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HERLINDE PAUER-STUDER

Department of Philosophy  
University of Vienna  
Herlinde.pauer-studer@univie.ac.at

## HUMEAN SOURCES OF NORMATIVITY

### 1. Introduction

A moral theory should, as many philosophers claim, offer us an account of obligation and motivation. It should address the following questions: How do we specify the reasons that morally require us to do X? How does the recognition that we are required to do X bring us to do X? The task is to provide an answer to the quite plausible claim that moral reasons should be normative as well as motivating.

It is nearly a commonplace of contemporary moral philosophy that a Humean theory of morality cannot explain the normative force of moral reasons. Humeanism, so the familiar criticism goes, lacks a conception of practical reason which makes sense of categorical normative requirements. Instrumental rationality in the sense of means-end reasoning is the sole principle of Humean practical reasoning. However, we cannot justify unconditional normative principles or reasons on the basis of the principle of instrumental rationality. Therefore Humeanism misses the core of morality, namely identifying some actions to be obligatory, our desires and inclinations notwithstanding. At best, critics concede, Humeanism provides an account of motivation. Motivation is a matter of having a desire and a belief about the best way to fulfil the desire. Means-end reasoning tells you that you are required to do Y if you desire X, and believe that doing Y is the means to realize X. So Humeans, since they consider means-end reasoning to be a principle of understanding and regard desires to be the driving force of acting are able to explain how one can be motivated to act.

Kantian philosophers take the desire-based character of a Humean conception of agency and its apparently limited understanding of rationality to make their point. Kant, they claim, develops not only a plausible theory how moral principles are normatively binding; he also offers a more convincing account of motivation than Humeanism. Moral motivation, so the Kantian view, cannot be a matter of just being driven by desires, impulses, and inclinations. Moral motivation presupposes the recognition that certain considerations and reasons have weight and normative force. Moral motivation includes a cognitive evaluation, namely the insight that one is justified to do X and that, therefore, one has a reason to develop and follow the corresponding desires and inclinations.

The most elaborate defense of the Kantian position along these lines has been given by Christine Korsgaard. Kant's account of a good will, Korsgaard claims, rests on "a *motivational analysis* of the notion of duty or rightness".<sup>1</sup> This way obligation and motivation do not fall apart since a good-willed person "does the right thing because it is the right thing".<sup>2</sup> Korsgaard offers a specific interpretation of the Kantian position. She defends a 'constitutive internalism' according to which the principles of practical reason, the instrumental principle and the categorical imperative, are constitutive of the person as a rational agent. This provides an elegant solution to the questions of obligation and motivation. If moral principles are constitutive of our rational agency, then obligation and motivation are due to internal reflection on the preconditions of our being persons. A practical reason, Korsgaard tells us, "must function both as a motive and as a guide, or a requirement".<sup>3</sup>

If normativity is a matter of the truth of external normative facts, the question of motivation, Korsgaard argues, remains mysterious – external truths might leave us cold and fail to have an influence on our ways of acting. A Kantian 'constitutive internalism' connects normativity and motivation via the insights of rationally reflecting agents: Obligation is due to the recognition that, in so far as we are agents, we are committed to moral principles. Moreover, in so far as reason has an influence on our choices, we are motivated to act on behalf of reasons which have normative force. If a person is rational, then, according to Korsgaard, she "must be motivated by her own *recognition* of the appropriate conceptual connection between

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<sup>1</sup> Ch.M. Korsgaard (1996), "Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of *Groundwork* I", in Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ch.M. Korsgaard (1997), "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", in G. Cullity and B. Gaus (eds.), *Ethics and Practical Reason*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 215-54, here: 219.

the belief and the desire”.<sup>4</sup> Such an insight presupposes autonomous practical reflection, i.e. reason in the sense of autonomous self-legislation.

Korsgaard’s criticism of the Humean account of morality focuses on two points, namely that Hume’s account of instrumental reason is mistaken and, moreover, that Hume’s conception of moral approbation is insufficient. Her arguments in more detail:

First objection: A Humean position cannot provide an account of the normative force of the principle of instrumental rationality. On a Humean desire-based account of agency the principle of means-end reasoning just tells us to follow our desires, whatever they are. So means-end reasoning amounts to a description of our desire-based ways of acting, but not to a normative guideline which could be violated.<sup>5</sup>

Second objection: Though Hume develops a conception of reflective rationality, his account of ‘reflective endorsement’ lacks the power to establish the normative authority of moral principles. Hume’s reflective endorsement method has to be completed by a Kantian conception of autonomous agency that takes the principle of morality to be constitutive of autonomy and practical reason.<sup>6</sup>

If these arguments are successful, then there is indeed not much room left for a Humean approach to morality. My aim in this paper is to assess Korsgaard’s objections against the Humean position. In regard to instrumental rationality, I will reject Korsgaard’s claim that the normative force of the instrumental principle can only be established in case the ends pursued do have unconditional value. A value-neutral reading of the instrumental principle is, as I try to show by referring to John Broome’s work, compatible with understanding instrumental rationality to be a normative requirement. Next, I try to point out some problems with Korsgaard’s argument that a Humean reflective endorsement method is deficient. Hume’s more moderate account of reflective rationality is not as inappropriate an account of practical reason as Korsgaard’s criticism suggests. Humean attempts to offer a conception of normativity in the form of reflective endorsement can avoid some difficulties facing Korsgaard’s strong constitutive internalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>5</sup> This argument is developed in Korsgaard (1997), “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”, 220-34.

<sup>6</sup> For this argument see Korsgaard (1996), *The Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 51-66.

## 2. Korsgaard's Account of Instrumental Rationality

Humeanism is usually associated with the thesis that the principle of means-end reasoning is the paramount principle of practical reason. Indeed, defenders of a Humean account of rationality and morality consider the principle of instrumental reason to be self-evident: to challenge it makes no sense. For example, James Dreier attributes to the principle of instrumental reason “a special status” due “to its being the *sine qua non* of having reasons at all”.<sup>7</sup> Means-end reasoning is a necessary condition for identifying reasons to act. However, the principle of means-end reasoning is indifferent to the value of the ends; it informs us about the relations between means and ends, given our beliefs about how best to realize particular ends we have adopted.

Humeans are careful to draw the line between rationality and morality. They are sceptical towards a conception of practical reason whose core principle is the principle of morality, and the principle of instrumental reason having a diminished status. For Humeans it is clear that the move from rationality to morality demands an additional justification, a justification that cannot be simply provided by the content of practical rationality as such.<sup>8</sup>

Christine Korsgaard tells a different story about the *sine qua non* conditions of having reasons. For Korsgaard, the capacity to be an autonomous agent, i.e. an agent valuing her or his own humanity as an end in itself, is indispensable for having reasons for action at all.<sup>9</sup> Her “truly Kantian strategy” is to start with an account of rationality as “the autonomy of the human mind – and then to define reasons in terms of rationality – say as that which can be autonomously willed, or as those considerations which accord with the principle of autonomous willing”.<sup>10</sup> The principles of autonomous willing are the hypothetical imperatives, namely the principle of instrumental reason and the principle of prudence, and

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<sup>7</sup> J. Dreier (1997), „Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality“, in G. Cullity and B. Gaus (eds.), *Ethics and Practical Reason*, 81-99, here: 98, 99.

<sup>8</sup> As James Dreier, defending a Humean position, notes: “Our skepticism should consist in doubts that the content of practical reason is anything like the content of morality.” J. Dreier, „Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality“, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 120ff.

<sup>10</sup> Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”, 243.

the categorical imperatives.<sup>11</sup> Compliance with the principle of instrumental rationality is “constitutive of having a will” and having a will is “constitutive of being a person”.<sup>12</sup>

The instrumental principle is a normative requirement and a necessary condition of rationality. However, the instrumental principle cannot stand alone, it is not the „only requirement of practical reason“. <sup>13</sup> Korsgaard links the authority of the requirement of instrumental reason to the normativity of reasons: the instrumental principle only does have normative force if directed to ends we do have good reason or undefeated reason to pursue. As Korsgaard writes: „Unless there are normative principles directing us to the adoption of certain ends, there can be no requirement to take the means to our ends.“ <sup>14</sup> In the framework of Korsgaard’s account of agency, the adoption of the end has to be a choice based on a person’s free will. Given her conception of the will and rational agency, the ends must have value.

Korsgaard’s interpretation of the instrumental principle as a constitutive condition of a free and rational will is due to a modification of Kant’s account which she thinks necessary to overcome the traces of rational dogmatism still affecting Kant’s program.<sup>15</sup> Kant, she criticizes, reads the principles of practical reason sometimes as external rational restrictions on maxims. Kant’s reconstruction of instrumental rationality presupposes independent normative facts in the form of externally given rational laws. Such an externalism Korsgaard considers as deeply problematic. The assumption of independent normative facts in the form of externally given laws of rationality does not, she argues, provide us with a reason why we should conform to these laws. As Korsgaard writes:

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<sup>11</sup> The categorical imperatives are: The Universal Law Formula, the Humanity Formula and the Autonomy Formula, the idea of self-legislation. The step to the Universal Law Formula is provided by Kant’s argument that the form of a law is its universality, hence that the Universal Law Formula fulfils exactly the conditions of a self-legislating will and is therefore the principle of autonomous willing. The Humanity Formula is connected with the Universal Law Formula via the argument that a categorical imperative has to be bound to unconditional values (otherwise it would be a hypothetical imperative, dependent on a conditional value). Humanity is such an unconditional value (in fact the only unconditional value), i.e. a value which is not dependent on other conditions. The conditions for an unconditional value are being valued for its own sake and having the source of value in itself. Cf. Ch. M. Korsgaard (1996), “Two Distinctions in Goodness”, in Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 249-274.

<sup>12</sup> Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”, 254.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 220. The thesis that reasons to take the means depend on the value of the ends is common ground between Joseph Raz and Korsgaard. In his discussion of instrumental rationality Raz writes: “Crucially, the way goals acquire their normative relevance is by being conditions on the applicability or stringency of reasons. Therefore, they can have that effect only if the goals are worth pursuing in the first place. On this point my account is close to Korsgaard’s.” See J. Raz, “The Myth of Instrumental Rationality”, in *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy*, 23. Raz talks here about the normativity of reasons, not about the normative force of requirements.

“(A)ccording to what we might call *instrumental* realism, facts about the instrumentality of actions to our ends support those reasons. The difficulty with this account in a way exists right on its surface, for the account invites the question why it is necessary to act in accordance with those reasons, and so it seems to leave us in need of a reason to be rational. I have an end, and out there in the universe is a law saying what I must do if I have an end (take the means), but the reason why I must obey this law has not yet been given. To put the point less tendentiously, we must still explain why the person finds it *necessary* to act on those normative facts, or what it is about *her* that makes them normative *for her*. We must explain how these reasons get a grip on the agent.”<sup>16</sup>

The externalism problem confronts us on two levels: on the level of morality and the level of (instrumental) rationality. “Why be moral?” is the sceptical question haunting moral justification. The requirements of morality might leave us cold, because the motivational link between external normative facts and our actions is missing. Korsgaard sees a parallel problem with respect to rationality. “Why be rational?” is the skepticism haunting our accounts of practical reason. If, Korsgaard argues, the principles of rationality in the form of normative requirements amount to external logical truths and normative facts, there might not be any reason to be rational. If external instrumental realism holds, the question “why be rational” remains unanswered. Korsgaard’s solution is, as mentioned already, a constructive internalism claiming the laws of practical rationality to be the laws of agency. The principle of instrumental rationality is part of the autonomy of the mind, and no longer an external rational truth with no connection to our motivating reasons. So, quite in the same way as Korsgaard internalizes the categorical imperative, the principle of instrumental rationality is constitutive of agency and willing:

“The idea that you could make a maxim and *then* apply the instrumental principle to it makes no sense. A maxim that does not already at least aspire to conform to the instrumental principle is no maxim at all. So the instrumental principle does not come in as a restriction that is applied to the maxim. Instead, the act of making a maxim – the basic act of will – conforms to the instrumental principle by its very nature. To will an end is just to will to cause or realize the end, hence to will to take the means to that end.”<sup>17</sup>

Korsgaard considers internalism - apart from its potential to leave behind the legacy of dogmatic rationalism - as *the* alternative to Humean empiricism. Hume, she claims, is not able to establish instrumental reason as a normative requirement. According to her reading of

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<sup>15</sup> Kant’s allegiances to rational dogmatism are, Korsgaard thinks, observable in Kant’s *Groundwork*.

<sup>16</sup> Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”, 240.

Hume, one is rational in case one has an end and pursues it in an effective way. The ends are set by the desires one has. They are arbitrary, merely dependent upon whatever our passions and inclinations are directed towards. Each end is worthy to be pursued as long as the desire for it is strong enough. Whatever a person desires, the person has reason to take the most effective means to realize that end. Since Hume lacks any conceptual resources to distinguish actual from rational desires, anyone just driven by his or her desires complies with the instrumental principle. If we identify the aims of the person with what the person prefers, one is always guided by what one thinks what one's reasons are. But if any wish is giving us a reason, independently of its content, we are always practically rational. Korsgaard thus thinks that Hume's account of instrumental reason undermines the concept of practical rationality, since the alternative of irrational acting is missing. The instrumental principle lacks any normative force, because it cannot be violated. So the status of the instrumental principle as a requirement of rationality would be lost – a requirement would compel us to adopt certain desires and give up others.<sup>18</sup> Korsgaard's example of a truly Humean character is Jeremy, who wants to study, then takes a walk, meets a friend, goes to a bar, and in the end comes home without having done anything of what he wanted to do with good reasons.<sup>19</sup> Jeremy's problem is that he does not recognize a superior principle which would allow him to distinguish between important aims or reasons and spontaneous impulses and inclinations.

To conclude: Korsgaard's main objection is that Hume does not have a normative conception of instrumental reason, because his radical empiricism makes a normative requirement-interpretation of the principle of instrumental reason impossible. There are according to Korsgaard two readings of the instrumental principle, by which we can reconstruct the empiricist position:

The first version reads: (a) "If you have a *reason* to pursue an end, then you have a reason to take the means to that end." This is, Korsgaard adds, a normative principle, since it "derives a reason from a reason, something normative from something normative".<sup>20</sup>

The second formulation is: (b) "If you are going to pursue an end, then you have a reason to take the means to that end."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>19</sup> Korsgaard, "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant", *The Journal of Ethics*, 1-29, esp. 19; Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", 247, n 64.

<sup>20</sup> Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", 223.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Korsgaard assumes that only the second interpretation agrees with Hume's position "since it is perfectly clear that he thinks that reason does not play a role in the determination of ends. He would have to believe that the instrumental principle instructs us to derive a reason from what we are *going* to do".<sup>22</sup> However, Korsgaard objects, principle b contradicts another principle of reasoning that Hume highly cherished, namely that you cannot derive an 'Is' from an 'Ought'. But the validity of an 'is-ought' derivation is exactly presupposed by the second formulation of the instrumental principle, i.e. formulation b above: From the fact that you desire X, you derive that you have a reason to do X. Therefore, Korsgaard concludes, Hume could not have believed in instrumental reason. Hume does not give us a normative account of instrumental reason.

Korsgaard considers her criticism of Hume as sufficient to reject Humean accounts of instrumental rationality in general: "The instrumental principle, because it tells us only to take the means to our ends, cannot itself give us a reason to *do* anything. It can operate only in conjunction with some view about how our ends are determined, about what they are."<sup>23</sup> Such an assessment of the ends Korsgaard thinks to be possible only in the framework of a Kantian conception of practical reason.

### 3. Problems of Korsgaard's Account of Instrumental Reason

I will now address some problems of Korsgaard's interpretation of instrumental rationality. First, I discuss some shortcomings in her reading of Hume's views on means-end reasoning. Second, I try to show that Korsgaard's value-based conception of instrumental reason is a consequence of her failing to distinguish clearly between the *normativity of rationality* and the *normativity of reasons*.<sup>24</sup> To read the instrumental principle as a normative requirement does not commit one to the claim that one must have a reason to take the means to an end. Therefore the ends pursued need not necessarily be valuable or worthwhile projects. Hume's value-neutral reading of instrumental reasoning seems to me plausible.

In regard to the first point of my criticism: Korsgaard's interpretation of Hume's conception of instrumental reason is based on what Hume says in the famous section "*Of the influencing*

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> For the distinction between the normativity of requirements and the normativity of reasons see N. Kolodny (2005), "Why Be Rational?" in *Mind* 114, 509-63, esp. 509-12.



*motives of the will*” in Book II of the *Treatise*.<sup>25</sup> Hume’s aim in that part of the text is, as he tells us, twofold: He tries to show, first, “that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will”; secondly, he argues “that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will”.<sup>26</sup> Often interpreters have read Hume’s discussion of the motives of the will as proving Hume’s complete skepticism in regard to practical reason. Indeed, Hume makes some rather provocative claims in his investigation of the motives of the will, the most famous ones being: “’Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. ’Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me. ’Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer my own acknowledg’d lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter.”<sup>27</sup> Considered in isolation, these passages seem evidence for Hume’s hostility to reason.

Korsgaard adopts, as far as Hume’s interpretation of instrumental reason is concerned, such a reason-skeptical understanding of Hume. She attributes to Hume a theory of ‘revealed desires’: whatever you do expresses the desires driving and motivating your actions.<sup>28</sup> She takes Hume’s allegedly outrageous claims about the bewildering variety of desires rather literally: the only parameter determining the nature of our ends is the subjective intensity of the wish. There is no rational or critical assessment of desires, no distinction between actual and rational desire – since reason, as Hume says, does not have any influence on the motives of the will.

It seems to me mistaken to read Hume’s allegedly provocative remarks in that way. Hume, in that passage on the motives of the will, does not discuss reflective rationality, but reason in the sense of *understanding*, namely abstract or demonstrative reasoning and means-end reasoning. His claim is that these forms of reasoning do not directly influence our actions, but direct our judgements in regard to cause and effect on the one hand, and means-end relations on the other hand. In particular cases, reasoning leads us to a judgment that some passions are unreasonable.<sup>29</sup> However, Hume states, that nothing can be judged to be reasonable or

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<sup>25</sup> D. Hume (1978), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), Book II: *Of the Passions*, Part III, section III: “Of the influencing motives of the will”, 413-18.

<sup>26</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, 413.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>28</sup> Korsgaard does not use the term ‘revealed desire’; but in analogy to the concept of ‘revealed preferences’ the formulation seems an appropriate characterization of Korsgaard’s interpretation of Hume’s views.

<sup>29</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, 416.

unreasonable except by appealing to a standard of truth or reason. We cannot call affections and passions reasonable without a standard of assessment:

“(N)othing can be contrary to truth or reason, except what has a reference to it, and as the judgments of our understanding only have this reference, it must follow that passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are *accompany’d* with some judgment or opinion.”<sup>30</sup> Hume also informs us that there are “two senses, that any affection can be call’d unreasonable”.<sup>31</sup>

The first one is at stake if our passions rest on false imagination; for example, if we feel “hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security” in situations where there is no object which could justify those affections. The second instance of displaying unreasonable affections is given when we, blindly following our passions or desires, choose means inappropriate to pursue our ends, and in case we “deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects”.<sup>32</sup>

Understanding has, so Hume, an influence on our actions – but merely in the way that we check whether our actions follow the rules of reasoning. Hume clearly sanctions the violation of means-end reasoning. Means-end reasoning is a principle of reasoning. It requires us, to take the appropriate means, if we desire an end and believe that a particular means-end connection holds. Hume rejects the famous combat of will and action, of reason and passion, since he considers reason and passion not to be in general opposition. They merely conflict in case a passion can be criticized as unreasonable. However, if affections and passions are deficient in that respect, then reason in the form of a judgement about the proper connections between means and ends tells us to modify them and bring them into conformity with reason’s judgment. Hume emphasizes the influence of reflective judgment, when he writes:

“Since a passion can never, in any sense, be call’d unreasonable, but when founded on a false supposition, or when it chuses means insufficient for the design’d end, ‘tis impossible, that reason and passion can ever oppose each other, or dispute for the government of the will and actions. The moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means our passion yield to our reason without any opposition. I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases. I may will the performance of certain actions as means of obtaining any desir’d good; but as my willing of these actions is only secondary, and founded on the supposition, that they are causes of the propos’d effect; as soon as I discover the falsehood of that supposition, they must become indifferent to me.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 416, 417.

In that passage means-end reasoning is clearly described as a principle displaying normative guidance. If I detect that there is no connection between specific means and ends, or that, for example, I assume wrongly that I can realize my end, reflection tells me to modify or give up my end. So Hume's statement that "our passions yield to our reason without any opposition" does not mean, as Korsgaard supposes, that Hume's desire-based creatures are following the instrumental principle whatever they do, and that they therefore cannot violate the dictates of instrumental reason. Our passions, Hume tells us, conform to reason, not because reason lacks normative force, but because reason tells us to modify and rethink the passions in case they incline us to take means inappropriate for pursuing an end effectively.

Korsgaard proposes a different reading of the passage cited above. She says that the deficiencies mentioned by Hume, namely a false supposition and the choice of inappropriate means, are merely "cases of mistake", not violations of rationality, since "the actions that result are not, strictly speaking, irrational".<sup>34</sup> However, to admit the possibility of "mistake" in the sense of erroneously choosing inefficient and inappropriate means to realize an end, amounts to admitting that the principle of instrumental reason can be violated. If, for example, you pursue your end to participate successfully in the Vienna City Marathon by just watching marathon competitions on TV, instead of running regularly, then you are instrumentally irrational: you fail to take the means to your end.<sup>35</sup> And, given what Korsgaard says about normative strength, making room for the possibility of mistaken means-end reasoning is all Hume needs to establish the normative force of the principle of instrumental reason. It must be possible for a person to will an end, and yet to fail to will the means to that end - otherwise the principle of instrumental reason does not meet the conditions of being a requirement of rationality. Yet, as I tried to show, Hume does not exclude infringements of correct means-end reasoning as such. These infringements can, of course, be merely 'matters of mistakes': they can occur in the form of erroneous assumptions about means being effective, and errors about the relations between certain means and ends, and in failures to draw the conclusion about what you are required to do, in case you desire something, and believe that X is the means to realize your desire. Hume in a way tells us that you can fulfil the requirement of

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<sup>34</sup> Hume, Korsgaard claims, allows only for actions being irrational in "two *derivative* ways." Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", 228.

<sup>35</sup> As Jonathan Dancy points out, the principle of instrumental rationality is a meaningful normative principle. It demands of us to take the most effective means to our ends. Yet, Dancy points out, one can be motivated by the recognition that the action X is the most effective means to pursue one's aims, and one can ignore this fact in a way that one's irrationality becomes obvious. So instrumental rationality is violated if one does not choose the appropriate means; hence the principle of instrumental rationality does have normative force independently from the status of the ends. See J. Dancy (2000), *Practical Reality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 46, 47.

means-end reasoning by giving up the end or by taking the means<sup>36</sup>; hence a violation of means-end reasoning would be possible in case you intentionally ignore those options.

Hume does not hold a ‘revealed desire account’; he leaves room for the reflective agent to reason in accordance with or in violation of the principle of means-end reasoning. So, it is not true that “Hume has no resources for distinguishing the activity of the person *herself* from the operation of beliefs, desires, and forces *in her*.”<sup>37</sup> To make judgments, to assess whether one’s passions are driven by superstition or amount to appropriate responses to given facts or ends, requires that the reflections and evaluative assessments of the person do play a role. In addition to means-end reasoning Hume adopts a conception of ‘reflective rationality’.

The principle of means-end reasoning does have normative force. We can respect or violate it in our activities and derivations of understanding. Hume points out the limits of demonstrative reasoning and means-end reasoning. “Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chuses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it.”<sup>38</sup> Means-end reasoning demands to take the means, in case you have an end and a belief about the appropriate means to realize it. You can violate that principle: you might not choose the means conducive to the end. The function of reason is to help us detect the proper relations between causes and effects, between means and ends. But means-end reasoning does not allow or help one to assess the value of ends and desires as such. Means-end reasoning by itself does not inform us about the truth of our beliefs or the goodness or value of our ends and desires. The assessment of truth and goodness presupposes a judgment in regard to standards of truth and practical reflection. So Hume’s remarks about the bewildering form our desires might take, are, besides an affirmation of the wide variety of humans’ wishes, a reminder of the limits of means-end reasoning: by itself, means-end reasoning does not allow an evaluative assessment of the desires; that would be beyond its scope. And Hume is correct to say so.

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<sup>36</sup> Compare the following passage: “I may desire any fruit as of an excellent relish; but whenever you convince me of my mistake, my longing ceases. I may will the performance of certain actions as means of obtaining any desired good; but as my willing of these actions is only secondary, and founded on the supposition, that they are causes of the proposed effect; as soon as I discover the falshood of that supposition, they must become indifferent to me.” Hume, *Treatise*, 417.

<sup>37</sup> Kosgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”, 233.

<sup>38</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, 416.

In fact, Korsgaard's concedes that point, namely that Hume presupposes the value-neutrality of the means-end principle. Hume, she tells us, "thinks we neither ought-to-want nor really-want only those ends which are consistent with our overall good".<sup>39</sup> She considers that as a crucial deficiency of Hume's position undermining the normativity of the instrumental principle. However, by putting forward that objection Korsgaard makes the normative force of the instrumental principle dependent on something different than the normativity coming with means-end reasoning as a principle of logically correct reasoning. Her critical argument against Hume assumes that instrumental reason only has normative force if the ends pursued do have value. And that is exactly Korsgaard's position: "(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 means that your willing the end gives it a normative status for you, that your willing the end in a sense makes it good".<sup>40</sup>

But this is a problematic objection, since it conflates the *normativity of rational requirements* with *the normativity of reasons*. We should distinguish these two forms of normativity. The 'normativity of rationality' is the kind of normativity connected with requirements like consistency, coherence, entailment, and means-end reasoning. The 'normativity of reasons' is due to the weight reasons have. The source of normativity in regard to logical requirements is a different one than the source of normativity in the case of reasons. Requirements of rationality demand not to violate formal standards of rationality like consistency, coherence, and the rules of valid reasoning. Logical standards are value-neutral. Therefore, normative requirements of rationality do not answer questions of what we should do, all things considered. That is a matter of assessing the weight of reasons we have for doing X or refraining from doing X. The normative power of reasons depends on the justification we can provide for them to count as good or compelling reasons. The reflection on the weight of reasons has to work within the framework provided by formal conditions of rationality – yet the question of fulfilling or violating the conditions of rationality has to be kept separate from the question whether we do have good reasons for acting.

The main argument for the separation of the normativity of requirements and the normativity of reasons is the bootstrapping problem. An account of practical reasoning must, as Michael Bratman has pointed out, avoid 'bootstrapping': logically valid practical reasoning cannot create for you a reason to do something. The requirement of means-end reasoning by itself

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<sup>39</sup> Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", 231.

cannot bootstrap a reason into being.<sup>41</sup> Applied to the principle of instrumental rationality, this means: you have to formulate the principle of instrumental reason in such a way, that it amounts to a normative requirement to take the means, in case you have an end X and believe that doing Y is the means to realize X. The question whether you have a reason to do Y is a separate issue. For example, that you intend to participate in the Vienna City Marathon does not provide you with a reason to start with your daily training sessions, though you believe that running daily is necessary to participate successfully in the marathon. It might well be that you have no reason to do so, since due to a cardiac insufficiency you might not survive running a marathon. The fact that you form an intention to pursue end E does not create a reason for you to take the means to realize E.

The point can also be made in regard to Korsgaard's formulation of the principle of instrumental reason in terms of willing.<sup>42</sup> The fact that you will an end X, and believe that if you do Y you will realize X, does not give you a reason to will the end, and hence not a reason to take the means. The claim that your willing an end gives you a reason to will the end, and consequently a reason to will the means, amounts, as John Broome following Bratman points out, to bootstrapping since "a reason would be being pulled into existence out of nothing".<sup>43</sup> So if by means-end reasoning a volition gives rise to another volition, the question whether we do have reason to follow the volition derived, has not been answered. Reasoning just works via the logical connections between the contents of reason, and those connections create a normative requirement. The relation of normative requirement is, as Broome expresses it, "given by the correctness of the reasoning."<sup>44</sup> Reasoning is a relation between mental states; in the case of means-end reasoning an intention, a belief (about the

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 245, 246.

<sup>41</sup> M. Bratman (1987), *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason*, Harvard University Press, 23-7. Broome equally insists on the separation of requirements and reasons. See J. Broome (2002), "Practical Reasoning", in J. Bermúdez and A. Millar (eds.), *Reason and Nature: Essays in the Theory of Rationality*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Korsgaard suggests that Kant's reading of the instrumental principle amounts to the following syllogism:  
Whoever wills the end, wills the means.

I will the end. Therefore: I will the means.

That formulation is, as Korsgaard concedes, problematic since someone can will the end, yet fail to will the means. Therefore Korsgaard adds the condition "in so far as one is rational". So the correct syllogism, she argues, is:

Whoever wills the end, wills the means in so far as one is rational.

I will the end. Therefore I will the means in so far as I am rational,

which is equivalent to: Whoever wills the end, ought to will the means.

Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", 239. This leaves us with a narrow scope 'ought'. One can make the detachment: you ought to take the means, i.e. you have a reason to take the means. That is exactly the point Broome criticizes. For Broome's criticism of Korsgaard's argument see J. Broome (2000), "Normative Requirements" in J. Dancy (ed.), *Normativity*, (Oxford: Blackwell), 78-99, here: 98-99.

<sup>43</sup> Broome, "Practical Reasoning", in J. Bermúdez and A. Millar (eds.), *Reason and Nature*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 8.

means to an end), and an intention (as the conclusion of reasoning). It is important to have a neutral notion of instrumental rationality – means-end reasoning as such does not turn the end into something good. Intending an end does not provide one with a good reason to realize it. As Joseph Raz rightly objects: “(A) would-be murderer cannot create for himself a reason for poisoning his intended victim just by making it his goal to kill him.”<sup>45</sup>

Broome suggests that the crucial distinction between the requirement-relation and the reasons-relation can be made explicit by focusing on the different scope the ought-operator has, dependent on whether ‘ought’ expresses a reason or whether ‘ought’ indicates a normative requirement. In the case of reasons, ‘ought’ is a narrow-scope operator. The reasons-relation is a slack and detaching relation: if *p* is a reason for *q*, it follows that you have a reason to *q*; you ought to *q*. In the case of a normative requirement ‘ought’ is a ‘wide-scope ought’, the ought-operator applies to the whole conditional. Normative requirements are for Broome strict non-detaching normative relations. The normativity of instrumental rationality is captured by a ‘wide-scope ought’, i.e. the ‘ought’-operator governs the whole conditional of instrumental deliberation:

You ought (If you intend to *E* and believe that your *M*-ing is a necessary means to *E*, form the intention to *M*).<sup>46</sup>

The wide-scope interpretation forbids detachment; and therefore it does not entail that you ought to take the means to end *X* (in the sense of a narrow-scope ‘ought’).<sup>47</sup> Since the interdiction of detachment holds for instrumental reasoning in general, it equally holds for the case of a commitment to worthless or morally bad ends.

Normative requirements, as Broome states, are based on logical relations between the content of propositions.<sup>48</sup> The logical relations are the source of normativity. You are required, if you believe the premises, to believe the conclusion; you are required, if you intend the premises, to intend the proposition stated in the conclusion. Therefore, Broome argues, it is wrong to

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<sup>45</sup> J. Raz, “The Myth of Instrumental Rationality”, 3.

<sup>46</sup> J. Broome (2004), „Reasons“, in J. Wallace, M. Smith, S. Scheffler, and Ph. Pettit (eds.), *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, Oxford: Oxford University Press),. pp. 28-55, here: 29. Broome’s most recent formulation of the instrumental requirement is: “Rationality requires of *N* that, if *N* intends that *e*, and if *N* believes that *e* will be so only if *m* is so, and if *N* believes that *m* will be so only if she herself intends that *m*, then *N* intends that *m*. See J. Broome, “The Unity of Reasoning?” in S. Robertson, J. Skorupski, and J. Timmerman (eds.), *Spheres of Reason*, 2, forthcoming.

<sup>47</sup> Broome does not reduce all normative relations to wide-scope normative requirements. His claim is, merely, that the normativity going with instrumental reasoning is best captured by a ‘wide-scope ought’. Therefore his position is not undermined by admitting that there are also requirements expressing a ‘narrow-scope ought’, whose normativity is due to the fact that there is strong justificatory evidence for it.

<sup>48</sup> J. Broome, “Normative Requirements”, 82.

assume that instrumental reasoning provides you with a reason to take the means: “But instrumental reasoning does not provide you with a reason to take a means. That is not how it works. Willing (or intending) an end normatively requires you to will whatever you believe is a necessary means to the end.”<sup>49</sup>

A consequence of keeping the normativity of requirements apart from the normativity of reasons is that instrumental reasoning is completely neutral in regard to the value of the ends. Instrumental rationality can neither confer any sort of value on the ends, nor is its normative status touched in any way by the value of the ends. Instrumental rationality is a sort of rational requirement that is neutral to the good and the bad. As Broome notes:

“ Instrumental reasoning brings you to take appropriate means to your ends, and it is not paralyzed if your ends happen to be ones you should not have. Similarly, your theoretical reasoning works well and in the same way, whether or not it is premised on beliefs you should not have.”<sup>50</sup>

What can we conclude in regard to Korsgaard’s interpretation of the principle of instrumental reason and her criticism of Hume’s account of means-end reasoning? To recall: Korsgaard’s argues that the principle of instrumental rationality only does have normative authority in the context of ends that do have value, moreover, that do have unconditional value. So, only if there is normative force in regard to the ends, there is a normative requirement to take the means. If you will an end, you ought to take the means, in so far as you are rational. This leaves us with a narrow scope ‘ought’ that expresses that you have a reason to take the means. However, the normativity established by valid reasoning cannot be used to assess the normative status of ends and means. To repeat the point made before: the logical relations between the contents of the propositions at stake in means-end reasoning<sup>51</sup> entail normativity in the sense of a requirement to reason correctly; but means-end reasoning does not entail that the ends do have a normative status. Means-end reasoning does not inform us about the worthlessness or goodness of our ends. Whether the ends as such do have normative force is a matter of assessing the value of the ends.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> In Korsgaard’s case: a volition, a belief, and a derived volition.



Korsgaard's conception of 'will' is a specific one. Due to her adoption of a Kantian notion of the will, willing is connected to a very specific form of autonomous reflection, namely autonomy in the sense of understanding yourself bound by the moral law. Take the following passage of her text: "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*."<sup>52</sup> Willing is for Korsgaard *good* willing; her notion of a will is a Kantian good will based on the moral law.<sup>53</sup> Due to her moralized notion of willing – the principle of acting is the moral law – the distinction between the requirement-relation and the reasons-relation is blurred. Since the idea of the autonomy of the will, the freedom to make a decision or a choice, is connected with the moral law, the objects of your willing are by definition good or valuable ends. Therefore, since the end is a good one, you have a reason to pursue the end, and accordingly you have a reason to take the means. Korsgaard's assumption that the "fact that you will an end *is a reason* for the end" is restricted to a specific form of willing, namely willing those ends which we can justify as being good or valuable.

The problem is that Korsgaard extends her moralized conception of the will to the principle of instrumental reason. Korsgaard's problem is not that the detachment of "I ought to will the means" might not be warranted; in her account of unified agency, which commits a rational agent to unconditionally valuable ends, the detachment would not be a problem. But means-end reasoning as such can also be correctly done in the context of ends we consider to be valueless or simply wrong. Of course, one can claim that good willing, in the sense of acting on a moral principle, might be tied to correct means-end reasoning. But claiming that a good

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<sup>52</sup> Korsgaard, „The Normativity of Instrumental Reason“, 246.

<sup>53</sup> Korsgaard follows Kant's functional argument in the *Groundwork*: the only principle which fulfils the condition of being a law is the categorical imperative. Korsgaard's argument that brings us to the Kantian laws has two steps: The first part of the argument establishes why we need a law, the second part why this law is the categorical imperative. More specifically: In order to be persons who are able to reflect on what they are doing, we cannot simply follow our impulses, otherwise we would be *wantons*, not persons. But we can only give reasons for our actions and justify them if there are laws guiding our reflective evaluations. We have to ask whether a certain incentive for action can qualify as a law for us. We have to be a free will, that means to be guided by a self-given law. The principle of a free will is a law, and this condition, to be just a law, is exactly fulfilled by the categorical imperative in the universal law formulation, which brings in the moral law in the form of a law. This completes the first part. The second part of the argument tries to establish the categorical imperative as the only solution to the given problem. Korsgaard brings in a further argument to arrive at a substantive conception of morality: To be a person we need a normative structure. Normative structures are not only supplied by morality, but also by our practical identities, i.e. those normative codes that result from our social roles and social contexts - whether one is a father, mother, mafioso or a philosopher. But we cannot develop practical identities, if we do not attribute value to ourselves, i.e. when we do not value our humanity. And to value our humanity we have to equally value the humanity of others. That brings us to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the Formula of Humanity. See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 98, 104-105.

will often presupposes valid means-end reasoning does not mean that means-end reasoning as such amounts to good willing.

Kant himself had a different conception of the normative force of the instrumental principle. He claims that the principle of means-end reasoning is analytic and neutral towards values.<sup>54</sup> In the case of a principle of skill, it is, for Kant, irrelevant whether the end is reasonable or good; the relevant issue is *how* we can reach the end. He illustrates the end-neutrality by a rather drastic example: The prescriptions that a doctor needs to cure a man and those that a poisoner needs to kill the man are, as Kant claims, of “equal value” since each prescription “serves to bring about its purpose perfectly”.<sup>55</sup>

The hypothetical imperative is for Kant either a principle of skill or a principle of prudence. Kant is careful to distinguish the analytic form of the hypothetical imperative, the principle of means-end reasoning, from the non-analytic version of the hypothetical imperative, namely the principle of prudence. The principle of prudence is addressed to the end of one’s own happiness. Here the value of the means is dependent on their being appropriate to realize a specific end, namely happiness or well-being. In contrast to the principle of means-end reasoning, the imperatives of prudence are not analytic, since the concept of happiness is according to Kant not determinately given - it depends on the circumstances of a life whether long living, being rich or being successful will bring happiness.<sup>56</sup>

Kant’s claim about the value-neutrality of the means-end principle matches what Hume says. Hume talks of affections and passions instead of intentions, maxims and willing. He assumes

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<sup>54</sup> I. Kant (1994), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated as *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* by James Ellington, in: Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 27, 25 (Academy edition, 417, 414).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 (Academy edition, 415).

<sup>56</sup> It is interesting that Korsgaard criticizes the “self-interest or economic theory of rationality” for failing to give a justification why it “is rational for each person to pursue his overall good”. Ch. Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”, 230. She argues that the “instrumental principle says nothing about our ends, so it is completely unequipped to say either that we ought to desire our overall good or that to prefer it to more immediate or local satisfactions. The self-interest theory of rationality, because it is committed to the principle of prudence, *has to* go beyond the instrumental theory.” *Ibid.*, 231. Korsgaard’s criticism of the self-interest theory is plausible: the apparent validity of the principle of instrumental reason does not provide a justification for assuming the maximization of one’s advantage to be *the* goal of a rational agent. The self-evidence of the means-end principle does not support the specific interpretation of instrumental rationality which is tacitly presupposed in the *homo economicus* paradigm, namely that being rational means to maximize one’s own advantage. There have to be given further arguments why maximizing one’s own advantage should be the appropriate end of rational behavior as such. However, to raise these objections presupposes to distinguish clearly between the normativity of rationality (which ensures merely the logical validity of means-end reasoning) and the normativity of reasons which depends on the assessment of the ends; in this particular case whether we do have

that we can merely judge or criticize means-end reasoning in regard to the correctness of the belief on which it relies, namely that particular means are in fact appropriate and sufficient to realize an end. His claim is that means-end reasoning is one of the valid principles of understanding – independent from the question whether the affections and passions at stake are good or bad, immediately approved of or not.<sup>57</sup>

To sum up the discussion so far: Korsgaard's objection that on Hume's interpretation the principle of instrumental reason lacks normative force since it cannot be violated, is not valid. Her second critical argument, namely that Hume's account of means-end reasoning is deficient, since it is neutral in regard to the value of the ends, is not convincing. The principle of instrumental rationality is normative in regard to the process of correct means-end reasoning; the assessment of the value of the ends and the reasons we might have for pursuing ends or for giving up certain ends is beyond its scope. Means-end reasoning cannot provide a normative standard to evaluate the ends; its normativity is not dependent on the ends.

#### 4. Hume and 'Reflective Endorsement'

In her book *The Sources of Normativity* Korsgaard offers a more sympathetic reading of Hume. She attributes to Hume's moral philosophy a conception of normativity. Hume, she claims, offers us a method of reflective endorsement that allows us to confirm our moral judgments and assess whether our sentiments of approval and disapproval are rightly held.<sup>58</sup>

Korsgaard in fact makes Hume's position very strong: She emphasizes that Hume brings a form of objectivity into his conception of moral judgments by the requirements of the *general*

good reasons to consider a rational agent by definition to be an agent focusing exclusively on her or his own advantage.

<sup>57</sup> Some authors have denied that Hume develops anything like a conception of practical reasoning leading to practical conclusions. The justification for that position is that Hume's moral psychology excludes the mental contents which could be the contents of the logical relations at stake in means-end reasoning. Hume, so the criticism, assumes that passions are not representational, they are not representations of objects; so passions (which in Hume's conception would be the mental contents of means-end reasoning) do not have content. Therefore passions cannot be the subject of practical reasoning. Therefore, since the contents are missing, practical reasoning is not possible, given Hume's assumptions. Such a position is defended by Elijah Millgram. See E. Millgram (1995), "Was Hume a Humean?" in *Hume Studies* XXI, 75-93.

I consider this objection to be wrong. Passions, Hume holds, are not copies of objects; in that sense – being copies of objects – they are not representational. However, as mental experiences they do have content (they are directed at ends or disapprove of ends). Moreover, as Hume's examples show, we can meaningfully talk about the relations between our passions and their ends and the actions we are required to do or not do by our reasoning, given these relations.

<sup>58</sup> Ch. Korsgaard (1996), *The Sources of Normativity*, 55.

*point of view*.<sup>59</sup> The first of these requirements is that we should not evaluate the character of persons from an idiosyncratic point of view, but from the point of view of our sympathy with the person and the persons of her narrow circle. The second one demands, Korsgaard says, that we must judge the characteristics of a person according to *general rules*.<sup>60</sup> Hume's method to come to an agreement in regard to the qualities and deficiencies of a character can be extended into a general method of rational agreement on moral principles or judgments. That way, she concludes, Hume offers us an account of normativity. Korsgaard points out that we can even detect a notion of acting from duty in Hume's conception of morality.<sup>61</sup>

Though Korsgaard characterizes Hume "as the major traditional representative of a theory of normativity", she considers his account of normativity to be deficient. She argues that the only way to make Hume's reflective endorsement test viable is by extending it into a Kantian account of normativity. As Korsgaard writes: "I will end by saying why I think the logical consequence of the theory of normativity shared by Hume...is the moral philosophy of Kant."<sup>62</sup>

Korsgaard's main objection is that Hume does not apply his method of reflective endorsement universally because he connects the test of reflective endorsement not only with impartiality, but with 'general rules', rules that lack specificity. Hume, she concedes, certainly tries to subject our sentiments and dispositions of character to critical moral assessment. Yet, since the normative devices for that moral testing are general rules, Hume's procedure does not, she criticizes, cover each and every particular case. In order that we can examine not only "general tendencies", but each single disposition, it is necessary, Korsgaard points out, to understand Hume's appeal to general rules as an appeal to moral principles which we can will

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<sup>59</sup> Korsgaard presents a normative reading of Hume's appeal to the general point of view. According to the normativist interpretation, we judge from the perspective of the general point of view our sentiments not only in regard to formal aspects like consistency and coherence, but also in regard to appropriateness and moral validity. A normativist reading is also developed by Annette C. Baier and Barry Stroud. See A. C. Baier (1991), *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise*, (Cambridge, M.A. and London: Harvard University Press), ch.12; B. Stroud (1977), *Hume*, (London: Routledge), ch. VIII. The normative interpretation is not generally shared by Hume scholars. For example, Rachel Cohon argues that Hume introduces the idea of the general point of view merely to make his descriptive moral psychology consistent. Hume explains the origin of moral sentiments with the help of the mechanism of sympathy. Yet sympathy varies with closeness and remoteness. Therefore, Cohon argues, Hume introduces the general point of view as a means to correct these differences and to secure consistency and coherence of our judgments and evaluations. Cohen reduces the general point of view to a psychological mechanism (*deflationary account*). See R. Cohon (1997), "The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, 827-50.

<sup>60</sup> Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-58.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

to be universal laws for all of us. Seen this way, Kant's ethics offers the appropriate reformulation of Hume's test of reflective endorsement and Hume's conception of morality. The step from Hume to Kant seems inevitable.

Korsgaard's critical argument is a version of those objections familiar from discussions of rule utilitarianism: In certain cases it seems reasonable to violate a rule since the violation produces a better result than the strict adherence to the rule. Korsgaard uses the example of "a slightly more attractive version of Hume's sensible knave", namely the case of a lawyer who discovers that a recently deceased client has changed his will. The client has eventually decided to leave his money to his careless nephew and not – as originally intended - to medical research. Since it would be far better to give the inheritance to medical research, the lawyer has, Korsgaard concludes, a normative reason to violate the deceased client's will. However, such a deliberation presupposes a specific weighing of reasons in the particular case which, Korsgaard says, cannot be provided by general rules which normatively apply merely to dispositions "which are themselves tendencies of a general kind".<sup>63</sup>

We need, as Korsgaard puts it, a method of reflective endorsement that extends to all of our dispositions. To have a viable conception of normativity that covers particular cases of inclinations, we must subsume *all* of our particular motives and inclinations to the test of reflection. However, with endorsing that condition we are on Kantian grounds: to check whether all of our inclinations constitute good reasons or not means to ask whether these reasons can be a *law* for us. In Korsgaard's words:

"(W)hat we need in order to establish the normativity of our more particular motives and inclinations is the reflective endorsement of those. That after all is the whole point of using the reflective endorsement method to justify morality: we are supposing that when we reflect on the things which we find ourselves inclined to do, we can then accept or reject the authority those inclinations claim over our conduct, and act accordingly. But what I have just described is exactly the process of thought that, according to Kant, characterizes the deliberations of the autonomous moral agent....Since a reason is supposed to be intrinsically normative, we test a motive to see whether it is a reason by determining whether we should allow it to be a *law* to us. And we do that by asking whether the maxim of acting on it can be willed as a law."<sup>64</sup>

So we come to see that autonomy in the sense of self-legislation is the source of normativity and obligation.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 89.

However, the problem Korsgaard sees at stake in Hume's appeal to general rules results only when we postulate strict adherence to rules as absolutely prior to particular reasons. Such a form of rule-fetishism would undermine the plausibility of each moral theory. It is a familiar objection, for example, that rule utilitarianism generates counterintuitive results, if we associate it with an absolute priority of rules. In particular cases, so a well-known objection, utilitarian standards tell us to violate the rule.<sup>65</sup> The same holds for self-interest versions of contractualism and their vulnerability to 'sensible knave-strategies': if a self-interest maximizing strategy is the self-evident and incontestable condition of rationality, then it is not merely tempting, but rationally justified to violate an agreement, in case a particular infringement does not endanger the general terms of cooperation, yet increases one's utility. Even Kantianism is not free from the dangers of rule-fetishism: the idea of following a law could equally deteriorate into a moral rigorism which ignores taking into account the moral relevance of special relations and duties to others. Of course, Kantian testing procedures can do better – they can be used for assessing maxims that include those very specific moral aspects.

But the same holds for Hume's reflective endorsement test: it is a form of reflective assessment that by itself does not commit us to abstract from particular inclinations, sentiments, or dispositions. Our sentiments of approval or disapproval, of "blame or praise", change, Hume tells us, according to nearness or remoteness. Social interaction on any reasonable terms" would be impossible, if we judged other persons only from our "peculiar point of view".<sup>66</sup> Our moral judgements cannot be based on our immediate feelings; they need to be reflected and corrected if tainted by the stronger effects of pleasure or disapproval, of "affection and admiration", in case other persons and characters are close to us. Our diligent and devoted servant, Hume says, causes stronger immediate sentiments than a historically distant character like Marcus Brutus or a virtuous person in ancient Greece, yet we could reach a more balanced and appropriate judgment by reflection and "contemplation ...of particular qualities or characters".<sup>67</sup> So we have to adopt "some *steady* and *general* points of view" in order to correct the idiosyncracies of our subjective moral perceptions and feelings.

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<sup>65</sup> This objection has been raised by Bernard Williams. In his defense of rule utilitarianism John Harsanyi argues that the relevant rules can be formulated in a way that exceptions to the rule are covered by the utilitarian standard: „Yet, even though there may often be practical difficulties in deciding what specific list of permissible exceptions to a given moral rule would in fact maximize social utility, I think it is very important from a philosophical standpoint that rule utilitarianism does provide at least a conceptually clear theoretical criterion for the set of morally permissible exceptions.“ J. Harsanyi: "Rule utilitarianism, equality, and justice", in: E.F. Paul et. al. (ed.) (1985), *Ethics and Economics*, (Oxford: Blackwell), 129, 130.

<sup>66</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, 581.

The general point of view is a standpoint of objectivity that indicates what our feelings and sentiments would be, if we were not captives of our immediate impulsive reactions. Our moral judgements are reflective and considerate expressions of our feelings – they are, characteristic for Hume’s conception of morality, still based on sentiments, but not on immediate emotional reactions distorted by contiguity, closeness and physical and historical distance.

It seems worth noting that Hume does not understand *general rules* as those normative devices we have to follow in our reflections from a general point of view. Hume introduces the notion of *general rules* to control the cases where our passions, easily influenced and driven “by degree of liveliness and strength”, are due to imagined, but not real objects and causes. Sometimes passions are stronger than our beliefs, sometimes they are aroused “independent of the real existence of their objects”.<sup>68</sup> The general rules are, as Hume tells us, means that remind us of the *probability* of specific relations between cause and effect; they indicate to us where our imaginations fail to be correct or complete representations of the real connections between our passions and the things causing them. They help us to avoid false inferences from effects to causes and, moreover, to elude mistaken, or at least incomplete, assumptions about causes. “*General rules*”, Hume tells us, “create a species of probability, which sometimes influences the judgment, and always the imagination.”<sup>69</sup> Sure, Hume does talk of “general principles” which “command our judgment and opinion”.<sup>70</sup> But these principles, different from the general rules mentioned before, are just those standards of critical reflection that constitute a “method of correcting our sentiments, or, at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and unalterable”.<sup>71</sup> These principles are impartial standards which are not biased by our subjective point of view. Impartiality amounts to a considered form of reflection free of the distortions of personal interests; it is not a form of generality that ignores concrete details of moral relevance like specific inclinations and dispositions.

To conclude: My aim in this paper has been to show that recent Kantian claims notwithstanding, there is still room for Humean accounts of rationality and normativity. Korsgaard’s criticism that Hume’s conception of reflective endorsement cannot reach the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 585.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 584.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 582.

more particular dispositions on which we act, does not do justice to Hume's views on moral justification. The focus on particular inclinations and dispositions is part and parcel of Hume's sentiment-based understanding of morality. Thus Korsgaard's claim that Hume's method of reflective endorsement finds its completion merely in Kantian moral theory seems unwarranted. There are remarkable resources of moral approbation in Hume's theory, resources that amount to a conception of normativity that guides not only our thoughts and imaginations, but encourages us to develop into moral beings by a steady correction and refinement of our sentiments. Hume provides us with a conception of normative reasons – they are those judgments which we can rightfully hold. Hume presupposes the autonomy of the reflective mind in forming reliable judgments. But his moral reflection is a form of subtle moral authority that does not commit us to a law-based form of self-constitution that conceives of moral goodness and moral deficiency merely as a matter of being governed by the right or wrong kind of law. Korsgaard is correct that autonomy is the source of normativity; yet we are not necessarily committed to share her strong notion of autonomy that presupposes the moral law not only as a guideline of willing, but as constitutive of a will.