporation Thesis, in Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, where Kant claims “freedom of the will [Willkür] is of a wholly unique nature in that an incentive can determine the will to an action only insofar as the individual has incorporated it into his maxim.” Allison sees Kant here as explicitly affirming that the act of incorporation, which involves the spontaneous exercise of practical reason, is a necessary precondition for the motivation of a rational will. See Kant, Religion in the Boundaries of mere Reason, in Religion and Rational Theology, trans. and eds. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:24. It is worth pointing out that Kant is here speaking of a rational agent who has the capacity to will autonomously.
161 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 55
grounds for making or modifying choices." This makes setting an end a fundamentally normative project in that it involves forming a conception of the good or some state of affairs that we value, and therefore judge as “worth pursuing.” Correlatively, setting an end “involves the capacity to discriminate between actions one should perform” and “submitting to the self-discipline of performing those actions (called ‘means’) which are judged suitable to achieve the end.”

Will is the activity of determining one’s practical faculty to seek an end that has been set according to a maxim or practical principle. The basic activity in willing is the adoption of normative principles for the regulation of our conduct ... and involves the subjection of one’s actions to a norm, and to the extent that one acts on the norm, also the summoning of the agent’s powers to produce it through actions chosen as appropriate means (G 4:394; VA 7:251).

In line with the Incorporation Thesis, Wood agrees that for Kant “will” or rational agency requires adopting ends on the basis of normative principles of some kind.

Wood also insists that there is nothing “specifically moral” in this account of “good.” To set an end, is simply to make a judgment that the action is worth pursuing, and thus “should be performed in consequence of a rational principle of some kind, irrespective of one’s momentary impulses or inclinations (even if the adoption of the rational principle is itself based on

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162 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 55.
163 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, pp. 54-55
164 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 55: “For this reason, will also presupposes and involves a conception of oneself as an agent, and the ability to be concerned about one’s success or failure in pursuing the ends one has set, in following the principles one has chosen.”
165 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 51.
166 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, pp. 53-4.
167 Actually, Wood quotes Kant as saying: “‘The will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason independently of inclination recognizes as practically necessary, i.e. as good’ (G 4:412),” (Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 55). But Wood drops the antecedent, which, in this case, clarifies that Kant is talking about the will of a perfectly rational being: “If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary, that is, the will is a capacity to choose only that which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good,” (Groundwork, 4:412).
168 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 55.
inclination).” But he does link this limited conception of practical agency, as well as the conception of a rational will that underlies it, with the capacity to act on a priori practical principles. For beings who are capable of grasping the concept ‘good,’ “there must also be principles of reason, which are independent of inclination.” Insofar as something is rational, or something we take to be rationally binding, “it must be understood in terms of the same fundamental principles.” These principles are a priori because they have the marks of both necessity and universality. Given the Incorporation Thesis, and the correlative idea that end-setting is a fundamentally normative act, Wood argues that Kant thinks there is an “indispensable place for a priori principles even in the pursuit of entirely empirical ends (whose pursuit is governed by hypothetical imperatives).”

Central to the Incorporation Thesis, then, is the attribution of a limited form of freedom (Allison calls this “practical” freedom) to finite rational agents that is neutral with respect to the possibility of the full blown transcendental freedom required for moral agency. And correlatively, the supposition that there are, for Kant, fundamental, yet non-moral principles of reason that govern an agent’s “acts of incorporation.” As Allison puts it, the point is not that human agency is “free” merely in this limited sense, but rather, that it is epistemically possible

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169 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 57
170 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 55.
171 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 57.
172 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 57: “Whether we are speaking of moral or nonmoral principles of reason, these principles ‘necessitate’ in the sense that they constrain (or should constrain) me to do what they prescribe irrespective of what I may otherwise desire to do at that moment (G 4:389). In other words, the fact that I do not want to do something can never by itself defeat the claim that I am rationally required (This claim, once again, applies equally to moral and to nonmoral, i.e., instrumental and prudential, requirements of practical reason).”
173 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 58: “If there are genuine principles of practical reason, however (whether of instrumental rationality, prudence, or morality), then these principles must apply equally to all beings who have the faculty of will or practical reason, irrespective of any additional empirical features that these beings share or in which they may differ. Necessity implies apriority because an empirically grounded practical principle would be based on some empirical desire we contingently have. If a contingent empirical desire were the only reason we had for following the principle, then it could not claim universal validity.”
174 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 56. In response to empiricist prejudices to the notion of an a priori practical law like the Categorical Imperative, Wood thinks that we might dispel these kinds of worries once we recognize that that “in addition to practical laws (a priori moral principles that are categorically binding on the will), Kant holds that other a priori practical principles are necessarily and universally binding on the will even when it is acting on ends set in response to the inclinations” and that these are fundamental principles of practical reason that are “non-moral (yet nonetheless a priori) practical principles,” (Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 56).
that we are free only in this limited sense, and we would remain so even if Kant’s argument for the absolute spontaneity involved in moral agency were ultimately unsuccessful. Wood would seem to be in agreement with Allison on this point since, according to the Incorporation Thesis, even desire-based or “heteronomous action involves the self-determination of the subject, and therefore a ‘moment’ of spontaneity.” Thus all rational beings are free in this limited sense, even those for whom there could be only empirical sources of motivation. In Kant’s own language, this conception of freedom applies equally to a being whose agency is “ineluctably heteronomous.”

Allison argues that this “limited” spontaneity is thought to be a genuine causality of reason even though its exercise may remain motivationally dependent on “sensible stimulus to trigger its agency.” The conception of practical freedom underlying the Incorporation Thesis involves “independence of determination by any particular desire or inclination but not (necessarily) independence of determination by desire or inclination überhaupt,” and it indicates “a capacity to act on the basis of imperatives, although the incentives for obeying these imperatives would ultimately be traceable to our sensuous nature.”

And herein lies a serious ambiguity in the Incorporation Thesis. The Incorporation Thesis requires that the adoption of the rational principle, whereby an empirical inclination will come to constitute a reason for the agent, involve “an act of spontaneity” that deems the inclination to be “an appropriate basis of action.” But if the basis for the incorporation of any particular inclination is itself another empirical inclination, then the adoption of any particular rational principle, or the obedience of any particular imperative, is, in the last instance, itself grounded in

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176 Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 65. According to Allison, the motivationally dependent and the motivationally independent will is one for whom reason is practical, and thus both capacities contrast with a faculty of desire that is pathologically (according to which the agent is determined “quasi-mechanistically” by her strongest desire). By contrast, both the motivationally dependent and the motivationally independent will indicate the exercise of practical reason and its provision of rational incentives, the latter’s, however, will do so in such a way that is completely independent of any empirical incentives. A motivationally independent will is therefore transcendentally free, and its self-legislation is fully autonomous.

177 Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 65: “In Sellar’s terms, an agent possessed of such a will would be a *practical automaton spiritualae,* which is to be distinguished from a mere *automaton spiritualae* or *cogitans* in that the former, but not the latter, has a least a minimum degree of practical spontaneity.” See Wilfred Sellars, *Essays in Philosophy and Its History* (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel, 1974), pp. 81-82. Cf. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 57.
the agent’s sensuous nature (a state of being in desire). The Incorporation Thesis, however, posits a rational basis that cannot itself, in turn, be (exhaustively) traceable to the agent’s empirical nature, and this depends on the possibility of a rational ground that is not itself “purely rational,” or moral, but which provides guidance as to how an agent ought to pick from among her various empirical incentives—namely, as a perfectly rational agent would. This is just to say, that the thesis supposes a rational basis for end setting. Recall, that the insufficiency of sensible inclination to explain action “is not of the sort that can be made up for by introducing further empirically accessible casual factors,” such as a further desire, rather the “missing ingredient is the spontaneity of the agent, the act of taking as or self-determination.” So, on the one hand, the Incorporation Thesis requires that in all rational agency reason set an end. On the other hand, if reason sets ends ultimately, and always, in response to the inclinations, it looks like reason, in the final analysis, does take its prompts from nature.

Since this model of agency is identified with a capacity to act on the basis of imperatives, another way of framing the issue is to analyze the above tension in terms of the nature and role of the imperatives such an agent is governed by. Since the Incorporation Thesis is a thesis

178 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 40.
179 Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 446. “After all, it is one thing for an agent to regard its ends as ‘good’ in the sense of being endorsed by practical reason rather than simply being given to it by instinct or some other mechanism, and quite another for such an agent to adopt ends on purely rational grounds.”
180 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 36: “…rules that are not based solely on what one in fact desires at a given moment but rather reflect what one would choose if one were perfectly rational.”
181 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 39.
182 In “Allison on Rational Agency,” Engstrom worries that Allison’s conception of a genuinely spontaneous heteronomous agency is ultimately unstable. Since the ineluctably heteronomous agent would (presumably) be governed only by hypothetical imperatives, depending on how Allison interprets the hypothetical imperative, this conception of rational agency will either collapse back into the standard, Humean conception, according to which actions are determined by the agent’s strongest desires, or it will turn out to require the full spontaneity necessary for moral agency. Engstrom points out that on the wide-scope interpretation, the hypothetical imperative does not turn out to be an imperative. For our desires come with consistency requirements built into them in the sense that no desire itself generates any interest in inconsistency per se, and so there will never be an opposition between reason and desire, the possibility of which, is a condition of imperatives. Strictly speaking, any apparent opposition will always be between one desire and another. (In his response to this point, Allison insists that desires don’t come with “pre-assigned weights,” and that the agent must appeal to practical reason to give a desire its status as a reason, the implication being that an inconsistency between reason and desire could, in this way, arise. See Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 447. But Allison’s response both appeals to the Incorporation Thesis in order to answer an objection to it, and it suggests an appeal to some other principle besides the wide-scope imperative). Although I am sympathetic to Engstrom’s analysis of the wide-scope interpretation, notice that one need not agree with the particulars of it in order to see that the wide-scope formulation cannot support the Incorporation Thesis. As wide-scope, it is not a
about *all* rational agency, rather than moral agency, it must apply to an agency that is “ineluctably heteronomous,” an agency that remains motivationally dependent on empirical incentives. This agent’s ends will be empirical, and their pursuit will be governed by hypothetical imperatives because only a being with *full* spontaneity (transcendental freedom) could act on the basis of the categorical imperative.\(^{183}\) How do hypothetical imperatives govern the pursuit of the ineluctably heteronomous agent’s ends? On the one hand, if a hypothetical imperative prescribes an action that is necessary as a means to an end an agent has willed, it is unclear that this kind of imperative supports the Incorporation Thesis. In this case the imperative does not itself pick out which desire is an appropriate basis of action, and so it is not the rational principle that determines the end. We will need to suppose some other imperative of reason that determines a rational order of ends, or we will need to assume that hypothetical imperatives themselves determine a rational order of ends.

Allison says very little about imperatives in his discussion of rational agency. In fact, he says very little about hypothetical imperatives at all. But in what little he does say, the very same ambiguity resurfaces. According to Allison, imperatives are rules for maxim selection. As products of practical reason, maxims are subject to a criterion of reasonableness expressed in the objective practical principles or imperatives, which should be conceived of as second-order principles in light of which an agent selects a maxim. For an agent subject to the categorical imperative, its maxims would be subject to the criterion of intrinsic reasonableness, a reasonableness under all conditions. An agent bound only by hypothetical imperatives is subject only to a criterion of reasonableness *subject to a condition*—a condition, which is ultimately specified by the agent’s empirical inclinations and interests. But the Incorporation Thesis principle that picks out which desire the agent ought to incorporate (what “he would choose if he were perfectly rational”) and it does not bind an agent to any particular course of action. On the other hand, Engstrom argues that if Allison adopts the material interpretation of hypothetical imperatives, we require a rational principle that frames an order of ends as *rational*. On Kant’s account, the objects of the inclinations are only judged to be good, in themselves, on the condition that the agent is worthy of happiness because she is bound by the principles of morality. I take the following argument to expand on, and complement, Engstrom’s argument for the instability of Allison’s view of rational agency, and certainly one that supports his conclusion. See Engstrom, “Allison on Rational Agency,” pp. 410-12.

\(^{183}\) Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 56.
requires that an agent’s empirical inclinations cannot, of themselves, determine a course of action. So a hypothetical imperative that merely specifies what is reasonable subject to the condition of a non-normative inclination will not entail the requisite spontaneity required by the Incorporation Thesis. If the hypothetical imperatives only specify reasonable means relative to a condition, the Incorporation Thesis will require that that condition, an agent’s empirical “interest,” must already be mediated by a rational endorsement in accordance with the spontaneous adoption of a practical principle. Allison says that maxims themselves “reflect the underlying interest of an agent, which provides the reason for adopting the maxim.”184 If this is true, then the “condition” under which hypothetical imperatives can specify what is reasonable, must already be mediated by a spontaneously adopted rational principle. Allison says:

> implicit in every maxim is the assumption that maxims are products of practical reason and, as such, subject to a rationality requirement. If the agent did not both believe the end or interest worth pursuing and the proposed plan of action the best strategy, all things considered, for attaining the desired end, there would be no reason to adopt the maxim.185

This passage makes clear that the rational summoning of the means is subordinate to the judgment that the inclination (or the object of the inclination) is “worth” pursuing.

And both Allison and Wood do in fact argue that according to the Incorporation Thesis, even an agent’s pathological interests are indeed spontaneous products of practical reason, involving the reflective endorsement of an inclination in virtue of which the agent adopts maxims (or policies of action). Allison says that one “has an interest in something (as opposed to a mere inclination) only insofar as one spontaneously takes186 an interest, and this necessarily involves the (rational) projection of some end as in some sense desirable.”187 Of course, by Allison’s own lights, “desirable” cannot mean the empirical representation of the satisfaction accompanying the

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184 Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 90; emphasis added.
186 This is not how Kant conceives of an “empirical” or “pathological” interest, and in the *Groundwork*, Kant specifically reserves this language for our moral interest in the action as opposed to a merely pathological interest in the object of the action. See especially, Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:413.
representation of an object (the feeling of pleasure), but must indicate the rational endorsement of that object as “at least in some sense” good. However the agent determines that a given inclination, or more accurately, its object, is good, and worth pursuing, the Incorporation Thesis supposes that this judgment cannot itself be determined solely by the agent’s desires. Rather this interest must be spontaneously determined, yet without recourse to the categorical imperative according to which an object is good only insofar as it is an object of pure practical reason.

The Incorporation Thesis requires a rational principle that frames an order of ends. Insofar as this is a thesis that applies to rational agency generally, rather than moral agency, it will apply to an agent whose activity is governed by hypothetical imperatives. And so either hypothetical imperatives must themselves spontaneously determine an order of ends, or we are looking for an additional practical principle, other than the categorical imperative, according to which the agent judges her inclination as an appropriate—rational—basis of action, and thereby incorporates it into her maxim making it a reason for her. After all, Allison says, it is “one thing for an agent to regard its ends as ‘good’ in the sense of being endorsed by practical reason rather than simply being given to it by instinct or some other mechanism, and quite another for such an agent to adopt ends on purely rational grounds, independently of any input from inclination.”

3.

Is it though? In this section, I want to explore that difference and the rational ground that must explain it. How does reason pick which desire an agent should act on? How does it array the multitude of her inclinations into a rational order of “ought-to-be-s”? As we try to understand this morally neutral role that reason plays in practical agency, and give an account of the normative content of these spontaneously adopted principles that determine an order of ends, we are forced into a trilemma: the ultimate (nonmoral) ground of choice is either arbitrary, or it will turn out to

188 Allison, “Kant on freedom,” p. 446.
be, in fact, based on empirical determining grounds, or it must tacitly appeal to some source of value external to reason.

To see this, consider that what puts an object of inclination on the table for the agent as an end for her is her representation of the agreeableness of its existence.\textsuperscript{189} It has been stipulated that in the case of an ineluctably heteronomous agent at least one of its inclinations is required in order for her to “have a sufficient reason to adopt an end (or act at all).”\textsuperscript{190} So in setting an end, and therefore choosing to pursue the satisfaction of one inclination over the satisfaction of any alternative, she must first incorporate this desire into her maxim by adopting a principle of action which prescribes the pursuit of the satisfaction of that inclination, thereby turning it into a reason for her action. How should she choose?

If she chooses merely arbitrarily, on the basis of what Regan\textsuperscript{191} calls an “arbitrary self-launching,” this does not seem to be an expression of “spontaneity” in Kant’s use of the term. It’s not clear how this is an expression of an active rational faculty, and moreover, it would seem to privilege a “liberty of indifference” (liberum arbitrium indifferentiae), over an agent’s responsiveness to her sensuous needs and inclinations as a finite empirical being.

More plausibly she would choose on the basis of her strongest inclination, or the greatest amount of satisfaction she anticipates in the reality of its object. But this is a merely empirical determining ground, and the Incorporation Thesis supposes that desires themselves never suffice to explain action. In order for her action to express rational agency, on this view, we require a spontaneously adopted principle that governs her act of incorporation. But ‘choose your strongest desire,’ or ‘choose this desire,’ would not seem to fit the bill, especially when we think that this grounds a course of action the agent has reason to pursue “even in the face of contrary inclinations,”\textsuperscript{192} and according to a rule that reflects “what one would choose if one were perfectly rational.”\textsuperscript{193} Moreover, as Regan points out, this makes the choice equally arbitrary

\textsuperscript{189} See Kant, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:9, 5:21.
\textsuperscript{190} Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 446.
\textsuperscript{191} Much of this argument is indebted to Regan’s argument in “The Value of Rational Nature,” pp. 278-281.
\textsuperscript{192} Wood, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 55, See also, Allison, \textit{Kant’s Theory of Freedom}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{193} Allison, \textit{Kant’s Theory of Freedom}, p. 36.
insofar as the inclinations themselves, from the standpoint of reason, are “essentially arbitrary.”\textsuperscript{194} Insofar as desires, in and of themselves, do not constitute reasons, and can become reasons only by being taken up into a maxim, as the Incorporation Thesis supposes, I am in agreement with Regan that “choice on the basis of desire is really just a version of arbitrary self-launching.”\textsuperscript{195}

The problem is only compounded when we consider that both Allison\textsuperscript{196} and Wood suppose that Kant thinks there is a fundamental (and formal) a priori principle of instrumental reasoning. Wood calls this principle HI, and it says, “If you set an end Z, perform whatever actions are indispensably necessary means to the attainment of Z that lie in your power.”\textsuperscript{197} Wood thinks that HI is a normative principle any rational agent lays down for herself in the normative activity of adopting an end, and so on the Humean model of agency, there is no room for this conception of practical imperatives. On the Humean model, practical rationality is merely theoretical (insofar as reason—in providing the relevant beliefs—is responsible for altering the content of our desires, it does so only as theoretical reason).\textsuperscript{198} Once we appreciate that instrumental rationality is normative, we will see that the failure to comply is not a theoretical failure (or not merely so), as it would be if we located that failure in the possible privation of the correct theoretical beliefs about the actions necessary to secure our desires. Rather,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{194}Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature, p. 279. Actually, Regan says there that desire is arbitrary from the point of view of the free will. Since, we are here assuming that the will with a limited freedom, we might be tempted to think that this may not be true of it, or its reason. However, I think this would be a mistake. First, if the inclinations were not arbitrary from reason’s standpoint in this limited, heteronomous will, it’s not clear that the introduction of transcendental freedom and its principle would, or could, render them wholly arbitrary. I actually think that it works the other way for Kant, and desires, or at least, their objects, will, in an important sense, not be wholly arbitrary from the standpoint of the free will. See, for instance, Kant, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:61.
\item \textsuperscript{195}Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature,“ p. 280.
\item \textsuperscript{196}Again see, for example, Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 447. I take the argument here to apply just as well to Allison’s discussion there in which he responds to Engstrom’s inquiry as to whether the hypothetical imperatives that govern the ineluctably heteronomous agent are thought, by Allison, to be narrow-scope or wide-scope requirements.
\item \textsuperscript{197}Wood, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{198}Wood, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 64.
\end{itemize}
the threat to rationality in pursuing an end is not that our desires will not be informed about the right beliefs about how to achieve the end, but rather that when the time comes to perform the necessary action, our desires may no longer conform to the norms of conduct we established in setting the end. The function of instrumental reason is not to inform desire regarding means but to constrain the will to hold to its rational plan to pursue an end, perhaps even in the face of distracting or contrary desires that attempt the will to abandon the plan.\footnote{199}{Wood, \textit{Kant's Ethical Thought}, p. 64.}

Hypothetical imperatives, according to Wood’s analysis, are “universally valid, necessary, and \textit{a priori},” and so like categorical imperatives, are also supposed to move the will independently of empirical desires.\footnote{200}{Wood, \textit{Kant's Ethical Thought}, p. 65.}

But what establishes an agent’s plan to pursue an end as \textit{rational}, if it is not merely to inform desire regarding means? Wood supposes that there is some further rational ground generated by this imperative\footnote{201}{Or, more accurately, that willing an end establishes a normative ground that entails the imperative.} of reason that expresses more than the mere “theoretical” proposition that “sticking” to the plan is part of the means.\footnote{202}{Any failure to take the means in this sense need not suggest more than a theoretical failure reflected in the will’s activity, the activity of a will that is not productive of its object.} This conception of instrumental reason sees reason as having an independent stake in the agent’s continued commitment to the end—“independently of empirical desires.”

But again, if the chosen end is a result of an “arbitrary self-launching,” according to Wood’s interpretation of HI, she is now committed to stick to her rational plan in the face of any temptation not to. On the other hand, if it is adopted on the basis of desire, or her choice to act on a desire, even her strongest desire, she is still committed to stay the course, even if her inclinations have since changed. The original problem with the arbitrariness of these “rational”
grounds is, in light of the principle, now exacerbated. For Wood supposes, in light of the principle, that the agent cannot change her mind.\textsuperscript{203}

This comes out even more clearly, if we notice that Wood, likewise, supposes that in order to conform to the a priori rational principle of HI, it is not enough to simply act in conformity with the principle on the basis of the original anticipated pleasure that prompted the agent’s normative act of end-setting. Rather, in order for the action to express instrumental rationality, the desire that in fact motivates the action when the time comes to perform it \textit{has to be consequent} to the agent’s determination of the will by the principle of HI; the motivation must be a “function of instrumental reason,” and therefore “produced by pure reason” in accordance with the a priori principle:

\begin{quote}
\textit{If the desire that moves the agent to act according to its rational plan “precedes determination of the will, then we are not dealing with a genuine case of practical reason at all, but only of action on a desire that coincides contingently with our rational pursuit of an end. The desire from which we act is a function of instrumental reason only if it is produced by pure reason, in accordance with a priori principles…}\textsuperscript{204}
\end{quote}

This would be a motive analogous to the moral motive, and acting from it would require an analogous feeling of respect for the a priori principle, the desire to conform to the command is only counted as “rational” if it is generated consequent to the determination of the agent’s will by the principle (HI). This is the clearest expression of privileging an arbitrary commitment. Regan’s criticism against Korsgaard’s “heroic existentialists,” who, in Regan’s words, “choose projects for no reason at all and then stick to them in the face of competing inclinations for no reason except that [they] choose them,” can be leveled against Wood here as well.\textsuperscript{205}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{203} For reasons that this discussion should help make clear, I think this problem was already implicit in the Incorporation Thesis itself, without having to suppose or explicitly formulate a principle like HI. Because if we are looking for a rational ground, or principle, that frames an order of ends, then these will be ends that a rational being cannot give up without contravening reason, in which case, HI would certainly follow as a consequence.

\textsuperscript{204} Wood, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{205} Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature.” It’s worth pointing out that while Regan’s paper is supposed to be a criticism of Kant’s view (as well as of contemporary Kantians), Kantians should be receptive to this criticism, the “liberty of indifference” cannot provide a rational ground.
\end{footnotesize}
Notice as well that Wood formulates the HI as a wide-scope requirement, and he says that he has in mind the kind of principle that Hill has called the “Hypothetical Imperative.” Recall that on the wide-scope formulation of the imperative, we cannot detach the command to will any particular means to any particular end. The wide-scope formulation does not allow for detachment without a detaching condition. So without supposing our ends are normative, HI would not entail the consequence that Wood thinks it does, namely, the prescription to will the necessary means. I have argued that, if there are ends that we ought to will, ends that are normative, then we can plausibly detach a conclusion to will the means. Since Wood also supposes that end-setting is fundamentally normative, he thinks that the very activity of willing an end, sets the agent the rational task of following through on a commitment to will the means:

To violate HI thus involves a failure of instrumental rationality, a failure to comply with a normative principle that is contained in the very concept of the normative activity of adopting an end, and in that sense is analytic: The very concept of the normative act of willing and end Z contains within it the normative consequence: “You must will every indispensably necessary means to Z that is within your power.”

This means that for Wood, facts about our ends could plausibly allow for detachment if he had a plausible account of what makes end-setting normative. But, as the previous discussion makes clear, that will require a more substantive ground than an agent’s arbitrary self-launching, or facts about her empirical desires.

206 See Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative.”

207 Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 62. Similarly, Wood claims, that there “would be a related failure of rationality in an agent that willed Z as an end, realized that M is indispensably necessary to achieve Z, but found in itself, (when the time came) no desire to employ M,” Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 63. Since, according to Wood, reason’s instrumental interest is capable of generating a desire that is consequent to its determination of the will, a lack of rational “desire” to employ M would indicate an analytic failure of rationality. See also Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 54, 60, 64-5.

208 In “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” this problematic leads Korsgaard to suppose that one way to account for the bindingness of the instrumental principle is to suppose that reason may require us to be “heroic existentialists,” who, again, in Regan’s words, “choose projects for no reason at all and then stick to them in the face of competing inclination for no reason except that we chose them,” “The Value of Rational Nature, p. 278. Of course, Korsgaard does not herself endorse this kind of view, but her discussion does seem to suggest that it is a live option and one that would indeed provide some normative ground for the agent’s continued commitment. I think this leaves her exposed to Regan’s criticism. It also falls prey to Broome’s “bootstrapping objection,” and the corollary objection that if there were really no reason in the first place for one to choose an end, there should be nothing wrong with changing one’s mind.” Insofar as this kind of implication is a live option for Wood and Allison, it leaves
But Wood thinks, and Allison appears to agree,\textsuperscript{209} that happiness itself is an end endorsed by practical reason. Although, Kant claims that happiness is a necessary end for us in virtue of our nature as finite beings,\textsuperscript{210} Wood argues that this claim should also be understood \textit{normatively}, “as a distinctive \textit{a priori} principle of prudential reason (with ‘happiness’ understood in the collective sense, as the idea of a sum of empirical satisfaction).”\textsuperscript{211} Forming an idea of one’s happiness and setting that as an end, is a part of the “essence of rationality,” and thus \textit{all} rational beings are \textit{rationally} constrained to will the maximum sum of their well-being.\textsuperscript{212} Failure to do so would be in violation of “a distinctive principle of practical reason.”

\textit{The problem is not that he wills the end (happiness) and yet fails to will the necessary means to it. The irrationality lies instead in the fact that he fails (at least on this occasion) to will the end of happiness, or at least prefers to it a momentary pleasure that (according to reason) he ought to will only on the condition that it is consistent with his overall happiness and constitutes a proper part of it.}\textsuperscript{213}

their account exposed as well. I think this is an implication that Kantians should reject, and so, insofar as the Incorporation Thesis entails it, this implication is a strike against it.

\textsuperscript{209} Allison, \textit{Kant’s Theory of Freedom}, p. 102. See also, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 448. Allison thinks that there is a “certain tension” between Kant’s claim that happiness is an end we necessarily pursue, and Kant’s “doctrine of ends set through free choice rather than nature,” (a doctrine the Incorporation Thesis must suppose), he argues that this tension may be resolved if we consider that happiness is just a place-holder for an indeterminate end. Since it is we who determine \textit{how} our happiness becomes determinate, Allison thinks we reconcile these two seemingly conflicting claims, namely, that rational agency sets ends through “free choice,” and that happiness is a naturally given end. Allison must think that prudence or some similar principle is plausible as a rational ground for determining an order of ends, especially since an agent will presumably find its happiness “‘good’ in the sense of being endorsed by practical reason,” at least in the sense that Allison has in mind with the Incorporation Thesis: a necessary object of practical reason (where reason judges the object as ‘good’ or ‘to be pursued’), if not a necessary object of pure practical reason (an object practical reason judges to be good independently of all inclinations).

\textsuperscript{210} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:415-6.

\textsuperscript{211} Kant, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{212} Kant, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 66. Wood thinks that this is the most natural way to understand Kant’s claim that happiness can be “presupposed surely and a priori in the case of every human being because it belongs to his essence” (\textit{Groundwork}, 4:15-6). Although, in this passage cited by Wood here, Kant says that happiness is one end that we can safely presuppose that all rational, and yet dependent, beings “actually \textit{do have} by a \textit{natural necessity}…” (\textit{Groundwork}, 4:15).

\textsuperscript{213} Wood, \textit{Kant’s Ethical Thought}, p. 67.
The idea of happiness, “the total satisfaction of our state,” requires that we judge not only the rationality of actions (relative to our ends), but the rationality of the ends themselves relative “to a whole of satisfaction”:

**PI:** Form an idea for yourself of the greatest achievable sum of your empirical satisfaction (under the name ‘happiness’) and make happiness your end, always preferring it over any limited empirical satisfaction.\(^{214}\)

PI condemns as *irrational* the pursuit of any end that is inconsistent with that agent’s idea of the sum-total of her satisfaction.

Even though an *a priori* prudential imperative would provide a rational ground for determining which ends an agent *ought* to pursue (those ends that are consistent with the maximum sum of the agent’s well-being), it’s not clear that this principle is defensible. If the desires put on the table by inclination are in themselves contingent and therefore arbitrary,\(^{215}\) why would it be any more rational to pursue a maximum combination of them, in the specifically *normative* sense that the Incorporation Thesis requires, than is the individual pursuit of any particular one of them. While it may be that finite rational agents just do have a strong inclination to always pursue their maximum well being (as a sum of their inclinations), why should it turn out that they *ought* to? If any single given inclination is not independently endorsed by our practical reason, it is not clear why their sum total would be qualitatively different and provide a qualitatively different and a *a priori* determining ground. Wood, like Paton,\(^{216}\) insists that the principle of prudence is an *a priori* practical principle that is part of the “essence of rationality,” and so one that any perfectly rational being necessarily pursues. But this insistence is unwarranted without an argument establishing the validity of the principle. Certainly Kant does not give any argument for it. Kant does not build into his conception of happiness the extra content of “too be pursued.” The choice to be prudent, then, must itself be determined by our *strongest* inclination, or else, must again, be the consequence of an arbitrary “self-launching.”

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\(^{214}\) Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 67.

\(^{215}\) Notice that if they weren’t, then we would not need the Incorporation Thesis. Desires themselves would indeed come with “pre-assigned weights.” Cf. Allison, “Kant of Freedom,” 447.

\(^{216}\) Although, Paton does not say that the principle of prudence could stand alone.
There is another possibility here, and for this reason, when we try to account for the normative ground that the Incorporation Thesis supposes will determine a rational order of ends, we face a trilemma. If there were normative ends in nature, and real relations of value external to an agent’s choice, one might argue that morally neutral reason is simply tracking and responding to value external to practical reason.\(^\text{217}\) One problem with going this route is of course textual, but further, it’s not clear that the alternative is going to be consistent with Allison and Wood’s own views about the nature of agency and the Incorporation Thesis itself.

According to Kant’s doctrine of the faculties, we need to intuit or receive anything we don’t generate ourselves via the spontaneous faculties. Our spontaneous faculties are productive of what is necessary and universal in cognition in accordance with the principles of their exercise (and combinations thereof). Kant does not seem to think we intuit anything but what we sense, and there doesn’t seem to be a receptive faculty for intuiting value. If we did have such a faculty, it would have to be something analogous to sensibility that gives us desires. Now one might take issue with Kant’s doctrine of the faculties, or any other number of issues with Kant’s account of practical reason, but even if Kant is wrong about this, it’s not a Kantian conception of freedom to posit the existence of external (and morally neutral) values that our reason is responsive to, and Kant himself certainly doesn’t seem to offer an argument for it. This is deserving of more treatment that I am able to give here, but it’s worth emphasizing that if the realist view turns out to be right, and there are normative ends in nature to which the fully rational agent is responsive in the requisite way, we no longer seem to need a “Kantian” theory of agency.

Nonetheless, a rationalist solution will not support the Incorporation Thesis. Allison and Wood both emphasize that it is the spontaneity of the rational faculties, and the capacity to act in light of freely adopted principles that is crucial to Kant’s conception of agency, and which confers value on the agent’s ends. According to Wood, it is precisely because we are the source of the principles of rational choice that rational nature is valuable and has dignity. Wood says,

\(^\text{217}\) This is Regan’s preferred choice in “The Value of Rational Nature,” and it is a rejection of the Kantian conception of rational agency and its “dignity.” For an interpretation of Kant that is sympathetic to Regan’s value realism, see Robert Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation: Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
What is a priori ... we ourselves produce through the exercise of our faculties. This point is especially important in the case of practical principles. A moral law can be truly autonomous only if it is a priori ... This is because an a priori principle is one we give ourselves, in contrast to one that we are given from outside (whether environmentally, by authority, by custom, or tradition, or innately, by supernatural divine infusion or some nonrational genetic disposition).218

Given that Wood thinks there are other a priori principles of practical reason, they too will be “truly autonomous,” and so could not be responsive to a value given from outside. And likewise, the Incorporation Thesis must insist that any spontaneously adopted rational principle that incorporates a desire into a maxim as an appropriate basis of action, and therefore turns it into a reason, will be an a priori practical principle itself that confers value on the agent’s desires (or the objects of her desires).

If this is right, it presents an important requirement for a successful defense of the Incorporation Thesis, and the theory of rational agency that it entails. If there are nonmoral, a priori practical principles that come from us (as they must on Kant’s view), then they are subject to Kant’s critical demand for an account of their normative authority. ‘Isn’t it obvious?’ won’t be enough, and here Hume can just dig his heals in.219 Kant certainly does not provide any deduction for this sort of principle, and it’s not clear that one can be given. In Kant’s own inventory of the faculties there does not seem to be any room for the kind of intermediate practical faculty that both Allison and Wood seem to argue for.220 At any rate, the onus to provide this kind of argument would seem to rest on those who insist on the principle and its authority.

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218 Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, pp. 59-60.
219 I need to thank David Suarez for helping me to clarify this point.
If this account of rational agency were successful, notice that we still lose the distinction between unconditional and conditional necessity, and thus what is crucial in Kant’s distinction between autonomy and heteronomy. If there really were nonmoral rational principles that determined an order of ends for us, their normativity, or bindingness, would be exactly the same as the categorical imperative. I have already indicated some of the significant problems on this front, so for now I will limit my discussion to just a few of them.

Notice that the Incorporation Thesis requires that the spontaneously adopted rational principle determines an order of “ought-to-bes” for the agent, thereby making her desire into a reason, and so her choice normative, for her. This will be an end that she cannot rationally give up without running afoul of her reason. As Allison puts it, “we think of reason as determining the will by legislating to it,” her reason “governs” her act of incorporation, or, “more simply” her choice. And so she is rationally required to remain committed to her choice “even in the face of any contrary inclinations.” This means she cannot change her mind with respect to it without contradicting her reason, and so this will not turn out to be a “discretionary” end for her. If she could change her mind, then it’s not clear what the principle is doing, or how it would be binding on her. In what sense, would reason be legislative with respect to her choice? And on what basis can she change her mind? Presumably, not on the basis of her desire because the imperative was supposed to rule out just this and constrain her choice in the face of any contravening desires.

It should be clear enough by now where the problem is coming from. Insofar as practical reason itself legislates ends for the agent, then these will be ends that she cannot give up, and the imperative with respect to it, the principle that she experiences as necessitating, must be categorical. Recall that there was a significant ambiguity with respect to how we should conceive of the imperatives that govern the will of the ineluctably heteronomous being whose agency, according to both Allison and Wood, is practically normative, and in a limited sense ‘free.’ On the one hand, both Allison and Wood suggest that such an agent would be governed

by hypothetical imperatives, and both offer a wide-scope interpretation of the hypothetical imperative as a “second-order” rational principle with disjunctive content. According to the wide-scope formulation of the imperative, both could argue that the agent can change her mind, and that when the time comes for her to perform the relevant action, she can instead give up the end. But if the imperative is formulated as an unconditional consistency requirement, it would now be unclear why desire could never suffice to explain an agent’s actual ends. It is, in fact, one of the claims that instrumentalists make in favor of the instrumental principle being a wide-scope requirement that reason does not bear on our ends.\(^{222}\)

But both Allison and Wood also argue that the wide-scope principle allows us to derive first order principles that constrain the agent to adopt a particular set of means, and stay on a particular rational course of action, never mind any contravening inclinations.\(^{223}\) Of course, the wide-scope principle does not allow us to derive any first order consequent-scope imperatives, such as those that both Allison and Wood have in mind. Recall that Wood thinks that, if you will an end \(Z\), \(HI\) entails the conclusion, “you must will every indispensably necessary means to \(Z\) that is within your power.”\(^{224}\) I say the conclusion is detached because it is thought to guard against a particular threat to rationality namely, “that when the time comes to perform the necessary action, our desires may no longer conform to the norms of conduct we established in setting the end.” This is of course, not a consequence that can be derived from a wide-scope principle without a detaching condition. For that, we must suppose the agent’s end is normative. Of course, this is just what Wood and Allison both suppose. For Wood, the consequent-scope requirement is entailed in the “normative act of willing an end.”\(^{225}\) For Allison, “it is the value placed on a desire or inclination that gives it its ‘motivational force,’ its status as a reason to act,” and this evaluation “rests on an appeal to practical reason (some sense of good), but not necessarily to morally practical reason.”\(^{226}\)

\(^{222}\) Again, I think Engstrom has this kind of objection in mind in his argument against the compatibility of the Incorporation Thesis with the wide-scope formulation of hypothetical imperatives. See, Engstrom, “Allison on Rational Agency.”

\(^{223}\) Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 447.

\(^{224}\) Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 62.

\(^{225}\) Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought, p. 62.

\(^{226}\) Allison, “Kant on Freedom,” p. 447.
that makes an end or choice normative is a *categorical* imperative. Particular hypothetical imperatives to take means derive from ends that are already normative.

Again, we are left seeking a nonmoral *categorical* imperative that the Incorporation Thesis really presupposes—an a priori practical principle that sets a rational order of ends.\(^\text{227}\) I have already indicated my doubt that one can be found. But notice that this view collapses Kant’s distinction between the unconditional, categorical *moral* imperative, on the one hand, and the conditional, hypothetical instrumental and prudential imperatives, on the other. Moreover, it does so in a way that presents a much more worrisome threat to the integrity of Kant’s moral philosophy than is done by the defenders of the material interpretation who argue instead that all imperatives have their source in *moral* reason.

Wood himself actually draws out this implication quite nicely in his discussion of the a priori prudential imperative.\(^\text{228}\) Wood admits that Kant never states PI explicitly, and that he “isn’t even clear that there is such a principle distinct from the principles involved in hypothetical imperatives”:

> So he doesn’t ask how it (or prudential rationality in general) is possible. It is not at all clear that PI is an analytic normative judgment like ... HI. Perhaps *pragmatic reason has greater affinity with moral than with instrumental reason, and this fact (if Kant had acknowledged it) might require him to qualify his anti-eudaemonism – his view that the principle of morality and the principle of one’s happiness are direct opposites (KpV 5:25). Following up this last thought, some post-Kantians, such as T.H. Green, view the pursuit of happiness (or individual

\(^{227}\) In his response to Engstrom’s worry that the limited spontaneity which characterizes the ineluctably heteronomous agent, able to act on only on the basis of hypothetical imperatives, will turn out to be unstable, either falling back into a conception of agency that can be accounted for on the standard Humean view, or else, requiring the full spontaneity of an agent governed by the categorical imperative, Allison insists he “never did claim that such a putatively spontaneous yet heteronomous agent was able to act only on the basis of hypothetical imperatives,” (“Kant on Freedom,” p. 446).

\(^{228}\) Though one does not need to suppose the principle of prudence specifically. Indeed Wood’s conclusion will apply to any categorical, nonmoral imperative that frames a rational order of ends.
“self-realization”) as occupying a middle position on a kind of continuum between mere desire satisfaction and morality.

And as a corollary to this discussion Wood notices that it turns out to be a happy accident for Kant that morality cannot be grounded in prudence. If happiness were an end that one could not “rationally disavow,” then acting from duty could be represented as acting on “hypothetical imperatives” to pursue one’s happiness, or one’s overall good, in the face of distracting and contingent inclinations to the contrary. In this case, moral imperatives would be a “species of hypothetical imperatives,” namely, those commanding the pursuit of happiness as a necessary end, and a “eudaemonistic ethical theory, such as Locke’s, which regards moral imperatives as species of assertoric imperative, could therefore do just as well as Kant’s theory at meeting the condition that our moral obligations must be independent of our desires or our (optional) ends.”

However, due to the combination of “stepmotherly” nature and our own empirical limitations, Kant thinks that there are no assertoric imperatives, but only “general counsels.” This means that moral obligation cannot “be presented under the guise of a hypothetical imperative telling us how to achieve the sole end that we as rational beings cannot disavow (namely, happiness).” This contingent and empirical fact about human limitation, coupled with the idea that moral obligation requires universal principles that bind us independently of our contingent and discretionary ends, forces Kant to deny that moral imperatives command only hypothetically “(relative to an end, perhaps a necessary end),” and insist that they “command categorically (independently of any end, even a necessary one).” Thus Wood concludes that Kant’s rejection of the Lockean eudaimonistic alternative is motivated by empirical considerations, and

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231 Kant never actually says that there are no assertoric imperatives. Rather, he says that “imperatives of prudence cannot, to speak precisely, command at all, that is, present actions objectively as practically necessary...” (*Groundwork*, 4:418). This is because, in the case of prudence, we lack a determinate antecedent.

232 Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 70.
thus that his “philosophical argument for the conditional claim that if morality is real, then its principle must be a categorical imperative valid a priori, is not itself an entirely a priori argument.”

By Wood’s own lights, then, we lose the distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity—the distinction between hypothetical and categorical practical necessity—but with it we lose the central distinction in Kant’s moral philosophy between a merely formal practical principle that grounds obligation, and the empirical practical principles that are only contingently dependent on what we, as human beings, are like. Of course, Wood insists, that the principle of prudence is an a priori practical principle, and so if we had more perfect information regarding the objects in which our happiness, as a (normatively) necessary end, would actually consist, it would admit of no exceptions and bind us independently of our contingent ends. In this case, moral obligation could be “presented under the guise of a hypothetical imperative telling us how to achieve the sole end that we as rational beings cannot disavow (namely, happiness).”

The same problem reiterates on Allison’s view, and it highlights another interrelated and complicating issue. Recall that Allison thinks that the practical freedom that characterizes the ineluctably heteronomous agent differs from the transcendental freedom of the rational agent bound by the moral law because the ineluctably heteronomous agent’s will remains motivationally dependent on sensuous incentives in order for reason to determine its choice, whereas the transcendentally free agent’s will is motivationally independent of all empirical incentives. The capacity for autonomy is the capacity to act on a practical principle “that makes no reference to an agent’s needs or interests as a sensuous being.” But if a motivationally dependent will is self-determining, and therefore its reason is the source of a law that endorses an inclination as “an appropriate basis for action” and so motivates actions independently of any particular desires, why think it is important that it do this independently of all desire? If it should turn out that there is a principle of reason that commands actions independently of all empirical

233 Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 70.
inclination, why should that command trump another rational command to will the pursuit of a particular inclination independently of the other (potentially conflicting) inclinations?²³⁶

For example, suppose there is a King who commands his subject to choose only one, but to choose the blue one and to choose the red one (but only on the condition that he has an inclination towards it). Suppose that the subject, moreover, has some inclination to choose the red one, but no inclination at all to choose the blue one. How should he choose? He certainly cannot choose on the basis that it is the King’s command since the King commands him to choose both the red one as well as the blue one. Supposing he can only choose one, what would be the relevance of his choosing the blue one because he had no inclination towards it? If anything at all, he should choose the red one since the King both commands it, and besides he has an inclination towards it. If the King commands both, how can we possibly explain the normative superiority of choosing the blue one over the red one simply because he had no inclination towards the blue one besides?

Similarly, on Allison’s account, it’s not clear, at least not obviously so, why the capacity for autonomy (the property the will has of being a law to itself independently of any object of inclination), or its principle, is considered to be so sublime. Insofar as reason can be spontaneously self-determining, issuing in commands that constrain our desires, independently of our particular inclinations and desires, why would it be somehow, normatively speaking, better that it is able to do this independently of all desire? If it turns out that reason can spontaneously project an order of ends that is practically rational, and so necessary, the capacity of the will to choose independently of all inclinations, would appear to be, as Wood supposes, a dispensable embellishment.

Moreover, on this view, we do get a genuine rational conflict between categorical, or at least, universally binding, imperatives of reason. Remember, one of the reasons that Kantians adopt a wide-scope view of hypothetical imperatives is to avoid the conclusion that reason could issue in conflicting, and unequivocal, rational commands. Recall, Hill argues that

²³⁶ For example of this kind of tension see, Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 104.
imperatives are supposed to tell us that certain acts are necessary, not merely that there is a prima-facie case for them; and as principles of reason, imperatives should never fall into an irreconcilable conflict. That is, one imperative should never demand unequivocally that we do something prohibited unequivocally by another imperative. A rational man should not have to choose between obeying one objective principle or another.\textsuperscript{237}

On both Allison and Wood’s conception of rational agency, we should expect to fall into this kind of rational conflict all of the time. Insofar as both views suppose that morally neutral reason issues in universally binding commands that constrain the agent’s desires, the “rational man will have to choose between obeying one objective principle or another.” Why shouldn’t he choose on the basis of his inclination towards the object besides?

5.

There seem to be two main problems in the literature that motivate the Incorporation Thesis and the supposition that all rational agency involves a limited spontaneity of reason.

First many people worry that Kant presents a false picture of empirical motivation.\textsuperscript{238} Thus sympathetic Kantians have looked for resources in Kant in order to show that his view of heteronomy, or nonmoral agency, does not imply a crude hedonism. One motivation for adopting a view like Allison’s and Wood’s is an all out rejection of Humean agency and the picture of nonmoral motivation that suggests that ‘agreeableness’ is the end of all nonmoral or heteronomous actions. This picture suggests that if the only sources of motivation are empirical, and it is the representation of pleasure, which happens to accompany any particular representation of an end, that really motivates the action, then the particular purposes of the agent would appear fungible; all the agent is really pursuing is her own pleasure. Allison rejects

\textsuperscript{237} Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 435.

\textsuperscript{238} Allison does not think that hedonism is Kant’s considered view. Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 102.
that Kant’s considered view is hedonistic, and he argues that we do not need to suppose that because an action is “‘from inclination,’ its aim or object is the satisfaction of that inclination.” The objection that Kant is committed to such a hedonistic view, so Allison argues, comes from the “failure to distinguish between an end and the ground or reason for adopting such an end.” This distinction is rooted in the Incorporation Thesis, and it also enables us to see the difference between the principle of an action (in this case the principle of self-love) and the end or object of that action.240

I have argued that the Incorporation Thesis cannot sustain any meaningful distinction on this account. If an order of ends is determined by empirical incentives, then while the purposes or objects of those ends may be in fact be very different things, this cannot account for any normative difference between them, and certainly not one grounded in our freedom. The Incorporation Thesis supposes that it cannot be the relation of pleasure between the agent and the agent’s representation of an object that explains his adoption of the principle, but rather that a spontaneously adopted principle will instead explain his incorporation of his inclination towards it into his maxim. I have argued that, at least on the supposition that reason is not responsive to some order of value external to it, the adoption of such a principle will turn out to be arbitrary or determined empirically. If this is right, we have good reason to accept Kant’s disjunction between empirical determining grounds of choice and the merely formal practical law to be exhaustive and exclusive. Absent a purely formal law, the only thing that can determine the will is the feeling of agreeableness (or disagreeableness) the agent expects from the represented object, and the “only thing that concerns him, in order to decide upon a choice, is how intense, how long, how easily acquired, and how often repeated this agreeableness is.”241 I think we should take Kant’s discussion here at face value, psychological hedonism is exactly Kant’s view of heteronomous agency.

239 Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, p. 102.


241 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:23.
Finally, there have been the perennial concerns raised against Kant’s identification of autonomy with moral agency, thus linking freedom with moral obedience. Allison points out that this interpretation, coupled with Kant’s identification of will with practical reason, leads to the “absurd” view that all nonmorally motivated actions, and even immoral actions, are “ultimately nothing more than ‘mere bits of behavior,’ not genuine products of will at all.” Allison thinks that this view leads to absurdities, and thus many sympathetic Kantians have tried to insist that Kant later renounces it, and introduces the Wille – Willkür distinction, and with it a morally neutral conception of autonomy in order to explain how heteronomous willing could turn out to be free. Others argue for a morally neutral conception of autonomy that the capacity to self-impose maxims (self-legislate) indicates. It is, again, supposed that the self-imposition of maxims is never determined solely by an agent’s empirical desires, but indicates a “law” self-given by the agent’s choice. Allison is sympathetic to these alternative interpretations, but he argues that since they posit a morally neutral conception of autonomy that applies to both moral and nonmoral (and immoral) agency, they undermine the crucial distinction between autonomy and heteronomy. “Practical” freedom, or the limited spontaneity supposed by the Incorporation Thesis, enables us to preserve a general conception of freedom as well as the crucial distinction between autonomy and heteronomy.

But, as I have argued, this seems to be a distinction without a difference. While Allison can distinguish between empirical and purely moral motivation, which is independent of all inclination, it’s no longer clear that this distinction retains the same force. If reason can spontaneously determine an order of “ought-to-bes” in an agency for whom there are only sensible incentives, then Wood is absolutely right to think that we do not need to look elsewhere for the a priori, universal and necessary principles, that ground obligation.

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245 Allison attributes this view to Rüdiger Bittner, *Moralisches Gebot oder Autonomie*. 
By contrast, I think there are good reasons to take Kant at his word, and deny any room for freedom within heteronomous agency, and certainly within an ineluctably heteronomous agency, like Humean agency. Freedom, or self-determination, consists in autonomous willing, and this willing consists in the determination of the will by the mere form of a law; freedom, for Kant, has one principle—the categorical imperative. If this is right, then the idea that only moral action is, strictly speaking, free, and correlative that nonmoral and immoral action is not, is not as “absurd,” as people have taken it to be. Reason commands that our actions take a certain form, the form of universal law, and although, as free beings, we have a capacity to adapt our maxims to it, it does not thereby reach directly, so to speak, to the matter of the maxim. Reason does not command the inclinations themselves, rather, in our pursuit of the end that nature has imposed upon us by a natural necessity, it commands that we act freely with respect to them by ensuring that the pursuit of their satisfaction has the form of a universal law.

And Kant certainly thinks that freedom cannot be defined “as the ability to make a choice for or against the law (libertas indifferentiae)”:

> Only freedom in relation to the internal lawgiving of reason is really an ability; the possibility of deviating from it is an inability. How can the former be defined by the latter? It would be a definition that added to the practical concept the exercise of it, as this is taught by experience, a hybrid definition (definitio hybrid) that puts the concept in a false light.\(^{247}\)

Although as free beings we are responsible for our immoral actions, Kant draws a distinction between the capacity of freedom and its exercise, as we are taught by experience. There is a genuine sense in which we are not exercising freedom with respect to our immoral choices. Freedom is the agent’s capacity to act on the universal form of a law, and when his actions fail to embody this principle, they are heteronomous, “his feelings and inclinations play the master over him.”\(^{248}\)

\(^{246}\) For example, Kant says, “love as an inclination cannot be commanded…” (Groundwork, 4:399).


There are good reasons for rejecting a neutral conception of freedom that locates it in a capacity to choose heteronomously. For the same reasons, we should take Kant’s hedonistic thesis, as it concerns nonmoral motivation, seriously. I hope to have at least indicated some of those in this argument. Nature sets the agenda for heteronomy precisely because there are no a priori, nonmoral rational standards to guide our nonmoral choice. The important implication is that without the moral incentive, we are left exactly with the Humean view of practical agency. The Incorporation Thesis threatens to distort the “crucial” Kantian idea that the sole source of practical value is an autonomous will. Exactly contrary to Wood’s claim then, Kant is emphatic that the only thing sufficient to explain the action of an agent not bound by the categorical imperative is that agent’s strongest desire.

If this discussion is right, then insofar as an agent’s ends are endorsed by practical reason, this will be an exercise of pure practical reason. And so if hypothetical imperatives only derive from reason’s commitment to the end, they must have their source in the categorical imperative. On the standard view of hypothetical imperatives, the material interpretation must be right.
Chapter 5: The Material Interpretation, Again

1.

I have tried to show that each of the interpretations of hypothetical imperatives that we have discussed result in what we have been referring to as the ‘material interpretation,’ according to which hypothetical imperatives are particular (narrow-scope) requirements of practical reason that derive from reason’s endorsement of our ends. Further, I have argued that the only plausible version of this view—as an interpretation of Kant—requires that hypothetical imperatives ultimately depend on the categorical imperative for the source of their normativity.

In chapter 3, I argued that there are theoretical as well as textual problems with this view. Perhaps most significantly, it collapses the distinction between unconditional and conditional necessity that Kant argues is of paramount importance in distinguishing between the two kinds of imperative. Further, it runs against the grain of Kant’s insistence that hypothetical imperatives apply to our discretionary ends, and Kant says, “we can always be released from the precept if we give up the purpose.” Kant also seems to think that hypothetical imperatives would apply to heteronomous agents, agents for whom nature, rather than reason, determines their ends. Finally, on this view, we lose the distinction between practical failures that are merely stupid, and those that are vicious.

In this chapter, I’d like to offer a diagnosis of the problem and an alternative understanding of Kant’s view that avoids it. I argue that there is a shared, but mistaken, understanding in the literature about what hypothetical imperatives actually command, and this interpretation of the command results in the material interpretation. I offer an alternative understanding of Kant’s conception of willing an end, one that forecloses the possibility of the standard interpretation of the imperative’s ‘command,’ and so avoids the aforementioned problems.

To begin, first notice that each of these interpretations also holds that hypothetical imperatives are rational precepts that command the agent to “will” the necessary means to her end, even in the face of any insubordinate local desires that prompt action incompatible with that end. That is,

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it is generally held that hypothetical imperatives are, first and foremost,\(^{250}\) anti-akratic principles that rationally constrain an agent to *will* the means to the ends that she wills, even, or insofar as, she is tempted not to. Thus the imperative is held to be an expression of one’s better judgment, issuing a rational constraint on the agent’s will to remain steadfast in her purposes in the face of recalcitrant inclinations that may prompt action incompatible with her end.\(^{251}\) If reason commands us to will the means, each of these interpretations must suppose some normative ground, or “reason” for that continued commitment, which cannot itself derive from the mere fact that an agent happens to have willed a certain end—additional principles of reason must be supposed that makes that end normative for her.

I argue that the material interpretation is the logical consequence of a conception of hypothetical imperatives that holds that it is possible for imperfectly rational beings to will ends while failing

\(^{250}\) I say ‘first and foremost’ here because many hold that hypothetical imperatives have a theoretical component insofar as they presuppose the identification of a causal connection between ends and means. Instrumental failures of this sort, however, are thought to be merely theoretical failures, and not instances of *practical* irrationality that hypothetical imperatives are thought to guard against. These theoretical failures, therefore, do not constitute, what Korsgaard identifies as “true irrationality,” in which without miscalculating or making a mistake, the agent “fails to be motivated by the consideration that an action is the means to her end,” Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason,” The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 83, No. 1 (1986), pp. 5-25, pp. 12-14. For other examples, see Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 62, as well as Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, pp. 41-42.

\(^{251}\) Even a cursory sample of the literature shows this. See Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, pp. 124-125: “If any rational agent wills the end, he ought to will the means…” See Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) p. 87: “Since beings like us do not, in fact, always will the means necessary to their ends, even when they know the means, the hypothetical imperative expresses a constraint of reason on impulse. If we were completely rational beings, the maxim of doing whatever is necessary to the end in view would be easy to follow. But since we are not, even our desires and wishes can create constraints and not mere lures and enticements. Pleasure itself, it has been ruefully discovered, can be a hard mistress.” See Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 64: “The threat to rationality in pursuing an end is … that when the time comes to perform the necessary action, our desires may no longer conform to the norms of conduct we established in setting an end. The function of instrumental reason is not to inform desire regarding means but to constrain the will to hold to its rational plan to pursue an end, perhaps even in the face of distracting or contrary desires that tempt the will to abandon the plan.” See Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason,” p.14: “Knowing the truth about the relevant causal relations in the case, we might nevertheless choose means insufficient to our end or fail to choose obviously sufficient and readily available means to the end. This would be what I will call true irrationality…” See also, Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law,” p.93: “Some one who wills an end, knows that it will be brought about by a certain necessary and available means, has no extraneous reason not to use that means, and yet is utterly unmoved to take it, is irrational in a way that does seem to amount to a contradiction.” See Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, pp. 42-45. According to Engstrom, all imperatives involve an exercise of practical judgment about what it would be good, all things considered, to do, and therefore the possibility that one can “against one’s better judgment,” the possibility of “weakness of will” or akrasia. See, Hill, “The Hypothetical Imperative, p. 433 fn 7: “Strictly speaking, the principle is to will the necessary means, not to take them or to do what is required.” See also pp. 445, 450. See *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, pp. 36, 38. See Hampton, *The Authority of Reason*, p. 165.
to *will* the necessary known means, and so the imperative implies that it is “better”\(^{252}\) for the agent to follow through and will the necessary known means when her local inclinations may threaten to interfere with her pursuit of that end. Robert Johnson lends his voice in support of this general consensus in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” and he says there that a hypothetical imperative

> requires us to exercise our wills in a certain way given we have antecedently willed an end ... it is not an error of rationality to fail to take the necessary means to one’s ends, nor to fail to want to take the means; one only falls foul of practical reason if one fails to *will* the means.\(^{253}\)

If hypothetical imperatives are conceived as essentially anti-akratic rational principles, then it is supposed that the foundation for that normative constraint is the rationality of the agent’s ends; hypothetical imperatives guard against *practical irrationality*—an agent’s local inclination interfering with her willing the means to her end, or her “better judgment.” Thus, it is thought to be rational for the agent to stick to her course and follow through on her commitment to her end by *willing* the necessary known means to it.

In order to show how this conception of hypothetical imperatives leads Kantians to adopt the material interpretation, I begin with Korsgaard’s argument in the “Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” in order to expose what I take to be the underlying structure of many of the similar Kantian arguments for holding the material interpretation.\(^ {254}\) Korsgaard concludes instrumental principles cannot stand alone, but require other principles of practical reason in order to lend them normativity. Her analysis here is convincing, and it highlights the conclusion that the traditional understanding of hypothetical imperatives is committed to.

\(^{252}\) “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law,” p. 93, ft.22: “If we think that she would be better off taking the means even though she feels lethargic, we will find it better to say the depression is a cause of irrationality rather than it changes the structure of available reasons.”


In section 3., I discuss three problematic implications of Korsgaard’s view. These are important because they will apply to the other interpretations that adopt the traditional understanding of the hypothetical imperative. In the final section, I offer an alternative understanding of hypothetical imperatives that avoids Korsgaard’s conclusion, and one that enables us to preserve Kant’s crucial distinction between unconditional and conditional necessity, and the correlative distinction between practical failures that are evil, and those that are merely stupid.

2.

In the “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” Korsgaard argues that the instrumental principle, the principle that requires us to “take the means to our ends,” requires a normative foundation and cannot stand alone. If it is really normative, prescribing rational necessity, it must borrow its normativity from some other principle, or principles, of reason that direct us in the adoption of our ends.

As a starting point, Korsgaard argues that in order for the principle of instrumental reason to be a principle of rationality that governs or guides the agent’s activity, it must be possible for an agent to recognize the rational necessity of an action, and yet fail to comply with it. This is a point she originally receives from Nagel who points out, in The Possibility of Altruism, that even on the “Humean belief/desire model” of rational action, the rational character of an action depends on the specific way in which the agent herself combines the belief and desire when performing the action. In Nagel's example, there is an agent who is conditioned to form the desire to drop a coin into the pencil sharpener every time he is thirsty and has the belief that there is a pencil sharpener in front of him. In this example, the behaviour lacks rationality, not merely because pencil sharpeners are not the kinds of things that yield thirst-quenching substances upon obtaining coins, but because the agent has not himself combined the relevant belief and desire. That is, even if the right conceptual connection (in this case) had obtained between the belief and

the desire—for example, if we had a belief that putting a coin in the vending machine will yield a drink and a desire for a drink—insofar as the action is the mere casual consequence of the bare co-presence of a given belief and desire, the action of putting the coin in the vending machine when one has the desire for a drink will only be “externally different” from putting the coin in the pencil sharpener. In order for the action to express the agent’s own rationality, the agent himself must combine the appropriate belief with the relevant desire, and it must be that recognition that motivates his action; the action must be an expression of his “own mental activity.” In order for the action to express rationality, it must be the result of the agent’s reflective, conscious, deliberate thinking rather than a merely conditioned response.

But Korsgaard also claims that in order for the principle to guide (necessitate) an agent’s conduct, it must present that conduct as rationally necessary. This is not to say that it is logically necessary that the agent who has formed the appropriate conceptual connection between her desires and her belief about how to satisfy them will perform the relevant action, and it is not to say that she will be caused by her recognition of the appropriate conceptual connection between her desire and the proposed action. For if, Korsgaard argues, the action is a mere causal consequence of her recognition of the necessity of performing the action, we could not say that the agent was “guided” by reason. In order for the action to really be an “expression” of her own mental activity, Korsgaard argues that it must be possible for her to fail to be motivated by her own recognition—even if/when this combination is the result of her own mental activity—of the rational necessity of performing the action. Because the person who is caused to act by her own recognition of the connection between her end and her belief that a certain action is necessary to obtain it, such as the Humean agent would be (even when that combination is the result of her own mental activity), then any observer who knows what the person’s end is, may predict that person’s conduct. This suggests, Korsgaard claims, that for this person, there is no such thing as practical reason. In order to express rationality, it must be possible for her to behave irrationally.

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258 Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p. 34.
259 In “Skepticism about Practical Reason,” Korsgaard says that it must be possible that “…knowing the truth about the relevant causal relations in the case, we might nevertheless choose means insufficient to our end or fail to choose obviously sufficient and readily available means to the end. This would be what I will call true irrationality by,
But this is a different point than the one she takes from Nagel. Nagel points out that the agent must herself synthesize the appropriate combination of beliefs and desires in order to say that bringing about an effect is a consequence of her own rationality, but Korsgaard further insists that it must also be possible that she can intentionally fail to be motivated by her own recognition of that conceptual connection. And this is an additional claim. We can register the distinction between logical and rational necessity, and yet recognize that in the latter case there could be two ways of failing it: failing to draw the correct connection, and deliberately failing to act on it. In Nagel’s own example, we can agree that the agent himself must combine the belief that putting a coin in the vending machine will yield a drink and a desire for a drink, and yet acknowledge that he might fail to (perhaps having the mistaken belief that pencil sharpeners are the kind of things that yield drinks). Korsgaard argues for the further claim that in order for the agent’s action to be an expression of rationality, it must be possible that he himself synthetize the appropriate connection between his belief that putting a coin in the vending machine will yield a drink and his desire for a drink, and yet still fail to be motivated by his own recognition of that connection. Korsgaard denies that the former possibility is a case of rational failing, and she insists on the latter way only.\textsuperscript{260}

Thus, Korsgaard goes on to argue that the necessity expressed in the instrumental principle is a specifically practical necessity. If the instrumental principle is not simply a descriptive principle, a theoretical truth about how agents with theoretical reason will normally and predictably act

\textsuperscript{260} That is, we might agree with Nagel that in order for an action to express an agent’s own mental activity, she must herself recognize the appropriateness of the conceptual content that motivates her such that her causality is not merely mechanical (e.g. like a heart beat), or determined merely by the operation of desires in her (her desires transferring ‘motive force’ all the way through to a behaviour), and that her own reason must be employed in order to transfer the ‘motive force’ from her desire to her action, but this does not exclude the possibility that her own recognition of the conceptual appropriateness might reliably cause action. Korsgaard goes further, and claims that rational failure is the failure of the agent to be motivated by her own conscious putting together of the appropriate beliefs with the relevant desires.
(say, that finite rational agents just do will the necessary known means to their ends, then it must be possible for them to fail to be motivated by the recognition that a given action is the necessary known means to their ends. Only then will the instrumental principle be a principle that guides rational behavior, expressing how an agent ought to be motivated. It will then constitute a practical claim on the agent’s will, expressing a truth about how she should act, and yet might fail to; it will govern, without necessarily causing, her behavior. In order for it to be possible for the agent to consciously fail to comply with its verdicts, it must therefore be possible for her to have an end and fail to will the necessary known means—and so to will irrationally.261

Given that the instrumental principle is normative, Korsgaard thinks that we require an account of its normativity, an account of why it is rational (in this more specific sense) for an agent to will the necessary known means to her end, and she thinks that Kant was the first to recognize the need for an account of its normativity.262

Speaking both of hypothetical and categorical imperatives, in *Groundwork* II, Kant asks how it is that these imperatives are possible:

This question does not inquire how the performance of the action that the imperative commands can be thought, but only how the necessitation of the will, which the imperative expresses in the problem, can be thought.263

Of course his answer is that hypothetical imperatives don’t require any “special” discussion.

How an imperative of skill is possible requires no special discussion. Whoever wills the end also wills (insofar as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that are within his power.264

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261 If instrumental principle is normative (guiding), it must be possible for the agent to recognize the theoretical connection between her ends and the necessary means, and yet ‘willfully’ fail to be motivated by that recognition. This is the sense of ‘irrationality’ that Korsgaard represents as specifically practical.

262 Here it does not matter whether we assume, with Korsgaard, a general hypothetical imperative (i.e., what she calls the instrumental principle), or specific particular hypothetical imperatives. We might think, with Korsgaard, that either, or both, stand in need of an account of their normativity insofar as both are thought to guard against specifically practical failures.


But the parenthetical clause, “insofar as reason has decisive influence on his actions,” has led many interpreters to believe that hypothetical imperatives warrant more discussion than Kant perhaps thought. The thought is that if reason has decisive influence on an agent’s actions, then that agent “also wills the indispensably necessary means” to her ends (where these are taken to be known), whereas imperfectly rational agents might not will the necessary known means to their ends—although they ought to. Thus the hypothetical imperative is thought to link two distinct practical activities: the activity of willing an end, and the activity of willing the known indispensably necessary means to that end. This clause is thought to lend support to views like Korsgaard’s, which hold that hypothetical imperatives guide, or govern, an agent’s practical activity because irrationality (as previously defined) is possible; it is always possible for an agent to will an end, recognize the appropriate conceptual connection between ends and means (that is, have the appropriate theoretical cognition, “know” the means), and yet fail to will them. Hypothetical imperatives are understood as principles that link these distinct practical acts, and therefore as commanding an agent to will the necessary known means that she might knowingly, and purposely, fail to.

Imperfectly rational agents do not necessarily will the means to their ends, but they ought to. This is just the wide-scope formulation of the hypothetical imperative. On the wide-scope view the principle is thought to be an unconditional rational command with disjunctive content: it demands that imperfectly rational agents either take the means to the end(s) that they will or give up their end(s). Formulated this way, the principle is an unconditional consistency requirement directed to all finite rational agents regardless of the ends they happen to have, and it does not direct the agent to adopt the means to her end because she can always conform to the

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265 This qualification is necessary because failures of hypothetical imperatives are not thought to consist in mere theoretical failures, but specifically practical failures, which involve the conscious failure to will the known means (or what are believed to be the means) to an end one has already willed.

266 Or what are believed to be the indispensably necessary means.

267 I believe that this is why Schroeder attributes the wide-scope view to Korsgaard. I don’t think this is right, and the argument in the first section of “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason” can be read as a criticism of the wide-scope view as a self-standing principle of practical reason. I argue that she in fact holds the material interpretation, according to which hypothetical imperatives are consequent-scope, and conditional on ends endorsed by practical reason.
principle by abandoning the it. Without detaching conditions, the imperative always has an embedded conditional, and it does not of itself direct us to will ends or to take the means to them. At least initially, this seems to be the formulation of the instrumental principle that Korsgaard has in mind.

But Korsgaard points out that the instrumental principle does not give us reason to do anything in particular until we determine what our ends are.

The instrumental principle, because it tells us only to take the means to our ends, cannot, by itself, give us a reason to do anything. It can operate only in conjunction with some view about how our ends are determined, about what they are.

If our ends are simply those things we want most, they seem to be just those things we are “going to pursue.”

The criterion of what the person wants most appears to be what he actually does. The person’s ends are taken to be revealed in his conduct. If we don’t make a distinction between what a person’s end is and what he actually pursues, it will be impossible to find a case in which he violates the instrumental principle.

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268 For a Kantian defense of the wide-scope view of the hypothetical imperative, again, see Hill “The Hypothetical Imperative.” For a discussion of the contrast between wide-scope and consequent-scope formulations of hypothetical imperatives, see Engstrom, “Allison on Rational Agency,” p.408, and Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative?”

269 Korsgaard also mentions that she is in agreement with Hill’s wide-scope reading of Kant’s hypothetical imperative, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p. 46.

270 Here I think we can read Korsgaard as pointing out that we don’t know the particular disjunctive content of the imperative, and so what particular disjunct we are required to conform with. Of course it is possible to read this as Korsgaard misunderstanding the wide-scope view by thinking that our ends themselves would constitute detaching conditions. There is much precedent for this mistake, and even Hill himself seems to make it, see “The Hypothetical Imperative,” p. 441-3. Allison also appears to make this mistake in “Kant on Freedom,” p. 447. For Allison this may be permissible given that he thinks our ends are normative, in which case they could plausibly constitute detaching conditions. This would then just be a version of the material interpretation.


Without some gap between our end, and what we are actually pursuing, pursuing one’s end will just be the very same thing as pursuing the necessary known means to it. If our ends are simply the objects of those desires we happen to be pursuing, then we cannot violate the principle, for “how can you be guided by a principle when anything you do counts as following it?”274 The instrumental principle will turn out to be descriptive of agency after all, and practical irrationality, of the kind that Korsgaard argues is presupposed by the normativity of the principle, conceptually impossible.

But if there are practical principles that determine, which ends are normative for us, then we can account for the requisite gap between willing an end, and what we are actually pursuing, and so also between willing an end and willing the necessary known means to that end. If there are ends that we ought to will and might fail to, then it seems plausible to hold that we can also fail to will the (known) means to those ends. But if certain ends are normative for us, we will also have a legitimate condition of detachment which enables us to detach the consequence, and yield a particular prescription to will the necessary means to those ends. If we ought to will the end, we ought to will the necessary known means to that end, and now we will have an imperative that we can fail to comply with. So if there is a principle of reason that determines what our ends should be, then the instrumental principle can be formulated as a narrow-scope requirement; if one ought to will an end, then one ought to will the necessary means to it. If there are principles of reason directing us to ends that we ought to will, then we can apply modus ponens, and derive an imperative to will the necessary means.

But if there is no additional principle to the principle of instrumental reason that determines what an agent’s ends should be, then either an agent’s ends will be determined by her strongest desires, those things she happens to be pursuing at the moment, in which case the instrumental principle is not normative because there is no way of violating it (anything the agent does counts as conforming to the principle), or there must be some other way of determining what an agent’s ends are, and one that allows for the requisite gap between willing an end and willing the means to it.

The crux of Korsgaard’s argument is really that no matter which view we adopt about end-determination, the instrumental principle cannot prescribe any particular means without assuming that our ends are normative for us. The instrumental principle, formulated as wide-scope does not allow for the detachment of any particular conclusions without the addition or specification of detaching conditions. Mere facts about what our ends happen to be do not allow us to detach any particular conclusions about willing means since that would be deriving an ought from an is. If our ends were to constitute detaching conditions, then we wouldn’t formulate the principle as wide-scope; given facts about our ends, we could always derive particular prescriptions to will the means (and if our ends just are the things we happen to currently be pursuing, then there is no way to violate this imperative, and it turns out not to be an imperative at all). Without any additional principle determining the ends we ought to pursue, we cannot detach a particular prescription to will the necessary known means.

But perhaps Korsgaard’s argument moves too quickly over another possibility, which would block the necessity of presuming irrationality involves the violation of a particular narrow-scope requirement to will a particular set of necessary known means to an end that she ought to will. Perhaps hypothetical imperatives aren’t anti-akratic principles, principles that provide us with reasons to will the means to ends that we have reason to pursue, after all. After all, Korsgaard argues that there must be a reason to will the end because she was looking for an account of the normativity of the instrumental principle. She required a gap between what the agent was actually doing and her “end,” such that the violation of the imperative was practically possible. It looked like she needed the agent’s ends to be normative in order to account for that gap between what the agent is actually doing, and her end, which Korsgaard, therefore, concluded is what she ought to be doing. But assuming that there is some plausible way to draw the distinction between what an agent is pursuing and what her ends are, then perhaps we can account for the necessary “gap” between willing an end and willing the necessary known means so that we can account for the normativity of the instrumental principle, but without supposing that an agent’s ends are normative, or that there must be additional principles of practical reason.

If this can be done, then perhaps it is more plausible to think of hypothetical imperatives as particular wide-scope (consistency) requirements. After all, Kant does suggest that “we can
always be released from the precept if we give up the purpose.”\(^{275}\) Moreover, it seems that if Korsgaard, and others who hold the material interpretation, are right, then Kant must be mistaken here; we cannot be released from the precept by giving up the purpose—if there are necessary objects of practical reason, then we ought to will the necessary known means to them, independently of our actual purposes.

I think there are serious difficulties in trying to extract a wide-scope view from Kant’s account of hypothetical imperatives without running into significant conceptual and interpretive problems, but here, I will point out only two of them that arise in connection with the previous discussion.

If Korsgaard and others have been right to assign the instrumental imperatives the task of guarding against specifically practical failures, where such failures are thought to consist in the conscious failure to will the necessary known means to one’s ends, Korsgaard is also right that we will require an account of what it means to have an end that will allow for a gap between one’s end and what one is actually pursuing that makes failing to obey the imperative—consciously violating a consistency requirement—conceptually possible. However one is inclined to come down on the issue of end determination, the Kantian will have the task of accounting for why it is a principle of rationality to will the means to one’s ends. So, for example, no matter how one conceives of an end, perhaps either as a certain kind of mental state among others, a set of biological goals, the object of certain desires, or perhaps even the objects of all our desires (in which case it seems unlikely that anyone could altogether avoid expressing some amount of irrationality), we will need some explanation of why it would be a principle of rationality that agents ought to will the necessary known means to, respectively, that particular mental state, or that biological goal, or the object of that particular desire, or the objects of all desires. Further, the Kantian will also have to explain how this principle is meant to be analytic. Even leaving aside this last interpretive issue, and granting—as the Kantian defenders of the wide-scope view are wont to do\(^ {276}\)—that the principle may be synthetic, it’s not clear that a plausible (Kantian) argument can be found for the validity of this (synthetic) principle.

\(^{275}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:420. I have already indicated that I do not think that this quote supports the wide-scope view either.

\(^{276}\) For example, see “The Hypothetical Imperative.” Of course, those who hold the material interpretation think that although analytic, hypothetical imperatives depend on a synthetic a priori categorical imperative.
So this leaves us with the material interpretation; if there are purposes that we ought to bring about, then the imperative to will the necessary known means follows analytically. And of course, for Kant, the principle that makes our ends normative for us is the categorical imperative.

3.

There are three important implications of Korsgaard’s analysis.²⁷⁷ First, notice that on Korsgaard’s view, we get the sought after gap between an “end” and what an agent is going to pursue, or happens to be pursuing, such that willing an end, and consciously failing to will the necessary known means is possible. But on this account, an end just is something that ought to be effected. And for Kant, this is just to say that it is a moral good, a necessary purpose of (pure) practical reason. As long as we are talking about good “ends,” the purposes an agent ought to effect, then we can account for the normativity of the principle to will the necessary known means. But Korsgaard’s account only works for these cases, and not for morally neutral or morally impermissible purposes; at least, it remains unclear how her account would extend to the latter two.²⁷⁸ If only necessary purposes of practical reason are counted as “ends,” hypothetical imperatives will command a being to will the necessary known means to the purposes she has only insofar as these are the purposes that she ought to have (her ends). Instrumental irrationality consists in not willing the necessary known means to the necessary objects of practical reason (the purposes she ought to have will be her “ends”). This is at odds with the intuitive idea that for Kant, in the case of hypothetical imperatives, we do not take into account whether the purposes are good, bad, or indifferent.

²⁷⁷ These issues come up for all versions of the material interpretation, not just Korsgaard’s. They will come up for all interpretations of Kant that suppose the normativity of hypothetical imperatives is conditional on practical reason’s endorsement of an end as good.

²⁷⁸ Moreover, since it’s not clear that there is the requisite “gap” between the agent’s actual (non-normative) purpose and what she is going to pursue (since this is what has not been accounted for), it appears that it may not be possible for the agent to fail to will the necessary known means to that purpose. Otherwise the instrumental principle could (potentially) “stand alone.” Recall that the issue was cleaving some space between an agent’s end and what she is actually doing, in order to allow for the possibility of normativity and failure to obey the imperative.
So the requisite “gap” between willing an end and willing the necessary known means to that end enters into the account as a gap between an agent’s acknowledged “good,” a purpose she acknowledges she ought to have, and her failing to will the means to that purpose. To say that there are ends, is just to say that there is some possible purpose of the will that ought to be \textit{effected}, and this implies that there are purposes she ought to will the \textit{cause} of. This makes clear how it is that Korsgaard preserves the logical connection between willing ends and the command to will the necessary known means to them, while at the same time allowing for the possibility that an imperfectly rational agent might fail to will the necessary known means to her \textit{ends}—the purposes she \textit{ought} to bring about. To say that there are ends that she ought to bring about implies that she ought to will the necessary known means to them. This puts Korsgaard squarely in the company of those who hold the material interpretation, and on this view instrumental irrationality is a weakness of will: a failure to will the necessary known means to a necessary object of practical reason. Accordingly, instrumental failure does not consist in making a logical or theoretical mistake in one’s reasoning, but rather in ‘willfully’ neglecting to take what one believes to be the means to an end that she ought to effect. Instrumental failure is akratic.

Second, on this account, an “end” is a \textit{necessary} object of practical reason, and so, at least for Kant, this is a purpose that is unconditionally required by the categorical imperative. We collapse the distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity; all practical necessity will be \textit{unconditional}. This means that instrumental irrationality will turn out to be a \textit{moral} failure. It is this point that is really troubling for a Kantian account of instrumental reason.

If hypothetical imperatives to will the means to one’s ends are primarily anti-akratic requirements, then weakness of will, will often consist primarily in failing to will the means to purposes that are unconditionally required. And for Kant, this means that our instrumental failures will turn out to be vicious. Instrumental failures will be failures of \textit{categorical} imperatives to will the means to unconditionally required purposes. And this means many moral failures which are apparently failures of categorical imperatives, will actually be failures of hypothetical imperatives. Certainly failures of imperfect duties, seem to be instrumental failures: failures to effect the ends that are unconditionally required by the categorical imperative. (The ends themselves, as “oughts” are given, they are already presupposed as willed). Recall that for Kant, there are two necessary ends, self-perfection and the happiness of others. If and when we
fail to make particular people happy, these will be failures to will the constitutive means to these general ends of practical reason.

For example, perhaps I have a friend in the hospital, and I acknowledge that it would make her happy if I brought her dog for a visit, and I acknowledge that this is something that I therefore ought to do. Suppose, however, that I am terribly afraid of dogs, and even though I know hers is a perfectly harmless one, I am too fearful to pick it up and walk it over to her. According to Korsgaard, this is a prototypical example of instrumental failure. I have the end of others’ happiness, and, due to “frailty,”\textsuperscript{279} or weakness of will, I fail to will the necessary known means to a necessary object of practical reason. Moreover, on this view, if I fail to bring her dog for a visit because I prefer to stay home and watch the football game on the television, I have also failed instrumentally. This account provides no room for registering any distinction between these two cases of instrumental failure.

But Kant consistently talks about locating the failure of imperfect duties in failing to will the relevant ends: “So it is not a question here of ends the human being does adopt in keeping with the sensible impulses of his nature, but of objects of free choice under its laws, which he ought to make his ends.”\textsuperscript{280} On this account, however, insofar as the categorical imperative is thought to be a principle determining an order of ends, we seem to have already satisfied it, and we only fail instrumentally. So in many cases in which we want to capture moral failings, we will have satisfied the categorical imperative (on some level)—our ends just are the requisite objects that we ought to be willing/taking the means to\textsuperscript{281}—and weakness of will consists in the failure to will the means.

Crucially, we now lose distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity, and so the distinction between the two imperatives is really otiose. Instrumental failures are failures to will the means to ends that are unconditionally required, and as such, are morally culpable. This is a

\textsuperscript{279} See Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:406, 4:430,

\textsuperscript{280} Notice this relies on a coherent distinction between actual and necessary ends.

\textsuperscript{281} There is no account (so far) of how to distinguish between an end an agent has willed and to which she fails to will the necessary known means, and when she has simply failed to will the end. Since, on this view, “ends” just are the necessary objects of practical reason—the purposes we ought to have—it seems we just have them, as rational beings bound by the categorical imperative, there just are objects we ought to will, and these are “ends” for us.
result that is clearly at odds with the primary sense of instrumental reason, reason as an instrument or tool used in the production of objects—hypothesetical imperatives as “precepts of art.”

Notice that it will not help to say that hypothetical imperatives are really twofold practical requirements, namely, the theoretical requirement to grasp the correct theoretical connection between the relevant ends and the appropriate means (the rational activity captured by the concept of “instrumental intelligence” or “practical thinking”), as well as the requirement to will the means to the purposes that, “according to one’s better judgement,” we ought to. As we saw earlier, everyone agrees it is this latter, anti-akratic, requirement that is the practical one, and that the hypothetical imperative guards against. Theoretical failures, on the contrary, are not thought to be practically irrational.282

Third, Korsgaard’s conclusion really presupposes the identity of willing an end and willing means. On Korsgaard’s view, and according to the material interpretation more generally, we lose the distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity. The necessity of willing the means is the very same necessity expressed in the imperative to will the end, the necessity of effecting the required purpose. The unconditional principles from which we derive reasons for having particular purposes of the will (more accurately, our ends just are the purposes “we have some reason to keep them in view”283), also provide unconditional reasons for willing the means. To say that an agent should will a purpose is not to say something different than that an agent ought to will the necessary known means to effect that purpose. And so Korsgaard concludes:

if there are any instrumental requirements, then there must be unconditional requirements as well. Conversely, if there are unconditional requirements to adopt certain ends, then there are also requirements to take the means to those ends, since a commitment to taking the means is what makes a difference between willing an end and merely wishing for it or wanting it or thinking that it would be nice if it were realized.284

283 Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p. 64.
This leads her to remark that the distinction between the two kinds of imperatives, hypothetical and categorical, and Kant’s supposition that the former is analytic and the latter synthetic turns out “to be less important than Kant thought.”\textsuperscript{285} They have the same source of normativity—the requirement to will the means is analytically entailed by the requirement to will the end. And so Korsgaard notices that her argument problematizes the distinctiveness of the principles of practical reason, and concludes that there is really only one principle of practical reason: the categorical imperative, which is the source of normativity for the others. This raises issues about the distinguishability of different kinds of practical rationality and irrationality ... there is only one principle of practical reason, the categorical imperative viewed as the law of autonomy, but there are different ways to fall away from autonomy, and the different principles of practical reason really instruct us not to fall away from our autonomy in these different ways.\textsuperscript{286}

So hypothetical imperatives, and the instrumental principle—should one insist on it, are various derivative principles preventing us from “falling away from our autonomy” in various ways—i.e. not “willing” the means to our ends.

But the conclusion is really stronger than that, and Korsgaard herself later notices this, and thinks it worthy of devoting an afterword to explicitly stating it in her republished 2008 version of the paper. It’s worth quoting this at length:

\begin{quote}
there are two things wrong with the way I described my conclusion in this essay. First, the instrumental principle is not a principle of practical reason that is separable from the categorical imperative: rather, it picks out an aspect of the categorical imperative: the fact that the laws of our will must be practical laws, laws that constitute us as agents by rendering us efficacious. Second, the categorical imperative is not a principle of practical reason that tells us to have certain ends, and that is separable from the principle that tells us to take the means to those ends. Practical principles govern the will, and a principle that
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{286} Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p. 62, fn.60.
governs the will must tell us to do something—even if it is just, indeterminately, to do whatever we can (legitimately) do in the pursuit of certain ends. It cannot tell us simply to have certain ends ... So let me here state the conclusion of my argument properly. There is only one principle of practical reason, and it is the categorical imperative. 287

In the end, Korsgaard concludes that the instrumental principle and the categorical imperative are not really distinct principles after all—they could not be satisfied independently. It isn’t as if there is a categorical imperative that determines the ends we ought to have, and then a separate principle of reason that tells us, in addition to will the means to it. At least for purposes that are unconditionally required, “ends” are requirements to effect the purpose, and this just is the requirement to cause the relevant cause. These aren’t separate principles—it would not, as Korsgaard indicates, be possible to satisfy one without simultaneously satisfying the other.

But if these are not really distinct principles, or imperatives, why should we insist that there are really distinct practical faculties—the faculty of willing ends and the faculty of willing the means that the instrumental imperatives are thought to unify? That is, why think it is possible to will an end and “willfully” fail to will the necessary known means? As Korsgaard notices, if willing an end just is committing to take the necessary known means, then how can we distinguish between the cases in which a person has failed to will the necessary known means to a purpose that she ought to effect from the person who has simply failed to will the purpose? 288 Moreover, why would we? 289

But then, it does not seem possible to will an end 290 and willfully fail to will the necessary known means. If by willing an end, we commit to take the necessary known means, it would seem that

288 In fact, her argument for the practical contradiction interpretation of Kant’s formula of universal law seems to require it, see Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law,” p. 94.
289 That is, if Korsgaard’s conclusion in the Afterword is right, how would these represent two distinct ways of falling away from the same principle?
290 Recall that on Korsgaard’s account, it was not clear what made for the distinction between an “end,” the purpose we have “reason to keep in view,” the purpose we ought to will the means to, and willing that end. Here, it seems the way she wants to account for this distinction is by acknowledging that willing an end is committing to take (willing) the necessary known means.
we would always be in conformity with the practical principle (as the material interpretation interprets it), and so it would seem like the requirement to will the means just is the very same requirement to will the end, and so insofar as there are ends that we ought to will, there will also be means that we ought to will. Korsgaard herself says that these turn out to be the very same thing, the command is of a single volition. The conclusion of “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” is really that there is no instrumental reason—only instrumental “intelligence.”291 That is, if there is an imperative that requires us to will the means to the purposes we ought to effect; it just is a categorical imperative—a requirement to will an end. If it is thought that hypothetical imperatives require that we can fail to will the means to our ends, it would seem that there just won’t be any—it doesn’t turn out to be possible to will an end, and willfully fail to will necessary means to them.292

4.

So was Kant’s discussion of hypothetical imperatives confused after all? If this analysis is right, then the interpretations that hold that hypothetical imperatives are primarily anti-akratic requirements to will the means to the ends “we have reason to keep in view” will collapse the distinction between unconditional and conditional necessity, and intuitively instrumental failures will turn out to be morally vicious. All practical failure will register as moral failure.293

291 Engstrom claims that Kant tried to capture the salient difference between ‘cleverness’ (Klugheit) and practical knowledge or ‘practical wisdom,’ by distinguishing between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. But even though instrumental thinking is exemplified in hypothetical imperatives, as commands of reason, hypothetical imperatives only arise for will determined by pure practical reason. See, Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, p. 34. See also, Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p.64.

292 Although this discussion has focused on Korsgaard’s argument specifically, the arguments here extend to other interpretations that hold that hypothetical imperatives command only in cases of our normative ends, ends determined in accordance with a categorical imperative.

293 Moreover, intuitively instrumental failures won’t turn out to be practical failures.
But I do not think Kant’s discussion was ill conceived, or that the distinction between the two kinds of imperative is “less important than Kant thought.” I argue instead that the contemporary interpretations have distorted Kant’s original concept of the nature and role of hypothetical imperatives because they conceive of all imperatives as anti-akratic rational requirements. Kant did not conceive of hypothetical imperatives (nor should he have) as anti-akratic rational requirements. In his discussion of hypothetical imperatives and the instrumental use of reason, Kant nowhere suggests that there is a principle of practical reason, or principles of practical reason, that require imperfectly rational beings to will the necessary known means to their ends, in the face of contrary or distracting inclinations.

Recall that Kant thinks that the explanation of how a hypothetical imperative is possible requires “no special discussion” because, unlike, a categorical imperative, it is not synthetic. In contradistinction to categorical imperatives, “the hypothetical imperative is a practical proposition that derives the volition of an action analytically from another volition already presupposed.” The concept of the volition of the means is already contained in the concept of the volition of an “end.”

The full passage is instructive:

Now the question arises: how are all these imperatives possible? This question does not inquire how the performance of the action that the imperative commands can be thought, but only how the necessitation of the will, which the imperative expresses in the problem, can be thought. How an imperative of skill is possible requires no special discussion. Whoever wills the end also wills (insofar as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that are within his power. This proposition is, as regards the volition,

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295 I have not found a single passage where Kant lends his voice to the view that hypothetical, or technical imperatives, command imperfectly rational beings to ‘stay the course’ in the face of contrary inclinations.
296 Kant, Groundwork, 4:417
297 Kant, Groundwork, 4:417, 4:419, 4:420 nt.
298 Kant, Groundwork, 4:420 nt.
analytic: for in the volition of an object as my effect, my causality as acting cause, that is, the use of means, is already thought, and the imperative extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end merely from the concept of a volition of this end (synthetic propositions no doubt belong to determining the means themselves to a purpose intended, but they do not have to do with the ground for actualizing the act of will but for actualizing the object). That in order to divide a line into two equal parts on a sure principle I must make two intersecting arcs from its ends, mathematics admittedly teaches only by synthetic propositions; but when I know that only by such an action can the proposed effect take place, then it is an analytic proposition that if I fully (vollständig) will the effect I also will the action requisite to it; for, it is one and the same thing to represent something as an effect possible by me in a certain way and to represent myself as acting in this way with respect to it.299

Kantians have assumed that the crucial clause in this passage is the parenthetical one; the qualification “insofar as reason has decisive influence on his actions.” This parenthetical clause is thought to indicate that for an imperfectly rational being, and thus a being for whom the necessity of the practical principle is experienced as necessitation, as an imperative, it must be possible to will an end, but purposely and consciously fail to will the necessary known means. Therefore, as we have seen, the failure that the imperative is thought to guard against is taken to be a specifically practical failure, rather than a theoretical mistake, or a misfiring of a still inchoate use of reason. They see the volition of the end and the volition of means as two distinct practical acts that require a rational principle linking the performance of one with the performance of the other, and the hypothetical imperative is thought to provide this connection. If this is right, and hypothetical imperatives unite these distinct practical acts by commanding the volition of the necessary and known means to one’s end in the face of temptation, then Kørsgaard and other defenders of the material interpretation have been right to ask for an account of their normativity.

On this view the hypothetical imperative is really a synthetic principle after all, and one which requires just as much explanation as the categorical imperative. This follows from the fact that the volition of the end and the volition of the means are distinct volitions. We therefore need an argument for a rational principle that commands the volition of the means simply on account of our having willed an end. This seems hopeless, unless of course, we make the concept of an “end” normative, effectively frontloading it with the normativity we are seeking. And this is precisely what Korsgaard, and the other defenders of the material interpretation have noticed. Recall that Korsgaard is only able to preserve the analytic connection between the concept of willing an “end,” and the concept of willing the necessary means because for her, an end just is a purpose that ought to be effected, which, as she later notices, is just to say, a purpose that ought to be caused through our agency. Of course if there are ends that ought to be willed, then there will be necessary means that ought to be willed. And so she loses the distinction between the difference in necessity that Kant thought was expressed in each of these imperatives; all practical necessity is unconditional necessity. But we were left without an account of how to distinguish between these two sorts of failures since, according to Korsgaard, and others who hold the material interpretation, failures of instrumental intelligence are not practical failures.

Kant never lends his voice in support of this conception of a hypothetical imperative. Instead the idea of an anti-akratic instrumental imperative is read back into the text in order to explain the common contemporary interpretation of that parenthetical clause. Kant never suggests that the hypothetical imperative is a “requirement” to follow through with willing the means to an end we have reason to “keep in view.” In fact, nothing in the above passage suggests that it is possible for an imperfectly rational being to (fully) will an end, to grasp the analytic conceptual relation between this volition and the volition of the necessary known means, and to then consciously, and purposely, fail to will the means. The passage says nothing about hypothetical imperatives making it, necessary for an imperfectly rational being to fully will the end.

Rather, Kant says “it is one and the same thing” to represent an effect through my will, and to represent myself as the acting cause. We should take this at face value: the necessitation that hypothetical imperatives express is grounded in a single act of volition—the willing of an end,

300 Korsgaard, The Normativity of Instrumental Reason, p. 64.
just is, the willing of the necessary known means. It is ‘one and the same thing’ to will an effect through my will, and to will myself as the acting cause.

Given Kant’s conception of an “end,” we can agree with Korsgaard that “instrumental intelligence,” the theoretical cognition of the analytic connection between “ends” and “means,” those “instrumental thoughts” that enable a rational being to transfer her desire for the end to the means, causing her “to want to take those means,” is indeed a “prerequisite for instrumental rationality,” but it is also, at least for Kant, exhaustive of it. “Instrumental intelligence” is constitutive of having a faculty of choice (a will)—a faculty of desire that is determined in accordance with concepts. And this is just to say that grasping this fundamental conceptual

301 This reading actually coheres best with Kant’s conception of an end: In the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant says an “end is an object of the choice (of a rational being), through the representation of which choice is determined to an action to bring this object about,” in Metaphysics of Morals, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:381. And in the Critique of Judgment, he says that an “end is the object of a concept insofar as the latter is regarded as the cause of the former (the real ground of its possibility); and the causality of a concept with regard to its object is purposiveness (forma finals). Thus where not merely the cognition of an object but the object itself (its form or its existence) as an effect is thought of as possible only through a concept of the latter, there one thinks of an end. The representation of the effect is here the determining ground of its cause, and precedes the latter,” in Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, trans. by P. Guyer and E. Matthew, ed. by P. Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5:219. Later he says, “the product of a cause whose determining ground is merely the representation of its effect is called an end…” (Critique of Judgment, 5:408). And, in the Groundwork, Kant says, “…what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is an end… What, on the other hand, contains merely the ground of the possibility of an action the effect of which is an end is called a means,” (Groundwork 4:427).

302 Kant says “whoever approves the effect, must be willing to approve the cause,” Critique of Practical Reason, 5:26. If willing an end as an effect of our will, and willing the means—willing ourselves as the cause—were really distinct volitions as both the wide-scope view and the material interpretation suppose, why couldn’t we approve an effect—or an end—without approving the cause? It would seem that we could approve all sorts of effects without approving the cause. But Kant is not being sloppy here. An end is an “effect” through the will of a rational being, not merely an event, or possible event. In the concept of an “effect,” a cause is indicated. To conceive of an object as an “end,” is already to conceive of oneself as the acting cause, and thus to approve an end, an effect of one’s own will, just is to approve of the cause, the action necessary to bring effect it (the means). This passage suggests that, for Kant, the volition of the end just is the volition of the necessary known means.

303 Kant, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” p. 64.

304 In most places Kant speaks of the will in this morally neutral sense, and contrasts it with a pure will, or a free will, which he later claims is actually the faculty of choice determined by concepts of pure reason (Wille). In the Metaphysics of Morals, when Kant contrasts Willkür with Wille, Willkür corresponds to a ‘faculty of choice,’ freie Willkür to a faculty of choice determined in accordance with Wille. See Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:213.

305 Engstrom calls this instrumental intelligence, “practical thinking,” and it is the form of thinking that characterizes the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, which when combined with “one’s consciousness of the ability to bring about its object by one’s action is called choice (Willkür),” (Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:213). Choice is the capacity for self-conscious, efficacious representation of action, and as such, it is subject to the two-fold rationality condition that the action be both possible and sufficient to effect its object, and so also the condition that its practical thinking be compatible with its theoretical cognition. This principle is the condition of rationality that is
connection between the end and the means, namely, that one’s own causality is necessary to produce an effect through one’s will, is the cognition which is constitutive of willing an end, and the ground of hypothetical imperatives. That is, to fully will the effect, I must will the cause because they are the same volition; if I fully will the effect, then I just do (fully) will the cause since that’s just what it means to will an effect through my will. If I do not fully will the necessary known means, I do not (fully) will the effect.

The worry, of course, has been that if the volition of the means just is the volition of the end, then it is not clear how the imperative can be necessitating for the will of a finite being; how will it turn out the be possible that the rational being can ever violate it? As we have seen, the need for accounting for this possibility, has led people to think that hypothetical imperatives presuppose the capacity for a specifically practical failure, internal to the will itself. But this is to ignore or set aside the possibility of a logical or theoretical mistake that may interfere with the successful production of the effect. The parenthetical clause, “insofar as reason has decisive influence on his actions,” is thought to register the possibility of a specifically practical failure; a perfectly rational being would will the means to his ends, but an imperfectly rational being might fail to. What is thought to be analytic is the application of the imperative due to the conceptual connection of the concepts of ends and means, not conceptual connection, for an imperfectly rational being, between the volition of an end, and the volition of the means. The perfectly rational agent necessarily wills the means to his ends, but the imperfectly rational agent, who experiences interference from contrary inclinations, might fail to, and what is thought to follow analytically is that he ought to will the means to the end that he wills (even though he might not).

constitutive of instrumental reasoning, and Engstrom thinks that it is also expressed in Kant’s analytic proposition explaining the possibility of hypothetical imperatives: “Who wills the end wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the indispensably necessary means to it that are within his power.” But Engstrom maintains that even though this principle is typified in Kant’s discussion of hypothetical imperatives, this form of rationality does not itself give rise to them, and nor do they govern it. See Engstrom, The Form of Practical Knowledge, pp. 28-44 (especially, pp. 41-42). Engstrom’s discussion of practical thinking as the form of rationality that characterizes the faculty of choice, is I think, quite illuminating and very helpful. Though, I think this is precisely the form of rationality that gives rise to hypothetical imperatives, and which is governed by them.

The imperative is thought to govern against the all too familiar phenomenon of weakness of will, commanding an imperfectly rational being to follow through on his commitment to the end. But it isn’t necessary to suppose that there must be this kind of conceptual gap between willing an end and willing the necessary known means in order to account for the normativity of hypothetical imperatives. It may be true that fully developed finite rational beings who grasp the analytic conceptual connection between means and ends, and who will the end, will never fail to “will” the means since this is one and the same volition. But grasping the imperative is nevertheless an exercise of a cognitive faculty, and one that cannot misfire if there is to be success in the production of the object. Reason here provides a set of instructions that have to be followed for the productive activity to be successful, even if these turn out to be elementary. Thus, if a being knowingly fails to will the requisite means to an effect he represents as possible through his will, then we should insist, with Kant, that he gives up the end (doesn’t fully will it) and instead merely desires, or wishes for, the object.

Of course, this does not mean that reason (in its instrumental capacity) always has decisive influence on the actions of imperfectly rational beings, even if willing the end just is willing the means. Imperfectly rational beings can make mistakes in their reasoning, they may hold faulty beliefs about the relevant causal connections between the means and the ends, and it’s possible that they might not even have developed the faculty of grasping clearly the relevant conceptual connections involved in instrumental thinking. As imperfectly rational beings with a faculty of choice, determinable by feeling and yet reliant on reason (conceptual understanding) rather than a feeling (instinct), in order to successfully effect even our empirical ends, we have to succeed in our logical and theoretical understanding of the world. And even this analytic representation of a connection between ends and means is an achievement of a rational capacity, which has to be learned and exercised correctly; there is a “right” way to do it.

In the same way that grasping the concept of a bachelor involves grasping the concept of being an unmarried adult male, grasping the concept of an end is just to grasp the concept of an object whose existence (the ground of its real possibility) is dependent on a rational being’s representation of it as an effect through his will, as determining the cause, taking the necessary

\footnote{307 For Kant’s technical use of the term “wish,” see Metaphysics of Morals, 6:213.}
means. In the same way that if one willed to be a bachelor, one would also will to be an unmarried adult male, if one wills an end, and one understands the concept of an end, one wills to take the necessary known means. In the production of an object, if one wills an end, and grasps the conceptual connection between willing an end and willing the means (seeing an object as an effect through one’s will, and seeing oneself as the acting cause), imperfectly rational beings like us develop, and eventually exercise, the basic capacity to immediately infer the “volition of means” (the volition of the specific action necessary to produce an effect through one’s will).

If this is right, then the mistakes we make in the production of the ends we will, as Hume points out, will indeed involve mistaken theoretical beliefs or mistakes consisting of (unconscious) errors in our reasoning, and these failures may constitute cases in which reason does not have “decisive influence.” And of course, as soon as we recognize the error, our “passions yield to our reason without any opposition.”

There is nothing in the passage cited above which suggests that it is possible for a being to have a faculty of choice (Willkür), and (fully) will an end, yet consciously fail to will the means. In fact, if anything, the passage seems to indicate that this is exactly what cannot happen. The volition to will the end is exactly the very same volition as the volition to will the means:

för in the volition of an object as my effect, my causality as acting cause, that is, the use of means, is already thought, and the imperative extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end merely from the concept of a volition of this end ... for, it is one and the same thing to represent something as an effect possible by me in a certain way and to represent myself as acting in this way with respect to it.”

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310 That is, a “faculty of desire in accordance with concepts.”
311 One might be tempted to think there is some significance to the distinction between ‘fully’ willing an end and willing an end. But I would point out that in cases where an agent hasn’t “fully” willed the end, the imperative to will the means will not “fully” apply. See Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:417.
One who has sufficient grasp of the concepts, cannot will an end, and fail to will the necessary known means. For Kant, being “irrational,” in the way that Korsgaard requires, i.e. deliberately (“willfully”) failing to will the means to an end that one wills, is unintelligible.

So rather than treat the willing of the end and the willing of the means as two discrete volitions that practical reason brings together by applying the hypothetical imperative, I have argued that it is best to think of the volition of the end as the very same volition as the volition of the necessary known means. If this is right, then if the agent willfully fails to take the necessary known mean to her end, then it is more accurate to say that she fails to will the end. Cases of akrasia should be understood as cases in which the agent has given up, or has not (fully) willed, an end which she ought to. But for morally neutral or morally impermissible ends, a failure to will the necessary known means, thereby giving up the end, won’t be irrational.

So rather than instructing an agent to follow through on a commitment she has to a purpose required by practical reason, hypothetical imperatives represent rational precepts that instruct a finite rational agent how she is to effect her purpose, or bring about her end. This requires an analytic inference, which I have argued is constitutive of wiling an end, but also an accurate logical and theoretical exercise of one’s cognitive capacities in order to effectively manipulate the natural world for successful purposive action. These represent places where cognition is requisite and rational failure is possible, hence, we experience the hypothetical imperative as necessitating. But according to this argument, if an agent indeed has a determinate end in view, and has indeed willed the end, then Hume is right to point out that, at least with respect to the instrumental use of reason, when the mistake is pointed out, “our passions yield to our reason without any opposition.”

If we deny that the volition of the end and the volition of the means are really two separate acts, we avoid many of the textual and interpretive problems that the anti-akratic interpretation of

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314 And recall that Korsgaard’s conclusion is in agreement with this. See, Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” pp. 67-8.
hypothetical imperatives,\textsuperscript{316} runs into—the most significant of which, as I, as well as Korsgaard, have argued, is the unintelligibility of a hypothetical imperative as a distinct, and conditional, imperative. Given these extensive problems, we can legitimately ask whether we gain anything from hanging on to this interpretation, and insisting that willing ends and willing the means to them are two distinct volitions that can come apart. Once these are conceived as separate acts, any normative way of linking them again, or putting them back together, will require a categorical imperative. On my interpretation, willing ends and willing means are not separate volitions that need to be connected through hypothetical imperatives.

Notice that if Korsgaard and others are right, and the failure is specifically practical (rather than theoretical), then there are two significant mistakes that Kant makes. According to the anti-akratic interpretation of hypothetical imperatives (and the material interpretation that comes out of it), it is not a failure of rationality to fail to have the appropriate belief about a relevant causal principle, or to make a mechanical error in one’s reasoning. If this is right, then what the hypothetical imperative requires is that the agent willfully follow through with taking the means to her ends. But this means that hypothetical imperatives command the “necessary known means.” Since it is not a mistake in practical reason to make a mistake in one’s theoretical reasoning or thinking, even (and crucially) when that failure undermines the success of one’s activity, the failure that hypothetical imperatives are thought to guard against is not the failure to take the means which are actually necessary, but a failure to take means one believes to be necessary (even when these are based on a mistaken theoretical belief and will thwart the agent’s success). This implies that agents conform with hypothetical imperatives when they take mistaken means that they believe to be necessary, even when these mistakes undermine the successful production of their ends. It also implies that throughout the entire discussion of hypothetical imperatives, Kant was being sloppy; he should have instead said that hypothetical imperatives command agents to will actions they believe to be the necessary means to their ends.

Finally, as I have already pointed out, the most fundamental mistake, if their interpretation is correct, is Kant’s insistence on the very possibility of such an imperative distinct from the categorical imperative. On Korsgaard interpretation, the material interpretation, the necessity of

\textsuperscript{316} An interpretation that I have argued must result in the material interpretation.
hypothetical imperatives is unconditional, and derives from the categorical imperative. If this is right, then there is only one principle, the categorical imperative, and the hypothetical imperative appears to represent an injunction against one way of falling away from it. But on Kant’s account, we do not have a way of accounting for the difference between failing to will ends (failures of the categorical imperative) and failing to will the means to them (failures of the hypothetical imperatives), and so it seems there is really one way of failing after all: failing to effect purposes that we ought to. Korsgaard must conclude that there is only one principle of practical reason, and only one way of falling away from it, and so Kant turns out to be very wrong about hypothetical imperatives, and about their distinctiveness.

Two things fall out of this discussion which are instructive: 1) When you separate the volition of the end from the volition of the means, and interpret the hypothetical imperative as a categorical requirement to will the means, you’ll be looking for a categorical imperative to explain that, so all failures will turn out to be failures of a categorical imperative. Korsgaard starts out by analyzing a categorical imperative, and so it should be no surprise that that’s all she finds. 2) Despite the fact that on this interpretation of hypothetical imperatives as anti-akratic requirements that command the willing of the means to one’s end, and the interpretation of it as a categorical requirement, Korsgaard, nevertheless, realizes that the volition of the end, just is, the volition of the means. Practical reason “cannot tell us simply to have certain ends” because to be an object of practical reason, which for Kant is a rationally required end, is to be “an effect possible through freedom,”317 and this analytically entails the command to make oneself the acting cause of it. Thus, Korsgaard’s real conclusion: “There is only one principle of practical reason, and it is the categorical imperative.”

Even as an analysis of hypothetical imperatives, we lose the specific sort of akratic failure that these imperatives were thought to guard against, and, of course, we lose the distinctiveness of the imperative. Willfully failing to take the necessary known means to ends one ought to bring about is to fail to will those ends. This is, of course, akratic. As an interpretation of a categorical, anti-akratic requirement, the analysis works: we’ll only find these when reason commands the end, and the command to will the necessary known means is just the very same command. But this is

317 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:57.
not the command of a hypothetical imperative; the command to will an end, and thus the command to will the necessary known means, is the command of a categorical imperative.\(^\text{318}\)

But why continue to speak of hypothetical imperatives at all? Why insist on them? While, this question deserves a more thorough treatment than I can give here, I want to conclude by gesturing towards an answer. Retaining the concept of hypothetical imperatives as distinctive kind of imperative will enable us a hold in view a more accurate reading of Kant’s text. If we fail to accurately situate and contextualize the role of hypothetical imperatives in Kant’s theory of practical reason, we run into one of two worrisome (at least for a Kantian) distortions: either all normativity with respect to the practical expresses moral constraints, and we collapse the distinction between evil and mere stupidity, or (and perhaps worse) all normativity with respect to the practical expresses categorical constraints, even if these are not necessarily moral constraints. Both of these distortions impede our understanding of Kant’s key insights.

\(^{318}\) We can leave Korsgaard’s argument in place as an analysis of the normativity of an imperative commanding the willing of the necessary known means to a purpose that one ought to will, but this is an analysis of a command to will an end, and therefore, on the Kantian account, an analysis of a categorical imperative. Of course, for Kant, failing to will the particular ends that one ought to will often be akratic, and a form of irrationality that is morally culpable. Consider Kant’s discussion of the “propensity to evil in human nature,” of which he says there are three grades: the frailty of human nature, the impurity of human nature, and the depravity of human nature. See, Religion in the Boundaries of Mere Reason, 6:29-6:39.
Chapter 6: A Practical Principle with Theoretical Content

1.

In this chapter, I want to turn to the textual support for the view of hypothetical imperatives that I have been developing, as well as illustrate, more specifically, their nature and the role they play in our practical activity. In section 2., I discuss key passages from the published and unpublished introductions to the *Critique of Judgment*, and I argue that Kant’s discussion in both shows that hypothetical imperatives, the imperatives he henceforth calls *technical*, are practical precepts with theoretical content. In section 3., I explain more fully how the technical imperatives tie in with the key question guiding the development of Kant’s moral philosophy, as well as how they fit in against the backdrop of his faculty psychology. In section 4., I offer two points of clarification. First, I clarify the relation that the hypothetical, or technical imperatives, do stand in to the categorical imperative, and therefore also to a good will. Second, as empirical practical principles, I emphasize their connection to what is always the heteronomous aspect of our practical lives.

2.

In both the published as well as the unpublished introductions to the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant seems to indicate that hypothetical imperatives, as principles connecting ends and means, are practical principles that guard against the *theoretical* errors that can register practically in the unsuccessful production of objects.

Here, Kant reminds us that philosophy, as the system of rational cognition through concepts, can only be divided into two parts depending on the essential distinctiveness of its (philosophy’s) objects, and therefore also of its principles. *Theoretical* philosophy is the system of rational
cognition of nature through concepts of nature, and practical philosophy is the system of moral
cognition through the concept of freedom. In order for these parts of philosophy to be actually
distinct, they must have really distinct principles. But he warns us that philosophers have fallen
into a great “disadvantage” and “misunderstanding” with respect to the practical, and they have
often overlooked this crucial distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy, by
including all principles having a practical form in practical philosophy when, in fact, many of
these principles belong to a “complete” theoretical philosophy as an application or consequence
of it.\(^{319}\) That is, he argues that just because a proposition is practical in the way that it is
formulated, this does not entail that it has a distinctively practical content and therefore that it
belongs to practical philosophy.

Thus Kant tells us:

> while practical propositions certainly differ from theoretical ones, which contain
the possibility of things and their determination, *in the way they are presented,*
they do not on that account differ in their content, except only those which
consider freedom under laws. All the rest are nothing more than the theory of that
which belongs to the nature of things, *only applied to the way in which they can
be generated by us in accordance with a principle,* i.e., their possibility is
represented through a voluntary action (which belongs among natural causes as
well).\(^{320}\)

Many practical propositions simply contain theoretical representations of the nature of things,
but applied to an action, whereby we might successfully come to effect an object according to a
principle (i.e. according to our choice rather than through magic, for instance, or mere feeling).
The possibility of the object is represented as an effect of our own activity, rather than through a

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\(^{319}\) See also, *Critique of Judgment,* 5:171-2: “Hitherto, however, a great misuse of these expressions for the division of the different principles, and with them also of philosophy, has prevailed: for that which is practical, in accordance with the concept of nature has been taken to be the same as that which is practical in accordance with the concept of freedom, and thus under the same designations of theoretical and practical philosophy, a division has been made through which, in fact (since both parts could have the same principles), nothing has been divided.” And, *Critique of Judgment,* 20:195: “However, there is a great misunderstanding, which is even quite disadvantageous to the way in which the science is handled, about what should be held to be practical in a sense in which it deserves to be taken up into a practical philosophy.”

\(^{320}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* 20:196; bold emphasis added.
cause external to choice. Therefore, which propositions are formulated, or presented as having a practical form, will be those propositions that contain an effect possible through the causality of a will, a faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, or a faculty of choice (Willkür). Kant says:

The will, as the faculty of desire, is one of the many kinds of causes in the world, namely that which operates in accordance with concepts; and everything that is represented as possible (or necessary) through a will is called practically possible (or necessary), in distinction from the physical possibility or necessity of an effect to which the cause is not determined to causality through concepts (but rather as in the case of lifeless matter, through mechanism, or, in the case with animals, through instinct). –Now here it is left indeterminate with regard to the practical whether the concept that gives the rule to the causality of the will is a concept of nature or a concept of freedom.

A principle has practical form when it is addressed to a causality which is determined by its own understanding, or its reason: ‘in accordance with concepts,’ rather than through mere feeling (instinct) or mechanically. A being with a will thinks through its actions using concepts, and acts on principles. As we have already seen, this means that a finite rational being with a faculty of choice, or a faculty of desire that is determined through concepts, must, in many of its activities, (namely, those that produce objects, i.e., effects), rely on its understanding of the natural world.

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321 Throughout most of Kant’s moral works, he uses “will” in a way that is synonymous with what he later calls the “faculty of choice” (Willkür). I thus think we can, for the most part, use “will,” and “faculty of desire…which operates in accordance with concepts,” (Critique of Judgment, 5:172), as well as “faculty of choice” (Willkür), (Metaphysics of Morals, 6:213), interchangeably. The next cited passage illustrates this, but see also, for example, Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:220; emphasis added: “The faculty of desire, insofar as it is determinable only through concepts, i.e., to act in accordance with the representation of an end, would be the will.” See also 4:440, 5:44, 5:55, and especially, 5:21-2, where he uses “choice” and “will,” interchangeably. As will become clear, I argue that the central question throughout the Groundwork, as well as the opening question of the Critique of Practical Reason, is whether (and how) the will can be a pure will (free will) or whether it is always only pathologically determined. Put in terms of Kant’s later distinction between Wille and Willkür, this amounts to the question of whether our human ‘choice’ can be free. Cf. Lewis White Beck, “Kant’s Two Conceptions of the Will in Their Political Context.” Kant and Political Philosophy (1993), pp. 38-49 (especially, pp. 41-42). Cf. Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, pp. 129-136 (especially, p. 130).

322 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:213.

323 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:172.
in order to think through and produce the objects it represents. Animals, on the other hand, are
determined through mere feeling; nature has arranged for their feelings to be “successful.” As we
have seen, an effect that is produced through the (conceptual) representation of it is, according to
Kant, an end. A proposition takes a practical form, therefore, when instead of determining the
various relations of an object external to the will, it instead represents itself, or some other will,
as the possible cause of it; it represents the production of ends. That is, the principle represents
the object as a possible effect through its own, or some other will; the object is represented as an
effect through ‘voluntary’ (willkürlich) action, which is to say, through a determining ground
that is a representation of it—it is represented as an end. Any proposition, therefore, that has to
do with an effect caused by the representation of it—with ends—will be a proposition with a
practical form.

But just because a proposition takes a practical form since it is addressed to a being with a will
and therefore has to do with the production of ends in accordance with principles, this does not,
on that account, change the content of the proposition (perhaps as somehow also, and thereby,
including freedom). A proposition that has practical form will not necessarily have practical
content because its principle may be the concept of nature rather than the concept of freedom.
Kant says,

Now the possibility of things in accordance with natural laws is essentially
distinct in its principles from that in accordance with laws of freedom. This
distinction however, does not consist in the fact that in the latter case the cause is
placed in a will, but in the former case outside of the will, in the things
themselves. For even if the will follows no other principles than those by means of
which the understanding has insight into the possibility of the object in
accordance with them, as mere laws of nature, then the proposition which
contains the possibility of the object through the causality of the faculty of choice
may still be called a practical proposition, yet it is not at all distinct in principle
from the theoretical propositions concerning the nature of things, but must rather

324 See Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:220, and 5:408.
325 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 20:196.
derive its own content from the latter in order to exhibit the representation of an
object in reality.\textsuperscript{326}

The proposition which contains the possibility of the object through the causality of the will, or
faculty of choice, is a practical proposition, but insofar as the principle merely guides the will in
the production of its object, as an object that is possible in accordance with “mere laws of
nature,” it derives its content from a theoretical understanding of nature, in order to effectively
produce the object it represents—its end.

The essential difference between the practical propositions (i.e. all propositions having practical
form), that belong to practical philosophy and the practical propositions that are mere
“correlates” of theoretical philosophy, (and this is just to say, the difference between practical
propositions that have practical content and the practical propositions which merely have a
practical form and theoretical content), depends on the kind of concept that gives rise to the
principle that guides the causality of the will, and therefore the concept that gives the rule to the
causality of the will: whether this is a concept of nature, or a concept of freedom. As far as
philosophy is concerned, it is this difference that is key:

\textit{For if the concept determining the causality is a concept of nature, then the
principles are technically practical, but if it is a concept of freedom, then these
are morally practical; and since in the division of a rational science what is at
issue is entirely this sort of difference of objects, the cognition of which requires
distinct principles, the former will belong to theoretical philosophy (as a doctrine
of nature), while the latter will entirely by itself constitute the second part, namely
practical philosophy (as a doctrine of morals).}\textsuperscript{327}

\textsuperscript{326} Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, 20:197. See also, Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, 5:173: “It can be seen from this that a
set of practical precepts provided by philosophy does not constitute a special part of it, alongside its theoretical part,
just because they are practical; for they could be that even if their principles were derived entirely from theoretical
cognition of nature (as technically practical rules); rather they constitute such a special part when and if their
principle is not borrowed from the concept of nature, which is always sensibly conditioned, and hence rests on the
supersensible, which the concept of freedom alone makes knowable through formal laws, and they are therefore
morally practical, i.e., not merely precepts and rules for this or that purpose, but laws, without prior reference to
ends and aims.”

\textsuperscript{327} Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, 5:172.
Thus, Kant says that all principles that concern the production of objects in accordance with laws of nature, (this includes the production of any object of experience), are technically practical principles. They concern the production of effects possible in and through nature, and the theoretical understanding that is employed in making oneself the cause of the reality of those objects:

Practical propositions, therefore, the content of which concerns merely the possibility of a represented object (through voluntary action), are only applications of a complete theoretical cognition and cannot constitute a special part of a science.328

All practical propositions that contain rules “for producing an effect that is possible in accordance with natural concepts of causes and effects,” belong to theoretical philosophy “as mere corollaries of it (of natural science), and thus cannot demand a place in a special philosophy which is called practical.”329

Thus the difference between propositions with a theoretical form and propositions with a practical form, and yet theoretical content, consists only in the fact that the object, or the effect, “as far as its origin is concerned, is represented as possible through a cause whose determining ground is the representation of (it) (our choice).”330 Again, this is just to say that the effect is represented as an end. The ground/consequent relation is exactly the same as in our natural concepts of causes and effects,331 only we insert ourselves as a cause, by employing our

328 Critique of Judgment, 20:198; bold emphasis added. See also, for example, Critique of Judgment, 5:172: “[A]ll practical propositions that derive that which nature can contain through the faculty of choice as a cause collectively belong to theoretical philosophy, as cognition of nature…”; and 5:172: “All technically practical rules (i.e., those of art and skill in general, as well as those of prudence, as a skill in influencing human beings and their will), so far as their principles rest on concepts, must be counted only as corollaries of theoretical philosophy. For they concern only the possibility of things in accordance with concepts of nature, to which belong not only the means thereto that are to be encountered in nature, but even the will (as a faculty of desire, hence as a natural faculty), insofar as it can be determined through natural incentives, in accordance with those rules.”

329 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:173.

330 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 20:196.

331 See, Kant, Critique of Judgment, 20:196-7: “[T]he practical precept here differs from a theoretical one in its form, but not in its content, and thus a special kind of philosophy is not required for insight into the connection of grounds with their consequences.”
understanding of those relations, in order to bring about “that which one wishes should exist.”332 Thus, all technically practical rules, “i.e., those of art and skill in general, as well as those of prudence” are only corollaries of theoretical philosophy.

Of course the object of a free will, the highest good, is not an object (empirical or a priori) that the faculty of choice pursues directly by employing necessary known means thereto (concepts and principles of nature in order to bring about an object that nature can contain). Although, it is true that a good will has ends, even ends that it represents as necessary—that nature can contain—insofar as the relevant principles have to do with the specification of means for the objects we represent as the effects of our activity through nature, they will be merely theoretical in content and belong to theoretical philosophy.

“By contrast,” Kant says,

the morally practical precepts, which are grounded entirely on the concept of freedom to the complete exclusion of determining grounds of the will from nature, constitute an entirely special kind of precept: which are also, like rules that nature obeys, simply called laws, but which do not, like the latter, rest on sensible conditions, but on a supersensible principle, and require a second kind of philosophy for themselves alone, alongside the theoretical part, under the name of practical philosophy.333

They constitute a special part of philosophy,

when and if their principle is not borrowed from the concept of nature, which is always sensibly conditioned, and hence rests on the supersensible, which the concept of freedom alone makes knowable through formal laws, and they are therefore morally practical, i.e., not merely precepts and rules for this or that purpose, but laws, without prior reference to ends and aims.334

332 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 20:200.
333 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:173.
334 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:173.
Practical philosophy then, has to do only with the morally practical precepts, which are structured by the concept of freedom. They are rules for determining a free will, rather than for making the will technically effective with respect to ends and aims brought about in nature in accordance with its laws (laws of nature).

Kant’s discussion in the introductions to the Critique of Judgment shows that the practical rules that specify how the will might make something in nature, according to activity structured by concepts of nature, have theoretical content. Since Kant calls hypothetical imperatives rules of “art and skill,” there is good reason to think that hypothetical, or technical, imperatives, as rules that represent the possibility of the existence of objects through our causality, are also practical principles that rest on concepts of nature, and therefore are practical corollaries of theoretical philosophy. I, therefore think that Kant’s discussion in these passages in the Critique of Judgment points to an essential distinction between practical principles that is congruent with the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. I want to point out, more specifically, how I take Kant’s discussion in the Critique of Judgment to bear on an accurate interpretation of hypothetical imperatives, and how this interpretation will differ from the standard reading.

The defenders of the material interpretation may agree that technically practical principles have merely theoretical content. They argue, however, that particular technical imperatives, qua imperative, express an objective command of pure practical reason. Kant says that principles take a practical form when they represent an action as “possible or necessary” through the causality of a will. On the material interpretation, whatever is represented as necessary through the will of a rational being is always a “command” of practical reason. These practical principles take the imperatival form, then, only when they apply to the will of an imperfectly rational agent, for whom the action does not take place by an inner necessity, and so for an agent who can fail to conform to the principle. And particular hypothetical, or technical, imperatives are those technical principles that practical reason makes necessary for the agent.

335 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:172. For example, see also, Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:173; Kant, Groundwork, 4:416; Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:20, 5:25; and Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:221.

336 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:172.

337 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:172.
Consider one of Kant’s own examples of a technical “rule of skill”: “someone who would like to eat bread has to construct a mill.” On the material interpretation, if this rule of skill takes the form of an imperative (e.g. ‘you ought to construct a mill’), it is a particular command of practical reason that has theoretical content, but the failure to conform to the imperative is not thought to be theoretical failure (e.g. that agent has no idea how to build a mill, or that he has no idea of a mill whatsoever, or that he falsely believes he can eat the bread from his neighbor who is building a mill, etc.). It’s an imperative because the imperfectly rational agent may have the end of eating bread, grasp the necessary connection between eating bread and building a mill, and yet fail to build a mill. Conformity with the imperative is not thought to consist in ascertaining the correct casual connection between particular ends and particular means, but rather, in the willing of those means. They are thought to guard against the irrationality of akrasia: the rational failure that consists in having an end, and yet failing to will the necessary known means to it.

Of course, on the material interpretation, the explanation for the command of the means is that the end itself is normative for us. The imperatival form of the principle commanding the means follows analytically from an imperative to will the end. All practical principles with imperatival form, even the technical imperatives, will have their source in a principle with practical content, the categorical imperatives. All necessitation is the necessitation of obligation, and it has its source in the categorical imperative that determines a moral order of ends. While hypothetical (or technical) imperatives contain a theoretical content, qua imperative, as a command of reason, the practical rule will always derive from a principle that rests on a concept of freedom insofar as it is willed in accordance with a will that is fully determined by reason because imperatives only come into play with willings that could be thoroughly rational—in which pure reason is legislative, and provides its rule.

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338 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:26.
339 Accordingly, a subset of these technically practical propositions can be taken up into a practical philosophy insofar as they ultimately rest on grounds of freedom, as technically practical imperatives.
340 The moral law, the unconditional practical principle that finite rational agents like us represent as a categorical imperative, is the source of all practical necessitation, expressed in the imperatival form, whether the practical command has distinctively practical content (expressed in a categorical imperative), or whether it is a practical command with theoretical content (expressed in the hypothetical imperative).
Correlatively, it is supposed that failing a hypothetical imperative is a distinctively practical failure, or perhaps, a distinctive way of failing the categorical imperative—namely, failing to will the means to ends made necessary by it. As commands of pure reason, these possible failures represent non-conformity to two distinct, yet equally obligatory commands of reason. It is thought that we can differentiate between them because they represent really distinct types of practical failure: we can fail to will ends, and we can fail to will the means to them.

In the last chapter, I argued that this supposes there is a discernable way of failing to will ends that is really distinct from failing to will the necessary means to those ends. And if this were true, it would seem that we could conform to imperatives to will ends without necessarily having to will the means to them: if we will the end and yet fail to will the means, we still conform to the categorical imperative to will the end, and we fail a hypothetical imperative. On this view, it is not clear how the requirement to will the means follows analytically from the imperative to will the end; why should we will the means to the ends endorsed by practical reason? If categorical imperatives and hypothetical imperatives command against two distinct kinds of practically rational failure, then it seems we can conform to categorical imperatives by failing the required end, and we simply fail a hypothetical imperative when we fail to will the means to it. But we would then lack an explanation for the normativity of the hypothetical imperative. It was supposed to follow analytically from the imperative to will an end. But if we can will an end without willing the necessary means to it, the requirement to will an end, does not seem to, at least conceptually, entail any requirement to will the means. Willing the means was not a necessary condition for willing the end, and so its necessitation does not, at least not obviously, derive from the necessitation to will the end.

Of course, if willing an end constitutively requires willing the means, then, we can explain the necessitation of technical imperatives because they are entailed by the necessitation of the end. The hypothetical imperatives commanding a particular theoretical content show up with imperatival form, as necessitating, because this is required to conform to the categorical imperative necessitating the end. But then, it does not turn out to be possible to will an end without pursuing the means to it, and the particular technical imperative is really just a categorical imperative to will the end. The technical imperatives are just a species of categorical imperatives, or an application of them. Not only did Kant turn out to be wrong that there were really two distinct kinds of imperatives (and so also of necessitation), but contrary to the material
interpretation’s own commitments, it does not turn out that there are two distinct ways of failing a categorical imperative commanding an end: failing to take the necessary known means, just is failing to will the end. All practical necessitation is obligation, and all practical failure vicious.

I have already argued that there are very good theoretical reasons for rejecting this interpretation, and I won’t rehearse those issues again here. I think Kant did distinguish between two kinds of practical necessitation, and thus principles that have the imperatival form will not always be commands of pure practical reason or derive from them.

And Kant does say that there is an important dissimilarity in the necessitation of the will that the respective imperatives express.\(^{341}\) The imperatives express the difference between conditional and unconditional necessitation. If the principle represents an action that “would be good merely as a means to something else the imperative is hypothetical.”\(^{342}\) If it declares “the action to be of itself objectively necessary without reference to some purpose, that is, even apart from any other end,” it is categorical, and therefore “holds as an *apodictically* practical principle.”\(^{343}\)

Since we represent rational principles as having a practical *form* when we represent them as applying to the causality of a faculty of desire that operates in accordance with concepts, everything that is “represented as possible (or necessary) through a will is called practically possible (or necessary).”\(^{344}\) This will take the practical form of necessitation when the principle applies to “a will that by its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it,” and so we represent the practical principle as an *imperative* when the agent’s will is fallible with respect to it.

On the standard view, the thought has been that hypothetical imperatives, as imperatives of reason, express a distinctively *practical* command because this fallibility is conceived as representing a specifically practical kind of failure rooted in the opposition of its inclinations to the objective rules of practical reason, rather than the fallibility of a finite rational agent’s will.

\(^{341}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:416.

\(^{342}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:414: Hypothetical imperatives “represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else that one wills (or that it is at least possible for one to will).”

\(^{343}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:415.

\(^{344}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:172.
with respect to its rational cognition in general as it pertains to its actions. Accordingly, on the standard view, the conditional necessity expressed in the hypothetical imperative is not thought to guard against the theoretical failures that register practically, but rather against failures to conform to commands of practical reason, which, it turns out must have their source in pure practical reason. However, speaking of imperatives in general, Kant says,

> The imperative thus says which action possible by me would be good, and represents a practical rule in relation to a will that does not straight-away do an action just because it is good, partly because the subject does not always know that it is good, partly because, even if he knows this, his maxims could still be opposed to the objective principles of a practical reason.\(^{345}\)

Thus, according to Kant, practical principles can appear as necessitating to the imperfectly rational being because she does not always know what action would be “good” to do, and so the action does not take place by an inner necessity and is, accordingly, represented as necessitated.

The “hypothetical imperative says only that the action is good for some possible or actual purpose.”\(^ {346}\) It “commands” conditionally because it represents the action necessary as a means to one’s end, which, as I have argued, is just to say that it represents the action necessary to will the end. Imperfectly finite rational beings can fail in the production of their purposes, and theoretical failure is indeed one way this can happen, and so the principle is expressed as necessitating, but always based on the presupposition of an effect that she represents herself as causing. The necessitation of hypothetical imperatives is always conditional, and it tells us what is necessary to do in order to be the cause of a given effect (to bring about an end). The necessitation of categorical imperatives, on the other hand, is unconditional, and it tells us to do something—it “is limited by no condition and, as absolutely although practically necessary, can be called quite strictly a command.”\(^ {347}\)

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\(^{345}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:414.

\(^{346}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:414-5.

\(^{347}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:416.
These introductions to the *Critique of Judgment* give us an alternative way of explaining what is going on in the case of the technical imperatives: these precepts, or rules, apply analytically to agents who will an end, and they “guard” against theoretical failures that can register practically in the application of our understanding of nature to the production of (“all that nature can contain as”) an end—a product of our causality that is to be brought about in nature. If this is right, then the imperatives that apply to the will in virtue of the (immediate) production of an object (of nature), express necessitation, but they say only what it is necessary to do in order to make one’s object real: what it is necessary to do to will the end. They invoke a theoretical understanding of nature in order to bring about objects in nature. The theoretical content of the propositions does not have to do with the ground for actualizing “the act of will but for actualizing the object,” and of course, the ground for actualizing the act of will is just the agent’s adoption of an end.

But in our technically practical activity, the determination of the will, what we do, does have to do with this content. The action represented as necessary to achieve one’s purpose (the ground for actualizing the object) is inferred from a theoretical understanding of nature, and applied to the way in which it “can be generated by us in accordance with a principle.” In technically practical thinking, the ground of the imperative (the ground for actualizing the “act of will”) is simply the representation of an end, in which “the causality of a rational being is already thought.”

If this is right, then as I have already argued, hypothetical, or technical imperatives have theoretical content and do not belong to practical philosophy. Moreover, and contrary to the material interpretation, they will apply to rational beings with a faculty of desire determinable in accordance with concepts, even if those are always concepts of nature. In this “technical” sense, the heteronomous agent has practical reason, it acts on the basis of hypothetical imperatives.

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348 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:417. The theoretical fact that water boils at 100° Celsius or that one could cause water to boil by heating it to 100° Celsius has nothing to do with the determination of the will (that is, this empirical fact in and of itself does not, in itself, prompt me do anything; these theoretical facts have nothing to do with actualizing the “act of will”). But if I represent myself as bringing about an effect through my representation of it (an end), it is this representation that “actualizes” the act of will, and it is the determining ground of the real cause of the object’s existence. In the case of “technical production,” and thus of the technical imperatives, we do not need to inquire further about the source of that representation (as an end). Insofar as the end is an object that ‘nature can contain,’ the rules and concepts that structure the will’s activity rest on concepts of nature. What holds objectively for rational beings, or what is universal in it, is this theoretical content—what one has to do in order to make oneself the ground for “actualizing” the object. It is the analytic connection between willing ends and willing means that grounds the imperative. I return to this point in the next section.
In what follows, I want to draw out a parallel between Kant’s discussion in these introductions and what the central question that animates Kant’s ‘practical philosophy’\textsuperscript{349} turns on. Kant’s discussion in the \textit{Critique of Judgment} of the essential distinction between practical propositions with \textit{practical} rather than \textit{theoretical} content parallels the leading question in Kant’s discussion of practical reason: the central question concerning practical reason is whether the source of the representation that determines the will, is empirical or pure—whether it is a concept of nature or a concept of freedom. In the \textit{Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals}, as well as in the opening of the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, it’s still undecided whether the will, as practical reason, can be determined only pathologically, in which case nature \textit{always} gives the law, or whether it can determine itself—whether freedom can give the law.

3.

In this section, I want to draw out the aforementioned parallel. The task of this section is to show that hypothetical \textit{imperatives} should be understood as practical rules, or precepts, with \textit{theoretical} content. The practical \textit{necessitation} that they express is a theoretical necessity that is formulated practically—it is addressed to the causality of a will. They will therefore apply to rational beings who could not act from the idea of freedom, that is, to beings for whom there are \textit{only} empirical sources of motivation, and so whose choice could only be determined in accordance with concepts of \textit{nature}. There is only, according to Kant, one kind of \textit{distinctively practical} necessity—the necessity of obligation. Hypothetical imperatives, on the other hand, although they express \textit{necessity}, express only a “subjectively conditioned necessity,” and they are always only practical precepts with theoretical content. Their content, what is represented as “necessary” and “universal” in them, always derives from laws of nature.

\textsuperscript{349} I am taking “practical philosophy” here in the broader sense than the one Kant indicates in the \textit{Critique of Judgment} and in the \textit{Metaphysics of Morals} as having to do with exclusively with laws of freedom. Here I mean “practical philosophy” more generally to stand for the philosophical investigation of reason as a practical faculty.
In order to draw out this point more clearly, I want to draw on Kant’s discussion of empirical practical reason in order to illustrate how he thinks of it as a source of conditional imperatives, as well as to characterize more precisely the nature of these imperatives and reason’s contribution in them.

In his moral writings, Kant takes it as a starting point that reason has an empirically conditioned practical use, and that this is something we know from experience. The key question concerning reason as a practical faculty is whether it has a pure use. In the preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains that the argument of the *Critique* merely has to show that there is pure practical reason, and “for this purpose it criticizes reason’s entire practical faculty.”

With respect to the practical use of reason, we are “concerned with the determining grounds of the will,” and, Kant says that the

> *first question here, then, 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.*

That reason has a practical influence in the determination of a will with empirical purposes is not at all in question. The central question, rather, is whether the empirically conditioned use of reason exhausts reason’s vocation as a practical faculty, or whether it can determine the will independently of every empirical incentive, providing an *a priori*, and hence objective, practical determining ground that holds for every rational being with a will. In other words, that reason can be a determining ground of the will in accordance with empirical practical principles is something we know quite well from experience; the *Critique* investigates whether the will can be an independent causality through freedom.

If this is indeed how to frame Kant’s central question in his moral philosophy, then the corresponding contrasts between “the will” and the “pure will,” and between practical reason

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350 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:3.
351 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:15.
352 “[W]hether the concept that gives the rule to the causality of the will is a concept of nature or a concept of freedom,” (*Critique of Judgment*, 5:172).
and pure practical reason, will all turn on this crucial distinction in its principles that Kant explains in the *Critique of Judgment*, and the corresponding distinction between a reason “empirically limited,” taking its prompts from nature, determined through its concepts of nature, and a pure reason that is practical.

Given that Kant clearly thinks that reason has an empirically conditioned practical use, the question for us is whether empirical practical reason is also a source of imperatives, or whether all imperatives, both categorical as well as hypothetical, have their source in its pure practical use. Empirical practical reason is, of course, not a source of unconditional imperatives, for that we require that reason itself be an independent causality through the concept of freedom. But Kant does suggest that, *qua reason*, it is a source of imperatives, albeit conditional imperatives, and that the possibility of the conditional imperatives is independent of the possibility of unconditional or categorical imperatives.

Kant says that “what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is an end,” and if this is given empirically, then the objective determining ground of the action (what in fact triggers the will), is the subjective and contingent relation between the object and the will. With reason’s empirically conditioned use it is this relation, the pleasure (or displeasure) that accompanies one’s representation of the existence of the object, which determines which objects are ends for him, and therefore also determines his will. If reason has merely an empirically conditioned use, then it is only the feeling of agreeableness that one anticipates from the reality of the object that determines the faculty of desire. In this case, all practical principles will be merely subjective (determined by the particular constitution of the subject’s receptivity, and therefore in accordance with conditions that are contingent and distinguish one rational being from another), and all ends, or purposes of the will, therefore are also subjective (determined in accordance with the subject’s desires). If we consider the faculty of desire of a

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353 As will, whether we have merely “an animal or enslaved power of choice (arbitrio bruto s. servo)” or a “free choice,” *(Metaphysics of Morals, 6:227).*

354 *Critique of Practical Reason, 5:15.*

355 Kant, *Groundwork, 4:427.* See also, Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason, 5:58-9*: “[R]eason alone is capable of discerning the connection of means with their purposes (so that the will could also be defined as the faculty of ends, inasmuch as these are always determining grounds of the faculty of desire in accordance with principles).”
rational being, with a reason that is empirically limited in this way, deciding what to do or to
effect through his action, supposing he is not to choose merely arbitrarily, or according to mere
instinct (where feeling determines his behavior all the way through to the result, so to speak, and
so non-conceptually), Kant thinks that he will represent his actions in accordance with principles
which give the rule to his causality:

Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has
the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws, that is, in
accordance with principles, or has a will. Since reason is required for the
derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason.\textsuperscript{356}

How does the will decide what law it is to follow, that is, what principles he will act in
accordance with? Since we have stipulated that his will can be determined only empirically, it is
the relation of an object (whether one of pleasure or displeasure) to his “specially constituted
faculty of desire,”\textsuperscript{357} that determines the object he represents himself as effecting (his end), and
consequently that determines his will. The principle that applies to his choice, therefore,
presupposes this empirical relation between the object (whose existence is represented with
pleasure or displeasure) and his will, as the determining ground of his choice.\textsuperscript{358} The principle is
also, on this account, an empirical practical principle (also called subjective or material). The
principle he represents himself as acting in accordance with is always determined with respect to
the “interest”\textsuperscript{359} he takes in the object of the action it may prescribe, and whether he is “to expect
satisfaction from following the law and how much,” and this is a relation that can only be
discovered empirically.

\textsuperscript{356}Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:412. See also, 4:427: “The will is thought as a capacity to determine itself to acting in
conformity with the representation of certain laws. And such a capacity can be found only in rational beings.”

\textsuperscript{357}Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:428.

\textsuperscript{358}Kant, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:21.

\textsuperscript{359}“An interest is that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., becomes a cause determining the will … But if
[reason] can determine the will only by means of another object of desire or on the presupposition of a special
feeling of the subject, then reason takes only a mediate interest in the action, and since reason all by itself, without
experience, can discover neither objects of the will nor a special feeling lying at its basis, this later interest would be
only empirical and not a pure rational interest,” \textit{(Groundwork}, 4:460).
But even when a rational being acts \textit{from} the “interest” it has in the represented object, he still relies on principles of reason to guide his activity. Kant calls the “dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason” an “interest.” If he acts “\textit{from interest},” the interest is a “pathological interest in the object of the action that determines the will.” A pathological interest represents the dependence of the will “upon principles of reason for the sake of inclination, namely where reason supplies only the practical rule as to how to remedy the need of inclination.”\textsuperscript{360} It is the object of the action (insofar as it is agreeable) that determines his choice, and is the condition of the application of the principle:

\begin{quote}
Wherever an object of the will has to be laid down as the basis for prescribing the rule that determines the will, there the rule is none other than heteronomy; the imperative is conditional, namely: \textbf{if or because} one wills this object, one ought to act in such or such a way ... the will never determines itself \textbf{immediately}, just by the representation of an action, but only by means of an incentive that the \textbf{anticipated effect of the action has upon the will}: \textbf{I ought to do something on this account, that I will something else}...\textsuperscript{361}
\end{quote}

Insofar as the will is determined by the pathological interest in the object of an action, the “rule is heteronomy,” and the imperative is always \textit{conditional}. The principle of his will in this case, and in all cases in which the anticipated existence of the object is the determining ground of choice, is “heteronomy.”\textsuperscript{362} He is “bound” to this law that he represents his action in accordance with always “by means of some interest” he has in the object of the action. When the will is determined in accordance with empirical and subjective determining grounds (the representation of pleasure), the law that determines the will has “to carry with it some interest by way of attraction or constraint;” in order to “conform with the law, his will” must be “constrained by \textit{something else} to act in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{363}

\textsuperscript{360}Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:413. Gregor translates \textit{pathologische} as “\textit{i.e., dependent upon sensibility},” (\textit{Groundwork}, 4:399).
\textsuperscript{361}Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:444.
\textsuperscript{362}Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:433.
\textsuperscript{363}Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:432-3.
Since the rational being with an empirically limited reason can only choose in accordance with empirical determining grounds, the principles he represents himself as acting in accordance with will depend on his empirical nature, and it is his empirical interest in the object that constrains his will to act in accordance with the principle. According to Kant, such an interest is a ground only of hypothetical imperatives. If the will seeks its law

in a property of any of its objects - **heteronomy** always results. The will in that case does not give itself the law; instead the object, by means of its relation to the will, gives the law to it. This relation, whether it rests upon inclination or upon representations of reason, lets only hypothetical imperatives become possible: *I ought to do something because I will something else.*

In heteronomy, the ends

*he proposes at his discretion as effects of his actions (material ends), are all only relative, for only their mere relation to a specially constituted faculty of desire on the part of the subject gives them their worth, which can therefore furnish no universal principles, no principles valid and necessary for all rational beings and also for every volition, that is, no practical laws. Hence all these relative ends are only the ground of hypothetical imperatives.*

We anticipate them as a source of satisfaction (uninterrupted, happiness). If there were no final, moral end, then all “ends” would be material ends and merely relative, they themselves would be mere means to the agreeable, and each would have to determine for himself, the object he expects as a source of pleasure (or displeasure), and so all these relative, and contingent ends can only ground hypothetical imperatives. The principle only necessitates an action based on the pathological interest in the object of the action.

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364 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:441.
If reason had only this empirically conditioned use, if there were no pure practical reason, Kant thinks that all imperatives would be merely hypothetical. It is the possibility of a categorical imperative that is in question here, and Kant does not ever call into doubt the possibility of hypothetical imperatives, rather he says that it is “to be feared that all imperatives which seem to be categorical may yet in some hidden way be hypothetical.” Since categorical imperatives are not based on a presupposition—an end, an interest in it that constrains the will to act in accordance with the principle—their possibility has to be investigated “entirely a priori.”

It is this difference that explains the dissimilarity in their necessitation of the will, the dissimilarity between the empirical and conditional necessity that characterizes rules of skill and counsels of prudence, and the a priori and unconditional necessity that characterizes a practical law. Hypothetical imperatives “contain mere precepts of skill,” and they “determine the conditions of the causality of a rational being as an efficient cause merely with respect to the effect and its adequacy to it.” Unlike a categorical imperative, hypothetical imperatives “do not determine the will simply as will but only with respect to a desired effect,” and so they “are indeed practical precepts but not laws.” In contradistinction to categorical imperatives, hypothetical imperatives can determine the will only after the agent asks if she has “the ability required for a desired effect” and what she is “to do in order to produce it.” In other words, she can only conform to the imperative once this has been determined. Moreover, the hypothetical imperative is a practical precept that specifically, and only, holds on the basis of the “contingent, subjective conditions that distinguish one rational being from another.” Reason, therefore, puts only a “subjectively conditioned necessity” into the practical precept.

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367 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:419.
368 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:419.
369 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:20. Cf. 5:45. Kant says there that since the *Critique of Practical Reason* seeks to explain whether reason determines maxims of the will “only by means of empirical representations as determining grounds or whether pure reason might also be practical ... [w]ether the causality of the will is adequate for the reality of the objects or not is left to the theoretical principles of reason to estimate.”
370 Categorical imperatives, “must sufficiently determine the will as will even before I ask whether I have the ability required for a desired effect or what I am to do in order to produce it, and must thus be categorical: otherwise they are not laws because they lack the necessity which, if it is to be practical, must be independent of conditions that are pathological and therefore only contingently connected with the will,” (Critique of Practical Reason, 5:20).
371 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:20. Notice this would not seem to be the case for the standard view.
But how should we understand a merely “subjectively conditioned necessity”? What is necessary and universal in these practical cognitions?

On the one hand, as I have previously argued, there is the analytic necessity that grounds the imperative. The volition of the end, *qua* end, even when it is determined entirely subjectively by means of the feeling of pleasure, grounds an imperative to take the necessary means. Insofar as these ends rest on empirical incentives, as subjective ends, so too does the imperative to “will” (or take) the means. Again, this should not be understood as a separate volition, rather, Kant thinks that willing an end and willing the necessary means to it is one and the same volition, though one must still rationally represent this relation of conceptual entailment: to represent oneself as effecting a thing in a certain way, is to represent oneself as causing it in that way. Kant also says: “Whoever approves the effect must also be willing to approve the cause.”\(^{372}\) This, of course, would just be false unless approving of an *effect* analytically entails an approval of the *cause*. Likewise, the volition of an effect through my will, an end, is at the same time the volition of the *action* necessary to cause it.\(^{373}\) It is this very basic analytic inference that constitutes the volition of an end for Kant, and this, I have argued, distinguishes a faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, or a faculty of choice (a will), from a faculty of desire determinable *merely* in accordance with feeling (and so non-conceptually). The conditional imperative expresses the necessity of willing the necessary known means on the condition of willing the end; the volition of the means is conceptually contained in the volition of the end.

On the other hand, Kant explicitly points out that the *content* of the imperative, as a rule of skill, contains theoretical necessity. In the *Groundwork*, he points out that theoretical propositions “belong to determining the means themselves to a purpose intended,” and therefore have to do with determining the ground for “actualizing the object” (determining the means). He makes a similar observation in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, when he emphasizes that principles of

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\(^{373}\) Following Kant’s technical use of the term “wish” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:213), we might suppose that if the necessary means to an end turned out to be immoral, then the agent might wish for the object, but until she sees some permissible and therefore ‘available’ sufficient means that enable her to effect the object, she approves of the object as a mere *event*, as opposed to an *effect* through her (or even possibly some other’s) will.
self-love (material practical principles), since they apply based on subjective, and contingent, determining grounds, cannot yield any universal or necessary practical principles of the will.

*Principles of self-love can indeed contain universal rules of skill (for finding means to one’s purposes), but in that case they are only theoretical principles (such as, e.g., how someone who would like to eat bread has to construct a mill). But practical precepts based on them can never be universal because the determining ground of the faculty of desire is based on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, which can never be assumed to be universally directed to the same objects.*

And in the note to the passage Kant says:

*Propositions that in mathematics or physics are called practical should properly be called technical. For in these teachings it is not at all a question of the determination of the will; they only point out the manifold of the possible action that is sufficient to produce a certain effect, and are thus as theoretical as any proposition that asserts the connection of a cause with an effect. Whoever approves the effect must also be willing to approve the cause.*

Taken together, these considerations suggest that hypothetical, or technical, imperatives are practical precepts that apply to an agent *analytically* based on the conceptual connection between the volition of the means (the cause) and the volition of the end (the effect), the particular content of which is a theoretical representation of the particular cause necessary to bring about a particular effect.

One way, then, to cash out the distinction between the subjectively conditioned necessity that the conditional imperatives express and the “unconditional and objective and hence universally valid

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375 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:25-6. After their mention in this initial Remark to the first section of the first chapter of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant never again calls the conditional imperatives hypothetical imperatives. The two places (*Critique of Judgment*, 20:200, and *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:221-2) they come up again at all, throughout the rest of his practical philosophy, are both in the context of his distinguishing moral principles from merely technical principles, and insisting that only the former belong to practical philosophy.
necessity,” expressed by categorical imperatives—“laws that must be obeyed” and “followed even against inclination.”—is to locate in the hypothetical imperatives, as practical cognitions, the nature of reason’s specific contribution to the represented principle. What kind of necessity does reason put the into the precept? I have argued that the conditional imperative expresses the analytic necessity of willing the necessary means for one (with a faculty of choice) who has willed the end. The hypothetical imperatives are principles for producing objects in nature based on the presupposition that the object is one that agent represents herself as effecting. They are practical correlates of theoretical principles, and they pick out the action required as a necessary means.

Now Kant defines the will as practical reason, which is a faculty for deriving actions according to a principle. But notice that Kant often uses ‘reason,’ in both a general and a more specific sense. In the general sense, reason signifies our faculty of a priori cognition through concepts, the faculty for producing what is ‘necessary’ in our representations. Falling under this general use of ‘reason’ denoting the faculty of rational cognition as a whole, Kant also conceives of the ‘faculties’ in a more specific sense as specific sources of the representations that figure in this cognition.377 In the latter sense of ‘faculty,’ reason enters into a relation with the other faculties in order to yield particular kinds of cognitions (both theoretical and practical). In this more specific sense of faculty, Kant thinks that reason has both a ‘logical’ as well as a ‘real’ use.

In its merely formal, logical use, it is the faculty “of drawing inferences mediately (as distinct from immediate inferences, consequentis immediatis).”378 It is a “faculty for the determination of the particular through the general (for the derivation from principles).”379 In its logical

376 Kant, Groundwork, 4:416.
377 For a good and concise discussion of the Kant’s ‘doctrine of the faculties,’ see Gilles Deleuze, Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties, trans. by H Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See especially, pp. 7-8.
378 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A299/B355.
379 Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 20:200.
exercise, reason “abstracts from all content of cognition,” deriving particular cognitions from more general rules, and these mediate inferences we call a “syllogism.” Kant calls,

\[\text{a “cognition from principles” that cognition in which I cognize the particular in the universal through concepts. Thus every syllogism is a form of derivation of a cognition from a principle. For the major premise always gives a concept such that everything subsumed under its condition can be cognized from it according to a principle.}\]

In its logical use, reason employs the same rules in its derivations (it has the same employment), whether the “cognition from principles” is a representation of an action (a practical cognition) or a determination of an object (a theoretical cognition). In our practical inferences reason has this logical employment, and the will, as a capacity to derive actions from “laws” or “principles,” is therefore called “practical reason.” When the relevant cognition is from principles that are formulated practically, reason represents the necessity of an action derived in accordance with the principle, and this is called a practical cognition.

In its \textit{real} use, reason “contains the origin of certain concepts and principles, which it derives neither from the senses nor from the understanding.” The question in the moral philosophy is whether reason has a \textit{real} use in the practical—whether it is itself a source of the principle that determines the will.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A303/B360.}{Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A303/B360.}
\item \footnote{Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A300/B357.}{Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A300/B357.}
\item \footnote{Kant uses this term in a general sense to encompass empirical practical cognition as well as a priori practical cognition, as opposed to just moral cognition. See: “Thus, among practical cognitions, not only do moral laws, along with their principles, differ essentially from all the rest, in which there is something empirical, but all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part…” (\textit{Groundwork}, 3:389). And, for example, when speaking of the mere form of a law providing a determining ground of volition, Kant says, the “thing is strange enough, and has nothing like it in the rest of our practical cognition” (\textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:31). See also, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:420, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:20.}{Kant uses this term in a general sense to encompass empirical practical cognition as well as a priori practical cognition, as opposed to just moral cognition. See: “Thus, among practical cognitions, not only do moral laws, along with their principles, differ essentially from all the rest, in which there is something empirical, but all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part…” (\textit{Groundwork}, 3:389). And, for example, when speaking of the mere form of a law providing a determining ground of volition, Kant says, the “thing is strange enough, and has nothing like it in the rest of our practical cognition” (\textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:31). See also, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:420, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:20.}
\item \footnote{Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:412.}{Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:412.}
\item \footnote{Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A299/B355.}{Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A299/B355.}
\item \footnote{The question is whether, in the practical, reason is a source of a synthetic cognition from concepts, and Kant says that it is properly these that he “calls principles absolutely; nevertheless, all universal propositions in general can be}{The question is whether, in the practical, reason is a source of a synthetic cognition from concepts, and Kant says that it is properly these that he “calls principles absolutely; nevertheless, all universal propositions in general can be}
If this is right, then another way of framing the central question in Kant’s moral philosophy, is whether reason has a real use in the practical, or whether it has a merely conditioned, i.e. and only formal use. In the empirically conditioned use of reason, the principles (as rules of the understanding), as well as the condition (the end), are given by nature, and so the practical cognition is always empirical, and the content of the precept derives from a theoretical principle (a law of nature).

This is how Kant describes heteronomy, and why this relation (the relation of between the object and its affect on the will) lets only hypothetical imperatives become possible. For a heteronomous will, it is, Kant says, “strictly speaking,” nature that gives the law:

because the impulse that the representation of an object possible through our powers is to exert on the will of the subject in accordance with his natural constitution belongs to the nature of the subject - whether to his sensibility (inclination and taste) or to his understanding and reason, which by the special constitution of their nature employ themselves with delight’ upon an object - it would, strictly speaking, be nature that gives the law; and this, as a law of nature, must not only be cognized and proved by experience - and is therefore in itself contingent ... it is always only heteronomy of the will; the will would not give itself the law but a foreign impulse would give the law to it by means of the subject’s nature, which is attuned to be receptive to it.\(^{387}\)

Dependent on the special constitution of his receptivity, and what is peculiar to human nature,\(^{388}\) his choice is determined pathologically, and the rational being “must be represented as subject to called principles comparatively,” (Critique of Pure Reason, A301/B38). And in this latter comparative sense, this is “in respect of their possible use” in a syllogism, (Critique of Pure Reason, A300/B357). Only reason, in its real use is the source of a principles in the absolute sense, the principles of pure understanding must bring in “pure intuition,” and the “conditions of a possible experience in general,” and “they are correctly called principles relative to the cases that can be subsumed under them,” but they do not yield, strictly speaking, “cognition from principles,” (Critique of Pure Reason, A300-01/B357).

\(^{387}\) Kant, Groundwork, 4:444.

\(^{388}\) Kant, Groundwork, 4:410.
the law of his own needs.” \(^{389}\) Not only is the pleasure (or displeasure) that accompanies his representation of the object’s existence (or nonexistence) something determined by nature, but also the rules themselves that he must employ “or represent his actions in accordance with,” will be derived from laws of nature. As an empirical being, “belonging to the world of sense,” he can “cognize laws for the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions … under laws of nature (heteronomy)” \(^{390}\):

\[
    \text{all laws that are determined with reference to an object give heteronomy, which can be found only in laws of nature and also can have to do only with the world of sense.}^{391}
\]

If there are only empirical interests, that is, if reason has merely an empirically conditioned use, then the principles that apply to the will are both determined by nature (nature picks out the object), but they are also derived from our theoretical understanding of nature (from laws of nature). Thus, the concepts that determine the causality of the will, reason’s use as a practical faculty, will always be concepts of nature, and the content of the practical rules, will be merely theoretical.

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    \text{For even if the will follows no other principles than those by means of which the understanding has insight into the possibility of the object in accordance with them, as mere laws of nature, then the proposition which contains the possibility of the object through the causality of the faculty of choice may still be called a practical proposition, yet it is not at all distinct in principle from the theoretical propositions concerning the nature of things, but must rather derive its own content from the latter in order to exhibit the representation of an object in reality.}^{392}
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\(^{389}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:439.

\(^{390}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:452.

\(^{391}\) Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:458.

\(^{392}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 20:197-98. See also, Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5:55: “However, besides the relation in which the understanding stands to object (in theoretical cognition) it has also a relation to the faculty of desire, which is therefore called the will and is called the pure will insofar as the pure understanding (which in this case is called reason) is practical through the mere representation of a law.”
Laws based on the interest one has in the object of an action are practical principles that derive their content from a theoretical understanding of nature in order for the empirically determined will to insert itself, by employing its understanding of it, into nature as an empirical cause producing the desired (“wished for”) effect.

If reason had only this empirically conditioned use, and its principles and precepts were therefore always determined by nature, the interest in the action would never be its own, but always for the sake of the empirical inclinations. As empirically limited, reason “administers an interest not belonging to it,” it can determine the will only “in the service of the inclinations.” A faculty of choice, which can be determined only by inclination, is, for this reason, an “animal or enslaved power of choice” (arbitrio bruto s. servo). A choice that can be determined only pathologically, namely, where a sensible impulse is a necessary condition for the determination of the will, is therefore only an animal choice (arbitrium brutum).

Thus, what is significant in the distinction between a free choice and an empirically limited, animal choice is therefore the source of the representation that determines the will. This depends on whether reason has a real use in the practical, or whether reason, in its merely logical employment, is enlisted by nature to help carry out nature’s purposes. In the latter case, the agent uses reason “merely as a tool for the satisfaction of his needs as a sensible being.” From a practical standpoint, this subordinate use of reason is not what is relevant in the distinction between the human faculty of desire, a faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, and an animal faculty of desire. Insofar as both are determined pathologically, it is irrelevant that the human being can use its reason and understanding to look after its preservation and its welfare, a task set by nature. Moreover, in this case, Kant thinks that nature, would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose. For all the actions that the creature has to

393 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:441.
394 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:24-5.
perform for this purpose, and the whole rule of its conduct, would be marked out
for it far more accurately by instinct, and that end would have thereby been
attained much more surely than it ever can be by reason.\textsuperscript{398}

Thus what distinguishes a \textit{free} choice from an \textit{animal} choice is that in the former reason must
have a \textit{real} use and is itself the source of the principle that determines the will. If reason did not
have this real use, then the faculty of choice is only pathologically determinable, and empirically
practical reason, stepping in for silent instincts, always borrows its principles from nature.\textsuperscript{399}

But in a free choice, reason must “regard itself as the author of its own principles independently
of alien influences.”\textsuperscript{400}

\textit{The will is not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it
must be viewed as also giving the law to itself and just because of this as first
subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author).}\textsuperscript{401}

Kant argues the mere idea of a categorical imperative contains in it a determination that is the
“specific mark distinguishing categorical from hypothetical imperatives,” and this is found in
the third formulation of the principle: “namely the idea of the will of every rational being as a \textit{will
giving universal law},”\textsuperscript{402} and by which “the renunciation of all interest is indicated.” In the
principle of \textit{giving universal law} through one’s maxims reason expresses an interest of its own,
and “just because in the idea of giving universal law \textit{it is based on no interest} and therefore,
among all possible imperatives, can alone be \textit{unconditional}.\textsuperscript{403} Again, Kant says that only “law
brings with it the concept of an \textit{unconditional} and objective and hence universally valid
\textit{necessity}, and commands are laws that must be obeyed, that is, must be followed even against

\textsuperscript{398} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:395.

\textsuperscript{399} And, thus, Kant says, “only, insofar as reason of itself (not in the service of the inclinations) determines the will,
is reason a true \textit{higher} faculty of desire, to which the pathologically determinable is subordinate, and \textit{then only is reason really, and indeed specifically, distinct from the latter}, so that even the least admixture of the latter’s
impulses infringes upon it,” (\textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, 5:24-5).

\textsuperscript{400} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:448.

\textsuperscript{401} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:431.

\textsuperscript{402} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:431-2.

\textsuperscript{403} Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:432.
inclination.” Categorical imperatives “determine the will as will,” and therefore they express a distinctive kind of practical necessity, a necessity that is “independent of conditions that are pathological and therefore only contingently connected with the will.” They are representations of pure reason that make actions necessary in themselves. And so “among practical cognitions, not only do moral laws, along with their principles, differ essentially from all the rest, in which there is something empirical, but all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part”

I have argued that hypothetical imperatives should be counted only as empirical practical precepts, based on “principles of mere experience.” They represent a logical use of reason in its derivation of actions from principles, but principles that are not distinct in their content from theoretical principles, and therefore the content of the conditional imperative (a proposition with a practical form), is also merely theoretical. We cannot know what conclusion reason will draw, or what principle will apply, until the condition is given. On the contrary, in the case of a categorical imperative, the mere form of a practical precept gives us its content.

4.

In section 3., I offered an alternative way of thinking about the place of hypothetical imperatives in Kant’s practical philosophy, and one that has not been readily apparent on the standard reading, since on the standard view, hypothetical imperatives are interpreted as anti-akratic practical principles that constrain the agent to follow through on her choice. The assumption has, therefore, been that practical reason links the volition of the end with the volition of the means for imperfectly rational agents for whom these volitions can come apart. It is, consequently, assumed that an imperfectly rational agent can will an end, grasp the necessary connection

\[405\] Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:389.
between willing an end and willing the necessary known means, and yet fail to will those means while retaining the end. Thus, in order to explain this command, we had to search for a normative source for the end, a principle that had to have its seat in pure reason. I have argued that there is no reason to suppose that Kant held such a view, and there is little to recommend this reading in the text.

I have argued instead that Kant did not think about hypothetical imperatives this way, and rather, that the volition of the necessary means – though a rational representation – is, in fact, analytically entailed in the volition of the end. On this interpretation, if the agent grasps the necessary connection between willing her end, and willing the necessary known means, and she nevertheless fails to will those means, she is not pursuing the end. Hypothetical imperatives are principles of reason that produce a will that is good “as a means to other purposes,” by representing the actions that “would be good merely as a means” to them. They are rules for making oneself the causality of the represented object, and this is to say, that they are rules for willing ends. They say, ‘in order to will this end, this is the action you must take.’ The failures they instruct against are theoretical mistakes in one’s beliefs, or mistakes in one’s reasoning, that undermine one’s success in effecting the object.

In this section, I want to offer two points of clarification.

First, on the view that I have been developing, hypothetical imperatives are consequent-scope. This means that we might be worried about the problem of detachment. Recall that one motivation for adopting either the wide-scope view or the material interpretation is the worry about detachment. On an unqualified narrow-scope reading, if one wills an end that requires immoral means, then we apply modus ponens and yield a detached conclusion that “commands” the volition of those immoral means. On the wide-scope view, the imperative is an unconditional consistency requirement and we do not detach a command to will any particular means, but rather a disjunctive set of consistent pairs. The imperative proscribes the “duplicity” involved in retaining an end, and failing to will the necessary known means. On the material interpretation, the imperative is narrow-scope, but it only applies to ends that are endorsed by practical reason.

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407 *Groundwork*, 4:396.
408 *Groundwork*, 4:414.
We derive an imperative to will the necessary means, only when the antecedent is an end that we have reason to will. If we adopt a consequent-scope reading that applies to all ends, even the non-normative ones, reason would seem to come into conflict with itself. Insofar as the imperative represents the action necessary as a means, if that action is immoral, reason would seem to issue in contradictory and therefore, *irrational* practical principles.

I think, with the qualification introduced here, there is a sense in which this is right, and we should welcome rather than evade an interpretation of instrumental reason that accounts for a very apparent and manifest conflict in our human practical reason.\(^{409}\)

I have argued that we have two sorts of practical cognitions, instrumental and moral, and the distinction between them is represented in the two kinds of *necessitation* the imperatives express, a difference that Kant goes to great lengths to distinguish. If the practical cognition that determines the will concerns merely the “possibility of a represented object,” the “law,” or principle of the will, is determined by the cooperation of the understanding with sensibility, and reason “can only (by being well-versed in law by means of the understanding) draw inferences from given laws to conclusions that … always stop at nature.”\(^{410}\) The practical cognitions that represent an action as “necessary merely through the representation of its form (in accordance with laws in general) without regard to the means of the object that is thereby to be realized, can and must have their own special principles (in the idea of freedom),”\(^{411}\) and so they belong to “a special part of a system of rational cognitions, under the name of practical philosophy.”\(^{412}\) Given that these representations of reason have two different sources, it seems obvious that they can and will conflict in the actions they represent as necessary, and thus, as *necessitating* for an agent with an imperfect and fallible will.

\(^{409}\) See, for example, Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:393-4. Kant thinks this kind of rational conflict is manifest in our common moral cognition. Indeed, Kant points out that, a calculative and quick mind, judgment, calm reflection all are qualities that render us “good for all sorts of purposes,” but become “extremely evil,” if they are in conflict with the principles of a good will (e.g. the “coolness of a scoundrel makes him immediately more abominable in our eyes than we would have taken him to be without it”). The favourable use of his cognitive faculties renders the agent a more perfect cause of his purposes, and so makes him potentially more dangerous, but also, and I think independently of the former, it makes him *appear* to us as more loathsome.

\(^{410}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:174-175.

\(^{411}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 20:199.

\(^{412}\) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 20:199.
Insofar as the hypothetical, or technical, imperative is still a representation of necessity (representing reason’s logical employment), they do not thereby cease to be or constitute a particular kind of rational cognition, and one that has legitimacy from a theoretical or technical standpoint: it is a technical cognition. The necessitation the imperative expresses is a theoretical necessity that is formulated practically. It represents the connection between an effect and its cause, as a connection between ends and means, and it therefore represents to the will how to exhibit its object in reality (what it is necessary to do in order to make its object real). The imperative represents the action “good for” producing the end, and it directs the agent to the action necessary as the means. This, I have argued, is a theoretical representation that has a practical, albeit conditional, form. Instead of determining the cause of an effect external to her, the agent applies that very same theoretical relation to herself as a causality in order to bring about the effect herself—her end.

But the technical imperative is not a command that, strictly speaking, commands us to do anything. It does not “command” as an objective practical determining ground, and so it does not tell us, what we ought, unconditionally to do. It is the moral task of the finite rational being that can act freely, to organize its practical activity in a way that accords with the categorical imperative, and therefore to ensure that its actions have the form of universal law. If an agent has an end that is willed, contrary to the moral law, and he therefore makes self-love the unconditional practical principle of the will (self-conceit), this is an unwarranted and even transcedent use of reason in the practical (which is more pernicious than in the theoretical), and the agent, as an autonomous agent, is under obligation to give up the end. This means he will not conform his will to the precept and adopt the means that he represents as necessary for willing the end. He won’t will it.

But if he retains it as an end, his reason will still represent the action that is necessary for it as a conditional, and subjectively conditioned imperative. The action that is represented as necessary (in order to will the end) is in conflict with the categorical imperative, but it should now be clear that this is a conflict between theoretical reason employed on behalf of her inclinations, and her practical reason itself, but one that manifests as practical. Hypothetical imperatives are principles

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413 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73.
of the will that represent actions necessary in order for the agent to be the effective, or efficient, cause of her “end,” and insofar as these actions do not take place by an inner necessity (often because the agent does not know in what the means consist, but also because the faculty of desire relies on its representations of reason in order to determine its choice—even if these represent a fundamentally elementary use of reason), these are still characterized by Kant as imperatives. It is more accurate to suggest that these are imperatives that the being ought not to stand under or conform to, rather than dismiss them altogether and thereby collapse the distinction between the instrumental, and essentially theoretical, use of reason that is practical, and the moral, and distinctively practical use of pure reason.

But if the technical imperatives have theoretical content, and represent an employment of reason on behalf of nature, “the counter-weight of his needs and his inclinations,” where nature gives the condition, and the principle that contains it, then we can understand how these imperatives, even as representations of an ideally rational employment of the respective cognitive faculties, can conflict. And this does have to do with the source of the “law,” the agent acts on, which incentive is made the condition of the other. But the conflict between the principles that the will is to follow is genuine, and we can be more or less instrumentally rational in the bringing about of an immoral end. Here reason “commands,” or counsels, on the basis of a presupposition, an interest that is not its own (whether that is the agent’s own empirical interest or that of another’s, the will has to be constrained to the action by some interest in effecting the object). This collusion of the cognitive faculty with self-conceit is certainly what makes the immoral action appear more abominable in our eyes.

But, of course, the hypothetical imperatives are not obligations, they are not laws that command the means at all. “For only law brings with it the concept of an unconditional and objective and hence universally valid necessity, and commands are laws that must be obeyed, that is, must be followed even against inclination.”⁴¹⁴ They represent the action necessary for willing an end, and so as “necessitating” for the fallible will for whom the volition of the end is presupposed. If the agent grasps what the necessary means are, then there is no distinction between her willing the end and willing the necessary means. The conflict, properly understood, is between an agent’s

⁴¹⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:416.
willing of an irrational end that conflicts with the rational end(s) that she necessarily wills in accordance with the moral law.

Second, I have argued that the “commands” (precepts) that hypothetical imperatives express are independent of whether the end is determined in accordance with a free will, and therefore in accordance with rational self-love, or in accordance with self-conceit, or even an ineluctably heteronomous will. Since the imperatives are only instructions for willing ends, they do not themselves take into account whether the end itself is rational or good. But I do want to emphasize the connection that hypothetical imperatives always stand in to the empirical aspect (or character) of our activity. Since the command is always based on a presupposition, and the volition of the end is therefore the ground that actualizes the act of will, the ensuing interest in the action is always conditioned by the ‘matter’ of the will—the interest the agent has in the object. For this reason, the content of the principle is always theoretical, and since the end is an object to be effected, a material end, the technical imperative is a practical precept based on concepts of nature. This will also be true even for a will that is objectively good, and whose ends are willed in accordance with the concept of freedom. For the technical imperatives have to do with the production of objects in nature, and for this, practical precepts that have theoretical content are required. This will be true for the good will, as well as for the “bad” will or the heteronomous agent. For hypothetical imperatives will always be based on something empirical, and our interest in them will always be grounded, in some sense, on an empirical interest.\footnote{Kant actually comes very close to articulating this point in the \textit{Critique of Judgment} when he says that “in a word: all practical propositions that derive that which nature can contain from the faculty of choice as a cause collectively belong to theoretical philosophy, as cognition of nature…” (\textit{Critique of Judgment}, 20:197). But here Kant crossed out: “all practical propositions that \textit{are also possible through empirical determining grounds (e.g., those of the theory of happiness)}’ belong to theoretical philosophy, as cognition of nature…” I think Kant was formulating something correctly here: the practical propositions, and precepts concerning the production of objects that could be determined merely through natural incentives, e.g. the precepts of health, wealth, and happiness (wellfare), have merely theoretical content, and for the will that adopts the (material) end, the hypothetical imperative is identical for the will that is vicious, the will that is good, as well as for a merely animal choice.}

And so this will be true for the particular material ends that may also be duties. Recall that Kant says, that when the represented necessity of an action is based on a “certain interest” in the object of the action, whether “one’s own or another’s interest,” the “imperative had to turn out always conditional…”\footnote{Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 4:433.} When the imperative represents the action necessary to effect an object in
nature, whether the end is adopted on account of one’s own self-love, or on account of another’s, is immaterial to the necessitation the imperative expresses. Taking Kant’s own example from *Groundwork* I, the man suffering from gout can adopt the end of health (on the expectation that happiness is supposed to lie in health) and whether his will is determined by “the general inclination to happiness” or the duty to promote his own happiness, the precept, as well as its content, will be the same: to abstain from an excessively indulgent lifestyle. That this is an end that is also perhaps a duty does not impact the nature or content of the conditional imperative: the imperative instructs the action necessary for the end that it is presupposed as willed. Of course in the case of a categorical imperative to will the end, it will follow analytically, that one ought to will the means. But this, I have argued is a command to will the end, and the volition of the means is therefore represented as necessary in accordance with the categorical imperative.
Bibliography


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