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On Kant's Idea of Humanity as an End in Itself

Sven Nyholm

Abstract: Writers like Christine Korsgaard and Allen Wood understand Kant's idea of rational nature as an end in itself as a commitment to a substantive value. This makes it hard for them to explain the supposed equivalence between the universal law and humanity formulations of the categorical imperative, since the former does not appear to assert any substantive value. Nor is it easy for defenders of value-based readings to explain Kant's claim that the law-giving nature of practical reason makes all beings with practical reason regard the idea of a rational nature as an end in itself. This article seeks to replace these value-based readings with a reading of the idea of rational nature as an end that fits better with the overall argument of the *Groundwork*.

1. Introduction

At a critical junction in the second section of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant famously argues as follows:

If there . . . is to be a highest practical law, and, in relation to the human will, a categorical imperative, then it has to be such that it makes an *objective* principle of the will out of the representation of what is an end for everyone since it is an end in itself, [which] hence can serve as a universal law. The basis of this principle is: *the reason-endowed nature exists as an end in itself*. The human being necessarily represents its own existence in this way: thus far is it, then, a *subjective* principle of human action. But each reason-endowed being also represents its own existence in this way; thus it is also an objective principle, out of which, as a highest practical basis, all laws of the will must be derivable. The practical imperative becomes the following: *so act that you always treat the humanity within your own person, as well as that in each other person, at the same time as an end, and never as a means only*. (G: 4:428–9)¹

Attached to the all-important premise that each reason-endowed being represents its own nature as an end there is a footnote in which Kant says that at this point in his discussion he is putting this forward as a postulate, but that he will give his reasons for making this claim in the last part of his book (G: 4:429). This claim that each reason-endowed being—simply because it has practical reason or a will—necessarily represents the reason-endowed nature as an end is my main topic in this paper, and I shall be especially concerned with the question of what Kant means when he claims that the third part of his book vindicates it. [Correction

added on September 23 2013, after first online publication: The word 'endowed' has been replaced with 'the reason-endowed' in this sentence.]

That third part of the *Groundwork* argues that our will or practical reason is an essentially *active*, as opposed to passive or receptive, faculty (which helps to explain the sense in which our will is 'free'); it argues that our will or practical reason's distinctive activity consists in imposing lawlike order on our practical lives; and it argues that the possibility of a categorical imperative of reason lies precisely in our own reason's constantly trying—often in opposition to our various inclinations and impulses—to impose this lawlike order onto our practical lives. What does all this have to do with the claim that each reason-endowed being, simply on account of how it possesses reason, regards the reason-endowed nature (viz. the existence of beings with reason under principles they represent as laws) as an end? The answer suggested by many contemporary commentators: nothing.

These writers instead think that Kant's above-quoted argument uses as its main premise the idea that each reason-endowed being places an absolute *value* upon herself. Christine Korsgaard, for example, writes:

When Kant says: 'rational nature exists as an end in itself. Man necessarily thinks of his own existence in this way; thus far it is a subjective principle of human actions,' . . . I read him as claiming that in our private rational choices and in general in our actions we view ourselves as having a value-conferring status in virtue of our rational nature. We act as if our own choice were the sufficient condition of the goodness of its object: this attitude is built into (a subjective principle of) rational action. (Korsgaard 1986: 196)

How does this lead to the conclusion that our own nature as beings with reason exists as an end in itself? Korsgaard continues:

the argument for the Formula of Humanity depends upon the application of the unconditioned/conditioned distinction to the concept of goodness . . . [R]egressing upon the conditions, we find that the unconditioned condition of the goodness of anything is rational nature, or the power of rational choice. To play this role, however, rational nature must itself be something of unconditional value—an end in itself. This means, however, that you must treat rational nature wherever you find it (in your own person or in that of another) as an end. (Korsgaard 1986: 191–92, 196)

There is a very broad agreement in the literature that Korsgaard is, as Allen Wood puts it, 'on the right track' in giving such a value-based reconstruction of Kant's argument (Wood 1999: 127). Indeed, as Jens Timmermann puts it:

Korsgaard's work stands out among recent Kantian scholarship. Her reconstruction is now widely considered the standard reading of Kant's

value theory in Anglo-American moral philosophy. (Timmermann 2006: 69)

Insofar as commentators within this Anglo-American school of Kant interpretation disagree with Korsgaard, these disagreements are about the details of what they think of Kant's theory of value; they all offer reconstructions that are variations on Korsgaard's theme. Wood, for example, thinks that it is wrong to say that our choices confer value upon our objections of choice, since this would indicate that we have no prior reasons to make the choices we make, or that no choice could possibly be better than any other (Wood 2008: 92, Cf. Regan 2002 and Sussman 2003). On Wood's reading, however, it is nevertheless the case that virtually everything that has value has its value because of how it relates to us and our nature as beings with reason:

Ends to be promoted will usually have value, for instance, because they fulfill the needs, or enrich the lives, or contribute to the flourishing and happiness of rational beings, and so setting and achieving these ends shows respect and concern for the value of those rational beings. (Wood 2008: 92)

And so Wood concludes that Kant's argument in the passage quoted above is precisely that:

Because humanity or rational nature is the source of all such value, it is regarded as absolutely and unconditionally valuable. (Wood 1999: 127)

Despite disagreeing with Korsgaard's understanding of Kant's theory of value, Wood thus nevertheless basically agrees that we should understand Kant's argument in a value-based way. Other variations on Korsgaard's theme are argued for, or simply assumed to be true, in related work by writers such as Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Julia Markovits, Samuel Kerstein, Rae Langton, Allison Hills, David Sussman, Lara Denis, among others.²

My own disagreement with Korsgaard runs much deeper. I believe that we should reject all these value-based reconstructions of Kant's reasoning. What we need, instead, is an explanation of how and why (as Kant sees things) having an internal faculty that tries to impose a lawlike order on our practical lives necessarily amounts to, or is the same as, having as our end the existence of 'the reason-endowed nature'. The chief aim of this paper is to provide a reading that explains this. A complementary aim is to motivate a move away from the value-based way of reading Kant.³

The discussion below divides into the following further sections. Section 2 offers four reasons for rejecting value-based reconstructions of Kant's reasoning. Section 3 reviews Kant's explicit definitions of an 'end' and 'the reason-endowed nature' (which defenders of value-based readings seem to overlook) and explains how, on these definitions, it indeed follows analytically that trying to impose a lawlike order on our practical lives (by subjecting ourselves to maxims fit to be universal laws) is the same as treating the reason-endowed nature as an end in itself. Section 4 offers my reading of why Kant thinks that the claims he makes

in the third part of the *Groundwork* help to vindicate the postulate that each being with reason treats or regards its own existence as a reason-governed being as an end. Section 5 anticipates and responds to two objections that might be raised against my reading.

2. Why We Should Reject Value-based Reconstructions of Kant's Reasoning

The reasons to reject value-based readings of Kant's argument that I will now offer are fundamental enough that we do not need to go into details about how exactly the value-based readings suggest that we understand Kant's claims. All we need to know for our purposes is that these writers think that Kant places the value of humanity at the basis of his argument, that Kant thinks that each person is committed to this value (at least when she reflects on herself and the choices she makes), and that the humanity formula is a principle that says to respect and promote this value in all our actions.

We have already seen that such value-based readings fit poorly with Kant's claim that the third part of the *Groundwork* vindicates his postulate that each being with reason sees its nature as such a being as an end. This section of Kant's book, in other words, is not about value. Nor is it about the idea that making choices always involves conferring value onto ourselves or our decision-making capacities.⁴ It is instead about Kant's idea that it is our own will, or practical reason, that tries to make us act on lawlike principles, which means, Kant argues, that the commanding ought we associate with the categorical imperative is really just an expression of our own will, as it would be if determined by reason alone (G: 4:445, 449, 455). The first major problem with the value-based readings, therefore, is that they cannot account for Kant's claim that the third part of his book explains why, by necessity, each being with reason regards the existence of the reason-endowed nature as an end.

Another equally striking problem with value-based readings concerns the relation between the humanity formula and the universal law formula ('act only on that maxim that you at the same time can will that it were a universal law') (G: 4:421). The problem is that whereas Kant repeatedly claims that these two formulas are but 'different statements of the same law', the value-based readings imply that these are not different statements of the same law (G: 4:436). This has not been lost on members of the Anglo-American school. Thomas Hill, for example, writes of the humanity formula that it appears to 'go beyond the famous first formula' since it, unlike the universal law formula, appears to declare 'a rather substantive value judgment with significant practical implications' (Hill 1980: 98). The idea here is that (as members of the Anglo-American school understand these formulas) the requirement to subject ourselves to lawlike maxims is a merely formal requirement, which does not assert any value judgment, whereas the humanity formula supposedly *is* a requirement that asserts a substantive value judgment. If that is right, these formulas cannot be 'different statements of the same law'.

So *either* Kant is confused about the relations between his two famous formulas, by failing to see that his formulas are not equivalent, and by overlooking the fact that one, but not the other, formula declares a basic value judgment; *or* the members of the Anglo-American school have a mistaken understanding of Kant's formulas and the relations between the two. The end of this paper being to offer a charitable interpretation of Kant's reasoning, I want to argue that we here have a second problem with the value-based readings: they cannot make sense of Kant's claim that the universal law and humanity formulas are equivalent.

A third problem with the value-based readings is that Kant himself addresses the suggestion that a basic value could serve as the basis of the moral law and firmly registers his opposition to this suggestion:

the concept of good . . . must not be determined before the moral law . . . but only (as was done here) after it and by means of it. (KpV: 5:62, emphasis in original)

Now when Allen Wood discusses this claim, he tries to defend the value-based reading by claiming that this just-quoted sentence is only meant to apply to our objects of choice: hence the claim that the law comes first and that values come second, Wood claims, does not apply to the value or worth of the reason-endowed being (Wood 1998). But this claim of Wood's ignores the fact that, in the *Groundwork*, Kant explicitly says of the reason-endowed being that 'it only has the worth that the law determines for it' (G: 4:436). And the humanity formula is supposed to be one of the ways in which we can state the moral law. So it cannot be, I submit, that the humanity formula is based on a prior assertion of the value of the reason-endowed being.

These value-based readings also—or so it seems to me—overlook the overall context in which the passage we are discussing appears. What has happened in the pages leading up to the passage under consideration is that Kant has first argued that the very idea of a categorical imperative, which applies to us simply because we are beings with reason, itself implies what the content of the categorical imperative must be: namely, that whatever principles or maxims we adopt for ourselves, they must take the form of universal laws (G: 4:420–21). Having made that claim, and having briefly illustrated what he means using his four famous examples, Kant then asks whether this categorical imperative to subject ourselves to lawlike principles really does apply to us with the force of law as a matter of necessity. And he claims that if it does, then that must be so simply in virtue of what it is to be a reason-endowed being:

Thus the question is this: is it a necessary law for *all reason-endowed beings* always to appraise their actions in accordance with such maxims that they themselves could will to serve as universal laws? If there is such a [law], then it must already be connected (completely a priori) with the concept of the will of a reason-endowed being as such. (G: 4:426)

And, Kant adds:

What we are talking about here are objective-practical laws, hence the relation of the will to itself insofar as it is determined by reason alone. ... (G: 4:427)

To determine whether the idea of subjecting ourselves to maxims fit to serve as universal laws really is an imperative that applies to us with the force of a categorical law, then, what we must do, Kant claims, is (1) to examine the concept of the will of a reason-endowed being and (2) to also examine what relation the will would have to itself if it were determined by reason alone. It is within the course of this discussion of what a will is, and of what relation a will would have to itself if determined by reason alone, that the passage appears that we are discussing in which Kant claims that each being with reason necessarily represents the reason-endowed nature as an end in itself.

So in order to understand this passage we must examine Kant's claims about what a will is; and we must also examine his claims, which appear in the third part of the *Groundwork*, about how a will would relate to itself if it were determined by reason alone. But in defending their value-based readings of Kant's claims, the members of the Anglo-American school do neither of these two things. As Stephen Darwall notes, defenders of the value-based readings instead treat the passage we are trying to understand as a freestanding argument, which is not a part of the overall argument that is laid out across the second and third parts of the *Groundwork* (Darwall 2006: 229). That such readings thus ignore the overall context within which the passage we are discussing appears, i.e. Kant's claims about the will and its relation to itself (as it would be if determined by reason alone), is, I wish to argue, a fourth problem with these value-based readings.

On the basis of these just-reviewed four problems—i.e. that value-based readings (1) cannot make sense of Kant's crucial promissory footnote; (2) also cannot make sense of the supposed equivalence between the universal law and humanity formulas; (3) clash with Kant's claim that the law comes first and that it determines the worth of the reason-endowed being; and (4) overlook the context of the passage under discussion and, along with it, Kant's claims about the will and its relation to itself—we should, I submit, reject these value-based readings. I will now work my work towards an alternative reading.

3. The Equivalence of the Universal Law and Humanity Formulas

Before we go any further, the first thing we should address is the question of what exactly Kant means by 'humanity'. For our purposes here, all we need to know is the following: 'humanity', as Kant uses it in the *Groundwork*, refers to our particular variety of the more general class of, as he puts it, 'reason-endowed natures'. Why do I say this? I say this for two reasons. First, Kant's reasoning leading up to the humanity formula uses as its main premise that each being

with reason represents the reason-endowed nature as an end (i.e. rather than that humanity exists as an end). Second, when Kant talks about the humanity formula, he himself calls it the 'principle of humanity and each reason-endowed nature as an end in itself' (G: 4:430). Taken together these two considerations suggest that 'humanity' refers to our particular variety of the reason-endowed nature.

Given that our main question is what Kant means when he says that each being with reason represents the reason-endowed nature as an end, we do not need to know, for the purpose of settling our main question, what Kant thinks is distinctive of our particular variety of the reason-endowed nature. We can instead focus on the more general question of what Kant means when he talks about 'the reason-endowed nature'. So what *does* he mean by this phrase? Consider the following two passages:

- (1) Each thing in nature operates under laws. Only a reason-endowed being has the capacity to act on the basis of *representations of laws*, i.e. on the basis of principles, or a *will*. Since the derivation of actions from laws requires *reason*, the will is nothing but practical reason (G: 4:412).
- (2) Nature in the most general sense is the existence of things under laws (KpV: 5:43; Cf. G: 4:421).

What we get when we put 1 and 2 together is that 'the reason-endowed nature' refers to beings—or the existence of beings—that are able to act and interact on the basis of principles they represent as laws. Such beings have a will, and having a will consists in having practical reason: as Kant also puts it 'the capacity to determine oneself to action on the basis of representation of certain laws' (G: 4:427). The reason-endowed nature, then, is the existence of beings with a will or practical reason under principles that they represent as laws. Putting things in different terms, we might say that on Kant's view there is, on the one hand, the natural order (things without reason existing and operating according to laws discovered, or imposed on them, by our reason), and the reason-governed order, on the other hand, (beings with reason existing under self-adopted principles they represent as laws) (KpV: 5:44–45).

The will, we have also just seen, is 'the capacity to act on the basis of representations of laws, i.e. on the basis of principles' or 'nothing but practical reason'. The next thing we need to know is what Kant means by an 'end'. Here is the explicit definition that he gives:

Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the *end*, and if it is determined by reason alone, then it must hold for all reason-endowed beings. (G: 4:427)

In being the 'objective ground' or 'basis' for the 'self-determination' of the will, an *end* is thus simply whatever basis it is that the will—understood as the capacity to act on principles—uses for determining what principles, guidelines, or rules to act on. Normally we might think of an end as simply a goal that we

are aiming at. But in claiming that an end is that which serves as the basis for the determination of the *will*, Kant, in contrast, has the idea of acting on principles as a part of his idea of what an end is. The reason is that on Kant's theory of reason-governed or willful action, all actions are in some way or other governed by principles, rules, or guidelines. Our end, then, is whatever determines our choice of these principles (which might, of course, be some desire-based goal we are aiming for).

If our end is *not* given by reason alone, but instead is constituted by the object of some desire of ours, then, Kant tells us, the given principle of the will ends up being a 'material principle' that expresses some merely hypothetical imperative: some plan about how to fulfill our desire (G: 4:427–28). Our concern here, however, is the question of what basis we would use for the 'self-determination' of the will if our wills were 'determined by reason alone'. And the only basis for the choice of guiding principles that we would use if our choices of principles were governed by reason alone, Kant famously claims, is the 'formal' condition that these principles have properties that make them fit to serve as universal laws (KpV: 5:27, 30).

Let's now think about what all this implies about the relation between the universal law and humanity formulas. The first thing to notice is this: given Kant's definition of an 'end' (namely, as being whatever serves as the basis on which we determine our wills), it follows that subjecting ourselves to lawlike maxims (i.e. basic principles fit to be universal laws) itself amounts to setting ourselves a certain *end*. What end? That we operate on the basis of principles all could adopt, and that we, and all others, could coherently represent as universal laws. The next thing to notice is that given Kant's understanding of the 'reason-endowed nature' (namely, as the existence of reason-endowed beings governed by principles they represent as universal laws), the following also holds: making it our end (or basis for determining our wills) that we act on principles fit to be universal laws is the same as making (the existence, preservation, and realization of) the reason-endowed nature into our end.

Hence the equivalence of the universal law and humanity formulas that has seemed so puzzling to so many commentators follows directly and analytically from Kant's definition of an *end* and his idea of a *reason-endowed nature*: these formulas are, as we have just seen, equivalent because in choosing our guiding principles on the basis of their fitness to be represented as universal laws, we thereby make the existence and functioning of the reason-endowed nature (= the existence of reason-endowed beings under principles they represent as laws) into our end (= the ultimate basis for the determination of our will). As we can also put it (running the argument from the other direction): having the reason-endowed nature as our end is to have the idea of beings under shared principles that they represent as universal laws as the basis on which we choose our guiding principles, which is the same as choosing our guiding principles (or 'maxims') on the basis of their fitness to serve as universal laws.

We now know what it is to have the reason-endowed nature as our end: it is to have as the basis on which we choose our principles the condition that these

be principles that could be a part of the existence of reason-endowed beings under shared principles represented as universal laws. So we can now, as our next step, turn to the third part of the *Groundwork* and ask why it is that Kant thinks that we have the reason-endowed nature as our end simply because we possess practical reason.

4. The Reason-Endowed Nature as an End in Itself (for All Beings with Reason)

We have already seen that Kant thinks that everything operates according to laws, but that the will of a reason-endowed being is special since it, unlike other things, has the capacity to operate on the basis of representations of laws. It does this, Kant tells us, by choosing its basic guiding principles on the basis of how these principles have properties that make them fit to serve as universal laws for all beings with reason. We must now note the following: Kant not only thinks that our wills have the capacity to choose principles based on how they are fit to be universal laws. Kant also thinks that this is how our wills would necessarily function if they were determined by reason alone. (G: 4:449)

Kant thinks this, firstly, because he thinks that the will is constituted by our practical reason. And our reason, he thinks, is simply a faculty whose distinctive activity is to impose lawlike order upon all its objects of consideration (including, in the case of reason in its practical employment, our practical lives). Kant therefore thinks that when or if we subject ourselves to maxims fit to be universal laws, we are simply being governed by our own reason: our own practical reason, in other words, makes itself known or manifests itself to us by trying to bring our practical lives under a lawlike order (G: 4:449, KpV: 5:31).

Why, however, is it that we do not always without exception act on lawlike principles? It is, Kant thinks, because we have wills that are not wholly determined by our reason, but which are instead also 'affected' by the 'sensual' side of our nature: as human beings, we are also subject to various inclinations, desires, and impulses (G: 4:454). These are not by nature lawlike and principled, but can often pull us in other disorderly and law-less directions. That is the reason why our own reason's attempts to impose lawlike order on our practical lives are experienced as an *ought* or *should*: 'this should is really a will, which holds for each reason-endowed being under the condition [that] reason were practical within him without obstacles' (G: 4:449).

Our reason, Kant thus claims, is an essentially 'active' faculty: it is not merely passively receiving inputs and orders from external sources, but is instead by itself actively imposing law and order upon its objects of consideration. Do we really, however, have a will or practical reason of the sort Kant claims that we have? Kant himself certainly thinks so, and he thinks that common human experience confirms this. Thus he writes:

... the human being really does find within himself a capacity, which sets him apart from all things, indeed even from himself insofar as he is

subject to [external] influences, and that is his *reason*. This [is] a pure activity of the self. . . . The practical use of common human reason confirms the correctness of this. . . . There is no one, not even the most hardened evil-doer, if he is otherwise accustomed to using his reason, that—when one puts before him examples of honesty in intensions, perseverance in the following of good maxims, sympathy and benevolence (and together with these large sacrifices . . .)—doesn't wish that he were so disposed. . . . The moral should is thus a necessary own will as a member of an intelligible world, and is only thought of as a should insofar as [the reason-endowed being] also [is] a member of the world of senses. (G: 4:452, 454)

As Kant sees things, then, we human beings have within us an essentially active faculty (namely, our practical reason) whose distinctive activity is to constantly try to impose a lawlike order on our practical lives, which it does by trying to make us to govern ourselves on the basis of principles that could serve as universal laws for all reason-endowed beings. This is what it is, on Kant's view, to have a will or practical reason in the first place. And this is also, as I will now argue, precisely why Kant claims that any being with reason represents the reason-endowed nature as an end in itself. What do I mean by this?

Well, an *end* (on Kant's explicit definition) is the basis on which we choose our principles or guidelines of action. And *the reason-endowed nature* is the existence of beings with reason under principles they represent as universal laws. So if we have within us a faculty (namely, our practical reason) whose essential nature it is to prompt us to subject ourselves to principles on the basis of how they are fit to serve as universal laws, then we have within us a faculty whose chief end is the existence and realization of the reason-endowed nature. We have within us a faculty, Kant thus claims, that tries to impose lawlike order on our practical lives: a faculty that tries, in other words, to make us use the idea of us and other reason-being under principles represented as universal laws as our highest end or basis for choosing our principles of action. So if we combine Kant's definition of an 'end', his understanding of the 'reason-endowed nature', and his claim that our own reason has as its internal end, or basis for directing our wills, that we function on the basis of lawlike principles; then it follows that we necessarily have the reason-endowed nature as an end simply in virtue of possessing practical reason.

We can now summarize the whole argument for why (as Kant sees things) each being with practical reason, simply because it has reason, necessarily represents the reason-endowed nature as an end. First step: having as our basis for the choice of guiding principles that these principles be fit to serve as universal laws amounts to having the reason-endowed nature as our end because (1) an *end* is the basis on which we choose our guiding principles and (2) *the reason-endowed nature* is the existence of beings under shared principles represented as universal laws. Second step: it is our own practical reason that, by its very nature, tries to impose such a lawlike order upon our practical lives:

it does so by trying to make us govern ourselves on the basis of principles fit to be universal laws. Conclusion: having practical reason amounts to, or is the same as, having an internal faculty whose internal end is that the reason-endowed nature be realized: an internal faculty that, through our wills, tries to bring about, preserve, and fully realize the existence of beings under principles they represent as universal laws.

The reasons why (as Kant sees things) each being with reason necessarily represents the reason-endowed nature (= the existence of beings with reason under shared principles represented as universal laws) as an end thus have nothing to do with values or value-judgments. These reasons instead all have to do with Kant's ideas about how our own practical reason functions and also with what Kant means when he talks about *ends* and *the reason-endowed nature*. When our practical reason operates 'freely' and 'autonomously', and nothing is holding it back, then what it does, Kant thinks, is to bring about a lawlike order under which we and other reason-endowed beings can exist under shared principles we represent as laws (G: 4:446–47). That is what Kant means when he says that, insofar as we are governed by our own practical reason, we have the existence and realization of the reason-endowed nature as our most basic end.

5. Two Objections and Two Replies

We now, then, have a new reading of what Kant means when he says that each being with reason has the reason-endowed nature as an end. This reading, unlike the value-based readings, helps to explain Kant's equivalence claim. It also makes sense of Kant's claim that the third part of the *Groundwork* gives his reasons for claiming that each being with reason represents the reason-endowed nature as an end. It is perfectly compatible with Kant's claim that the value of everything (including the value of the reason-endowed being) is determined after, and by means of, the law. It also, finally, does a better job than the value-based readings at fitting the passage we are discussing into the overall context in which it appears: namely, Kant's discussion—which spans over of the second and third parts of the *Groundwork*—of how the properties of the will of a reason-endowed being explain why it is a necessary law for us to subject ourselves to lawlike maxims. So the reading I am offering is better than the value-based readings on all the four counts discussed in section 2 above.

I will now end by anticipating and responding to two objections that might be raised against my suggested reading. These two issues will be particularly fitting to discuss in this overall context. Why? Because based on some of the arguments that defenders of value-based readings use in favor of their theories, it might seem that the reading I am offering is uncharitable towards Kant in two specific respects. But in neither of these respects is, I shall now argue, my reading uncharitable towards Kant.

The first possible worry is that the focus above on the idea of our reason as an internal faculty that imposes lawlike order on all its objects of consideration

can make a moral mind-set appear much less impressive and respect-inspiring than Kant's discussion makes such a mind-set out to be. Our nature as beings with reason, Kant famously claims, is 'an object of respect' (G: 4:428); and when we are presented with examples of honesty and other types of morally motivated actions, our 'spirit bows' (KpV: 5:77). It might seem as if value-based readings have an easier time explaining what Kant has in mind in making such claims. It can seem, in other words, as if treating each human being as unconditionally valuable—which is what value-based theorists understand Kant's idea of humanity as an end in itself as amounting to—is something that more obviously and easily could inspire a feeling of respect within us when we are confronted with examples of morally motivated people. The idea of being governed by a law-imposing reason whose end is the existence of human being under rules and laws, in contrast, might seem a little obsessive, like some kind of 'rule-worship' (Smart 1973). So am I not, in offering my reading, being uncharitable to Kant?

Whether the law- and order-centered reading that I am offering comes off as uncharitable to Kant—as a reading that makes Kant's theory appear as a seemingly blind rule-worship—depends, I think, on what way of framing the mind-set Kant describes that we use. Once we think of this mind-set in the way I suspect that Kant himself mainly thinks of it, it no longer, I think, seems obsessive, but instead comes across as something that it obviously makes sense that Kant and others (perhaps ourselves included) would respect so much. Here is what I mean.

If we are determined to interact with others on the basis of shared principled that are fit to serve as universal laws, and to thereby bring about an order under which we all operate on the same principles and the same terms, then we in effect adopt a fiercely egalitarian and anti-oppressive mind-set. If in a potentially privileged position, we refuse to accept any privileges we might be able to grab hold of at the expense of others, and instead insist on living on equal terms with those around us (MS: 6:449, 462). If in a disadvantaged position, having the mind-set that Kant describes would mean that we would stand up for ourselves and demand that we be treated as equals and that the terms on which we interact with others not permit others to dominate and oppress us (MS: 6:435). In short, the idea of using our law- and order-imposing faculty in our ethical thinking, as Kant describes what this would involve, leads to a strongly egalitarian ethical outlook that would condemn all sorts of oppression and domination, and which would subject all to equal terms: i.e. principles fit to serve as universal laws.

In response to the first worry, then, I want to say that if we think of Kant's view in the way I have just described—as a view that indeed is strongly focused on the subjection of all to certain lawlike principles, but which thereby brings about a non-oppressive, non-dominating, and thereby deeply egalitarian social order—then Kant's view certainly does not appear like a form of blind rule-worship. It instead becomes very clear why Kant had such a deep respect for the type of mind-set he was describing, and also why he would expect us to also

respond with this type of respect for those that possess such a mind-set. Whether or not we wholeheartedly share Kant's great enthusiasm for this type of deeply egalitarian social order—with everyone under shared rules they represent as universal laws applying equally to all—we should at least agree that it certainly is not uncharitable to Kant to understand him as having this type of idea in mind when he is talking about the reason-endowed nature as an end, and expressing his deep respect for those that treat such an order as an end in itself.

The next possible worry I wish to address—which I in effect already began addressing in making those remarks about the egalitarian, anti-oppressive, and non-dominating aspects of Kant's views above—is that my claim that treating the reason-endowed nature as an end consists in subjecting ourselves to lawlike basic principles ultimately makes Kant's theory come across as a kind of 'empty formalism' (in Hegel's phrase). Indeed defenders of value-based readings, such as Wood, tend to market their value-based readings precisely as ways of responding to this objection. It is, Wood argues, by appealing to a substantive value—namely, the unconditional value of each human being—and indeed only by appealing to such a value, that Kant is at all able to use his theory to generate any positive substantive implications.

Kant's universal law formula, Wood for example writes, is 'merely the first stage in a philosophical search for the supreme principle of morality' (Wood 1999, 110). Kant's different formulations of the universal law formula are just, Wood writes, 'the earliest and most abstract formulas Kant derives in the course of a progressive argument' and 'also the least adequate expressions of the supreme principle of morality, and the poorest in practical consequences' (Wood 1999, 110). After having put forward those merely initial and inadequate formulations of the moral law, Wood continues, Kant then 'proceeds immediately to specify the substantive value on which the principle rests' (Wood 1999, 107). And that is the supposedly basic and unconditional value of all beings with reason.

If Wood were right, then the reading that I am attributing to Kant—on which treating humanity as an end involves nothing over and above subjecting ourselves to maxims fit to be universal laws—leaves Kant in a situation where he never moves beyond the supposedly 'least adequate expressions' of the moral law, which are 'the poorest in practical consequences'. And that, if correct, is surely not a very charitable way to read Kant. But Wood and others that offer these sorts of arguments for their value-based readings are, I think, wrong in claiming that Kant's universal law formula is a merely formal requirement without any substantive implications.

We have already seen that the merely formal idea of refusing to act on any other principles than ones that are fit to be universal laws amounts to adopting an egalitarian perspective that opposes special privileges, oppression, domination, and that instead requires that all live on the same terms, whatever those might be. Those are already some rather strong practical and substantive implications generated by the kind of mind-set that the universal law formula requires us to adopt. But the implications of the universal law formula, I believe,

do not end there; at least not if, as Kant himself does, we combine the type of reasoning prescribed by the universal law formula with certain substantive ideas about what sorts of beings human beings are.

Thus the way Kant gets additional substantive implications out of his idea of trying to bring forth an order of beings under shared principles represented as universal laws—or, what comes to the same thing, subjecting ourselves to principles fit to be universal laws—is by combining this idea with supplementary ideas about what human beings are like. Maxims, in other words, fit to be universal laws are, as Kant sees things, not only ones that all could possibly adopt and govern themselves by, and under which our social relations would be egalitarian in nature; they are also basic principles under which we could both preserve and fully realize the distinctive nature that we have as beings of our particular human kind.

So what Kant does in his main work in substantive ethics, *The Metaphysics of Morals*—and what Kant already said that we need to do in the *Groundwork* when he claimed that the law needs to be ‘applied’ to human beings based on knowledge of ‘anthropology’—is precisely to go through various of aspects of (what he believes to be) our nature as human beings, and to offer various maxims and directives for how to relate to these aspects of our nature in ways that help to bring them into harmony with the idea of us as beings governing ourselves, and interacting with others, on the basis of universal and lawlike principles (See in particular G: 4:389; MS: 6:419–20; A 7:119.). Now I don’t want to say that all the arguments that Kant uses in the course of this discussion are compelling. Nor do I necessarily want to unequivocally endorse this type of moral reasoning. But I do want to insist that Kant’s universal law formula is a not a piece of empty formalism that cannot possibly be used in moral reasoning.

Take, for example, the basic claim, which Kant repeats in all his major ethical works, that all human beings desire happiness and the support of others. And ask what principle could be laid down as a universal law that could help us to combine this aspect of our nature with the idea of our governing ourselves, and interacting with others, on the basis of lawlike universalized maxims. The result you get, if this argument of Kant’s works the way it is supposed to, is ‘the maxim of benevolence’ that says to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ (i.e. make the happiness of all into one of your ends) (MS: 6:450–51).

The just-sketched argument of Kant’s does not appeal to the value of each human being. And so the worry that Kant’s view only generates substantive and practical implications if we understand it in the value-based way is unfounded. My reading—on which treating humanity as an end involves trying to bring about an order of beings under shared principles they represent as laws—is therefore not, I conclude, uncharitable to Kant in the sense of attributing to him a view that amounts to some sort of empty formalism. There may indeed be various good reasons for rejecting Kant’s views (or at least some parts of them), but we cannot include among those reasons the idea that Kant’s formulas lack any substantive or practical implications.

So, to conclude, the reading I am putting forward in this paper is not uncharitable to Kant, at least not in the two just-discussed respects. On this reading, to summarize, treating the reason-endowed nature as an end is the same as subjecting ourselves to lawlike principles since (1) an end, as Kant uses this term, is any basis for choosing our guiding principles and (2) the reason-endowed nature is the existence of an order of beings with reason under shared principles they represent as universal laws. Simply possessing practical reason, Kant thinks, means that we necessarily have this end—that we necessarily, in other words, have the idea of an order of reason-endowed beings under shared laws as a basis for the determination of our wills—because practical reason, as Kant understands it, just is an internal faculty that tries to impose a lawlike order onto our practical lives: a faculty, in other words, that tries to make us principled and that tries to make us use the idea of fitness to serve as universal laws as the basis on which we choose our principles. The reason why we do not always operate on the basis of such principles, and why the ‘moral law’ has to take the form of an imperative in relation to our wills, as Kant sees things, is that we are also, as human beings, under the influence of various inclinations, impulses, and desires that are not necessarily lawlike and universal in their nature. When Kant claims that each being with practical reason represents the reason-endowed nature as an end, then, he is not simply suggesting that we all attribute an unconditional value to ourselves. He is instead trying to describe how our reason functions and how it is possible for it to control our wills; he is, in his terms, conducting what he terms a ‘critique’ of our practical reason. Or so I have argued in this paper.⁵

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NOTES

¹ As is customary, I cite Kant by giving volume and page numbers in the Prussian Academy edition of Kant’s collected works. I also use the following abbreviations (derived from the original German titles): G: Kant 1785, KpV: Kant 1788, MS: Kant 1797, A: Kant 1798 [2006]. The translations are all my own.

² Sayre-McCord 2001; Markovits 2011; Langton 1992; Kerstein 2002; Hills 2005; Sussman 2003; Denis 2007. See also (Hill 1994).

³ Presenting another reading that also is not value-based, Oliver Sensen makes the alternative suggestion that when Kant claims that humanity is an end in itself, he is primarily making a *descriptive* claim that chiefly amounts to the claim that we have a free will. An end in itself, which is not a mere means to some other end, is, Sensen suggests, something that itself sets ends (Sensen 2009: 270–71, 274). But this does not obviously fit very well with Kant’s text, since Kant repeatedly claims that humanity is an ‘objective’ end set by reason, which we *should* have. Kant writes, for example, that ‘[t]his principle

of humanity and each reason-endowed nature in general as an end in itself (which the highest constraining condition of the freedom of action of each human being) is not drawn from experience ... because in it humanity is ... represented as ... an objective end, which—whatever other ends we may have—as a law should constitute the highest constraining condition on all subjective ends, hence [an end] that must spring out of pure reason.' (G: 4:430–31)

⁴ Korsgaard tries to make sense out of Kant's crucial promissory footnote by referring to the closing remarks of the *Groundwork*, which are in its third section, by pointing out that Kant does mention there that reason always seeks the unconditioned (Korsgaard 1986). This fits, Korsgaard thinks, with her suggestion that Kant's point is that we regard ourselves as unconditionally valuable. But this is not convincing. As I just said, Kant's brief remarks about how reason seeks the unconditioned are in his brief closing remarks that come after all the main action of the third section is over. And when he makes that remark he does so in a context that does not have to do with what kind of value we attribute to ourselves and/or our objects of choice.

⁵ In preparing this article, I have benefited greatly from the very helpful comments from an anonymous reviewer for this journal. In developing my reading of Kant's idea of humanity as an end in itself, I have benefited greatly from discussions with Elizabeth Anderson, Don Regan, Peter Railton, and, in particular, Sarah Buss.

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