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*Beyond the Sub-Humean Model: Instrumental Reason in
Aristotle, Hume, and Kant*

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Abstract

Generally upheld within disciplines as diverse as moral and political philosophy, economics, and political science is a standardised, “sub-Humean” conception of instrumental reason that is viewed as the only viable model of rationality, claiming its relative neutrality towards substantive evaluative content and supposed amenability to a radically secularised and pluralistic worldview as among its chief virtues. Based on these features, the standard model is conceptualised as freestanding and unsituated by a notion of objective normativity – in short, instrumental reason comes to acquire subjectivist connotations and neglects broader ethical issues that demand constraint upon self-interested, self-projecting behaviour.

Contemporary moral and political philosophers have rightly contested this model of rationality. However, their critical aim is undercut by their chosen methodological strategy: these current philosophers, against the background of the now dominant model, utilise and reappropriate the practical philosophy of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant as a point of departure for examining problems that are distinctive to *contemporary* liberal moral and political thinking. But in accepting a number of key presuppositions of the standard model, these critiques end up emulating the subjectivism and unsituatedness of the standard model. Thus, overlap between proponents and critics of the standard model signals a deeper ambivalence towards moral frameworks and foundationalist claims.

In contrast to the unsuccessful retrieval strategies of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant, the thesis argues that a critical stance towards the standard model must disentangle the terms of contemporary debates from those immanent to the philosophical frameworks of each of these key historical thinkers, thereby achieving the critical distance from contemporary concerns necessary to the elucidation of historically and conceptually important differences between current and past approaches to instrumental reason.

The thesis illustrates the importance of philosophical frameworks to our conception of instrumental reason through the comparative exegetical analysis of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. Interpretations of each thinker reveal the significance of their respective philosophical frameworks in helping them avoid the subjectivist and freestanding connotations of the standard model. Specifically, since Aristotle, Hume, and Kant incorporate a notion of ethical normative objectivity within their frameworks, I show that these three thinkers represent a rich if divergent historical tradition according to which an adequate understanding of the normative significance of instrumental practical reasoning depends on situating it within a broader moral, social, or metaphysical framework. I establish how Aristotle’s, Hume’s, and Kant’s thinking about practical reason is integrated within a more general frame of moral and political theorising that in each case reflects a degree of philosophical unease with the allure of a freestanding conception of instrumental rationality. Thus, a sympathetic examination of these historical thinkers’ metaphysical commitments are important to illustrate the need for contemporary philosophers to directly confront, examine and articulate the comparative moral framework situating our current conception of instrumental reason.

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1 Introduction

I. The Dilemma of Instrumental Reason

This thesis provides a comparative investigation of divergent conceptions of the role of instrumental reasoning in the history of philosophy with a view to diagnosing and explaining a predominant ambivalence concerning the nature and status of instrumental reasoning in current moral and political philosophy. This ambivalence reveals itself in a simultaneous aversion against and pull towards the idea of instrumental reasoning: while frequently decried as morally flawed or impoverished, instrumental conceptions of practical reasoning are also generally accepted as inescapable for us on broader methodological grounds. For proponents of the currently dominant, “sub-Humean”¹ conceptions of practical instrumental reason (what I subsequently also call “the standard model”) its freestanding nature and alleged neutrality towards objective normativity are considered its most beneficial features. Even as detractors express concerns about the absence of standards of normative objectivity and the resultant subjectivist implications of the standard model, common to both critics and proponents is the thought that the avoidance of metaphysical commitments is an appropriate philosophical reflection of our times.

To provide an accurate diagnosis of this underlying ambivalence towards the role of instrumental reasoning my thesis examines a range of influential historical conceptions and their partial reappropriations by contemporary critics of the standard model. I argue that these attempts at partial historical retrieval tend to “lift out” discrete elements of their positions irrespective of how these claims are situated within their wider original philosophical frameworks. This strategy reflects a widespread hesitancy to commit oneself to foundationalist philosophical arguments which specify the ends or goods of practical reason.

In part this reluctance to posit comprehensive, foundationalist arguments is understandable: the paradigm of scientific explanation has been successful in numerous areas of study and it seems inevitable that this type of explanation will penetrate into philosophical discussions of morality. On these grounds, it seems more in keeping with the scientific worldview to adopt a stance of value neutrality or even scepticism about the existence of objective moral facts.² Not only are those dubious metaphysical commitments traditionally associated with moral objectivism avoided, but the fact of value pluralism, too,

¹ “Sub-Humean” refers to the term used by Bernard Williams to describe a model of instrumental reasoning that claims to be inspired by Hume. I will explain the supposed Humean lineage in the following section but argue against this attribution in Chapters 4 and 5.

² J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) pp. 38-42.

can be much better accommodated. These background concerns inform debates between contemporary Humeans and Kantians about the motivational authority and normative source of reason (such as Bernard Williams and Christine Korsgaard). It is also evident among neo-Aristotelian attempts to formulate “objective lists” articulating the ends of practical reason, but all the while linking these ends to the expression of individual autonomy in a pluralistic domain (seen in the work of Joseph Raz and Martha Nussbaum).

However, despite their intention to criticise and provide an alternative to the sub-Humean model I will examine how contemporary reappropriations are likely to collapse back into a version of the subjectivism of the standard model. For both critics and proponents of the standard model, instrumental reason is not constrained within a wider framework of moral thinking in which it is situated. To clarify my terminological use, throughout this thesis I will refer to a number of different frameworks: “philosophical”, “situating”, “orientating”, “moral” frameworks. “Philosophical” frameworks refer more specifically to the architectonic structure of a theory which tries to articulate and structure the content of “situating”, “orientating”, “moral”, or “normative” frameworks. These latter terms – which I will use interchangeably with the geographical terms, “horizons” and “landscapes” – refer to constitutive values and goods which grant broader meaning and significance to human life as well as situating our practical agency. I will discuss the function of the importance of these frameworks in the latter sections.

In my thesis these problems form the backbone of my scepticism about the success of contemporary re-appropriations of historical conceptions of practical reason, though I share their anxiety about the ubiquity of the standard model within the social sciences. Alongside its use in moral philosophy I outline economic and political theory’s application of the standard model in the following section. Section III explores Charles Taylor’s rejection of the standard model; in this section I shall also explain my scepticism about the possibility of partial historical retrieval as a possible alternative to the standard model. Finally, Section IV provides the structure of the overall thesis.

II. The Standard Model Outlined

i) The Sub-Humean Model

Though the standard model is widely thought of as based on Hume’s account of practical action, its supporters, including Bernard Williams, Michael Smith, and David Gauthier, point out that this model does not represent a close textual rendering of Hume’s views. Rather, their conclusions simplify and gain inspiration from Hume’s most

polemical statements about desire and reason.³ Moreover, accounts of the standard model are not homogenous and vary in some respects: though Gauthier's Hobbesian reading of the Humean model is clearly influenced by the economic model of rational choice, other proponents of the standard model are not.⁴ Williams and Smith are both concerned with providing an empirically plausible account of motivation which rejects the reductivism of Gauthier's views.⁵ Some accept Hume's account of motivational reasons but reject his account of normativity.⁶

Articulations of the standard model may differ in subtle ways but there is nonetheless consensus over a number of core features which are also deemed its chief virtues. These include, first, its neutrality towards objectivist claims and commitment to a subjectivist philosophical framework. Second, this subjectivism helps avoid the positing of questionable metaphysical claims. Finally, the predictive capacity of this model is commended, particularly among rational choice theorists and economists.

First, the subjectivist framework of the sub-Humean model is considered an asset because value pluralism can be readily accommodated within it. Its proponents want to forward a strong explanatory and naturalistic theory of practical action even whilst maintaining a stance of value neutrality. A theoretical minimalism is endorsed and reflected in their philosophical framework: any commitment to objectivist claims that exert conceptual pressure on the kinds of ends individual agents should adopt is conscientiously avoided. Instead, the focus is on the necessary constituents of practical motivation – belief and desire – in order to provide an empirically plausible explanatory framework of practical action. The belief-desire model specifies that “actions are caused and rationalised by a pair of mental states: a desire for some end, where ends can be thought of as ways the would could be, and a belief of the agent that something she can just do, [...] has some suitable chance of making the world the relevant way.”⁷

According to this belief-desire model, reason itself is inert – reasons are motivational only when they are related to what Williams' calls an agent's “subjective motivational set”. Though usually conceived of as containing subjective desires for particular ends, Williams notes that this set may be comprised of “dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional

³ Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reason” in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-80* (Cambridge: UP, 1981) p. 102.

⁴ The Hobbesian reading of the Humean model means literally that Hume is interpreted as very similar to Hobbes in his account of human motivation and action. This helps explain the misreading of Hume by contemporary readers, Gauthier and Jean Hampton among them.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Also Michael Smith in *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) criticises Gauthier's version of the sub-Humean model. I will provide an outline of Gauthier's views later in this section.

⁶ See Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

⁷ Michael Smith, “Instrumental Desires, Instrumental Rationality,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 78* (2004): 101.

reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent.”⁸ Normative reasons become motivational through the internalist requirement: our norms or justificatory reasons must be connected to our subjective motivational set and are therefore internal not external reasons.⁹

This subjective turn shifts attention to the specific agent and her internal reasons rather than a relevant conception of objective normativity – be it in the form of objective specifications of the good, reason or desire.¹⁰ The agent-relativity of reasons entails that instrumental reason’s function is thought of as the promotion of subjective ends. Most proponents of the standard model suggest these subjective aims and commitments will not necessarily be self-interested. But, as Williams suggests, one can only “hope” that the agent will have altruistic, other-regarding commitments and projects which also form reasons for action.¹¹ This theory passes no judgement as to whether other-regarding interests *ought* to or *do* shape one’s individual choices.¹²

This leads to another considered virtue of the standard model. The subjectivist philosophical framework situating the standard model frees conceptions of practical reason from the metaphysical burdens associated with moral objectivism, thereby better accommodating the social reality of value pluralism and our scientific viewpoint. Scepticism about objective ends of reason stems from a pervasive dichotomy operating within contemporary moral philosophy: the source of human value is thought either to

⁸ Williams, “Internal Reason,” p. 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-13.

¹⁰ It is clear that this aspect has overlap with the economist’s discussion of welfare and utility. Economists believe the maximisation of utility depends entirely on an agent’s individual consumption and the pursuit of their self-interest. All choices, if they are considered rational, are reduced to the pursuit and maximisation of an individual’s own self-interest. This theory passes no judgement as to whether other-regarding interests in fact do, or ought to, shape and delimit one’s individual choices. This model may say little about the substantive content of one’s preferences, but it nonetheless presumes much in terms of the *motivation* behind preference-formation. A close connection is said to obtain between action that promotes individual interests – also called “welfare” – and what it means to be rational. According to this model, both prudence and rational choice are equivalent to enlightened self-interest: even the choices of the most altruistic person are thought to be maximising their own personal utility. Economic theories of instrumental rationality therefore assume that social, political or external goods possess an instrumental, not intrinsic, significance, where their value lies solely in their benefit and importance *to individuals*.

¹¹ Williams, “Internal Reason,” p. 105.

¹² It should be noted that Smith tries to situate his endorsement of the sub-Humean account of motivation within an anti-Humean theory of normative reasons. But ultimately he ends up endorsing a species of the subjectivism he tries to avoid. Smith writes, “[t]o say that someone has a normative reason to Φ is to say that there is some normative requirement that she Φ s, and is thus to say the her Φ -ing is justified from the perspective of the normative system that generates that requirement. As I see it [...] normative reasons are thus best thought of as truths: that is, propositions of the general form ‘As Φ -ing is desirable or required’. *These truths may well be many and varied, as many and varied as there are normative systems for generating requirements*” (*The Moral Problem*, p. 95, emphasis added). The subjectivist implications of the standard model penetrate into Smith’s account of normative reasons, mainly because he cannot move away from scepticism about the existence of substantive objective ends of practical reason.

derive from objective moral facts or must be viewed as the product of individual creation and anthropocentric power.¹³ If normative principles had value independent of the human will and motivation, *a priori* claims would be required of all systems of morality. The sub-Humean model subscribes to the view that, if moral objectivism is metaphysically implausible in our scientific age, normativity must stem from a form of “creative anti-realism”. Incidences of akrasia and depression may illustrate how normative reasons can exist independently of motivating reasons¹⁴; yet normative reasons are still understood as the result of individual, subjective preferences or social construction.

The normativity of instrumental reason itself is grounded in standards of coherence and consistency between contingent desires rather than in substantive foundationalist commitments deemed metaphysically questionable from a scientific viewpoint. Smith describes these standards in terms of local and global coherence: local coherence demands that desired ends and instrumental reasons must be appropriately related to each other. Global coherence goes further and demands that an agent’s complementing instrumental desires are consistent with their means-end beliefs and non-instrumental desires. In other words, norms of rationality are restricted to the structural consistency of that particular agent’s subjective motivational set, between their means-end beliefs and instrumental and non-instrumental desires. One is rational if an agent is “in a state of maximal preparedness to act in way that optimally satisfy their desires, given their beliefs, under a whole range of counterfactual circumstances”¹⁵, but is nonetheless silent on the qualitative content of one’s choices.

ii) *The influence of sub-Humean model in economic theory*

For many, the standard model’s descriptive nature lends itself well to the predictive and policy aspirations of economics. Economists adopt this language of desire satisfaction, subjective preference rankings, and maximisation which then enables them to make policy recommendations based on predictions about human practical behaviour. Though it “does not, and it cannot, enable us to evade the necessity of choosing between alternatives,” the standard model does propose a tidy solution to problems posed by divisiveness and “split personalities”; “ it does make it possible for us to bring our different choices into

¹³ On this objection, see John E. Hare, “Essay Review on Christine Korsgaard’s *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*,” *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000): 375-7. For someone who adheres to this division in his interpretation of Kant, see J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: UP, 1998). For these strategies, see Mackie, *Ethics*.

¹⁴ See Smith.

¹⁵ Smith, “Instrumental Desires,” p. 108.

harmony”.¹⁶ Lionel Robbins writes, “it cannot remove the ultimate limitations on human action. But it does make it possible within these limitations to act consistently.”¹⁷ Here Robbins implies that the standard model does not claim to represent the full range of human agency but aspires to conceptualise practical action under certain idealised circumstances so as to explain consistent action.

However, the usability of the sub-Humean model within economic theory is subject to debate. Amartya Sen, Daniel Hausman, and Albert Hirschman argue that the underlying assumptions of the standard model represent an overly simplified description of rational choice. For Sen, economic theory needs to draw upon different concepts and “a more elaborate structure” related to one’s practical agency, which would then make allowances for complex choices and aims.¹⁸ Similarly, Hirschman points out that numerous activities, choices, and complex ends are not conducive to predictable outcome and deviate from the idealised assumptions of the standard model. Pursuits of some goods such as truth, beauty, justice, and friendship “are strongly characterized by a certain fusion of (and confusion between) striving and attaining”, writes Hirschman, and “a means-end or cost-benefit calculus is impossible under the circumstances”.¹⁹ The supposed ethical neutrality of the standard model has also come under attack. Hausman suggests that the welfare economist must consider more seriously the unavoidability of ethical issues and value judgements when explaining human agency or addressing economic problems.²⁰

These critics hope that by engaging with the ethical dimensions of human agency, economists can improve the explanatory force and practical applicability of their theoretical model.²¹ Though I am sympathetic to these criticisms it should be recognised that economists who utilise the standard model generally accept that their conception of rationality involves heavily idealised and artificial presuppositions for the purposes of prediction. Since my worries about the standard model lie elsewhere in the field of moral and political philosophy I refrain my commenting on this specific debate. Ultimately, however, my point is that the success of the standard model in one disciplinary area, such as economics, helps explain its hegemony elsewhere, which is illustrated precisely in the rational choice models adopted by contemporary political theorists such David Gauthier and John Rawls.

¹⁶ Lionel Robbins, “The Nature and Significance of Economic Science,” in Daniel Hausman, ed., *The Philosophy of Economics 2nd ed.* (Cambridge: UP, 1994) p. 95.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Amartya Sen, “Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* Vol. 6:4 (1977): 336.

¹⁹ Albert Hirschman, “Against parsimony: three easy ways of complicating economic discourse,” *American Economic Review* 74 (2): 91-2.

²⁰ Daniel M. Hausman and Michael S. McPherson, “Economics, Rationality, and Ethics,” in Hausman, ed., *Philosophy of Economics*, p. 263.

²¹ Ibid., p. 272.

iii) *The influence of sub-Humean model in rational choice theory*

The synthesis between the belief-desire model and economist's presuppositions about the maximising tendencies of humans is manifested in the rational choice theories adopted within mainstream political theory. In *Morals by Agreement* Gauthier adopts the standard model to generate a conception of political morality, where he claims that reason seeks to maximise individual interests, benefits, or preferences, providing the necessary causal information towards these subjective ends.²² Reason has no objective ends:

[I]n identifying rationality with the maximization of a measure of preference, the theory of rational choice disclaims all concern with the ends of action. Ends may be inferred from individual preferences; if the relationships among these preferences, and the manner in which they are held, satisfy the conditions of rational choice, *then the theory accepts whatever ends they imply.*²³

Gauthier's model of rational choice suggests that value is subjectively "created or determined through preference" or the "product of our affections" as opposed to an objective feature of the world.²⁴

The economist's version of the standard model is also evident in John Rawls' chosen model of rational choice in *A Theory of Justice*.²⁵ Like Gauthier, Rawls suggests that this "concept of rationality [...] is the standard one familiar in social theory", whereby "a rational person is thought to have a coherent set of preferences between the options open to him."²⁶ Further, "[h]e ranks these options according to how well they further his purposes; he follows the plan which will satisfy more of his desires rather than less, and which has the greater chance of being successfully executed."²⁷ Rawls claims that the two principles of justice as fairness will be generated from these assumptions about individual rational choice in the original position. Rational individuals "try to protect their liberties, widen their opportunities, and enlarge their means for promoting their aims whatever they are"

²² David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1986) p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁵ See Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: UP, 1989) p. 207.

²⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999) pp. 123-4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 124.

and this is “a rational decision in the ordinary sense.”²⁸ In short, the only rational principle is “to adopt that plan which maximizes the expected net balance of satisfaction.”²⁹

Like other proponents of the sub-Humean model, Gauthier and Rawls are noncommittal about the substantive ends of individual agents, confining reason to the determination of means and the maximisation of subjective interests, and therefore situate their account of rational choice within a subjectivist and naturalistic philosophical framework. As the supporting foundation to their theories, if this model of rational choice is neutral towards objective ends, Gauthier’s and Rawls’ liberalism appear to accommodate well both pluralism in society as well as the predominance of the scientific outlook. These latter virtues, according to Gauthier, account for the standard model’s “universal acceptance” in the social sciences.³⁰

III. *The Standard Model Rejected*

Despite Gauthier’s bold statement, the sub-Humean model of instrumental reason is problematic for a number of moral philosophers.³¹ In his genealogy of modern selfhood Charles Taylor provides an incisive account of the animating roots of the standard model: instrumental reason has turned into a problem because it has become situated within an ethic of domination and technological control which has a number of subjectivist, reductivist, and atomistic implications in both public life and personal experience. This current philosophical framework reflects a powerful but limited historical vision which loses credibility once we properly explore the full breadth of moral sources underlying why instrumental reason has significance for us.³²

Ultimately, the entrenchment of this distorting philosophical framework of instrumental reason is due to what Taylor calls “the naturalistic temper” in philosophy.³³

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 365, also see p. 367.

³⁰ Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement*, p. 8. According to Gauthier, the standard model as a rational choice theory is based on the view that “[t]he best explanation we can provide for our observations is that there are physical objects with properties that, given our sensory apparatus, cause those observations”; and “physical properties [are] part of any adequate account of our experience and environment.” (p. 56)

³¹ See John McDowell, “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement* (1978): 13-29, and “Virtue and Reason,” *Monist* 68 (1979): 331-50; Onora O’Neill, “Four Models of Practical Reasoning,” in *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: UP, 2000) pp. 11-28; Jean E. Hampton, *The Authority of Reason* (Cambridge: UP, 1998) and “Rethinking Reason,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29:3 (1992): 219-36; Christine Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason,” in Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) pp. 220-234

³² Taylor criticises anti-instrumentalist readings and critiques of modernity, such as endorsed by Leo Strauss, on the same grounds.

³³ Taylor speaks of this distortion in *Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1991) p. 101, but the factors leading to this distortion is more fully explored in *Sources of the Self; The*

Under the broad heading of “the naturalistic temper” are three characteristics. Two of these have already been examined in the course of my general outline of the standard model above, thus my description of them in the context of Taylor’s position will be brief.

First, according to Taylor the naturalistic temper tries to do away with “a given ontology of the human but focuses instead on subjective moral reactions which are reducible to sociobiological explanation.”³⁴ Determination of ends or goods depends on instinctual individual desires, inclinations and choices. Goods cannot be distinguished in qualitative terms – they occupy the same spectrum with no higher or lower ways of life.³⁵

Second, the naturalist expresses outright hostility towards or does away altogether with orientating frameworks incorporating strong qualitative distinctions about the “good life” – a seemingly necessary concession to the social reality of pluralism. The “stripped-down ontology which excludes these frameworks seems to them more in keeping with a scientific outlook.”³⁶ Rejected is the notion that moral frameworks are constitutive of the self, necessary in order to orientate oneself and understand one’s identity.

Finally, the naturalistic temper assumes that our understanding of human behaviour must be continuous with natural science explanation. According to Taylor this tendency is manifest in moral philosophy’s misconstrual of Hume’s fact/value distinction: accounts of the good are allocated to the sphere of values rather than fact.

Two possibilities emerge from this last distinction: on one account the good is relegated to the sphere of subjective value, and to determine these goods would be a subjective enterprise, a “projection” of subjective properties. Naturalistic explanation could not include value articulation and descriptions or terms which bridge the fact-value divide are invalid. The second possibility is to shift our theoretical focus onto rules and obligatory action away from substantive articulations of the good. In Taylor’s words, “[t]he focus is on the principles, or injunctions, or standards which guide *action*, while visions of the good are altogether neglected. Morality is narrowly concerned with what we ought to *do*, and not also with what is valuable in itself, or what we should admire or love.”³⁷

At root, however, both possibilities embrace what Taylor calls a “procedural” as opposed to “substantive” conception of practical reason. A “substantive” account of reason maintains that correct reasoning is constituted and defined by substantial truth; it reflects an

Making of Modern Identity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989). Taylor’s account is much more complex and multilayered but for purposes of brevity some simplification is unavoidable.

³⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

accurate moral vision.³⁸ Reason is a form of cognising and participating within a natural, cosmological order which is also defined as good. This characterises ancient models of rationality. But if the domain of “value” and notions of the substantive good have a questionable epistemological and metaphysical status from a modern naturalist viewpoint, practical reason must be “procedural”. This means that reason is “defined in terms of a certain style, method, or procedure of thought”.³⁹ The subjectivist turn in contemporary moral and political philosophy is therefore unsurprising, for, according to Taylor, the procedural account tries to accord some significance to practical reason whilst prioritising the agent’s desires, inclinations, or subjective will.⁴⁰ Practical reason so defined is committed to a specific method applied to reaching an open, unarticulated outcome.⁴¹ The predominance of the standard model attests to the entrenchment of procedural accounts of practical reason in contemporary moral philosophy.

Taylor provides an incisive response to these three factors. Against the first two, he provides a convincing account of how situating frameworks incorporating strong qualitative distinctions provide an important and inescapable source of substance and worth to one’s life, essentially constituting one’s sense of self.⁴² Taylor writes,

[T]he horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover, this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings [...]. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.⁴³

Using the example of language, Taylor illustrates how moral frameworks function as a necessary orientating horizon, as a point of reference for one’s own views on what is good, valuable, endorsable or not.⁴⁴ Thus, the naturalist view that such frameworks can be hived off is illusory.

Moreover, for Taylor some goods and moral intuitions are judged better and more significant – and the moral demand to fulfil these goods exercise a powerful influence on us accordingly. Goods, such as “respect for the life, integrity, and well-being [or] flourishing of others” as well as the “affirmation of ordinary life,” are “uncommonly deep, powerful,

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 85-6.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 20-6, 33-5.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

and universal”.⁴⁵ Those moral reactions which the naturalist would call subjective projections, are actually an “assent to” or “affirmation of a given ontology of the human”.⁴⁶ Tensions may exist in our moral consciousness but this does not automatically mean we do away with strong evaluative distinctions of goods.⁴⁷ As “incomparably higher” than others, some goods or ends cannot be measured on the same scale of ordinary goods, ends, and desires.⁴⁸ These goods “stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices, that they represent standards by which these desires and choices are judged.” And further, “the goods which command our awe must also function in some sense as standards for us.”⁴⁹

Finally, if these situating, value-constituted frameworks are unavoidable, it follows for Taylor that practical reason cannot be understood in a strictly procedural sense. Though procedural practical reason seeks to remain neutral towards the outcomes or ends of reason, it in fact presupposes both the primacy of some goods over others, as well as a background understanding of the incomparable goods concerned. Though an implicit adhesion to certain significant goods is present, procedural practical reason leaves us inarticulate about their value and meaning. The underlying impetus of naturalist explanation and procedural conceptions of reason is a variety of moral sources which are ironically obscured by the vehement denial of that source’s existence.⁵⁰ As Taylor states,

Impelled by the strongest metaphysical, epistemological, and moral ideas of the modern age, these theories narrow our focus to the determinants of action, and then restrict our understanding of these determinants still further by defining practical reason as exclusively procedural. They utterly mystify the priority of the moral by identifying it not with substance but with a form of reasoning, around which they draw a firm boundary. They then are led to defend this boundary all the more fiercely in that it is their only way of doing justice to the hypergoods which move them although they cannot acknowledge them.⁵¹

For Taylor, rejecting the procedural account is important to make space for a type of “articulating” reason which understands how crucial qualitative distinctions are inevitable parts of practical thinking and action.

Ultimately the naturalistic tendency to hive off its situating moral frameworks leads to a dilemma: Taylor concludes that “[t]hose who flaunt the most radical denials and

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 89.

repudiations of selective facets of the modern identity generally go on living by variants of what they deny. There is a large component of delusion in their outlook.”⁵² I argue that this same irony and delusion can also be applied to contemporary critiques of the standard model: on one hand there is an anxiety about the predominant role of instrumental reason within our lives and how this may constrict our moral vision, yet on the other hand presenting an alternative is palpably difficult given contemporary philosophers’ reluctance to distance themselves from the entrenched naturalist temper within the discipline. There is anxiety over the moral costs of a subjectivist conception of instrumental reason, yet the lack of awareness and even endorsement of the underlying source of that subjectivism precludes proper confrontation of that anxiety.

To address this dilemma Taylor tries to adopt a balance between two narrow readings of modernity with the hope of illuminating, rearticulating, and retrieving the underlying moral and spiritual sources animating the significance that instrumental reason has for us today.⁵³ These sources have been eclipsed by, on one side, the naturalist temper which embraces as all-important the standard model of practical action, and on the other side, by critiques of modernity which reject wholesale the pervasiveness of instrumental reason throughout the modern age.⁵⁴ “We have read so many goods out of our official story, we have buried their power so deep beneath layers of philosophical rationale, that they are in danger of stifling,” Taylor writes. “Or rather, since they are our goods, human goods, *we* are stifling.”⁵⁵

I am deeply sympathetic to Taylor’s diagnosis of how these moral sources have become obscured because of the predominant naturalistic temper, leaving us with a scaled down model of practical agency. I share Taylor’s opposition to the assumption that broader, moral orientating frameworks can be done away with at will without incurring severe moral costs. Indeed, my thesis emphasises the importance of awareness of how certain views are philosophically situated.

However, I am less optimistic about Taylor’s attempts at retrieving these obscured moral sources of instrumental reason within the philosophical tradition. One might argue that in reappropriating the historical conceptions of practical reason a richer tradition of moral thinking is being uncovered by critics of the standard model. But I disagree with this reading: I believe that the process of retrieval is much more difficult than Taylor envisages, as evidenced *precisely* by contemporary reappropriations of historical thinkers.

⁵² Ibid., p. 504.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 520.

⁵⁴ See for instance Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), also *On Tyranny*, revised ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 520.

As I explore in my thesis, opponents of the standard model typically enlist Aristotle's, Hume's or Kant's conception of practical reason in support of their normative projects but rope off their broader frameworks of qualitative distinctions because of the metaphysical commitments they entail. This move may be self-conscious or not.⁵⁶ On one hand these deep-seated worries about metaphysical claims and a priori arguments are understandable. Taylor accurately points out the multilayered source of these worries – i.e. a commitment to freedom and affirmation of ordinary life, a rejection of moral or societal elitism, the ubiquity of natural science explanation.

On the other hand, like Taylor, I believe that we run into numerous problems if these worries dictate our moral vision – as they do within current attempts at retrieval. The move to discard the original philosophical frameworks situating these historical views reveal how a number of contemporary critics of the standard model are themselves guilty of subscribing to what Taylor deems a “stripped-down ontology”. This lies at the heart of the dilemma of instrumental reason as I have articulated it – namely the tendency to collapse back into the underlying subjectivism of the standard model despite the genuine unease surrounding the role and nature of the instrumental reason in moral and political philosophy.

The rejection of certain philosophical frameworks may speak of how difficult it is to relieve oneself of the pressure exerted by the naturalistic temper. But if certain metaphysical commitments are genuinely unavailable to us today, resort to truncated versions of historical positions is questionable and incurs costs we may not wish acknowledge.

First, we compromise the philosophical fidelity of past ideas. Issues of textual exegesis are not my main concern however: even more of a worry is how we become unaware of *our own* philosophical situatedness within moral frameworks – a particularly damaging price to pay if Taylor is right about how these latter frameworks function as moral orientations for the self. Taylor is absolutely correct to say that examination of the past and the different historical traditions is incredibly important.⁵⁷ But this examination must acknowledge the philosophical situatedness of current and past views – how these

⁵⁶ For instance, John Rawls is more upfront about how he is discarding Kant's metaphysics, whereas others such as Christine Korsgaard are not. And as we see in Chapter 8, this is a conscious move by Bernard Williams.

⁵⁷ “The very fact of this self-definition in relation to the past induces us to re-examine this past and the way it has been assimilated or repudiated. Very often, understanding how this has in fact come about gives us insight into contemporary views which would not be otherwise available. In understanding our differences from the ancients, we have a better idea what our assimilation of their paradigms of self-rule actually amount to for us; and in looking more closely at the ‘traditions’ which our Enlightenment thought supposedly repudiated, and at the forms that repudiation took, we may come to see the difference between the two opposed terms in a new light, and consequently to take a new view on contemporary philosophy.” Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 103-4.

frameworks provided a moral orientation for past philosophical ideas and how some comparable but dissimilar framework orientates us ourselves. When we fail to recognise the philosophical situatedness and constraints of past conceptions of instrumental reason it translates into an unawareness of the situatedness and relevant constraints of contemporary conceptions. We end up endorsing the position we are trying to avoid. As this thesis will show, it is this lack of reflective awareness – evident in the disjuncture between the philosophical minimalism and the unexamined but necessary orientating framework – which then causes those opponents of the standard model to collapse back into a species of moral subjectivism they seek to evade.

IV. Outline of the Thesis

Thus my thesis claims that the “uncovering [of] buried goods” is more challenging than Taylor imagines as evidenced by the truncated re-appropriations of historical authors in contemporary debates about instrumental reasoning. To establish this point, my thesis focuses on Aristotle, Hume and Kant, as each are thought to provide a different but viable philosophical tradition of practical reason.⁵⁸ Each chapter on Aristotle, Hume, and Kant provides, first, an interpretive analysis of instrumental reason as situated within their original philosophical frameworks which stipulate objective human ends. Second, I critically examine prominent contemporary authors who – like myself – are anxious about the pre-eminence of the standard model, but are unsuccessful at their attempted retrieval of historical conceptions of practical reason. My strategy shows how the philosophical framework of historical models helps avoid moral subjectivist conclusions; in doing away with such normative objective frameworks, its truncated versions by contrast collapse back into a form of moral subjectivism.

Chapters 2 and 3 begin with Aristotle for two reasons. First, Aristotle marks the beginning of an influential tradition of virtue ethics and practical reasoning which will help explicate my reading of Hume in subsequent chapters. Second, the objective framework of Aristotle’s function argument specifies universal human ends which situate his account of practical wisdom (which is reasoning of ends as well as means), cleverness (which is akin to the standard model) and the practical syllogism. The subjectivism of the standard model is kept at bay precisely by this broader philosophical framework.

By contrast, the prominent neo-Aristotelian approach of Martha Nussbaum cannot help collapsing back into a species of moral subjectivism. Within contemporary debates about practical reason neo-Aristotelians believe that their approach occupies a middle

⁵⁸ See, for instance, the volume of essays within Gaut and Cullity, *Ethics and Practical Reason*, which surround a debate about practical reason between these three thinkers in particular.

ground between the standard and Kantian model: they share the Kantian's anxiety over the subjectivism of the standard model yet wish to avoid the abstraction and formalism of the Kantian response. This sought philosophical middle ground is partly justifiable given the reading I provide of Aristotle's practical syllogism in Chapter 3. However, Nussbaum minimises Aristotle's metaphysical framework in order to incorporate value incommensurability and pluralism into her conception of Aristotelian practical reason, thus weakening the objectivity of Aristotle's philosophical framework.

Chapters 4 to 7 discuss Hume and Kant. Both philosophers are typically understood as philosophical opponents in terms of the role accorded to practical reason. Though commonly understood as the historical source of the standard model, Chapters 4 and 5 dispute the sub-Humean reading of practical motivation which mistakenly attributes to Hume a similar naturalistic and moral subjectivist position. Humean instrumental reason is situated within a broader framework comprised of qualitative distinctions about human virtue, character development, and intersubjective judgements, thus showing a degree of continuity with Aristotle.⁵⁹ I argue that Hume's philosophical framework provides a substantive and integrated account of human beings as sociable and sympathetic agents, thereby articulating which ends and virtues are considered appropriate given that definitional account. This framework helps expose the Kantian presuppositions of a prominent sceptical interpretation of Hume in Chapter 5 and provides an appropriate segue into the discussion of Kant in Chapters 6 and 7.

If Hume is seen as the historical progenitor of the standard model, Kant is seen as his moral counterpart. Among contemporary Kantians, such as Rawls and Korsgaard, Kant is thought to provide a "moralised" conception of instrumental rationality and conversely, a "non-moralised" conception of moral reasoning. This strategy is achieved primarily through hiving off Kant's dualistic and metaphysical philosophical framework to produce a radically anthropocentric understanding of practical reason. But in so doing, as Chapter 6 and 7 argues, both Rawls and Korsgaard cannot avoid the subjectivist implications of the standard model. I show there how Kant's metaphysical framework is crucial to appreciate the full demandingness and objectivity of moral reason which provides the situating framework constraining our prudential use of reason.

The guiding thesis uniting this dissertation is that there are genuine philosophical costs incurred once situating frameworks are done away with, clouding both our interpretive engagement with historical ideas, and more importantly, our awareness of how our own ideas are situated within a moral framework which is constituted by its own constraints and underlying ethical interests. As I have described it, the ambivalence

⁵⁹ This point needs to be qualified. Hume's framework can be called "intersubjective" which differs from Aristotle's objectivist framework defined in terms of human function.

surrounding the standard model of instrumental reason attests to this “clouding” in both respects. Critics of the standard model find themselves in a rather intractable philosophical situation because of their own adhesion to a number of naturalist claims. My thesis argues that the current attempts at retrieval as of yet have not been successful, and may be much more daunting than we might envisage. The original claim of this dissertation is twofold: first, it contributes to our understanding of the role and central problematic surrounding instrumental rationality in contemporary moral and political philosophy, of which requires an approach that differs from the dominant “re-appropriation” strategies deployed by both adherents and detractors of the standard model. Second, my thesis contributes to debates surrounding the work of Aristotle, Hume and Kant, arguing that their central philosophical claims are deeply ensconced within their respective metaphysical, philosophical frameworks. I claim that these frameworks should be preserved regardless of how they may seem outdated from our modern, liberal perspective.

2 Aristotle and Means-End Deliberation

And so it is clear that prudence and virtue go together, and that these complex states are states of one in whom prudence and virtue are not combined, and the Socratic saying that nothing is stronger than prudence is right. But when Socrates said this of knowledge he was wrong. For prudence is virtue and not scientific knowledge, but another kind of cognition. [*Eudemian Ethics*, 1246b32-4]¹

I begin with Aristotle in part because he marks the beginning of an influential tradition of virtue ethics and practical reasoning which will help explicate my reading of Hume in subsequent chapters. However, the objective philosophical framework of Aristotle's function argument also specifies universal human ends which situate his account of practical wisdom (which includes reasoning about ends as well as means), cleverness (which is akin to the standard model) and the practical syllogism. The subjectivism of the standard model is kept at bay by this broader philosophical framework.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the standard model of instrumental reason displays several general propensities: including, first, the view of means-end rationality as independent of metaphysical commitments; second, the idea that practical reason demands consistency between desires and belief rather than the complex judgement, articulation and evaluation of moral practices and constitutive ends. These general tendencies promote an allegedly less problematic account of practical reason. But these contemporary philosophical trends do not resonate with Aristotle.² First, for Aristotle prudential reason (*phronēsis*) participates in the discovery and articulation of moral value, specifically, of the *constituents* of a naturally prior end. Those committed to a contemporary procedural account of instrumental reason, would find it difficult, moreover, to accept the metaphysical philosophical framework implied in Aristotelian practical deliberation. Indeed, for Aristotle instrumental reason cannot be isolated from a broader moralised philosophical discussion of human practices or values. Neither can practical instrumental reasoning be discussed without understanding its context of human desiderative, perceptual, and psychological faculties which collaborate with our cognitive, rational capacities, and collectively shape and cultivate our moral dispositional character. Practical deliberation encompasses our growth and development as moral agents, who are capable of ethical evaluation and rational activity in promotion of *eudaimonia*.

¹ All references to *Eudemian Ethics* (hereafter abbreviated *EE*) are to the translation by J. Solomon in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: UP, 1980).

² Aristotle's conception of practical deliberation incorporates the other-regarding good in a significant respect, as shown in his account of the political good and friendship. Though these are incredibly important, for the purposes of these chapters, I focus on how Aristotle departs from the standard model in the two aforementioned ways.

Over the next two chapters, my purpose is to give a reading of Aristotelian means-end reasoning which considers these complex factors. My argument is divided into two parts: the first part, outlined in this chapter, is that Aristotle's ideal form of prudential deliberation requires the moral evaluation of ends; the second part of the argument will show that this kind of means-end deliberation is irreducible to a scientific, deductive framework. That said, I am not claiming that Aristotle thinks it impossible for one to reason instrumentally towards an immoral or vicious end.³ The focus in this chapter, however, will be on Aristotle's definition of deliberation in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *EN*). There, Aristotle defines deliberation as always about the means rather than the ends [1112b12-20]: moreover, deliberation of means should emanate from a character of moral virtue [1114a1-7]. Different interpreters have disputed whether, in Book VI, Aristotle changes or widens his definition of prudential reason to include deliberation of ends. In his influential paper, "The Practical Syllogism", D. J. Allan observes a conflict between the Book III and VI accounts of deliberation, and ultimately concludes Aristotle must have altered his view. On this reading, Aristotle's more considered remarks on practical reasoning come to include the rational assessment of ends in Book VI, in contrast to the restricted account given in Book III.⁴ Others, David Wiggins among them, have disputed Allan's interpretation, and instead argue that, presupposed in Book III and more explicitly discussed in Book VI, is a wider *explanation* rather than a wider *conception* of deliberation.⁵ According to Wiggins, Aristotle never restricts practical deliberation to finding the best means to an end; rather deliberative tasks include the evaluation of worthy *ends* constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Like Wiggins, this chapter argues against Allan's view: Aristotle does not confine practical reasoning exclusively to the determination of appropriate means. The Book III account of deliberation will be shown to be consistent with the account given in Book VI. Ultimately, Aristotelian means-end rationality encompasses the moral appraisal of ends and the habituation of dispositional character.

In the first instance, Allan's reading of Book III is resisted because of exegetical disagreement: Allan assumes that the discussions of practical deliberation in Books III and VI have little continuity, whereas I believe both sections advance a broader, consistently unified conception, particularly in light of the intervening books on moral virtue. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, I wish to avoid

³ This is implied in Aristotle's discussion of cleverness, which I discuss below.

⁴ D. J. Allan, "The Practical Syllogism," in *Autour d'Aristote: recueil d'études de philosophie ancienne et médiévale offert à Mgr. A. Mansion* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1955) p. 338.

⁵ David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," in A. O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980) pp. 221-40.

the logical trajectory of Allan's reconstruction⁶: namely, if at any point Aristotelian means-end deliberation is confined solely to the determination of means, irrespective of an end's moral worth, such an account could accommodate reductivist accounts of instrumental reason that presuppose a stance of ethical neutrality towards one's ends and/or means. In other words, we need to reject interpretations like Allan's partly to avoid its resultant impression that Aristotelian means-end deliberation is indeed comparable to the problematic standard model of instrumental reason. Contra these contemporary conceptions, Aristotle's practical deliberation implies that instrumental reason actually can, and indeed often does require the specification and moral assessment of ends. Positive evaluations of an end must likewise influence the deliberative choice of means, in which case the means will simultaneously possess value of their own. This view fundamentally challenges two assumptions presupposed in, and characteristic of, the standard model of instrumental reason: the first is the repudiation of both metaphysical and ethical content, while the second is the evaluative detachment between deliberated means and desiderative ends. For Aristotle, neither set of assumption is attractive, let alone plausible: admirable practical deliberation relies on not just good causal inference or efficiency between means and ends, but substantive ethical content – namely the transmission of worthy ends to equally praiseworthy means, all emanating from a morally virtuous character.

The second part of the argument, more directly addressed in the next chapter on the function of the practical syllogism, will distance Aristotle even further from contemporary accounts of instrumental reason, specifically the latter's commitment to reductive naturalism. Here I will dispute Allan's second claim that Aristotle's discussion of the practical syllogism in *EN* Book VI and VII intends to draw close parallels between practical reason (*phronēsis*) and theoretical reason. For Aristotle, disparities between the demonstrative and practical syllogisms, in terms of function and structure, likewise suggest clear divisions between practical and theoretical rationality. Extended over two chapters, the argument will thus emphasise Aristotle's unique conception of instrumental reason, distinctive from modern reductivist accounts. Ultimately, the combined chapters forge an interpretive middle ground that avoids both the *attribution* to Aristotle of a contemporary reductively naturalistic conception of instrumental reason, as well as the *appropriation* of Aristotelian practical reason for contemporary normative purposes. Both this chapter and the first parts of the next chapter address the issue of attribution; the issue of appropriation will be discussed more directly in the latter sections of the second chapter. At root, both interpretive moves stem from tendencies to import foreign philosophical dilemmas into

⁶ It should be noted that this is not Allan's own conclusion, but merely the next logical step that would follow from his interpretation.

Aristotelian practical reason and suspend his more questionable metaphysical commitments, in order to make his theory amenable to both contemporary predilections.⁷

Aristotle's robust metaphysical realism, the moral evaluation requisite to practical deliberation, and his resistance to a scientific deductive paradigm, are all significant constraints on interpretation and appropriation. But an important question then arises: if we respect these historical constraints, what is the practical payoff of Aristotelian means-end reasoning? Respect for the gulf in worldview may ultimately restrict the straightforward applicability of Aristotle's conception of practical deliberation. This does not imply, however, that such an approach has no relevant practical advantages. To sever Aristotle from his historical moorings, with all its associated metaphysical baggage ignores how certain philosophical moves remain unproblematic to him. This may mean practical reason in Aristotle's sense is not easily retrievable. But considering means-end deliberation *in light* of these historically contingent assumptions nonetheless gives us vital normative distance from the predominant modern conception, allowing for the articulation of its limitations with greater coherence and force.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: Section I provides a brief exposition of Aristotle's metaphysical views and its impact on his ethics. Section II argues that Allan's reading of deliberative choice as restricted to means cannot be sustained. There I argue that the appraisal and specification of ends is presupposed in Aristotle's conception of means-end deliberation, as demonstrated in the analogy between the doctor's technical skill and the practical reasoning of the *phronimos*. Deliberation over complex ends leads to the appreciation of some means as intrinsically valuable goods, as opposed to an intermediate, merely instrumentally valuable step towards an external end. Section III provides the substance to that conception of deliberation. I claim that the habituation and acquisition of the moral virtues exemplifies those types of deliberatively chosen means to an end which are simultaneously appreciated as intrinsic goods, worthy ends in themselves.

I. A Brief Introduction to Aristotle's Metaphysical Realism and Human Function

It is important to provide a very brief overview of Aristotle's metaphysical framework, in particular that which informs his account of human function (*ergon*) and the rational soul. In this section we will see that these metaphysical concepts are not so easily suspended, since they operate on a normative as well as descriptive level for Aristotle and form the basis of praiseworthy, admirable practical reason. Aristotle's metaphysical commitments constrain the extent to which we can draw comparisons between the standard

⁷ See, for instance, Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy," in R. Bruce Douglass et al, eds., *Liberalism and the Good* (New York: Routledge, 1990) pp. 202-52.

model of instrumental reason and his account, as well as apply his theory as a solution to our current moral dilemmas.

Notwithstanding their divergent normative aims, both these interpretive tendencies are united in their suspension of the metaphysical claims implicated within Aristotelian human function. The function argument, outlined in *EN I*, is understood as a justification of ethics wholly internal to humans: ethical practices reflective of human function as rational soul remain confined to cultural conventions and the anthropomorphic standpoint.⁸ No reference is made to objective moral facts that are prior to, or independent of, the human perspective. From this point of view Aristotle's ethical and practical thought may appear metaphysically neutral. Unlike the problematic idealism of Platonic Forms, the function argument seems to suggest that Aristotelian morality is obtained and corrected within the limits of anthropocentrism. Given its metaphysical neutrality, Aristotle's practical reason can therefore be compared to contemporary conceptions of the role of instrumental reason and adapted to current normative concerns with relative ease. This anthropocentric account also assumes a deep methodological divide between dialectic and scientific knowledge, as well as between Aristotle's commitment to objective facts in his metaphysics and the empirically derived, contingently valid practical content in his ethics.⁹

Admittedly, there is a strong intuitive appeal to an Aristotelian theory that is easily divorced from the thick metaphysical realism conventionally associated with the predominant strands of the classical tradition.¹⁰ But some crucial overlap between Aristotle's metaphysics and ethics cannot be easily overlooked and minimised. Contained within the function argument are concepts such as essence and end – terms which originate in Aristotle's metaphysics.¹¹ At the very least, terminological continuity is enough to suggest that his ethical and practical theory must be related to his metaphysics in some limited way. This casts some doubt on the possible suspension of Aristotle's metaphysical commitments. Moreover, various parallels can be drawn between the scientific and the

⁸ See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: UP, 1986) pp. 291-4 and John McDowell, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics," in Robert Heinaman, ed., *Aristotle and Moral Realism* (London: UCL, 1995) pp. 201-18. On one extreme Aristotle would be a champion of tradition or an uncritical acceptance of parochial values.

⁹ I do not dispute the existence of a methodological divide and the subsequent departmentalization of the sciences; to an extent I also subscribe to the view that the content and structure of ethical and scientific knowledge is different (as will be much clearer in the next chapter's discussion of the practical syllogism). However, I don't think this difference for Aristotle is an unbridgeable gulf. Those who adopt Aristotelian practical deliberation for contemporary normative purposes usually maintain a very strong methodological difference, whereas I hold a weaker version of this divide. For a strong view, see Nussbaum, "Saving Aristotle's Appearances," in Malcolm Schofield and Martha Craven Nussbaum, eds., *Language and Logos; Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen* (Cambridge: UP, 1982) pp. 267-94.

¹⁰ I am thinking mainly of the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic traditions.

¹¹ C. D. C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) p. 137.

ethical inductive method through which we are said to arrive at first principles, though these principles are relevant to each discrete sphere of inquiry.¹² We should therefore be hesitant about concluding that no objective, mind-independent first principles relevant to the ethical domain can be discovered in Aristotle. All these considerations should constrain the wholesale adoption of Aristotle's conception of practical deliberation.

If this is correct, then Aristotle's function argument implies metaphysical views which commit him to something beyond an exclusively anthropocentric theory. Specifically, the concept of *ergon* or function must define, capture, and explain some enduring characteristic summarising the placement of species-kind within a natural, hierarchical order (see *Physics* 2). So defined, *ergon* draws on Aristotle's metaphysical explanations about how substance imparts form on material components: to fulfil one's function is to actualise one's constant, unchanging eternal form, where definitional form is impressed onto changing materiality. Essence must therefore articulate universal definitional qualities that stem from naturally prior principles.¹³ As Terence Irwin claims, "substantial properties of a subject tell us what it is; for these are the properties that provide knowledge."¹⁴ Similar to Irwin, C. D. C. Reeve's interpretation of *ergon* preserves the metaphysical underpinnings of Aristotle's ethics. Function, on Reeve's reading, is "essence activated" and "to say that the good for an F is to best achieve its essential end is to say something that is at least a candidate for truth."¹⁵ In other words, the definitional property of *ergon* schematically orders all acts or processes towards an objectively true, overarching end of natural priority. According to Aristotle, for all animals the relevant criterion of substantive essence is fulfilled by the soul which has endurance and priority over its material (bodily) components. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle writes:

Therefore the parts which are of the nature of matter and into which as its matter a thing is divided, are posterior; but those which are parts of the formula, and of the substance according to its formula, are prior, either all or some of them. And since the soul of animals (for this is the substance of living beings) is their substance according to the formula, i.e. the form and the essence of a body of a certain kind (at least we shall define each part, if we define it well, not without reference to its function, and this cannot be without perception), therefore the parts of the soul are prior, either all or some of them, to the concrete animal, and similarly in each case of a concrete whole; and the body and its parts are posterior to this its substance, and it

¹² Ibid., pp. 56-7.

¹³ M. F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge," in Enrico Berti, ed., *Aristotle on Science: The 'Posterior Analytics'* (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1981) p. 111.

¹⁴ Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, p. 202.

¹⁵ Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, p. 128.

is not the substance but the concrete thing that is divided into these parts as its matter. [1035b11-21]¹⁶

The purposive, teleological movement of animals serves as manifest evidence that their soul is substance; Aristotle can maintain this claim because, unlike the Cartesian soul, the soul as form and essence needn't be also an introspectible, transparent mental state.¹⁷

But unlike animals, human souls possess reason. The function argument in *NE I* states:

[I]f we assume that the function of man is a kind of life, namely, an activity or series of actions of the soul, implying a rational principle; and if the function of a good man is to perform these well and rightly; and if every function is performed well when performed in accordance with its proper excellence: if all this is so, the conclusion is that the good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. [1098a13-17]

Human function as rational soul features an important act / result ambiguity:¹⁸ this ambiguity specifies the kind of activity or practice required to actualise an essential result or end, and both components of *ergon* – the act and result – impose conceptual, reciprocal demands on each other. In other words, Aristotle associates human definition with engagement in particular forms of rational activity. Crucially, these activities exhibit the best human qualities and moral virtues. Here it is important to note that the distinctiveness of humans for Aristotle resides in our capacity to engage in practical deliberation and moral action. The “result” component of *ergon* implies, however, that rational activity must be directed towards an ultimate, species-wide end; the distinctively *human* good cannot be based on contingent wants – conditional upon what individuals or cultural groups themselves happen to deem desirable. Rather, the best rational activity must reflect and express *the essence and end* of one's species being.¹⁹ Should we adopt the former, less metaphysically committed view, substance is apparently derived *from* human contingent practices. In the latter this argument is reversed: human contingent practices presuppose and should be derived from objective substance. The contingent particularities are meant to

¹⁶ All quotations from the *Metaphysics* are from the translation by W. D. Ross in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2.

¹⁷ T. H. Irwin, “The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics,” in Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, pp. 41-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

actualise those enduring objective first principles imprinted onto the substantive essence of our very species-being.

For Aristotle, the ultimate end of *eudaimonia* meets the criteria of objectivity and universality in relation to humans: an essential descriptive property of the human rational soul is its aspiration towards the naturally prior, final end of *eudaimonia* through rational activity.²⁰ What begins initially as a precognitive, pre-reflective aim undergoes a phase of explicit, rational *articulation*, if one is fortunate enough to be well habituated, in possession of virtues and trained with good deliberative skills. One step further is the cognitive, *theoretical reflection* on how different moral goods and virtues, used in practical and theoretical activity, architectonically comprise the overarching *telos* of *eudaimonia*. This person, who would be called wise in ethics, therefore possesses a cognitive understanding of those objective first principles defining the essence and *telos* of their being.²¹ As Reeve states, “someone who has mastered ethics or biology [...] will simply be able to *see* that first principles – however complex and impenetrable they may seem to someone less experienced – are intrinsic necessities, that they could not be otherwise.”²² Reeve’s reading portrays Aristotle’s ethical and scientific views as a cohesive whole: in both spheres Aristotle is a realist who is committed to the existence of objective facts.²³

In the ethical domain these facts are always weighed against the *phainomena* (appearances) and *endoxa* (opinions of the wise and reputable) to ensure their overall coherence; as evidence, however, both *phainomena* and *endoxa* are not necessarily coextensive. Especially among those who are wise and reputable, language functions as a “repository of truth,” attesting to those recurrent ideas which orientate humans towards objective truth.²⁴ *Endoxa* may conflict with the *phainomena*, or the common opinions of that *phainomena*, resulting in a dialectical puzzle. But the solution, Aristotle thinks, does not necessarily favour the *phainomena*, since *endoxa* of the wise and reputable have the

²⁰ EN 1097b22-1098a18. See also Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, p. 123-38.

²¹ See John J. Cleary, “*Phainomena* in Aristotle’s Methodology,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 2:1 (1994): 61-97.

²² Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, p. 64.

²³ See David Charles, “Aristotle and Modern Realism,” in Heinaman, ed., *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, pp. 135-172.

²⁴ Cleary, “*Phainomena*,” p. 71. Indeed, this view makes sense if we interpret *endoxa* to be referring to the opinions of the *wise* and not simply common opinion. The person who is practically wise has gained enough experiential material to inductively reach first principles and is in a position to theorise in a more general, global sense involving knowledge of human function and the rational soul which go beyond the particularistic nature of practical ethics. Aristotle and the Greek view more generally idealises the wise as opposed to common person; it is the wise person who is the practical, normative standard. See also John M. Cooper, “Aristotle on the Authority of ‘Appearances,’” in his *Reason and Emotion; Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: UP, 1999) p. 285. André Laks, “Commentary on Annas” in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* Vol. IV (1988): 185.

antecedent authority of residual, objective truth.²⁵ For Aristotle, wisdom has two dimensions: the first is mastery of practical reason and its focus on the complex determination of the human good, while the second implies the mastery of theoretical reasoning and its comprehension of *a priori* connections and teleological explanations. Though theoretical wisdom does not necessarily imply practical wisdom, the full exercise of practical reason will appeal to theoretical concepts of teleological relations, human nature and the soul. The two intellectual virtues are thus connected by a common explanatory system which, in Aristotle's mind, is enough to ensure objectivity in the moral domain, and confers on human linguistic judgements an aspect of realism and truth.²⁶

This twofold aspect of wisdom leads Reeve to conclude that human function is, in part, shared with the divine. Aristotle's explanatory scheme of natural priority points to an objective order not solely restricted to human life. For the completion or actuality of our *ergon*, humans are meant to aspire to theoretical *nous* or intellection, characteristic of the highest beings in the natural hierarchy. Reeve states, "god's function is completed in a way that ours is not. Unlike us, god is eternally engaged in study, but we cannot engage in study without him. For his activity is the final cause of ours. We share god's function, to be sure, but that just makes us god-like, it does not make us god."²⁷ God, who is full actuality and permanently engaged in *theoria*, occupies the pinnacle of the natural, functional hierarchy. Thus the best human life requires the exercise of reason, not simply because *our* actuality demands it; but rather because rational activity encapsulates certain characteristics which correspond to the definition of *what is best and fully actual*.²⁸ Through exercising the rational soul, humans attempt to actualise their species-being by achieving the *telos* of *eudaimonia*: this process expresses human attempts to mimic and approximate – albeit restrained by certain inescapable anthropomorphic limits²⁹ – the *best*

²⁵ Cooper, "Aristotle on the Authority of 'Appearances'," p. 289.

²⁶ Charles, "Aristotle and Moral Realism," p. 170.

²⁷ Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, p. 149. This conclusion is also drawn by Allan Gotthelf, "The Place of the Good in Aristotle's Natural Teleology" in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* Vol. IV (1988): 127-31.

²⁸ Gotthelf, "The Place of the Good," p. 129. Aristotle states in Book Lambda in *Metaphysics*: "And thought in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thought in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought. And it is *active* when it *possesses* this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and god is that actuality; and god's essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God." [1072b18-31]

²⁹ For example, we need a measure of external goods (wealth, leisure, luck, friends); we are subject to change and decay. We also cannot engage in contemplation all the time.

kind of life that is maintained by god's full actuality, and in turn approach a comparable eternity of being as a species.³⁰

The full implications of the function argument's metaphysical background will become more evident in the final section of the next chapter. As the discussion so far indicates, appropriating Aristotelian practical reason in support of current liberal intuitions about value pluralism would be interpretively suspect. However, a more immediate concern arises as to whether my preferred reading of the function argument implies that practical deliberation is restricted solely to the means, since the ultimate human end of *eudaimonia* is already established. Reeve, for example, concludes rather oddly that if the end of *eudaimonia* is naturally given as a first principle, cognisable through theoretical reason, then humans deliberate only about the means, not about their ends.³¹ Reeve writes,

Current dominant economic models of rational choice conceive of rationality as applicable only to means, not to ends. We are rational, on these models, if we take the best or most efficient means to our ends, whatever those ends happen to be, but our ends themselves are beyond rational appraisal [...] On the interpretation that I have defended, *phronēsis* has something in common with these models of practical rationality. It, too, fails to apply to our ultimate end.³²

Since *eudaimonia* is not chosen, but pre-established as our descriptively valid end, Reeve thinks practical reasoning is confined to the means, making Aristotle's practical deliberation analogous to current standard models of instrumental rationality. Given that both are restricted to deliberating means, causal efficiency takes priority over the moral or evaluative assessment of ends. He goes on further to say that "[t]his is bound to disappoint the growing number of philosophers who look to Aristotle for a conception of practical reason that might be used to correct these economic models precisely by giving us an account of rational deliberation about ends."³³

³⁰ It is important to note that, while all species have a certain eternal dimension (form is perpetuated), humans are more capable of participating in the divine due to the fact that we possess reason and have the potential for theoretical, philosophic contemplation.

³¹ I have great sympathy with Reeve's reading in general, with the exception of this point.

³² Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, pp. 192-3.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 193. This claim hinges on how one interprets *eudaimonia* – whether it is primarily in the contemplative life or a composite of intrinsic goods. Reeve ultimately understands *eudaimonia* in the former sense, which makes comprehensible why he concludes practical reason does not deliberate about ends (since the definition of *eudaimonia* is already substantively given as "study" for Reeve). Yet it is not always clear that Aristotle privileged the contemplative life over the political life, where Book X of *EN* fundamentally conflicts with the preceding books which outline the necessary virtues required to be a good statesman or participant in the *polis*. If we understand *eudaimonia* in the composite sense, it changes the complexion of practical deliberation and certainly indicates a large divergence between Aristotle and contemporary economic models of instrumental rationality.

Reeve's comparison between Aristotle and modern accounts of instrumental reason is misguided however. At the outset, comparing the underlying scientific views which inform both conceptions of practical reasoning is a questionable interpretive move. Contemporary economic models of rational choice aspire to a scientific status, distilled of metaphysical content or ethical presuppositions. By contrast, Aristotle's practical reason draws on notions of human teleological functioning towards *eudaimonia*, and is therefore riddled with metaphysical assumptions and moral content that even sympathetic contemporary philosophers find problematic.³⁴ Reeve does not suspend these metaphysical commitments until he discusses what, if any, normative conclusions can be drawn from Aristotelian practical reason. At this point he himself discards the metaphysical framework of Aristotelian practical deliberation so as to highlight its similarities to contemporary reductivist models of rational choice

Why Reeve draws this conclusion is rather perplexing and perhaps not fully explicable, given his careful exegetical consideration of the metaphysics behind Aristotle's scientific commitments. However, D. J. Allan arrives at the same conclusion when he exposes an alleged rift between Aristotle's discussion of deliberation in Books III and VI in *NE*. I will not try to second-guess the reasons for Reeve's eventual suspension of Aristotle's metaphysics, but will instead focus on Allan's exegesis which leads him to interpret practical deliberation as limited primarily to the choice of means. In the remainder of the chapter I argue that the intervening books on the moral virtues help unite as a coherent whole the Book III and VI discussions of practical deliberation – ultimately this should help undermine Allan's claim that Aristotle's means-end deliberation is isolated to choice of means rather than the evaluation of complex ends.

II. *Is Deliberation Limited to the Means?*

According to Allan, Aristotle's first position in *EN* Book III maintains that practical deliberation is concerned merely with the choice of means. Allan writes, "[Aristotle] regards [deliberation] as a process whereby we discover means to attaining to an end, select one chain of means in preference to another, and so forth; and since it is preceded by wish for the end it is followed by desire for the means."³⁵ Therefore, "all choice follows upon deliberation, and all that deliberation is concerned with the selection of means"; one's chosen means are moreover separated from the adopted end in a mechanical, causal

³⁴ For example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue; A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985) pp. 196-9. See also Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Collins, 1985) chapter 2, who says Aristotle's worldview makes his theory unavailable to us moderns.

³⁵ Allan, "The Practical Syllogism," pp. 328-9.

procedure.³⁶ Recognising the limitations of this mechanical model of means-end deliberation in Book III, Aristotle “subsequently widens his view of the procedure of choice” meaning that “the connection between ‘choice’ and ‘deliberation’ [...] is loosened from the sixth book onwards”.³⁷ This loosened connection leads to two emerging patterns of action in Book VI and VII’s discussion of the practical syllogism: 1) action that follows the means-end pattern explicated in Book III; and 2) action governed by a rule.³⁸ The first can be considered a traditional consequentialist chain between means and ends; by contrast the latter acknowledges the intrinsic value of actions (actions that are “for its own sake”).³⁹ (For my purposes in this chapter I focus on the first pattern of action, and leave the latter for the next chapter). On Allan’s reading, in Books III and VI the accounts of deliberative choice are discontinuous and inconsistent: in Book III choice that is confined to the means is upheld as the paradigmatic model of practical action, whereas in Book VI this becomes only one of two types of procedures of deliberative choice. Allan says further, “the result is that Aristotle, in speaking of choice, uses expressions which are at least verbally inconsistent with his first account of its nature.”⁴⁰ Book VI’s extended account of rational choice nonetheless leaves intact Aristotle’s theory of practical deliberation, which, at its heart, is limited to the intellectual determination of means for a desired end.⁴¹

Contra Allan, I will show below that Aristotle’s Book III discussion *already* points to an account of practical deliberation which departs from a causal pattern of reasoning. But interpretations like Allan’s are partly understandable, given Aristotle’s explanatory treatment of practical reasoning as an overall genus. Some interpreters complain that Aristotle fails to give an account of moral reason separate from practical reason as a whole, and for this reason find more philosophically compelling Kant’s clear delineation between a more technical conception of instrumental reason and the morality of pure practical reason. Morality makes distinctive demands which, for Kant, preclude a simple means-end rational model. By contrast, Aristotle considers practical reasoning as a whole: practical deliberation towards the end of *eudaimonia* and deliberation towards external or technical ends are all under the same explanatory scheme. In other words, different species of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ I will deal with the practical syllogism more directly in the next chapter.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 338-40.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 338.

⁴¹ To be fair, Allan does think the broader account of choice which does include intrinsically valuable means should be the authoritative definition (see *ibid.*, pp. 339-40). My main interpretive quibble is that Allan reads a conflict between the Book III and Book VI accounts that leaves the door open for quite a restricted reading of Aristotelian practical deliberation. As this chapter will show, it is not clear to me that Aristotle’s definition in Book III is as Allan claims, nor that the Book VI/VII account of the practical syllogism indicates rule-governed behaviour.

practical reason – i.e. technical / craft or moral reasoning – are more generally classified under one broader genus by virtue of their shared means-end deliberative pattern.⁴²

Initially, Allan's reading of deliberation as restricted to means gains support from the type of means-end action characteristic of purposive animal movement. In *De Anima* 9 and 10 Aristotle rejects a rationalist account of movement, as he says, "neither can the calculative faculty or what is called thought be the cause of such movement; for mind as speculative never thinks what is practicable, it never says anything about an object to be avoided or pursued, while this movement is always in something which is avoiding and pursuing an object" [*DA* 432b26-28].⁴³ Theoretical knowledge can never be the original source of movement; such a rationalist account would be unable to explain *akratic* or incontinent behaviour, where an individual acts according to their appetite, contrary to their knowledge of the best good. Yet "appetite too is incompetent to account fully for movement" [433a7]. Converse to the rationalist account, an overly appetitive account of intentional movement is incapable of explaining *enkratic* or continent behaviour, in which an individual acts in favour of thought contrary to their appetites. In his own theory of purposive action Aristotle therefore seeks to minimise the asymmetry between intellectual thought and appetite, while providing enough conceptual space to incorporate the phenomena of *akrasia* and *enkrasia*. Both thought and desire must collaborate in order for purposive movement to occur. As he continues in *De Anima*:

Both of these then are capable of originating local movement, thought and appetite: thought, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. practical thought (it differs from speculative thought in the character of its end); while appetite is in every form of it relative to an end; for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of practical thought; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of action. [433a13-179]

Here Aristotle wants to make a further distinction between practical inference (practical thought) and theoretical, speculative thought. Practical thought is comprised of particular specifications which translate into action [434a17-21]; it is the rational faculty that infers from means to an end, and is instigated by an object or end sought by the desiderative faculty. All general knowledge remains divorced from practical action without this intermediate inference provided by instrumental reason or practical *nous*.

⁴² John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986) p. 1.

⁴³ All references to *De Anima* are translated by J. A. Smith in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* Vol. 1.

So far then the *De Anima* account appears to be a relatively straightforward, instrumentalist picture of purposive action: an object is desired, we reason and infer (or, in non-deliberative animals, perceive) the means to attain this object, and movement is initiated accordingly. Aristotle reinforces this thought in *De Motu Animalium*: “‘I have to drink,’ says appetite. ‘Here’s a drink,’ says sense-perception or *phantasia* or thought. At once he drinks” [701a32-3, hereafter abbreviated *MA*].⁴⁴ Elsewhere in the context of *EN* Book III Aristotle seems to evoke a strict division between the determination of an end – which is the object of wish – and the determination of means – which is properly the domain of choice and deliberation (*proairesis*) [also *EE* 1226a17]. According to the moral psychology outlined in Books II and III, ends are formed by a wish for either true or apparent goods found to be pleasurable. Aristotle writes, “the object of wish is the good, but for the individual it is what seems good to him; so for the man of good character it is the true good, but for the bad man it is any chance thing” [*EN* 1113a24-27].⁴⁵ If pre-cognitive and pre-reflective desire determines our ends, practical reason seems to just consider the best means to achieve that desired aim through the provision of salient technical information. Thus, the account of purposive action in *De Motu* and *De Anima* appears to support Allan’s main interpretive claim: that Aristotelian deliberative choice is restricted to the theoretical determination of the most expedient, best, and possible means towards an end.⁴⁶ Like a simplified Humean conception of instrumental reason,⁴⁷ personal interests, pleasures, or ends are not necessarily subject to any rational evaluation. Consider the Humean echoes when Allan writes that for Aristotle the process of mean-end deliberation “is intellectual and is not a distinctive operation of the *practical* reason.”⁴⁸

Fortunately, this reading is an oversimplification of Aristotle’s view. Comparisons between Aristotle and Hume are not altogether inaccurate: both philosophers minimise the motivational role of theoretical reason, both insist upon the presence of the desiderative faculty to generate purposive movement.⁴⁹ In *De Anima* 9 and 10 and *De Motu Animalium*, Aristotle asks rather broadly, “where does *animal* movement originate” in order to uncover its necessary and sufficient psychological constituents. But in his ethical works Aristotle

⁴⁴ All references to *De Motu Animalium* are translated by Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton: UP, 1978), hereafter abbreviated to *MA*.

⁴⁵ All references to *Nicomachean Ethics* are translated by J. A. K. Thomson (London: Penguin, 2004), hereafter abbreviated *EN*.

⁴⁶ A similarity that has been noted by numerous commentators; for a relatively full account, see Terence Irwin, “Aristotle on Reason, Desire, and Virtue,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 72:17 (1975): 567-78, also his *Aristotle’s First Principles*, p. 333. In both Irwin mentions some important caveats to similarities we may be tempted to draw between Aristotle and Hume.

⁴⁷ In Chapters 4 and 5 I argue that this view of Humean instrumental reason is also inaccurate.

⁴⁸ Allan, “The Practical Syllogism,” p. 328.

⁴⁹ I will show in my chapters on Hume that his scepticism of the motivational power of theoretical reason does not entail a similar scepticism of practical reason, as has frequently but mistakenly attributed to him.

builds upon and supplements this account in order to do proper justice to the complex nature of *human* rational agency; discussion of human desire and perception fill in some important gaps which appear in the initial, more general explanation of animal movement. Aristotle's theory of practical agency ought therefore to be understood in light of how agents acquire their desires, what it means to be a rational, and by implication ethical, perceiver, which together leads to the assignment of evaluative worth and desirability to specific goods. It is crucial to keep in mind that Aristotle's own distinction between the rational and non-rational constituents of means-end deliberation does not correspond neatly to the stricter modern delineation between the two.⁵⁰ First of all, Aristotle divides desire into three categories: *epithumia* (appetite), *thumos* (spirited impulse), and *boulēsis* (rational wish). The first two are non-rational impulses while the latter, *boulēsis*, is the term for an impulse reason itself generates; it is essentially "rational desire" that is "focussed on the final good". As such "[t]his appetitive part of the soul is therefore rational in the fullest sense."⁵¹ Other non-rational dimensions of the soul – *epithumia* and *thumos* – are also receptive to reason "in the sense that a child pays attention to its father" [EN 1103a4].⁵² These constituents and their interplay, all embedded within human practical deliberation, introduce a level of complexity which goes beyond a simple desire-belief model of instrumental reason. Reason is not just an intermediary, informational faculty, subordinate to an impetuous appetitive or desiderative drive. For Aristotle, humans have desires that are properly rational (*boulēsis* originating in reason), and even the emotional and perceptual assessments of the non-rational part of the soul are responsive to reasoned judgement.⁵³

⁵⁰ John Cooper, "Some Remarks on Aristotle's Moral Psychology," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27 Supplement (1988): 29-33. Indeed, Aristotle inherits the Platonic assumption that reason is a motivating force. It is therefore highly anachronistic to read into Aristotle questions of motivational scepticism, which is a largely modern concern. Aristotle's correction of the asymmetry between thought and desire in *De Anima* should not be understood, then, as ultimately doubting the motive power of reason. Indeed, it is also questionable that this dualism between cognitive and non-cognitive faculties applies as broadly in the modern era, as we will see in my discussion of Kant in Chapter 7.

⁵¹ Cooper, "Aristotle's Moral Psychology," p. 30.

⁵² It is important to note, as Cooper rightly does (*ibid.*, pp. 31-2) that even these irrational parts of the soul deploy what moderns would consider rational concepts. That is why Aristotle thinks *thumos* can have thoughts about a situation that is ultimately misinformed. In cases that appetite is mistaken, they can be properly understood as pursuing only an 'apparent' good. The fact that appetite considers it a good implies the use of concepts, further that irrational appetite can be swayed by reason reveal that these concepts or value-terms are commensurable with the conceptual thought of reason for Aristotle, though they may not rational in the sense that *boulēsis* is. Hence the importance to not anachronistically read into Aristotle our rigid modern distinction, in which case that the conative and cognitive are fundamentally different 'languages' which do not permit transmission between the two. See for instance the distinction between directions of fit between desire and reasons in Michael Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *Mind* 96 (1987): 36-61 (especially pp. 50-61).

⁵³ The fact that Aristotle maintains a permanent sphere of irrational desires and appetites within the soul provides further support to the view that he acknowledges a vulnerable dimension to human practical action. There will be times the *phronimos* will act from those non-rational appetites that will be fully fitting to the circumstance, and Aristotle would claim that it would be praiseworthy

The fact that the desire-belief model fails to capture the components of Aristotelian practical action should already hint that his conception of deliberation could not be limited strictly to the determination of “means”. The contemporary English understanding of “means” evokes the necessary causal step towards an external end. However, to begin with, the conventional translation of the Greek expression, “*ta pros ta telē*”, as “means” tends to be an oversimplification. The original expression encompasses, not only the determination of instrumental means, but also that which is “constitutive”, “contributes to”, “promotes”, or “has a positive bearing on” an end.⁵⁴ Rendered as such, Aristotle’s language diverges from the more limited sense of ‘means’ used in current philosophical terminology: practical deliberation of Aristotelian ‘means’ implies working out what activities *consist in* and *contributes* to an end.⁵⁵

This provides us with a clue as to how to interpret a difficult passage from *EN* III:

We deliberate not about ends but about means. A doctor does not deliberate whether to cure his patient, nor a speaker whether to persuade his audience, nor a statesman whether to produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about the *end* at which he is aiming. They first set some end before themselves, and then proceed to consider how and by what means it can be attained. If it appears that it can be attained by several means, they further consider by which it can be attained best and most easily. [1112b12-17]

Here Aristotle seems to confine practical deliberation to the means; yet this first sentence should be approached with some caution. Practical deliberation may not determine the ends of the doctor, speaker, and statesman, for these ends can be described as overarching ends which are *internal* to their various functions (doctor-health, speaker-persuasion, statesman-law and order). Following Wiggins, the plural form of “ends”, used in the first

since it exhibits the appropriate emotional sensitivity to that situation. If the *phronimos* experiences excessive grief it may be the case that he cannot be called *eudaimōn* but not morally vicious. See also the criticisms in *Magna Moralia* of the Socratic elimination of an irrational sphere of the soul, which results in “doing away also both with passion and character” [1182b15-23]. See further Cooper, “Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” p. 36. Nussbaum has a very good analysis of this in *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 318-72 but tends to overemphasise the role of luck and contingency which weakens her overall interpretation.

⁵⁴ Cooper, *Reason and Human Good*, p. 19ff, Anthony J. Kenny, *Aristotle’s Theory of the Will* (London: Duckworth, 1979) p. 149; W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) p. 256; see also Irwin, “Aristotle on Reason,” pp. 570 n. 4 on the ambiguity of the Greek phrase.

⁵⁵ Wiggins, “Deliberation,” pp. 221-40; also see Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 290-317. I believe Nussbaum overstates the vulnerability inherent in practical deliberation to passionate, emotional disruptions in favour of a larger thesis of value plurality or “saving the appearances” [*phainomena*]. For this more metaphysically committed reading of Aristotle’s realism and *ergon* argument, see Reeve, *Practices of Reason* and Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*; also Charles, “Aristotle and Modern Realism,” pp. 135-72.

sentence of 1112b12, can be understood distributively, and is meant to contain the subsequent examples cited by Aristotle. Thus, the singular form of “end” can be taken as the authoritative usage.⁵⁶ In this passage, Aristotle’s examples are of “internal” ends – ends that are already fixed by a particular state or condition. If this is right, it makes sense that Aristotle says we do not deliberate about our ends, *given these specific examples*. The person who is already a doctor doesn’t need to deliberate about the overarching end of health: it is an end fitting to his function *qua* doctor; this *telos* is presupposed and inscribed in the very definitional form of “doctor”. Practical deliberation is restricted to determining the means towards *eudaimonia* in a similar way: like the doctor *qua* doctor presupposes the end of health, humans *qua* human presuppose an end suitable to that function, which is *eudaimonia*, the end “we always choose it for itself and never for any other reason” [1097b1]. As Section I established, the substantive essence of our species predetermines our functional overarching *telos*, which schematically structures the basic activities of anthropomorphic life. Aristotle distinguishes non-deliberated external ends from naturally given ends which are internal to our function but are nonetheless too broad or vague to be a realistically *practicable* end. *Eudaimonia* would be a prime example of the latter.

Moreover, the fact that *eudaimonia* is a naturally predetermined end for humans does not automatically preclude practical deliberation about what *constitutes* that global end. In Book III, Aristotle likens this deliberative process to the geometer who is also involved in some pre-requisite search or investigation prior to making any viable practical applications [1112b22].⁵⁷ The geometry example here is apt. The form of a triangle is universally valid – its constituents, however, can be broken down and, with different specifications, will yield a distinctive kind of triangle. The geometer dissects the three sides and may alter their length accordingly to fit the particular situation (or, in the case of an architect constructing a house, will employ different kinds of triangles).⁵⁸ The appropriate specification of a triangle’s constituents allows its universal form to accommodate the requirements of each unique circumstance. Thus, that particular construction which is apposite to the situation becomes a “universal particular” of a triangle: it still preserves its universal form (three sides) despite the adjustment of its components.

⁵⁶ Wiggins, “Deliberation,” p. 226.

⁵⁷ Here I differ from Wiggins, (*ibid.*, p. 28) who argues that Aristotle’s example of the geometer tends to “go lame”, particularly considering that we may be required to specify our practicable end numerous times prior to initiating the means-end connection. However, I believe that the example of geometry may admirably incorporate this aspect.

⁵⁸ Or another way the geometry example could be construed is that the geometer searches among his knowledge of universal shapes and his deliberation concludes when he recognises through his perception that a triangle is the correct shape to use in a specific situation. This would follow Cooper’s claim that the particular premise of the practical syllogism needn’t refer to *individuals* or personal pronouns, but to particular *types*, see *Reason and Human Good*, pp. 34-46. I will have more to say on this point in the next chapter on the practical syllogism.

Similarly, a human being must discover the “universal particular(s)” that are constitutive of their *telos*. Just as a triangle can be specified in different ways depending on the circumstance, it is up to our practical deliberation to determine what comprises of an end and how this end can be actualised in the situational particular. But the predetermined end of *eudaimonia* never changes its substantial form, though its specification may be apposite to a potentially unrepeatably circumstance. “For the man deliberating deliberates if he has considered, from the point of view of the end,” Aristotle writes in *EE*, “what conduces to bringing the end within his own action, or he at present what can do towards the object” [1227a20, emphasis added]. “Conduce” – the operative word here – suggests deliberation not only about the possible means by which we can realise an end through action, but also about that which contributes to, or counts as partial components of that overarching end. This is more fully supported when Aristotle continues, “*But the object or end is always something good by nature, and men deliberate about its partial constituents*” [1227a22]. He cites the example of whether the doctor ought to give a drug to a patient.⁵⁹ Taken in conjunction with Book III of *NE*, we can say that the doctor *qua* doctor aims for health. On one level, to give a drug would be a proper means to that global end. Yet on another level – depending on who the specific patient is – that drug may in fact be a *constituent* of his overall health; in Wiggins’ words, it is what would qualify as “an adequate and practically realizable specification” of the end of health.⁶⁰ Suppose the doctor is attending to a patient who has a debilitating case of asthma – this condition prevents the patient from participating in normal activities that comprise a healthy life (i.e., exercise). The doctor who administers or prescribes a suitable drug would then be a contributory factor or partial constituent to a healthy life, not simply a “means” in the limited sense of the word. Giving the drug actually comprises part of the end of the patient’s health. On this reading then, the doctor not only deliberates about the means, answering practical questions more directly related to the intermediate causal steps to a practical end (such as “what is the best drug to give to this patient” and “how often does he need to take it”). But more importantly, he will deliberate about how this end of drug-taking will contribute to the overarching good of health for the asthmatic patient. This thought is confirmed in the *Metaphysics* when Aristotle says the starting point of health or healing is “the production of warmth, and this the physician produces by rubbing. Warmth in the body is either a *part of* health or is followed (either directly or through several intermediate steps) by something which is a *part of* health; and this, viz. that which produces the part, is the last step, and so

⁵⁹ Aristotle draws important analogies between the technical knowledge of medicine and practical wisdom of ethics. For more on this, see Werner Jaeger, “Aristotle’s Use of Medicine as a Model of Method in His Ethics,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77:1 (1957): 54-61, also G. E. R. Lloyd, “The Role of Medical and Biological Analogies in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Phronesis* 13 (1968): 68-83.

⁶⁰ Wiggins, “Deliberation,” p. 228.

are, e.g., the stones a part of the house, and so in all other cases” [1032b25-29, emphases added]. In this case, the physician deliberates about the constituents of health; warmth in the body is subsequently determined as a partial component which contributes to that overall end. Only after that is specified (warmth is part of health) can a more straightforward causal means-end relationship be initiated (the end of warmth can be produced through the means of rubbing the patient; the doctor will rub the patient).

One may counter my reading and say that the analogy between the doctor’s technical skill and prudence (*phronēsis*) is unsustainable. The practical skill of the doctor falls under technical or craft-knowledge and is therefore clearly distinct from the practical deliberation of the *phronimos* [EN 1112b1-8]. This objection needs to be considered: if this analogy between the two is inapplicable, the argument that Aristotelian deliberation should be understood as strictly limited to determining the means to an external end that is pre-given by a desiderative state external to our reason becomes all the more plausible. The objection considered here hinges on the distinct status of technical and prudential ends. “For production aims at an end other than itself,” writes Aristotle, “but this is impossible in the case of action, because the end is merely doing *well*” [1140b4-5]. Production is therefore subordinate to the kind of practical deliberation directed towards *eudaimonia*, mainly because, in the case of the former, the end is external and finite: “production is different from action [...] so that the reasoned state that is capable of action is also different from that which is capable of production” [1140a1, 4-5]. Unlike those who are technically competent, the prudent have “calculated successfully with a view to some serious end (outside the sphere of art)” [1140a32]. In technical skill, deliberation is about achieving an end or product that is external to its actual making or production, and the action concludes once that object comes into being.⁶¹ We do not deliberate about an end product such as a table, but do employ technical skill to produce that object. Moreover, without that end the means has no significance; it is for the sake of that table we act and deliberate about the best technical means to employ. Thus, our actions are conditional upon the end craft or product, and conclude once this object comes into being. For “every art is concerned with bringing something into being, and the practice of an art is the study of how to bring into being something that is capable either of being or of not being, and the cause of which is in the producer and not in the product” [1140a11-14]. The means-end causal chain is typically more clear-cut in this kind of technical deliberation, and is therefore different from the evaluative and procedural intricacies characteristic of *phronēsis*.

It is important to clarify the distinction between technical deliberation and *phronēsis*, mainly because one could potentially argue if technical reasoning is the paradigmatic

⁶¹ See Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, pp. 74-5.

model of practical rationality, then the claim that it must include the deliberation and evaluation of complex ends is undermined. All that can feasibly be expected from an account of means-end deliberation is the discernment of appropriate causal means towards an external end; the only value of one's means is their causal efficacy to an end product. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt eloquently articulates the repercussions arising from the modern propensity to conceive of instrumental reason strictly in this technical sense:

Man, in so far as he is *homo faber*, instrumentalizes, and his instrumentalization implies a degradation of all things into means, their loss of intrinsic and independent value. [...] The issue at stake is, of course, not instrumentality, the use of means to achieve an end, as such, but rather the generalization of the fabrication experience in which usefulness and utility are established as the ultimate standards for life and the world of men.⁶²

Here, Arendt describes the potent combination of practical reason understood in a purely technical sense, and the resultant devaluation of our surroundings. If the analogy between the technical skill of the doctor and the practical deliberation of the *phronimos* does not hold, rather worryingly Aristotle would then appear to accommodate these deeply problematic implications that emerge out of the standard model.

Though there is some textual justification for the above objection, the distinction between the kind of deliberation involved in craft-knowledge and ethics is nonetheless not as straightforward as implied, given Aristotle's treatment of practical deliberation as an overall genus.⁶³ Moreover, adherence to that division tackles insufficiently the difference between ends achieved *independently* of the means and those ends achieved *simultaneously* to the means. The former evokes the evaluative separation between means and ends in modern conceptions of instrumental deliberation; in the latter, however, the realization of an end is inseparable from the action or means itself. Importantly, to classify these two forms of deliberation into separate categories does not necessarily correspond to Aristotle's division between technical reasoning and *phronēsis*. To return to the earlier examples, if the doctor stopped prescribing or administering the necessary drug, the condition of the

⁶² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958) p. 137.

⁶³ Aristotle's conception of *technē* is conventionally understood as a two-way power – meaning that the exercise of technical skill can be used for contrary ends (the actual good or what only appears as good, and is consequently bad). On this understanding *technē* is purely instrumental in function and can be used for ends contrary to the actual good; however, as J. E. Tiles identifies in light of the Platonic context, “‘Technē’ and Moral Expertise,” *Philosophy* 59 (1984): 49-66, there is a level of ambiguity as to whether Aristotle consistently maintains *technē* as a two-way power. Tiles at p. 54, n.14 mentions that in *EN* Book VI. 4, Aristotle classifies *technē* under the genus *hexis*, and *hexis* is considered a one-way power in *Metaphysics*. This would imply *technē* is primarily employed for an end that is actually, not apparently, good.

asthmatic patient would deteriorate, or if the doctor stopped rubbing to produce warmth, health would not be achieved. In both these cases, the means or activity of the doctor is conjoined to the end of health. Here the doctor's craft knowledge and its associated activity do not cease once the end is obtained; both are constitutive of the end. The way to get around the above objection is to realise that, for Aristotle, the more relevant distinction is not between *technical* and *moral* ends with different forms of practical reasoning respectively, but between *productive* ends and ends that are *comprised of* activity.⁶⁴ The former are *para* ends – or those ends that conclude with a product that is external to its actual production – and the latter *allo* ends – or those ends that are “other than, but not over and above, the doings whose ends they are”.⁶⁵ A *para* end would be the production of a chair. All actions terminate once the chair comes into existence; the means are causally related to an external end and have a specific instrumental value. According to this definition, then, the physician's craft is not towards a *para* end, despite its classification as a *technē*. The example of the doctor's actions of warming or prescribing a drug indicate that the means-end deliberation required here is towards an *allo* end, where it seeks to specify the constituents and activities that comprise its overall end. As a result of this deliberation, the doctor realises the end of health is often a *concurrent* state to the actions or means employed; the means therefore possess an intrinsic and not merely instrumental value. Health lasts only so long as the patient is actively warmed or getting administered the necessary drug.

Thus, Aristotle's example of the doctor provides a helpful analogy between the practical deliberation of technical skill and ethical action. In particular, this analogy undercuts the troubling contemporary assumption that deliberation towards technical ends is, and must remain, evaluatively neutral, where all means contain only instrumental rather than intrinsic value. The metaphysical and ethical neutrality of practical reason, aspired to by today's reductive naturalists, diverges in significant respects from the Aristotelian vision. For Aristotle, important subtleties exist *even in* technical deliberation, as demonstrated in the technical skills of the doctor. And common to the doctor's *technē* and *phronēsis* is an intrinsic reliance upon the proper investigation of complex ends. This deliberative process – where we probe and specify the proper constituents of what may be a vague meta-end – is what allows instrumental reason to even get off the ground in the first place.⁶⁶

If this is true even of some forms of technical knowledge like medicine, it is highly likely it obtains in our prudential deliberation which is aimed towards *eudaimonia*, “the

⁶⁴ I am indebted to Reeve's discussion, *Practices of Reason*, pp. 103-5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

⁶⁶ Wiggins, “Deliberation,” p. 228.

first principles, since everything else that any of us do, we do for its sake; and we hold that the first principle and cause of what is good is precious and divine” [1102a3-4].⁶⁷ Elsewhere in *Posterior Analytics* [hereafter *APo*], Aristotle states that, by nature universal first principles remain more remote from the contingent, enmattered realm of humans.⁶⁸ If *eudaimonia* is by nature the final end all humans seek, and yet as a first principle is characterised by a large degree of imprecision, it follows that practical deliberation in the ethical domain (*phronēsis*) would necessarily include further reflection on the constituents of *eudaimonia*. According to the metaphysical teleology outlined in Section I, the potentiality to achieve *eudaimonia* involves the intermittent participation with the divine through first philosophy. But recall also our contemplative intellect is restricted by anthropomorphic limits which prevent the unceasing philosophic theoretical activity of the gods: these limitations alone indicate that contemplation is not the *only* activity which comprises and defines *eudaimonia*. We can be god-like, but we cannot be gods. Our potentiality rests in the rational soul – but the soul contains the potential for both *epistēmē* and *phronēsis*, and humans alone have the unique capacity for moral, noble action which deploys the latter intellectual virtue. The constraints on our philosophical contemplation, coupled with the distinctively human potential for practical, moral action in a political context, imply that ethical, practical constituents of *eudaimonia* need to be more precisely specified and evaluated. It is insufficient, for Aristotle, to say, since happiness is our first principle and final end, *phronēsis* simply needs to specify the means. The remoteness of this principle means that without first exploring its best specification we cannot even formulate means. And it is part of Aristotelian means-end reasoning to actively respond to our multiple searches: the means-end relationship may collapse from a deficiency in practical awareness or deliberation of those constitutive ends. As a result, instrumental rationality requires a large degree of responsiveness to those potential pitfalls which emerge from prior investigations of our overarching *telos*. The exploration of our global end we may not always get right, and this will dictate the effectiveness of our means-end deliberation more generally. There is no reason to believe this kind of deliberation of complex ends and of their constituents is somehow less necessary or elemental than the means-end paradigm; indeed, it may simply be the case, as I take Aristotle to be saying that the latter in fact *requires* and *encompasses* the former kind of deliberation.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *EN* 1095a15ff., 1097a25-1097b21.

⁶⁸ *Posterior Analytics* 71b29-72a6, especially 3-6.

⁶⁹ See *EE* 1226b10-30.

III. *The Inclusion of Moral Virtue in Means-End Deliberation*

The previous section established that means-end deliberation often requires the specification and assessment of constituent ends, and therefore cannot be restricted exclusively to means. The analogy between the technical reasoning of the doctor and *phronēsis* helped illuminate how working out the means to one's end presupposes this kind of concurrent appraisal of constituent ends. The substance of this theory will be filled in below. More specifically, this section argues that Aristotle would be deeply critical of the moral neutrality sought by scientific models of rational choice. For Aristotle the deliberation of the practically wise reflects an excellent moral disposition and displays moral virtue. A flawed conception of means-end reasoning divorces moral content from our appraisal of an individual's practical deliberation – both of their ends and chosen means. Indeed, the cumulative discussion of deliberation in Book VI intimates that the means-end deliberative process will often result in the recognition of intrinsically valuable goods, like the moral virtues. Thus, this section claims that praiseworthy means-end reasoning is heavily bound up with the development of a moral disposition. For practical reasoning to be admirable, both means and ends should be imbued with moral value.

That Aristotle assigns a broader, more evaluative function to practical deliberation gains further support in *EN* Book VI:

[I]t is thought to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous for himself; not in particular respects, e.g. what is good for health or physical strength, but *what is conducive to the good life generally*. A sign of this is the fact that we call people prudent in particular respects when they have calculated successfully with a view to some serious end (outside the sphere of art); so that in general also the man who is capable of deliberation will be prudent. [1140a26-33, emphasis added]

Initially, remarks like this in Book VI seem to represent a number of changes from the Book III account of choice and means-end deliberation. On Allan's view Aristotle eventually recognises, by Book VI, how some choice of means can have intrinsic value. Book VI therefore extends Aristotle's account of deliberative choice beyond the limited consequentialist scheme characteristic of the discussion in Book III. We need to make sense of the alleged disparity between the accounts of deliberative choice in Books III and VI in order to support my criticisms against Allan's reading. In Book III Aristotle gives a succinct overview of choice, defining it as the deliberation of means to actualise our wish (*boulēsis*) [1113a14]. But in the same sentence Aristotle also says this is merely an

“outline account”, implying that these are preliminary remarks which will be expanded upon later. Book III is followed by a more detailed discussion of the moral virtues and their mean states. Then in Book VI Aristotle’s definition of choice incorporates accordingly the preceding books on moral virtue and the development of good character, as he states:

Pursuit and avoidance in the sphere of appetite correspond exactly to affirmation and negation in the sphere of intellect; so that, since moral virtue is a state involving choice, and choice is deliberate appetite, it follows that if the choice is to be a good one, both the reasoning must be true and the desire right; and the desire must pursue the same things that the reasoning asserts. [1139a22-26]

Aristotle continues: “Now the origin of action (the efficient, not the final cause) is choice, and the origin of choice is appetite and purposive reasoning. *Hence choice necessarily involves not only intellect and thought, but a certain moral state*; for good conduct and its contrary necessarily involve thought and character” [1139a32-35, emphasis added]. Whereas Book III simply defines choice as the ability to actualise our wish (and carry out the means to our end), Book VI involves a much fuller account, incorporating our character and moral states. If one rejects Allan’s interpretation, how is one to explain the alleged discrepancy between these two accounts?

First of all, I certainly agree with Allan that Aristotle recognises that means are often chosen, not just for their causal efficiency, but also for their intrinsic value. But contra Allan, rather than introduce a wider or altogether different conception of deliberative choice, Book VI represents a deeper account of *an already established* definition. Here it is helpful to consider how the intervening books between III and VI explicate the moral virtues. The moral virtues are paradigmatic examples of deliberately chosen means because of their intrinsic value *independent* of an end; yet they simultaneously constitute the final good of *eudaimonia*. Even if we were to assume Allan was right – that Book III discusses means-end deliberation in a highly limited sense – it seems he would still need to answer how the acquisition and display of moral virtues fit substantively in that scheme. The benefit of how I have interpreted the Book III account of means-end reasoning is its resultant coherence with Aristotle’s discussion of moral virtue: both in Book III and VI, practical deliberation accounts for how the moral virtues function as both means towards, as well as intrinsically valuable, constituent goods of *eudaimonia*.

In the books preceding *EN VI*, Aristotle reveals how the training and guidance of the desiderative part of the soul is temporally prior to the acquisition of the intellectual virtues,

(such as the deliberative virtues that result in choice or decision).⁷⁰ An appetitive dimension, associated with pleasure and pain experience, is fundamental to all purposive animal (and therefore human) movement. For example, in *De Motu* desire is called the “first mover” [MA 700b35]⁷¹ which initiates meaningful action towards an object. As a result, in its barebones all animal behaviour can be classified under a means-end structure. Animals apprehend an object of pleasure – a real or apparent good – and follow through with the appropriate action. Animal perception is responsive to the constraints imposed by the world, and ensures the possibility of achieving an object of desire – such perception is necessary for desire to be motivating.⁷² Images formed from sense-perception inform the soul whether an object should be pursued or avoided accordingly, and whether it is possible to act in accordance with appetite. An object need not be within our immediate purview but can be simply the product of *phantasia* (imagination) as a result of previous perceptual experience [DA 431a1-19]. For Aristotle, *phantasia* in some instances is closely related to the perceptual faculty and at other times is likened to thought. It is “sometimes by means of the images or thoughts which are within the soul,” writes Aristotle, “just as if it were seeing, it calculates and deliberates what is to come by reference to what is present; and when it makes a pronouncement, as in the case of sensation it pronounces the object to be pleasant or painful, in the case it avoids or pursues; and so generally in the cases of action” [431b6-9].

Similarly, the acquisition of moral virtue stems from a similar hedonistic foundation. Drawing upon Aristotle’s psychological generalisations about animal movement, moral habituation through praise and blame corresponds to pleasure and pain respectively.⁷³ The animalistic emotional, perceptual, and appetitive motivational tools at our disposal are receptive to moral habituation and form the basis of a settled dispositional character. But unlike animals, humans further possess deliberative *phantasia* – or the capacity to unite separate images and calculate in light of that unity [433b6-11]. Habituation refines this aspect of deliberative *phantasia*, so we learn to pursue and desire the right things, and calculate according to that evaluation. Crucially, the preceding adjective to human *phantasia* – we are *rational* perceivers possessing *deliberative phantasia* – illustrates how,

⁷⁰ Hence why children, the mentally ill, or animals do not deliberate or choose, see EN 1111b8-10.

⁷¹ I set aside the debate about whether Aristotle has a goods-based or desires-based view of the first mover. See Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, p. 332 for a desire-based view and Henry S. Richardson’s criticisms and a goods-based view, “Desire and the Good in *De Anima*,” in Martha C. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty, eds., *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) pp. 381-99.

⁷² See Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 277.

⁷³ Aristotle also says we all possess a natural potential to receive the virtues but their full development is achieved only through habituation. See NE 1103a24-28.

for Aristotle, habituation is also an “intellectual process, not a merely mechanical one.”⁷⁴ In honing the natural psychological, appetitive responses needed to interpret accurately a situational particular, an individual is in fact gaining the kind of practical insight and knowledge that is crucial to the good practical reasoner of noble disposition.⁷⁵

Thus, the intervening books between *EN* III and VI hint that, for means-end deliberation to be *praiseworthy*, the acquisition of moral virtues is required. The *phronimos* synthesises all of the rational and desiderative dimensions which comprise of means-end deliberation: he is well-habituated – his proper interpretive *phantasia* and emotions form the basis of a good dispositional character. Consequently, he will act nobly whether he acts from these features or from reason. Aristotle’s account of means-end reason encompasses this fundamental insight: the quality of one’s settled character – whether or not one has acquired the virtues – will dictate the quality of one’s practical deliberation. If the ends are determined by one’s habituated wishes or desires, the ability to practically reason from a *telos* which is truly good (as opposed to a merely apparent one) will differentiate the deliberation of the *phronimos* from the merely clever, incontinent, or continent person. Without good habituation and all its implied abilities – such as the right interpretive lens and the gradual accumulation of morally salient practical knowledge – we would lack the deliberative skills needed to arbitrate between the conflicting appetites which are ubiquitous to us, as agents with a sense of time [*DA* 433b5-13].⁷⁶ And it is the acquisition of the moral virtues through the training of our psychological, appetitive animal features that, even in the pre-reflective stage of our lives, we can ensure our end or aim is an evaluatively worthy one [*EN* 1103a14-26].⁷⁷

Chronologically, it therefore makes sense that Aristotle’s account of choice and means-end deliberation becomes more complex in Book VI, mainly to incorporate his discussion of the moral virtues. Although the virtues are still technically “means” towards a *eudaimōn* life, they are also intrinsically valuable activities or *allo* ends which are done

⁷⁴ Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, p. 71. As Reeve points out, it is part of the inductive process of ethical knowledge towards first principles.

⁷⁵ *EN* 1103a14-18.

⁷⁶ The incontinent man also cannot arbitrate between reason and appetite. I will discuss this temporal dimension to human desiring and its relation to human function in more detail in the next chapter.

⁷⁷ *Magna Moralia* 1185b36: “it is not possible to achieve excellence or vice without pain and pleasure. Excellence then has to do with pleasures and pains.” (Translated by St. G. Stock in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2.) Although the authenticity of *Magna Moralia* is still questioned by some scholars, (D. J. Allan, “*Magna Moralia* and *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957): 7-11; C. J. Rowe, A Reply to John Cooper on the *Magna Moralia*,” *American Journal of Philology* 96 (1975): 160-72) I use the work assuming that it is a genuine work by Aristotle, although the main thrust of my argument does not rely on the work but simply bolsters my main interpretive claims in this chapter. For those who argue for the authenticity of this work, see J. M. Cooper, “The *Magna Moralia* and Aristotle’s Moral Philosophy,” *American Journal of Philology* 94 (1973): 327-49.

for their own sake. “The full performance of man’s function depends upon a combination of prudence and moral virtue,” writes Aristotle, “virtue ensures the correctness of the end at which we aim, and prudence that of the means towards it” [EN 1144a6-8]. He continues that the good man executes action in a specific state of mind, whereby his fine and just acts are done from choice and “for the sake of the acts themselves” [1144a20]. So when we engage in morally virtuous action, we actualise the means towards *eudaimonia*, in the sense that doing them *constitutes* and *contributes* to the good life. At the same time, these virtues are goods in themselves. Understood this way, Books III and VI should be taken as a unitary and cumulative discussion of practical deliberation. As has been shown above, Aristotle’s statements in Book III do not, by themselves, preclude the deliberation of ends; nor do they imply a simple causal means-end chain. Wiggins therefore argues correctly that Book VI signifies a broader discussion rather than an altogether new definition of practical deliberation. In Book VI, Aristotle asserts in more positive terms how the deliberative engagement of *phronēsis* results in the articulation of intrinsically valuable goods – like the moral virtues. These goods are “means” in the sense that they are substantive constituents of the final end of *eudaimonia*. Initially, they are goods that we come to some pre-cognitive, hazy awareness through praise and blame. Greater intellectual precision is acquired only through deeper rational engagement (via *phronēsis*) at a more mature stage in our lives; at that point our rational articulation of goods improves. We are consequently in a better position to appreciate how such goods we should choose *for their own sake*; we acquire a sound awareness of how these fit in the temporal structure of a flourishing human life. “For choice is not simply picking but *picking one thing before another*,” Aristotle writes in *EE*, “and this is impossible without consideration and deliberation; therefore choice arises out of deliberate opinion” [1226b7-9, emphasis added].

Aristotle’s distinction between the person who is merely clever as opposed to practically wise provides further evidence that prudential deliberation encompasses the correct evaluation of an end. In Book VI, he describes cleverness as the faculty “capable of carrying out the actions conducive to our proposed aim, and of achieving that aim” [EN 1143a25-6]. But this clever ability – to follow through with actions appropriate to our end, to instantiate a causally effective instrumental connection in action similar to what is required by the standard model – is not in itself praiseworthy. Anyone can execute means fitting to one’s end; it is not a characteristic exclusive to the morally virtuous. Indeed, even individuals with vicious characters can be called clever, “which is why we call both prudent and unscrupulous people clever” [1144a29]. But one is prudent – as opposed to merely clever – when the chosen ends are morally praiseworthy. To be judged prudent or practically wise depends entirely on the *value* or nobility of the agent’s aim. Instrumental cleverness the prudent person will necessarily have, but she will utilise it for the

achievement of praiseworthy ends, worthy of a morally virtuous character. Aristotle is emphatic that we “cannot attain to this state [of prudence] without virtue” [1144a31]. He goes on further to say:

For practical syllogisms always have as their starting-point ‘Since the end or supreme good is such-and-such (whatever it may be; for the sake of the argument it can be anything). Now only a good man can discern this, because wickedness distorts the vision and causes serious error about the principles of conduct. Thus it is evident that one cannot be prudent without being good. [1144a32-1144b1]

Yet, even if the correct aim is achieved, the chosen means must also be praiseworthy in order to be judged a good deliberator (*euboulia*). Aristotle writes again:

But the outcome of successful deliberation is generally assumed to be something good; because the sort of correctness in deliberation that constitutes resourcefulness is that which tends to secure something good. But it is possible to achieve even this by false inference: that is, to achieve the right end, but not by the right means, the middle term being false. So this sort of correctness, through which we attain to the right end, but not by the right means, still does not constitute resourcefulness. [1142b21-26]

The kind of resourcefulness or good deliberation implied in *phronēsis* requires that our conclusive choice demonstrates goodness of both aim *as well as* means. This implies a reciprocal relationship between the determination of valuable ends and the deployment of appropriate and praiseworthy instrumental means. Deliberative excellence (*euboulia*) entails both instrumental cleverness as well as a consistently virtuous character: the latter makes both the end and means morally praiseworthy while the former ensures that, given the opportunity, the right consequences are achieved. More specifically, the means will be praiseworthy due to the acquisition of the intellectual virtue of *phronēsis*. As an intellectual virtue, *phronēsis* involves a rational, cognitive recognition of the intrinsic value of admirable means like the virtues; it represents not simply an automatic procedure, but a conceptual acknowledgement and understanding of how certain goods possess a broader significance in light of *eudaimonia*. The person of vicious character may deliberate *correctly* and *efficiently* in a logical causal structure, he may still produce the right consequence even with the false inference or wrong intentions. But on Aristotle’s view,

this person certainly does not practically reason or deliberate *well*.⁷⁸ They do not rationally appreciate how some means – such as courageous, temperate, magnanimous, just acts – possess value in and of themselves, and as a result, the intellectual virtue of *phronēsis* is absent.

Conclusion

Above I have claimed that the Book III and VI accounts of deliberation are consistent with one another; thus, Allan's understanding of choice as restricted to the means is unfounded. On the interpretation given here, instrumental reason in Aristotle involves substantive moral evaluation and specification of complex, global ends. The paradigmatic example of this is the global, species-wide end of *eudaimonia*. As I have suggested above, to determine the means to an end involves strong evaluation and articulation of goods, as well as a general discrimination of how these different pieces or goods fit in the envisaged contours of one's life. Desired ends will be evaluated according to our human function. Aristotle therefore challenges two claims which are characteristic of currently standard models of instrumental rationality: namely the evaluative detachment between means and ends, and the repudiation of ethical or metaphysical frameworks. Clearly Aristotelian means-end reasoning cannot be assimilated to or aligned with such modern conceptions of rational choice and instrumental reasoning. This will help situate my discussion of the practical syllogism in the next chapter, where I argue Aristotle resists the modern propensity to reduce human purposive behaviour to the level of scientific prediction or deduction. The flexibility towards the perceived circumstance required of *phronēsis* is uncodifiable and lacks scientific certitude; in fact, such standards are unattainable in practical matters. Both this and the next chapter aim to provide an intermediate reading between those commentators who enrich means-end reasoning with the deliberation of constituent ends in order to ascribe to Aristotle a thesis of value incommensurability, and those who claim Aristotle's means-end deliberation follows one single, reductive metric, where the perplexities of practical life are rendered into scientifically codifiable rules. Both of these readings I argue against in the next chapter. Ultimately the normative options are not exhausted by these two extreme conclusions.

⁷⁸ See Ronald D. Milo, *Aristotle on Practical Knowledge and Weakness of Will* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966) p. 31.

3 Aristotle's Practical Syllogism

The reading in the previous chapter established how the objectivist framework of Aristotle's teleological naturalism, combined with the function of *phronēsis* as engaging in the evaluation and articulation of ends helps Aristotle evade the subjectivist and reductivist tendencies of the standard model of instrumental reason. But in Books VI and VII, Aristotle's supposed formulation of practical deliberation in a syllogistic structure calls this interpretation into question. For many commentators it is ambiguous whether Aristotle means to draw analogies or disanalogies between the practical syllogism and demonstrative, theoretical science.¹ Initially Aristotle's syllogistic project appears amenable to a kind of explanatory reductivism which is conducive to predicting human action. If means-end reasoning only requires formal structural consistency akin to theoretical demonstration, the separation between practical deliberation and theoretical reason would be minimised and moral, qualitative distinctions should have no necessary bearing on practical deliberation. On this possible reading, Aristotle's practical syllogism imposes an almost deterministic, rule-like pattern to practical deliberation, hence leading some to draw an inaccurate parallel with scientific deduction. Implicit in this view is the belief that in order for practical instrumental reasoning to qualify as rationality proper, it should aspire to resemble or at least be continuous with its more privileged theoretical scientific relative.² The answer to the interpretive questions surrounding Aristotle's syllogistic project will have implications for the extent to which his account of instrumental reason compares with the standard model.

But on a more defensible interpretation, this chapter argues that the practical syllogism does not imply a deductive model of instrumental reasoning which renders human behaviour predictable in accordance with rules. Aristotle's aim is not to reduce the actual practical deliberative process to the form of the syllogism, but rather to elucidate its two distinct functions. First, the practical syllogism links the kind of complex means-end deliberation outlined in the previous chapter to action; second, it confers some explanatory precision to our practical action. In its first function the practical syllogism should not be equated with actual means-end reason. Rather, it is a quasi-perceptual, intuitive capacity adjacent to the actual deliberative process, which translates decision – the end result of means-end deliberation – into conclusive action. The second function may not be called “practical” in the strictest sense, but is more an explanatory device meant to render

¹ Milo, *Aristotle on Practical Knowledge*, pp. 50-6; Allan, “The Practical Syllogism,” p. 329.

² For an incisive critique of this view, see John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *Monist* 68 (1979): 331-50, especially pp. 336-7; also see his paper, “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement* (1978): 13-29.

purposive action comprehensible.³ Aristotle is able to maintain two functions of the practical syllogism – one explanatory and one perceptual that is contiguous to deliberation proper, all without its amalgamation into scientific knowledge – mainly because he is not afflicted with the contemporary worries regarding gaps between thought and action, nor sceptical doubts about the motivational power of reason itself.

Two broader issues are therefore at stake here. First, as implied above, I want to illustrate how Aristotle's conception of practical deliberation is irreducible to a formula, which presents our rational choices as ordered solely in accordance with standards of consistency and coherence. Although the objectivist framework within the theoretical scientific domain situates and places conceptual pressure on practical reason's articulation of the human good (as shown in the previous chapter), the practical and theoretical, scientific modes of *explanation* are nonetheless relatively discontinuous. To clarify this point, theoretical reason is capable of cognising and understanding the metaphysical claims underlying an objective account of human function. But while this prepares space for the articulation of the human good by practical wisdom, it does not mean our explanations of practical action adhere to the deductive ideal of theoretical reason. Distinctions between the practical and theoretical syllogism provide support for a more complex account of human practical action, which retain all the complexities and particularities of practical life. This is consistent with the previous chapter's claim that practical deliberation inevitably involves the moral evaluation and specification of complex ends.

The second issue concerns the limited success of historical retrieval as a possible critical strategy against the standard model. Recent neo-Aristotelian normative philosophy has typically looked to Aristotelian practical reason as a much sought after middle ground between deontological Kantian ethics and the subjectivism of the standard model. While the differences between the practical and theoretical syllogisms (and therefore between practical and scientific reason) lends a degree of support for this presumed middle ground, their normative agenda cause contemporary Aristotelians to suspend the objectivist metaphysical philosophical framework situating Aristotle's theory. According to Martha Nussbaum the divergence between the two syllogisms represent an implicit attack on the commensurability of values, against any unitary form of scientific measurement to assess those goods. She thus concludes that Aristotle's conception of practical reason defends a thesis of value incommensurability and plurality, which can then be utilised to criticise, as

³ For the practical dimension of the practical syllogism, I draw from Cooper, *Reason and Human Good*, pp. 46-58; for the explanatory dimensions, see Martha C. Nussbaum's essay "Practical Syllogisms and Practical Science," in her *De Motu Animalium* (Princeton: UP, 1978), pp. 165-220 and von Wright's distinction between first- and third-person practical inferences, "The Practical Inference," *The Philosophical Review* 72:2 (1963): 159-79.

well as supplement, contemporary debates about the standard model and liberalism.⁴ On Nussbaum's account, Aristotle presents a metaphysically neutral account of practical reason that can readily accommodate divergent and conflicting conceptions of the good life, rendering it amenable to non-foundationalist liberal intuitions. But, as I show in the latter part of this chapter, Nussbaum's partial retrieval of Aristotle in turn weakens the objectivism of his philosophical framework, leading her to advance a relatively thin account of practical reason which has some similarity to the indeterminate, subjectivism of the standard model and therefore has little critical bite against the latter.

Throughout this chapter I will continue to engage with Allan's interpretation. Based on his inaccurate comparison between practical and theoretical reasoning, he concludes that the account of the syllogism in Books VI and VII articulates a rule-governed procedure of choice. The first two Sections claim that constituent differences produce structural differences between the practical and demonstrative syllogism. If the two syllogisms are indeed dissimilar, this implies a fundamental distinction between practical and theoretical rationality. Section III outlines how, in its practical function, the syllogism should be understood as an adjunct to the actual process of practical deliberation. This reading of the practical syllogism reinforces the argument that means-end deliberation should not be understood in term of the perfunctory application of a rational formula or procedure. To apply Taylor's distinction, Aristotle represents a substantive rather than procedural conception of practical reason. Yet this alternative reading to Allan's need not lead to Nussbaum's normative conclusion that Aristotle's theory of practical deliberation promotes value incommensurability and plurality, as shown in Section IV. Compared to Aristotle's moral realism and conception of functional essence, Nussbaum assumes a very thin conception of rationality that cannot qualify as the conditions of Aristotelian moral and practical deliberative choice. These crucial differences render questionable her attempted reappropriation of Aristotelian *phronēsis* as a critical response to the standard model.

I. *Distinctions Between the Practical and Demonstrative Syllogism*

According to Allan's interpretation, the practical syllogism discussed in Book VI and VII points to analogies between the function of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and contemplative, demonstrative knowledge. On his reading, the practical syllogism evokes a

⁴ Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 32-53; "Aristotelian Social Democracy," pp. 203-52; and see especially "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality," in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: UP, 1990) pp. 54-105. I should make clear that I am generally sympathetic to some of Nussbaum's exegesis – particularly of the practical syllogism – but do not think the normative implications she draws are supported by that exegesis.

different mood of the demonstrative syllogism and therefore points to a clear affinity between practical and theoretical reasoning.⁵ Allan states that there is

an analogy between the *internal structure* of the reasoning of theoretical science, which starts from self-evident principles and ends with the demonstration of the properties of its subject, and that of the *phronimos* who starts from the highest practical principle, namely the good apprehended by him and converted into an End, and who brings his reasoning down to the particular.⁶

In the context of Book VII's discussion of incontinence, the practical syllogism appears because "an analogy between the two intellectual virtues [theoretical and practical reason] is part of the plan of the treatise."⁷ Allan controversially assumes a close parallel between theoretical and practical reason: both intellectual virtues aim at truth, and both possess a similar internal, syllogistic structure which confers comparable logical necessity to their conclusions. Allan minimises the different constitutive contents of the practical and demonstrative syllogisms, and instead focuses on a presumed structural similarity between the two. Implicit in this view is a conception of content as having no bearing on the structure of reasoning. It does not matter that the content of the practical syllogism is perceptual, discursive, and experiential; resemblances in structure are sufficient to establish how demonstration of premises leads to conclusive action in a practical syllogism. Allan is thus led to conclude that in some contexts the practical syllogism refers to "actions [that] are subsumed under intuition under general rules, and performed or avoided accordingly."⁸ In other words, the practical syllogism represents a deliberative procedure by which particular acts are codified under a set of rules, resulting in rationally necessary practical action.

Two questions should be raised in relation to Allan's reading of the practical syllogism: first, is it textually accurate to subsume the practical syllogism under demonstration; more specifically, does Aristotle's account of a practical syllogism even follow his own criterion for a demonstrative syllogism? If we suppose that the answer to these questions is a firm no, any presumed analogy between the two disappears: dissimilar content implies dissimilar syllogistic structure. Second and more fundamentally, does the practical syllogism represent the deliberative process itself, or does it articulate a process adjacent to means-end reasoning? The deductive structure of the syllogism prompts an analogy between practical and theoretical reason because Allan mistakenly assumes that the

⁵ Allan, "The Practical Syllogism," p. 329.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 329, emphasis added.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

syllogism and deliberation are identical with one another. I will address the first question below and discuss the second concern in Sections II and III.

Traditionally, a syllogism is said to consist of two premises followed by a conclusion. As Kenny points out, those two premises follow a subject-predicate form, corresponding respectively to the minor and major premise.⁹ Aristotle is conventionally said to follow this pattern in *De Motu Animalium* (hereafter *MA*):

- 1) a) Every man should take walks;
 b) He is a man;
 c) At once he takes a walk.

- 2) a) No man should walk;
 b) He is a man;
 c) At once he remains at rest. [701a12-16]

- 3) a) I should make something good;
 b) A house is something good;
 c) At once I make a house. [701a15-17]¹⁰

In the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle specifies that a syllogism must be comprised of both definite and indefinite propositions in order to generate a demonstratively valid conclusion. Among interpreters it is standard to equate Aristotelian definite and indefinite articles with universal or major and particular or minor premises respectively. So defined, the basic syllogistic form of major-minor premise apparently operates in the examples above. The internal structure is relatively similar: the premises in 1(a), 2(a), and 3(b) refer to a universal premise, and combined with a particular premise, the conclusion logically follows.

But Aristotle then adds two further stipulations: a demonstration is an invalid deduction if, first, the syllogism is comprised solely of indefinite, particular propositions, or second, if it contains more than two premises [*Prior Analytics*, 42a30-39]. Already Aristotle's *own* definition of a demonstrative syllogism in *Prior Analytics* fails to correspond to his examples of the practical syllogism, where the permitted number of premises appears to be flexible and variable.¹¹ These usually contain more than two premises, with more complexity than the straightforward subject-predicate sentence

⁹ Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*, p. 112.

¹⁰ All references to *De Motu Animalium* are translated by Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton: UP, 1978).

¹¹ Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*, p. 122.

structure that traditionally defines the demonstrative syllogism. For instance, multiple premises are included in the cloak example from *De Motu*:

- 4)
 - a) I need a covering;
 - b) A cloak is a covering;
 - c) I need a cloak;
 - d) What I need I have to make;
 - e) I have to make a cloak. [701a17-23]

In addition to the multiple premises, as Kenny points out, all of the propositions in the cloak example would be considered indefinite and therefore particular premises.¹² The absence of a universal premise and the multiple particular premises mean that, by Aristotle's own definition, this practical syllogism would not be considered a valid demonstrative syllogism or theoretical argument. On one reading the syllogistic project could be construed as an unnecessarily rigid or deterministic construal of instrumental reason. Yet the fact that Aristotle does not limit himself to a certain number of premises in accordance with his own stipulations on theoretical deduction in *APr* – and is even invalid according to his rules of demonstration – should already signal a move *away* from the model of scientific demonstration in order to integrate an element of situational, particularistic complexity within the practical syllogistic structure itself. Indeed, Aristotle recognises the logical, linguistic oddity of determining practical action in the syllogistic form.¹³

The “universal” premises of the practical and demonstrative syllogism need to be further distinguished based on the different methods by which their content is derived. In scientific demonstration the universal premise is comprised of unqualified first principles known *simpliciter*, and are both necessary and eternal. These self-evident, unconditional first principles permit deduction: we reason theoretically *from* universal first principles to generate unconditionally valid scientific knowledge [*APo* 75b21]. However, such unconditional, universal premises are absent in the practical sphere. In the practical domain “we must be content with a broad outline of the truth,” Aristotle writes, “that is, in arguing about what is for the most part so from premises which are for the most part true we must be content to draw conclusions that are similarly qualified” [*EN* 1094b21-23]. Although still valid in a *dialectical* sense, universal premises of the practical syllogism are comparative generalities or rules which obtain only for the most part. They do not have the unconditional status of self-contained universal propositions functioning within the

¹² A. J. Kenny, “Practical Inference,” *Analysis* 26:3 (1966): 66-7.

¹³ von Wright, “The Practical Inference,” p. 165.

demonstrative syllogism; they cannot therefore advance our deductive knowledge in a particular theoretical sphere. The first principle of *eudaimonia* – the end which human functional essence aspires to achieve – may be the only premise that qualifies as unconditional and universal in ethics. But, as established in the previous chapter, this first principle requires detailed specification in order to be practically realisable; the constituents of *eudaimonia* are not deduced from similarly unconditional first principles known *simpliciter*, but are generalities that result from an inductive process through the accumulation of practical experience. For Aristotle, practical and moral inquiry is by nature distinct from the demonstrative sciences, primarily due to the universal, deductive nature of the latter, as opposed to the general, “true for the most part”, dialectical ingredients of the former.¹⁴ The practical syllogism reflects the contingent and complex nature of practical life, while at the same time conferring a degree of rational cohesion upon our explanations of human teleological action. Unlike the intuition bound up with theoretical demonstration which has “as its objects the primary immutable terms”, “the intuition that operates in practical inferences [is...] concerned with the ultimate and contingent” and it is “from particular instances that general rules are established” [1143b1-6].

But what does “ultimate” mean in this context? How this relates to action will become clearer in Section III. For my more immediate purpose, however, some preliminary remarks are in order. The term “ultimate” should be understood with reference to Aristotle’s metaphysical views on generic division or order, whereby one descends from the highest genera to the lowest species. At the ultimate or last step what is apprehended is not an *individual* item but its species or genus.¹⁵ Applied to the context of the quotation above, the ultimate in the practical syllogism refers to “kinds of things” that are grasped with an intuitive understanding, expressed in the instantaneous apprehension of the possibility of enacting one’s deliberative means in a specific context.¹⁶ But importantly, these types or kinds of things are not perceived as stand-alone eternal truths (as is the case with objects of theoretical demonstration); rather they are intrinsically bound to a particular problem or situational context.¹⁷ The “ultimate” represents an inductive accumulation of empirical experience which allows one to see that the specific kind of means chosen in means-end deliberation is possible given the context or practical problem. Intuition of an

¹⁴ This is not to say that humans cannot obtain ethical first principles; as made clear in the previous chapter, these objective principles bear on the moral practical life, but these principles in no way make practical action reducible to universal rules. Dialectic and “true for the most part” *endoxa* can generate objective first principles, but they are nonetheless distinct from the *simpliciter* relations between the first principles entailed within scientific demonstration.

¹⁵ Cooper, *Reason and Human Good*, p. 188.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39-43.

¹⁷ This important point is highlighted in *ibid.*, p. 40, n. 49.

ultimate, or kinds of things, may not boast any mathematical exactitude or eternal scope, but nonetheless possesses scientific validity appropriate to the fundamentally contingent nature of practical matters.

Thus, for Aristotle dissimilarity in propositional constituents points to an analogous disjuncture between the kind of rational, logical argumentation possible in either theoretical demonstration and practical syllogism. The nature of the premises dictates the degree of precision, exactitude, and necessity of the ensuing conclusion.¹⁸ In other words, the difference in content – and the method by which we acquire that content – implies a corresponding difference in *structure*. Throughout *APo* Aristotle makes clear that the deductive conclusions of a demonstration are necessarily valid on the basis of their eternal and necessary propositions. Given the enduring nature of its propositional content, the conclusions will be likewise both unqualified and eternal [*EN* 1139b18-36; *APo* 74b6-12, especially 75b21]. Moreover, the irreducibility of its content bears on the stringency of the inferential structure, making it amenable to an equally necessary, logical deduction. Yet this kind of unqualified inference, characteristic of demonstration, is impossible in the practical syllogism: its “universal” or “ultimate” premises obtain only for the most part, representing generalities usually derived from the accumulation of practical, empirical experience in the particular. An approximate conclusion – that also obtains for the most part – is all that the practical syllogism can aspire to, given the conditional nature of its premises.¹⁹ Whereas the premises of demonstration are universal postulates that promote *deduction*, the premises of the practical syllogism are derived from the process of empirical *induction*, which confers upon its conclusion a measure of contingency and laxity of form accordingly. In contrast to the stringency of demonstration, the content of the practical syllogism confers flexibility onto its structure.

¹⁸ See *APo* 75a1-20 on how a demonstrative conclusion from necessity requires constituents that are also necessary, as opposed to accidental constituents which will not yield demonstrative knowledge. Further, in *Parts of Animals* Aristotle draws a distinction between the necessity of demonstration and that of natural science, of which art or technical knowledge would be a species of (since it deploys knowledge of natural processes): “For there is absolute necessity, manifested in eternal phenomena; and there is hypothetical necessity, manifested in everything that is generated as in everything that is produced by art, be it a house or what it may. For if a house or other such final object is to be realized, it is necessary that first this and then that shall be produced and set in motion, and so on in continuous succession, until the end is reached, for the sake of which each prior thing is produced and exists. So also is it with the production of nature. The mode of necessity, however, and the mode of demonstration are different in natural science from what they are in the theoretical sciences [...] For in the latter the starting-point is that which is, in the former that which is to be. For since health, or a man, is of such and such a character, it is necessary for this or that to exist or be produced; it is not the case that, since this or that exists or has been produced, that of necessity exists or will exist. Nor is it possible to trace back the necessity of demonstrations of this sort to a starting-point, of which you can say that, since this exists, that exists.” [639b24-640a9, trans. W. Ogle in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: UP, 1980)]

¹⁹ This is hinted at in Aristotle’s exclusion of non-universal and perishable propositions (or in other words, dialectical propositions that “will sometimes be and sometimes not be”) from generating demonstratively valid deductions in *APo* 75b25-30.

Already this casts doubt on Allan's reading of the internal structure of the practical and demonstrative syllogisms as analogous. This should make equally suspect the interpretive unification of practical and theoretical reasoning. Allan incorrectly concludes that Aristotle's practical syllogism simply represents an application of theoretical reason, though a separation between the two is already implicit in *De Anima*, where Aristotle excludes theoretical, speculative thought as a potential source of movement in order to precisely make distinct philosophical space for practical thought.

II. *The Explanatory Function of the Practical Syllogism*

One could argue on Allan's behalf, if the components of the practical and demonstrative syllogisms differ, and if the conclusion is meant to be action as opposed to truth respectively, why would Aristotle attempt to construct means-end deliberation in a syllogistic structure in the first place? Aristotle's equivocation in this direction seems to justify Milo's charge that Aristotle does not adequately or successfully distinguish between the practical and demonstrative syllogism, between practical and theoretical reason.²⁰ While Milo may have a point, I nonetheless believe Aristotle's analogy should be taken in a very limited sense. Aristotle intends us to understand the practical syllogism in two ways, depending on whether we are referring to a first-person or third-person intentional act. In the former sense equating the syllogism with the actual process of means-end deliberation is deeply questionable (this will be explained in more detail below). However, the latter sense of the syllogism does indeed evoke some commonalities with theoretical reason. When describing a third-person intentional act, the practical syllogism grants a degree of logical coherence to our teleological, sometimes retrospective explanations of human behaviour, but does not *necessitate* or *dictate* practical action.²¹ This explanatory function becomes clearer if, in the first place, we recognise that it is misleading to impose the theoretical, deductive framework of the demonstrative syllogism onto the language of the practical syllogism. As Kenny correctly points out, for Aristotle the practical syllogism encompasses something broader and more complex than the traditional deduction in the simplified form (as quoted from Kenny), 'All *x*s are *y*s; *a* is an *x*; therefore *a* is a *y*'.²² The Greek term used by Aristotle more literally translates as a "for-the sake-of-which" explanation of purposive action, the "account one would give of what one was doing if one

²⁰ Milo, *Aristotle*, p. 50. By contrast, G. E. M. Anscombe is more convinced that Aristotle differentiates between the two. See her *Intention* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1957) p. 59.

²¹ Nussbaum, *De Motu*, p. 180ff.

²² Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*, p. 112.

was asked for the sake of what one was doing it”.²³ This more accurate rendering evokes the search for an account of practical action which extends beyond a mere efficient causal explanation. It permits a sequence of third-person question and answer in order to discover the first cause and *telos* of a particular action; it allows the agent to render her action intelligible by working back *from* the action to its starting-point or end, through an imagined dialogue. Aristotle’s examples in *MA* distinguish between a teleological explanation of instrumentally complete activity from the perspective of a third-person, and the first-person process which concludes in action.²⁴ Examples 1 and 2 indicate the former explanation while 3 and 4 indicate the latter.

Hence the loosely drawn theoretical-practical analogy in Aristotle’s discussion of the practical syllogism represents his attempt to distinguish between the ascription of a logically plausible inference from the third-person – which makes no subsequent demands of practical necessity on the agent carrying out that action – and the logical, linguistic peculiarity of the kind of practical inference that does result in action. Represented in von Wright’s words, “it is logically or necessarily true that if *A* wants to attain *x* and will not attain it unless he does *y*, then he *must* do *y*. But it does not follow that he *will* do *y*.”²⁵ In other words, the inference drawn from the practical syllogism in such third-person cases is a logically valid statement but does not necessitate action. Indeed the linguistic presentation matters a great deal: in the third-person the practical syllogism would arguably have the kind of straightforward subject-predicate propositional sentence structure evocative of (but certainly not equivalent to) a conventional, demonstrative syllogism.²⁶ In those cases, the practical syllogism would be more naturally understood as *theoretical* and explanatory as opposed to *practical*. But we risk misunderstanding the relation between action and the practical syllogism itself if we make too much of this loose parallel. Part of the function of the practical syllogism is to serve as an explanatory tool of teleological action, to provide the conceptual resources to *explain* and make comprehensible possible action from a third-person perspective. “For wisdom is not irrational,” writes Aristotle, “but can give a reason why it acts as it does” [*EE* 1247a14].²⁷ Any similarities between the practical syllogism and theoretical or scientific demonstration should not be regarded as reducing practical reason and our subsequent actions to the level of scientific deduction (of the form, ‘All *x*s are *y*s; *a* is an *x*; therefore *a* is a *y*’). Rather, it is as an explanatory tool

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 114. Also, those passages that Aristotle discusses the necessary conditions of animal purposive movement in *De Motu Animalium* are usually translated as “that for the sake of which”. See both the Oxford translation by A. S. L. Farquharson and Nussbaum’s translation.

²⁴ von Wright, “The Practical Inference”.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9. This adheres most closely to the traditional syllogism identified by Kenny, *Aristotle’s Theory of the Will*, p. 112.

²⁷ Aristotle continues that those who cannot give an account of the reason why they act the way they do would fall under the sphere of art [*EE* 1247a15].

that makes perspicuous the necessary and sufficient factors which contribute to teleological explanation of human action.

In other words, any conflation of Aristotle's demonstrative and practical syllogism is symptomatic of the failure to recognise the latter's dual function: it is, on one level, giving an *account* of "for-the-sake-of-which" action, *whether or not* the action takes place. If it does occur, it begins with the action and moves towards the discovery of the goal. Aristotle means as much when he writes in *NE* III, the "first cause [...] is the last order of discovery (because the process of deliberation by the method described is like the investigation or analysis of a geometrical problem" [1112b20-22]. But we can still ascribe a connection between a person's end and the necessary means, whether or not the corresponding action occurs. From the positive form of "A desires *p*; A must do *y* if he wants *p*, therefore A must do *y*" comes the equally valid negative form of "A desires *p*; he must do *y* and if not, he will not obtain *p*; therefore without *y* A will not obtain *p*". As von Wright shows, in our linguistic, verbal usage the counterfactual statement logically follows from the positive form, implying that even the absence of action would be explicable in this form. But though the practical syllogism in the third-person form acquires an explanatory, theoretical hue it does not automatically evoke parallels with a demonstrative syllogism. One needs to keep in mind the clear propositional discrepancy between the two – demonstrative ones being "speculative" about "unchanging objects" [*MA* 701a6-25], whereas practical syllogisms contain propositions that are more often specific to the appetitive, desiderative circumstance, and refer to *possible* action. The explanatory aspect of the practical syllogism may not conclude in action – its aim may be some form of logical validity – yet its *subject matter* and subsequent structure remain practically orientated and situationally contingent, and therefore clearly demarcated from a demonstrative syllogism.

Thus, in some respects the practical syllogism in an explanatory function has some similarities with the explanatory aspirations of the standard model. But it is important to note that the reductivist tendencies of the latter are avoided in Aristotle's clear distinction between the practical and demonstrative syllogism. Whereas the standard model takes its cue from the rise and general acceptability of the scientific mode of explanation within the domain of practical philosophy, Aristotle does not. Although the objectivist account of function imposes conceptual pressures and limits on the specific articulation of substantive human goods, standards of theoretical wisdom do not determine the mode of explanation since theoretical and practical modes of inquiry are comparatively distinct from each other in terms of content and structure.

III. *The Practical Function of the Syllogism*

The confusion surrounding Aristotle's theoretical-practical distinction is partly understandable given their divergent functions depending on whether we refer to the first- or third-person in the practical syllogism. From one direction, the practical syllogism leads to the "starting-point" or the end which an agent's actions are aimed towards in order to render those instrumental acts (or inaction) comprehensible from a third-person perspective. On this level the practical syllogism in its theoretical mode makes logical, explanatory sense of our means-end action, within the context of our normal linguistic usage and propositional structure, and is reminiscent of (but not analogous to) the traditional subject-predicate rendering of the demonstrative syllogism. From the opposite direction, the syllogism concludes with the initiation of appropriate action or the means toward an end; this first-person perspective refers to the second sense in which the syllogism is practical. Aristotle says cryptically in *EN* III, "it seems that not every investigation is a kind of deliberation, e.g. those of mathematics are not; but every deliberation is an investigation – and the last step in the analysis is the first in the process" [1112b23-24]. The practical syllogism in its theoretical function evokes a logical model to give an account of teleological action (deliberation will therefore discover the first cause or "for the sake of which"), but this does not exhaust the function of practical inferences. It also can be the case that inferences derived from means-end deliberation result in the first step in the process – namely practical action. The practical syllogism's second function offers an action guiding, intuitive process which allows us to perceive the possible means towards an end.²⁸

If all of this is plausible, an important question emerges: namely, how and where exactly does the syllogism fit within the means-end deliberative process? In the previous chapter I claimed that Aristotle's account of practical deliberation points towards an intricate process of assessment and evaluation of constitutive ends, and is therefore not limited to a strictly causal means-end paradigm. In the case of complex, global ends, instrumental reason could not even be initiated without this kind of prior exploration. But at times, Aristotle's discussion of the practical syllogism appears to undercut this thesis, particularly since *immediate* action is supposed to be the syllogism's conclusion in its non-explanatory, practical mode. This has led Allan to conclude inaccurately, but understandably, that Aristotle upholds a "deterministic psychology of action,"²⁹ and in its syllogistic form the means-end paradigm seemingly indicates a model of predictable human action that generates rules of conduct. But if Allan's mistaken conclusion is rightfully

²⁸ Cooper, *Reason and Human Good*, pp. 46-58.

²⁹ Allan, "The Practical Syllogism," p. 333.

challenged, we need to answer the following questions: in what way does the first-person form of the practical syllogism represent a deterministic account of action, and what does Aristotle mean when he says action is the *necessary* conclusion of the practical syllogism? Moreover, to what extent are particular acts reducible to inscribed, codified rules of conduct? Let me address the first question, as the answer will put us in a better position to respond to the second.

Periodically Aristotle indicates necessity in a strong sense. When discussing incontinence he writes:

The universal premiss is an opinion, while the other is concerned with particulars, which fall within the scope of sensation. When the two are combined, in one kind of reasoning the mind must *affirm* the conclusion, but in the practical syllogism it must immediately *act* on it. [1147a25-29]

At first glance Aristotle is drawing a confusing analogy between deductive necessity, characteristic of demonstration, and the practical syllogism. But the language of necessity here may be misleading: the claim that action “must immediately” conclude the practical syllogism is further qualified by, “if he has the power and is not prevented” [1147b31]. Thus Aristotle includes caveats that allow for temporal, physical, and passional disruptions. Aristotle’s account provides the general cognitive and desiderative ingredients required for practical action, but he nonetheless leaves enough conceptual space for possible obstacles to our action, and for both *akratic* and *enkratic* agency.³⁰ But this still does not explain away sufficiently why Aristotle nonetheless says action must “immediately” follow the practical syllogism.

To make sense of Aristotle here the actual process of practical deliberation – discussed in the previous chapter – and the practical syllogism need to be separated. The structure of our practical deliberation does not have to adhere slavishly to the practical syllogism; indeed, following John Cooper, the syllogism actually falls *outside* of means-end reason proper.³¹ In other words, once a decision or choice is reached by means-end deliberation, the practical syllogism describes an intuitive, perceptual process that instigates action; it essentially links deliberative choice with the specific act. Aristotle points to a relationship between the syllogism’s quasi-perceptual process and deliberation proper in two opaque passages:

³⁰ See Gerasimos Santas, “Aristotle on Practical Inference, the Explanation of Action, and Akrasia,” *Phronesis* 14 (1969):176-89.

³¹ Cooper, *Reason and Human Good*, pp. 43-6.

It is obvious that prudence is not scientific knowledge, because it apprehends the last step, we have said, since the thing to be done is of this nature. Thus it is opposite to intuition; for intuition apprehends the definitions, which cannot be logically demonstrated; and prudence apprehends the ultimate particular, which cannot be apprehended by scientific knowledge, but only by perception – not that of objects peculiar to one sense, but the sort by which we perceive that the ultimate figure in mathematics is a triangle; because there too there will be a halt. *But this is perception rather than prudence*, although it is another kind of perception. [1142a24-30, emphasis added]

[T]he intuition that operates in practical inferences being concerned with the ultimate and contingent, i.e. the minor premiss. For these are the starting-points for arriving at the end, because it is from particular instances that general rules are established. *So these particulars need to be perceived; and this perception is intuition*. [1143b3-6, emphasis added]

As implied here the syllogism makes patent an intuitive, recognitional capacity that is an adjunct to our actual prudential deliberation; it articulates our *perception* of the particulars or means already decided upon through preceding instrumental reasoning, and we subsequently “arrive at the end” – meaning practical action. In other words, only with that perceptual, intuitive recognition bound up with the syllogism do chosen means get instantiated in action. As shown in the preceding chapter, choice or decision (*proairesis*) concludes the complex process of practical deliberation – where constitutive ends and appropriate means are considered. It is only *after* a decision is conclusively reached that the practical syllogism comes into the picture in order to link that specific decision with the act itself.

Let me explain this using one of Aristotle’s examples of the syllogism. He writes, “all sweet things should be tasted, and *x*, one of the particulars <forming a class>, is sweet” (1147a29-30); the person should then immediately taste *x*. Perhaps the agent has the practical knowledge that sweet things should be tasted; perhaps they are the means to some other end, for my purposes here imagine that it is good for the *telos* of health. Hence, through deliberation we know that sweet things are a means to the end of health. The agent then makes a decision (*proairesis*) to eat sweet things but at that very moment of decision nothing sweet is within his immediate purview. The agent recognises nothing that he knows of which falls under the class of sweet things, so he does not act upon his deliberative decision to eat sweet things. The intuitive perception, implied in the practical mode of the syllogism, shoulders precisely the responsibility of accurately identifying the

ultimate: namely that a particular item (referred to above as the minor premiss) belongs to a broader class of kind or species.³²

Aristotle confirms elsewhere this recognitional perception which results in immediate action:

But as sometimes happens when we ask dialectical questions, so here reason does not stop and consider at all the second of the two premises, the obvious one. For example, if taking walks is good for a man, it does not waste time considering that he is a man. Hence whatever we do without calculating, we do quickly. For whenever a creature is actually using sense-perception or *phantasia* or thought towards the thing for-the-sake-of-which, he does at once what he desires. [MA 701a26-31]

Although here Aristotle appears to provide cases whereby no deliberation occurs prior to action, that is clearly not always the case. For instance, in the statement, “taking walks is good for man” we imagine prior deliberation has already taken place – about the constituents of *what* is good for man, and how walks contribute to that good. Only once such deliberation has occurred (and the person possesses the desire to obtain the good for man, does our perception of the situational particular allow us to intuit that at *this* time, at *this* place, it is an appropriate time to walk, and as a result we do so immediately. Presupposed in any action is a pre-existing desire or conscious deliberative choice on the agent’s part; thus evidence of instantaneous action should not suggest means-end deliberation is reduced to the level of predictive necessity. Aristotle’s use of the terms “must” or “immediately” may simply apply to those practical examples where the situation is interpreted or perceived as an appropriate instance to instantiate one’s choice in action.³³ Indeed, the ability to recognise the times or occasions it is fully appropriate to act is part and parcel of humans possessing deliberative *phantasia*. To return to my earlier example, upon seeing an apple (and thus exercising a recognitional capacity) an agent acts right away. On Aristotle’s view, that immediate act isn’t the result of scientific or deductive necessity. Rather, it represents the person’s accurate perceptual capacities of the ultimate and contingent (she recognises this thing is an apple, and fruit is further classified under sweet things) which mediates between action and desire or deliberative choice (“sweet

³² This clarifies what Aristotle means when he says that intuition here is concerned with the “ultimate and contingent” – it must have a degree of understanding of the “ultimate” in order to even make sense of the contingent (that what I perceive in the particular falls under a broader classification). The analogy of perceiving a triangle is a case in point: the geometer who perceives that a geometrical problem can be solved by the construction of a triangle, and accordingly draws the shape. The perception in question, then, recognises that the puzzle has been ultimately solved through the figure of a triangle; see *ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

³³ Santas, “Aristotle on Practical Inference,” p. 176.

things are a good means towards health”).³⁴ But the converse is also true: *not* to act when the means are unavailable or absent would not indicate a lack of deliberation. The decision may be delayed in action – perhaps the particular means are not perceived and the decision will have to be tucked away for a more appropriate time, when the agent actually intuits the possibility of enacting that choice. Having a temporal dimension to our deliberative *phantasia* means we are not strictly bound to the immediacy of the present as are other animals, but possess the capacity for long-range planning. I will have more to say on deliberation and its temporal significance in the final section. But suffice to say here the practical syllogism represents a perceptual bridge between practical deliberation and action. This bridge features crucial temporal awareness, capable of recognising constraints on the immediate implementation of chosen means which need not occlude its potential future enactment. Clearly, in no sense does this replace or represent an *alternative* form of practical reasoning.

Thus, if there is any degree of necessity to the practical syllogism, it is insofar that the immediate presence of means or the availability to act is intuited through perception. This necessity is not the essence of practical deliberation itself, but is characteristic of the perceptual addendum, expressed in the practical syllogism. A dimension of necessity to the syllogism does not compromise the complexity and substantive, evaluative nature of practical deliberation, primarily because Aristotle does not conflate but in fact differentiates instrumental reasoning from the perceptual, intuitive faculty. Therefore Aristotle is in no way committed to a thesis of strong determination or reductionism in his actual conception of means-end reason. That Aristotle does not have in mind a strong sense of necessity, where action *must* follow from deliberation, is already implicit in the explanatory function of the practical syllogism. Recall that in the positive form of “A desires *p*; A must do *y* if he wants *p*, therefore A must do *y*” is the negative form of “A desires *p*; he must do *y* and if not, he will not obtain *p*; therefore without *y* A will not obtain *p*”. In cases where practical action has *not* immediately followed deliberation, the adjunct function of practical syllogism allows us to explicate reasons *why* he failed to act, making transparent perceptual factors which may have gone awry.

Aristotle further confirms this view in his explanation of incontinent action. *Akrasia* represents a failure in our perceptual intuition of the particular. The formal structure of the practical syllogism permits us to conclude that, due to contradicting desires or emotions, the incontinent agent has failed to adequately grasp the perceptual knowledge that is crucial to link proper deliberation with action [EN 1147b1-18]. The incontinent person is “exercising his knowledge of the universal but not his knowledge of the particulars;

³⁴ In this sense, von Wright is correct to say that the action conclusion of the first-person, practical syllogism is both voluntary and determined. “The Practical Inference,” p. 166.

because the things that we have to *do* are particulars” [1147a2-3]. Aristotle goes on to give an example: “‘Dry food is good for every man’, and ‘I am a man’ or ‘This sort of food is dry’; but whether this particular food is the right sort he either does not have the knowledge or is not using it” [1147a5-7]. The incontinent person, under the influence of appetite or emotion, is akin to “a drunken man quoting Empedocles” [1147b13] and, consequently, does not truly understand or possess knowledge of the particular. Bound up with the immediacy of our perceptual, intuitive faculty is the capacity to properly utilise and grasp our practical knowledge.

Thus, even in such cases where an agent fails to act, their rational decision would still be explicable through the practical syllogism. The process of deliberation may have gone according to plan – it may contain beliefs and desires that can be accurately ascribed to the agent.³⁵ But the syllogism provides the conceptual tools needed to extrapolate reasons why action was successfully or unsuccessfully executed – *without touching the deliberative process at all* – and focus on problems with the perceptual, intuitive faculty. When means-end reason concludes, Aristotle says we “arrive at the first cause, which is the last order of discovery” [1112b21]; this refers to the perceptual, intuitive bridge between practical deliberation and action. The accurate perception of the feasibility or immediacy of the particular situation falls upon this intuitive capacity represented by the practical syllogism. Without that bridge, a deliberative choice may be unfulfilled – a given situation may be perceived impossible so a decision cannot be performed. For Aristotle, the failure to immediately act needn’t necessarily be attributed to any malfunction within the deliberative process.

The interpretation of the practical syllogism as falling *outside* of means-end deliberation means one should not worry that Aristotle provides philosophical space for deliberative decisions which are not immediately enacted, nor that this may confer on practical choice a more theoretical hue, evocative of what post-Kantian philosophy now classify as theoretical reason. In fact, the tendency to remove any space between rational reflection and action is symptomatic of a contemporary misapprehension about the power of practical reason to motivate. The motivational question informs both critics and proponents of the standard model and is a problem which informs their reading of Aristotle, manifested in, first, sceptical doubts regarding the power of practical reasons to motivate and second, a clear segregation between abstract thought and practical reason. But it is unlikely that Aristotle had this particular worry about reason’s motivational power. First, the motivational power of practical reason is never called into doubt; what is questioned specifically is whether theoretical knowledge, such as eternal truths and Platonic Forms, are

³⁵ Santas, “Aristotle on Practical Inference,” p. 177, n. 11.

sufficiently engaged with the enmattered realm of humans to be motivating. Second, we cannot assume that Aristotle's distinction between practical and scientific knowledge implies that *phronēsis* is incapable of abstraction. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre underscores the immediacy of action in the practical syllogism, removing any gaps between thought and action in order to dispute the misguided emphasis on theoretical reason endemic in modern conceptions of instrumental reason. He writes:

Aristotle takes the conclusion to a practical syllogism to be a particular kind of action. The notion that an argument can terminate in an action of course offends Humean and post-Humean philosophical prejudices, according to which only statements [...] can have truth-values and enter into those relationships of consistence and inconsistency which partially define deductive argument. But statements themselves only possess these characteristics in virtue of their capacity to express beliefs; and actions can of course express beliefs as certainly, although not always as clearly and unambiguously, as utterances can. It is only because and only because of this that we can be puzzled by the inconsistency between a given agent's actions and his statements.³⁶

MacIntyre is right to suggest that the Aristotelian theory of practical deliberation does not correspond to the modern prioritisation of theoretical reason at the expense of practical reason.³⁷ However, this does not, and should not, close off the possibilities represented by the practical function of the syllogism: namely, cases where perception informs us that it would be unrealistic to enact our decision, given the particular circumstances, so one holds off acting. Aristotle is not committed to saying that the *decision itself* is flawed – it may very well be a good decision that simply requires the right situation. But if read in light of modern worries, this conjecture is plainly incomprehensible. The sceptical or internalist view underlying the standard model would deem this as evidence that practical reasons – or reasons in general – are fundamentally non-motivating or external to the agent's subjective motivational set.³⁸ Or, as implicitly reflected in MacIntyre's quotation, these reasons are not properly practical but merely the result of inactive theoretical, cognitive thought.

But these views about reason ignore the subtlety involved in Aristotle's distinction between the theoretical and practical, and between deliberation proper and its adjacent intuitive-perceptual faculty. More forcefully put, this perceptual intuitive faculty represents

³⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue; A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985) p. 161.

³⁷ But that said, I believe it deeply questionable for Hume's conception of reason to be classified under the sceptical view. This will be apparent in Chapter 5.

³⁸ Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," pp. 101-13.

a kind of moral or practical discernment. Recall that habituation involves the honing of our appetitive, pathological dimensions *as well as* the acquisition of practical *knowledge* which culminates in wisdom. Through admirable perception, the *phronimos* may discern that it is inappropriate to act on his deliberative choice in this situational particular. For Aristotle, what would be deemed on the modern picture as the failure of reasons to motivate or the situational absence of practical deliberation could in fact be something to be praised because it nonetheless displays the impeccable dispositional *character* of that person *not* to act in that instance. Theoretical, scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) apprehends data that is altogether different from the practical knowledge acquired in habituation, yet the latter is still capable of abstract knowledge of a practical and enmattered nature. The distinction between the practical and scientific knowledge needn't automatically imply the complete foreclosure of abstract thought in the practical domain. On these grounds, Aristotle can say that conclusive action can be *post-facto* to practical deliberation; the choices and decisions that conclude means-end deliberation can be applied later and it still would not undercut his division between speculative and practical reason.

IV. *Incommensurability and Aristotelian Deliberation*

Let me briefly tie together the extended argument outlined in the previous chapter and above. The first chapter argued that, unlike the subjectivism of the standard model, Aristotle situates instrumental reason in an objectivist moral framework that necessarily impinges on the determination of both means and ends. If mapped onto Taylor's distinction, this illustrates that Aristotle would have a substantive as opposed to procedural conception of practical reason, in large part because the conceptual pressure exerted by his metaphysical framework requires further specification and evaluation of the goods constitutive of that framework. In the Aristotelian sense of *phronēsis*, deliberation results in the recognition and articulation of intrinsically valuable goods, which simultaneously function as means towards the ultimate, species-wide end of *eudaimonia*. This will involve both the correct moral shaping of one's character and the evaluation and articulation of complex ends. Praiseworthy deliberation (*euboulia*) requires choice that represents the harmonious collaboration between all of these deliberative ingredients, ensuring "correctness in estimating advantage with respect to the right object, the right means and the right time" [1142b27-8].

The current chapter has further distanced Aristotle from the standard model by resisting the practical syllogism's assimilation to a reductivist explanatory framework which favours scientific, i.e., deductive reasoning. Aristotle's objectivist framework makes further demands on the proper cultivation of the intuitive-perceptual adjunct to means-end

deliberation, as illustrated by the practical syllogism. Specifically, Aristotle's arguments exert tremendous pressure on this kind of intuition in the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. As mentioned before, *eudaimonia* as an unconditional end is far too expansive to be realistically actualisable in practical life without further deliberation or articulation of its constituents. Once those particular constituents or means are determined, it is up to the perceptual, intuitive faculty, articulated in the practical syllogism, to recognise an appropriate moment to instantiate our deliberative choice. Only with the rational perception implied in practical wisdom does one possess the ability to extrapolate and interpret the moral salience of a unique situation; a person comes to recognise and intuitively perceive the possibility of actualising the universal at that particular moment. This does not mean that universal, eternal knowledge is generated or reached through means-end deliberation, nor does it mean that the rational procedure somehow take priority over substantive content.

Thus, my argument has presented Aristotelian means-end reasoning as, first, both participatory and responsive to thick ethical evaluation of ends, and, second, opposed to a predictive formula which treat human agency as reducible to rule-governed behaviour. Ultimately, Aristotle cannot be aligned with the standard model of instrumental rationality. What normative implications can we then draw from the combined argument of both chapters?

One possible but arguably misguided option comes from Nussbaum's attempt to retrieve Aristotle for contemporary normative purposes. Nussbaum concludes that the articulation of constitutive goods of an end, as well as the clear divide between theoretical demonstration and the practical syllogism, between scientific knowledge or theoretical reason (*epistēmē*) and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), culminate in a moral theory that endorses plural goods and incommensurable values. Because Aristotelian means-end reason requires and implies a more detailed specification of an end, resulting in the recognition of goods valuable in themselves, Nussbaum suggests it is the necessary condition of deliberative choice that no objective criterion exists whereby one virtue can be deemed to be of greater value, or one specification of a *eudaimōn* life can be rationally privileged over another. Instead, the requisite evaluation of ends will lead to reflection on the tragic tensions that exist between different values comprising the good life. For example, as intrinsically valuable constituents of *eudaimonia* the moral virtues would be entirely distinct and separate goods from one another. Nussbaum writes, "[a] rational Aristotelian adult will have a reasonably good understanding of what courage, justice, friendship, generosity, and many other values are. He or she will understand how in our

beliefs and practices, they differ from and are noninterchangeable with one another.”³⁹ The separateness of these intrinsic goods therefore suggests that no common metric can unify or judge between them, and subsequent tensions are “not to be mitigated without a loss in richness in life.”⁴⁰

On the one hand, Nussbaum’s reading takes issue with the evaluative and explanatory reductivism which the standard model adheres to; on the other hand, she ultimately takes her cue from certain liberal intuitions regarding the social reality of value pluralism. Aristotle’s ethical views are accordingly made to support a form of value incommensurability that accommodates liberal intuitions about in the plurality of values and the separateness of persons.⁴¹ Nussbaum states this much more explicitly in the following extended passage:

The liberal view about Aristotelianism is that it always involves opting for a single conception of good rather than a plurality, and that in the process it tells people what they should be, asking them [...] to live the life that a supremely wise man thinks would be best for them. This is actually to remove their moral autonomy, and thus, from the liberal’s point of view, to treat them unequally. There is no issue to which the Aristotelian should be more sensitive than this one, since her ability to convince contemporary citizens of the merits of her view depends very much on the way these charges are answered. The first thing she must insist on is that her conception of the good, while thick is in fact vague. That is, it is designed to admit of plural specifications, in a number of different ways.⁴²

Clearly Nussbaum is trying to reappropriate Aristotle’s conception of practical reason so as to establish a philosophical middle ground in contemporary liberal theory between Kantian universalism and abstraction and the subjectivism of the sub-Humean ethical position. Nussbaum supports her normative agenda by roping off Aristotle’s metaphysical framework; Aristotelian practical reason “is [not] a theory peculiar to a single metaphysical or religious tradition”.⁴³

She defends this claim through an exclusively anthropocentric reading of the function argument. Human function means “the life we choose must be [...] a life that we, as we

³⁹ Nussbaum, “The Discernment of Perception,” p. 60.

⁴⁰ Nussbaum, “Aristotelian Social Democracy,” p. 213.

⁴¹ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, pp. 240-317, especially pp. 297-312; “The Discernment of Perception,” pp. 54-105, especially pp. 56-66; also “Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity: Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato,” in Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, pp. 395-436.

⁴² Nussbaum, “Aristotelian Social Democracy,” p. 234. She further claims on p. 217 that liberals should not be worried that Aristotle represents a single, metaphysical tradition.

⁴³ Nussbaum, “Aristotle’s Social Democracy,” p. 217.

deliberate, can choose for ourselves as a life that is really a life for *us*, a life in which there will be enough of what makes us the beings we are for *us* and to be said to survive in such a life.”⁴⁴ Notably this account puts heavy emphasis on individual choice, and suspends the metaphysics underlining Aristotle’s naturalism which is conventionally understood to support his claims of human *ergon* and the rational soul.⁴⁵ Instead, Nussbaum equates human function with a thin conception of practical rationality and deliberative choice, a move which weakens the objectivity of Aristotle’s philosophical framework.⁴⁶ She writes, “the really rational way to choose, says Aristotle with great plausibility, is to reflect on and acknowledge the special contribution of each item, and to make the understanding of that heterogeneity a central part of the subject matter of deliberation.” She then concludes succinctly, “[e]vasiveness is not progress.”⁴⁷ According to Nussbaum, accommodation of vast cultural differences and value specifications lies at the heart of this metaphysically neutral conception of human function. In fact, function supports the notion of cultural divergence, value plurality, and the reality that some heterogeneous values will be both incomparable and incommensurable as a normative ideal. Such plurality of goods are often agonistic, as Nussbaum explicitly says, “this is what it means to judge that something is an end, not simply a means to an end; there are no trade-offs without loss.”⁴⁸ On Nussbaum’s picture of human nature, Aristotle’s theory of practical reasoning can be appropriated and utilised unproblematically as a relevant normative corrective to the reductivist tendencies of the standard model, particularly since it corresponds well to contemporary liberal values which emphasise the variegated individual and cultural conditions of human choice.

Nussbaum’s retrieval of Aristotle is initially appealing particularly if one is concerned about the reductivism and subjectivism characteristic of standard model: it would appear that Aristotle provides an ideal counterweight to the standard model and even accommodates well certain widespread liberal intuitions. Yet I remain sceptical that Aristotle’s texts do indeed endorse any of these claims and am generally unconvinced that one can sever Aristotle from both his historical moorings and metaphysical commitments so easily, as implied by Nussbaum. Indeed, two troubling implications emerge from her view: first, it is one thing to maintain that an underspecified objective end requires

⁴⁴ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, p. 293.

⁴⁵ See Irwin, “The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle’s Ethics” in A. O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980), pp. 35-54 and his *Aristotle’s First Principles*; Reeve, *Practices of Reason*. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 148-57, Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), especially pp. 43-52. Both MacIntyre and Williams explicitly depart from Aristotle, as they both claim that his metaphysical biology makes Aristotle’s views untenable in light of contemporary scientific knowledge.

⁴⁶ André Laks makes similar criticisms of Julia Annas’ paper, “Naturalism in Greek Ethics,” which can apply to Nussbaum as well. See Annas’ paper and Laks, “Commentary on Annas,” both in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* Vol. IV (1988).

⁴⁷ Nussbaum, “The Discernment of Perception,” p. 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

evaluation and specification of its constituents through practical deliberation, but entirely another to say that the trajectory of this kind of deliberation will be the promotion of an agonistic, plural specification of the good. Nussbaum essentially conflates these two separate claims. Second, Nussbaum misrepresents Aristotle's conception of human nature in order to make his theory practically amenable to our contemporary predilections, as reflected in the perceived desirability of evaluative and metaphysical neutrality in light of the social reality of value pluralism. This, in turn, weakens the scope, complexity, and the robust objectivity of his means-end deliberation. Nussbaum's partial retrieval of Aristotle's conception of practical reason therefore fails to establish a substantively different and critical alternative to the subjectivism of the standard model; instead, she retreats to a position which ironically endorses the presuppositions of the subjectivist and reductivist view she is trying to avoid. These issues are enough to doubt the success of Nussbaum's partial reappropriation of Aristotelian means-end deliberation in support of Nussbaum's normative enterprise. Let me address these two points in turn.

First, it remains unclear how Nussbaum's interpretation manages to bridge the claim that Aristotelian practical deliberation represents the process by which we come to articulate and evaluate constitutive goods – and in some cases recognise their intrinsic value – with the entirely separate claim that Aristotle's practical reason actually *accounts for*, and indeed endorses, the objective, normative moral value of irreducibly separate and plural goods. The former claim is incapable of bearing the full weight of a normative moral theory constructed by the latter view. As André Laks points out, any conceivable normative theory in the latter sense would need, not simply to acknowledge the *existence* of plural ends and goods, but the stronger claim that all these goods are of *equal value*.⁴⁹ Aristotle may recognise the existence of plurality, of conflicting choices between goods and ends, but this is not something to be celebrated or upheld as a normative ideal of practical reason – such conflict is a problem to be eradicated or minimised so that choice can be exercised without major impediment. In other words, awareness of conflict is not synonymous with defining it as the ideal normative conditions of deliberative choice.⁵⁰

Aristotle's propensity to reduce conflict in practical deliberation is clearly illustrated in his discussion of the virtues. At the outset, the cumulative discussion of deliberation and the virtues from *EN* Book III-VI points to a reciprocal – not plural or conflictual – account of the virtues.⁵¹ Though each specific virtue and mean state outlined in Book III should be understood as intrinsically valuable, Book IV's discussion of justice unifies these virtues, calling justice “not a part of virtue but the whole of it” [1130a10]. In other words, to

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Laks, “Commentary on Annas,” p. 184.

⁵¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 157.

conduct oneself with justice already presupposes the architectonic reciprocity of the virtues [1137a5-25] and “is the active exercise of complete virtue; and it is complete because its possessor can exercise it in relation to another person, and not only by himself” [1129b30-33]. The virtue of justice therefore naturally invites the use of other virtues, simply to describe and define what it means to be just. For instance, one’s just character could be defined only in relation to other virtues like intelligence, amiability, reliability, temperance, and magnanimity. It is not the case, as Nussbaum suggests in the quotation earlier, that courage is inherently separate from justice or generosity. In fact we cannot remotely understand the significance of one virtue unless it implies another; otherwise the context of the virtue is lost and as a result, so is its richness and potency. For a virtue or intrinsic good to stand alone – much less than reinforce the value of that virtue – it must be trivial enough not to imply some hierarchical arrangement or connection with others.⁵² Or the other alternative is the individual lacks the requisite coherent rational articulation needed to cognitively understand how one virtue fits with another.

For argument’s sake let us provisionally grant Nussbaum the view that the virtues or values composite of *eudaimonia* are relatively separate and equally worthy depending on the variable context. Nussbaum’s may argue that the recognition of separate goods is needed for the virtue of justice; that is why Aristotle thinks the Lesbian rule – malleable to the particular, and receptive to the situational and dispositional context – should be used to judge another’s deliberative choices in meting out praise and blame. In principle, in judging other citizens, the person of a just disposition recognises how unfortunate circumstances led to the moral conflict between separate goods, which subsequently bore on this person’s deliberative choice. This just individual will then accordingly inflict a more moderate punishment. The justness of the moderate punishment stems from the praiseworthy recognition of separate and incommensurable goods through deliberation; in other words, the nature of the values or goods themselves confer upon practical reasoning the moral reality of plurality and incommensurability. But this reverses the actual process Aristotle describes. For Aristotle, the *conditions of practical deliberation itself* – where we judge values and goods – cannot be riddled with such indeterminacy. The individual with a just character may acknowledge an *apparent* clash of goods, but she is in a position to judge in the first place because she has shown to others her possession of deliberative excellence, meaning she is capable of assessing conduct *in light of* a harmonious good. She will be sensitive to the particularities, but she will praise and blame through the rational application of law in order to orient others towards that good.

⁵² This point is powerfully described by Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 55-6.

This leads to my second objection against Nussbaum. Nussbaum depicts Aristotelian rationality in a fairly minimal, thin sense: it cannot concretely arbitrate between conflicting goods without loss; indeed the successful exercise of one's deliberation will lead one to acknowledge our *inability* to rationally measure and decide between distinct values. This presupposes a thin notion of what it means to actualise human *ergon* and essentially weakens Aristotle's own robustly objectivist conception: how an individual achieves full human functioning remains undetermined and open to a myriad of divergent, often conflicting choices.⁵³ In other words, this construal of practical reason and value incommensurability *vis-à-vis* Aristotelian function can lead to conflict in *functional roles themselves*. Nussbaum gives an example where one is required to make a choice between playing music and helping a friend, and no neat practical rational resolution can be had in this decision, given the equal and incomparable value of each.⁵⁴ Implicit here is perhaps an even stronger claim: Nussbaum wants to say that these both can be meaningful specifications of human function – function of man as a musician *qua* musician in pursuit of artistic excellence, or as a friend *qua* friend engaged in other-regarding virtues – and therefore illustrate how diverse functional roles comprising the overall function of man can, and indeed frequently do, clash. Human function may be realised in both our functions as musician or as friend, and both would be equally valid definitions or combinations of what it is to be human. Even if I am right that, when one deliberates well, intrinsically valuable goods, like the virtues, imply one another in some fashion, could Nussbaum be correct to pinpoint the possibility for conflict between different functional roles?

Nussbaum's example suggests that human function as musician or friend can be a partial and irreplaceable *component* that comprises human functioning, and a weaker theory of practical rationality follows. But this thin conception of function and practical reason contradicts Aristotle's statements in *EN* I.7:

If we take a flautist or a sculptor or any artist – or in general any class of men who have a specific function or activity – his goodness and proficiency are considered to lie in the performance of that function; and the same will be true of man, assuming that man has a function. But is it likely that whereas joiners and shoemakers have certain functions or activities, man as such has none, but has been left by nature a functionless being? Just as we can see that eye and hand and foot and every one of our members have some function, should we not assume that in like manner a human being has a function over and above these particular function? [1197b25-34]

⁵³ See Laks, "Commentary on Annas," pp. 181-2.

⁵⁴ Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception," p. 59.

The quotation here indicates something significantly different from Nussbaum: Aristotle says joiners, artists, and shoemakers all have a specific function, and it therefore follows that we can say humans *likewise* have a function that is *distinct* from these.⁵⁵ It is not the case that the function of man admits plural, diverse, equally valuable (and therefore sometimes contradictory) functional roles. Two options will actualise human function: either the political or contemplative life.⁵⁶

Moreover, this discrete function involves specific metaphysical notions of the rational soul as an objective form, substance, and essence. However ambiguous and tenuous this connection, it nonetheless suggests Aristotle attempts to *minimise* conflict in deliberative choice by indicating a singular choice of life capable of actualising anthropomorphic function and essence, and therefore indicates the conferral of a common measure or objective property onto seeming disparate values via one's practical deliberation. Ultimately Aristotle gives us two options: the contemplative or political life – and depending on one's reading, the latter may even be secondary to the former. This gets to the crux of the argument presented over these two chapters: Aristotle clearly maintains a discrete sphere for practical and theoretical reasoning: the former is limited by the complex and contingent nature endemic to the situational perplexities of practical life; whereas the latter is concerned with universal, enduring truths. These differences are crucial to keep in mind, but nonetheless an explanatory scheme unites the two: both employ teleological, *a priori* relations that confer upon practical reason a degree of moral objectivity and realism, independent of cultural or subjective hedonistic reactions.⁵⁷ Constituent means can be evaluated and measured against one another according to a determinate, singular vision of human function (*ergon*) and our ultimate end. Aristotle believes all humans aim roughly towards that naturally prior end, even when one's abilities to rationally arbitrate between conflicting goals are still relatively crude.⁵⁸ Even when *eudaimonia* is only implicit in the precognitive phase and one is not mature enough to rationally articulate such a goal, a wiser observer could still make rational sense of their behaviour by eliciting a species-wide desire for the ultimate end. In its explanatory role, the practical syllogism conveys this kind of self-conscious, retrospective activity in search of a reasoned, conceptual articulation of the overarching value (the “for the sake of that”) underlying human intentional acts. For the person of practical wisdom and moral virtue this will eventually lead to a theoretical

⁵⁵ See Laks, “Commentary on Annas,” p. 181.

⁵⁶ For my purposes I do not need to take a clear stand on which life Aristotle conclusively endorses. But for more on this see Timothy D. Roche, “*Ergon* and *Eudaimonia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* I: Reconsidering the Intellectualist Interpretation,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26:2 (1988): 175-194; W. F. R. Hardie, ‘The Final Good in Aristotle’s Ethics,’ *Philosophy* 40 (1965): 277-95, also J. L. Ackrill, ‘Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,’ in Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, pp. 15-33.

⁵⁷ See especially Charles, “Aristotle and Modern Realism,” pp. 135-72.

⁵⁸ Irwin, “The Metaphysical,” p. 48.

exploration of human *ergon* or function – the naturally prior, schematic organisation of the constituents which contribute to our species’ overall flourishing. In contrast to the subjectivism pervasive in both the standard model and contemporary liberal stance – whereby subjective, interior self-ascriptions and subjective choices over one’s life are primary – Aristotle says that whether an individual says to herself she desires and adopts this ultimate end is unimportant, given the objective context of the rational soul and functional essence.⁵⁹ In other words, it is unimportant that an individual cannot articulate the reasons for their action in terms of the only choice of life worth having (one that is *eudaimōn*); it just *is* the case that when those actions are observed by others who possess rational wisdom, they will be understood in light of this singular – not pluralistic – choice of life or end, applicable species-wide. Without this orientating framework an individual’s rational choices and means-end actions may be misconstrued as disconnected and unintelligible.

Even the temporal dimension to human desire and choice supports this view. Recall that the human sense of time, whereby seemingly incompatible present and future desires are encountered, appears to make means-end deliberation and practical action patently unpredictable and sometimes capricious. Aristotle says human “appetites run counter to one another, which happens when a principle of reason and a desire are contrary and is possible only in beings with a sense of time (for while thought bids us hold back because of what is pleasant and good, without condition in either case, because of want of foresight into what is farther away in time” [433b5-10]. On one superficial understanding we could say, unlike animals that have no temporal awareness and have appetites they pursue immediately, humans are capable of desiring both immediate and future goals and these could fundamentally conflict with one another. However, the flip side of this temporal dimension is also the deliberative capacity to integrate a long-range view of our goals and a rational understanding of the way different goods or ends *do* and *should* fit at different phases of our lives. Temporal awareness in deliberation should ultimately grant consistency to one’s choices and moral character. As Irwin acutely puts it,

[i]f [a person] has no view of what would be preferable in the future, or if his view is quite inconstant from one occasion to another, he is ill equipped to make a sensible choice; either he does not know how to evaluate the future effects of an action, or he may well change his mind about them later, and so has no reason to take his present views seriously.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The capacity to rationally arbitrate practical options and measure them according to *human* functional end – rather than function of man *as* a musician or *as* a friend – is to have consistency with the present and future self. Indeed, this is the kind of sophisticated arbitration and appraisal envisaged in *phronēsis*. To simply say it is the nature of intrinsic values to be incommensurable, and the condition of means-end rationality is subsequent immobilisation by tragic conflict between two equally viable options, would indicate *flawed* means-end deliberation rather than reflect ethical reality for Aristotle.⁶¹ The inability to compare values and assess different possible courses of action is endemic to the person who either has not moved beyond the precognitive phase, or possesses habitual faults with their practical reasoning.

In sum, contrary to the normative conclusions drawn by Nussbaum, the practical means-end deliberation that matters ultimately to Aristotle must reflect the universal and natural function of humans, whereby the self is a temporal manifestation of a kind of being in a natural hierarchy. Our functional placement within this hierarchy grants us with an objective measure or common property to examine seemingly conflicting practical possibilities, and provides us with an objective end to our lives. The means-end deliberative process of *phronēsis* cannot remotely be instigated if the overarching *telos* of *eudaimonia* is absent from view, by which a myriad of activities or options are judged, structured, and harmonised in light of that aim. Characteristic of the person who deliberates well is this very capacity to compare and weigh different values, assess the impact of their present choice on their future selves and circumstances, and visualise whether this best actualises their ultimate end, in light of their function as a being with a rational soul.⁶² And importantly, this objective measure or common property will not lead to a thin conception of practical rationality and certainly resists the tragic contingency of choice emphasised in Nussbaum. The existence of enduring definitional features, contained within human function, imparts similarly enduring qualities to the means-end reason of one who is practically wise. The *phronimos* is not an exemplar of practical wisdom because his deliberation values or reflects the plurality and tension of the ultimate *telos*, but because his high degree of deliberative sophistication appreciates the complexity of activities that eventually culminate in his *telos* and actualisation of species function, regardless of the circumstance [1100b31-1101a3].

The difficulties inimical to practical, moral life do not minimise how Aristotle incorporates a number of rational, emotional, and psychological devices at the agent's disposal to resolve potential conflict between multiple desires and ends. Nussbaum overlooks how these rational and non-rational aspects in the *phronimos* are potential tools

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 45.

in instances of value conflict, and allow him to measure, through means-end deliberation, what goods or means are appropriate at that time of his life, and in light of his future self. That values may not be codifiable with complete scientific exactitude and certainly does not entail the moral neutrality aspired to by contemporary liberal political philosophy. But Aristotle nonetheless utilises the notion of human *ergon* and its correspondingly substantive conception of human reason, in order to provide an objective measure according to which intrinsically valuable goods are negotiated and mitigated against one another. Like other contemporary value-pluralists, Nussbaum's reading implies any conflict between two equally desirable means or ends will simply result in a toss-up or a tragic impasse; but that is not the kind of arbitrary deliberation paradigmatic of *phronēsis*. Aristotle's conception of means-end reason ultimately acknowledges that humans – as emotional, receptive beings who are responsive to others and the world around us – are vulnerable to misfortune or inner turmoil. However, the possession of a consistent moral character, manifested in instrumental deliberative excellence – which admirably synthesises our irrational and rational facets to engage in rational activity fitting to our *ergon* – provides a dynamic coping stone for such upheavals in the course of one's life.

Conclusion

The argument extending over these two chapters has been twofold: First, I claimed that the combined result of Aristotle's metaphysical background to human function, the necessary specification and evaluation of ends in practical reasoning, and the non-reductivist nature of the practical syllogism suggests that the standard model cannot be ascribed to Aristotle. Moreover, even if Aristotle's conception of cleverness is akin to the standard model, it is not of the freestanding nature of the latter since it is situated within a broader conception of substantive practical deliberation which demands the articulation of moral value and objective human goods. The distance between Aristotelian practical reason and the standard model was important so as to illustrate the crucial function carried out by Aristotle's objectivist philosophical framework in evading the subjectivism of the standard model. Second, the objectivity of this very framework is weakened in Nussbaum's partial reappropriation of Aristotle in order to make his moral theory more amenable to our liberal and naturalistic proclivities towards the accommodation of value plurality and metaphysical neutrality. Aristotle strikes a decidedly intermediate position between those who claim our moral conduct can be reduced to a formal procedure of universal validity and those who uphold a subjectivist view of moral evaluation and

practice.⁶³ It is precisely this balance Aristotle strikes that Nussbaum finds so attractive. But her attempts at retrieval is unsuccessful: in suggesting that Aristotelian reason cannot arbitrate between incommensurable values according to an objective metric or criterion, Nussbaum ends up roping off the framework which makes Aristotle avoid the subjectivism and reductivism of the very model she rejects. For Aristotle practical rational complexity can co-exist with a determinate definition of human life, all without necessarily committing oneself to the claims of liberal agonism, explanatory reductivism, or ethical subjectivism. Ultimately, Aristotle's objective account of human function will commit us to metaphysical views we simply cannot endorse today but we should be weary of hiving off the very framework which prevents the subjectivism critics find so problematic in the standard model. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, this dilemma is not isolated to neo-Aristotelian attempts at retrieval.

⁶³ Here G. E. R. Lloyd's observation that "our moral excellences may be determinate without being invariable constants" is apt. See Lloyd, "Medical and Biological Analogies," p. 76.

4 The Naturalism of Humean Instrumental Reason

Wee, sleekit, courin', tim'rous beastie,
 Oh what a panic's in thy breastie!
 Thou needna start away sae hasty,
 Wi' bick'ring brattle!
 I wad be laith to rin and chase thee
 Wi'murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
 Has broken nature's social union,
 And justifies that ill opinion
 Which mak's thee startle
 At me, thy poor earth-born companion,
 And fellow mortal!

- Robert Burns, "To A Mouse"

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* Hume writes, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" [p. 415].¹ As we saw in Chapter 1 the standard model takes this to mean that reason has only an informational, theoretical function, and action is motivated by natural human passions or desires. Moreover, the relationship between reason and the passions evokes analogies with Aristotelian means-end deliberation: an appetitive or desiderative state, such as wish (*boulēsis*), provides an agent's end; reason determines the means to achieve those ends. These similarities between what the standard model takes Hume to mean and Aristotle are superficial however: Chapters 2 and 3 showed that Aristotelian instrumental reason differs from the standard model insofar as *phronēsis* implies a commitment to an objectivist philosophical framework, evidence in Aristotle's function argument, which then imposes demands on the articulation and evaluation the goods and ends constitutive of that framework. Despite contemporary normative appeals to Aristotelian means-end deliberation as a possible corrective to the standard model's subjectivism and reductivism, I argued that these metaphysical commitments are an integral part of Aristotle's account of practical reason. Given the current dominance of the scientific viewpoint and related reluctance to engage a metaphysical perspective, such retrieval projects are of limited success.

Unlike the evident ancient-modern cosmological gulf facing (and restricting) neo-Aristotelian retrievals, Hume's background Newtonian view of nature comports well with

¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edn., L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., with textual notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). All quotations from Hume's *Treatise* refer to this edition, hereafter abbreviated *T*.

to the predominant naturalistic temper in contemporary philosophy which in turn justify current retrievals of Hume's views in debates about practical motivation. Indeed, as noted in the introduction, Hume is widely considered the historical ancestor of the standard model for three reasons. First, Hume examines human nature in a more experimental fashion, thus aligning the human sciences with the natural sciences. Much like the aspired metaphysical neutrality of current naturalistic temper, Hume's critique of rationalism rejects all metaphysical assumptions that are incompatible with a scientific, experiential approach to the study of human nature. Second, Hume is known for giving a conativist account of motivational action: natural desiderative and passionate human features are more important than cognitive rational capacities in the explanation, motivation, and guidance of human practical action. Indeed, the causal origin of practical action can be traced to individual desiderative states or pro-attitudes. Reason has no role in evaluating and articulating the substantive worth or moral value of conatively determined ends, but merely provides empirical content; reason has no motivational force independently of its association with subjective preferences. Finally, these desires or passions reflect subjective reactions and preferences of individuals – no objective framework determines the value of these conative reactions. If there are non-subjective standards of reason, these pertain to the structural consistency between (rather than substantive content of) contingent desires and beliefs. Hume's conativist account of motivation seems amenable to the explanatory aspirations of the standard model while the subjectivist nature of human desire responds well to the evaluative and metaphysical neutrality sought among contemporary adherents of the standard model.² In short, Hume's reputation as a naturalist, a conativist, and an ethical subjectivist appears to verify the standard model's Humean heritage.³

Despite these superficial similarities, I argue in this chapter that comparisons between Hume's conception of instrumental reason and the standard model are misguided for two crucial reasons. First, proponents of the standard model underestimate the depth of Hume's scepticism in his naturalist commitments. This leads to a mistaken assumption that Hume's reason has a purely information function which avoids problematic metaphysical claims bound up with a normative objectivity. In short, instrumental reason allegedly falls firmly on the "fact" side of the fact/value divide. But for Hume, when negative, sceptical arguments combine with more positive, naturalist claims the epistemic certainty – the "fact status" – assumed by modern science is in fact *questioned*. Hume's highly provocative

² Hence Hume is sometimes portrayed as a descriptive utilitarian. John Bricke, "Hume, Motivation and Morality," *Hume Studies* 14 (1988): 7.

³ See Jean Hampton, "Does Hume Have an Instrumental Conception of Practical Reason?" *Hume Studies* 21:1 (1995): 57-74; Elijah Millgram, "Was Hume a Humean?" *Hume Studies* 21:1 (1995): 75-93; Christine Korsgaard, "Scepticism About Practical Reason," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83:1 (1986): 5-25.

naturalist stance restricts what humans can objectively know of the external world and by default what humans can know of *themselves* as participants within that world. Constraints on *theoretical* rational knowledge therefore create positive space for reason *in a practical function*.⁴

Second, Hume resists rather than endorses the ethical reductivism and subjectivism of the standard model; his account of practical reason is substantive rather than proceduralist in its basic conception. The idea of an objective normativity valid for all humans is still operative in Hume's approach, and he thinks of reason as responsive to that normativity. More important than the coherence and consistency of preferences and beliefs is the actual substantive content constitutive of our instrumental deliberation. Like Aristotle, Hume's conception of instrumental reason incorporates qualitative content about the good: his naturalistic framework posits the value and worth of human sociality which then necessitates the articulation and cultivation of those admirable traits and virtues best able to promote human sociality.⁵ I show in these two chapters that evaluative content – like the moral worth of society's promotion and benefit – impinges on an individual's reasons and beliefs, and subsequently influence the direction of his or her practical conduct. Unlike the freestanding nature of the standard model, Hume's conception of instrumental reason is firmly situated within this crucial intersubjective framework.

Disregard for Hume's philosophical framework not only leads to a mistaken association with the standard model, it also encourages others to assume that Hume has no conception of instrumental reason at all so as to support a particular normative, critical agenda against the standard model. As I explain in the next chapter, the sceptical interpretation of Korsgaard, Hampton, and Millgram claim that Hume does not have the philosophical tools needed to support a practical conception of reason. According to these interpreters instrumental reason must contain normative premises which are suppressed by the standard model: proponents of the latter are wrong to suggest that the normative status of practical reasons is reducible to concerns about motivation, particularly since hypothetical imperatives of instrumental reason – or the *means* to an end – are in fact prescriptive, normative reasons for action. Standards of instrumental reason presuppose a categorical rational norm. If this is true, Korsgaard, Millgram, and Hampton doubt that an agent's actions can be evaluated according to any rational norms in a Humean theory of

⁴ This move on Hume's part anticipates Kant's claim about the primacy of practical reason.

⁵ Hume regards this as a natural fact about human beings, much like how classical thinkers presume humans are by nature co-operators and communicators. Hume would be quick to note that this is explicable in a science of man, but nonetheless it does presuppose a very particular vision of human nature. This is true if we compare Hume to a Hobbesian naturalist account, where the latter presumes a much more atomistic vision of humans.

motivation.⁶ Either Hume must have a normative conception of instrumental reason – therefore contradicting his own account of the is/ought gap – or he must be a thoroughgoing sceptic about instrumental reason. Sceptical readings maintain that Hume must be the thought of as committed to the latter view – that he does not believe there to be such a thing as practical reason – since he presumably would reject the suppressed normative premises entailed in an account of instrumental reason.⁷

In the next chapter I claim that, despite its critical agenda, the sceptical reading shares with the standard model an adherence to the fact/value gap, resulting in a proceduralist understanding of practical reason that is misguidedly attributed to Hume.⁸ Like the standard model, the sceptical reading is guilty of disregarding Hume's philosophical framework. As a result, it fails to appreciate Hume's much more substantive conception of instrumental reason. Ultimately, Hume does not have to resort to a proceduralist account of reason in order to make philosophical space for quasi-objective reasons with both motivational and normative authority. Specific questions of motivation and normative justification in Humean instrumental reason will be addressed in the next chapter.

Resisting both contemporary standard models' re-appropriations and Kantian critiques of Hume allows us to see how Hume's naturalistic framework demands evaluative and qualitative distinctions in relation to the non-subjective, specifically intersubjective, human good which constitute and situate his account of instrumental reason. Standards of instrumental reasoning are judged according to collectively affirmed, broader social, moral (and ultimately natural) values. Hence, proponents of the standard model are wrong to say that a naturalist account of instrumental reason requires us to hive off normative frameworks and focus on motivational questions instead. Yet the Kantian critique is equally mistaken when it seeks to invalidate Humean instrumental reason through the imposition on it of categorical norms typically associated with proceduralist conceptions of practical reason. For Hume, the social tapestry offers a crucial motivational and normative backdrop, that is part and parcel of reason's practical function of ethical judgement guided by communally shared demands upon individual character. Thus, the norms or standards of

⁶ Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut, "Introduction," in Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) p. 9. See also Christine Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason," in *ibid.*, pp. 220-234; Hampton, "Practical Reason" pp. 66-9.

⁷ However, some Humeans would agree with these criticisms of the instrumental norm. It is generally acknowledged that Hume's principles are only a *point of departure*, and are subsequently enhanced with what Humeans see as more philosophically defensible claims. See James Dreier's "Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality," in Cullity and Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason*, p. 96.

⁸ I say Kantian in the constructivist sense (and use Kant as a point of departure) as opposed to a more textual, exegetical approach. This distinction will become much more important in Chapters 6 and 7 on Kantian instrumental rationality.

instrumental reason assess the character of a person – whether they exhibit admirable traits and virtues beneficial to society and common life – not discrete actions. Some striking similarities between a Humean and Aristotelian account of instrumental rationality will become more evident throughout this and the next chapter.

The interpretation provided in these two chapters therefore emphasises the broader framework of human sociality which situates what Hume would deem as admirable instrumental reasoning. This shows how and why he avoids the subjectivism that is implicit within contemporary debates about the standard model. The focus of this chapter in particular is to illustrate why Hume’s naturalist framework differs from that which informs the current standard model: in positing certain natural, non-subjective human ends that situate Hume’s much richer conception of practical reason cannot be considered the historical ancestor of the standard model.

To argue against the alignment between Humean and the standard models of instrumental reason, I will pinpoint their discrepant accounts on nature and the role assigned to morality in the instrumental use of reason. To do this, the current chapter provides a very cursory but necessary survey of Hume’s scepticism and naturalism. Section I establishes the divergent naturalist commitments of contemporary and Humean models of instrumental reason. I show that modern theories presuppose a “strict, reductive” naturalism, based on the possibilities of scientific investigation to yield genuine knowledge about objects in the external world. This contrasts with Hume’s epistemic justification of natural belief. In Section II I go on to show how different underlying conceptions of nature also leads to contrasting ideas about the function of reason. I argue that, for Hume, reason becomes subsumed under natural belief; this implies a specifically *practical* rather than *theoretical* function, which resonates with the Aristotelian distinction between practical and speculative thought.

I. *Contemporary and Humean Naturalism*

Both Hume and the standard model seek to eradicate metaphysics from their philosophical accounts of instrumental reason. Both adopt a scientific approach to human nature. In the Introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume writes, “’Tis evident that all the sciences have a relation [...] to human nature” [xv]. He continues, “as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation” [xvi]. It is, however, unwise to assume that their underlying naturalism and the aims of their methodological approach are one and the same.

The contemporary naturalistic temper makes specific assumptions about the scientific status of empirical facts impinging on human reason that differ in important respects from a Humean model. Indeed, these substantial differences tend to go unappreciated – a consequence of contemporary readings favouring either Hume’s sceptical or naturalist strands at the expense of the other.⁹ Yet as Kemp Smith and Stroud both point out, Hume’s scepticism and naturalism need to be seen as mutually supportive in Hume’s philosophical system to properly understand one or the other. It is necessary to outline the scientific realism underlying the standard model’s naturalistic framework in order to understand how it differs in substantial respects from that of Hume’s.

Underlying the standard model’s reading is what Strawson calls “reductive or strict naturalism” which is committed to a broader epistemological claim.¹⁰ The benefit of Humean reason so defined is that it sidesteps any problematic metaphysical or normative claims. As a freestanding, information-processing faculty, reason will have an influence on our practical action in solely providing the means-end, causal information needed to obtain a desired end. For one particular strand of the standard model in the philosophy of science, the standard model’s implicit reductive naturalism is conducive to their broader epistemological agenda geared towards legitimising the nature of scientific discovery.¹¹ Through the adoption of instrumental rationality a naturalist position can avoid the trappings of metaphysical realism, a common but undesirable feature of traditional epistemological justification. Thus, the standard model seemingly coheres with the naturalist’s rejection of *a priori*, transcendental arguments or synthetic justification.¹² Though deeply critical of this view, Harvey Siegel explains,

[a]ccording to this sort of naturalism, we can scientifically investigate the instrumental value that beliefs, cognitive processes and scientific methodologies have in achieving our ends; insofar as they have instrumental value, we can say that such

⁹ For an exception, see Barry Stroud, “The Constraints of Hume’s Naturalism,” *Synthese* 152 (2006): 339-51.

¹⁰ This epistemological claim is that the scientific way of conceiving of the world, stripped of pre-scientific, orientating frameworks containing our moral perspectives, is superior – and indeed, more real – than a standpoint which incorporates moral, evaluative qualities. This scientism encourages us to do one of two things: it urges us to either doubt the reality of conscious experience, or demote phenomenal qualities and moral judgements to the non-scientific, non-descriptive sphere of subjective reality. See P. F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties; The Woodbridge Lectures 1983* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 68.

¹¹ See Larry Laudan’s papers, “Normative Naturalism,” *Philosophy of Science* 57 (1990): 44-59; “Progress or Rationality? The Prospects for Normative Naturalism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24 (1987): 19-31; “Aim-less Epistemology?” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 21 (1990): 315-22; Ronald N. Giere’s work, “Philosophy of Science Naturalized,” *Philosophy of Science* 52 (1985): 331-56; “Scientific Rationality as Instrumental Rationality,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 20 (1989): 377-84.

¹² Laudan, “Aim-less Epistemology?” pp. 315-22.

beliefs and methodologies are rational. On this view rationality is instrumental, naturalistic and fully normative.¹³

Moreover, “the judgments of instrumental efficacy require appeal to empirical evidence concerning the efficacy as established by such evidence, we have good instrumental reason to utilize the means established by that evidence as efficacious for the realization of those ends, in so far as we embrace them as our ends.”¹⁴ For R. N. Giere and Larry Laudan, the reductive naturalist position is inevitably linked to an instrumental model of reason, since the efficacy of the means / end calculus can be justified through appeal to empirical evidence. As such, instrumental reason possesses solid scientific credentials: it does not require any *a priori* claims or justification through mysterious metaphysical norms external to the instrumental reasoning process itself. For these reasons, the standard model functions as a feasible methodological rule for scientific investigation. Giere states:

If there were autonomous principles of justification, they would provide standards of what is often called categorical, or unconditional, rationality. But there is another, weaker, form of rationality which is conditional, or instrumental. To be instrumentally rational is simply to employ means believed to be conducive to achieving desired goals [...] [T] here is also a more objective sense of instrumental rationality which consists in employing means that are not only believed to be, but are in fact conducive to achieving desired goals. This latter, objective, sense of instrumental rationality provides the naturalistic theorist of science with ample means for making normative claims about science. These claims, however, are not autonomous but are grounded within science itself. It requires empirical research to determine whether a particular strategy is in fact likely to be effective in producing valuable scientific results.¹⁵

In the same paper Giere goes on to suggest that instrumentally normative judgements are “for the naturalist [...] the only kind of normative judgment anyone can legitimately make. There is no ‘higher rationality’.”¹⁶ Moreover, the standard model’s inclusion of established empirical knowledge views instrumental reason as capable of progressively verifying and

¹³ Harvey Siegel, “Instrumental Rationality and Naturalized Philosophy of Science,” *Philosophy of Science* 63 Supplement (1996): 116.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁵ Giere, “Scientific Rationality,” pp. 379-80.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 382. Crucially, the espousal of a reductivist account of instrumental reason is a point of convergence between science and economics. See D. Wade Hands, “Blurred Boundaries: Recent Changes in the Relationship Between Economics and the Philosophy of Natural Science,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 25 (1995): 751-72.

generating known objective facts about the natural environment. The scientific content of instrumental reason incorporates information that has withstood previous empirical tests, and is therefore “grounded within science itself”. As methodological rules of science, hypothetical imperatives of instrumental rationality “are a part of empirical knowledge, not something wholly different from it.”¹⁷ More specifically, instrumental reasons are “simply claims about relationships in the world: relationships that can be empirically investigated in the same way that science would investigate any other claim about relationships in the world.”¹⁸

Ultimately, the standard model as applied in the philosophy of science promotes naturalist *theoretical* aims of improved general scientific knowledge of brute, natural facts; these aims are achieved through instrumental reason by upholding empirical standards like expected utility, avoidance of error, or high probability.¹⁹ Presupposed in the standard model is therefore a robust conception of nature. Nature describes the sum-total of objects as these exist independently of the human perspective, and which are progressively explicable through scientific empirical investigation, facilitated through the standard model. If one were to map out which side of the traditional practical / theoretical divide of reason this account would fall, it would be firmly under the latter. Somewhat ironically the practical function of instrumental reason is minimized, even as reductive naturalists claim that the standard model must be the only scientifically viable model capable of promoting certain desirable results – epistemic *or* practical.²⁰ The priority shifts towards whether epistemic standards of theoretical knowledge – constituted by causal laws and concrete scientific facts – are adhered to. As Giere explains, a naturalist framework of instrumental reason results in a “constructive realist” position: scientific models are “humanly constructed abstract entities”. However, the realism of these theories derives from the claim that a similar structure, obtains between models and real systems, “without imposing any distinction between ‘theoretical’ and ‘observation’ aspects of reality.”²¹

Hume’s combined sceptical and naturalist commitments have a rather different, more modest aim. His conception of natural belief reflects serious doubts over the possibility of *any* epistemic model to produce genuine theoretical knowledge about the external world, and, crucially, this would rule out instrumental reason of a kind just outlined. In effect, Hume’s scepticism about theoretical reason restricts its reach to the level of human experience. In the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* claims of objective knowledge

¹⁷ Laudan, “Progress or Rationality?” p. 241.

¹⁸ Laudan’s position as articulated by Hands, “Blurred Boundaries,” p. 767.

¹⁹ Laudan, “Aim-less Epistemology?” p. 317.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 315-22. Siegel also identifies this problem, and tries to distinguish between epistemic rationality and instrumental reason as practical inference. See “Instrumental Rationality,” pp. 166-24.

²¹ Giere, “Philosophy of Science Naturalized,” p. 346.

of nature are equated with specious declarations about reason's speculative power. Hume writes:

These words, *generation*, *reason*, mark only certain powers and energies in nature, whose effects are known, but whose essence is incomprehensible, and one of these principles, more than the other, has no privilege for being made a standard to the whole of nature. [...] In this little corner of the world alone, there are four principles, *reason*, *instinct*, *generation*, *vegetation*, which are similar to each other, and are the causes of similar effects. What a number of other principles may we naturally suppose in the immense extent and variety of the universe, could we travel from planet to planet and from system to system, in order to examine each part of this mighty fabric? [...] Reason, in its internal fabric and structure, is really as little known to us as instinct or vegetation; and perhaps even that vague, undeterminate word, *Nature*, to which the vulgar refer everything, is not at bottom more explicable. [Part vii]²²

Hume calls into question what humans can objectively explain or know of our surrounding natural environment. To speculate on the causal principles governing natural processes is to overstep those epistemic tools nature has provided us.

It is highly unlikely that Giere would concur with Hume's view about the inexplicability of nature here. As Giere writes,

Neither empiricists nor rationalists could see how to get beyond their subjective experience or intuitions. This led to the familiar philosophical views that the world is nothing more than the sum total of our sense experience or that it is totally unknowable. In fact, we possess built-in mechanisms for quite direct interaction with aspects of our environment. The operations of these mechanisms largely bypass our conscious experience and linguistic or conceptual abilities. Thinkers struggling to understand the nature of their own knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be forgiven for not appreciating evolutionary theory of contemporary neurobiology. A century after Darwin a similar lack of appreciation is less forgivable.²³

²² David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1947) p. 178. All quotations are from this edition, hereafter abbreviated *D.*

²³ Giere, "Philosophy of Science Naturalized," p. 340.

For Giere, the content of instrumental rationality is consonant with a scientific explanation of nature; brute facts are theoretically comprehensible through empirical research. Granted, throughout the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* Hume makes ambiguous remarks regarding human natural beliefs about the permanence of objects and their interaction, all broadly classified under “matters of fact”; yet this is not indicative of commitment to a robust method of scientific research, capable of explicating real systems, objective causes or relations in nature. If we were to follow Giere’s reductive naturalism, the assertion that we simply “believe” cause-effect relations to obtain between objects would be insufficient. Rather, on Giere’s account, the scientific method can establish that the cause-effect relation in instrumental reason does “*in fact*” obtain, i.e., that the relation corresponds to a property or law governing objects and their interaction. When Giere writes that instrumental reason employs “means that are not only believed to be, but are *in fact* conducive to achieving desired goals”, his view contrasts directly with Hume’s description of our beliefs as “fictions”. Stroud is correct to expose the problematic nature of Hume’s view. He writes, “this attribution of ‘fictions’ to all human beings [...] gives Hume’s version of naturalism its peculiar character and its distinctly provocative air. And whatever exactly he means by ‘fictions’ – whether or not he means that they are all strictly false – that is what makes it so hard to accept his naturalistic explanations.”²⁴ Giere would presumably agree with Stroud’s assessment of Hume. A crucial requirement in the standard model is an epistemically knowable conception of enduring or interacting objects – and though philosophers of science are explicit about this requirement, it is implicit in the model’s application within moral and political philosophy as well. But such a requirement is notably absent in Hume’s naturalist explanation.²⁵ As Stroud writes, for Hume the “public world of independently existing physical objects that all human beings inevitably come to believe in plays no role at all in the naturalistic explanation of how human beings come to believe in such a world.”²⁶

In sum, “nature” for the standard model means to uphold the methodological primacy of science and to understand how instrumental reason is continuous with the scientific mode of explanation. It implies one can have certain knowledge of brute facts about the external world and interacting objects – a degree of certainty underwritten by a corresponding model of instrumental rationality.²⁷ By contrast, “nature” for Hume means that we must accept certain givens about human nature, and we must therefore accept the

²⁴ Stroud, “The Constraints,” p. 347.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 339-51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

²⁷ I use the term “brute” here purposely: Giere believes in a “constructive” realism and distinguishes his view from classical empiricism, which would limit knowledge to observable facts. See Giere, “Constructive Realism,” in Paul Hooker, ed., *Images of Science: Essays on Realism and Empiricism* (Chicago: UP, 1985) pp. 75-98.

inherent limitations of our beliefs and rational knowledge which necessarily impede our capacity to objectively know anything. As we will see in the next section, Hume's negative, sceptical arguments are mitigated by his more positive naturalist arguments, and both strands contain residues of a more classical vision. This is not to deny his adherence to Newtonian science; however, scepticism and natural belief for Hume are discussed more in the spirit of ancient sceptical attitudes towards rational speculation, and is tied to nature's function as a guide to practical life. The examination of nature has benefit, not because it leads to certainty about brute natural facts but because it has special relevance for our human endeavours as practical and moral agents.²⁸ In other words, the objectivity of natural beliefs is from its moral and practical applicability and therefore moves us away from the scientific realism and theoretical bias underlying the standard model.

II. *Hume and Natural Belief*

For Hume, scepticism in the theoretical sphere makes room for a distinctly *practical* sphere. Hume, like the ancient Pyrrhonian Sceptic, argues that one cannot make dogmatic claims about the real objective order of things.²⁹ But for Sextus Empiricus – one of the main adherents to Pyrrhonian Scepticism – the presence of sceptical doubts, of contradictions in our beliefs and rational arguments regarding the true reality of things, means one must refrain from having *any* beliefs. By means of this attitude of *epochē* – where one suspends beliefs or judgements altogether – the ideal state of *ataraxia* (freedom from disturbance) can be achieved. As a practical model, Pyrrhonian Scepticism involves living in detached acquiescence to societal conventions. Hume agrees with Sextus that one must refrain from dogmatic claims; however, he finds the Pyrrhonian arguments for the elimination of belief unconvincing, and thinks of this suspensive state as a practical impossibility. Thus, scepticism for Hume is not as global as the Pyrrhonians, whose scepticism extends even to the sphere of ethics.³⁰ Indeed, unlike the Stoic or Epicurean, “the Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society.” Hume continues in the

²⁸ Thomas M. Olszewsky, “The Classical Roots of Hume’s Skepticism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52:2 (1991): 283-4. Olszewsky draws interesting parallels with the scepticism of Cicero and Hume, and argues convincingly that Hume’s scepticism has important Ciceronian remnants.

²⁹ For more on the historical importance of ancient Scepticism in early modern philosophy, and on Hume particularly, see Richard Popkin, “David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1951): 385-407 as well as “David Hume and The Pyrrhonian Controversy,” *Review of Metaphysics* 6 (1952-3): 65-81. See also David Fate Norton’s section on Pyrrhonian Scepticism in *David Hume; Common-Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: UP, 1982) pp. 255-69.

³⁰ For more contrasts between ancient and modern scepticism, see Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism; Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge: UP, 1985) p. 165.

same passage, if one lived the life of Pyrrhonian scepticism, “all human life must perish [...] all discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, *till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence*” [*E*, p. 160, first emphasis added].³¹ Total *epochē* results in a kind of practical immobility that would undermine ordinary life and common society. In the end, the Pyrrhonian would be forced to admit that even their philosophical speculation confirms the workings of nature, as “nature is always too strong for principle” [*ibid.*]. Hume’s own scepticism therefore occupies a more intermediate position between the rationalist and the extreme sceptic, and attempts to do the same work as Aristotle’s separation of the sciences. Namely, in rejecting the view that logically necessary rules – discovered through theoretical reason – somehow determine human action, Hume creates positive space for a distinctly practical sphere of human activity and ends which orient and direct our rational faculty. This he does through his positive naturalist claims.

In essence, Hume’s unique naturalism avoids the impracticality of Pyrrhonian *epochē*.³² The extremes of Pyrrhonian doubt can be averted by natural belief: nature mitigates even the most extreme form of scepticism in order to point to beliefs humans cannot know with certainty but *must* nonetheless retain in order to survive. Nature implants these beliefs in us because of their intrinsic utility for our ordinary, everyday endeavours. Hume writes:

Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breath and feel; nor can we any more forebear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour’d by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render’d unavoidable. [*T*, p. 183, first and third emphases added]

Hume suggests that nature bestows upon us an instinctual process of belief-formation, as well as beliefs with specific *content*. Beliefs about causality, about the endurance of the

³¹ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd edn., L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., with textual notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: UP, 1975). All subsequent quotations from Hume’s *Enquiry* are from this edition, hereafter abbreviated to *E*.

³² For a good exposition of Hume’s understanding of Pyrrhonism, see Popkin, “David Hume: his Pyrrhonism” and “David Hume”. M. F. Burnyeat argues Sextus Empiricus can answer Hume’s criticisms of Pyrrhonian scepticism. See his “Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?” in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983).

self and external objects may be fictional from some non-anthropocentric, God's eye view. However, our nature as human beings makes it necessary that we take these potentially fictional accounts *as* true in order to function in our natural environment. These beliefs are “two operations of the mind [...] equally natural and necessary in the human mind” [p. 266].³³ In the *Enquiry* he states even more provocatively:

Here, then, is a kind of *pre-established harmony* between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life [*E*, pp. 54-5, emphasis added]

Nature itself has therefore equipped humans with cognitive tools necessary to the successful navigation of practical life.

At their root natural beliefs derive from sense impressions which arise as responses to our natural environment. Hume writes, “An impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other” [*T*, p. 8]. The impressions are *always* prior to any mental conception of it in the idea. Thoughts, or the ideas and beliefs of objects, cannot even exist unless their origin is an impression experienced by sensory perception. Customary association by means of memory turn ideas or complex impressions into beliefs, and causal beliefs are formed by a combination of “both an impression of the memory or senses, and of the idea of that existence, which produces the object of the impression, or is produc'd by it” [p. 84]. Beliefs – and the reasoned inferences we draw as a result (this I discuss in greater detail below) – are cognitive psychological states with an experiential root: present impressions generate associative ideas that imitate the vividness and forcefulness of the impressions of an original object or event. Since beliefs approximate our original experiences in vivacity, we come to some idea about the unobserved which, in turn, can have a mediate influence on our passions.³⁴ Hume says further, “belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain

³³ Cf. in *D*, Cleanthes states, “The declared profession of every reasonable sceptic is only to reject abstruse, remote and refined arguments; to adhere to common sense and the plain instincts of nature; and to assent, wherever any reasons strike him with so full a force, that he cannot, without the greatest violence, prevent it.” [p. 154]

³⁴ David Owen, *Hume's Reason* (Oxford: UP, 1999) pp.163-5. See also Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments; Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) p. 159.

determinate causes and principles *of which we are not masters*” [p. 624, emphasis added]. As humans we are naturally constituted to have some beliefs that do not originate from our own rational construction; rather our commonly held beliefs are, in some ways, *imposed* or *determined* by nature:

It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible in its operations, may discover itself at the first appearance of life and thought, and may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding. As nature has taught us the use of our limbs, without giving us knowledge of the muscles and nerves, by which they are actuated; so has she implanted in us an instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to which that which she has established among external objects; though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends. [E, p. 55]

Unlike the Pyrrhonian, the presence of sceptical arguments does not entail the complete suspension of *all* beliefs. We can (and should) remain noncommittal about the rational truth of the objective order of things, but this does not mean that we are not necessarily committed to the certainty with which we hold our beliefs. This necessity is not attributable to a rationalist, metaphysical source of belief, but to instinctive psychological mechanisms natural to all humans.³⁵

Even more important is what gives our beliefs epistemic warrant. As stated in Section I, the reductive naturalism underlying the standard model suggests that our beliefs are scientifically verifiable. By contrast, for Hume mechanisms of memory and imagination make a belief worthy of epistemic consideration, and strength of *feeling* or *sentiment* counts as sufficient *evidence* for the validity of a belief. In other words, our beliefs are epistemically grounded on nothing but a feeling generated by customary experience, and certain psychological instincts effectively bridge the gap between experience and thought.³⁶ Unlike the “loose reveries of the fancy”, those beliefs we think are true will affect us with greater force than those presumed to be false; they will be attended by a “feeling or sentiment” [p. 48]. Again he writes, “The difference between *fiction* and *belief* lies in some sentiment or feeling [that] must be excited by nature, like all other sentiments; and must arise from the particular situation, in which the mind is placed at any particular juncture” [p. 48]. (The relationship between feeling, sentiment and true

³⁵ See Burnyeat, “Can the Sceptic Live His Skepticism?” p. 118.

³⁶ Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977) pp. 132-3.

beliefs has important implications for the motivational question of reason, which I leave for a fuller discussion in the next chapter). That sentiment and feeling give our beliefs sufficient epistemic warrant affirms that the truth value of our cognitive beliefs and reasons is relevant *only* for their practical value, for their ability to guide us in human activity. Crucially, *true* belief – and how we verify its truth – shares a common root with the main motive source of practical action, namely sensation and sentiment.

In sum, then, natural beliefs are epistemically confirmed by sentiment and memory, and these beliefs do not have to adhere to an actual property in the world in order to still have some important impact on human practical life. What *actually* or *truly* exists independently of human beings, and what we psychologically believe to be true about the independent existence of objects, are distinct questions; belief in the latter sense does not necessitate belief in the former sense. Indeed, the former question is closed off altogether from human inquiry, but this does not diminish the practical utility of holding those beliefs. For example, nature imposes a belief in enduring personal identity. “The sceptic [...] must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, though he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity,” Hume writes. He continues, “

Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? but 'tis vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings” [T, p. 187, first emphasis added].

The permanence of the self may or may not be an objective fact, but out of psychological necessity we have this belief because of its practical usefulness to human activity. And for Hume this practical sphere emerges when nature subsumes and guides our human cognitive faculty.

i) Causality and Probable Reason

As explained so far, for Hume natural beliefs are ones that we hold instinctively: they do not advance our knowledge in a theoretical sphere, but rather facilitate human practical and common life. A similar argumentative strategy justifies our belief in causal relations between objects. Objects become conjoined from previous experience, and memory is a valid epistemic consideration for causal beliefs. But the opposite is also true: without firsthand experience, ideas of cause and effect – of the succession of objects or events – are impossible. In the *Enquiry* Hume claims that the mental operation which conjoins relations

between objects – such as flame and heat, snow and cold – is “a *species of natural instinct*, which no reasoning or process of thought and understanding is able, either to produce, or to prevent” [*E*, pp. 46-7, emphasis added]. Hume also refers to this natural mental process of customary object association as causal or probable reasoning.

Though the many ways in which Hume uses the term “reason” are a matter of dispute among interpreters, it is relatively uncontroversial to say that he refers to both demonstrative and probable reason.³⁷ Hume is deeply sceptical that demonstrative reason can reveal intrinsic properties of, or necessary connections between, ideas or objects.³⁸ According to demonstrative reason, relations between ideas or objects are deemed self-evident according to the laws of non-contradiction and deductive logic; epistemic justification would be through formal deductive argumentation.³⁹ This preoccupation with formal justification, however, is not the concern of causal inference. Inferences stem, not from *a priori* properties of ideas, but from experience; no necessary relations between inferred ideas are rationally discovered since these necessary connections between impressions – the *source* of our propositions and ideas – are never empirically observed in the first place.⁴⁰ In confining demonstration to the sphere of mathematics, Hume effectively rejects the rationalist view of reason as a divinely inspired faculty which functions independently of custom and experience. By contrast, the causal story that originates in experience and natural belief is all that our reason can discover.⁴¹ The amplified role of experience within probable reason specifically challenges the Cartesian objectification of experience, where rational disengagement from sensory experiences enables the mechanical unification of disparate ideas or impressions to produce a superior whole. For Hume this strategy fundamentally confuses the sequential order between experience and ideas: thought or cognitive belief is always posterior to, and inseparable from, sensory experience.

Like the idea of personal identity, causal beliefs *force* themselves upon individuals, as “experience may produce a belief and a judgement of causes and effects by a secret operation, and without being once thought of” [*T*, p. 104].⁴² Causal reasoning is the posterior reflection of past or immediate experiences, which allows hypothetical correlations to be drawn between certain events with certain effects. Experience is composed of disparate sensory impressions of constant flux and change which only become

³⁷ David Fate Norton identifies at least five ways Hume uses the term reason; see *David Hume*, pp. 96-9, n. 4. For my purposes here I focus on the demonstrative and probable forms of reasoning, and set aside prospective ambiguities between reasoning as a calm passion for the next chapter.

³⁸ This is with the exception of mathematical propositions and quantities (see *E*, p. 25).

³⁹ Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966). p. 99.

⁴⁰ Stroud, *Hume*, p. 45.

⁴¹ Owen, *Hume's Reason*, p. 63.

⁴² Stroud, *Hume*, p. 76

conjoined or constant by some natural cognitive mechanism. As a part of this natural cognitive faculty, probable reasoning will use those natural beliefs, especially of causality, generated through custom, memory, and habit. Whereas Giere's naturalist view suggests that cause and effect are properties of interacting objects in nature, for Hume causal relations are part of a natural psychological propensity of ours, rendering probable inferences no more than *subjectively* valid, though in an enlarged sense of "subjective" -- i.e. valid for us as humans.⁴³ These causal connections may indeed obtain in the objective world independent of anthropomorphic experience; however, to claim to know this is to overstretch our epistemic capacities. Our principal interaction with the external world is composed of disparate impressions, passions, and ideas, processed through the influence of custom and habitual experience.

Probable reasoning further presumes that the unobserved will imitate what we have experienced. Hume's uniformity principle states: "If reason determin'd us, it would proceed upon the principle, *that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same*" [p. 89]. The purpose of the uniformity principle is ultimately to, first, differentiate the *focus* of both demonstrative and probable forms of reasoning and, second, affirm probable reason's incorporation of inductive belief which originates from our natural constitution. In probable reasoning the focus has shifted from the problem of epistemic justification to the actual process of proper belief production that is guided by associative, inductive principles instinctive to us.⁴⁴ Hume clearly expresses this in the *Treatise*:

To consider the matter aright, reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities, according to their particular situations and relations. This instinct, 'tis true, arises from past observation and experience; but can any one give the ultimate reason, why past experience and observation produces such an effect any more than why nature alone shou'd produce it? Nature may certainly produce whatever can arise from habit: Nay, habit is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin. [p. 179]

⁴³ Norman [Kemp] Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume (I)," *Mind* 14, no. 54 (1905): 173.

⁴⁴ For a very good, concise discussion of the uniformity principle, see Kieran Setiya, "Hume on Practical Reason," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18, *Ethics* (2004): p. 369; also David Owen's interpretation, *Hume's Reason* (Oxford: UP, 1999) chap. 6. For a good overview of debates over Hume's (supposed) scepticism over induction and his own detailed interpretation, see Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Psychology* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) pp. 76-95.

Thus, probable inferences about the future are bestowed on us, not by speculative determinations of reason, but by virtue of past experience and custom.

Nature delimits and determines our reason in a similar way as it determines our legitimate beliefs through natural psychological mechanisms. Hume effectively inverts the relationship of priority between reason and nature: whereas the rationalist claims that reason elevates humans above the determinism of nature, for Hume reason must function *within* nature, and any rational judgements must be derived from some psychological mechanism natural to humans. Nature has equipped us with beliefs in personal identity and permanent external objects which are necessary for our ordinary human practical endeavours; the causal inferences rooted in experience and drawn by probable reasoning are similarly necessary for our practical purposes. Reason is posterior to, not the progenitor of, our natural belief; and, given the original natural source of belief, probable reasoning would likewise be “nothing but a species of sensation” [p. 103]. Naturally given beliefs therefore delimit and subsume our deployment and exercise of reason.⁴⁵ To function within the constraints of natural beliefs means reason cannot overstep their circumscribed boundaries in hopes of supporting an unjustifiable *speculative* framework. But importantly this means an overarching *natural* framework must situate and delimit instrumental reason, particularly if probable reasoning is associated with the instrumental connection between means and ends. For Hume, human reason fundamentally adheres to purposes concordant with, not contrary to, nature. In recognising nature’s imposed limits on our reason, Hume conversely affirms that reason’s only function is to interpret our general natural beliefs *for their practical implementation*.

Hence probable inference more broadly describes the underlying cause-effect relation which provides the basis of the means-end connections in instrumental reasoning. The determination of the appropriate means to an end relies on an accurate grasp of how one can bring about a certain effect, based on customary experience. Causal beliefs and probable inferences, the process by which we conjoin objects together, are therefore practically applicable in a way that demonstrative relations are not. Particular ideas that are habitually conjoined or gain some constancy are natural beliefs of practical salience; likewise, our possession of certain substantive beliefs leads to an instinctive exercise of reason in a practical capacity. We require an idea of personal identity in order to attribute a source of practical agency. We need to have an idea of permanent objects in order to provide us with external reference points for our practical pursuits. We must possess ideas of causality in order to effect change on the environment around us. The practical

⁴⁵ Smith, “The Naturalism of Hume (I),” p. 169.

importance of instrumental reasoning emerges with this latter point: without hypothetical correlations of means-end deliberation, humans would be ineffective as active agents.

The result of sceptical constraints on our theoretical reason – on our objective knowledge of the natural world – is the emergence of reason’s natural, practical function. Importantly, in its legitimate practical sphere the content of reason will have particular relevance to the common practical endeavours of humans. Like Aristotle’s criticism of Platonic Forms, for Hume supposedly *a priori* logical relations between objects are disconnected from experience as we know it. This is implied in his arguments against rational proofs of immaterial, eternal substance. “We have no perfect idea of anything but of a perception. A substance is entirely different from a perception,” Hume writes, “[w]e have, therefore no idea of substance” [p. 234]. His claim against the rational proof of God follows a similar argumentative vein:

We in reality affirm, that there is no such thing in the universe as a cause or productive principle, not even the deity himself; since our idea of that supreme Being is deriv’d from particular impressions, *none of which contain any efficacy*, nor seem to have *any* connexion with *any* other existence. [p. 248, first emphasis added]

Rational speculation about God’s existence can never find confirmation in actual experience. Thus, the postulation of eternal substances, a claim so abstract and far removed from our known experiences and contingent existence, has no possible effect on our practical agency; indeed, *even if* these immaterial substances existed, knowledge of them would be unnecessary to practical life.⁴⁶ Its contingent and substantive content makes instrumental reason distinct from the formal, logical validity of theoretical demonstration.

Hume’s sceptical doubts over the motivational force of demonstrative reason should be understood as similar to Aristotle’s practical/theoretical divide. As opposed to a theoretical faculty capable of discovering objective knowledge of reality, reason is a natural guide to human *practical* life when properly subsumed under the demands of natural belief. As Norman [Kemp] Smith writes:

⁴⁶ This is explicitly confirmed when Philo states in *D*: “Let us become thoroughly sensible of the weakness, blindness, and narrow limits of human reason: Let us duly consider its uncertainty and endless contrarieties, even in subjects of common life and practice: Let the errors and deceits of our very senses be set before us; the insuperable difficulties, which attend first principles in all systems; the contradictions, which adhere to the very ideas of matter, cause and effect, extension, space, time, motion; and in a word, quantity of all kinds, the object of the only science, that can fairly pretend any certainty of evidence. When these topics are displayed in their full light, as they are by some philosophers and almost all divines; who can retain such confidence in this frail faculty of reason as to pay any regard to its determinations in points so sublime, so abstruse, so remote from common life and experience?” [p. 131]

Hume is thus no sceptic as to the powers of reason, but quite positive that its sole function is practical. The question that has to be decided is not how the fundamental characteristics of experience are to be rationally explained, but what kind of role rational insight can have in our lives. That can only be discovered by observation of the facts derived from experience. And this will point to humans as essentially active and moral beings.⁴⁷

The positive argumentative strategy of Hume's naturalism establishes how nature itself directs human beings towards practical action. By discrediting demonstrative reason conceptual space is created for instrumental reason (probable inference) as it pertains to human practical life. But the crucial question is *how* does probable reason have a practical function? Giere and other proponents of the standard model elevate the theoretical and informational faculty of reason, because the assertion that reason has a normative force on human practical conduct is deemed by them question-begging from a scientific perspective. The question that emerges is whether Hume's scepticism about reason as a faculty capable of generating genuine theoretical knowledge entails a similar scepticism about practical reason. Hume's claim that "reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions" is read by many to suggest not only that reason cannot ground belief, but also that it has no normative and motivational influence on intentional action. The next chapter will argue more directly against this broader sceptical reading but for my purposes here I will establish that the extension of Hume's positive arguments for natural belief explain how instrumental reason has a practical function by virtue of its substantive content.

III. Instrumental Reason

Hume refers to instrumental reason in the section "Of the influencing motives of the will":

[a] 'Tis obvious, that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carry'd to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. 'Tis also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but making us cast our view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. [b] But 'tis evident in

⁴⁷ Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume (I)," p. 155.

this case, that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. 'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object: And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know, that such objects are causes, and such others effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. [p. 414]

Several important issues arise with this quotation. First, our rational faculties are entirely subordinate to impulse and seemingly incapable of motivating agents contrary to existing conative states; this is the *motivational* problem of reason. Second, this quotation gives the impression that Humean practical reason does indeed adhere to standard economic or naturalist interpretations: an appetitive, desiderative state gives rise to an end and our rational deliberation subsequently determines the most effective means. Thus our rational reflection is restricted to the determination of causal efficiency; no broader moral assessment of the end, or of the value of the means themselves, is warranted. This second point implicitly exposes a lack, not only of motivational force, but also of *normative* authority to our practical reason.⁴⁸ Both these issues are interrelated and stem from debates over whether motivating and normative reasons can be prised apart. I must nonetheless set aside the first issue for closer examination in the following chapter, where I explain Hume's implicit arguments for reason's power to motivate, influence, and change our ends. This requires deeper discussion of both Hume's sympathy mechanism, a tool which enlivens rational judgements, and the important role assigned to general rules of society in normatively judging and guiding our practical rational agency. But in the present chapter, the issue of evaluative neutrality remains the more salient issue for my argument against the standard model reading of Humean instrumental reason.

Recall that the standard model adopts a stance of evaluative neutrality: instrumental beliefs are only causally connected, but no necessary evaluative relation is said to obtain between them. The working assumption is that the adoption of an end stems from a subjective desire or preference. The presence of a desire itself is sufficient indication its corresponding end is worthy of pursuit; the desire is thus the main evaluative source of the end. As an informational faculty, reason comes into the picture only once an individual has some desire or appetite. Desire can evaluate the *subjective* value of ends – “subjective” now in the narrow, personal sense -- as it pertains to a specific agent. Reason will not second-guess this initial appetitive evaluation because of its subordinate role to desire. In

⁴⁸ I recognise that some philosophers, such as Michael Smith in “The Humean Theory of Motivation,” think the motivational and normative issues are two separate questions, but for many adherents of motivational internalism they can be conceived also as one and the same.

other words, no evaluative exchange occurs between desiderative and rational cognitive states about the substantive value of subjective ends. Since the evaluative work is done *prior* to our use of reason, all that is further required is causal *information* – not normative assessment – of how to achieve this end. This comes in the form of some causal, probable inference between means and ends. Causal relations determine its internal formal *structure* while there is no place in the instrumental deliberative process for the examination of the evaluative relation between the *content* constitutive of means and end. In short, structural coherence determines good means-end reason – not the moral value of its constitutive content.

Though some kind of appraisal is unavoidable in means-end reasoning, it is evaluation that is nonetheless very minimal and undemanding. Ends are judged on the basis of their subjective desiderative appeal or motivational grip and are completely relative to different agents. Desires as the origins of the means-end reasoning process may indeed incorporate evaluation based on hedonistic or maximising considerations, but they are only subjectively valid and have no robust defence against accusations of relativism and arbitrariness. But while subjective ends potentially conflict, their underlying justification is deemed unproblematic: evaluation stems from presumed natural psychological facts about humans rather than rational deliberation articulating the substantive moral worth of certain ends above others. On such an account, practical reason has no say on whether the *content* of subjective ends, preferences or desires are morally or socially valuable – reason has no evaluating, articulating function.⁴⁹ Means-end rationality can therefore sidestep contentious moral or ethical determinations of thick, objective values or goods. When instrumental reason does enter the picture it is meant to inform the agent of relevant causal connections, but it is altogether silent on whether the content of the end – or the means for that matter – are intrinsically valuable or moral. It cannot determine whether these subjective ends have either “moral weight or social importance.”⁵⁰

Hume is typically attributed with a conception of reason that is presumed independent from substantive moral content and the appraisal or articulation of value. As mentioned in Chapter 1, according to Michael Smith’s influential standard model reading, Humean instrumental reasoning articulates the necessary conditions of *motivation* (subjective desires or conative states) yet is silent on the *normative* requirements of reason.⁵¹ The metaphysical connotation associated with normative justification – a common naturalist worry – ultimately underlies this separation. As Onora O’Neill describes this position:

⁴⁹ See Onora O’Neill, “Four Models of Practical Reasoning,” in her *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: UP, 2000).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁵¹ Smith, “Humean Theory,” p. 41.

[I]f ends are subjective, reasoned action by different agents need not converge, so egoism, economic rationality and competition will be paradigms of reasoned action. Ethics and social science are thereby set the tasks of defusing and reducing or coordinating the Hobbesian implications of a conception of reason which is hostage to individuals' desires or preferences, and their beliefs, which seems the inevitable corollary of an empiricist and anti-metaphysical outlook.⁵²

In line with O'Neill's description, Smith claims that, in denying to our reason a thick evaluating function – and thereby limiting appraisal of ends to the level of subjective desires – the Humean belief-desire model need not introduce “a state of some further, mysterious, hybrid kind.”⁵³ Questions about normative, ethical content are distinct from the inquiry into natural psychological facts about our instrumental motivation. This distinction alone may not be contentious; but the current naturalistic temper informing the standard model takes this to mean that a conception of practical reason in an articulating, evaluating function, capable of determining normative values or goods, is unfeasible in our scientific age given its associated metaphysical baggage. To separate the question of motivation and normativity is to dispense with problematic questions about moral content, ethical value, sources of normative justification, and their seemingly irrevocable links with supporting metaphysical, objectivist frameworks. Humean instrumental reason accordingly need not posit any mysterious normative source since evaluation only occurs at the level of natural appetitive desires, based on no content other than hedonistic or maximising subjective impulses relative to each individual agent. Others, unlike Smith, actually specify the substantive content of motivating desires: as we saw in Chapter 1 the standard model as applied in economic theory go one step further than Smith and deem it a psychological fact that humans are self-interested individuals. In that case instrumental reason will be deployed towards explicitly egoistic or *self*-maximising ends.

Hume's remarks above initially support these contemporary standard model readings. In [a] Hume associates reasoning with the probable, causal inference required to achieve an end given by some volitional, hedonistic impulse. It is because of the “prospect of pain or pleasure from any object” that we avoid or pursue an end, and reason informs us of the causal connections relevant to the pursuit of these objects. Ultimately, the prospect of pleasure from an object will initiate the instrumental process. In [b] Hume says, not reason, but the impulse and promise of pleasure or pain will begin the exploration of the causal

⁵² O'Neill, “Four Models,” p. 15.

⁵³ Smith, “Humean Theory,” p. 58.

means towards a hedonistic end. Unless they relate to our subjective impulses, these causal connections or probable inferences will have no impact on us.

Thus, the subjectivist and proceduralist reading of Hume endorsed by proponents of the standard model is at the very least explicable. But I have argued so far that this interpretation misunderstands his naturalist framework, leading to the misconstrual of Hume's intentions at a fundamental level: contra standard naturalist interpretations, Hume does not think instrumental reason can be severed from evaluative or normative content,⁵⁴ and therefore means and ends are not linked solely by some causal relation. For Hume, the standard model's focus on the coherence or causal *structure* of instrumental reason would be deemed a misguided generalisations of human action.⁵⁵ Reason's starting point will always be some natural basis – crucially, that means naturally formed beliefs bearing specific *content* which impacts on human practical life. Hume wants to establish how at their core both reason and morality share a common natural framework. Moral and rational judgements are not “queer facts”⁵⁶ since both are subsumed under Hume's specific conception of nature; neither are they different “languages” which automatically preclude the interchange of moral and rational propositions.⁵⁷ As a result, in Hume's naturalist framework evaluative, substantive ethical content frequently impinges on our instrumental reason. To understand this, we need to ask: what does Hume think is pleasurable and painful for humans; are our desires as undetermined or subjectivist as the standard model suggests? How do we develop these desires, on what grounds are they evaluated? In short, how does the substantive content of desires impinge on our instrumental reasoning? The answers to these crucial questions will demonstrate that moral content constitutive of his naturalistic framework is important to the practical function of reason for Hume which in turn avoids the subjectivism characteristic of the current standard model.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ The question of *what* this normative content that judges our instrumental use of reason will be more fully discussed in the next chapter. But it is important to understand that this is not rational normativity in the Kantian sense, which evokes a categorical imperative to legislate the form of our rational maxims. Hume's normative principle is built more upon his common sense views, and by implication has a very different normative framework than Kant.

⁵⁵ It is important to note Hume's historical context. Though I partly disagree with his criticisms of Norman Kemp Smith's naturalist reading, Norton provides a very good comprehensive exposition of the worry over Hobbesian moral scepticism during Hume's period. See *David Hume*, pp. 21-54.

⁵⁶ See Mackie, *Ethics*, pp. 38-42. As will be explained further below, I disagree with Mackie's claim that Hume maintains that evaluation involves “the postulating of value-entities or value-features of quite a different order from anything else which we are acquainted, and of a corresponding faculty with which to detect them” (p. 40).

⁵⁷ This relates more to the issue of the is/ought distinction. I discuss this in more detail in the following chapter.

⁵⁸ Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions; A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) p. 239.

i) Pleasure and Pain, and the Desiderative Origins of Instrumental Reason

In the earlier quotation, pleasure and pain are described as the origin of the means-end deliberative process; wholly natural impulses direct our use of reason towards an object that is deemed pleasurable. However, Hume's supporting naturalist framework discredits a simplistic hedonistic interpretation. This becomes evident in his description of pleasure and pain in the *Treatise*:

[a] There is implanted in the human mind a perception of pain and pleasure, as the chief spring and moving principle of all its actions. But pain and pleasure have two ways of making their appearance in the mind; of which the one has effects very different from the other. They may either appear in impression to the actual feeling, or only in idea, as at present when I mention them. 'Tis evident the influence of these upon our actions is far from being equal. Impressions always actuate the soul, and that in the highest degree; but 'tis not every idea which has the same effect. [b] Nature has proceeded with caution in this case, and seems to have carefully avoided the inconveniences of two extremes. Did impressions only influence the will, we should every moment of our lives be subject to the greatest calamities; because, tho' we foresaw their approach, we should not be provided by nature with any principle of action, which might impel us to avoid them. On the other hand, did every idea influence our actions, our condition would not be much mended. For such is the unsteadiness and activity of thought, that the images of every thing, especially of goods and evils, are always wandering in the mind; and were it mov'd by every idle conception of this kind, it would never enjoy a moment's peace and tranquility. [c] Nature has, therefore, chosen a medium, and has neither bestow'd on every idea of good and evil the power of actuating the will, nor yet has entirely excluded them from this influence. [p. 118]

Broadly speaking, Hume claims that pleasure and pain, and its influence on human conduct, is simply part of our natural constitution. Yet this is not the entire picture: in [a] Hume says our hedonistic impulses are internalised through impressions or ideas. Impressions, according to Hume, are derived from firsthand experience, unmediated by rational thought or ideas. Impressions, like human passions and volitions, are "original facts and realities, compleat in themselves" [p. 458]. Like the immediacy of the passions, impressions are non-representational and are therefore not subject to standards of matters of fact – even according to Hume's minimal process of epistemic verification. By contrast, ideas are "copies" or representations of original impressions and contain propositional

content. These cognitive ideas, however, cannot discriminate between or give rise to the feelings and volitions accompanying our original impressions, and are therefore practically “impotent”. Compared to ideas, impressions are more practically efficacious because of their close proximity to our experience of pleasure and pain, and sometimes Hume even suggests this immediacy makes them akin to, or a species of, sensation. Thus, in [a] Hume claims that pleasure and pain are absorbed through impressions or ideas, where impressions are more effectual in a practical sense. But crucially Hume also says, “’tis not *every* idea which has the same effect”: the converse meaning *some* ideas are indeed capable of actuating the will. (What ideas those are will become clearer in the next chapter, which discusses morality’s impact on instrumental reasoning.)

As the main wellspring of human intentional action, the experience of pleasure and pain is carefully balanced between ideas and impressions because nature “has proceeded with caution” to “avoi[d] the inconveniences of two extremes”. Though impressions are more practically efficacious given their closer proximity to original experiences, on their own they would render human actions capricious, absent of principled foresight, and would subsequently be of little value to our ordinary practical endeavours. On the other hand, ideas of pleasurable and painful ends (“goods and evils”) are equally unsteady and subject to the itinerant wanderings of the mind. Indeed, the speculative strivings of our human reason lead to constant unrest and lack of tranquility.

Though pleasure and pain are always mediated by some impression or idea, these hedonistic impulses are practically efficacious only when they represent the combined effort of both. The claim in [c] is that practical action is initiated once this natural balance is achieved between hedonistic impressions and ideas. Ideas allow us to generate principles to guide our action – for instance, we believe in some causal connection between heat and fire, and generate an idea or principle of action, “don’t touch the fire to avoid the pain of getting burnt”. What Hume seems to be saying in [c] is that impressions are always practically effective in a way that ideas aren’t necessarily; impressions give us an appreciation of the particular situation, but need to be supplemented by some general principle provided by ideas. Conversely, cognitive judgements and general principles require awareness of the situation as provided by impressions in order to be relevant and applicable. If ideas were the sole source of practical activity, good and evil would lack the requisite awareness of the circumstantial particular. In other words, impressions provide the applicable *focus* for rational ideas or principles of action, and only through this collaborative effort does our pleasure and pain gain practical force and authority. The dictum “don’t touch fire to avoid the pain of getting burnt” would have no practical importance if the situation we found ourselves in didn’t require such useful information. In other words, as the primary motivational source of intentional action, pleasure and pain

cannot be either *unprincipled* or *situationally inappropriate*. This brings to mind Aristotle's characterisation of the means-end deliberative process as determining the universal particular. For Aristotle, to instrumentally reason in a praiseworthy manner one must have an accurate perceptual lens of the situational particular and adapt one's conduct accordingly; all the while some more general or global end/principle needs to be within purview. It is this dynamic between the particular and universal, the malleable and structured, that distinguishes admirable instrumental reason from the simplistic, mediocre sort.

To minimise the collaboration of impressions and ideas in our hedonistic impulses would be to disregard those aspects of Humean instrumental reasoning which presuppose both the givenness of some substantive content and principles of its evaluative appraisal. The reference to nature in [c] helps illustrate this latter point. *By nature* the collaborative effort of hedonistic impressions and ideas will have practical effect; *by nature* some ideas of good and evil, of pleasure and pain, will have authority and influence on our intentional action. In other words, it is our nature to discriminate some cognitive ideas as having distinct practical, not epistemic, content and value for us. Rationalists like William Wollaston, John Balguy and Samuel Clarke think that the intrinsic *truth* value of ideas or beliefs imbues them with corresponding practical value; by contrast Hume maintains that the distinct practical value of ideas is a function of the relevance of their substantive *content* is to human practical ends.⁵⁹ Hume's evocative use of the term "nature" in the above passage calls to mind classical views of nature as a benevolent entity, capable of ensuring the instinctual connection between the certain beliefs or activities required for tranquillity of mind and the survival and flourishing of the human species.⁶⁰ "We are conscious, that we ourselves, in adapting means to ends, are guided by reason and design," Hume writes, "and that 'tis not ignorantly nor casually we perform those actions, which tend to self-preservation, to the obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain" [p. 176]. Thus nature will orientate what we instinctively find pleasurable and painful so that these impulses will be adapted to our natural environment, conducive to particular kinds of activities best suited to human survival.⁶¹ More specifically, those reasoned ideas and impressions that give us pleasure and pain should naturally orient us towards ends that are amenable to sociality and communal life. Unlike the indeterminate subjective desires of

⁵⁹ Páll S. Árdal, "Some Implications on the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume's *Treatise*," in Donald W. Livingston and James T. King, eds., *Hume: A Re-Evaluation* (New York: Fordham UP, 1976) p. 95.

⁶⁰ That said, I am not at all suggesting Hume's conception of nature is something akin to Stoic cosmological nature; indeed, Hume is deeply critical of this view. However both similarly think submission to nature also leads to an acknowledgement of our natural constitution. For the Stoics, the latter would imply the human use of right reason; for Hume it is to acknowledge our sentimental and sensible way of experience, cognition, and moral valuing.

⁶¹ Árdal, "Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume's *Treatise*," p. 101.

the standard model, for Hume nature has implanted within us practically efficacious content to particular ends geared towards the promotion of society and participation in common life.

Hume's unique conception of nature, with its classical residues, provides the supporting framework to instrumental reason. Because of this naturalist framework, the hedonistic origins of means-end rationality already presuppose the substantive *content* of what should – and indeed for Hume *is* – a naturally pleasurable good or end that is worthy of pursuit. And it is precisely when this starting point is misguided – for example, in the individual who desires only egoistic or selfish ends – that evaluative judgements of instrumental reason become so crucial. As we will see in the next chapter, it is for this reason that Hume incorporates a developmental account of our pleasure and pain instincts which benefit from social nurturing.

Conclusion

To conclude, once the power of speculative reason is curtailed we will have a conception of natural instrumental reason which will better support, sustain, and promote the practical and moral activity of human beings. Hume wants to draw a positive conclusion from the potentially dispiriting denial of rational exceptionalism to human nature. To do this he adapts the classical assertion that virtue and happiness is achievable if one follows nature.

At the end of Book I of the *Treatise* Hume's famous description of philosophic melancholy illustrates firsthand how nature restores balance through a reorientation towards practical activity and the society of others. As Hume describes this dilemma, to maintain a position of scepticism, to accept the imperfection of human demonstrative, theoretical reason, leads to “the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty” [p. 269]. But Hume continues, “[m]ost fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, *nature* herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras” [p. 269]. The pleasurable activities deemed appropriate cures are social in nature; it is to engage in common life and the society of men.⁶² “Here then I find myself absolutely and

⁶² Also, Pamphilus states in *D*, “Any question of philosophy [...] which is so *obscure* and *uncertain*, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it; if it should be treated at all; seems to lead us naturally into the style of dialogue and conversation. Reasonable men may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive: Opposite sentiments, even without any decision, afford an agreeable amusement: And if the subject be curious and interesting, the book

necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life," Hume writes, "may, nay *I must yield to the current of nature*, in submitting to my senses and understanding: and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles" [p. 269]. Reason must confirm practical experience and "limit our enquiries to common life".⁶³ Nature duly restricts the mind from fanciful imaginings that would render us practically inert;⁶⁴ it also saves humans from the contradictions which emerge through our speculative strivings and extreme sceptical doubts. Even if sceptical philosophy of the Pyrrhonian strand were to be taken to such extremes as to "undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation [...] Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever" [E p. 41]. The current of nature therefore saves us from the extreme ideational wanderings of our reason and bestows upon us certain beliefs or cognitive ideas to guide us in our practical endeavours.

Similar to Aristotle's critique of Plato, Hume's negative sceptical remarks against demonstrative reason combine with a positive naturalist strand to establish the significance of *practical* reason or knowledge, capable of guiding humans in their interactions with one another, and fostering common life. To "follow nature" therefore involves the recognition of how nature has supplied humans with certain substantive ends that affirm our everyday endeavours. If reason is to have a positive role in human life, at the outset its use must be naturalised, reflecting ordinary experiences and customs; second, it must be directed towards participating in and actualising ends that are social in nature. Reason thus cannot lift us out of natural determinism, but is situated within nature. Underlying the previous rationalist, more Cartesian ideas is the view that human reason can be seen as a redemptive force against passional disruptions or natural attachments that are part and parcel of our animal natures. This rational core helps distance humans from the natural or social world, and functions as proof of the human potential for autonomous mastery over the natural world we necessarily inhabit.⁶⁵ By contrast, to uphold nature as a guide means humans must function *within* the confines and dictates of our natural – indeed social – environment. The force of natural beliefs and the natural use of instrumental reason will subsequently lead to a more engaged, "determin'd" stance towards those conventions or customs held in common.

carries us, in a manner, into company, and unites the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life, study and society" [p. 128].

⁶³ Cf. *D*, p. 134, 205

⁶⁴ Olshewsky, "Classical Roots," p. 285.

⁶⁵ See Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Moral Psychology," in *Themes in Hume; The Self, the Will, Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003) p. 154.

It is in this unique sense that we should understand Hume's naturalism, particularly when compared with the scientific realism informing the naturalism of the current standard model. For Giere, factual cause-effect relations, established by cumulative empirical knowledge, should ground and justify the means-end connection in instrumental rationality. This underlying causal belief makes certain claims about real world systems that are cognised through scientific investigation and experimentation. Hume would be very hesitant to say that belief in causal relations, and the rational inferences we draw out, are rooted in some scientific, descriptive fact. Associated psychological mechanisms like imagination, feeling, and sentiment are epistemic warrants that justify one's beliefs and inferences. And these underlying natural cognitive instincts are sufficient to yield one's intended results simply because their evaluative content corresponds to some natural objective human ends.

In this chapter I outlined the naturalistic framework situating Hume's instrumental reason, as this was necessary to establish important differences from the contemporary naturalistic temper of the standard model. More specifically a connection was made between Hume's naturalism, instrumental reason and the value of certain natural and objective anthropomorphic ends – such as the promotion of practical activity and common society. The substantive content of this framework illustrates explicitly how Hume averts the evaluative neutrality and procedural emphasis on rational structure characteristic of the standard model. While this chapter resists the standard model reading of Hume, the next chapter highlights the limitations of those who reappropriate Hume with the intention of arguing *against* the standard model, found in what I call the sceptical reading. Ultimately, I argue that even though the sceptical reading has a broader normative agenda aimed towards criticising the standard model's resistance to categorical norms, when examined more closely they in fact share the same proceduralist presumptions of the latter. This, I claim, manifests itself clearly in the misguided imposition of a (constructivist) Kantian framework onto Hume.

5 Hume's Social Standards of Practical Rationality

Human reason is a tincture infused in about equal strength in all our opinions and ways, whatever their form: infinite in substance, infinite in diversity.

- Montaigne, "Of custom"¹

According to this short and imperfect sketch of human life, the happiest disposition of mind is the *virtuous*; or, in other words, that which leads to action and employment, renders us sensible to the social passions, steels the heart against the assaults of fortune, reduces the affections to a just moderation, makes our own thoughts an entertainment to us, and inclines us rather to the pleasures of society and conversation, than to those of the senses.

- Hume, "The Sceptic"²

The previous chapter examined how Hume's combined sceptical and naturalist strands leave space for reason with a practical, not theoretical, orientation. I claimed that Hume's non-reductive naturalism differs from contemporary reductive naturalist claims underlying the standard model in two important respects: first, Hume does not maintain a scientific realist position; what we perceive does not necessarily correspond to nature as it really is. Rather, our cognitive faculties are naturally attuned to perceive nature as fit for us as practical agents. Second, natural beliefs concern the practical utility of causality, personal identity, and the permanence of external objects. These beliefs also endorse moral sentiments and evaluative judgements conducive to common life and sociality. I argued that this leads to an emphasis on the actual *content* of beliefs over any formal causal structure in instrumental reasoning. Humean instrumental reason does not share the standard model's demand for neutrality towards substantive ethical content.

My reading so far may indicate that Hume's conception of instrumental reasoning is not of the freestanding and subjectivist nature of the standard model but I still have not yet outlined the substantive content of this framework, nor *how* reason exerts any motivational or normative force over our practical conduct. Arguably, any philosophical account of practical reason needs to explain reason's authority over human conduct, without which reason would have a merely theoretical, not practical, function. Since Hume expresses deep scepticism about reason's authority in relation to human action, some interpreters argue that Hume is a thoroughgoing sceptic of practical reason in all its forms, including an instrumentalist account. His sceptical polemic against "philosophical" reason – the

¹ Michel de Montaigne, "Of custom," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: UP, 1965) p. 80.

² David Hume, "The Sceptic," in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1987) p. 168.

cognitive faculty that generates empirical facts or mathematical propositions – is taken to dispute the existence of practical reason.

Oddly enough, both sceptical and standard model interpretations read Humean reason as a theoretical, information-processing faculty, though for different reasons.³ According to the standard model interpretation of Hume described in the previous chapter, if instrumental reason is seen as simply processing relevant empirical data, then problematic metaphysical or normative claims can be sidestepped accordingly. By contrast, the sceptical reading – represented mainly by Kantian constructivist interpreters – attributes to Hume a theoretical conception of reason precisely in order to challenge the standard model's eschewal of categorical normativity in their conception of human agency. Sceptical interpreters hope through their challenge to evade the problematic implications of a morally neutral account of practical reason. Where connections between moral and practical rationality are loosened or even severed, we may be led to endorsing as practically rational the pursuit of ends – the pursuit of which we might nonetheless wish to question on moral grounds. Thus, what standard model interpretations of Hume see as a virtue of his account – its evaluative neutrality – sceptical readings construe it as a limitation of his approach. What both approaches share in common is the assumption that Hume's conception of practical reason is (or can be made to be) evaluatively neutral with regard to chosen ends.

The sceptical reading claims that Hume *cannot* have a conception of instrumental practical reason since all accounts of practical reasoning, including instrumental practical reasoning, *must* presuppose some categorical rational norm. I am sympathetic to the sceptical reading's broader normative agenda; however, believe theirs to offer a misguided interpretation of Hume. When examined in detail, the sceptical interpretation can be shown to share several presuppositions with that of the standard model. Most prominently among these is the rejection of a substantive conception of practical reason in favour of a proceduralist account: the sceptical interpretation tries to show that the authority of practical reason has primacy over subjective desires, but nonetheless takes on board contemporary naturalists' worries about positing substantive moral values. Thus, despite its critical intentions the sceptical reading, like the standard model which it seeks to repudiate, presupposes a very specific historical tradition of practical reasoning. This manifests itself in philosophical concerns surrounding the motivational and normative authority of reason

But Hume sits much more comfortably in an alternative but equally valid historical tradition of substantive practical reason which focuses on the development of dispositional

³ I will have more to say on this point in Section II.

character and the articulation of human values. Like Aristotle, Hume suggests that both the conative and cognitive components of instrumental reason engage in strong, qualitative distinctions about moral value; moreover, this value-laden content is both motivational and normative. The fact that this has become obscured in contemporary readings is symptomatic of the current tendency to discard the original frameworks that situate historical conceptions of instrumental reason. Hence, by disentangling Hume from the strong hold of proponents of proceduralism in contemporary philosophy – who include both the advocates of standard model and their Kant-inspired critics – I want to highlight Hume’s unique understanding of naturalistic, intersubjective, practical normativity which frames and situates instrumental rationality. This framework ultimately helps Hume evade the evaluative reductivism and subjectivism characterising both sides of the contemporary debate about instrumental reason. An alternative, substantive conception of reason comes to the fore: Hume’s practical reason is responsible for the articulation of the qualitative distinctions and values constituting its overarching intersubjective, naturalistic framework.

The challenge of this chapter is that Hume’s philosophical works offer no clear systematic treatment of practical reason: the term “reason” alludes to speculative thought rather than practical deliberation. To complicate matters further, Hume often conflates practical reason with calm passions or “strength of mind”, all referring to developed, habitual character.⁴ Despite these difficulties, the chapter contends that a conception of practical reason can be found in Hume. His combined epistemological scepticism and naturalism establishes a naturalist framework of reason; ultimately this framework orients us towards the reasoned articulation and affirmation of human practical activities and moral values. Instrumental reasoning therefore cannot be divorced from the evaluation of ends; rather, it encompasses the acquisition of moral character and virtues which imply developed, socially valuable desires.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section I provides an outline of the sceptical interpretation. I show that this reading imports some anachronistic dilemmas into its understanding of Humean practical reasoning. Section II offers a reinterpretation of Hume’s famous is/ought distinction in order to highlight prevalent presumptions which unite both sceptical Kantian and standard model readings of Hume. According to these shared presuppositions, the adoption of a formal reasoning procedure ensures the objectivity of descriptive and ethical judgements alike. I argue that these presumptions need to be set aside in order for Hume’s own conception of practical reason to be appreciated in its own right. The purpose of the is/ought passage is to incorporate into practical reason an explanatory function which articulates moral value, implicit in our

⁴ See Jane L. McIntyre, “Strength of Mind: Prospects and problems for a Humean account,” *Synthese* 152 (2006): 393-401.

everyday moral understanding, as shown in Section III and IV. Section V explains how instrumental reason requires natural human sympathy to connect third-person, evaluative judgements with first-person motivation. This shows that Hume is capable of responding to sceptical worries concerning the normative and motivational authority of practical reason.

I. The Sceptical Reading

Hume writes that “reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion” [*T*, p. 459]. According to the sceptical reading, this passage states two things: first, reason has no motivational force and is only causally implicated in practical action. Second, the dictates of reason are not normative because reason possesses no special, intrinsic authority that we necessarily ought to obey. As discussed in Chapter 1, in contemporary debates the motivational and normative questions can be separated – reason can be normative without being motivational or vice versa.⁵ However, it is common to link normative reasons with the motivational structure of an agent through an internalist requirement. Regardless of how normative reasons are linked to subjective motivation, both reductive naturalist and rationalist theories of practical reason claim that an adequate theory of practical reason must explain how reason has a motivational and/or normative grip on an agent, and therefore has the power to guide intentional action.⁶

In the passage above, Hume seems explicitly to deny that reason has any motivational or normative authority over an agent. His scepticism about reason’s epistemic reach seems to extend also to the realm of practical reason. Scepticism about practical reason includes not only substantive models that connect standards of practical deliberation with moral rightness and obligation, but also the standard model of instrumental reason. According to this sceptical interpretation, Hume is miscast as the historical progenitor of an instrumental model of practical reason. Hume seems untroubled by the prospect of an agent who lacks motivation or interest in the instrumental means necessary to achieve a

⁵ See Smith, “Humean Theory,” pp. 36-61.

⁶ Of course, this could be done in different ways. Those influenced by Williams would want to say that reason has motivational and normative authority because it corresponds to an individual’s subjective motivational set. Other rationalist readings would want to say that it is because reason has some quasi-ontological property of “oughtness” or obligation. Both posit a link between the normative and motivational questions, but their response differs because they disagree on reason’s normative source.

desired end.⁷ Irrational behaviour appears removed from criticism. If “[t]is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger” [p. 416] the failure to enact the means to an end would not be called “irrational” or “mistaken”. Indeed, on these grounds Jean Hampton argues that a Humean view of reason

does not provide us with a normative standard by which to judge action. So someone who fails to act so as to achieve his ends, in a situation where he has no desire to perform the actions required to achieve those ends, does nothing wrong. He violates no rational standards of action; and indeed, that’s the point of this Humean view – *there are no rational standards of action.*⁸

In the same vein Elijah Millgram states, “[t]he conclusion of [Hume’s] argument [...] is evidently not that all practical reasoning is instrumental, but that there is no such thing as practical reasoning at all.”⁹

To say irrational or mistaken behaviour cannot be judged according to any rational standard would violate what Hampton sees as a necessary claim in all theories of instrumental reason: “an action is *rational* to the extent that it furthers the attainment of an end.”¹⁰ Accounts of means-end reasoning must incorporate the prospect of “irrationality”, exhibited in the behaviour of the agent who is unmotivated to take the means to their desired ends. As such, the possibility of irrationality implies our practical reasons have prescriptive and motivational authority to our practical reasons; this authority, moreover, appeals to universal norms of rationality. To say the same thing a bit differently, a categorical norm of reason must be invoked in order for a theory of instrumental reason to be able properly to account for irrational action. The normativity of instrumental reason therefore presupposes non-instrumental justification; its foundation hinges on an objective norm of rationality.¹¹ According to proponents of the sceptical reading, therefore, the intelligibility even of instrumental practical reasoning presupposes some kind of categorical norm of reasoning, notwithstanding its proponents’ claims to the contrary.

But unlike his latter-day followers, Hampton claims that Hume in fact acknowledges this requirement upon the normativity of instrumental reason: his response is to reject the very possibility of practical reasoning. Hampton writes:

⁷ Korsgaard, “Skepticism About Practical Reason,” pp. 12-15.

⁸ Hampton, “Practical Reason,” p. 68.

⁹ Millgram, “Was Hume a Humean?” p. 77.

¹⁰ Hampton, “Practical Reason” p. 66, emphasis added.

¹¹ Korsgaard, “Skepticism About Practical Reason,” p. 21.

Hume abandons the idea that there is practical reason, and thus the idea that actions can be condemned as irrational, because he understands, better than many contemporary proponents of instrumental reason, that even this (seemingly minimal) understanding of practical reason is still positing a kind of normativity that will be problematic for any naturalist. To say that the curmudgeon should have acted to secure the means to his end, *no matter what his occurrent desires were*, is to say that he is governed by an authoritative reason.¹²

Hampton's primary target is contemporary naturalists and moral sceptics who uphold the standard model of instrumental reason as the only conception of rationality a scientific worldview can plausibly accommodate. But though Hume is more aware of the objectivist connotations of normativity underlying an instrumental model, she alleges that ultimately he makes a mistake similar to contemporary naturalists when he discusses the artificial virtues in the *Treatise*. Hume states:

There is no passion [...] capable of controlling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction. Now this alteration must necessarily take place upon the least reflection; since 'tis evident, that the passion is much better satisfy'd by its restraint, than by its liberty. [*T*, p. 492]

Hampton exploits the ambiguity of the statement, "must necessarily take place". Hampton writes:

One gets the feeling he means that such an alteration "ought" to take place, and yet that would mean recognizing the authority of something like the instrumental norm (understood to be partially constitutive of reason) [...] I suspect Hume "slips" here because the way in which we normally understand reason includes the idea that it necessarily has authority over action when it supplies accurate cause-and-effect information regarding action.¹³

In the case of artificial virtues Hampton claims that Hume is unable to ascribe to reason a mere theoretical function and must acknowledge that reason exerts some normative authority. Though wiser than contemporary proponents of the standard model, in the end Hume cannot justify other aspects of his philosophy, like the artificial virtues, since the

¹² Hampton, "Practical Reason," p. 70.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

reflective process by which these virtues are internalised, affirmed and renewed involves attributing a prescriptive force to our reasons.

The sceptical reading is, however, misguided in several important respects. First, to speak of Humean “hypothetical imperatives” is misplaced, anachronistic terminology. It is highly questionable that Hume would describe instrumental reasons as “imperatives”. The imperatival form ascribes a property of “oughtness” or obligation to reasons; already conformity of action to norms of rightness is the main theoretical focus, signalling that the sceptical reading begins with certain Kantian proceduralist presuppositions. (I will refer to Kantian proceduralism to denote the contemporary constructivist reading of Kant as opposed to Kantianism, a reading that I will forward in the next two chapters). Hampton’s conclusion that “the Humean view does not count as an instance of the instrumental theory of reason as I have defined [...] because it violates [the] thesis [...] that ‘an action is rational to the extent that it furthers the attainment of an end’” betrays a distinctly proceduralist - specifically Kantian bias in her use of the term, “rational”.¹⁴ Thus the sceptical reading superimposes a quasi-Kantian conception of instrumental practical reason onto Hume.¹⁵ Yet it remains entirely unclear why theories of practical reason should privilege this predominant – yet very specific – tradition to the exclusion of other existing historical strands. Various remarks are “lifted out” of Hume’s original philosophical framework in order to support the normative and critical agenda of the sceptical reading. Hume’s own views become progressively obscured in consequence. But as will become clearer throughout this and the next two chapters, the modern constructivists’ partial retrievals of both Hume and Kant lack critical bite against the standard model given their own tendency to collapse back into versions of the subjectivism and proceduralism they decry as objectionable in the standard model.

If the two are properly disentangled, Hume’s unique conception of practical reason becomes apparent. Hume’s naturalist framework may preclude categorical norms of rationality in the Kantian sense, but can nonetheless accommodate norms of reason based on human *content* or *value*. This would suggest that Hume has a substantive conception of practical reason. The authority of reason is derived, not from some ontological property of

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 66. Cf. Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) trans. H. J. Paton (London: Routledge, 2003), hereafter abbreviated *G*: “Who wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means which are indispensably necessary and in his power.” (45 [417])

¹⁵ I use the term “quasi-Kantian” because I do not believe that these sceptical interpreters reflect an accurate interpretation of Kantian hypothetical imperatives. Though Kant can be seen to forward some of the formalist and proceduralist assumptions, he does articulate substantive ends of practical reason. These are obscured in current debates about practical reason mainly because the metaphysical commitments that are entailed are rejected as implausible given the current scientific age and naturalistic temper.

“reasons”¹⁶ or from its formal objective procedures, but rather from its substantive practical content which itself derives from perceptions of value, goodness, and rightness which are subjective in the large sense, i.e., common and natural to all humans. If Hume’s combined scepticism and naturalism is taken seriously – a view argued for in the previous chapter – instrumental action is judged according to criteria generated from naturally held psychological beliefs which are conducive to our ordinary endeavours as socially engaged agents. Hampton is right to say that, for Hume, “there are no rational standards of action.”¹⁷ But as shown below, this is right because the criterion of “rationality” departs from the predominant proceduralist conception.

II. *The Is/Ought Distinction*

We need to examine more closely the philosophical agenda driving the sceptical reading’s interpretation of Hume. This agenda rests on a widespread but mistaken interpretation of the fact/value distinction. At root, this distinction is responsible for the predominant proceduralist conception of practical reason adhered to by both sides of the contemporary debate. Thus, though both the sceptical and standard model readings believe they are making diametrically opposed arguments, at their core they share the same commitment to a proceduralist account of reason.

It is a common view that Hume exposes how “ought” cannot be deduced from “is”. “[O]ught, or *ought not*”, he writes, “expresses some new relation or affirmation, ‘tis necessary [...] that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it” [*T*, p. 469]. Orthodox readings of this passage take Hume to be exposing the fact/value gap: supposedly taken from Hume, G. E. Moore famously argues that the naturalistic fallacy is committed when a natural property is taken as an ethical property. Descriptive facts cannot be invoked in order to explain moral statements, mainly because the former are distinct from ethical properties. Thus, philosophical attempts to bridge the “is” and “ought” effectively confuse one class of statements with another.

Given what Hume is assumed to say about the fact/value gap, the sceptical reading attributes to Hume a non-cognitivist, ethical subjectivist position. Subjective, emotive states or reactions are all we can appeal to for moral justification, since Hume’s broad scepticism of practical reason means that there can be no *rational* justification for any ought claims, be it instrumental or moral. Hampton writes:

¹⁶ A common view held by Hume’s rationalist contemporaries, but the sceptical reading does not make this particular mistake.

¹⁷ Hampton, “Practical Reason” p. 68.

Hume's famous dictum that you cannot derive an "ought" from an "is" has been forgotten by moral skeptics who believe, nonetheless, in the existence of an instrumental practical reason. [...] The fashion for seeing moral imperatives as hypothetical rather than categorical has assumed that naturalists are able to accommodate the hypothetical 'ought' in a way that they cannot accommodate the categorical 'ought'. But Hume implicitly understood that this is not so; even if hypothetical imperatives strike us as more congenial or more understandable by virtue of their connection with desires, nonetheless, insofar as they generate authoritative reasons for action, which "apply" to us no matter what our occurrent desires, then their prescriptivity is just as "queer" and problematic from a naturalistic point of view as the prescriptivity of categorical imperatives.¹⁸

In other words, according to Hampton's sceptical reading, Hume must in fact be a non-naturalist about instrumental reason. By virtue of its intrinsic prescriptivity, practical reason, whether it is moral or strictly instrumental, is problematic from a reductive naturalist point of view.

Here Hampton could be understood as targeting the neo-Humean strand of reductive naturalism, represented by Philippa Foot. Ironically, like Hampton's non-cognitivist interpretation, these reductive naturalists presume that they are also forwarding a broadly Humean project. In varying degrees, they accept Moore's analysis that the is/ought passage expresses Hume's doubt that moral claims can be derived from descriptive statements.¹⁹ As a response, they provide an account of morality as instrumental rationality, an account which posits no metaphysical or objectivist source to reason. Foot argues that, at root, moral claims are reducible to subjective sentiments, so "[t]he new element in a proposition [refers to] [...] nothing new in the object but in ourselves".²⁰ Morality as subjectively valid "hypothetical imperatives" is therefore more acceptable from a scientific point of view, and "put[s] an end to the hunt for mysterious extra properties".²¹ In other words, moral prescriptions avoid committing the naturalistic fallacy if they are framed conditionally and instrumentally, rather than unconditionally and categorically. Moral prescriptions characterise a change within the sentiments of an agent rather than an actual property of goodness or of the external natural world. Thus, the appropriate naturalistic response to the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1.

¹⁹ Many try to avoid the naturalistic fallacy; Laudan is one exception, see his "Normative Naturalism," pp. 45-6.

²⁰ Foot, "Hume on Moral Judgement," in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: UP, 2002) p. 79.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 79. See also "Morality as Hypothetical Imperatives," in *ibid.*, pp. 157-73.

is/ought gap is to adopt a subjectivist account of morality that is based on a metaphysically neutral account of instrumental rationality.

Moreover, Foot suggests that the naturalistic fallacy can be further avoided by recognising that moral *argument* already presupposes the use of shared descriptive terminology which does not require or include a suppressed normative proposition. If determinations of value are firmly located on the descriptive side of the is/ought divide, they must therefore be truth-evaluable and justifiable through either scientific investigation or analytic argument. In the case of behaviour that offends, “to accept as evidence the fact that behaviour causes a certain kind of offence, he cannot refuse to admit R when O has been *proved*”.²²

Despite their divergent philosophical agendas, both readings assume they are faithful to the spirit of Hume’s is/ought passage. The former believes that Hume objects to all ought statements – be they hypothetical or categorical – and therefore must be a thoroughgoing sceptic of all forms of practical reason. The latter, by contrast, argues that naturalism of a Humean stripe can accommodate prescriptive claims, so long as they remain conditional and analytic. On this view, Hume endorses the standard model of instrumental reason.

Whether or not Moore’s description of the naturalistic fallacy is plausible is not my main concern here.²³ Rather, I am more interested in whether Moore’s view accurately represents Hume’s position. Both the sceptical and standard model readings abide by the supposedly Humean division between fact and value, between descriptive and prescriptive statements, said to originate from the elemental truth expressed in Hume’s is/ought distinction. But if this were our starting point Hume himself would violate the is/ought rule in his discussion of justice. Obligations of justice depend on existing descriptive concepts of common interest; the “ought” in this case is explicable only through such presupposed, commonly agreed upon concepts.²⁴ One could follow Hampton and say that Hume is inconsistent. But there are good reasons to reject this conclusion, even aside from the principle of interpretive charity. If Hume does not adhere to the presuppositions underlying the Mooreian reading, it seems that neither the proponent of the sceptical reading nor the advocates of the standard model can say that they are forwarding a broadly Humean view. Their shared understanding of the fact/value gap also provides an important clue as to how both readings at root share a proceduralist conception of practical reason – one that is not shared by Hume. Should this be the case, the deeper implication is that both prevalent views of Humean practical reason and motivation are misguided. The orthodox misreading

²² Foot, “Moral Argument,” in *ibid.*, p. 105.

²³ For arguments against Moore, see P. F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism*, pp. 3-8.

²⁴ A. C. MacIntyre, “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’,” *The Philosophical Review* 68:4 (1959): 457-8.

of the is/ought passage needs to be corrected in order to make interpretive space for a conception of Humean instrumental reason in the first place, and more importantly, a conception that is attuned to and articulates qualitative distinctions about moral value and the good, where the substantive content of practical reasoning is more important than formal justification and valid epistemic relations. Below I expose the presuppositions underlying the fact/value gap, and contest Hume's presumed adherence to them. This will be helped if we examine how the sceptical and the standard model readings overlap.

Revealingly, both readings ascribe to Hume a reductivist account of practical motivation and moral value. For the sceptical interpretation, Hume is positioned as the Kantian's main philosophical interlocutor and opponent. But even as they criticise the standard model, if probed further, proponents of the sceptical reading begin with a surprisingly similar formal, abstract conception of rationality, motivated by a latent epistemological and proceduralist bias, which I describe below. What they do with this presupposition may differ from the contemporary naturalist: different interpretive conclusions may be reached (i.e. Hume has no conception of instrumental reason) and a radically divergent philosophical agenda may ensue (i.e. Kantian practical reason provides an account of objective morality, whereas proponents of the standard model eliminate the sphere of moral practical reason altogether and thereby jeopardise morality's objective scope and applicability).

But at their core, both readings share certain presuppositions which subsequently inform their response to the naturalistic fallacy. First, both implicitly adhere to current moral philosophy's preoccupation with the justification of our moral claims through a rational procedure. Let me call this the *proceduralist bias*. In other words, good, justifiable reasons for holding the moral beliefs or practices that we do are confirmed through the scrutiny and analysis by an objectively valid rational procedure. For Kantians, moral actions or duties are legitimated through an objective procedure of practical reason; for the standard model, since ends are set by subjective preferences and desires, reason is there to ensure a certain degree of coherence and consistency between beliefs and contingently held desires. The hope for the latter is that a plausible scientific account of instrumental or theoretical reason can affirm the empirical plausibility of some conceptions of goodness. At root this bias assumes that the function of reason is to resolve a conflict of moral views through an ideal rational procedure or form of argument.

This leads to a second, subsidiary overlap between the two readings. The preoccupation with justification through procedure suggests a common goal among contemporary Kantians and defenders of the standard model: namely, the attempt to obtain the truth. In short, the proceduralist bias implies an epistemological bias. This is a controversial claim, particularly considering that for Kant, ethics is *sui generis* – unique of

its kind and irreducible to other fields of study. However, let me explain it this way: according to the proceduralist bias, both Kantian sceptics and advocates of the standard model assume that the function of reason is to resolve conflict according to some objective procedure. Rational argument is needed to settle moral disputes – preferably achieving a kind of moral truth, or, if not truth, a kind of objectivity which people can agree upon.²⁵ This moral truth or objectivity need not have a strong realist status that requires the provability or verification of its descriptive propositions. For instance, a commitment to moral truth in a weaker sense is implicit in the Kantian constructivist conceptions of practical reason, which comes to the fore in some comments made by Christine Korsgaard, another sceptical interpreter of Hume.²⁶ Commenting on the analogies between the practical reason of Kant and the constructivism of Rawls, Korsgaard argues that moral language does indeed admit truth or falsehood, “for the correct conception of a concept will be a guide to its correct application, and when a concept is applied correctly, what we get is truth.” She continues, “[b]ut what makes the conception correct will be that it solves the problem, not that it describes some piece of external reality”.²⁷ Though they may not be committed to the epistemologically driven aspirations of proponents of the standard model, Kantian sceptics transport the goal of truth into the practical, moral domain. The formal procedures of reason provide us warrant for constructed moral practices, assuring us of their validity and truth.

For those reductive naturalists who endorse the standard model, the preoccupation with justification manifests itself slightly differently and leads to claims about what *kind* of arguments are valid. Specifically, arguments containing premises that have a necessary relation to their conclusions are upheld as the ideal form of justification. Our moral beliefs are sufficiently supported only if they are deductively related to the evidence, thus revealing how factual premises can entail moral conclusions.²⁸ For example, we interpret certain descriptive words in a strong functional sense, so that functionality has an analytic connection to its goodness. “[S]ince ‘knife’ is a functional word in the strong sense”, Foot writes, “‘good knives cut well’ must be held to be some kind of analytic proposition”.²⁹ More emphatically, she states:

If someone should say that in the expression “a good root” “good” is not used “evaluatively” this would only increase the artificiality of the notion of “evaluation”

²⁵ See Christine Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Philosophical Research, Centennial APA Supplement* (2003): 99-122; Joshua Cohen, “Truth and Public Reason,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 37 (2009): 2-42.

²⁶ See Korsgaard, “Skepticism About Practical Reason,” 5-25.

²⁷ Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism,” pp. 99-122, 117.

²⁸ Foot, “Moral Arguments,” p. 99.

²⁹ Foot, “Goodness and Choice,” in *Virtues and Vices*, 135.

as used in moral philosophy, and it would raise a number of awkward problems as well. For if the “good” in “good roots” is said to lack “evaluative meaning” because good roots are not things that we should have any reason to choose, then presumably “good claws” and “good fangs” are expressions which must be treated in the same way. But then we shall be in difficulties over examples such as “good eyes”, “good muscles” and “good stomachs”.³⁰

Such deductive arguments are appealing because their procedure confers a degree of objective validity onto our evaluative conclusions. A commitment to analyticity – implicit in the formal mode of argument – can therefore guarantee the truth of our claims. The endeavour is to demonstrate that transitions from “is” to “ought” need not fall short of the deductive ideal. But should these transitions be invalid, it would be because their relation is, not one of entailment, but of some “looser”, more objectionable form of inference.³¹ As MacIntyre writes, “underlying [this thought] is an assumption that arguments must be either deductive or defective.”³²

More specifically, the standard model minimises the peculiar status of “ought” practical judgements: these normative statements need to be assessed according to the requirements of formal linguistic analysis, making them fit, as it were, into the proceduralist and epistemological paradigm of deductive argument and scientific investigation. The sceptical reading appreciates that Hume does not adhere to the epistemic ideal of deductive justification: precisely because of its mysterious epistemic status, moral claims need to be isolated from ordinary descriptive discourse.³³ Yet, the sceptics’ *own* latent adherence to the proceduralist bias causes them to import into the practical, moral domain a standard of objective justification through a rational procedure. And as indicated above, deeper analysis of the sceptical reading reveals that the epistemological bias has not remained confined to the theoretical domain, but has crept into the way standards of practical reason are analysed and assessed. The distinct epistemological ring to the sceptical reading’s description of categorical norms is no coincidence: overarching formal terms such as “mistakenness” and “wrongfulness” are invoked in order to criticise and correct the instrumental reasoning process.

Thus, both readings ultimately share a similar starting point, informed by the same biases. This leads them both to assume incorrectly that Hume believes reason to have an exclusively theoretical, epistemological function, and second, that practical motivation and

³⁰ Ibid., 145-6.

³¹ This is R. M. Hare’s view, as articulated by MacIntyre, “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’,” p. 454.

³² Ibid., 453.

³³ Ibid., pp. 471-3.

moral value is only subjectively determined. But these attributions are inaccurate for two reasons.

Firstly, in the is/ought passage Hume's main worry is not about the pursuit of moral truth, and he is unconcerned with the proper classification of descriptive and normative statements. The sceptical reading poses the question, does the normativity of "hypothetical imperatives" stem from categorically binding norms of reason? But this concern tries to ensure the truth-value and objectivity of our practices through a valid rational procedure; for Hume, however, this preoccupation with truth would be an issue that is entirely beside the point. In other words, *both* practical and descriptive statements require the same cognitive skills of probable reasoning, imagination, and memory, but the latter tackle issues and concerns which are unlike those of the former though *equally legitimate and objective*.³⁴ Ultimately, Hume is suggesting that the substantive content of practical reason is objective given its usefulness for, and our natural inclinations towards, practical and common life.

Second, in drawing attention to the fact that normative judgements require a different "cognitive orientation"³⁵ Hume is not making the claim that *because* this (supposedly non-natural) content has no truth-value or justification we need to adopt a formal rational procedure with norms that do. Since Hume does not share epistemological bias of the orthodox Moore-inspired reading, he cannot be endorsing any particular ideal justificatory procedure, such as deductive proof. The traditional interpretation of the is/ought passage mistakenly assumes that Hume is asking, "can moral rules be deductively derived from factual claims" and then proceeds to show how derivation rules disallow this transition. However, unlike its current association with logical entailment, Hume has a different notion of "deduction" which denotes the type of *inference* incorporated in *inductive* argument.³⁶ More accurately, MacIntyre suggests that Hume's question should be understood as, "how and if moral rules may be *inferred* from factual statements."³⁷ Importantly, Hume validates our inductive beliefs because they rely on natural cognitive mechanisms *a posteriori* to experience, not *a priori* demonstrative arguments. Like inductive arguments, moral arguments cannot be rendered deductively.³⁸ Thus, the is/ought passage asserts that prescriptive statements *are not demonstratively valid*, and therefore we need not worry that normative claims cannot be conclusively proved through some rational procedure such as deductive argument.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 362.

³⁵ W. D. Falk, "Hume on Is and Ought," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976): 359-378, 362.

³⁶ MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'," p. 461.

³⁷ Ibid., p.461, emphasis added.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 454.

The orthodox misreading of the is/ought distinction helps explain why contemporary philosophers – both those who endorse and those who criticise the standard model of instrumental reason – are so preoccupied with the formal structure or procedure of reason as well as the proper classification of rational statements. Scepticism about is/ought transitions is to mistakenly privilege certain presumptions about the way epistemological and ethical arguments must proceed in order to be valid. Essentially this means we read Hume anachronistically in light of these historically recent concerns. By disentangling the two, my corrected reading makes interpretive space for a plausible, non-sceptical understanding of Humean practical reason – and one which follows a more substantive rather than proceduralist conception of practical reason.

III. *Humean Desire and the Good*

Given how neither epistemological or proceduralist bias of the sceptical and standard model readings are present in the is/ought passage, transitions between fact and value are possible through the naturalist framework common to both ethical content and practical deliberation. Illustrating how normative values for Hume are not problematic from a motivational point of view by virtue of its *content* is important to establish Hume's more substantive conception of practical reason.

For Hume, morality is not an autonomous sphere that is removed from our natural desiderative constitution.³⁹ Similar to how “[n]ature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breath and feel” [*T*, p. 183], morality, as Hume says, “depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species” [*E*, p. 173]. Hume's unique naturalism maintains that concepts of desire are meaningless without objective ends, relevant to us from our inescapable anthropocentric perspective. Objective standards are not the exclusive domain of human *reason*, but a matter of human *nature* – which includes desires and passions *as well as* reason, and all fall broadly under the rubric of individual character. Indeed, as Hume writes, “in each creature, there is a sound and a defective state; and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a *true* standard of taste and sentiment.”⁴⁰ Hume goes so far as to say that “[w]riters of all nations and all ages concur in applauding justice, humanity, magnanimity, prudence, veracity; and in blaming the opposite qualities.”⁴¹

In contrast, Hampton states, “[t]o say that the curmudgeon should have acted to secure the means to his end, *no matter what his occurrent desires were*, is to say that he is

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-6.

⁴⁰ “Of the Standard of Taste,” in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 233-4, emphasis added.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

governed by an authoritative reason.”⁴² Hampton’s remarks should indicate that the central concerns motivating the Kantian sceptical reading – concerns about moral objectivity and rational autonomy – lead to the misrepresentation of Hume’s intentions on a deeper level. According to the contemporary Kantian view, if our conception of reason does not preserve a robust notion of critical objectivity, we are trapped into a kind of natural necessity and ethical relativism: what is desirable is too rooted in human contingent circumstances, and therefore cannot provide sufficient critical distance from existing practices in order to generate universal, absolute norms of morality or rationality. And without the latent epistemological and proceduralist bias, practical reason would be viewed as incapable of outlining actions that are justifiable and valid for everybody. But this leads to some puzzling conclusions.

In the first place, Hampton is not clear why it would be morally desirable, or indeed rationally necessary, for someone to be committed to the means to their end “no matter what his occurrent desires were”. From an explanatory point of view, such deep-seated commitment is inessential to making sense of our purposive action. Even a morally substantive account of practical reason like Aristotle’s would consider this odd. Aristotle stipulates that a person of good character must be habituated towards ends of the right sort, so both rational *and* non-rational impulses within the soul are correctly orientated. This is what qualitatively distinguishes the *phronimos* from a merely clever person; indeed, that is precisely why cleverness does not have the freestanding nature of the current standard model.⁴³ Similarly, Hume would not want to say that a person of good character has to pursue the means to an end *regardless* of their desires, especially since a virtuous character emanates proper moral feelings; ethical distinctions are grasped more with sentiment rather than discovered by reason [*T*, p. 470]. Hume’s psychological hedonism involves the process of critically shifting our evaluative point of view, a process where the content and quality of our desires or ends come to matter and can be *moral* orientations, just in the same way that our reasoned reflection and judgements can be. In Hume’s words, “*reason and sentiment concur* in almost all moral determinations and conclusions” [*E*, p. 172, third emphasis added]. Indeed, such thick, committed endorsement of an end, required by the sceptical reading’s over-intellectualised instrumental principle, could actually deter us from behaving morally. Desiderative moral content, not disembodied rational principles, initiates purposive acts fitting of a virtuous dispositional character. From Hume’s perspective, the Kantian view privileges impersonal rational norms that are irrelevant or even harmful to morality, given their abstraction from the unique situational context which

⁴² Hampton, “Practical Reason,” p. 470.

⁴³ Aristotle would characterise someone acting according to reason despite his or her occurrent desires as an *enkratic* agent, characteristic of a poorly habituated person.

grants our practical action apposite meaning and significance. Hume is not a relativist about value: even with the contextual nature of social reason and morality, Hume has a standard of objectivity, just not of a Kantian variety. Objectively valuable ends exist; such ends, however, cannot be found independently of our natural condition as socially situated beings.

So far this captures some Aristotelian elements: as we saw in Chapter 2, praiseworthy action considers the circumstantial particular. But also part of the task of means-end deliberation is to evaluate whether an end is worthy of pursuit in the first place. A straightforward causal connection can be rationally formulated only once this evaluative deliberation has already occurred. Thus, according to an Aristotelian account, openness to circumstantial and evaluative content is often required for instrumental reason to even get off the ground, and the positive assessment of a decided end should also generate equally praiseworthy means. Importantly, evaluative content is acquired through the habitual development of a moral dispositional character. The moral virtues are psychological dispositions that display the right deliberative orientation towards the right things: what is “desirable” is also morally and normatively good. The two can intersect because Aristotle deploys “bridge notions between ‘is’ and ‘ought’: wanting, needing, desiring, pleasure, happiness, health.”⁴⁴

For Hume, evaluative judgements impact on desire in a comparable way.⁴⁵ Hume likewise invokes “bridge notions”, particularly in the hedonistic origins of instrumental reason, and this puts normative weight on the substantive content of what is desired, wanted or needed. Hume believes that to be sceptical of such transitions – reflected in both the standard model and Kantian sceptical interpretations – is to mistakenly privilege certain presumptions about the way epistemological and ethical arguments must proceed. The reductive naturalism underlying the standard model views nature as neutral brute data that can be grasped through human reason, a purely information-processing, cognitive faculty. Understood as such, nature (an “is”) cannot contain or generate any ethical content (an “ought”); subjective desire, however, is exempt from the is/ought distinction since, unlike ethical claims, these are deemed psychological facts about human nature. But frameworks demanding the rational articulation of moral value – or a substantive conception of the good – are problematic since they depart from numerous presuppositions of the current naturalistic temper, requiring us to adopt both the proceduralist and epistemological bias in

⁴⁴ Hampton, “Practical Reason,” p. 462.

⁴⁵ In saying this, I am not claiming that Hume has an Aristotelian account of reason. Hume is notoriously critical of peripatetic schools of thought; however, his moral psychology has some Aristotelian elements, especially when we consider Aristotle’s account of moral habituation, bound up with certain hedonistic instincts. But the crucial difference is that, for Aristotle, practical wisdom is achieved only when an agent comes to rationally reflect on the moral virtues and end of human life; for Hume, one could live a relatively unreflective life and still be a virtuous, social agent.

our conceptions of practical reason. We see this illustrated precisely in the standard model and sceptical readings of Hume, despite its divergent philosophical agenda.

Yet for Hume, the structure of natural human desire is such that we unavoidably allude to the substantive good. Across different cultures and societies is a common insight about the nature of human valuing: what is deemed pleasurable is not necessarily isolated from what is good, nor is good necessarily isolated from what is pleasurable.⁴⁶ Consider, for instance, how Hume thinks pleasure and pain naturally appear to the mind: hedonistic ideas or impressions are necessarily accompanied by the notion of “goods and evils”; indeed the “good” and “desirable” or “pleasurable” appear to be inseparable natural features of human motivation. Moreover, the indispensability of these reciprocal concepts means that our practical reasoning is bound by certain innate anthropocentric and perspectival limits; pursued ends and desires *should* and *ought* to be amenable to the society we inhabit. It is therefore from our inescapably human vantage point – as natural culture-formers and social beings with a certain degree of innate benevolence to our fellow beings – that we reason about, appoint and articulate moral value to some goods or desires over others.

Though this may initially suggest a kind of cultural relativism, Hume’s naturalist framework has a determinate idea of what ends have motivational force and are also considered objectively “good” or valuable. For example, “[t]hough it is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of my little finger,” writes Kemp Smith, for Hume, “it is less ‘humane’ to do so, i.e. less in keeping with the sentiments which, as members of the human species, we *naturally* entertain.”⁴⁷ Ends that are motivating and normative can be self-interested, but their transcendence, where we incorporate the broader social good, is equally possible and indeed morally praiseworthy. “Nature, by establishing a connexion between our feelings and certain objective ends, determines us to actions that completely transcend self-love.”⁴⁸ *Both* sorts of ends cohere with Hume’s unique naturalist stance.⁴⁹ To “follow” nature, to be attuned to her direction

⁴⁶ Hampton, “Practical Reason,” p. 463.

⁴⁷ Kemp Smith, *David Hume*, p. 198.

⁴⁸ [Kemp] Smith, “The Naturalism of Hume (II),” *Mind* 14:55 (1905): 338.

⁴⁹ For instance, in Hume’s essay, “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature,” he writes: “Were our selfish and vicious principles so much predominant about our social and virtuous, as is asserted by some philosophers, we ought undoubtedly to entertain a contemptible notion of human nature. There is much of a dispute of words in all this controversy. When a man denies the sincerity of all public spirit or affection to a country and community, I am at a loss what to think of him. Perhaps he never felt this passion in so clear and distinct a manner as to remove all his doubts concerning its force and reality. But when he proceeds afterwards to reject all private friendship, if no interest or self-love intermix itself; I am then confident that he abuses terms, and confounds the ideas of things; since it is impossible for any one to be so selfish, or rather so stupid, as to make no difference between one man and another, and give no preference to qualities which engage his approbation and esteem. Is it also, say I, as insensible to anger as he pretends to be to friendship? And does injury and wrong no more affect him than kindness or benefits? Impossible: He does not know himself: he

of humans towards the practical common life, means that our *explanations* of the good describe its “potential as a thing to be loved”.⁵⁰ In other words, our discursive explanations will be intimately bound up with our practical valuations of, and motivation towards, moral goodness and activity. Motivation is therefore already embedded within the concept of the good: *this* is what lies at the heart of the is/ought passage. As Hume says, “when we consider how aptly *natural* and *moral* evidence link together, and form only one chain of argument, we shall make no scruple to allow that they are of the same nature, and derived from the same principles” [p. 90].

IV. *Social Purpose of Instrumental Reason and Character Development*

Humean practical reasoning has less to do with the rightness of discrete acts or the correctness of procedure, and more to do with the practical assessment and communication of *both* intersubjective moral facts and values, functioning as an evaluative mirror to society’s practical values. Though Hume may not explain our “practical rationality” in an explicit way – particularly characteristic of the *Treatise* more than the *Enquiry* – I argue that it is implied in the inductive forms of knowledge we gain from our implicit everyday moral learning and social habituation. Specifically, instrumental practical reason is used, first, in our acquisition and articulation of practical, moral experience of social norms; and second, in the merit judgements of the character traits of others and ourselves. These judgements are, in turn, a crucial prerequisite to the formation and correction of moral sentiments.

Recall from the previous chapter that Hume’s unique naturalist framework orientates humans towards practical activity and common society with others. Humean practical reasoning is situated within a horizon comprised of collective judgements, which are beneficial to “the peace and security of human society” [*E* p. 102]. These judgements, along with “[t]he great force of custom and education mould the human mind from its infancy and form it into a fixed and established character” [*E*, p. 86].⁵¹ These customary, educative appraisals – essentially inferential, inductive knowledge – aid the development of socially beneficial character traits, including a dispositional capacity to instrumental reason

has forgotten the movements of his heart; or rather he makes use of a different language from the rest of his countrymen, and calls not things by their proper names.” [pp. 85-6] In Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*.

⁵⁰ Falk, “Hume on Is and Ought,” p. 373.

⁵¹ Cf. Hume, “The Sceptic,” pp. 170-1. Some interpreters like John Immerwahr think that none of the essays on happiness represent Hume’s considered view, see “Hume’s Essays on Happiness,” *Hume Studies* 15:2 (1989): 307-24. I disagree with this and follow Fogelin, who says the essay “On the Sceptic” closely follows Hume’s own style of writing and is consistent with his views in other philosophical works. See Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume’s Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

in a way which reflects ease with our naturally appointed role as practical, socially engaged agents.⁵² Thus, common, everyday practical inferences represent an inductive accumulation of practical experience and draw upon internalised, socially generated rules of morality.⁵³ Given that the cognitive orientation of our reason is one of practical activity, general rules will supervene on and correct subjective desires, tastes and sentiments, making these rules or facts “affect-related”.⁵⁴

Hume outlines this process in the *Enquiry*. He first explains that “[t]he final sentence [...] which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praise-worthy or blameable” and “that which renders morality an active principle and constitutes virtue our happiness, and vice our misery” is down to “some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species” [pp. 172-3]. But he then continues: “in order to pave the way for such sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions, drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained” [*ibid.*]. Though reason does not influence our sentiments towards natural kinds of beauty in particular, “in many orders of beauty [...] it is requisite to employ much reasoning, *in order to feel the proper sentiment*, and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection” [p. 173, emphasis added]. Hume finally concludes, “moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, *in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind*” [*ibid.*, emphasis added]. In other words, for Hume practical reason is a judgemental, cognitive faculty, whereby its explanatory and evaluative conclusions allow us to determine moral beauty and value, with a subsequent motivational influence on our sentiments. To say the same thing a bit differently, reason’s examination of an object or end work, in tandem with the unique affective disposition of the individual, in order to generate valid moral beliefs which contain practical content that is both motivating and normative.⁵⁵ In Falk’s words, inferential practical judgement “bridge[s] the gap between understanding and sensibility by making object-knowledge available to impinge on our sensibilities.”⁵⁶

To further make sense of the above passage from the *Enquiry*, we have good textual warrant to assume that Hume is describing “practical reason” in an expanded sense, though the actual term is not mentioned. Causal inference is an assessing, judging, reflective process: in a practical, cognitive orientation, we observe, compare, and describe objects, fact-knowledge, and character traits, leaving us with socially-communicated moral values

⁵² Penelhum, “Hume’s Moral Psychology,” p. 154.

⁵³ Cf. Philo, *D*, p. 134.

⁵⁴ Falk, “Hume on Is and Ought,” p. 373.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hume, “The Sceptic,” p. 169. See also Setiya, “Hume on Practical Reason,” p. 384.

⁵⁶ W. D. Falk, “Hume on Practical Reason,” *Philosophical Studies* 27:1 (1975): p. 16.

and motivating sentiments. Elsewhere, Hume notoriously discusses how moral good and evil are discerned by feeling rather than reason. However, he continues:

But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from *reflexions* on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons. [...] [B]oth these causes are intermix'd in our *judgments* of morals; after the same manner as they are in our decisions concerning most kinds of external beauty: Tho' I am also of opinion, that *reflexions on the tendencies* of actions have by far the greatest influence, and determine all the great lines of our duty. [*T* pp. 589-90, emphases added]

And when Hume describes the calm passions, they are not described as impetuous, pathological forces of great intensity, but are closely related to commonsense notions of how it is to conduct oneself according to reason and admirable pragmatic reflection. Included in the calm passions are “every valuable quality of the mind, whether of the imagination, judgment, memory, or disposition; wit, good-sense, learning, courage, justice, integrity” [*T*, p. 279]. When a passion “pronounces its verdict” on an object’s value, it “considers not the object simply, as it is in itself, but surveys it with all the circumstances, which attend it.”⁵⁷ Surveying all the circumstances attending an object evokes a causal inference, so the passions must involve some kind of cognitive activity; without which object and circumstance remain disjointed isolates and the value of an object cannot be determined. Similarly, in the essay “Of the Standard of Taste” the incapacity to discern and be moved by beauty and virtue is attributed to an indelicate imagination – namely a cognitive mechanism that is part and parcel of the instrumental reasoning process.⁵⁸ Thus, if we took reason in a very exclusive sense – as denoting a cognitive faculty which generates valid arguments conferred by its procedure – we would be hard-pressed to comprehend the general meaning of these textual passages. The words “reflexion”, “judgments”, “surveys” and all that comprises “valuable qualities of the mind”, would suggest something rather trivial, incomplete, maybe even incoherent, if we did not think Hume was describing practical reason in a more expanded sense of the term.

⁵⁷ “The Sceptic,” p. 172.

⁵⁸ “Many and frequent are the defects in the internal organs, which prevent or weaken the influence of those general principles, on which depends our sentiment of beauty or deformity. Though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected, that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt. Particular incidents and situations occur, which either throw a false light on the objects, or hinder the true from conveying to the imagination the proper sentiment and perception. One obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that *delicacy* of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions.” “Of the Standard of Taste,” p. 234.

Humean instrumental rationality also includes qualitative judgements and assessments which transcend a simple calculative logic; the “practical” function of instrumental reasoning is not constrained exclusively to the first-person execution of a means-end connection, but encompasses third-person, cause-effect appraisals of individual character traits and virtues. Causal inference between *objects* is therefore only a partial dimension of practical deliberation: more fundamental ground for instrumental reasoning’s practical significance is that it allows us to determine the consequences of specific character traits, and generate moral approval or disapproval accordingly.⁵⁹ One may, however, object that though means-end deliberation includes substantive content in the form of such qualitative judgements, it nonetheless eventually collapses into a form of ethical subjectivism. In other words, the content that bears on instrumental reason is motivating and influential only because of its subjective *benefit* or *usefulness* to society. Unlike Aristotle or Kant, Hume cannot claim that these virtues are, in themselves, objectively valuable ends, of which their intrinsic value is confirmed by deep rational reflection. Kantians endorsing the sceptical interpretation partly justify their rejection of Hume’s moral theory on these grounds. To some extent Hume has a utilitarian strand: some virtues – particularly those that are artificial, such as justice and property – are endorsed simply because they promote the good or usefulness of the society one inhabits.⁶⁰

But to acknowledge this utilitarian aspect of Humean justice does not mean that it should also be seen as defining his account of moral virtues and sentiments – that he is a subjectivist about moral value. Hume in fact justifies many aspects of good character and sociable virtues, such as benevolence, prudence, and other virtues beneficial to oneself (like patience, industry; qualities of the mind like learning, courage, and integrity), irrespective of their potential consequences or conditional utility for the individual. “Virtue in rags is still virtue,” Hume writes, and the love which it procures, attends a man into a dungeon or desert, where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world.” He continues more emphatically, “where any object, in all its parts, is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure, and is esteem’d beautiful, even tho’ some external circumstances be wanting to render it altogether effectual. ‘Tis sufficient if every thing be compleat in the object itself” [T, p. 584]. Our esteem of a person’s character does not seem to be based solely on their successful execution of a means-end connection. Rather, virtuous character is *valuable in itself*; there is quasi-objective merit to good character that transcends the straightforward consequentialist achievement of ends or its benefit to the individual. Causal judgements of instrumental reason permit the objective valuing of certain traits from an observational, third-personal point of view, and good

⁵⁹ Penelhum, “Hume’s Moral Psychology,” p. 144.

⁶⁰ See T, p. 501 ff.

character that readily promotes the good of society will impart evaluative worth and value to attempted means, even when the ends are not successfully achieved. In the case of a person who is well respected for their admirable, sociable character, with good traits amenable to common life, it doesn't matter that circumstances rendered ineffective their intended action. Their cause-effect connection may be unsuccessful, but we as observers effectively judge the person for the general tendencies or "rule" of action which displays a certain enduring quality or temperament; we know that in this instance their lack of success is, as it were, "out of character". Or we realise that the person intended a good effect, and had the circumstances been right, they would have succeeded. Based on how we judge their character we render the means and ends complete even when they are not, by filling in the situational and dispositional gaps to the story. Hume confirms this in the *Enquiry*:

Where would be the foundation of *morals*, if particular characters had no certain or determinate power to produce particular sentiments, and if these sentiments had no constant operation on actions? And with what pretence could we employ our *criticism* upon any poet or polite author, if we could not pronounce the conduct and sentiments of his actors either natural or unnatural to such characters, and in such circumstances? It seems almost impossible, therefore, to engage either in science or action of any kind without acknowledging the doctrine of necessity, and this *inference* from motives to voluntary actions, from characters to conduct. [p. 90]⁶¹

In short, the practicality of instrumental reason lies partly in those causal judgements which connect character with specific effects, and thereby facilitate the normative reflection and a quasi-objective determination of virtues and vices.

The previous chapter established how Hume discredits reason's theoretical or speculative aspirations to assert its practical utility; as indicated so far, the specification of its "practicality" is far more expansive than the dominant proceduralist strand. To illustrate, for Kant (and his adherents in the sceptical interpretation) factual statements about the empirical world – even if these relate directly to human life and experience – would not qualify as instances of practical reason. Alternatively, for the standard model, the sphere of practical reason is eliminated altogether; practical normativity is reducible to motivating subjective desires and preferences, and the moral problem is confined to the logical analysis of ethical statements. As previously explained, however, Hume's scepticism about reason's capacity to advance knowledge in a theoretical subject means that "factual" statements – particularly if their content is relevant to the promotion of social

⁶¹ Cf. *T*, p. 582.

interaction and reciprocity – are indeed “practical”. By virtue of its content, by virtue of its capacity to explain and articulate that content, reason has a practical, cognitive orientation.

In this context, the full import of correcting the is/ought passage now comes to the fore. We set aside entrenched philosophical prejudices about how objective rational argument must proceed – as adhering to the epistemological and procedural biases in contemporary philosophy. Third-person character judgements illustrate precisely a dimension of practical reason so often neglected in contemporary debates, namely practical reason as the explicit explanation, as the non-deducible, informal articulation of normative human values as these are embedded in everyday practice and moral understanding. Practical reason is bound up with common linguistic idioms, common moral terminological distinctions, used in social communication. Humans are natural articulators of value, and “we must allow that some part of the seeming harmony in morals may be accounted for from the very nature of language.”⁶² When Hume says that people usually attribute the existence of similar sentiments to the “plain reason” of the “abstract sciences”, he is referring to reason in the rationalist sense, where converging sentiments are viewed as evidence of demonstrable, ontological truths cognisable by reason. Hume then claims that common sentiments are in fact due to the nature of language and social communication.

One might say Hume means to draw a sharp distinction between reason and language here; if that were the case, however, his definition of language would be reduced to the superficial outward expression or utterance of instinct; human communication would be elementary, ad hoc pleasure and pain verbal outbursts. On these grounds, the reason/language dichotomy does not seem to capture his thought here. For Hume, language is intrinsically evaluative; it reflects a more general viewpoint that “must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community” [p. 227]. Because language develops for more general use, the implicit evaluative content of our moral vocabulary veers towards the benefit of larger social interests. If, as Hume says elsewhere, “the intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners” [*T*, p. 603], it makes little sense to imply he is counterposing *practical* reason and language. There is no way we can discursively convey approbation or disapprobation if we are incapable of making causal, reasoned judgements, connecting character traits with effects. Ensnared within a linguistic framework, invariably the development of our individual character will imply an intimate acquaintance with broader discursive idioms of moral judgement and their implicit social value [*E*, p. 174].

⁶² Ibid., p. 228.

Practical reason is consequently a matter of personal character and social development: it combines our natural hedonistic inclinations and feelings with evolving yet stable social conventions and linguistic artefacts; together they cultivate our natural moral sensibilities through time. Conceiving of instrumental practical reason as such highlights the intersubjectivity and social valuing that contextualises human activity. It is *this* context that forms the crucial motivational and normative foundation of Hume's practical reason. We can better see how Humean instrumental reason evades both dominant readings when the reinterpreted *is/ought* passage is combined with this section's description of Humean practical reason. Instrumental reason will never be neutral or devoid of substantive content: its exercise is not a function of its structural form nor meant to be a procedure of critical detachment from our entrenched value perspectives. Thus, in itself, the fact that some desiderative or hedonistic state initiates means-end reasoning does not suggest that all substantive ends are deemed equally valuable, nor that they originate in an undeveloped, primitive psychology, absent of integrated reasoned judgements of some sort. Sub-Humean readings, such as Michael Smith's, neglect these aspects and are guilty of narrowing Hume's actual picture of human impulses. They disregard the role of reasoned belief and the broader ethical significance of a good, socially developed character.⁶³ For this reason, it is mistakenly thought that Hume collapses prudential self-interest into practical reason, and thus ascribes to humans predominantly egoistic, self-maximising desires, reminiscent of the standard model of rational choice.⁶⁴ But the sceptical reading, based on their proceduralist bias, is equally guilty of narrowing the potential task of practical reason. That practical reasoning can be about both a reflective articulation and explanation of human value *in addition to* providing practical direction to individual behaviour is a possibility the predominant proceduralist conception of practical reason simply cannot accommodate. They claim that unless the normative or motivational authority of reason is explicitly and comprehensively justified, accompanied by a corresponding account of categorical formal norms with universal appeal, no adequate account of practical reason can be had.

At this point we may ask about Hume's conception of normativity: is Hume simply making the point that the type of categorical normativity sought by the Kantian is in fact reducible to motivation? As informed by the conventional Mooreian understanding of the *is/ought* divide, contemporary philosophers display a strong tendency to isolate the normative sphere away from the question of motivation, assuming a great distance between

⁶³ My intuition is that the sceptical reading generally dictates the way reason is discussed (in terms of rational necessity and normativity) while the sub-Humeans dictate the way that desires are discussed (in a rudimentary dispositional way, where any supporting cognitive structure may be tangentially implicated inasmuch as it corresponds to a natural pathological disposition, but divorced from any developmental process).

⁶⁴ I will address this issue more comprehensively in the next section.

the two. So far we have been exploring two possible responses to this view in contemporary philosophy: on one hand, the Kantian could say that *regardless* of whether these reasons grip an agent's motivation, they are *normative*. But the problem we then encounter is trying to account for the source of this categorical normativity. In response, the proponents of the standard model argue that this Kantian conception of normativity is problematic from a scientific point of view, particularly where subjective motivation diverges from normative reasons for acting. Thus, contemporary sub-Humean models try to do away with conceptions of objective norms and focus instead on the features of subjective motivation: if we want to understand normativity then we simply need to understand how humans are motivated by certain conative elements. On this view, if normativity entails reasons for doing something irrespective of subjective motivation, then Hume has no conception as such.

But herein lies the importance of correcting our reading of the is/ought passage: if Hume, like Aristotle, believes that human motivation is inextricably linked to normative reasons for acting – that the good is something to be loved or drawn to – neither option in contemporary philosophy makes sense. Unlike the standard model reading, Hume does not believe we can effectively do away with normativity, reducing it all to questions about subjective motivation. Social, evaluative judgements about character and virtue are both reasonable and normative – and this intersubjective content constrains, guides, and becomes integrated within subjective motivation. Unlike the more Kantian view, the space between normative reasons and subjective motivation is smaller: qualitative, moral judgements provide us reasons for acting but their link to subjective motivation is much closer given that the *content* of our normative reasons has a naturalistic basis (the practical ends of human sociality and common life).

We will see more precisely how this is possible through Hume's sympathy mechanism in the next section. The generation of appropriate moral sentiments presuppose the normative judgements determined through reason – through cognitive mechanisms such as comparison, imagination, object distinctions, and causal inference. In the next section I want to focus more on how these cognitive processes can have a motivating role through the sympathy mechanism, whilst I address potential worries about Humean egoism and subjectivism.

V. *Sympathy, the Self and Egoism*

At this point, one might argue that I have erroneously aligned Hume with Aristotle in order to avoid the Kantian predilections of the sceptical interpretation. However, in saying that Hume has some vague Aristotelian elements, in no way do I claim that Hume adheres

to an Aristotelian account of practical reason. That would be blatantly incorrect: Hume has no conception of an overarching, functional end, which we reason towards in Aristotle's thicker, more demanding understanding on practical deliberation. Articulation of value, for Aristotle, means a rational reflection of objective values possessing species-wide validity. One cannot be practically wise in the Aristotelian sense if one does not in fact rationally evaluate and understand the intrinsic worth of certain moral, intellectual virtues, within the context of the *polis*. For Hume, articulation of value refers to a minimal level of assessment, implied within the natural use of language, though these values vary from place to place. Deep reflection in the Aristotelian sense is admirable, but certainly not required for one to be virtuous in the Humean sense; in fact, should such reflection be carried too far, practical immobility and philosophic melancholy is the inevitable result.

Moreover, Hume's implicit concern with philosophical egoism highlights crucial respects in which his account of practical reason departs from Aristotle. The former attempts to respond to distinctly modern, post-Hobbesian / post-Mandevillian worries about egoistic self-regard, worries which do not necessarily arise in the latter.⁶⁵ This section shows that Hume attempts to address and sidestep the spectre of modern moral subjectivism and psychological egoism by appointing to sympathy a central normative, moral role. The way Hume addresses thoroughly modern worries through sympathy reveals his firm philosophical allegiance to a more sentimentalist, non-Hobbesian approach, whereby other-regarding virtues are viewed as beneficial to individuals.⁶⁶ Moreover, as we will see, the sympathy mechanism allows Hume's model of instrumental reason avoid of the moral subjectivism of the current standard model; if reason does not assure us of morality's objectivity in terms of its procedures, features of human nature, such as the capacity to sympathise with another human being, become the objective standard of moral conduct. Ultimately our use of reason should be aligned with these natural features of humanity.

As we saw in the previous section, causal, probable inferences within instrumental reasoning have a twofold practical significance: first, they provide firsthand guidance to relevant means-end connections, object knowledge and comparisons; second they allow an observer to judge the effects and social worth of specific character traits. Crucially, instrumental reason from the first-person standpoint and the more evaluative third-person perspective become linked through sympathy, a natural mechanism common to all humans:

⁶⁵ See Norton, *David Hume* and Stephen Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) for more on how moral sense philosophy tries to address these worries.

⁶⁶ For an opposing point of view, see Jean Hampton, "The Hobbesian Side of Hume," in Andrews Reath et al, *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls* (Cambridge, Mass.: UP, 1997) pp. 66-102.

For besides the relation of cause and effect, by which we are convinc'd of the reality of the passion, with which we sympathize; besides this, I say, we must be assisted by the relations of resemblance and contiguity, in order to feel the sympathy in its full perfection. And since these relations can entirely convert an idea into an impression, and convey the vivacity of the latter into the former, so perfectly as to lose nothing of it in the transition, *we may easily conceive how the relation of cause and effect alone, may serve to strengthen and inviven an idea.* In sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea into an impression. [p. 320, emphasis added]

For Hume, sympathy is the natural, sensible identification with the situation or feelings of others; it is through this natural instinct that moral beliefs or reasons can be activated and are motivational. Far from being a one-way motivational channel from impressions to ideas, cognitive mechanisms can “convert an idea into an impression”, conferring onto the former a vivacity and motivational force that the latter naturally possesses. Indeed, natural cognitive mechanisms such as resemblance and contiguity often aid our sympathetic responses to others, rendering our ideas of another’s experience more immediate and dynamic. Thoughts of another person’s situation, of another person’s evaluative judgement of character traits or moral values, are always fainter when compared to our firsthand experience, but sympathy enlivens these third-personal experiences to the point of actually experiencing similar passions. Through sympathy an individual can see situational or emotional resemblances with another, thus enlivening otherwise impotent causal ideas and beliefs.

Of course, human sympathetic identification has a limited sphere, and to determine and eventually expand its boundaries requires a notion of the self and its natural attachments. The idea of the self, though fundamentally unstable and inchoate, has the capacity to aid the sympathetic activation of ideas, but this naturally means that ideas and beliefs close to oneself are activated more than ones remote to our situation. Hume thinks we will consequently sympathise more with our family, friends, and countrymen. But the natural limitations to sympathy should not detract from its capacity to expand feelings and thoughts to ones beyond the self. Even the initial, more restricted sphere of sympathy affirms the normative impact of one’s broader socio-cultural context on self-identity, and affirms the evaluative purpose of practical reason.⁶⁷ Hume writes in the *Enquiry*:

⁶⁷ Charlotte Brown, “From Spectator to Agent: Hume’s Theory of Obligation,” *Hume Studies* 20:1 (1994): 28.

Now nothing is more natural than for us to embrace the opinions of others in this particular; both from *sympathy*, which renders all their sentiments intimately present to us; and from *reasoning*, which makes us regard their judgment, as a kind of argument for what they affirm. These two principles of authority and sympathy influence almost all our opinions; but must have a peculiar influence, when we judge of our own worth and character. [*E*, pp. 320-1]

Our natural sympathetic inclinations help us to adopt and activate more general judgements about morality and virtue which are held by our larger discursive community. Personal development involves the internalisation of moral judgements pronounced by others, and is fuelled by the desire to possess a reputation worthy of praise. This affiliation with others, combined with the desire for their good opinion, allow us to be so passionately affected that we would voluntarily change our character. “Sympathy we sometimes carry so far,” Hume writes, “as [to] even be displeas’d with a quality commodious to us, merely because it displeases others, and renders us disagreeable in their eyes; tho’ perhaps we can never have any interest in rendering ourselves agreeable to them” [*T*, p. 589]. The evaluative judgements and disapproval of others, through sympathy, can have a motivating influence on future practical conduct. And since the substance of the self is comprised of assessable character traits, these appraisals inevitably affect one’s self-conception.

Hume clearly has in mind this sympathetic, evaluative process when he rather oddly refers to the self as “object” rather than the more common term, “subject”. When we speak in evaluative terms the self is referred to as an *object* rather than a *subject*,⁶⁸ we identify ourselves as a “self” only through another comparative stance.⁶⁹ To refer to the self as “object” therefore suggests a change in the evaluative viewpoint, to a characteristically stable and intersubjective perspective. Árdal astutely writes that “[m]oral approval always has a person as its object. We can morally approve or disapprove of actions only as having their source in a person or a group of persons.”⁷⁰ Moreover, perception of the self as “object” involves taking a degree of pride in oneself, especially when the judgements of others reflect favourably upon us. Without a notion of the self and its attending pride our ideas, beliefs, or reasons would remain inactive, yet without common social and linguistic references, these beliefs remain arbitrary and our identity would be fragmented. For its stability, the self therefore requires the mediation and

⁶⁸ Robert S. Henderson, “David Hume on Personal Identity and the Indirect Passions,” *Hume Studies* 16:1 (1990): 35.

⁶⁹ Hume does not have a solipsistic account of personal identity. The self is something we know of only indirectly: it gives vivacity to our ideas, it is implicated in our social relations; in fact we come to some vague notion of the self only through others. But we cannot “know” the self in the way a Cartesian would want to say we can.

⁷⁰ Páll S. Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume’s Treatise* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: UP, 1989) p. 123.

reflection others provide, so that self-identity possesses greater significance than the trivialities commonly dominating individual choice. As Annette Baier notes, this comes in the valuing one's public standing, reputation and character, as opposed to arbitrary or ephemeral desires.⁷¹ To ascribe identity to the self is to presuppose further what MacIntyre calls a "publicly-usable, third-person" perspective which attributes accountability and responsibility to the first-person.⁷²

The shift from subject to object, moreover, is possible only within a landscape of common, existing moral terms and distinctions, and ultimately attests to the evaluative, articulating function of practical reason. For Hume, instrumental practical reasoning is not restricted to the first-person question, "what are the means to this desire?" Nor is it restricted to the third-person evaluative standpoint asking, "what is the broader impact of this character trait on society?" Rather, sympathy's subtle operation in practical reason shows how both stances mutually imply one another, meaning the first-person must, and for Hume, does ask, "how does this end reflect my character, and how will others judge me?" What *doesn't* arise, however, (at least, from Hume's point of view) is the morally sceptical question, "*why* should I care about how others judge me".

At this point, one may object that Hume's emphasis on other people's judgement compromises the moral basis of the sympathy mechanism; instrumental reason is consequently all about fulfilling hedonistic self-interest and therefore his conception collapses into a subjectivism reminiscent of the standard model. If moral evaluation of our self-identity, desires, and means and ends, relies on taking pride in other people's judgement of our character, if earlier I was right that valid transition arguments between "is" and "ought" effectively blur the distinction between personal desire and normative judgements about the moral good, the question then arises whether Hume's position is really that far removed from the standard model's definition of rational preferences. The sub-Humean alleges that instrumental reason hinges on subjective desires individual: an agent has reason to act in a way that promotes his individual desires that are not themselves subject to external evaluation.⁷³ From this point of view it is unclear what normative work is actually carried out by Humean sympathy: much less than extend the motivational source of practical reason beyond self-interest, sympathy seems to merely confirm the truth of moral subjectivism and philosophical egoism. Perhaps another person's pleasure or pain is simply a means to my own hedonistic ends; sympathy is just another way my own pleasure and prudential interest can be maximised. Moreover, to dispute the subjectivism and egoism of the standard model seemingly substantiates the sceptical reading: in order to

⁷¹ Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, pp. 142-3.

⁷² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: UP, 1988) p. 291.

⁷³ Cullity and Gaut, "Introduction," n. 15.

avoid reason's collapse into subjectivism, movement towards the other extreme – namely towards a more critical, universal foundation for ethics and practical reason which renders irrelevant subjective desires and interests – may be necessary and indeed preferable.⁷⁴

So we are presented with a false dilemma: either Humean practical reason has the subjectivist framework of the standard model, or Hume's outright scepticism about practical reason provides no grounds to criticise imprudent behaviour. Against the latter claim, for Hume an individual's imprudence can be criticised according to a more commonsense, ordinary understanding of what constitutes reasonable conduct. In the *Treatise* he asks the question, "what character, or peculiar understanding, is more excellent than another?" His response:

'Tis evident we can answer none of these questions, without considering which of those qualities capacitates a man best for the world, and carries him farthest in any of his undertakings. There are many other qualities of the mind, whose merit is deriv'd from the same origin. *Industry, perseverance, patience, activity, vigilance, application, constancy*, with other virtues of that kind, which 'twill be easy to recollect, are esteem'd valuable upon no other account, than their advantage in the conduct of life. 'Tis the same case with *temperance, frugality, oeconomy, resolution*: As on the other hand, *prodigality, luxury, irresolution, uncertainty*, are vicious, merely because they draw ruin upon us, and incapacitate us for business and action. [pp. 610-11]

Significantly, the prudential virtues are described, not as whimsical desires or pathological impulses, but as "qualities of the mind". These qualities refer to the common use of the term, "reasonable" or "unreasonable". As suggested in the previous section, "reasonable" denotes an admirable character disposition comprised of socially and individually beneficial calm passions. In order to make sense of these prudential virtues, again we must assume that Hume uses practical reason in an expanded sense: for instance, to define "constancy" or "application" necessarily invokes functions of practical reason, like good, effective causal inferences and its imaginative or recollective process, which likewise reflect accumulated practical experience. The term "reasonable" is, as Simon Blackburn describes, the "only currency of evaluation"⁷⁵ because its implicit standard encompasses

⁷⁴ Worries over egoism latently inform and motivate a number of the sceptical interpretations, particularly Korsgaard's critique of Hume via Kantian practical reason. See *Sources of Normativity*. I criticise Korsgaard's reading and misuse of Kant in the following two chapters.

⁷⁵ Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, p. 240. I partly disagree with Blackburn's conclusion when he says that Hume is trying to "distinguish defects of input from ones of processing and hence output". Blackburn rightly says that that how one responds to a situation is supposed to be a "dynamic

various prudential virtues and calm passions that promote our *natural* cognitive orientation towards “business and action”.

Second, Hume thinks it unrealistic for philosophers to suggest that morality stems solely from pure, unmixed motives, for these may not even exist. We don’t need to deny altogether prudential or subjective interests in order to make space for other-regarding interests that can and do motivate our instrumental reasoning; actual human motivation is much more complex and mixed.⁷⁶ He writes:

Where avarice or revenge enters into any seemingly virtuous action, it is difficult for us to determine how far it enters, and it is natural to suppose it the sole actuating principle. But vanity is so closely allied to virtue, and to love the fame of laudable actions approaches so near the love of laudable actions for their own sake, that these passions are more capable of mixture, than any other kinds of affection; and it is almost impossible to have the latter without some degree of the former.⁷⁷

Importantly, in this essay “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature” Hume expresses genuine unease with purely negative conceptions of human nature. These conceptions reduce all human practical motivation to an egoistic level, making our instrumental reasoning mere instances of self-projection.⁷⁸ And like the sceptical reading, he finds troubling the morally destructive implications of such pessimism.⁷⁹ Our virtuous acts and friendship – both of which flourish with a healthy sympathy for others – may produce incidental pleasure, but these acts are ultimately done for the sake of a friend’s good, out of genuine, other-regarding affection for the person. Elsewhere in another essay, he says that a bad opinion of human nature “extinguish[es] the social affections” and “prevent[s]

response”. But Blackburn limits this to our passionate and sensible nature. I think this minimises how much sympathy can activate our cool judgements and ideas. I argue that Hume shows how passions *as well as* sympathetically animated ideas, beliefs, and reasons form our practical responses, and does better justice to the depth of our dynamic responses.

⁷⁶ This makes sense if we situate Hume within the natural law tradition of Grotius and Pufendorf, both of whom claim natural law is bound up with self-preservation, but this self-preservation reveals innate sociable tendencies. Thus, the promotion of society is the natural condition of our self-preservation. See Buckle, *Natural Law*.

⁷⁷ Hume, “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature,” pp. 85-6.

⁷⁸ Norton shows how Hobbesian moral scepticism is a spectre over Hume’s philosophy, of which the latter attempts to challenge in his moral sentimentalism. See *David Hume*, pp. 21-54.

⁷⁹ As Frederick C. Beiser notes, the eighteenth-century debate between rationalism and sentimentalism differs from contemporary philosophical debates between cognitivism and emotivism or naturalism and prescriptivism. The former is more of a dispute about whether moral values are primary qualities, like rational or mathematical terms which don’t depend on human consciousness, or secondary qualities which are relative to human consciousness. See *The Sovereignty of Reason; The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: UP, 1996), pp. 313-4.

remorse for a man's own crimes; when he considers, that vice is as natural to mankind, as the particular instincts to brute-creatures".⁸⁰

These remarks indicate important respects in which Hume differs, not only from Aristotle, but also the moral sceptic and egoist. For Aristotle, the possibility of defining human essence and moral motivation in egoistic terms is an anathema; those who do are either simpleminded or poorly habituated. This classical option is no longer available to Hume: any scientific account of human nature must respond, in some way or another, to the spectre of egoism and moral subjectivism – a problem that perhaps originates in Augustinian theology and takes on a life of its own after Hobbes. Hume argues that to do away with egoism altogether would be the wrong way to assuage philosophical unease over self-interested behaviour, particularly if one hopes to provide a plausible, relevant moral system. He thus avoids the subjectivism of the standard model by making the development of admirable character the appropriate focus of our natural egoism. Without proper social development of our mind's disposition, without cultivating dignity in our taste and passions, it is entirely possible that the pride attending the self may lead to excessive vanity and a warped desire for glory. But this possibility is minimised if we appoint to practical reason an evaluative, articulating function, best expressed in the third-person causal assessment of both character and shared moral values. Good instrumental reasoning is not measured according to whether my subjective interests have been advanced. Rather, it must encompass a two-way, corrective process, whereby substantive, moral content – represented in socially communicated, practical human values – is imparted to my subjective desires or ends. Without this reflexive process, my own desires can remain inert: for Hume, pride and humility – the passions relating to the self – are “unattended with any desire, and not immediately exciting us to action” [*E* p. 367]; by contrast desire attends the passions directed *towards others* (such as love and hatred). Hume thinks that our impressions of the self are not necessarily accompanied by desire; instead, desire attends *other-directed* passions. Self-interested desire is never the sole cause for practical action; indeed, as we saw above, though we commonly praise long-term prudential planning in our ordinary use of the term “reasonable”, in many instances people act contrary to their own personal advantage. Both moral and non-moral, disinterested and self-interested motivation exists, and their potential conflict requires sympathetic reconciliation.⁸¹

Humean sympathy illustrates the close connection between subjective motivation and normative reasons (which are constituted by qualitative, evaluative judgements); this is

⁸⁰ “The Sceptic,” p. 173.

⁸¹ Nicholas Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) p. 6. This idea of mixed motives contrasts with Kant; however, many contemporary Kantians try to say that Kant has an account of mixed motives (which include the desire for happiness), in order to avoid the charge that his moral motivation is overly strict and unrealistic.

clearly distinct from contemporary accounts of normativity which favour a gap between motivation and normativity as based on the Mooreian understanding of is/ought divide. Moreover, Humean sympathy also presents an important challenge to the subjectivism of the standard model of instrumental reason, effectively situating instrumental reason within a normative intersubjective framework which has an objective naturalistic basis. As an intrinsic part of the instrumental reasoning process, sympathy provides the necessary motivational link between third-personal, evaluative, reflective judgements and first-personal hedonistic desires, between societal values and self-identity. Our sympathetic affiliation with others' evaluative judgements allows the general viewpoint to supervene on our individual, contingent tastes. The reasoned censure or approval of the more general point of view become integrated with the subjective passions; our self-interested motives evolve into genuine moral sentiment and change the direction of our practical conduct accordingly. Thus, at its core the normativity of instrumental reasoning encompasses the articulation of valuable societal customs which naturally impinge on our individual actions and moral sensibilities. Because the stability of our self-identity depends on others, because we can humanly relate to another's judgements and respect their discretionary power, Hume can answer the sceptical reading's question of *how* and *why* evaluative normative reasons or beliefs become practically activated in the instrumental reasoning process.

Conclusion

The previous chapter outlined how standard model readings misunderstand Hume's naturalistic framework and assume his conception is similar to the forms of reductive naturalism realism informing what Taylor refers to as the current naturalistic temper. As a result, Hume is mistakenly thought to be the historical source for the current standard model. Yet the differences between Hume and current sub-Humean accounts of the role of instrumental reasoning are substantial enough to call into question the plausibility of these partial reappropriations of Hume who seek to align his position with that of the standard model. What is more, and as I have argued more specifically in this chapter, the sceptical reading is just as guilty as the standard model of suspending Hume's philosophical framework and importing in its place its own Kant-inspired biases. Once removed from his philosophical framework Hume does appear to endorse a version of ethical subjectivism and reductivism about human motivation. This then does render him susceptible to the charge of scepticism raised against him by proponents of Kantian proceduralism.

But the sceptical reading's recruitment of Hume as historical source of the standard model's moral impoverishment is unsuccessful. Indeed, despite its critical agenda in this

regard, the sceptical reading in fact shares with the standard model the same basic proceduralist and epistemological biases which then inform their accounts of the function and normativity of instrumental reason. This predominant view regards practical rationality as the formal capacity to follow a procedure that is divorced from substantive content and dispositional context. Good instrumental reasoning must invoke formal criteria that possess universal validity and application, freed from the qualitative distinctions constitutive of our intersubjective values. This view is not unique to the sceptical reading – as we saw, standard model readings too have a conception of practical reason as a freestanding, formal procedure which ensures the coherence between desires and belief, and is applied towards an open-ended, subjective outcome. Both sceptical and standard model readings are therefore suspicious of the qualitative distinctions constitutive of a more substantive conception of practical reason. At root, this suspicion animates the suspension of Hume’s philosophical framework in both readings, and it is for this reason both accounts attribute to Hume a form of moral subjectivism.

Once we resist this methodological impulse to suspend Hume’s philosophical framework, it is apparent that Hume’s theory of instrumental reason does not entail the subjectivism or evaluative reductivism of the standard model. Nor is Humean instrumental reasoning of a freestanding nature. I have shown how Hume’s unique naturalistic framework outlines substantive human ends of human sociality and practical action which then necessitates the intersubjective articulation of moral value. These judgements, expressed in the causal judgements of individual character, represent a crucial articulatory function to practical reason which is currently eclipsed by the predominant proceduralist conception at the forefront of contemporary debates about instrumental reason.

Defined in Hume’s sense, reason’s importance stems, not from its objective procedures or norms but rather from its constitutive, qualitative content, whereby it is ensconced within the broader naturalist rubric of societal norms. Instrumental rationality incorporates inductive forms of understanding, manifested in socially articulated, collective principles, intersubjective discourse and evaluative judgements. Through sympathetic mediation, these forms of understanding are absorbed into our dispositional character and motivational structure. Even with its pathological origin, it is the socially amenable *content* of the means and ends that matter in practical reason; *this* is what makes character admirable and praiseworthy. Correcting presuppositions of the supposed fact/value gap reveals how good causal inference implicate both motivational and normative reasons to fulfil the means-end connection – not because it is required by some objectively justified norm, or because it follows from our blind obedience to our dispositional desires, but

because we are unavoidably inculcated within linguistic community and a value perspective.⁸²

At root, the fact that the sceptical reading shares core biases with the standard model explains its lack of success as both a critique of the latter as well as an interpretation of Hume. It also illustrates well the inherent weaknesses and constraints of current attempts at historical retrieval as a critical challenge to the subjectivism of the standard model. If we find Hume's provocative naturalist framework implausible, there are clear limitations on current retrievals of his theory by both proponents and critics of the standard model. The danger is that once we resort to truncated versions of Hume's thought, the collapse back into a version of moral subjectivism inevitably follows. The next chapter shows that this collapse is not confined to the standard model reading of Hume: it was implicit in the sceptical reading presented here and is more fully fleshed out when these same sceptical interpreters are understood in the context of contemporary reappropriations of Kant. Thus, the shared biases of both the sceptical and standard model readings in Hume are particularly important to illuminate reasons why the partial reappropriations of historical thinkers by critics of the standard model tend to mirror the subjectivism they are trying to reject.

⁸² I should clarify that it is not an expectation due to an overarching rational norm over society, but because the actions / motives which are approved are ones that are conducive and valuable to society's renewal.

6 Constructivist Interpretations of Kantian Practical Reason

“It is not as if we *chose* the game.”

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*¹

Kant defines instrumental reason in terms of hypothetical imperatives which recommend adoption of the means necessary to an agent’s given ends. More specifically, he states in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* that “[h]ypothetical imperatives declare a possible action to be practically necessary as a means to the attainment of something else that one wills (or that one may will)” [414 (39)]. Hypothetical imperatives are analytic propositions, whereas the categorical imperative is an *a priori*, synthetic principle. This is meant to highlight the distinct normative source of the moral law.

Despite this, the extent to which hypothetical imperatives share the same normative source as the categorical imperative is a source of debate. Contemporary commentators often invoke Kant’s theory of hypothetical imperatives to pinpoint defects within the volitional picture of agency provided by empirically based conceptions of instrumental reason, such as that of Hume and the standard model. As we saw in the previous chapter, the sceptical interpretation uses its particular reading of Hume to ultimately endorse a Kantian model of practical rationality; the sceptical interpretation’s historical retrieval of both Hume and Kant is therefore meant to function as a broader critique of the freestanding and subjectivist connotations of the standard model. Christine Korsgaard in “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”² contends that Kantian hypothetical imperatives presuppose a form of normative endorsement of ends traditionally associated with the categorical imperative. She contends that hypothetical and categorical imperatives share a common normative source in human rational agency. Korsgaard wants to resist the standard model’s evaluative neutrality since according to it morally repugnant ends might be thought not to be subject to moral scrutiny and assessment. To avoid this possibility Korsgaard resorts to a moralised conception of instrumental reason, effectively conflating the normativity of both instrumental and pure practical reason.³ Thus, for Korsgaard as well as many prominent contemporary moral and political philosophers, Kant provides the most salient and plausible rejoinder to the standard model of instrumental reason since he

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969) p. 317.

² In Cullity and Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason*, pp. 215-54.

³ Though this conflation is not immediately self-evident, I will illustrate how this is implied in Korsgaard’s regress strategy.

can explain how normative principles fulfil the internalist requirement through his conception of human rational agency, yet still demand for the moral assessment of ends.

But there are inherent problems with these contemporary applications of Kant to our current worries about the standard model. Should Korsgaard's interpretation be endorsed, we risk misunderstanding the categorical imperative and Kant's defence of the distinctiveness of pure practical reason more generally. This is particularly evident in Rawls' account of the categorical imperative procedure (hereafter CI-procedure) in his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, a reading of Kant to which Korsgaard is clearly deeply indebted. According to Rawls, Kant's conception of the categorical imperative provides a procedural account of how moral principles are constructed out of our prudential maxims. Rawls – like Korsgaard – assumes that both prudential and moral maxims are united in human rational agency. With its anthropocentric grounding, the CI-procedure encompasses *both* the maxims of instrumental and of moral reason. In fact, the latter cannot be generated without the input of the former: the categorical imperative is a normative procedure of maxim testing which assumes the need for contextual knowledge and applies to both instrumental and moral willing. Specifically, the CI-procedure begins when an agent adopts a prudential maxim, and concludes when this maxim passes a universalisation test. If a prudential maxim passes this test, it is deemed morally permissible. Though not his principal concern, Rawls' account of the CI-procedure tries to present Kantian practical reason as essentially amenable to a secular, pluralistic point of view. Hence prudential, conditional – not moral, unconditional – maxims are seen as initiating the CI-procedure. On Rawls' reading of *Groundwork*, Kant's practical philosophy can be read as continuous with the standard model's repudiation of metaphysical commitments – effectively avoiding the troubled waters of moral realism or external reasons – while still providing a conception of objective rational normativity that is based entirely on a humanistic source.

The constructivist Kantian reading seems appealing initially: resulting from the unification of both forms of practical reasoning in their conception of human rational agency is a moralised conception of instrumental reason which does not compromise one's naturalist and liberal commitments. But despite this, there are deep-seated problems with this perceived alternative to the standard model. The constructivist reading essentially *empiricises* the categorical imperative and pure practical reason in its bid to make Kant practically relevant to contemporary moral and political concern – in particular, to the concern to justify a metaphysically sanitised conception of liberal autonomy that

nonetheless responds critically to the current standard model.⁴ This empiricisation comes at a high normative cost: the principle of pure practical reason becomes indistinguishable from principles of instrumental rationality. Moralised Kantian instrumental reason takes on a freestanding character similar in certain respects to that of the standard model. Moral reasoning no longer has the robust critical authority over and above (and separate to) instrumental reason as intended by Kant. Thus the constructivist retrieval of Kant, though often proffered as an alternative to the standard model in fact faces many of the problems associated with the latter. This dilemma is the natural consequence of the method employed by the retrieval strategies under examination in this thesis: the constructivist reading eliminates Kant's metaphysical, dualistic philosophical framework thereby rendering conception of practical reason becomes amenable to the current naturalist philosophical temper. And like the other historical retrievals examined in previous chapters, the constructivist reading of Kant ends up with a version of the subjectivist and unsituated account they seek to repudiate,⁵ thereby reinforcing the weakness of this approach as a critical strategy against the standard model. This will become clearer in the following chapter when the constructivist reading is compared to my alternative interpretation of Kantian instrumental and pure practical reason as situated within his dualistic philosophical framework.

This current chapter will explore and criticise these two prominent contemporary retrievals of Kant's instrumental and moral reasoning. Thus the argument here has a ground-clearing function in order to prepare for the reading presented in the next chapter. Sections I and II examine Korsgaard's reading of Kantian instrumental reason. I examine how her worry about motivational scepticism informs her agent-centred analysis of rational principles, which consequently leads to several exegetical problems, including the misguided moralisation of hypothetical imperatives. Sections III and IV explore similar exegetical manoeuvres in Rawls' account of the CI-procedure. The most significant among these is how his reading maintains a close connection between prudential and moral reason. Deeper reasons for this close connection stem from the desire to minimise the gulf between moral aspirations and natural human capacities, as shown in Sections V and VI. I argue that this is a misguided strategy which leads to a problematic conflation between instrumental and pure practical reason. Thus, these partial retrievals of Kant take on the unsituated character of the standard model despite their critical intentions.

⁴ See Jens Timmermann, "Value without Regress: Kant's 'Formula of Humanity' Revisited," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14:1 (2006): 69-93.

⁵ This is more relevant for Korsgaard than Rawls: as we saw in Chapter 1 Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* does adopt the standard model of rational choice to generate the two principles of justice. Korsgaard rejects the standard model much more explicitly.

I. Korsgaard's Reading of Kantian Instrumental Reason

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

All imperatives are expressed by an “*ought*”. By this they mark the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which is not necessarily determined by this law by virtue of its subjective constitution (the relation of necessitation). They say that something would be good to do or to leave undone; only they say it to a will which does not always do a thing because it has been informed that this is a good thing to do. Practical good, however, is that which determines the will by means of representations of reason, hence not by subjective causes but objectively, that is, from grounds that are valid for every rational being as such. [413 (37-38)]

Rational principles affect human agents through agents’ rational consciousness of their “oughtness”, necessity, or “to-be-doneness”. Both hypothetical and categorical imperatives share this prescriptive quality. Conventionally – and as the next chapter explains in more detail – reason’s prescriptivity is explicated with reference to Kant’s dualistic philosophical system.⁶ Given that humans are only imperfectly rational and possess unavoidable desiderative features, principles of practical reason do not in general exercise full control over the human will. Moreover, Kant stipulates that, though all imperatives share a kind of practical necessity, those of skill and prudence exert only *subjective* necessity, whereas the categorical imperative has *objective* necessity. The former are applicable to an agent given particular subjective ends, while those of the latter pertain to all rational beings irrespective of their particular subjective ends. The normativity of instrumental and moral reason is both different and separate, based on the divergent character of their necessity.⁷

Korsgaard’s interpretation departs from this conventional reading in significant respects. Korsgaard contends that moral practical reason grounds the normativity of instrumental reason.⁸ She reaches this conclusion through two interpretive strategies, which I explain in more detail below. First, she focuses on the common practical necessity and motivational force of the imperatival form; second, she emphasises how both imperatives are constitutive of human autonomous, rational agency. At root, Korsgaard hopes to provide a moralised account of instrumental reason that complements her

⁶ See Jens Timmermann, *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals; A Commentary* (Cambridge: UP, 2007) pp. 47-9.

⁷ In the next chapter I argue that instrumental reason is indeed separate from pure practical reason.

⁸ Korsgaard, “Normativity,” p. 250.

commitment to a liberal conception of the autonomous agent. To make this clear, let me explain Korsgaard's various interpretive steps in more detail.

First, for Korsgaard, Kant's primary question in the *Groundwork* is how *any* imperative – whether hypothetical or categorical ones – motivates agents to act. Specifically, Korsgaard assumes that Kant tackles this question from the perspective of one fundamentally concerned about motivational scepticism; his analysis of all imperatives – be they of skill, prudence, or morality – allegedly begin from an inquiry into how normative principles of reason manage to 'grip' an agent. As explained in Chapter 1, Bernard Williams' influential version of internalism outlines how, in order for normative reasons to have motivational force, they must correspond to an agent's subjective motivational set. These may comprise of existing beliefs, desires, or conative components; independent of these subjective elements normative reasons have no power to motivate an agent to act. Reasons are normative and have motivational force not by virtue of their intrinsic 'rightness', but because they become attached to an already existing set of subjective commitments. Internalism therefore appears to solve the problem of reason's motivating force and normativity without invoking any metaphysical frameworks outside the individual agent. But in so doing, Williams argues that we would need to endorse the standard model's sub-Humean – rather than Kantian – picture of human motivation.

Korsgaard accepts the force of the internalist position, but she is further preoccupied with deflecting the popular view that Kant has an externalist conception of practical reason.⁹ Korsgaard argues that Kant ultimately adopts an internalist position so that he can challenge the empiricist's scepticism about reason's motivational force. But unlike Williams' more Humean version of subjective motivational set, Korsgaard stresses that the normative principles of Kantian reason have motivational force by virtue of the necessary, constitutive features of practical rational agency itself. More importantly, Korsgaard's concern with the internalist / externalist debate is motivated by a deeper concern with moral scepticism: namely, to show how *moral* principles are not external reasons, but part and parcel of our everyday use of instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality is usually upheld as the paradigmatic example of motivational internalism, and as we saw in the Chapter 1, these reasons are commonly thought of as requiring no special philosophical justification. For Korsgaard, Kant maintains that moral principles must be internal and motivating reasons, since they are *presupposed* in instrumental reasons.

For Korsgaard, to will or have a volition towards an end necessarily involves the self-application of some kind of rational normativity. We are first-personally committed to an

⁹ Korsgaard, "Scepticism," pp. 10-1, in particular her rejection of Frankena's reading of Kant. See William Frankena, "Obligation and morality in recent moral philosophy," in Kenneth Goodpaster, ed., *Perspectives on Morality: Essays by William Frankena* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1977) p. 63.

end if we will it; such willing necessarily involves the “inward, volitional act of prescribing the end along with the means it requires to yourself.”¹⁰ In the case of means-end reasoning we apply the *instrumental principle* – the rational normative command that “if you will the ends, you must will the means”. Williams’ brand of Humeanism would want to claim that, for an agent to be motivated by a reason, it needs to be connected to a subjective volitional commitment to an instrumental end; but an external, normative principle itself is not necessary. Korsgaard, by contrast, argues that essential to all practical motivation is the recognition of how normative rational principles apply unconditionally to all agents (as well as oneself), in addition to volitional commitment.¹¹ This acknowledgement is not simply a process of self-application – for self-application can be of either of internal or external reasons. To be consistent with the internalist requirement, Korsgaard believes we actively and subjectively *endorse* these normative, rational principles.¹²

This first-personal endorsement means that we confer substantive value or goodness on an end based on these principles we give ourselves. Specifically, Korsgaard interprets the instrumental principle as having substantive, evaluative content. This differs from Kant’s own abstract description of hypothetical imperatives. Other than the recognition that humans employ instrumental reason towards broad ends involving technical skill and prudence, Kant remains silent on how individuals define goodness or value in terms of specific ends. But for Korsgaard, to will an end implies that an individual does not simply desire or will an object, but actively examines and endorses the *substantive value* of that end in accordance with a rational principle, where we can judge this end as a good thing to will. Korsgaard states, “the normative force of the instrumental principle does seem to depend on our having a way to say to ourselves of some ends that there are reasons for them, that they are good.”¹³

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

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

¹¹ R. Jay Wallace, “Normativity, Commitment, and Instrumental Reason,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 1:3 (2001): 7.

¹² Korsgaard, “Normativity,” p. 247. See Mark Schroeder, “The Hypothetical Imperative,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83:3 (2005): 358.

¹³ Korsgaard, “Normativity,” p. 251.

[F]or the instrumental principle to provide you with a reason, you must think that the fact that you will an end *is a reason* for the end. It's not exactly that there has to be a *further* reason; it's just that you must take the act of your own will to be normative for you. And of course this cannot mean merely that you are *going* to pursue the end. It means that your willing the end gives it a normative status for you, that your willing the end in a sense makes it good. The instrumental principle can only be normative if we take ourselves to be capable of giving laws to ourselves – or, in Kant's own phrase, if we take our own wills to be *legislative*.¹⁴

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

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

The hypothetical imperative tells us that if we will an end, we have a reason to will the means to that end. This imperative [...] is not based on the recognition of a normative fact or truth, but simply on the nature of the will. To will an end, rather than just wishing for it or wanting it, is to set yourself to be its cause. And to set yourself to be its cause is to set yourself to take the available means to get it. So the argument goes from the nature of the rational will to a principle which describes a procedure according to which such a will must operate and from there to an application of that principle which yields a conclusion about what one has reason to do.¹⁵

Here, Korsgaard begins with an analysis of autonomous agency and rational will, to instrumental reasoning. When one examines further why we value rational agency, it is because we value our autonomy and how as rational agents we legislate and create laws for ourselves. Thus, the means to our ends are normative only insofar as they reflect the normativity of what it is to be an autonomous *rational agent*. Based on how the will

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 245-6.

¹⁵ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge: UP, 1996) p. 36.

functions, rational agents automatically choose and confer value upon subjectively chosen ends according to the criteria of self-given laws.¹⁶

Regardless of which argumentative strategy she ultimately endorses, Korsgaard's analysis of instrumental reason leads to a focus on what she views as the constitutive features of Kantian rational agency. Korsgaard contends that the application of the instrumental principle does not come after the construction of a maxim. Rather, maxims aim to conform to the instrumental principle by their very nature.¹⁷ This is because principles of practical reason "do not represent external *restrictions* on our actions, whose power to motivate us is therefore inexplicable, but instead *describe* the procedures involved in autonomous willing". Moreover, "they also function as normative or guiding principles, because in following these procedures we are guiding ourselves."¹⁸ All practical principles – and therefore hypothetical and categorical imperatives – are at once descriptions of the procedures of our rational agency, as well as prescriptive standards of how our rational agency should function. If this is true, instrumental reasons – and more importantly, moral reasons – would be internal reasons, and both normative and motivational, since these reflect how it is to be a being that wills maxims as self-given laws. This autonomous self-government therefore describes and binds *all* agents and their endorsed ends, whether they are moral and objective, or instrumental and subjective.

Conventionally, Kantian autonomy is read as identical with the good will which accords with the moral law.¹⁹ Kant writes in the *Groundwork*

An absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative, will therefore, being undetermined in respect of all objects, contain only the *form* of *willing*, and that as autonomy. In other words, the fitness of the maxim of every good will to make itself a universal law is itself the sole law which the will of every rational being spontaneously imposes on itself without basing it on any impulsion or interest. [444 (95)]

If Korsgaard accepts what Kant says here, her claim that the instrumental principle requires us to "give oneself a law"²⁰ must mean that instrumental reasoning in fact necessitates individuals to behave in a morally autonomous sense as typically associated with categorical willing. Korsgaard's interpretive analysis of Kantian instrumental reason therefore appears capable of responding neatly *both* to charges of externalism against

¹⁶ Timmermann, "Value without Regress," pp. 70-1.

¹⁷ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 244.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁹ Timmermann, *Commentary*, pp. 15-21; also Beck, *A Commentary*, pp. 37-40.

²⁰ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 245.

Kant's account of practical reason *and* to the threat of moral scepticism. For even when we reason instrumentally, our capacity for legislative moral autonomy is engaged: on Korsgaard's account the latter is simply a constitutive feature of our rational agency in general. It is precisely this agent-centred focus and regress strategy which allows Korsgaard to make the claim that hypothetical imperatives require the legislative demands of the categorical imperative.

In this, Korsgaard advances an intriguing but implausibly demanding account of practical agency. The "mature Kantian view," writes Korsgaard, "traces both instrumental reason and moral reason to a common normative source: the autonomous self-government of the rational agent."²¹ All choices – be they instrumental or moral – require normative endorsement in the form of universal judgement; as Korsgaard sees it, the nature of Kantian agency, of the autonomy which is constitutive of the will, implies that individual maxims are *eo ipso* willed as universal law. This suggests that, when Korsgaard discusses the normativity of reasons, she equates it with the norms of *morality*. "To say that moral laws are the laws of autonomy is not to say that our autonomy somehow requires us to *restrict* ourselves in accordance with them," Korsgaard writes, "but rather to say that they are constitutive of autonomous action. Kant thinks that in so far as we are autonomous, we just *do* will our maxims as *universal* laws."²² On this reading, the subjective necessity of hypothetical imperatives is virtually indistinguishable from the objective necessity of the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is not a law that we may or may not apply; rather, Korsgaard's reading suggests that the universality requirement is implicit in *all* maxim construction, for both instrumental and moral purposes. If you are a sort of being who acts on maxims, you are therefore a rational being that can always make, and act in accordance with, universal law.

The initial appeal of Korsgaard's account lies in her claim that humans must invoke universal moral principles (the categorical imperative) even in the non-moral pursuit of subjectively desired ends. Moreover, the constitutive features of unconditioned human autonomy respond neatly to the questions surrounding the normative and motivational force common to both instrumental and moral reasons. Korsgaard's reading therefore appears overall as a promising strategy against the evaluative neutrality and freestanding nature of the standard model. Nonetheless, her account is unconvincing both as an interpretation of Kant as well as a critique of the standard model. Her interpretation is weak in two ways: first, she misunderstands Kant's analytic-synthetic distinction; and second, she misguidedly conflates prudential and moral reasoning, thereby minimising the normative function of the categorical imperative. As I show below, Korsgaard's perceived alternative conception of

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 249, third emphasis added.

instrumental reason comes to mimic the same unsituated and freestanding quality of the standard model account. The first problem I will explain in this section; the second problem I will elaborate by examining how Korsgaard's mistakes can be better understood if we examine Rawls' influential account of the CI-procedure in the following sections.

Korsgaard's agent-centred analysis of hypothetical imperative rests on a generous understanding of analyticity. Kant argues that hypothetical imperatives are analytic, "for in my willing of an object as an effect there is already conceived the causality of myself as an acting cause – that is, the use of means; and from the concept of willing an end the imperative merely extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end" [417 (45)]. On a straightforward reading of this passage, the means are analytically contained within willing the end. But Korsgaard adopts a different take: she extends the analyticity of hypothetical imperatives to incorporate the constituents of "agency". She alleges that the constituent features of rational agency – not the predicate, "willing the end" – perform the analytic work in Kantian instrumental reason. If we analyse the constituents of "rational agency", we will be able to extract the claim "ought to ensure that if she has an end she takes the necessary means to it".²³ Korsgaard states, "[t]o will an end just is to will to cause or realize the end, hence to will to take the means to the end. This is the sense in which the [instrumental] principle is analytic. The instrumental principle is *constitutive* of an act of the will. If you do not follow it, you are not willing the end at all."²⁴ The normativity of instrumental reason relies on what it means to be an *agent* who wills rather than what it means to *will* an end.²⁵ In other words, Korsgaard understands the analytic claim, "if you will the ends you necessarily will the means", to be an essential part of the analysis of "rational agent".²⁶ Following from this analytic truth, Kant wants to suggest, that imperatives – be they hypothetical or categorical – apply *unconditionally* to all agents.

In order for this to make sense, we would have to grant Korsgaard a wider and non-Kantian notion of analytic truth which claims "that it is analytic that any agent ought to do what *rational* agents do".²⁷ Korsgaard seems to have this non-Kantian account in mind, as she writes:

The model suggests that the normativity of the *ought* expresses a demand that we should emulate more perfect rational beings (possibly including our own noumenal

²³ Schroeder, "Hypothetical Imperative," p. 363.

²⁴ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 244.

²⁵ Schroeder, "Hypothetical Imperative," p. 363.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 365.

selves) whose own conduct is not guided by normative principles at all, but instead *describable in a set of logical truths*.²⁸

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

[S]ince we still *do* make choices and have the attitude that what we choose is good in spite of our incapacity to find the unconditioned condition of the object's goodness in this (empirical) regress upon the conditions, it must be that we are supposing that rational choice itself *makes* its object good.²⁹

Thus, if we adopt Korsgaard's conception of analytic truth, it is possible to derive the moral law analytically. If we were to abstract from the material and conditional nature of hypothetical imperatives, we would be left with the unconditional form of the categorical imperative, especially since both are united by an analysis of the constitutive features of autonomous rational agency.³⁰ "Rationality, as Kant conceives it," she writes, "is the human plight that gives rise to the necessity of making free choices – not one of the options which we might choose or reject."³¹

II. *Problems with Korsgaard's Reading*

At root, Korsgaard's account of Kantian instrumental reason reflects her general desire to ground all willing – whether hypothetical or categorical – in the moral requirements of free rational agency. Korsgaard's underlying worry seems to be the potentially morally indigestible consequences which may follow from a principle of instrumental rationality that holds independently of the universality requirements of the moral law, such as maintained by the standard model. To use an example given by G. A. Cohen, it would be like saying that the Mafioso who adopts an end to kill someone is in some way committed to carrying out the means.³² This action would be both normative and rational; and the Mafioso is not *necessarily* required to test their maxim for moral permissibility. Korsgaard's moralising conclusion perhaps tries to avoid these harmful consequences: if all rational principles lead to the constitutive features of morally autonomous rational agency, then the Mafioso who adopts this end would automatically

²⁸ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 240, emphasis added, qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 364.

²⁹ Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: UP, 1996) p. 122.

³⁰ Schroeder, "Hypothetical Imperative," p. 361.

³¹ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 244.

³² G. A. Cohen, "Reason, humanity, and the moral law," in Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, pp. 183-4.

will this maxim to kill as universal law, and would be subsequently required to abandon such an objectionable end.³³ Conflating moral endorsement of rational principles with volitional commitment seemingly avoids extreme detachment from the moral assessment of our ends, and allows these moralised evaluations to be transferred from means to the end itself.³⁴

But to address this worry of detachment through Korsgaard's strategy does seem problematic for several reasons. First, Korsgaard's reading cannot make coherent sense of the *Groundwork's* analytic-synthetic division; this should indicate that her account of the normative source of instrumental reason is mistaken at least by Kant's lights. Second, her moralised conception of instrumental reason ignores a range of deliberative possibilities, such as *akrasia*. Finally, she reduces the full moral force of the categorical imperative. The first two issues I will discuss in this section, the third problem I will explore through the subsequent discussion of Rawls' CI-procedure.

First, we should be hesitant about adopting Korsgaard's looser conception of analytic truth. I take it that Korsgaard's regress strategy relies on a notion of analyticity as one of logical *entailment*. This may cohere with some remarks Kant makes in the first *Critique*,³⁵ but it cannot be said to reflect Kant's narrower definition of analyticity in the *Groundwork*. There analytic truth is defined as strict logical *containment*: meaning that the predicate is contained in its subject. "Willing an end" contains the concept that one "ought to will the necessary means";³⁶ the adoption of an empirical end entails the means towards that end. This specifies that willing the means – or a hypothetical imperative – is analytically contained within willing the end. By contrast the categorical imperative is an *a priori*, synthetic proposition that is "concerned, not with the reason for performing the act of will, but with the cause which produces the object" [417 (45)]. Thus, Kant's instrumental principle is analytic insofar as it applies only *if* you have adopted an end; its applicability is *conditional* on an adopted end. By implication, the instrumental principle acquires its practical content entirely from the adoption of a desired end, not from the meaning or constituents of agency: without that end, *the instrumental principle would have no evaluative, material, or practical content*. And more importantly, the analyticity of the instrumental principle relies on one willing an end, *whether or not* its material content is judged good or bad from the perspective of morality or self-legislating rational agency.

³³ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, pp. 256-8.

³⁴ See Schroeder, "Hypothetical Imperative," p. 367-8. At root, it seems that Korsgaard wants to claim that morality *is* rationality.

³⁵ See *KrV*, A6-7, which reveals a notion of analyticity which includes logical containment as well as loose analyticity or entailment.

³⁶ Schroeder, "Hypothetical imperative," p. 365.

Ultimately, it is doubtful that Kant shares any of these contemporary worries about practical reason's motivational grip on subjective agents, nor is he preoccupied with disproving moral scepticism.³⁷ This already indicates that Korsgaard's basic points of departure are not ones shared by Kant.³⁸ Kant's main theoretical question in the *Groundwork*, and indeed throughout his practical philosophy, is to show how synthetic principles, such as the moral law, are possible since it cannot be derived from any empirical intuition. By contrast, as an analytic proposition, hypothetical imperatives are fundamentally less problematic to account for than the categorical imperative given their dependence on the empirical world for practical content.³⁹ Hypothetical imperatives Kant seems to set as relatively straightforward, demanding no extra philosophical justification. The brunt of the analytic work is shouldered by the adoption of a subjective end: meaning if an agent pursues an object of desire, then she ought to will the requisite means. Since hypothetical imperatives are analytic, instrumental reason must have a conditioned, as opposed to an unconditioned, normative source. This, as well as how instrumental reason's normativity draws upon theoretical sources of cognition, I will explore in much more detail in the next chapter.

Second, Korsgaard's highly demanding picture of instrumentally rational willing excludes a number of deliberative options encompassed within our practical agency, such as *akrasia*. She states, "[s]o the reason that I must conform to the instrumental principle is that if I don't conform to it, if I *always* allow myself to be derailed by timidity, idleness, or depression, then I never really *will* an end."⁴⁰ According to Korsgaard's reading of the instrumental principle, in willing an end we are committed to carrying out the means, *even in the face of opposing volitional commitments*. In other words, Korsgaard presents us with a dichotomy in her conception of the Kantian will: either all willing must reflect our autonomous rational agency, where we invoke universal normative principles, or we are passive, subject to the whims of our desires and inclinations, and by implication, cease to be an agent.⁴¹

But Korsgaard fails to capture a range of instrumentally rational possibilities between these two extremes. In saying that moral endorsement of an end is an actual prerequisite to

³⁷ This "response to scepticism" reading is very pervasive and likely originates from P. F. Strawson's interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy. See *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen, 1966). The main thrust of Korsgaard's problem fails to have any resonance with Kant, since the paradigm operating during and prior to his time presumed that the interplay of cognitive and conative dimensions within instrumental reason were motivationally efficacious; its motivational power was never questioned but simply assumed.

³⁸ I will expand on this further in the next chapter.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁴⁰ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 247.

⁴¹ For another take on this dichotomy, see Wallace, "Normativity," p. 10.

any volitional commitment, she cannot explain instances of *akrasia*.⁴² In these cases an agent adopts an end which may not be morally endorsable. The end that is pursued may be one that is bad outright in comparison to other options; and crucially, he or she is fully conscious of the fact that a better one is rationally endorsable. Instrumental reasons are still normative in cases like these, insofar as even in one's volitional commitment to a morally "lesser" end, they must nonetheless formulate the means. Here the absence of moral rational endorsement in the form of universal law is unimportant: the *akratic* agent still follows through on the analytic connection between means and ends, but whether or not that end *is*, or *should* be, morally-endorsable is immaterial.

To illustrate this point, let us take Korsgaard's own example of Timid Prudence, who claims to have an end to lead a more adventurous life, but consistently fails to take the necessary means. She regularly procrastinates about carrying out the means to this end, even when adventure knocks on her door.⁴³ If I understand Korsgaard's arguments correctly, she would conclude that Timid Prudence has violated the instrumental principle because she is not really *willing* this end, since her normative and volitional commitments fail to coincide. But if we instead considered her action as *akratic*, Kantian hypothetical imperatives can still explain this case. We could understand this example as one where normative and volitional commitments fail to correspond. So Timid Prudence may believe that leading an adventurous life is one that she normatively endorses – she herself thinks it is the best end that she ought to adopt. She is, however, volitionally committed to a lesser end – to leading a comfortable, less daring existence. On a less demanding picture of Kantian practical agency, Timid Prudence would not necessarily be guilty of violating her hypothetical imperative – she takes the means to her lesser end which expresses her volitional commitment, but with the full awareness of a better end that she herself normatively endorses. As R. Jay Wallace points out, absent in the case of *akrasia* is the adoption of the *best* or more preferable end, not of instrumental rationality itself. The *akratic* agent will still take the means to an adopted end – but the only difference is that this end will be one they consciously know to be in their lesser good (or one they do not normatively endorse). I agree with Wallace that Korsgaard would be hard pressed to describe cases like these as a breakdown of instrumental rationality.⁴⁴ Clearly the means-end connection is upheld, the only difference being the endorsable value of that end. This shows that normative endorsement value of an end, and volitional commitment to it, can be independent of one another, without leading necessarily to the failure of means-end rationality.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-26.

⁴³ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 236.

⁴⁴ Wallace, "Normativity," p. 15.

Ultimately Korsgaard's interpretation is motivated by a desire to counter the standard model picture of practical reason. Korsgaard is right to reject this picture, but in so doing she goes to the other extreme, where our normative reasons must coincide with rational volition. The example of *akrasia* shows that we as agents are capable of generating normative reasons for an action, and, crucially, can choose a course of action that contradicts those reasons. If we really want to do justice to the complexity of human rational deliberation, we need to recognise a wide spectrum of rational actions which can, and indeed often do, diverge from both the endorsement of a normative principle and requirements of universality.⁴⁵ Korsgaard's all-or-nothing approach to instrumental reason cannot deal with these *akratic* cases where an agent is volitionally committed to an end with the awareness that they normatively endorse a better option. This weakens the plausibility of Korsgaard's alternative to the standard model since it forecloses a whole range of deliberative possibilities in the complex picture of practical agency. If we want to avoid this prevalent assumption that the standard model is *the* definitive account of practical motivation and instrumental reason, it is more important, not to deny wholesale the possibility that this model functions in some limited capacity in our lives without us ceasing to be agents – be it when we are *akratic*, egoistic, depressed. Rather, the focus and attention needs to be on the philosophical articulation of its situating, broader framework that is composed of more meaningful substantive values, and subsequently disproves the freestanding nature of the standard model. For instance, we saw in Chapters 2 and 3 how Aristotle in his conception of cleverness – simply based on a something akin to the standard model – can still accommodate and explain *akratic* agency. Similarly, a textually faithful account of Kant is better equipped to grapple with *akratic* possibilities. Yet both Aristotle and Kant do not collapse into versions of the standard model precisely because of their overarching philosophical frameworks, which incorporate a conception of normative objectivity and situate their accounts of instrumental reason.

Although Kant never deals directly with the problem of *akrasia*, he recognises how an agent's volitional commitments can oppose morally endorsable ends. Unlike Korsgaard's claim that in willing – whether it be instrumental or moral – we necessarily will our maxims to be universal law, Kant carefully distinguishes between pure autonomous willing, which is the moral law, and heteronomous willing. Heteronomous choice depends on how empirical, conditional objects affect our desiderative faculty; in short, it involves our volitional commitment to objects of desire. Heteronomy subsequently requires the employment of hypothetical imperatives to achieve these desired ends, while autonomy necessitates the categorical imperative; our ends are therefore *legislated*

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

according to the universal requirements of the moral law. This distinction between heteronomy and autonomy is important, as it signals that Kant believes that an agent can choose *contrary* to the categorical imperative, adopting instead a lesser good rooted in empirical grounds of determination. Hence, we can choose and pursue an end that is recognisably bad, even though we may acknowledge that there is a better end that we ought to endorse according to the criteria of morality – and this would still qualify as instrumentally rational.

The case of the *akratic* agent is implied when Kant discusses the conflict between the end of duty and the end of happiness in the *Groundwork*. He speaks of an individual who feels “a powerful counterweight of his needs and inclinations, whose total satisfaction he grasps under the name of ‘happiness’”. On the other hand, reason “commands relentlessly”, and with “disregard and neglect of these turbulent and seemingly equitable claims”. Between the inclination towards happiness and the command of duty by reason there emerges a “natural dialectic” or “a disposition to quibble with these strict laws of duty, to throw doubt on their validity, or at least on their purity and strictness, and to make them, where possible, more adapted to our wishes and inclinations” [405 (23)]. This suggests Kant does not conflate volitional commitment with the moral endorsement of ends in the instrumental principle. Indeed, he implies that our volitional commitments point regularly to the lesser good of happiness, even when we are conscious of the demands of the highest good, moral duty. It therefore seems that a more textually faithful reading of Kant demonstrates his philosophy capable of grappling with other forms of rational agency neglected in Korsgaard, such as *akrasia*. As we will see, his broader philosophical framework prevents his account of instrumental reasoning from collapsing into a version of the standard model.

III. *Rawlsian Readings of the CI-Procedure*

Above I have presented various criticisms of Korsgaard’s conception of Kantian instrumental reason, namely that it distorts Kant’s analytic-synthetic distinction and fails to account for a spectrum of practical deliberative possibilities that could qualify as instrumentally rational. Should Korsgaard’s reading be endorsed, we risk misunderstanding the categorical imperative and moral reasoning, whereby the objective moral force of the categorical imperative is curtailed. This moralised version of instrumental reason then begins to resemble the freestanding character of the standard model. By contrast, for Kant, moral duty and the categorical imperative are meant to remain somehow “above” instrumental reason: what it means to will autonomously remains normatively separate, for Kant, from mere choice so that the moral law can effectively be

applied to *delimit* and *restrain* those choices. There needs to be some space between spontaneous choice and law in order for this normative work to happen. Bad ends can be the result of choice, but certainly not from the autonomous moral will. If these two elements of volitional choice and normative endorsement are conflated, it does raise the question as to the extent to which moral autonomy or law can have normative authority beyond instrumental reasoning and guide our practical choices. Korsgaard inherits numerous exegetical moves from Rawls' understanding of the CI-procedure; thus closer examination of the Rawlsian CI-procedure will enrich our understanding of her account Kantian instrumental rationality.

Rawls distinguishes between the categorical imperative proper and its procedure as it applies to humans. The Formula of Universal Law in the *Groundwork*, "Act on the maxim that can at the same time be made a universal law", Rawls understands as the 'strict method' of the categorical imperative. As the principle of pure practical reason, the categorical imperative helps construct morally permissible maxims which guide our practical action. But according to Rawls' interpretation, the reality of our human neediness and finitude mean that the categorical imperative can be applied by human agents only once the Formula of Universal Law has been rendered in the terms of the Formula of the Law of Nature, "*Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature*" [421(52)]. "While this procedure is not the categorical imperative itself," Rawls writes, "*it does provide us with the most usable expression of the strict method based on it.*"⁴⁶ In other words, the categorical imperative needs to be understood through the CI-procedure in order for the principle to be applicable to human practical action.

Conventionally, the categorical imperative, as the supreme principle of moral or pure practical reason, is thought of as distinct from hypothetical imperatives, or principles of instrumental rationality.⁴⁷ Qualitative differences – such as particularity vs. universality, hypothetical vs. categorical, sensible vs. intelligible – set apart empirical and moral principles of practical reason. We will see the full impact of Kantian dualisms on his conception of instrumental and moral reasoning in the next chapter. By contrast, Rawls takes the CI-procedure "to represent in procedural form all the requirements of practical reason (both pure and empirical) as those requirements apply to our maxims."⁴⁸ Thus, Rawls understands the CI-procedure as encompassing both instrumental and moral reasoning. To support this, Rawls claims that Kant's use of the German word, *vernünftig*, includes what we commonly call "reasonable" and "rational". According to Rawls,

⁴⁶ John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2000) p. 182, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ See Timmermann, *Commentary*, pp. 73-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

“reasonable” denotes “‘judicious,’ ‘ready to listen to reason,’ where this has the sense of being willing to listen to and consider the reasons offered by others.”⁴⁹ But *vernünftig* also includes “the narrower (often the economist’s) sense of ‘rational’ to mean roughly furthering our interests in the most effective way.”⁵⁰ Rawls continues, “Kant’s usage varies, but when applied to persons, *vernünftig* usually covers both reasonable and rational.”⁵¹ Rawls is not clear why just because human beings can be both reasonable and rational in their distinct meanings, it follows that moral reasoning must include the two meanings of *vernünftig*. Nonetheless, for Rawls the broad sense of *vernünftig* leads to the unity of practical reason: the categorical imperative applies, not exclusively to pure practical reason, but also to the “economist’s” conception of instrumental rationality.

According to Rawls, Kant outlines a four-step CI-procedure which tests the moral permissibility of existing maxims, and “enables us to regard ourselves as making universal law for a possible realm of ends.”⁵² At the first step, this existing maxim is typically a hypothetical imperative – or a prudentially motivated maxim of action, which is “rational given the agent’s situation and the available alternatives, together with the agent’s desires, abilities, and beliefs.”⁵³ The form of the maxim would be, “I am to do *X* in circumstances *C* in order to bring about an end unless *Z*.”⁵⁴ In short, the first step determines whether our existing maxim is rational from the perspective of instrumental reason. The second step of the procedure generalises this agent’s maxim, resulting in a “universal precept that applies to everyone”, and “[w]hen this precept passes the test of the CI-procedure, it is a practical law, an objective principle for *every rational being*.”⁵⁵ This second stage abstracts from the merely subjective validity of the hypothetical imperative, so that the maxim becomes a universally applicable precept. The third step then transforms this universal precept into an “as-if” law of nature – as if such a practical law, which is valid for all rational beings, “was implanted in us by natural instinct.”⁵⁶ Finally, the fourth stage connects this hypothetical law of nature with the existing laws of nature which then forms a readjusted “order of nature”. We imagine what our world would look like according to this readjusted natural order. This describes an agent’s “legislative intention, an intention as it were to legislate such a world”.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 164.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168. It is unclear at this point whether Rawls has an anthropocentric understanding of “rational being”. If he does, this reflects a clear departure from Kant’s use of the term.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

According to Rawls our maxims must satisfy two conditions if they are to be morally permissible: first, “we must be able to intend, as sincere, reasonable, and rational agents, to act from that maxim when we regard ourselves as a member of the adjusted social world associated with it”; second, “we must be able to will this adjusted social world itself and affirm it should we belong to it”.⁵⁸ In other words, the CI-procedure suggests that we are rationally committed to apply and act from practical maxims that create an adjusted social world. Otherwise, we cannot act on that maxim, even if it is instrumentally rational’ in our particular circumstance. The two conditions embedded within the CI-procedure therefore “reflec[t] the priority of pure practical reason over empirical practical reason.”⁵⁹ When we test and subject existing instrumentally rational maxims under the CI-procedure, we eventually recognise how our practical reasons must solve certain moral dilemmas and effectively constructs an improved social and political reality.

Importantly, we can see how Rawls’ interpretation of the CI-procedure informs Korsgaard’s reading of the instrumental principle. Korsgaard clearly adopts three main concerns of the Rawlsian reading. First, the CI-procedure and the unity of practical reason imply a view of the *intrinsic value* of free, rational agency. Korsgaard’s regressive approach suggests that the principles of practical reason – including the instrumental principle – eventually direct us to the objective valuing of our anthropocentric rational agency in a legislative capacity, and this agency contains both content and value.⁶⁰

Second, the categorical imperative provides a deliberative procedure that is directly applicable to practical action and can solve our immediate moral dilemmas.⁶¹ Korsgaard calls both Kant and Rawls “constructivists”, which means that “[p]ractical philosophy, as conceived by Kant and Rawls, is not a matter of finding knowledge to apply in practice. It is rather the use of reason to solve practical problems.”⁶² The categorical imperative’s presumed applicability stems from how both Rawls and Korsgaard inject substantive material content into the categorical imperative. Specifically, their reading of rational agency is intended to provide an account of the categorical imperative that “does not just

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 169.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁰ Echoing this point, Andrews Reath says of the categorical imperative, “[s]ince Kant is concerned with both content and validity, he must first give a characterization of rational agency that yields this principle and, in addition, guides its application.” See Reath, “The Categorical Imperative and Kant’s Conception of Practical Rationality,” in *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory; Selected Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), p. 75.

⁶¹ I understand that Kant himself employs this language, particularly in the *Groundwork*. But constructivist meaning of “formula” seems to suggest that the CI- procedure will provide a concrete, conclusive answer to our immediate moral dilemmas. I don’t understand Kant to be saying “formula” in this sense.

⁶² Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism,” p. 115.

yield the basic principle, it will also figure in the *application* of the principle to concrete situations, and thus hold a substantive role in the moral conception that it grounds.”⁶³

Finally, the application of the categorical imperative ultimately helps construct a better social and political world. Korsgaard argues that the term “constructivism” implies that “our use of the concept when guided by the correct conception *constructs* an essentially human reality – the just society, the Kingdom of Ends – that solves the problem from which the concept springs.”⁶⁴ If we follow the CI-procedure correctly Rawls believes that we can formulate a conception of justice based on the moral status of each person, who each possess the “interests to realise and to exercise the two powers of moral personality”.⁶⁵ These two powers include the “capacity for a sense of right and justice (the capacity to honour fair terms of cooperation), and the capacity to decide upon, to revise and rationally to pursue a conception of the good”.⁶⁶ Thus, the two powers of moral personality encompass both meanings of *vernünftig* (the “rational” and “reasonable”). For Rawls, the latter has regulative priority over the former so what we do construct of the social or political must therefore have the voluntary acceptance and endorsement of our moral personality.⁶⁷

IV. *Problems with Rawlsian Readings of the CI-Procedure*

At first glance the Rawlsian reading of the CI-procedure has intuitive appeal: the categorical imperative articulates an applicable formula which provides justification for the existence, transformation, and creative construction of certain moral or social practices. Moreover, as with Korsgaard, Rawls’ approach suggests that whether we reason instrumentally or morally, we regress to an appreciation and valuing of the autonomous creative potential of our rational agency. The Hegelian critique of empty formalism is successfully deflated, since the CI-procedure incorporates both material content and form.

If my understanding of the Rawlsian interpretation of practical reason and categorical imperative is correct, it is nonetheless questionable whether this represents Kant’s own view. The Rawlsian interpretation is deeply problematic from both an exegetical and a

⁶³ Reath, “Categorical Imperative,” p. 88, n. 20.

⁶⁴ Korsgaard, “Realism and Constructivism,” p. 117.

⁶⁵ Rawls, “Social Unity and Primary Goods,” in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: UP, 1982) p. 165.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ “[T]he two highest-order interests are the two main forms of moral motivation for the purposes of developing the content of the first principles of justice. Thus citizens in the well-ordered society of justice as fairness have both the capacity and the regulative desire to cooperate on fair terms with others for reciprocal advantage over a complete life. This in turn implies the desire on the part of individuals and groups to advance their good in ways which can be explained and justified by reasons which all can and do accept as free and equal moral persons.” (*Ibid.*, p. 184).

moral point of view. I am interested in the Rawlsian departure from Kant, not simply because of textual issues – though I believe these are important. Rather, my concern is how the Rawlsian reading – like Korsgaard’s – effectively diminishes the full moral force of pure practical reason, causing his account of instrumental reason to emulate the freestanding character of the standard model. By contrast, I want to retain the sense of how, for Kant, *pure* practical reason – reason free of contingently given empirical content – has a separate, overarching moral force which situates, frames and constrains our instrumental use of reason.

Despite the regulative priority of “reasonableness” – of this sense of right and justice – over instrumental rationality, Rawls’ understanding of the CI-procedure nonetheless relies intimately on instrumental rationality and prudential maxims to provide the material content for public law-making. Rawlsian “reasonableness” is not equivalent to Kant’s categorical imperative or moral practical reason for two reasons. First, Rawls’ philological analysis of *vernünftig* is misleading because within the original German text Kant rarely uses that term except in the context of prudential reasoning about individual happiness. In the context of moral reasoning persons are almost never characterised as *vernünftig*, likely because of this term’s prudential connotations. Instead, Kant usually refers to *Vernunft* (reason) and *Gebrauch der Vernunft* (use of reason), or *vernunftgemäß* (capable of reasoning). Second, Rawls’ conception of “reasonableness” as the capacity to listen to the reasons of others so as to come to a mutually acceptable agreement, whereby personal agreement to the terms is conditional on another person’s agreement, would be a clear instance of heteronomous reasoning for Kant. The injection of material and conditional content into the categorical imperative is a major departure from Kant’s purely formal account which has problematic exegetical and normative implications, as we will see.

We can appreciate the full moral normativity of pure practical reason if the categorical imperative is understood through the lens of Kant’s dualisms. The categorical imperative can be thought of as expressing an important Augustinian dynamic, between pessimism about human natural abilities and inclinations, and the perfectionism and intellectualism of Greek, specifically Stoic, thought. It points to the moral ideal for humans; however, our natural abilities fall short of this ideal. A gap exists between the ideal we wish to attain and the ability to fulfil it.⁶⁸ The fact that the law of pure practical reason expresses itself in an imperatival form attests to this moral gap. According to Kant, divine or perfect wills do not reason instrumentally; only finitely rational beings such as humans do. The purpose of our instrumental reason is to fulfil a natural desire for happiness and indeed in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* Kant calls this the

⁶⁸ See John Hare, *The Moral Gap; Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God’s Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

development of the “human predisposition” [6:26].⁶⁹ Though Kant believes that humans will always have this psychological *eudaimonism*, the problem is when it takes priority over our moral duty.⁷⁰ This suggests not a unitary, cooperative picture of practical reason or the practical agent, but tension between the interests of empirical and moral reason. The following chapter will draw out this dualistic picture in more detail, as well as its full impact on Kant’s conception of hypothetical and moral willing. Suffice it to say here, the tension between our natural desire for happiness and the demands of the moral law suggest that our natural inclinations and wishes cannot be the basis by which the moral gap can be closed. Something more akin to moral faith and hope is needed in order to overcome our natural prioritisation of prudential and *eudaimonistic* interests.⁷¹

As John Hare points out, two temptations arise in relation to the moral gap: interpreters either inflate Kant’s conception of natural, rational capacities, or minimise the demand of the moral ideal. This lessens or eliminates altogether the gap between human capacities and the moral ideal; both tendencies appear in Korsgaard and Rawls and are symptomatic of the general tendency to dismiss Kant’s philosophical framework. For instance, Rawls explicitly rejects Kant’s dualisms to justify his procedural understanding of Kantian autonomy and the categorical imperative. He writes,

To abandon these dualisms as he understood them is, for many, to abandon what is distinctive in his theory. I believe otherwise. His moral conception has a characteristic structure that is more clearly discernible when these dualisms are not taken in the sense he gave them but recast and their moral force reformulated within the scope of an empirical theory.⁷²

In abandoning Kant’s dualisms, Rawls tries to minimise the gap between the moral law and our natural constitution. He claims that the relevant distinction is not between empirical and moral reason, but between the “strict” method of the categorical imperative and the CI-procedure. Similarly, Korsgaard tries to claim that all normative rational principles *describe* the condition and functioning of our practical agency – it “*just is*” the case that human agents will their maxims as universal law.

⁶⁹ *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft (Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, hereafter abbreviated to *R*), ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: UP, 1998). All page numbers refer to the Prussian volume and page numbers.

⁷⁰ I will have much more to say on this point in the next chapter.

⁷¹ This leads to certain intractable issues and debates into whether Kant’s rational religion is plausible. These I will not delve into, but it is worth keeping in mind that Kant attempts to reconfigure central Christian doctrines, such as radical evil, justification and sanctification, onto a rational grounding.

⁷² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition* (Oxford: UP, 1999) pp. 226-7.

Thus, the reading of Korsgaard and Rawls does two things. First, human natural capacities are inflated in their interpretation of Kantian practical reason; specifically, practical reason and rational agency lead to an anthropocentric account of morality. Kantian practical reason is read in light of a strong voluntarist conception of the will in order to justify this interpretation. According to this reading, we are responsible for the active creation of our own moral laws when we naturally exercise the human rational will; and somewhere in the causal story, our existing natural capacities contribute to the achievement of the moral ideal. Second, the conflation between the principles of instrumental and pure practical reason illustrates how Korsgaard and Rawls succumb to the temptation to lower the moral ideal. Both interpreters claim implicitly that moral, legislative laws are the expected outcome if we use our instrumental rationality in the correct way; in this respect we see Korsgaard's more generous understanding of analyticity also in Rawls. In other words, the priority of universal moral reasons will be revealed if we are instrumentally rational; these moral reasons will be responsive to the material content of our instrumental reasons. No gap or tension exists between the ends of our instrumental and moral willing, particularly since both branches of practical reason and their principles are unified in how our rational agency is naturally constituted.

The next two sections outline these two misguided interpretive tendencies. If we reject the reading of Korsgaard and Rawls, we can better capture how pure practical reason and its independent normative source can delimit our prudential choices and instrumental rationality.

V. *Positive Morality and Voluntarist Will: Bolstering our Natural Capacities*

We need to examine its underlying motivation if we are to fully grasp both the exegetical and normative problems with the Rawlsian reading. Underlying this appeal to human, self-given freedom is a desire to find a historical precedent and Kantian justification for a liberal conception of autonomy.⁷³ For both Rawls and Korsgaard, Kantian practical reason is highly appealing because it allegedly provides a creative account of morality that is also justified on non-metaphysical grounds. These two interpreters, like defenders of the standard model, believe the rejection of metaphysics is an appropriate response to the current scientific age and the fact of value pluralism. Korsgaard appeals explicitly to a voluntarist conception of the will to justify her interpretation. Though Rawls does not explicitly make the same move, the voluntarist will provides the implicit background to his account of the CI-procedure.

⁷³ See O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*.

On this reading, the Kantian will show how the application of its formulaic procedures creates justifiable, self-made laws. All rational procedures involve the recognition and valuing of human autonomy, expressed through our active capacity to create the moral requirements of practical reason. We see this in Rawls' description of the third and fourth steps of the CI-procedure. Rawls writes, "it is through the CI-procedure that we can view ourselves as *making* universal law for a realm of ends, and so as *making* law for ourselves as a member thereof."⁷⁴ For Rawls, the notion of "good willing" falls away and is instead replaced by an emphasis on public law-making. Ethics is therefore confused with political morality. In a slightly different vein, Korsgaard states that "[g]eneralized to the Kingdom of Ends, my own ends must be the possible objects of universal legislation, subject to the vote of all. And this is how I realize my autonomy."⁷⁵ For Korsgaard, the emphasis is not necessarily on political morality, as it is with Rawls. Rather, she believes that the will's constitutive autonomy means individuals necessarily will the morally-endorsable good; the will is therefore responsible for the positive creation of our moral and practical obligation to value those moral goods for others and ourselves. But for both, the human will is understood in a thorough-going voluntarist sense: "thorough-going", in this context, means that the will is not simply responsible for subsuming oneself *under* law out of obedience to the objective demands of pure practical reason, but in fact creates the actual demands of pure practical reason.

One may be tempted to argue that, within the text, the Kantian will contains irreconcilable intellectualist and voluntarist elements.⁷⁶ On one hand, the fact that pure practical reason *is* the free will expresses Kant's voluntarist strand; on the other hand his belief in the non-contingent, objective moral law testifies to Kant's intellectualism. Korsgaard and Rawls emphasise the voluntarist strand to gain the most philosophical mileage out of Kant, particularly to find historical support for a liberal conception of autonomy. But if Kant maintains a tight connection between objective morality and the will, or pure practical reason and objective morality, we cannot, without contradiction, attribute to him a strong voluntarist position. Ultimately, Kant seems to depart from the

⁷⁴ Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 206, emphases added. He states, "[O]ur making of law as we intelligently and conscientiously follow the principles of practical reason (as procedurally represented by the CI-procedure) constitutes, or constructs, the public moral law for a realm of ends." (p. 203)

⁷⁵ Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, p. 193.

⁷⁶ For more on the history of this tension between voluntarism and intellectualism, see Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics; A Historical and Critical Study; Volume I: From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: UP, 2007) pp. 653-725. In this context intellectualism' refers to practical reason as a "source of non-positive morality" (Irwin, p. 175), not reason's ability to provide some theoretical proof or ontological, moral truths. Also, see Schneewind, *Invention of Autonomy*, pp. 497-530. However, I disagree with Schneewind's conclusion that Kant's rejection of *theological* voluntarism means he eventually sides with an extreme form of human creative realism.

intellectualist / voluntarist dichotomy, where by he in fact straddles both traditions.⁷⁷ Discrete elements of his account of practical reason fit loosely with both strands: for instance, the more consistent reading of categorical willing appears to favour the intellectualist strand, whereas hypothetical willing seemingly adheres to the voluntarist strand.

Ultimately, Kant preserves a close link between the idea of the free will, his conception of *pure* practical reason and the possibility of morality; yet not *all* spontaneous willing expresses this link – not all choices reflect moral autonomy. How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory claims? Kant appears to be aware of this problem. He clarifies his position in later works by showing how the will as *Willkür* represents the capacity for spontaneity or negative freedom, and *Wille* is the capacity for positive, moral freedom. Kant writes, “[f]reedom of choice is this independence from being *determined* by sensible impulses; this is the negative concept of freedom. The positive concept of freedom is that of the ability of pure reason to be of itself practical. But this is not possible except by the subjection of the maxim of every action to the condition of its qualifying as universal law” [MS 6:213-4].⁷⁸ Instrumentally rational actions are conditionally free from the point of *Willkür*, but fail to express the legislative will, *Wille* [6:213]. Spontaneous choice in terms of *Willkür* could, and often does, diverge from the demands of moral practical reason, in favour of heteronomous or prudential considerations. The will here would be negatively free: it is undetermined by causal laws and is a source of spontaneous practical action, but it is not positively free. Positive freedom of the will – in terms of *Wille* – is a strictly moralised conception of freedom; it is will’s causality by the objective moral law. Positive freedom, Kant defines as the “pure will [...that is] based [on] unconditional practical laws, which are *moral*” [6:221]. Positive freedom occurs when *Willkür* coheres with *Wille*; this self-agreement of the will occurs when choice accords with the law of the moral and noumenal good.

In light of this distinction, the will as *Willkür* can indeed be very loosely understood in a more voluntaristic spirit, if only to highlight the contrast between instrumental and non-instrumental reasoning. But strictly speaking, instrumental reasoning does not adhere to traditional forms of voluntarism, particularly since *Willkür* in this case is determined by heteronomous considerations stemming from humanity’s sensible nature.⁷⁹ No *necessary*

⁷⁷ Mainly because, as interpreted within the framework of Hare’s moral gap, for Kant the human will is fallible and weak. It is unclear how this characterisation of the human will (as practically cognisant of the moral law, but consistently falling short of its moral aspirations) can fit neatly within the intellectualist / voluntarist dichotomy.

⁷⁸ *Der Metaphysik der Sitten (The Metaphysic of Morals)*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: UP, 1996), hereafter abbreviated to *MS*. Pagination refers to the volume and page number of the Prussian Academy

⁷⁹ I will have more to say about this in the following chapter.

link obtains between pure practical reason and the will at the level of *Willkür*. Kant writes, “[f]or us [...] choice [*Willkür*] is sensibly affected and so does not of itself conform to the pure will [*Wille*] but often opposes it” [6:221]. But even if Kant is marginally voluntarist at the level of *Willkür*, his definition departs from traditional, morally-neutral conceptions:

[Moral evil] is only possible as the determination of a free power of choice [*Willkür*] and this power for its part can be judged good or evil only on the basis of its maxims, must reside in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law. [...] We can further add that the will’s [*Willkür*] capacity or incapacity arising from this natural propensity to adopt or not to adopt the moral law in its maxims can be called *the good or the evil heart*. [R 6:29]

According to Kant, no necessary connection obtains between pure practical reason and spontaneous choice (*Willkür*). Rather our *Willkür* has two possible avenues to go: autonomous, pure practical reason or heteronomous, instrumental rationality; or even more starkly, either good or evil [see also R 6:44]. As Jean Nabert accurately describes,

In a doctrine like Kant’s, where reason and freedom are transposable, free choice (or the possibility of acting against reason and against the moral law) belongs to us insofar as we are sensible beings. There is *nothing positive* in this possibility in respect of the causality of reason. What is free in our free choice does not derive from our power to act against reason but, on the contrary, from the faculty of acting in conformity to the law. And what there is of free choice in our freedom merely testifies that the reason of a being subject to sensuous incentives may deviate from unconditioned reason [...] The idea of choice within reason is a mark of its *weakness*, for choice indicates that the mastery of reason is not absolute. One can only make sense of it in a being which, possessing both reason and sensibility, can introduce sensuous motives into the context of its maxims. According to Kant, such is the free choice of the human, with its ability to resist reason arbitrarily.⁸⁰

While the will in terms of *Willkür* can be very loosely described as voluntaristic, this does not also commit Kant to an account of self-created morality: the spontaneous choices of *Willkür* to decide whether it conforms to instrumental or moral reason does not automatically imply that we ourselves *create* the moral law. This is where the Rawlsian

⁸⁰ Jean Nabert, *L’expérience intérieure de la liberté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1924), qtd. in Bernard Carnois, *The Coherence of Kant’s Doctrine of Freedom*, trans. David Booth (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) p. 90.

reading goes astray. Because they fail to consider the *Willkür / Wille*, negative / positive freedom distinctions, Rawls and Korsgaard assume that the voluntarist will of *Willkür* also commits us to a voluntaristic conception of morality at the level of *Wille*. Moral obligations are allegedly the active expression and creative product of our will's freedom. As we saw in Section I, Korsgaard subsequently places significant weight on our positive endorsement of ends; particular empirical ends can be justified on moral grounds, by virtue of the rational will's free, voluntary endorsement.

By contrast, the *Wille / Willkür* distinction as I have explained it, illuminates the voluntarist and intellectualist dynamic we find in Kant: the space given to the voluntarist, spontaneous will, *Willkür*, means that evil and prudential maxims can still be imputed to individuals. It expresses conditional, negative freedom but not the positive freedom of the autonomous will [*Wille*]. Thus, we can still be held responsible for the way we exercise instrumental reason, particularly since the ideal of pure practical reason is unchanged and indeed, independent of human positive creation. The separate normativity of the categorical imperative reinforces how our empirical and instrumental choices often depart from the moral ideal. For Kant, our natural rational capacities cannot be so elevated as to create the demands of morality; the human will cannot be the source of untrammelled, autonomous creativity. According to the Collins notes to Kant's lectures on ethics (1784-5), "nobody, not even the deity, is an originator of moral laws, since they have not arisen from choice, but are practically necessary; if they were not so, it might be the case that lying was a virtue" [27:282-83].⁸¹ Moreover, "the question of morality has no relation at all to subjective grounds; it can only be framed on objective grounds alone. If we divide morality into objective and subjective, that is utterly absurd; for all morality is objective, and only the condition for applying it can be subjective" [27:264]. For Kant, the good will is willing in accordance with the universal, objective moral law. The *Wille / Willkür* distinction therefore acknowledges the existence of certain human rational powers, yet still maintains some distance between such natural capacities and the moral ideal.⁸²

⁸¹ Notes by Collins (1784-5) in Kant's *Lecture on Ethics*, eds. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: UP, 1997). All pagination from *Lectures on Ethics* refers to the volume and page number of the Prussian Academy.

⁸² As Richard Velkley and Ian Hunter point out, under the influence of Rousseau and German rationalist critique Pufendorfian and Thomasian natural law doctrines, Kant became increasingly apprehensive of the exercise of rational freedom absent of universal law. The latter, Kant believed, results in morality's collapse into subjectivism or relativism, whereby morality is the mere product of individual human creation. Velkley points out this connection between Rousseau and Kant admirably in *Freedom and the End of Reason; On the Moral Foundation of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: UP, 1989). See also Henrich, "Ethics of Autonomy," p. 98. For Kant's connection to Leibnizian rationalism and the latter's critique of civil natural law (represented by Grotius, Pufendorf, and Thomasius) see Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments; Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: UP, 2001)

VI. *Lowering the Moral Ideal: The Empiricisation of the Categorical Imperative*

According to the constructivist view, the moral ideal must be humanised or empiricised if we are to make Kantian pure practical reason philosophically relevant and applicable. In the previous sections, I showed how Rawls and Korsgaard attempt to extrapolate from Kant's theory a rational procedure which can serve as basis of either public law-making, or interpersonal reciprocal endorsement of one's prudential ends. To do this, both interpreters attempt to fortify the natural capacities of our rational agency. The autonomous rational will is understood as responsible for the positive creation of moral obligations and political institutions. This, however, is only part of how these interpreters try to close the moral gap: effectively, Kantian pure practical reason and the categorical imperative become *empiricised* in order to lower the demands of the moral ideal. This is achieved by injecting material content into the categorical imperative – content which builds upon existing preferences, intuitions, and beliefs. We see this particularly in the Rawlsian reading, where he argues that practical reason and the CI-procedure “takes for granted an already established background of commonsense beliefs and knowledge about the world. Thus, at step (1), in deciding whether a maxim is rational, and in assessing adjusted social worlds at step (4), agents are supposed to have considerable knowledge, which is public and mutually shared.”⁸³ On Rawls' interpretation, the CI-procedure incorporates and improves upon existing commonsense beliefs about the world. Consequently, the categorical imperative is no longer attached to questionable metaphysical frameworks, implicit in the conventional understanding of pure practical reason as the causality of the moral law. Understood in the latter sense, the categorical imperative is an expression of a moral ideal which originates from our partial membership in a supersensible, noumenal realm.⁸⁴

Rawls instead interprets Kantian practical reason in purely anthropocentric terms; he believes that *human* rational agency and the moral ideal are tightly connected. He states,

For Kant [...] God's reason is intuitive reason and quite different from our own. We comprehend only our human reason, with its various powers and concepts, principles and ideas, discerned by reflecting on our thought and capacity for judgment. *It is our practical human reason that must have supremacy on moral questions: we have no*

⁸³ Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 218.

⁸⁴ See Dieter Henrich, “The Moral Image of the World,” in *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World* (Stanford: UP, 1992).

access to a higher, more supreme, reason. What is radical is the place Kant gives to human reason and the constructivist role he sees it as having.⁸⁵

This anthropocentricity grounds both instrumental and pure practical reason. Of course, an anthropocentric turn occurs in Kant's famous Copernican revolution, where he denies the possibility that humans can truly come to know the "things in themselves", though it is part and parcel of the human predicament to fixate on speculative questions which we can never answer. It is this latter claim – that human aspirations extend beyond their sensible capacities into the metaphysical domain – which distinguishes Kant's anthropocentric turn from the naturalist temper within contemporary philosophy. In short, the anthropocentrism of the Copernican turn is confined to the domain of *theoretical reason* and does not imply a similar move towards the naturalist dismissal of reason's metaphysical aspirations, as mistakenly suggested by the Rawlsian version of human practical agency. For Kant, the demands of pure practical reason may take priority over instrumental reason; however on the Rawlsian account we arrive at the categorical imperative when we judge whether or not our prudential maxim is universalisable. As Bernard Williams correctly points out, it is not that Rawls is trying to derive justice from personal self-interest, but "that a self-interested choice in ignorance of one's identity is *supposed to model* in important respects non-self-interested or moral choice under ordinary conditions of knowledge."⁸⁶ Another way of saying the same thing is, we examine our prudential maxim – our subjective want – and judge whether this is something everyone would want if they were fully rational.

Instrumental willing therefore provides the basic material content for categorical willing. Rawls has in mind conditional social goods or "true human needs, certain requisite conditions, the fulfilment of which is necessary if human beings are to enjoy their lives".⁸⁷ But for Kant Rawls' list of these needs – food, drink, rest, education and culture⁸⁸ – would be strictly empirical, hence contingent, not moral goods; indeed, the introduction of such material content contradicts the very purpose of Kant's categorical imperative. Morality comes to depend on and require empirical content, whereas from Kant's perspective moral autonomy is freedom from such conditional content. For Kant, the introduction of material content into the categorical imperative compromises the universal and categorical nature of moral willing; the moral law would seem to take its cue from various elements of human contingency (wants, needs, intuitions, beliefs) rather than vice versa. In that case, morality

⁸⁵ Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 207, emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 78, emphasis added.

⁸⁷ Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 174. Rawls himself notes that his account of "true human needs" is "amending or adding" to Kant's conception (p. 174, n.4). But more fundamentally this rests on a misreading of the relevant passages of *MS* 6:393, 432 and 435).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

would be based on purely heteronomous considerations. From Kant's perspective, Rawls is conflating the categorical imperative with hypothetical imperatives by introducing these conditional goods and building upon the content of instrumental rationality in the CI-procedure.

Similarly, Korsgaard claims that the Kantian instrumental principle regresses analytically to the categorical imperative, by virtue of our unified rational agency. Korsgaard's account of rational moral normativity as constitutive of human practical agency illustrates too her adherence to an anthropocentric account of morality developed along naturalised, non-Kantian lines.⁸⁹ Both Rawls and Korsgaard are motivated to move away from a metaphysical reading of Kant's account of pure practical reason: if pure rationality is coextensive with human rational agency and incorporates conditional human goods and material content, justification of the categorical imperative becomes less problematic, particularly from a scientific, secular point of view; moreover, the "spectre of the unconditioned"⁹⁰ as a basis of morality – of which so many of Kant's historical heirs objected to – is successfully eradicated. Out of Kant we can extrapolate a non-metaphysical account of moral obligation that is ultimately grounded in existing capacities for both free, creative rational agency, and established, commonsense knowledge. It is "when we see [the moral law] exemplified in someone's life, we are made fully aware for the first time of the dignity of our nature as free, reasonable, and rational persons."⁹¹

The concern to minimise the moral gap leads both Korsgaard and Rawls to empiricise the demands of pure practical reason. Conversely, prudential instrumental reason has an inflated moral worth. This interpretation effectively conflates the normativity of instrumental and pure practical reason. In the case of Korsgaard, the unique *moral* aspect to the categorical imperative is lost by her proposal that its rational normativity exerts the same necessity as hypothetical imperatives on all agents. Yet Kant never intends the categorical imperative to be a formula which justifies, reinforces, or even improves upon our prudential maxims; it is not a procedure whereby our prudential or instrumental reasons gain a moral stamp of approval. Moreover, we neglect the complexity of our moral practical judgements if the exercise of pure practical reason is thought of as simply the application of a procedural formula. The Rawlsian interpretation supports, rather than rejects, the caricature of Kant as a hard, deontological taskmaster: in the bid to make Kant

⁸⁹ She states in *Sources of Normativity*, "When you deliberate it is as if there is something over and above all of your desires, something which is *you*, and which *chooses* which desire to act on. This means that the principle or law by which you determine your actions is one that you regard as being expressive of *yourself*. To identify with such a principle or way so choosing is to be, in St. Paul's famous phrase, a law to yourself" (p. 100).

⁹⁰ Karl Ameriks, "The Critique of Metaphysics: The Structure and Fate of Kant's Dialectic," in Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn; Philosophy as Critical Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006) pp. 154-60.

⁹¹ Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 202.

practically relevant to our contemporary dilemmas, Rawls' CI-procedure in fact makes Kant's moral system formulaic, rigid and austere. Practical reason – instrumental and moral – is a matter of mechanistically applying a rational procedure.

Initially it may not be clear how both Rawls and Korsgaard both fail to distance themselves sufficiently from the standard model, particularly since it appears that Rawls and Korsgaard end up occupying different ends of the metaphysical spectrum. Korsgaard's reading of Kant endorses some kind of hyperrealism which claims that individuals are moral when they are rational, whereby rationality is defined by the sort of agency that wills ends that others could will as well. By comparison, Rawls emerges with a much more contextualist position which claims that Kantian practical reason will incorporate the backdrop of commonsense beliefs about certain conditional ends or human needs which stem from the types of beings we are.

But despite these differences, both readings by Korsgaard and Rawls are revealed to share a number of the same presuppositions of the standard model, based on their common desire to accommodate the prevailing naturalistic temper in philosophy. I have in mind three shared features in particular: first is scepticism of the thick metaphysical or foundationalist commitments which are traditionally associated with philosophical frameworks positing the existence of normative objectivity. Second, this scepticism then invokes a response to rope off these commitments and ground normativity in an anthropocentric rational source imbued with the capacity to "construct" morality out of subjective material content – this does not mean that such subjective content forms the standard of morality, but that such material content informs the content of moral reasoning. Finally, if practical reason is still to have significance for us, it must be a *procedural* conception. This means that practical reason will be characterised by a certain method or procedure of thinking towards an unspecified end. For Rawls, these features manifest themselves in the politicised form of human "reasonableness" and legislating for a new social reality. For Korsgaard, despite her realist moral stance, these presuppositions are revealed in her dismissal of the analytic / synthetic distinction so that one can effectively regress from the conditional content of instrumental norm to the unconditional moral law. The moral law becomes equivalent to the valuing of human rational agency and our ability to create our own moral principles. Thus, regardless of their differences, both Korsgaard's and Rawls' readings of moral practical reason take on a subjectivist and conditional hue which reveals some important similarities with the standard model and distorts our understanding Kant's purpose in his moral philosophy.

Conclusion

As shown in this chapter, Korsgaard and Rawls make certain interpretive moves so that Kant is more digestible to empirically-minded philosophers, and directly applicable to contemporary political dilemmas. The Rawlsian reading illustrates well the problem confronting us in contemporary critiques about instrumental reason: even as they rightfully worry about the reductivism of the standard model they fail to sufficiently distance themselves from this account. As this chapter has explained, Korsgaard and Rawls end up mimicking the freestanding and proceduralist characteristics of the standard model. By empiricising the categorical imperative, the normativity of the moral law becomes too closely connected to heteronomous prudential or technical considerations. This leads to misleading conclusions about the necessity of hypothetical imperatives: the subjective necessity of these imperatives becomes indistinguishable from the objective necessity of the moral law. The Rawlsian account is in danger of injecting morality with the conditional content of instrumental reason and therefore does not differ in substantial respects from the sub-Humean account of means-end rationality. Ultimately, Rawlsian reasonableness is not going to resolve the central predicament surrounding the standard model.

Following his immediate German critics, Kantian practical reason is often considered the pinnacle of modern preoccupations with anthropocentric mastery and domination over the external environment.⁹² The Rawlsian interpretation arguably tends to perpetuate this inflection given to Kant's work⁹³: all willing, whether it is instrumental or moral, is supposedly expressive of anthropocentric rational autonomy and the capacity to outwardly project individual maxims. Norms and procedures of practical rationality become associated with the achievement of idealised prudential maxims; further, our moral norms are based on the creative anthropocentricity which defines the overall character of practical reason. In dismissing Kant's dualistic philosophical framework, Rawls and Korsgaard both understand Kantian practical rationality as providing an account of positive morality – moral obligations are the creation of the free, human will. If understood this way, Kant's conception of either instrumental or moral reasoning differs little from the subjectivist and self-supporting inflection appointed to the standard model. To understand their fundamental differences we need to set aside the Rawlsian reading. We lose the normative significance of pure practical reason – as a moral constraint on instrumental reason and our

⁹² Obvious examples include Hegel and Heidegger. For more contemporary instances of this critique, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 136-9; also Ronald Beiner in "Kant, the Sublime, and Nature," in Ronald Beiner and William James Booth, eds., *Kant and Political Philosophy; The Contemporary Legacy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993) pp. 276-88.

⁹³ See Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy* (Cambridge: UP, 2000).

unfettered prudential interests – if we adopt the Rawlsian’s simultaneous empiricisation of the moral law and inflation of humanity’s natural creative capacities.

As we will see in the following chapter, Kant identifies the need to separate instrumental from moral reasoning precisely on these grounds. Like Aristotle and Hume, the situated character of instrumental reason within a broader framework helps avoid the subjectivist and evaluative reductivist tendencies of the standard model. This overarching normative framework does not build upon conditional and subjective content but has an entirely separate objective and unconditional normative source. The aspirations of instrumental reason are firmly constrained in this framework.

The next chapter illustrates how and why Kant’s dualisms are crucial to understanding the fundamental differences between his conception of instrumental reason and the standard model.⁹⁴ In the next chapter I will discuss how normativity in itself is a necessity only for the rationally imperfect beings we are, thus giving an inflection to Kant’s philosophical framework different to that of the Rawlsian reading. Moreover, norms of pure practical reason are never created, but reflect human weakness and duality. Rather than the picture of an individuated “voluntarist” will impressed upon the natural world, Kant’s conception of instrumental reason can be seen to contain two central insights: first, that Kantian instrumental reason heightens our awareness of the moral law; second, that this sociability itself leads to the recognition of how we as individuals fall short of the principles of pure practical reason. The alternative reading I propose in the next chapter will show how, against Korsgaard, Kant conceives of instrumental reason as a non-moral conception of practical rationality; not every rational procedure has to be moral, or reflect individual moral autonomy. This brings to the fore two claims: first, like Aristotle and Hume, Kant’s philosophical framework helps him avoid collapsing into a version of the standard model. Second, the core reason why current reappropriation strategies have failed as a critique of the standard model is the reluctance to undertake a similar re-examination of the current philosophical framework.

⁹⁴ I will explore this in more detail in the next chapter.

7 The Dualism of Kantian Practical Reason

“[W]hen delight of eternity draws us upwards and the pleasure of temporal goods holds us down, the identical soul is not wholehearted in its desire for one or the other. It is torn apart in a painful condition, as long as it prefers the eternal because of its truth but does not discard the temporal because of familiarity.”

- St. Augustine, *Confessions* VIII. X (24)¹

In the previous chapter I challenged different constructivist interpretations of Kantian practical reason. I argued that Korsgaard and Rawls make a number of exegetical moves, including the rejection of Kant’s dualisms, which then result in the conflation of the normativity of instrumental and pure practical reasoning in Kant. Kant’s philosophical framework is viewed as an optional extra which can be bracketed in order to suit the current naturalistic temper. Korsgaard’s implicit concern to accommodate the naturalistic temper results in an albeit unintended realignment between Korsgaard’s reading of instrumental reason and the standard model, undermining her critical endeavour.

This chapter presents an alternative understanding of Kant’s conception of instrumental rationality and its relationship to pure practical reason through the lens of the dualisms which are constitutive of Kant’s philosophical framework. By reinstating Kant’s philosophical framework I show how the subjective exercise of instrumental reason is situated within, and effectively constrained by, the objective ends of pure practical reason. Kant’s account can be seen to differ in important respects from the unsituated subjective character of the standard model. Moreover, Korsgaard’s attempt to retrieve Kantian practical reason as a critique of the standard model is unsuccessful because she, like Rawls, fails to recognise how Kant’s dualistic framework helps him avoid the problems of the standard model. Thus, correcting where the Rawlsian interpretation goes astray has a deeper significance beyond exegetical issues. The Rawlsian’s treatment of Kant’s philosophical framework illustrates well the moral dilemma we are facing in current debates surrounding the standard model: on one hand the evaluative reductivism of the standard model is deeply criticised for its subjectivism and potentially indigestible consequences from a moral point of view; on the other, these implications are unavoidable given the widespread proceduralist bias and rejection of metaphysical commitments shared by both proponents and critics of the standard model. In dismissing the significance of Kant’s framework the current retrieval strategies represented by Rawls and Korsgaard can be seen to apply the same short-sighted approach towards their examination their own philosophical framework.

¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: UP, 1991).

I make two central interpretive claims in this chapter. First, I want to capture the dynamic of activity and receptivity inherent in Kant's conception of instrumental rationality. This will place central importance on human openness to our surrounding phenomenal environment. Second, I claim that Kant's instrumental rationality is situated within a deeply metaphysical framework. Specifically, instrumental reason contains a dialectical trajectory towards a metaphysical conception of the moral ideal and pure practical reason. These two claims are fleshed out in a number of interpretive points which depart from Korsgaard's reading. First, I show that the desiderative faculty – crucial to setting the end for instrumental reason – appeals to the conceptual apparatus involved in theoretical knowledge. In short its normative source is a combination of standards of practical efficacy as well as good *theoretical* cognition. Second, prudential or skilful normative standards of instrumental reason are independent from the categorical imperative.² I argue that Kant's account of desires presupposes certain rational capacities which are nonetheless not to be confused with rational norms of moral reasoning. If moral autonomy is moreover taken as constitutive of all human rational agency – as it is in Korsgaard's account – we have in effect no freedom to judge when moral obligation does or does not obtain. We subsequently fail to capture how theoretical normative sources of instrumental reason incorporate a stance of openness and receptivity to the natural world.

In addition, this chapter provides an alternative, more metaphysical reading of pure practical reason and the categorical imperative, supplementing my critique of the Rawlsian CI-procedure in the previous chapter. In associating “reasonableness” with the categorical imperative Rawls attempts to incorporate a conception of substantive human needs into his reading of Kantian practical reason. The conditional nature of these goods nonetheless fails to capture Kant's notion of pure practical reason's objective ends. As I illustrated in the previous chapter the Rawlsian reading at root takes on board the proceduralist bias of the standard model: this assumes that practical reason must be bound up with an objective procedure rather than the articulation of objective goods. The proceduralist bias responds to the metaphysical and evaluative neutrality expected of moral theory in light of value pluralism and the current scientific age. But like Aristotle and Hume, Kant can be seen to forward a more substantive conception of practical reason. This claim is potentially controversial so let me clarify: I am not suggesting that moral reasoning for Kant is constituted by actual material content and so it is not “substantive” in the Rawlsian sense. Ultimately, Rawls' proceduralist bias reveals itself in his notion of the categorical imperative as a procedure which is immediately applicable to action. By contrast, for Kant, the categorical imperative – the principle of pure practical reason – represents a form of

² Patrick Kain, “Prudential Reason in Kant's Anthropology,” in Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain, eds., *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (Cambridge: UP, 2003) p. 231.

practical judgement or reorientation of the will towards the highest good. In other words, Kant's conception of practical reason is "substantive" in the sense that it is not focused solely on the procedure of reasoning of obligatory, discrete acts, but the realisation and articulation of the idea of the objective good of pure practical reason in a properly, reorientated will. We see this specifically in Kant's notion of the *summum bonum* – the highest good. Thus, like Hume and Aristotle, Kantian pure practical reason articulates an idea of the objectively good which ensures that instrumental reason is situated within wider ethical considerations. This is particularly so if the *Groundwork* is read in conjunction with Kant's later works.³

Sections I and II show that the gap between theoretical and instrumental reason is not as great as conventionally supposed. I explain norms of empirical and theoretical cognition contribute to the normativity of instrumental reason, and make hypothetical imperatives distinct from the law-like form of pure practical reason. As I explain in Section III, the distinctive function of instrumental reason towards specific anthropocentric ends leads to a dialectical and conflicted dynamic with pure practical reason. Section IV then explains how the dualism of practical reason indicates the inadequacy of empirical, conditioned definitions of prudential happiness, and in its place points to the highest good of pure practical reason – a moral ideal which unites virtue with proportionate happiness.

I. Theoretical Sources of Instrumental Reason's Normativity

The reading proposed by Korsgaard and Rawls assumes Kant's practical philosophy can be examined independently of his account of theoretical reason. Ultimately, instrumental rationality is part of a united conception of practical reason, based on their common normative source in autonomous rational agency. But in this section, I want to indicate that the distinction between theoretical and instrumental rationality is in fact of greater systematic importance to a proper understanding of Kant's practical philosophy than either Korsgaard or Rawls suppose. Through his dualisms Kant legitimises reason in *both* its theoretical and practical use and in turn, he carves out a sphere of instrumental practical reason which is neither pure practical reason nor pure theoretical cognition, but somewhere in between. I want to show that, Kant's conception of reason in general can be thought of as a continuum that ranges from theoretical, to instrumental, to pure practical / moral rationality, where instrumental reason falls between theoretical and pure practical rationality. In particular, I wish to emphasise how the normativity of instrumental

³ Barbara Herman also interprets the categorical imperative as a kind of moral judgement. However, my account of practical judgement departs from Herman, insofar that I do not think that Kantian pure practical reason is as amenable to cultural diversity as she seems to suggest. See *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993).

rationality incorporates standards of theoretical cognition. This will highlight how moral reasoning must be independent from instrumental reason in order to be able to exercise critical authority over it.

For Kant instrumental reason is “practical” in the sense that through its intentionality some kind of change is produced in the phenomenal world. However, instrumental rationality is connected more closely to theoretical reason than pure practical reason in many respects and therefore cannot be conflated with the moral legislation of the latter. Embedded within instrumental desires or impulses are aspects of theoretical cognition which also form part of the normativity of instrumental rationality. First, desiderative ends already presuppose as well as integrate a conceptual grasp of the sensible object in question. Second, the means-end connection – where human possibility or powers are evaluated and judged – presupposes the active synthesis of disparate empirical experience and concepts into laws of nature.

Common among both intellectual components is the use and application of *theoretical* cognition in order to formulate situationally appropriate principles of practical action. Theoretical reason therefore becomes “practical” when it is animated by the desiderative faculty and outlines means and ends based on possible experience. Kant suggests instrumental reason should be understood as “theoretical reason which is only extrinsically and contingently practical.”⁴ By contrast, the moral law as an unconditional *practical* law is discoverable by “a reason that is intrinsically practical.”⁵ In a crucial passage from the second *Critique*, Kant writes, “Whether the causality of the will is adequate for the reality of the objects or not *is left to the theoretical principles of reason to estimate*, this being an investigation into the possibility of objects of volition, *the intuition of which is accordingly no component of the practical problem*” [5:45, emphases added].⁶ This suggests that instrumental reason is theoretical knowledge animated by impulse or desire. Theoretical knowledge is applied to the desiderative context, resulting in the generation and execution of guiding practical rules.

Overall, Kantian instrumental reason integrates different elements from both ancient and modern philosophical traditions. For Aristotle the irrational parts of the soul are ensconced within a broader rational order; passional elements thus possess a propensity towards the rational. Desiderative and emotional parts of the soul are “receptive to reason” [EN 1102b15] and can “participate in reason, in the sense that it is submissive and obedient to it” [1102b31-33]. In fact, reason and habituated inclination work together in harmony to actualise natural human function. By contrast, the modern viewpoint typically detaches

⁴ Beck, *Commentary*, p. 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶ *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (Critique of Practical Reason)*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: UP, 1997), hereafter abbreviated to *KpV*, Prussian Academy pagination.

inclination from reason: reason becomes subservient to the dictates of passion or natural self-preservation. According to this latter picture, human inclinations are unreceptive to rational cognition or instruction. Or in the case of Hume, these rational capacities become naturalised: practical reason – its principles and judgements – are rooted in sympathetic or social propensities instinctive to humans.

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

Yet, by the same token, the cognitive component to instrumental reason is not subservient to its conative counterpart, as is typical of modern conceptions of practical reason.⁷ The Aristotelian distinction between animal and human passions can help explain Kant’s point. For Aristotle, the souls of both animals and humans contain an appetitive component which responds to sensory experience: this is a passive state of receptivity to the external, sensory world. But unlike animals, human passions incorporate active quasi-judgements or states of mind which direct us towards specific objects in particular circumstances. Thus, on one hand, human passions are intrinsically receptive: external sensory experience is required in order to provoke some kind of passional response.⁸ Yet, on the other hand, intentional action for Aristotle results from a close interaction of receptive passional and active intellectual features. Human purposive action therefore results from the modification and active direction of the passions, by the apprehensive capacities of the intellect.⁹ The active input of the intellect is the crucial differentiating feature between human passions and animal appetite, and corresponds to Aristotle’s functional placement of human essence above animals on a hierarchical scale of beings in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7.

Like Aristotle’s functional hierarchy, Kant’s dualistic vision of human nature imposes limits on human beings from below (that of nature and animals) and above (that of

⁷ This differing dynamic eventually leads to a dialectical relationship between the two forms of practical reason in Kant’s teleology (moral and non-moral, instrumental), as I will explain further in a later section.

⁸ See Susan James, *Passion and Action; The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) pp. 41-2.

⁹ For Aquinas’ adoption of these features of Aristotle, see *ibid.*, p. 60.

a purely rational, omnipotent being).¹⁰ His dualism draws a distinction between the desires involved in the instrumentally purposive action of humans, and the instinctual desiring of animals:

That which can be determined by *inclination* (sensible impulse, *stimulus*) would be animal choice (*arbitrium brutum*). Human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will. [MS 6:214]

Animals cannot unify their appetitive needs through active thought so as to achieve a degree of deliberative distance from inclination. For humans, receptivity to sensible phenomena simultaneously provokes the cognitive capacity for imagination. We necessarily draw upon this capacity of theoretical reason when we desire, will, or choose a particular end out of the conceptual unity encompassed within the thinking individual. This cognitive activity introduces a crucial element of human, rational control over inclination absent in animals.¹¹

Kant therefore restores in two distinct but related ways non-mechanical cognitive activity to means-end rationality. First, Kant has a cognitivist definition of desire: instrumental desires – the notion of good and evil – are always derived from theoretical concepts or judgements which evoke possible pleasure or pain. He states in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, “[g]ood and evil [are] always appraised by reason and hence through concepts, which can be universally communicated, not through mere feeling, which is restricted to individual subjects and their receptivity” [5:58]. Determination of the hedonistically good involves the distinctively *human* rational, theoretical tools which supplement sensibly given experience [5:61]. Kant’s cognitivism is further evident in his reference to the *concept*. In the first *Critique* a “concept” refers to the active process of

¹⁰ I want to emphasize that these delimitations are not concrete but fluid, as Kant’s teleology claims that humanity is constantly progressing towards the ideal of perfect morality. Thus limitations stemming from human dualism change as humanity grow in rationality and morality.

¹¹ For example, Kant writes a footnote in the *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 1st ed. 1798; 2nd ed. 1800), trans. Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: UP, 2006): “The irrational animal <perhaps> has something similar to what we call representations (because it has effects that are <very> similar to the representations in the human being), but which may perhaps be entirely different – but no cognition of things; for this requires *understanding*, a faculty of representation with consciousness of action whereby the representations relate to a given object and this relation may be thought” (7:141, n. 24). There also exist many similarities with Aquinas’ view on instrumental action featuring elements of cognitive activity and human control as indicators of rational capacities beyond instinctual animality; see for instance, *De Veritate* 22:4, 22.13, 24.2, also *Summa Theologiae* II-I 48, A. 6 *ad* 2, A. 15 *ad* 2. See also David Gallagher, “Thomas Aquinas on the Will as Rational Appetite,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29:4 (1991): 559-84.

thought representation, whereby our sensations must conform to the categories of the understanding. Kant incorporates this notion of “concept” into his account of the desiderative faculty: “The faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, insofar as the ground determining it to action lies within itself and not in its object, is called a faculty to *do or to refrain from doing as one pleases*” [MS 6:214]. He writes elsewhere, “If the concept of the good is not to be derived from an antecedent practical law but, instead, is to serve as its basis, it can be only the concept of something whose existence promises pleasure and determines the causality of the subject, that is, the faculty of desire, to produce it” [KpV 5:58]. Which representations of objects are subjectively pleasurable cannot be determined *a priori*.¹² Only after phenomenal experiences are accumulated can specific representations be seen as subjectively, hedonistically good. Thus, for Kant, the desiderative faculty is bound up with a necessary conceptual apparatus; reason is always present in inclinations, as the latter cannot even be formed without the prior employment of cognitive tools.¹³

This leads to the second point. Instrumental reason assesses physical possibilities or constraints in the practical context. Aggregated empirical experience is utilised to consider how the analytic means-end relationship can be realised or hindered [see *G* 444 (93-5)]. Indeed, the very notion of experience presupposes this process: human understanding spontaneously apprehends, associates, recognises, and reproduces sensibly-given appearances in accordance with a law-like form [KpV A 124-5, A643/B471 – A 644/B672].¹⁴ Means-end rationality cannot function without theoretical reason’s determination and compilation of disparate experiential facts into practically usable empirical laws, which may accordingly hinder human desiderative possibilities. Kant affirms this close connection between instrumental reason and the understanding of theoretical cognition in the second *Critique*:

Subsumption of an action possible to me in the sensible world under a *pure practical law* does not concern the possibility of the *action* as an event in the sensible world;

¹² Importantly, although the representations themselves are not subjectively constituted, the relation between pleasure and pain sensations and their representations are. The subjective relation is a crucial point that will be elaborated below to reject the collapse between the subjective and objective reasons in Korsgaard’s interpretation.

¹³ Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason*, p. 186, n. 10. Imagination entails discussion of how the spontaneity of thinking of concepts *a priori* and the receptivity involved in the mere reproduction of representations is unified in the “I” of apperception, but it goes beyond the scope of what I want to claim here. For more on the transcendental unity of imagination and the “I” of apperception, see *KpV* A 121-5.

¹⁴ That the understanding is a presupposition in the relevant empirical laws in means-end reasoning is further confirmed in the following: “[t]o make systematic the unity of all possible empirical actions of the understanding is a business of reason, just as the understanding connects the manifold of appearances through concepts and brings it under empirical laws” (*KpV* A665/B693).

for it belongs to the theoretical use of reason to appraise that possibility in accordance with the law of causality, a pure concept of the understanding for which reason has schema in sensible intuition. [KpV 5:68, third emphasis added]

In other words, instrumental reason falls partly under the normative domain of the theoretical use of reason since causal laws – generated by the understanding – help determine the physical possibilities of realising a desired object. Consequently, the agent judges the physical constraints relevant to means-end reasoning in accordance with the norms of theoretical reasoning, thus ensuring that the means to a desired object – and the object itself – reflect careful consideration of intervening limits, based on one’s understanding of the natural world. Inclination can therefore have an intermediate, not immediate, influence on human action; it always involves theoretical reason’s pre- and post-reflection on possible empirical constraints or miscellaneous causal connections. The imagination can redirect or deter an agent’s desire away from a chosen object accordingly, in response to these possible phenomenal restrictions. Indeed, if one fails to respond in a situationally appropriate way, the agent either has not acquired the relevant practical experience, or has insufficient awareness of their surroundings.

The discussion so far hints at where I believe Korsgaard’s account, outlined in the previous chapter, goes astray. The dichotomy implicit in Korsgaard – either instrumental and pure practical reason must share the same normative source, or instrumental reason fails to qualify as practical reason at all – ignores Kant’s subtle inclusion of theoretically rational elements in the desiderative faculty.

II. *Empirical, not Moral Laws*

The first implication of the above reading that Kantian instrumental reason involves a mixture of theoretically and practically rational components. Kant confirms this in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*:

For even if the will follows no other principles than those by means of which the understanding has insight into the possibility of the object in accordance with them, as mere laws of nature, then the proposition which contains the possibility of the object through the causality of the faculty of choice may still be called a practical proposition, yet it is not at all distinct in principle from the theoretical propositions concerning the nature of things, but must rather derive its own content from the latter in order to exhibit the representation an object in reality. *Practical propositions, therefore, the content of which concerns merely the possibility of a represented*

*object (through voluntary action), are only applications of a complete theoretical cognition and cannot constitute a special part of a science. [20:197-8, emphasis added]*¹⁵.

Importantly, the will in means-end rationality is marked by a certain dependency: in these situations, the will seeks ends that do not originate in pure practical reason. Accumulated empirical experiences and theoretical knowledge help inform and direct the faculty of desire towards subjective ends. Ultimately, the fundamental distinction between the subjection of the will (that of instrumental reason) or the subjection of nature (that of moral reasoning) lies in whether or not the representations of desired objects of nature, derived by theoretical means, intrude on practical choice.¹⁶

This suggests that the normativity of instrumental reason is partly constituted by the correct application of empirical laws, not the moral law of autonomous willing. Although the means-end relationship will vary depending on the contingently willed end, the relevant empirical law is nonetheless formally contained within such willing. As we saw in the previous chapter, Korsgaard's understands the instrumental principle to require making law for oneself.¹⁷ Yet this directly contradicts what Kant says in the second *Critique*:

All practical principles that presuppose an *object* (matter) of the faculty of desire as the determining ground of the will are, without exception, empirical and *furnish no practical laws*. By "the matter of the faculty of desire" I understand an object whose reality is desired. Now, when desire for this object precedes the practical rule and is the condition of its becoming a principle, then I say (*first*) that this principle is in that case always empirical. [*KpV* 5:21, second emphasis added]

For Kant, principles of instrumental reason are subjective and contingent; they depend on its desiderative and empirical components, resulting in a normative source which is neither pure theoretical or pure practical reason. Instrumental reasons are necessary only after an object has been represented, and its principles can never stand independently of that representation. Whereas the principle of pure practical reason must be obeyed even in light of opposing inclinations, hypothetical imperatives derive their necessity only from the conditional and particular volitional circumstances, and can easily change should inclinations point elsewhere. Kant writes, "for an action necessary merely in order to achieve an arbitrary purpose can be considered as in itself contingent, and we can always

¹⁵ *Kritik der Urteilskraft (Critique of the Power of Judgment)*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: UP, 2000), Prussian Academy pagination.

¹⁶ Hence why Kant would define moral reasoning as "*pure practical reason*".

¹⁷ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 246.

escape from the precept if we abandon the purpose; whereas an unconditioned command does not leave it open to the will to do the opposite at its discretion and therefore alone carries with it that necessity which we demand from a law” [G 420 (59)]. Principles of instrumental reason reflect the conditionality and transience of human desiderative needs, illustrated particularly in cases where the required means to one’s chosen end proves to be either unpalatable or infeasible to the human agent.¹⁸ In the instrumental use of reason, we rely and participate in the natural world, in line with our partially sensible constitution. Practical reason can only issue principles, rules, or recommendations – never laws – in the instrumental case because phenomenal considerations – and thus, theoretical cognitive features – must be given due weight. This combination of dependency and conditionality is captured in principles of instrumental reason conceived as *hypothetical* imperatives: empirical considerations infiltrate the principles of instrumental reason, as these principles come into being only after a represented object determines the will.

If I am right about the conditional normative source in the instrumental use of reason, what follows from this is a conception of practical necessitation that is manifestly weaker than, and indeed, dissimilar to the categorical, law-like demands of moral reason. As dependent on the phenomenal world, the “oughtness” of hypothetical imperatives represents the *subjective necessity* of the will unlike the objective necessity of the categorical imperative. Instrumental choice must apply and consider the causality of those empirical laws generated by the understanding; by implication, hypothetical imperatives are principles that can only *recommend*, not categorically demand, the appropriate practical action to the will [414 (47)]. The different principles of practical reason – and the terminology Kant uses to describe them – express their dissimilar practical necessitation. For Kant, instrumental reason has ends of technical skill and happiness. The practical principles that guide us towards these ends, he classifies as “*rules of skill or counsels of prudence*” [416 (44)]; both are “*principles of the will*” [420 (59)] as opposed to the unconditioned and objective “*commands (laws) of morality*” [416 (44)].¹⁹

¹⁸ Here there is a clear difference between Kant and Korsgaard, as the latter claims in “Normativity,” p. 250: “If I am to will an end, to be and to remain committed to it even in the face of desires that would distract and weaknesses that would dissuade me, it looks as if I must have something to *say to myself* about why I am doing that [...] It looks as if the end is one that has to be *good*, in some sense that goes beyond the locally desirable.” I am very doubtful that Kant would expect the same level of ‘commitment’ in instrumental reason, particularly if the desire for the end disappears or gets redirected elsewhere.

¹⁹ Also *KpV* 5:20: “The first would be hypothetical imperatives and would contain mere precepts of skill; the second, on the contrary, would be categorical and would alone be practical laws. Thus maxims are indeed *principles* but not *imperatives*. But imperatives themselves, when they are conditional – that is, when they do not determine the will simply as will but only with respect to a desired effect, that is, when they are hypothetical imperatives – are indeed practical *precepts* but not *laws*.” Kant also refers to hypothetical imperatives as pragmatic imperatives, and in his lectures on ethics dated roughly around the same period of the *Groundwork* (1784) he states, “[t]he moral imperative is opposed to the pragmatic, and commands in a different way. Pragmatic and moral

The causal position of the heteronomous will clarifies the deep differences between instrumental and pure practical reason. In a lengthy passage from the *Groundwork*, Kant explains how represented, desired objects combine with empirical laws of nature to determine the heteronomous will:

[Wherever] the object determines the will – whether by means of inclination, as in the principle of personal happiness, or by means of reason directed to objects of our possible volitions generally, as in the principle of perfection – the will never determines itself *immediately* by the thought of an action, but only by the impulsion which the anticipated effect of the action exercises on the will: ‘*I ought to do something because I will something else.*’ And the basis for this must be yet a further law in me as a subject, whereby I necessarily will this ‘something else’ – which law, in turn requires an imperative to impose limits on this maxim. The impulsion supposed to be exercised on the will of the subject, in accordance with his natural constitution, by the idea of a result to be attained by his own powers belongs to the nature of the subject – whether to his sensibility (his inclinations and taste) or to his understanding and reason, whose operation on an object is accompanied by satisfaction in virtue of the special equipment of their nature – *and consequently, speaking strictly, it is nature which would make the law.* This law, as a law of nature, not only must be known and proved by experience and therefore is in itself contingent and consequently unfitted to serve as an apodeictic rule of action such as a moral rule must be, but it is *always merely heteronomy of the will*: the will does not give itself the law, but an alien impulsion does so through the medium of the subject’s own nature as tuned for its reception. [444 (93-5) third emphasis added]

Kant claims that the normative principle of instrumental reason can be partly sourced in the theoretical laws of nature and more emphatically, *does not entail the moral law*. In this case the “will is subject” to the laws of nature, as opposed to “a nature which is subject to a will” for “in the former the objects must be the causes of the representations that determine the will” [*KpV* 5:44]. When Kant argues that the instrumental use of reason presupposes a conception of oneself as an acting cause, he is not arguing that all practical agency stems from the pure autonomous and moral will (*Wille*). Rather the instrumental, non-moral will (*Willkür*) functions as the *efficient* cause to practical action. By “efficient cause” Kant means that we actively insert the will (*Willkür*) within the causal, means-end connection

imperatives are very often confounded with one another, which happens not only among the ancients, but also even nowadays among the moderns, though the two things are poles apart. Pragmatic imperatives are merely counsels; moral imperatives either *motiva*, rules of virtue, or *leges*, juridical laws.” (C. C. Mongrovius notes, 29:619)

once we have ascertained the will's adequacy to effect change in the phenomenal world and as informed by a combination of empirical knowledge and desiderative conditions.

Yet the will conceived as "efficient cause" does not obliterate human agency in any way. As argued so far, the human understanding actively collates particular ideas/concepts into a law-like form. Once applied to the practical context, our subsequent reflection on causal possibilities towards our desired end together reveal "a further law in me as a subject". Attention to the theoretical norm of instrumental reason brings out how, in the means-end case, Kant is concerned primarily with *empirical*, not moral, constraints. In other words, in relation to morally indifferent actions, reason alerts us that we must apply another law which regulates part of our dual nature – namely, as sensibly driven, imperfectly rational beings, who are open to, and function within, a natural, mechanistic environment [5:6n]. Both laws of nature and the moral law are practically relevant, since both correspond and apply to different aspects of humanity's dual constitution. By implication, in the very recognition of which law is salient and applicable to the particular circumstance, individuals already demonstrate a deliberative, spontaneous component which, on one hand, progresses beyond the instinctual, unreflective activity of animals, and on the other, is ultimately bound and limited by the inescapable experience of human rational contingency.

Thus, theoretically rational components in instrumental choice or desire means that instrumental reasons are generated without appeal to the categorical imperative.²⁰ Ultimately, the normativity of instrumental reason relies upon the active conceptualisation and practical application of causal empirical laws in order to first, link a desired end (represented object) with the necessary means, and second, ascertain whether or not this theoretical connection is practically realisable. More importantly, if moral autonomy is taken as constitutive of all human rational agency, we fail to capture how theoretical normative sources of instrumental reason express practical agency's openness and receptivity to the natural world, as well as how this stance of openness can influence human purposive action.

The application of normative principles in the instrumental use of reason can be better understood in light of what has been said so far. Active choice (*Willkür*) of an end does indeed involve applying law to oneself, but crucially, this refers, not to the moral law, but to theoretically informed principles or laws the function of which is practical by virtue of their attachment to ends set by the faculty of desire. From the vantage point of humanity's partially sensible nature, the law of causality and nature is perfectly valid; from the viewpoint of our intelligible, noumenal counterpart, these empirical laws are merely

²⁰ Korsgaard, "Normativity," p. 244.

impure practical rules or recommendations owing to its inherent reliance on phenomenal nature to fulfil our subjective desire.

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

The human being is a being with needs insofar as he belongs to the sensible world, and to this extent his reason certainly has a commission from the side of his sensibility which it cannot refuse, to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to happiness in this life and, where possible, in a future life as well. But he is nevertheless not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to all that reason says on its own and to use reason merely as a tool for the satisfaction of his needs as a sensible being. For, that he has reason does not at all raise him in worth above mere animality if reason is to serve him only for the sake of what instinct accomplishes for animals; reason would in that case be only a particular mode nature had used to equip the human being with the same end to which it has destined animals, without destining him to a higher end. No doubt once this arrangement of nature has been made for him he needs reason in order to take into consideration at all times his well-being and woe. [5:61-2]

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

Thus, we can see how Kant answers the question regarding the motivational grip of hypothetical imperatives without appealing to a conception of autonomous rational agency.²¹ Instrumental reasons therefore have a motivational "grip" on the desiderative components generated from our combined human constitution – features from our finite, sensible as well as practically rational nature. Kant subsequently implies that, in cases where those practical principles fail to rationally compel the human agent, their appeal to our sensible/desiderative side would ultimately compensate.²² We can see that the opposite also holds: reason can contribute to our natural, sensible interest in human well-being and happiness, and can help determine its constituents for particular agents.

²¹ That said, my view of Kantian instrumental reason appears to accommodate particular compatibilist conceptions of practical freedom.

²² An evident example is simply when the means-ends connection fails to be practically enacted because the desire for the object changes or altogether dissipates.

III. *The Dialectic of Practical Reason*

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

Among all rational beings, only humans formulate hypothetical imperatives: they are exclusively human requirements which correspond to distinctively human ends, such as skill and happiness.²³ Such subjective ends of instrumental reason are rooted in the natural world, vary arbitrarily between individuals, and therefore cannot be the basis for a conception of universal morality.²⁴ Kant assumes a close connection between phenomenal experience, hedonistic inclination, and the end of happiness to justify his argument. He writes:

Only experience can teach what brings us joy. Only the natural drives for food, sex, rest, and movement, and (as our natural predispositions develop) for honor, for enlarging our cognition, and so forth, can tell each of us, and each only in his particular way, in what he will *find* those jobs; and, in the same way, only experience can teach him the means by which to *seek* them. All apparently *a priori* reasoning about this comes down to nothing but experience raised by induction to generality, a generality [...] will so tenuous that everyone must be allowed countless exceptions in order to adapt his choice of a way of life to his particular inclinations and his susceptibility to satisfaction and still, in the end, to become prudent only from his own or others' misfortunes. [MS 6:215-6]

On one hand, we can never shed our empirical selves: given our dualistic constitution, part of us will always be rooted within the phenomenal world and interested in our prudential happiness. We need to be receptive to sensibly-given intuitions in order to know what particular inclinations successfully promote our pragmatic interests in happiness; we

²³ Aristotle similarly determines the sphere of *phronēsis*, or prudence / practical reason, as the feature which humans exclusively have. But Kant's adherence to modernity's decisive break with Aristotelianism/scholasticism is present insofar that the traditional moral connotations embedded within this distinctive human feature (for Aristotle, humans – unlike the gods – are capable of moral virtue via prudential reason) are dismissed as lacking purity from passion elements.

²⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, Rawls' definition of "true human needs" would fall under this category.

accumulate subjective prudential experience through the exploration of what desires promote pleasure and satisfaction. Skilful or prudential ends, and our motivation towards them, are not moral in Kant's restricted definition of the term; indeed they are subjective and contingent. But despite their non-moral status, these ends are nonetheless necessary to the kind of desiring beings we are.

Instrumental reason – including its constituents, application, and purpose – must therefore be an exclusively anthropocentric exercise of reason, particularly since a perfectly rational being is incapable of willing contrary to the moral law. For Kant, the word “subjective” has two connotations: the more straightforward reading suggests a variety of individualised ends, but on a deeper level, the term stands for the predisposition of humanity in general, complete with the limited rational capacities which set us apart from divine, non-desiderative beings. Consider what Kant says in his lectures on philosophical theology, dated 1783-4:

Holiness is the absolute or unlimited moral perfection of the will. A holy being must not be affected with the least inclination contrary to morality. It must be *impossible* for it to will something which is contrary to moral laws. So understood, no being but God is holy. For every creature always has some needs, and if it wills to satisfy them, it also has inclinations which do not always agree with morality. [...] For every creature has needs which limit its inclination to make others happy; or at least these needs limit its ability to make such use of these inclinations that it may have not regard at all for its own welfare. But God is independent benevolence. *He is not limited by any subjective ground, because he himself has no needs.*²⁵

Desiderative elements and pragmatic interests within instrumental reason already suggest that a perfectly rational, non-appetitive being, such as God, would never need to use reason in an instrumental way. The anthropocentricity of the term, “subjective”, can be further illuminated if we consider how theoretical cognition contributes to means-end deliberation. The rational capacity to aggregate disparate empirical experiences into the form of law in itself, though thought of as universal, are “subjective” insofar as this form of cognition is necessary only to the human understanding. Kant states in a footnote that an individual “might apply the most rational reflection to these objects [of choice] – about what concerns their greatest sum as well as the means for attaining the goal determined through them – *without thereby even suspecting the possibility of such a thing as the absolutely imperative moral law which announces to be itself an incentive, and, indeed, the highest incentive* [R

²⁵ *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. by Allen W. Wood and Gertrude M. Clark (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) p. 114, final emphasis added.

6:26 note, emphasis added]. The correspondence between instrumental reason and the predisposition of humanity provides the keystone as to why the two forms of practical reasoning have an antagonistic, rather than cooperative, relationship. Inclinations towards “self love which is physical” exemplify the predisposition of humanity: both this predisposition and the instrumental use of reason have an acquisitive, self-interested inflection, and together, both promote a picture of human divisiveness, comparison, and multiplicity of ends [6:27]. For something to be “objective” in Kant’s sense, it has to apply universally, to all rational beings (*G* 421 [51]); *a priori*, universal principles are laws which are valid for all rational beings without exception. Happiness is classified as a “subjective” end because Kant rejects a conception of morality and objectivity that is defined strictly in anthropocentric terms, within the empirical confines of our indelible rational contingency.

The flip side of this, however, is that the prudential interests we pursue through the instrumental use of reason often divert us away from the true end of morality. Indeed, we often put our happiness before our moral duty; we prioritise the instrumental use of reason over our moral reason. Kant criticises Greek *eudaimonistic* theories because he believes that these philosophers confuse prudential self-regard and our instrumental, empirical desires with the objective end of morality.²⁶ Self-love and individual inclinations are made the basis of morality – or in Kant’s words, “subjective determining grounds of choice [become] the objective determining ground of the will” [*KpV* 5:74]. But for Kant, our pursuit of happiness through hypothetical willing is at odds with our moral duty, leading to a dialectical relationship between instrumental and pure practical reason:

Man feels in himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty presented to him by reason as so worthy of esteem – the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, whose total satisfaction he grasps under the name of ‘happiness’. But reason, without promising anything to inclination, enjoins its commands relentlessly, and therefore, so to speak, with disregard and neglect of these turbulent and seemingly equitable claims (which refuse to be suppressed by any command). From this there arises a *natural dialectic* – that is, a disposition to quibble with these strict laws of duty, to throw doubt on their validity or at least on their purity and strictness, and to make them, where possible, more adapted to our wishes and inclinations; that

²⁶ This applies especially to his critique of Epicureans. But his account of Stoic happiness is criticised on slightly different grounds. See *KpV*. I am not going to engage with the issue of whether or not Kant was indeed justified in his criticisms of Greek *eudaimonistic* theories. For a critical examination of this issue, see T. H. Irwin, “Kant’s Criticisms of Eudaemonism,” in Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting, eds., *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics; Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (Cambridge: UP, 1998). Irwin makes insightful comments about how Kant’s criticisms of *eudaimonia* cannot apply to theories whereby prudential imperatives are thought of as categorical imperatives, because the latter are grounded on external reasons (p. 81).

is, to pervert their very foundations and destroy their whole dignity – a result which in the end even ordinary human reason is unable to approve. [G 405 (23)]

Another way to understand this is to say that how our pursuit of empirical conditions for happiness makes us feel with greater intensity the moral gap: our instrumental reason directs us towards certain natural ends, but in doing so, we are aware that our conditional pursuit of happiness falls short of the moral demand [KpV 5:119]. All of this appears to point to an irresolvable antinomy within practical reason: humans inevitably seek happiness through hypothetical willing, yet this pursuit is wrought with ills and is inappropriate to our predisposition of moral personality. I will have more to say on this point in the next section.

One could object to my interpretation so far that embracing Kant's dualisms – and indeed, the moral gap – results in a rather ominous gulf between hypothetical imperatives and the categorical imperative. On this view, to read practical reason through the lens of Kant's dualisms weakens the overall coherence of his moral philosophy. No material content appears capable of bridging this interminable gulf between our intelligible and sensible natures and their divergent practical manifestations. One strategy would be to go along the constructivist path, outlined by Rawls and Korsgaard: practical reason is unified if the normative source of both instrumental and moral reason is founded on human capacities for creative self-legislation. Based on its common normative source, instrumental and pure practical reason interacts in an unproblematic and cooperative manner towards individual happiness and the societal or political good. In turn, Kant's overall theory appears to gain in cohesiveness.

This appearance of a gain in overall cohesiveness, however, is purchased at a large philosophical cost – namely at the expense of a moral framework which can restrict or critique instrumental reason. Indeed, I believe that, far from lacking cohesion, the dualism between instrumental and pure practical reason is central to the full understanding of how morality is meant to constrain and reorientate humans away from an empirical understanding of happiness. An answer to this interpretive dilemma can be uncovered if the metaphysical framework underlying Kant's conception of pure practical reason is properly considered. The prudential aspirations in the human exercise of instrumental reason point towards contradictions in its unrestricted pursuit. This necessitates certain postulates of practical reason to mitigate the deficiencies within our empirical and conditioned definitions of happiness, and to direct us towards an alternative, *unconditional* definition of happiness, whereby happiness is proportionate to virtue. As I will explain below, this involves our exercise of pure practical reason to realise the requirements of moral faith and hope in light of certain rational postulates, and to develop our moral

practical judgement accordingly. This will allow us to generate an alternative understanding of the categorical imperative.

IV. *Pure Practical Reason and the Highest Good*

This section provides an alternative account of the Kantian categorical imperative and pure practical reason which respects Kant's intended metaphysical grounding to morality. Our instrumentally rational capacities can never help us fulfil the moral ideal; rather, these capacities frequently hamper our moral progress, where this side of our nature needs to be mitigated or subdued in order to fulfil *imperfectly* the requirements of pure practical reason.²⁷ In recognising our limitations, Kant neither exaggerates human capacities, nor diminishes the perfection of the moral ideal. As Kant sees it, the moral gap is partly bridgeable if we adopt an alternative definition of happiness, away from its prudential grounding, and is bound up with a kind of moral rational faith. This contests the notion that Kantian practical reason is closed off from a metaphysical framework, and can be then used to accommodate the humanist and naturalist presuppositions shared by both proponents and critics of the standard model of instrumental reason.²⁸

To better understand this, two aspects neglected or misconstrued by the constructivist account outlined in the previous chapter need to be embraced. First, Kant does not have a procedural understanding of moral practical reason; rather, pure practical reason functions more as a form of ethical judgement which actively constrains our instrumental use of reason, while reorientating the will towards the highest good. Second, Kant's alternative definition of happiness, through a conception of the highest good, tries to address the problem of the moral gap, but without either the constructivist strategy of lowering the ideal or bolstering human capacities.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Kantian constructivists understand the categorical imperative in procedural terms: it is a rational formula or procedure that we apply to existing prudential maxims. By contrast, I want to recapture here how pure practical reason in accordance with the moral law – or the categorical imperative as it is known by humans – involves the cultivation of complex practical judgements and a reorientation of the will. In the Second *Critique*, Kant defines practical judgement as the capacity to assess “whether

²⁷ This is where I agree with Henrich's assessment that Kant rejects moral sense philosophies of happiness, surrounding ambiguities of moral motivation (Henrich, “The Moral Image of the World,” p. 22). Ultimately, I believe that this leads Kant to adopt the view that prudential and moral motivation is conflicted and cannot unified.

²⁸ Andrews Reath in “Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988): 539-619, argues for a secular, political understanding of the highest good. This is deeply contestable on exegetical grounds, not least because this fails to capture the demandingness of the moral ideal in Kant.

an action possible for us in sensibility is or is not a case that stands under the rule [...] by which what is said in the rule universally (*in abstracto*) is applied to an action *in concreto*” [KpV 5:67]. Kant further restates the Formula of Universal Law from the *Groundwork* as a rule of judgement²⁹:

The rule of judgement under laws of pure practical reason is this: ask yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by a law of the nature of which you were yourself a part, you could indeed regard it as possible through your will [...] If the maxim of the action is not so constituted that it can stand the test as to the form of a law of nature in general, then it is morally impossible. This is how even the most common understanding judges; for the law of nature always lies at the basis of its most ordinary judgements even those of experience. [5:69-70]

At first glance, these passages appear to support Rawls’ procedural reading: practical judgement applies the form of universality to existing maxims, beliefs or outlooks at hand; universal laws are applied to, and even build upon, the empirical world as we know it. Material content for the categorical imperative is provided by our subjective maxims. Part of the problem stems from the fact that the *Groundwork* seems to endorse this procedural reading. But if we supplement this reading with later works, such as the second *Critique*, the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, there is good textual evidence indicating that as the principle of pure practical reason, the categorical imperative is not a formula or mechanical procedure we apply to existing, prudential maxims.³⁰

Rather, moral practical reason is a form of practical judgement which expresses the cultivation of virtue, of respect and love of the moral law, and ultimately, the incorporation of such love into our “life-orientation”. “For Kant, the proper objects of moral evaluation are not so much actions, or even the principles that prescribe actions,” John Hare writes, “but rather the fundamental choices that shape a life either around respect for the moral law or around the agent’s own happiness.”³¹ In other words, practical judgement develops a newfound moral attitude, rather than reacting to an already existing action or viewpoint.³² Understood as such, pure practical reason’s application of the categorical imperative can be

²⁹ The Formula of Universal Law is as follows: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” [G 421 (52)].

³⁰ This is particularly so if we interpret the categorical imperative in the Teleological reading endorsed by H. J. Paton, as opposed to the Practical Contradiction test endorsed by Korsgaard. See Paton, *The Categorical Imperative; A Study in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1947) pp. 146-52.

³¹ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, p. 80.

³² See Onora O’Neill, “Practical Principles and Practical Judgment,” *The Hastings Center Report* 31:4 (2001): 19.

sensitive to the intricacies and particularities of different situational contexts.³³ It is akin to Aristotelian description of practical reason as the “universal particular”: the form of universality is responsive to the inevitable particularities and contingencies of practical agency. This does not mean that the principle itself incorporates particularised material content.³⁴ But how one chooses, judges, and acts in that particularity reflects whether or not the authority of the moral law determines and shapes one’s life. For Aristotle, one’s choice in a situational particular reflects the moral disposition and character of an agent, insofar as they can be sensitive to the uniqueness of the context, but situate that within the broader horizon of one’s life, reflective of one’s rational essence. Similarly, for Kant choices of moral worth reflect consideration of salient circumstances, but they more importantly reflect the correct orientation and aspirations of the will; it expresses an “ethical frame of mind” [R 6:46n]. There is much more latitude for practical discretion between the moral law and our unavoidably contextually and empirically situated selves, when we understand our application of the categorical imperative as such.

Moreover, understood as practical judgement, the categorical imperative brings together human virtue and the law of the noumenal realm, the moral law; it is the crucial bridge between human reason and objective morality. “There is no doubt that this exercise and the consciousness of a cultivation of our reason in judging merely about the practical,” writes Kant, “arising from this exercise must gradually produce a certain interest in reason’s law itself and hence in morally good actions” [5:160-1]. We can better see what Kant means if we examine how moral virtue is acquired. For Kant, virtue and practical judgement are reciprocal terms. A morally virtuous agent cultivates and imposes constraints upon her instrumental reason, for “[v]irtue is the product of pure practical reason insofar as it gains ascendancy over such inclinations with consciousness of its supremacy (based on freedom)” [MS 6:477]. Though we cannot be holy, humans “can be virtuous. For virtue consists in *self-overcoming*”.³⁵ The need to mitigate against self-inflicted, destructive aspects within our subjective pursuit of happiness through instrumental reason instigates the further *internal* discipline of human reason towards a moral orientation; humanity must undergo an internal change of heart, possible only with the use of pure practical reason. This dynamic tension between the two forms of reasoning, between humanity as simultaneously natural and morally autonomous being, energises and propels an individual’s eventual commitment towards this development of practical judgement. The cultivation of moral virtue, of our practical judgement, therefore involves both a negative *as well as* positive dimension: it incorporates *critique* of our prudential use

³³ See Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*; see also Patrick Kain, “Self-Legislation in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (2004): 294.

³⁴ Kain, “Self-Legislation,” p. 294.

³⁵ *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, p. 114.

of instrumental rationality, and replaces in its stead a positive notion of pure practical rationality and its principles [R 6:50]. “Considered in its complete perfection, virtue is therefore represented not as if a human being *possesses virtue* but rather as if *virtue possesses him*” [MS 6:406].³⁶ It is not the case that our natural rational capacities are *improved* upon, where we acquire the virtues one by one; rather, we are virtuous in the Kantian sense when our rational capacities are reorientated so that the moral law becomes practically effective and comes to dominate our use of reason. The categorical imperative as practical judgement represents the rationalist analogue to the Augustinian notion of the ‘turning of the soul’ towards the moral ideal, away from the natural pull of our self-love and prudential self-interest. This means that the moral law becomes more practically effective on agents, for “the moral law determines the will objectively and immediately in the judgement of reason” [KpV 5:78].

The fact we can never know whether or not our maxims are moral further supports this interpretation. If the categorical imperative is a procedure by means of which we churn out individual maxims to ensure their moral permissibility, it would imply that we can know with certainty whether we are acting from the moral law. Our moral or non-moral state becomes introspectible by virtue of the correct application of a rational procedure and through the laws we ourselves create. But Kant believes that at the level of individual agency the morality of our maxims is “inscrutable” to us [R 6:21n]. Indeed, “[t]he real morality of actions (their merit and guilt), even that of our own conduct, therefore remains entirely hidden from us [...] How much of it is to be ascribed to mere nature and innocent defects of temperament or to its happy constitution (*merito fortunae*) this no one can discover, and hence no one can judge it with complete justice” [KpV A551/B579 note]. We can never assess conclusively the purity of our maxims, nor chart our individual moral progress. Contra the Rawlsian reading, the ultimate moral ideal emerges “precisely because *we are not its authors* but the idea has rather established itself in the human being without comprehending how human nature could have even been receptive to it” [R 6:61, emphasis added]. Our individual moral progress is therefore opaque to us as individuals – our pragmatic pursuit of happiness through instrumental reason can never be the basis of morality, yet the human possibility of a good will seems tinged with uncertainty and stonewalled by our rational contingency.

³⁶ “[A] human being’s moral education must begin, not with an improvement of mores, but with the transformation of his attitude of mind and the establishment of his attitude of mind and the establishment of a character, although it is customary to proceed otherwise and to fight vices individually, while leaving their universal root undisturbed. But now, even the most limited human being is capable of all the greater a respect for a dutiful action the more he removes from it, in thought, other incentives which might have influence upon its maxim through self-love [...] And so the predisposition [to the good] gradually becomes an attitude of mind, so that *dutymerely* for itself begins to acquire in the apprentice’s heart a noticeable importance.” [R 6:48]

This opacity to even our own morality can lead to discouragement and despair which is why Kantian pure practical reason requires a reorientation of the will, of thinking and judgement. A moral reorientation of the will occurs when an agent's deepest choices reflect aspirations of, and are animated by, an objective and impartial goal. This requires a belief, a moral faith, in something else which overrides and yet, is also consistent with the human aspiration for happiness.³⁷ Moreover, as we saw, our instrumental use of reason points to a conditional, natural end – namely our desire for happiness – but its empirical foundations will always be contingent, subject to variation and vulnerable to luck. It diverts our attention away from humanity's true end, namely the moral law.

This uncooperative tension is resolved in the notion of the highest good. Our interest does not go away, but is included in the highest good; subjective grounds, however, are strictly limited and are not the motivational impetus to our moral action. Rather, morality comes to ground our own individual happiness, and as such, resolves the inner conflict of our practical reason. At first glance, my claim here may appear rather close to Korsgaard's reading, who similarly views morality as the condition of our happiness. But my interpretive position differs insofar as I accept, rather than reject, the postulates of practical reason as a necessary condition of this possibility. Acceptance of Kant's metaphysical and objectivist commitments in his philosophical framework reveals the reasons why Korsgaard, unlike Kant, ends up resembling the freestanding and subjectivist character of the standard model.

As the final and necessary command of the moral law, the highest good is "happiness proportioned to that morality" [*KpV* 5:124], where there is the systematic combination of virtue and happiness. By command of the moral law, individuals are obligated to intend and promote the highest good so defined. We cannot, however, know the purity of our own maxims, let alone that of others, and the just apportioning of happiness to virtue through *human* devices would be nigh impossible. How does one then fulfil the command of the moral law in our pure practical reason?

For Kant, the systematicity and coherence of the highest good relies, first, on the recognition of inherent limits to human rational powers – and more controversially – requires the rational postulate of the existence of a perfectly rational, omniscient and divine being. First, the failure of the deduction of the moral law in *Groundwork* III is attributable to the gap which exists between imperfectly rational beings, such as humans, and the law of pure practical reason.³⁸ Even if it were somehow possible to derive the categorical imperative by analytic means, the link between the moral law and the will of finite beings,

³⁷ See Hare, *The Moral Gap*, p. 78.

³⁸ See Patrick Kain, "Interpreting Kant's Theory of Divine Commands," *Kantian Review* 9 (2005): 135.

such as humans, would be synthetic, by virtue of our rational imperfection.³⁹ As Carnois accurately states, “our will is good enough to allow us to conceive its connection with the moral law, but not good enough to allow us to conceive that connection as analytic. The synthesis is the mark of our finitude, and the subjective imperfection of our will.”⁴⁰ For perfectly rational beings the deduction of the moral law in the *Groundwork* would be successful. But for contingent beings such as ourselves a gap exists between us and the highest good of pure practical reason. We are obliged to will only that which is possible, but given the limits to our moral introspection and our epistemic reach, the highest good would remain unattainable. Yet, “the command that we *ought* to become better human beings still resounds unabated in our souls,” writes Kant,⁴¹ consequently we must also be capable of it, even if what we can do is itself insufficient, and by virtue of it, we only make ourselves receptive to a higher assistance inscrutable to us [R 6:45].

Thus, in order to bridge the moral gap, the human exercise of pure practical reason points to a theological postulate. The postulation of God’s existence is necessary to confer rational systematicity on our obligatory intention to will the highest good, since only with this postulate, in combination with the postulate of immortality, does the objective end of the moral law become possible.⁴¹ Moreover, it is only through this postulate that the end of pure practical reason is both complete and necessary⁴²:

The moral law commands me to make the highest possible good in a world the final object of all my conduct. But I cannot hope to produce this except by the harmony of my will with that of a holy and beneficent author of the world; and although in the concept of the highest good, as that of a whole in which the greatest happiness is represented as connected in the most exact proportion with the greatest degree of moral perfection (possible in creatures), *my own happiness* is included, this is nevertheless not the determining ground of the will that is directed to promote the highest good: it is instead the moral law (which, on the contrary, limits by strict conditions my unbounded craving for happiness). For this reason, again, morals is not properly the doctrine of how we are to *make* ourselves happy but of how we are to become worthy of happiness. Only if religion is added to it does there also enter

³⁹ Carnois, *Kant’s Doctrine of Freedom*, pp. 51-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴¹ See Kain, “Divine Commands,” p. 132.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 133. Also, “Thus without a God and without a world invisible to us now but hoped for, the glorious ideas of morality are indeed objects of approval and admiration, but not springs of purpose and action. For they do not fulfil in its completeness that end which is natural to every rational being and which is determined *a priori*, and rendered necessary, by that same pure reason.” [KrV A813/B841]

the hope of some day participating in happiness to the degree that we have been intent upon not being unworthy of it. [*KpV* 5:129-30]

An assertoric yet practically grounded belief in the existence of God helps close the gap between reason's divergent aspirations. This belief would not be speculative knowledge about the noumenal domain or theoretical comprehensibility of God.⁴³ But our cultivation of practical judgement requires the orientation of the belief or faith, "act as if we know"⁴⁴, its purpose would not be for our epistemological advancement – indeed, we are required to avoid such beliefs from becoming spurious speculative aspirations – but rather, for our moral progression in practical life.⁴⁵ It is a rational, reflective faith in an omniscient and just divine being who can exercise a judicial and executive function, and can therefore justly determine equitable rewards and punishments. This is not to say that the anticipation of rewards and punishments is the underlying motivation towards the highest good. In that case the rational postulation of God's existence would be as heteronomous as are theological voluntarist conceptions of moral obligation, according to which arbitrary divine commands are binding for us simply because they issue from God's will. Morality then would be a means to the end of happiness, or towards divine reward or punishment. Instead, Kant holds that there is something in the striving of reason itself which, for its own coherence and demand for systematicity, requires the rational belief in certain metaphysical postulates, such as the existence of God (and the immortality of the soul).⁴⁶

The highest good, moreover, is not a *self-created* end – it is not something individuals make for themselves, despite how vigorously current proponents of liberal autonomy, such as Rawls and Korsgaard endorse this view. Individuals' hope is in the *participation* of happiness as a providential whole, and it is this whole which situates, ultimately overcomes, individual egoism and particularised interests.⁴⁷ Kant subsumes the prudential end of humanity under that of morality, much in the same way as classical teleological philosophy integrates anthropomorphic ends within a larger cosmological and meaningful whole. The highest good of pure practical reason is a heuristic idea that orientates the way we think, judge, and act within the present and future. The empirical evidence as it stands – of the rampancy of our instrumental use of reason, as well as the contingency and temporality of life – would cause individuals to falter over any prospect of

⁴³ Kain shows why it has to be an assertoric belief that "God exists", not simply an agnostic stance that "it is possible that God exists" in "Divine Commands," p. 136.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See Kant, "What Does it Mean to Orientate Oneself in Thinking" in H. S. Reiss, ed., *Political Writings* (Cambridge: UP, 1991).

⁴⁶ See *R* 6:52.

⁴⁷ Reinhard Brandt, "The Guiding Idea of Kant's Anthropology and the Vocation of the Human Being," in Kain and Jacobs, *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, p. 100.

progress; it would be cause for moral pessimism and despondency. In that case, the rational postulates of pure practical reason become all the more vital, as they impart much-needed hope. We cannot know what this systematic unity of happiness and virtue will look like, for it reflects something different than the causal and phenomenal nature as we understand it. Our only hope is this moral ideal, of “an order beyond our knowledge – toward another dimension of our lives” where we must trust that our exercise of pure practical reason, when divorced from our instrumental use of reason promotes the highest good.⁴⁸ Thus, the moral gap for Kant is bridged by these postulates, and the acquisition of moral faith and hope.

The most pressing question that emerges from my reading is: why reinstate the metaphysical postulates; why understand Kantian pure practical reason in light of the highest good? For instance, Andrews Reath tries to extrapolate a “secular” interpretation of the highest good, which can be “described entirely in naturalist terms, as a state of affairs to be achieved in *this* world, through *human* activity.”⁴⁹ To reach this interpretive conclusion, Reath minimises the connection between virtuous character and happiness, whereby “satisfaction of permissible ends would be a component of the Highest Good”.⁵⁰ In its place, Reath proposes that the highest good can be achieved through the ordering of social institutions. The proper functioning and maintenance of these institutions promote the happiness of its members. Clearly, Reath’s reading is influenced by the Rawlsian application of Kant’s theory to the public, political domain. These secular interpretations of the highest good are problematic for the same reasons the constructivist readings were rejected in the previous chapter. Just as do proponents of the standard model, so Reath and Korgaard’s Rawls-inspired readings of Kant assume, often without much supportive argument, that theories with deep metaphysical commitments ought to be rejected for their non-humanistic focus. Or if humans fall short of the moral ideal, if human limitations are reinforced, we “remove the need to address the problem of non-ideal circumstances”, such as injustices in the world.⁵¹ Whilst this political / social understanding of the highest good may seem to have the advantage of its immediate applicability to contemporary dilemmas, it is hard not to feel troubled by the implicit hubris of such a radically secular humanistic outlook. Reath’s interpretation of the highest good of our moral reason does not depart in a significant respect from the numerous assumptions informing the standard model.

⁴⁸ Henrich, “The Moral Image of the World,” p. 21. Henrich maintains that Kant eventually abandons this notion of ‘worthiness of happiness’ through the moral law (p. 24), but I think this is not entirely right, given the three postulates of reason in the second *Critique*, and how the postulates of a divine being and immortality bring together virtue and happiness.

⁴⁹ Andrews Reath, “Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant,” p. 601.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 619.

This conception of procedural practical reason that emphasises anthropocentric control and humanistic creation seems vitally unfaithful to the Kant's moral project. By contrast, an overriding spirit of humility pervades Kant's notion of the highest good – and indeed his dualistic conception of instrumental and pure practical reason: first, Kant is cognisant of the way in which the moral ideal, sought through the cultivation of virtue and practical judgement, must constrain and impose order onto our naturally self-regarding use of empirical practical reason. Second and more importantly, he accepts that the ultimate grounds of our idea of a given moral order are necessarily unknowable by us; we cannot attain to it be sheer effort of the human will, but can only judge our moral efforts in accordance with the idea itself. To say the same point differently, we must have hope and faith in a divine being in order to think the moral ideal is even within our possible grasp, but this in no way compromises the grandiosity of the moral ideal. For both instrumental and moral reasoning, everything is not anything fully within our creative grasp and control. When we examine the theoretical sources of normativity in the instrumental use of reason, we see it involves a dynamic of receptivity to our surrounding environment, and activity to change it. With pure practical reason, we see it involves receptivity to the highest good and the requirements of moral faith. Even if we find Kant's solution to the moral gap deeply unattractive from a secular point of view, we can nonetheless retain a kernel of its insight: namely how the recognition of limits to human creative powers can inspire a stance of humility and openness towards what is scientifically unknowable or external things which lay outside anthropomorphic control, but nonetheless function as objects of practical faith or orientations of moral thought, valuing, and action.

This suggests that underlying Kant's entire theory of practical reason is a dynamic of humility and certainty, of openness and activity. Human rationality is imperfect and incomplete: ultimately, both our moral experiences and participation in phenomenal nature point to our unavoidable human contingency.⁵² Coupled with our humility, with our acknowledgement of human limitations, is a sense of receptivity and belief in a benevolent moral order.⁵³ In some ways, Kantian practical reason becomes *less* rigouristic than the constructivist / Reath route, simply because the recognition that humans fall short, that aspects to our moral life often fall out of our control, means it is much easier to adopt a stance of charity towards the moral failings of others. Ultimately, even without a theological postulate, our exercise of pure practical reason – and the necessity of the highest good – still integrates a notion of moral faith which would restrict the scientific and

⁵² See Richard L. Velkley, "Moral Finality and the Unity of *Homo sapiens*: On Teleology in Kant," in Richard F. Hasting, ed., *Final Causality in Nature and Human Affairs* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997) pp. 110-1. This is not to say that Kant doesn't believe in rational progress and improvement; I will elaborate more on this point in section three.

⁵³ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, p. 92.

humanistic aspirations shared by both contemporary proponents and critics of the standard model of instrumental reason.

Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that once understood through the lens of Kant's dualisms, the normativity of instrumental reason is separate from the normativity of pure practical reason. This was to achieve two things: first, to distance Kant's conception of instrumental reason from contemporary Rawlsian readings; second, to reveal how Kant's philosophical framework helps him evade the subjectivist and freestanding implications of the standard model. The latter point brings to the fore the reasons why current reappropriation strategies are unsuccessful as a critique against the standard model. On one hand the rejection of metaphysical commitments is deemed an apposite reflection of the plural and secular social reality, yet on the other hand critics end up resembling the standard model as a result of their "picking and choosing" strategy. Indeed, closer examination of Kant's conception of instrumental reason shows how his model cannot be compared to the standard model precisely because of how it is situated within a robustly objectivist philosophical framework.

But even removed from Kant's dualistic framework his non-moralised conception of instrumental reason departs from the standard model in subtle but important ways. First and foremost is Kant's cognitivist account of desire: the requirements of theoretical cognition are themselves a constitutive feature of the faculty of desire in its relation to the world of appearances, i.e. the sensibly given world and its possible objects of desire. Second is the character or inflection given to instrumental reason: the freestanding character of the current standard model infuses our conception of instrumental rationality with a spirit of anthropocentric subjective power capable of imposing the individual's desires and preferences on the natural environment. But for Kant, instrumental rationality – and its proper use – essentially involves the interplay between receptive and active elements. As implied by his cognitivist conception of desire, to even be in a position to instrumentally reason requires first, an openness to or interaction with the natural and empirical world, and second, the mind's activity to process, understand, apply, and indeed, restrict these passive responses. Based on these cognitive elements within the faculty of desire, the use of instrumental reason is intrinsically dependent on the empirical world for its content and remains a firm reminder of human contingent limits. Thus, we may exercise our instrumental reason in a spirit of prudential self-interest or in light of subjective concerns, but even then our participation and dependence on nature is unavoidable – we cannot completely subdue our sensible nature and its drive towards the necessary human

ends of technical skill and happiness. Thus understood Kantian instrumental reason cannot be the expression of untrammelled anthropocentric power but rather conveys our individual frailty, needfulness, and incompleteness.

But this chapter has more crucially shown how Kant's moral framework situates and exercises critical authority over and above the exercise of instrumental reason. This very feature is lost in contemporary reappropriations of Kant. In following the standard model's rejection of metaphysical claims the Rawlsian reading collapses back into a version of the standard model, essentially mimicking the latter's freestanding and conditional character. But whereas the spirit of human creation or conditional ends characterise instrumental rationality for the standard model, this spirit is transferred to moral reasoning by contemporary reappropriations of Kant. This nonetheless fails to articulate how Kant envisages the overarching normative framework of practical reason. These ideals may, to a degree, describe the way and spirit humans aspire (but nonetheless fail) to utilise instrumental reason, but not moral reason. And unlike the standard model this spirit we is firmly situated and constrained by the dualisms constitutive of his philosophical framework. For Kant, pure practical reason is never an expression of humanistic creative control, but rather gestures towards the moral law's necessary constraint on pure anthropocentric, self-projecting action. Normative constraints on our instrumental rationality will *limit* this spirit, replacing it instead with a spirit of humility, a receptivity to what lies outside anthropocentric control and knowledge, and rational hope in light of the moral gap humans inevitably face.

8 Conclusion

[T]he aim of morality cannot be simply action. Without some more positive conception of the soul as a substantial and continually developing mechanism of attachments, the purification and reorientation of which must be the task of morals, 'freedom' is readily corrupted into self-assertion and 'right action' into some sort of *ad hoc* utilitarianism. If a scientifically minded empiricism is not to swallow up the study of ethics completely, philosophers must try to invent a terminology which shows how our natural psychology can be altered by conceptions which lie beyond its range.

- Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*¹

Through an investigation of historical models of instrumental reason this thesis has articulated a central dilemma surrounding current debates about the desire / belief model, with a particular focus on contemporary critics of the sub-Humean model. The pervasiveness of the standard model has understandably come under attack in the spheres of moral, political, and even economic theory, with its critics united in rejecting its ethical and explanatory reductivism as well as its worrying subjectivist implications. Yet at the same time, these critics often endorse the standard model's view that an eschewal of objectivist philosophical frameworks is an apposite reaction to our value pluralist and scientific age: traditional foundationalist views proposing a single moral vision have become fractured; the legitimacy of philosophical frameworks espousing an objective description of moral truth are routinely called into question. What is currently promoted is a radically anthropocentric outlook in our philosophical framework which automatically precludes theistic or non-anthropocentric views. The latter are deemed remnants of a simplistic past we are now free of as a result of our enlightened historical trajectory towards the disintegration of traditional hierarchical societal structures and the triumph of the natural sciences.

Given the contemporary context, critics of the standard model seek to articulate an alternative conception of instrumental rationality which simultaneously retains the latter's avoidance of contentious foundationalist claims regarding normative objectivity. In their appeal to historical models of practical reason the original philosophical frameworks are discarded due to their presumed implausibility in light of our current scientific intuitions. Yet this is to reinforce, not to challenge, the presumed correctness of the standard model's rejection of objectivist metaphysical foundations. Aristotle, Hume and Kant are applied as solutions to address worries surrounding the standard model; relevant aspects of their

¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 69.

theories deemed most desirable or attractive are anachronistically “lifted out” and recruited for contemporary normative projects. These partial reappropriations result, first, in distorted readings of Aristotle, Hume and Kant; second and more crucially, their general methodological continuity with the standard model means that critics are ultimately unsuccessful in their challenge of the latter. To support these claims, it was necessary to examine how, unlike contemporary retrieval strategies, each of these thinker’s respective philosophical frameworks help *distance* their conceptions of instrumental reason from the sub-Humean model, evading the latter’s subjectivist and freestanding character.

More specifically, in Chapters 2 and 3 I argued that Aristotle’s account of means-end deliberation is not comparable to the standard model for three reasons: first, instrumental reason is situated within Aristotle’s objective philosophical framework which articulates human function and the moral goods capable of actualising it. This diverges from the contemporary rejection of metaphysical commitments that is characteristic of the predominant naturalistic temper which unites both critics and proponents of the standard model. Second, Aristotle may appear to have a conception of instrumental rationality akin to the sub-Humean model in his notion of cleverness, but the fact that this kind of deliberation is not the paradigmatic conception – meaning that by itself it is a deficient account of means-end reasoning – reveals a further important difference. I argued in Chapter 2 that *admirable* practical deliberation – different from cleverness – demands the moral articulation and evaluation of the particular goods constituting our naturally prior end of *eudaimonia*. Thus, even if Aristotle’s discussion of means-end deliberation includes something similar to the standard model, it is contextualised by, and subordinate to, a more substantive and complex conception of practical reasoning which demands the more specific articulation and assessment of ends constitutive of human flourishing.

Third, in Chapter 3 I examined important differences between the theoretical and practical syllogisms in terms of their function and structure. This was to illustrate how the practical syllogism diverges from the explanatory reductivism and proceduralism characteristic of the standard model. But Chapter 3 also resisted Martha Nussbaum’s claim that the divergence between the two syllogisms lends support for value incommensurability and divergent, conflicting conceptions of the good. I argued that Nussbaum’s retrieval of Aristotle shares the standard model’s resistance to metaphysical and foundationalist commitments, whereby her interpretation of human *ergon* leads to relatively indeterminate, pluralistic, and incommensurable functional roles. Though she may have retrieved Aristotle for contemporary debates about liberalism and practical reason, it is at the expense of weakening Aristotle’s objectivist philosophical framework, causing her thin account of practical reason to resemble the subjectivism and indeterminism of ends of the standard model.

Chapters 4 and 5 argued against two different interpretations of Humean instrumental reason, both which mistakenly attribute to his philosophy an ethical subjectivist position due to their common suspension of Hume's unique naturalist and intersubjective philosophical framework: first, in Chapter 4 I argued that, despite claims to the contrary, Hume's combined sceptical and naturalistic philosophical framework distances his account of practical reason from the standard model. I demonstrated how Hume's naturalism differs in important respects from the naturalistic temper of contemporary philosophy: in particular, Hume is sceptical about the possibility of genuine scientific, theoretical knowledge in order to affirm certain natural beliefs that are necessary to function as practical, social agents. Hume's naturalistic framework therefore leads to scepticism about the possibility of truly knowing brute facts about our environment, but it integrates and is non-sceptical about the necessity of ethical normative objectivity for humans as practical beings. Importantly, I showed that Hume's philosophical framework posits objective ends of sociability and common life, creating space for reason in a practical rather than theoretical function, which ultimately prioritises the intersubjective sphere expressing common moral values and beliefs.

Chapter 5 argued that the misguided sceptical interpretation of Hume – endorsed mainly by constructivist Kantians – illustrates well the tendency among critics of the standard model to hive off a thinker's original philosophical frameworks and replace them instead with current presuppositions about reason. I showed that, at root, the sceptical reading shares a number of the same premises as the standard model, such as adherence to the Moore-inspired misreading of the fact/value gap and a proceduralist conception of practical reason. These commonalities weaken the sceptical reading's critical normative agenda against the standard model. However, in Chapter 5 I distanced Hume from the sceptical reading, where I argued that correcting our reading of the is/ought divide helps expose the articulatory, more substantive function of practical reason in Hume: specifically, similar to Aristotle, Hume's instrumental rationality involves the articulation of admirable character traits deemed valuable in the intersubjective context. Not only did this bring to the fore a more substantive conception of practical reason in Hume, it also illustrated how, as situated within a naturalistic and intersubjective framework that is constituted by socially valuable norms, Hume's account of practical motivation averts the evaluative neutrality, subjectivism and freestanding character of the standard model.

I claimed in Chapters 6 and 7 argued against the contemporary retrievals of Kantian practical reason by Korsgaard and Rawls. Taking her cue from Rawls, Korsgaard's dismissal of Kant's dualistic philosophical framework means that her proffered alternative account of instrumental reason does not differ substantially from the sub-Humean model. Specifically, I argued that, though Korsgaard arrives at a sort of "hyperrealism", while

Rawls forwards a more contextualist conclusion, both interpreters empiricise the categorical imperative as well as humanise and lower the moral ideal, so as to render Kantian practical reasoning amenable to the predominant naturalistic temper. But in so doing, moral reasoning's critical authority over and above instrumental reason is reduced: the categorical imperative becomes a procedure by which prudential maxims gain a moral stamp of approval. Instrumental reasoning, based on the constructivist interpretation, acquires an inflated importance. Ultimately, because of the lack of substantive normative distance between instrumental and pure practical reason, Korsgaard's and Rawls' unitary conception of practical reason ends up emulating the freestanding and conditional nature of the standard model. Given their shared presuppositions with the latter, the constructivist Kantian reading is unsuccessful both as a critique and an alternative to the latter.

In contrast, I argued in Chapter 7 that a more metaphysical reading of Kantian practical reason helps his account of practical reason avoid the characteristic traits of the standard model. My interpretation stressed three points in contradistinction to both Rawls and Korsgaard: first, I claimed that instrumental reason has a normative source that is *separate* to that of pure practical reasoning and is partially constituted by norms of theoretical reason; second, I argued for the importance of Kant's metaphysical, dualistic framework which manifests itself in an uneasy dynamic between instrumental and moral reasoning; third, I rejected a procedural understanding of the categorical imperative and argued instead that it should be understood more substantively. In other words, unlike the view that the categorical imperative is merely a procedure to approve of or improve on our prudential, instrumental reasons, I argued that it is focused on the promotion and realisation of the highest, objective good of pure practical reason through pure moral willing. My interpretive claims were important to establish how Kant's conception of instrumental reason is ensconced within broader objective, ethical normativity – even if hypothetical willing has a conflicted dynamic with moral reasoning, the function of the separate, overarching normative framework of pure practical reason is meant to critique and constrain the prudential interests pursued by instrumental reasoning.

The originality of this dissertation lies in two areas: first, my thesis contributes to our understanding of the role and problems surrounding instrumental rationality in current moral and political theory. Contrary to the dominant retrieval strategies adopted by both critics and proponents of the standard model, I argued that these reappropriations paper over rather than confront the central dilemma surrounding the role of instrumental rationality in moral and political philosophy. Instead, criticism of the standard model requires deeper examination of past and current philosophical frameworks: I will elaborate more on this point below. Second, my thesis contributes to interpretive debates surrounding the work of Aristotle, Hume and Kant, arguing, firstly, against the

predominant tendency to render these thinkers amenable to our naturalistic temper, and secondly, for a sympathetic reading of their conceptions of practical reason as situated within their respective philosophical and orientating frameworks, regardless of their implausibility from our own current viewpoint.

As previous chapters have shown, historical models of instrumental reason differ from the standard model precisely *because* of their respective orientating, objective frameworks; these frameworks provide the context for those aspects of their theories deemed salient or valuable. As we have seen so far, such objective moral frameworks are problematic if we take as our point of departure a bundle of sceptical doubts surrounding moral, epistemological, and motivational issues as informed by the predominant naturalistic temper. These doubts accompany (and are subsequently imported into) contemporary readings of these historical thinkers. Specifically questioned is, first, the objective status of moral judgements regarding right and wrong; second, the notion that such judgements can provide some objective explanation of the world as experienced by conscious humans; and third, that such judgements and reasons can motivate humans independently of subjective preferences, desires, or ends. We are then required to postulate additional motivational factors without which we cannot show how reason can move us to act. As we have seen in preceding chapters, these sceptical doubts are taken as the point of departure in current retrievals of historical authors even if they do not fully subscribe to their normative or explanatory implications.²

The fact that Aristotle, Hume and Kant are all committed to one or more claims which fly in the face of these sceptical doubts makes their respective philosophical frameworks problematic from the perspective of current philosophical background convictions. These thinkers' philosophical systems reflect a non-sceptical belief that orientating, value-constituted frameworks are inescapably part of how humans react, function and navigate ourselves in this world. Included within their conceptions of practical agency is a sense of how individuals are *moved* by this horizon of defined goodness: as situated within this horizon, instrumental and, more generally, practical reason requires *no* additional motivational postulate to explain its grip on ourselves as agents. Moreover, their conceptions of instrumental reason are ensconced within questions regarding moral value and worth: instrumental rationality's situatedness within a broader system of normative objectivity therefore ensures that the two standpoints are connected in

² What I mean is that though Nussbaum, Korsgaard, Rawls, and Hampton may not subscribe to moral or motivational scepticism, they take on board the legitimacy of these doubts and read Aristotle, Hume, and Kant with these problems in mind, whether or not these were salient issues for these thinkers. It is evident that as a *response* to the sceptical doubts they seek to present a metaphysically sanitised version of these historical thinkers through the dismissal of their objectivist normative frameworks.

some fashion – perhaps in a conflicted manner (as in Kant) or in a more cooperative sense (as in Aristotle and Hume). Because their philosophical frameworks convey this fundamental belief, if we discard them we do violence to the elements we find so compelling.

Even more than distorting the philosophical views of historical authors, these retrieval strategies are unsuccessful as a critique or amendment of the standard model for some important but neglected reasons. These strategies' inattentiveness to how historical models of instrumental reason are anchored within their philosophical frameworks translates into a corresponding theoretical neglect of contemporary philosophy's own situatedness. In other words, lacking in the retrieval projects investigated in this thesis is the critical examination of how instrumental reason is situated – or not – within our current philosophical framework. I have shown in the preceding chapters how this problem reveals itself in both a superficial and a deep way: superficially, it is manifested in how critics of the standard model end up replicating or reinforcing rather than querying central characteristics and commitments of the standard model. Even where they seek normatively to apply these thinkers' respective accounts of instrumental reasoning, current retrieval projects often remain at root closely tied to the view they are critical of – implicitly endorsing the same philosophical strategies and underlying sceptical assumptions of the standard model. Since the eschewal of metaphysical foundational claims is deemed an appropriate response to the value diversity and the rise of the scientific, secular perspective, the partial retrievals of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant come to mimic the freestanding and subjectivist qualities of the standard model. Neglected in this approach is how a sympathetic rendering of historical thinkers, with all the idiosyncratic or metaphysical baggage that may involve, attains critical distance from underlying theoretical assumptions simply taken for granted in contemporary moral and political philosophy. If opponents of the standard model rely implicitly on the same presuppositions informing the standard model, then it is not necessarily in the best position to criticise it.

Perhaps more worryingly, the approach adopted by critics of the standard model effectively papers over rather than confronting head-on the central dilemma regarding our own unexamined moral foundations which this debate about instrumental reason alerts us to: namely the problematic dynamic between our philosophical and unexamined, situating moral frameworks. The naturalistic temper characterising both critics and proponents of the standard model claims that we can do away with evaluative horizons altogether – indeed, the partial reappropriation strategies reflect that assumption explicitly. But if they are wrong – if we agree with Taylor that such frameworks are inescapable – the distortion of historical models is symptomatic of a deeper ambiguity and incoherence surrounding our own moral horizon. In other words, the casual treatment of historical philosophical

schemas by both sides of the debate about the standard model – particularly in contemporary retrieval strategies – translates into a willful blindness and inarticulacy about our own orientating landscape. Thus, investigating these historical accounts of instrumental reason within their original philosophical frameworks – no matter how unappealing or outdated from the scientific perspective – is important if only to draw critical attention to our own unexamined views and assumptions, highlighting our need for our philosophical theories to better confront, articulate and critically assess the thick values constitutive of our own moral foundations.

The implication is that this dilemma cannot be solved through some kind of retrieval of these different historical traditions: we cannot simply pick and choose what we like from historical models and insert them unreflectively within our own unexamined framework. In the previous chapters I have argued that we cannot align the standard model with these historical conceptions of instrumental reason, but neither can we partially appropriate their theories for our own normative purposes. Several questions then need to be answered: does this then commit me to a Skinnerian, contextualist approach? What can be drawn from these historical theories of instrumental rationality if historical and philosophical constraints preclude their straightforward retrieval? Moreover, does this mean we are, and will continue to be, saddled with the reductivism and subjectivism of the standard model?

To answer the first question I do not think my approach compels me into the Skinnerian camp. The contextualist approach towards the history of ideas is an important and valuable enterprise in itself; nonetheless, I need not be committed to the view that this is the *only* use of historical theories. Ultimately, any work in the history of moral and political philosophy will need to display sensitivity to the original historical context and guard against anachronisms influencing their particular reading. This will involve respect for the original philosophical frameworks and the recognition that ideas cannot be lifted out without doing some violence to the original meaning and intention of these ideas. But this claim, coupled with my scepticism about contemporary retrieval strategies, does not automatically make me a Skinnerian. The assumption that it does is founded on a false dichotomy: either past thinkers must be reinterpreted or amended to fit our current intuitions so their ideas are relevant and applicable to our own moral and political dilemmas, or these theories and ideas – if solely understood within their original historical and philosophical context – are of mere antiquarian interest to us. But it is simply false to assume that these are the only two options available to us. This leads to my answer to the second question.

There are three possible alternatives as to what can be drawn from historical models of practical reason, all of which confront the crisis I have identified above directly. The first strategy, endorsed by Bernard Williams, is the recognition that historical

consciousness brings about the “relativity of distance”³: the values we are confident about today may not obtain for future generations and thus we need to embrace, rather than fight against, a degree of philosophical and rational inarticulacy. In fact, a distinctive and problematic feature of modern philosophy is the use of outdated ethical concepts surrounding rationality; these concepts, Williams argues, are ill-equipped to grapple with or describe the unavoidably individualist and contextualist nature of society. “The resources of most modern moral philosophy are not well adjusted to the modern world,” he writes. “This is partly because it is too much and too unknowingly caught up in it, unreflectively appealing to administrative ideas of rationality.”⁴ For Williams, this insight, coupled with an awareness of the history of moral and political philosophy, should bring about an acceptance that we cannot “return” to certain historical views so the best way to reconcile our moral claims with reality is to relinquish all aspirations of establishing any moral foundationalist theories.

Moreover, Williams’ scepticism about the possibility of establishing frameworks of normative objectivity is in line with both the naturalism and pluralism underlying modern philosophy today.⁵ Like Nussbaum and Rawls, Williams claims that the diversity and incommensurability of value is the core ethical truth we can grasp today:

We also have the idea that there are many and various forms of human excellence which will not all fit together into one harmonious whole, so any determinate ethical outlook is going to represent some kind of specialization of human possibilities. That idea is deeply entrenched in any naturalistic or, again, historical conception of human nature – that is, in any adequate conception of it – and I find it hard to believe that it will be overcome by an objective inquiry, or that human beings could turn out to have a much more determinate nature than is suggested by what we already know, one that timelessly demanded a life of a particular kind. The project of giving to ethical life an objective and determinate grounding in considerations about human nature is not, in my view, very likely to succeed. But it is at any rate a comprehensible project, and I believe it represents the only intelligible form of ethical objectivity at the reflective level.⁶

Thus, Williams’ scepticism about the existence of normative objectivity then leads to his advocacy of a minimalist philosophical foundation.

³ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, pp. 162-73.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Though Williams is right to confront the modern crisis directly, his solution is wrong-headed for two reasons. First, Williams' prescription to the current dilemma ultimately atrophies into the subjectivism of the standard model. He argues that any foundations to ethical thought lie in individual or subjective dispositions. "Even if ethical thought had a foundation in determinate conceptions of well-being," Williams writes, "the consequences of that could lie only in justifying a *disposition to accept* certain ethical statements, rather than in showing, directly, the truth of those statements".⁷ For Williams, these personal dispositions are "a necessary truth" and occupy an essential causal role.⁸ Thus, if we are seeking to find an alternative to the subjectivism of the standard model – as most critics are – then Williams' solution is not a real contender.

However, Williams thinks this subjectivism a welcome result. It is also the natural consequence of his doubts about what philosophy can accomplish, which leads to the second problem. As I will explain in more detail below in the option that I propose, Williams' dismissal of ethical foundationalism is premature, particularly if one does not subscribe to his scepticism about rational explanation or the belief that situating frameworks can be hived off. Williams claims, "how truthfulness to an existing self or society is to be combined with reflection, self-understanding, and criticism is a question that philosophy, itself, cannot answer." Rather, "the answer has to be discovered, or established, as the result of a process, personal and social, which essentially cannot formulate the answer in advance, except in an unspecific way."⁹ If Taylor is correct in arguing that orientating moral frameworks are inescapable – and I believe he is, particularly in light of my investigation of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant in this thesis – it is not clear to me that the rational articulation of its content is beyond human reach, or that we should relinquish our aspirations for such articulation in philosophy. As I see it, the problem facing us today seems to be the very *lack* of articulation and examination of our orientating normative frameworks in the domain of practical philosophy, or the failure of our philosophical systems to accurately reflect the inescapable but unexamined values constitutive of our moral landscape.

The second option tries to rectify precisely this inarticulacy. This strategic use of historical ideas is a retrieval project slightly different from those examined in the preceding substantive chapters. To return to where I began this thesis, Taylor is an obvious example of a philosopher who tries to bring to the fore the deeply spiritual and multilayered moral roots of our instrumental reasoning. His historical genealogy is, as he eloquently puts it, "an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation – and thereby to make these

⁷ Ibid., p. 199, emphasis added.

⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

⁹ Ibid., p. 200.

sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.”¹⁰ Investigating the history of philosophy is important in order to uncover either a theistic moral source or a hope in historical progress which is capable of sustaining the spiritual aspirations underlying our most important human goods. As he writes,

That is why adopting a stripped-down secular outlook, without any religious dimension or radical hope in history, is not a way of *avoiding* the dilemma, although it may be a good way to live with it. It doesn’t avoid it, because this too involves its ‘mutilation’. It involves stifling the response in us to some of the deepest and most powerful spiritual aspirations that humans have conceived.¹¹

According to Taylor, these sources have become blunted by the proceduralist inflection of the current predominant naturalist temper, which has also led to the unfortunate idealisation of disengaged instrumental rationality. Such a potent mixture is illustrated by the freestanding and reductivist nature of the standard model. But Taylor’s hope is that through historical genealogy an alternative but suppressed narrative of modernity can be reclaimed, one which sheds light on the thick values that are hidden but nonetheless constitutive of our current situating framework. Thus, values such as autonomy, human dignity, justice, and benevolence stem from a spiritual, theistic root which we lose sight of if one pays little attention to the alternative historical strands shaping modernity.

Though I am ultimately sceptical about the success of the retrieval projects examined in this thesis, it should be noted that Taylor’s strategy differs from these projects in some important respects; it may thus possess more critical bite against the standard model. For one, he does not shy away from the central problematic which underlies our ambivalence about instrumental reason, but rather undertakes his historical philosophy in hopes of shedding further light on it. Taylor is fully aware of the paralysis caused by our current unexamined, situating framework which, on one hand, promises a radical humanistic freedom, but on the other, constricts the deeper spiritual sources animating the goods we think of as especially significant and valuable. As he states, “[d]o we have to choose between various kinds of spiritual lobotomy and self-inflicted wounds? Perhaps. Certainly most of the outlooks which promise us that we will be spared these choices are based on selective blindness.”¹² Taylor’s diagnosis of the problem penetrates the innermost root of the crisis we face today and for that reason is deeply valuable. In an age where “epistemic

¹⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 520.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 520.

abstinence”¹³ is the predominant game in town, where our moral values and goods have shallow and self-created roots, there is a cost which Taylor is rightly pointing out – both in terms of a narrowed moral and aspirational vision as well as a self-willed rational inarticulacy about substantive values.

Second, Taylor’s approach does not follow the retrieval strategies examined here in their dismissal of historical philosophical frameworks. This difference follows from Taylor’s own emphasis on the inescapable nature of orientating moral frameworks. Thus, contrary to those I discussed in previous chapters, Taylor’s normative conclusions about instrumental rationality do not collapse back into the subjectivism or reductivism of the standard model. His retrieval strategy does not “lift out” attractive claims irrespective of their original philosophical systems; rather he seeks to trace and bring to the forefront the residual imprint caused by neglected historical strands of modernity. The result, Taylor hopes, is an enrichment of contemporary discussion about human values and goods, where philosophers are less hesitant to engage in thick evaluation.

On one hand Taylor is engaged in a valuable project that I believe needs to be carried out – confronting the central crisis of instrumental reason that has been precipitated by numerous causes, such as the overwhelming naturalistic temper and the ideals of disengaged agency, and examining the deeper moral sources which have animated instrumental rationality historically. In some respects my work has been a continuation of Taylor’s project. But on the other hand, I remain much more sceptical and pessimistic about the prospects of historical retrieval, not only of those reappropriations of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant examined in the preceding chapters, but also of Taylor’s variant. Taylor may be much more careful in avoiding those mistakes committed by others; however, I remain unconvinced by the possibility of retrieving those neglected historical strands Taylor refers to. In some respects it would be a much more comfortable and straightforward if my pessimism did not extend to Taylor’s solution: Taylor provides an incisive diagnosis of the core dilemma and an interesting suggestion that a theistic source is capable of sustaining our ideals. Ultimately, however, given secularism’s stranglehold on contemporary moral and political philosophy (particularly among its liberal strands) – and indeed this is considered by many as a virtue rather than a vice – it seems unlikely that the retrieval Taylor envisages is a realistic solution out of our current predicament. There seems to be a virulent entrenchment of, rather than retreat from, the secularism and naturalistic humanism in our current age. Arguably, this trend has contributed to the seeming inescapability of the standard model and also explains precisely why current retrieval strategies, in adhering to the same naturalistic humanism, find it so difficult to

¹³ See Joseph Raz, “Facing Diversity: The Case of Epistemic Abstinence,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19 (1990): 3-46.

distance themselves from the view they criticise and reject. So though I am deeply sympathetic to Taylor's solution, my own diagnosis of the crisis as examined here in this thesis suggests that it is ultimately unrealistic.

But if his remedy is infeasible, we could still take something out of Taylor's insight about the importance of situating frameworks. This third is my proposed option, and where the central originality of my thesis lies in arguing for a new way of approaching the problematic of instrumental rationality which differs substantially from the current retrieval strategies in vogue. If we are genuinely worried about the standard model and we want to confront the crisis head-on, study of these historical thinkers within their respective philosophical systems can be instructive in heightening our critical awareness of how instrumental reason is embedded within a broader, self-orientating horizon of thick evaluation. Throughout this thesis I have pointed out how appreciation of historically dissimilar perspectives and metaphysical commitments has some crucial, deeper normative implications which are applicable for us today. By heightening our awareness of the importance of past and contemporary situating and philosophical frameworks, we gain some much needed critical distance from the unquestioned tendency to do away with these orientating frameworks altogether in their theories, a view subscribed to by both unapologetic supporters as well as critics of the standard model. Williams, like other contemporary philosophers, rejects wholesale endeavours to establish some philosophical schema of normative objectivity that is analogous to historical models, favouring instead theoretical minimalism and parsimony. Foundationalist projects such as Aristotle's, Hume's, and Kant's are considered unjustifiably grandiose, especially given our secularist and value pluralist age.¹⁴ Taken as a point of departure this sentiment results in a patch-up job, papering over the central problem rather than confronting it directly, as illustrated by the retrieval strategies examined in previous chapters. At root, both sides of the debate about the standard model reflect great faith in the promise of naturalist humanism – where moral self-grounding and subjectivism as a philosophical schema has in some ways liberated us from particular theistic or deeply objectivist commitments. But this faith comes also at a price, whereby current moral and political philosophers have gradually argued themselves into a corner in response to features of modernity and denied themselves the necessary theoretical resources needed to get out – meaning their stripped-down philosophical theories reflect the illusory view that objective, value-constituted horizons of

¹⁴ One may be tempted to say that Hume's project is not a foundationalist one. But as I showed in Chapters 4 and 5, Hume's philosophy involves naturalistic claims which involve a substantive conception of appropriate, objective human ends. Moreover, Hume's almost classical description of "nature" implies a departure from the contemporary, more brute account of nature. Hume's claims in these respects would be questionable from a modern naturalistic point of view, as shown in differences between Hume and contemporary scientific naturalists, such as Larry Laudan and Ronald Giere.

meaning can be eliminated altogether. By contrast, though we cannot reclaim their views directly, historical models of practical reason can nonetheless function as significant examples of how to approach the dilemma we are facing – of how to reconcile both philosophical and value-constituted frameworks – without resorting to the normative minimalism in vogue today.

This leads to the third question: does my solution effectively mean we are saddled with the standard model – that we may decry its pervasiveness and implications, but must nonetheless accept it as unavoidable? To better accommodate the reality of social diversity and requirements of naturalistic science, the subjectivist framework of the standard model initially appears to be the only available option. But is that the last word? In drawing our attention to these philosophical schemas framing instrumental reason we are confronted with the task of critically examining and rectifying the absence of normative objectivity in our current moral and political theories. Among these historical thinkers there is no hesitancy to engage in moral foundationalist projects – indeed, that is one of the purposes of systematic philosophical inquiry and how our practical, moral agency can be better understood in all its complexity. For instance, the crisis of how to reconcile a scientific worldview with ethics is hardly a new dilemma and we see two different options exercised by Hume and Kant respectively: both are trying to understand the role of morality and normative objectivity in light of a Newtonian, mechanistic universe. But rather than restricting themselves to highly deflationary normative claims, each embraces the task of examining how their respective theoretical systems can accommodate both spheres of science and ethics, and still do justice to the equal validity and significance of morality for humans. Hume ultimately chooses a modern variant of classical naturalism, whereas Kant seeks to resolve the dilemma through commitment to a highly distinctive form of philosophical dualisms. Both are united, however, in confronting this problematic from a moral – not a value-neutral – perspective, as well as in their rejection of a reductivist, freestanding conception of instrumental reason. Thus, though their views may be unavailable to us today, we can nonetheless draw inspiration from their philosophical example.

The modesty of my normative proposals may dissatisfy those who go to historical sources of practical reason anticipating a tidy solution to our contemporary problems. But my proposal is in fact more far-reaching, though less obviously so. My project has tried to highlight an inherent contradiction which lies at the heart of current moral and political philosophy. Like Taylor, I believe there is an aspect of self-inflicted wounding that is ignored today – on one hand we are trying to grapple with certain inescapable features of modernity, such as diversity of values and goods, on the other hand, we deny ourselves the very tools that would help guide and orientate ourselves at a time of seeming rootlessness

and dislocation. Both supporters and critics of the standard model are united in their dismissal of frameworks of thick normative objectivity. But it is precisely when we resist this urge – when we read these philosophers within their specific philosophical system, no matter how outdated – it brings to the fore how broader frameworks or horizons of objective significance are inescapable, no matter how much the current naturalistic temper tries to suggest otherwise. We may not be entirely clear about the specific contours of that situating landscape, but once we acknowledge that the current dilemma surrounding instrumental reason is symptomatic of a widespread illusion that we can do away altogether with these moral frameworks constituted by thick evaluation, we open up new possibilities for awareness, articulation, and examination. We begin to ask critical questions regarding the current unexamined framework which contextualises our contemporary understanding of instrumental rationality. The articulation of its content with greater precision and critical distance becomes all the more important. This may sound like an overly pessimistic conclusion but I believe it should be understood more as a call to arms – that is, unless one is ready to genuinely explore our own philosophical situatedness within an as of yet unarticulated objective framework of moral significance, it will indeed appear that instrumental reason is freestanding and imbued with untrammelled power. Plurality of values and the predominance of the scientific age may be undeniable features of modernity but this should not cause us to throw up our hands in collective resignation and assign ourselves the more deflationary task of ensuring our subjective interests and preferences somehow cohere with one another.

For this reason we need to pay attention to the naturalistic temper that encases our current conception of instrumental rationality. I use the term “encasing” deliberately: to demonstrate how this temper, composed of its bundle of sceptical doubts, effectively narrows and restricts our understanding of why instrumental reason has significance for us today. As I have shown in this thesis, contemporary liberal moral and political philosophers, when examining the role of practical reason, have in large part neglected this critical examination. One main reason for this neglect has been the lack of articulation of those frameworks – it is difficult to articulate how our instrumental reason is situated in our cultural, moral horizons without suggesting that our practical reason will have a more substantive rather than procedural function (to use Taylor’s language). In other words, critical examination of our current orientating framework requires a rethinking of the very function of practical reason. Rather than focusing on whether these acts instantiate some cause-effect relation in the world, our accounts of instrumental rationality should incorporate reflection on how our practical action reflects the shape of one’s life as a coherent whole, as situated within some horizon of broader and deeper meaning. It therefore becomes all the more important that we can understand those frameworks of

meaning; in turn it becomes possible to think of instrumental reason less restrictively and in a more sophisticated, nuanced manner. We can bring into sharper relief an altogether forgotten “articulating function” of practical reason.¹⁵ Reason is not just practical in the sense of “prescribing” and “directing” what we ought to do, therefore not preoccupied simply with action that is based on an agent’s desires or aversions. The criterion for good practical reasoning goes beyond judgements about disparate, isolated acts. Part of its function is to gain practical knowledge, to understand and articulate that conception of goodness and value which moves us in our lives; it involves the explicit explanation and clarification of our surrounding implicit moral landscape and of the qualitative values reflected there.

But to be clear, I have not been arguing that the standard model is misguided because it fails to make instrumental reason equivalent to *moral* normativity. On the contrary, if the normativity of our moral frameworks and instrumental rationality are so condensed, we risk two things, as illustrated by the retrieval strategies examined in previous chapters: we risk obscuring the existence of those objective, orientating frameworks, where we fail to acknowledge and draw attention to them. Or moral value becomes essentially reducible to subjective preferences – the product of anthropocentric, individual creation. But on the flip side, once we acknowledge how individual practical choices respond to and are shaped by the goods constitutive of that orientating framework, we see that in no way does instrumental reason’s means-end structure entail a freestanding or unsituated character, where our lens of meaning and significance is reducible to a purely instrumentalist stance to our surrounding environment. Rarely is our instrumental use of reason isolated from a network of values and moral significance, and we begin to understand how this overarching framework orientates or constrains our instrumental deliberation. It functions as a guide which may – cooperatively or dialectically – hone and develop our practical agency towards the articulation and actualisation of substantive goods that *matter* in a meaningful human life.

Only after critical scrutiny of our own philosophical predicament is undertaken can we genuinely formulate and articulate an alternative situating framework for instrumental reason, one which departs from the hostility towards thick evaluation and normative objectivity. If value-constituted moral horizons are inescapable, it should call into question the claim that our theories of instrumental reason must remain morally neutral towards evaluating the substantive content of our desire, preferences, or ends. Practical, instrumental choices are rarely self-referential; rather, they are more often than not part of a broader network of significance and meaning with desires and motivating reasons that are

¹⁵ Taylor, “Explanation and Practical Reason,” p. 60.

responsive to the ends of disinterested friendship and humanity. In this light, instrumental reason should recommend a stance of individual humility rather than one of anthropocentric self-assertion, imbued with a spirit of cooperation, exploration, and functions as part of an important self-orientating enterprise.

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