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TAKING ‘END’ SERIOUSLY. SOME REMARKS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN KANT’S CONCEPT OF AN END AND THE END IN ITSELF

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The aim of the present paper is to show that a particular interpretation of the end in itself, which is widely accepted in research on Kant’s critical philosophy, is at least worth discussing. I refer to the interpretation of the end in itself as a so-called existing end, i.e., something for the sake of which we perform an action but which we do not realize – simply because it already exists. As I will argue, this interpretation does not take into account a crucial aspect of the end in itself, i.e., its property of being an *end*. Being an end, the end in itself must fit into the Kantian general definition of a practical end and must therefore be something to be *realized*.

Keywords: Kant, ethics, categorical imperative, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, dignity, end in itself, value

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“But suppose there were something *whose existence in itself* had an absolute worth, something that, as *end in itself*, could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it and only in it alone would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, i.e., of a practical law”¹.

¹ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4: 428, 3–6. The pagination refers to: *Immanuel Kants Schriften*. Ausgabe der königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1902–). I will use the following abbreviations for the Kant’s writings: GMS for *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited and translated by Allen W. Wood with essays by J.B. Schneewind, Marcia Baron, Shelly Kagan, Allen W. Wood, 2002. CPpR for *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, general introduction by Allen W. Wood, 1996.

With these words, the concept of an end in itself is introduced in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Thus, in Kant's view, an end with absolute value grounds the categorical imperative.² Precisely what this end in itself is, however, remains subject to controversial debates. To some extent, this disagreement in research has to do with the fact that Kant calls many *prima facie* very different things ends in themselves.³ Another crucial reason might lie in an interpretation that has dominated ever since it was put forward by Paton⁴ and adopted by prominent interpreters such as Allison⁵, Korsgaard⁶, Schönecker⁷, and Wood⁸. I refer to the existence thesis (as I shall call it), i.e., the thesis that the end in itself is a so-called existing end, i.e., something for the sake of which we perform an action but which we do not realize – simply because it already exists.

Let me clarify the crucial point a little further: Usually, we think of ends as goals of action. Following Kant, one must think of such ends in the following way: First we represent something that does not yet exist but that we want

CPI for *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, 2000.

- ² On the end in itself as the ground of the categorical imperative cf. Schmidt, E. and Schönecker, D. "Kant's Ground-Thesis. On Dignity and Value in the Groundwork", *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 2018, Vol. 52, Issue 1, pp. 88–92.
- ³ Kant designates man and 'every rational being in general' (GMS, 4: 428, 07), 'persons' (GMS, 4: 428, 22), 'rational nature' (GMS, 4: 429, 02), 'humanity' (GMS, 4: 430, 28), 'the subject of all (possible) ends' (GMS, 4: 431, 13; 437, 31) as end in itself. Good will is only once and indirectly designated as end in itself, but unmistakably so (cf. GMS, 4: 396, 33); otherwise, it is designated as that which has 'pure', i.e., 'absolute' (GMS, 4: 394, 32f.) value or 'a value beyond any price' (GMS, 4: 426, 9f.) and so possesses dignity. Dignity is also applied to 'morality' (GMS, 4: 435f.) and to 'humanity as far as it is capable of morality' (Ibid.). The question of how far good will, humanity and the rational being can be at the same time an end in itself is the subject of numerous discussions. Korsgaard (Korsgaard, C. "Kant's Formula of Humanity", in: C. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge, 1996, pp. 107–132) is among the authors who identify a difference in meaning between 'humanity' and good will as end in itself. Like Korsgaard, Wood (Wood, A. *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge, 1999, pp. 111–156) defines 'humanity' as the general capacity to set ends or as practical reason itself. Wood thinks the interpretation of 'humanity' as *pure* practical reason would necessarily mean that only rational beings with good will could be considered as ends in themselves (Cf. Ibid., p. 120f.). By doing so, Wood and Korsgaard find themselves in a difficult situation: they can no longer explain why Kant attributes both to good will and to 'humanity' the status of an end in itself. A further proponent of the difference between 'humanity' and 'good will' is Glasgow. (Cf. Glasgow, J. "Kant's Conception of Humanity", *Journal of History of Philosophy*, 2007, No. 2, pp. 291–308) Kerstein discusses the assumption that only the good will possesses an absolute value and that this therefore is the genuine end in itself. Since he, like many other authors, interprets 'humanity' as a generic term, i.e., in the sense of 'all rational, willing beings', 'humanity' cannot be, in his view, the genuine end in itself. This is because, as Kerstein argues, not every rational being who as such has at his disposal a rational nature is *per se* morally good. In spite of this, he argues for the view that both humanity and good will can legitimately be addressed as the end in itself. Cf. Kerstein, S. "Deriving the Formula of Humanity", *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Berlin; New York, 2006, pp. 219f.
- ⁴ Cf. Paton, H.J. *Der kategorische Imperativ. Eine Untersuchung über Kants Moralphilosophie*. Berlin; New York, 1962, S. 203f.
- ⁵ Cf. Allison, H.E. *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals. A Commentary*. Cambridge, 2011, p. 209.
- ⁶ Cf. Korsgaard, C. "Kant's Formula of Humanity", *Kant-Studien*, 1986, Vol. 77, p. 125.
- ⁷ Cf. Schönecker, D. and Wood, A. *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals. A Commentary*. Harvard, 2015, pp. 142–149.
- ⁸ Cf. Wood, A. *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

to realize. Thus, this representation motivates us to perform actions that realize the represented thing or state of affairs. Consequently, an end here is always also a *goal* of action. The authors mentioned above now are of the opinion that there are ends which are *not* at the same time such goals. These ends would have to be thought of as something whose representation motivates actions, but which is not realized by the latter.

Let me give an example: In a famous passage of the second chapter of the *Groundwork*, Kant writes, “the human being, and in general every rational being, *exists* as an end in itself”⁹. According to the proponents of the existence thesis this must be understood in such a way that the conception or idea of a human being or of mankind creates in us the awareness and feeling of being obliged to certain, namely moral actions towards every human being. So, the idea of the human being or of mankind motivates these actions. Now we do not create human beings by moral actions, rather we feel obliged to *already existing* human beings. Consequently, man or mankind is an end, but not a goal of action.

In the present paper I aim to show that this interpretation is a misguided one. My main thesis is that every end is necessarily always something that is to be realized by action, i.e., is a *goal* and that consequently the end in itself necessarily includes a moment of realization. Closely related to this thesis I will argue that when Kant speaks of the human being, the rational being, or humanity as an end in itself, he does not primarily mean individual human beings or the species of all human beings, etc. Rather, he means the latter as ‘carrier’ of practical reason and moral autonomy, as that in which both take place or are realized, so to speak. The latter, i.e., practical reason and moral autonomy, are the genuine end in itself that is to be realized. How exactly this is to be understood will be clarified in the line of argument presented in this paper.

First, we will discuss whether the proponents of the existence thesis can make the concept of an existing end sufficiently plausible. Second, looking at some definitions in Kant’s critical writings, we will examine whether Kant conceived such a thing as an existing end at all. Third, it will be clarified how we must conceive the end in itself as something to be realized and in what relation it stands to the categorical imperative.

I. The Existence-Thesis

What does the existence thesis say?

In the following, we will discuss what exactly the existence thesis claims by looking at some statements of prominent Kant interpreters. Then, with referring to some explanations and examples given by these interpreters, we will have to consider whether the existence thesis is sufficiently determined, consistent and plausible. Wood writes on the concept of an existing end:

We are tempted to think that the concept of an end is nothing but the concept of a not yet existing object or state of affairs whose existence we desire and pursue. But we also include among our ends existing things, such as our own self-preservation... They are constantly ends for us, setting limits on what we are

⁹ GMS, 4: 428, 07.

willing to do in pursue of our other ends... In the broadest sense however, an end is anything for the sake of which we act.¹⁰

Wood thus proposes the following defining properties of an existing end:

- An existing end is an *existing* thing or state of affairs, thus it exists *prior* to actions that are performed for the sake of it.
- Existing ends are “constant”, they are therefore – this is how we presumably must understand Wood – ends of a higher order, which are thus not themselves means to other ends.
- Existing ends consequently set limits to other ends and corresponding actions; they say which ends are allowed to be pursued and which are not.
- An existing end is an end because an end in the most general meaning is something for the sake of which we act.

Allison writes:

Although they [both the English term “end” and the German “Zweck”] usually refer to some purpose or aim to be achieved, they can also refer to something that already exists and that constitutes a limit. Kant here terms the former an ‘end to be effected’ [‘*ein zu bewirkender Zweck*’] and the latter a ‘self-standing end’ [‘*selbständiger Zweck*’]. The former is the familiar sense of “end” that [...] constitutes the goal of every intentional action. What makes the latter an end is that it is likewise a source of reason to act or, more often, to refrain from acting. In Kant’s terms, this qualifies it as an objective ground of the will’s self-determination, which is just his definition of an end.¹¹

Allison, much like Wood, thus formulates the following defining properties of an existing end:

- An existing end is something that exists *prior* to the actions that are performed for the sake of it.
- It is not a *goal* of an intentional action.
- It, like any end, is a source of reasons to perform or refrain from performing actions.
- It is, like any end, an objective ground of self-determination of the will.

Dean also ascribes very similar properties to an existing end:

[...] when we think of an end, it is natural to think of something that is to be brought about or attained. [...] But an objective end or end in itself, is not like this. Kant says that instead of being something that is to be brought about, an end in itself is ‘the supreme limiting condition of the freedom of action of every human being’ (G 430) or ‘the limiting condition of all merely relative and arbitrary ends’ (G 437). Kant means here that the end in itself or objective end is not some object or state of affairs that is to be brought into existence. An end is always some sort of reason for acting, but in the case of the end in itself the action is not to bring the end into existence. An end in itself provides a reason for other types of action. [...] So Kant says the end in itself ‘must here be thought not as an end to be effected but as an independently existing end, and hence thought only negatively, that is, as that which must never be acted against’.¹²

Dean does not speak directly of an existing end in general in this passage, but of an objective end or an end in itself. However, he clearly characterizes this

¹⁰ Wood, A. *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹¹ Allison, H.E. *Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 208f.

¹² Dean, R. *The Value of Humanity in Kant’s Moral Theory*. Oxford, 2006, p. 114f.

type of ends as existing ends when he, for instance, writes ‘that the end in itself or objective end is not some object or state of affairs that is to be brought into existence’. Dean gives an objective end, or the end in itself, the following properties, which have already been mentioned in a very similar way Wood and Allison:

- An objective end or end in itself is *not* something to be produced or brought about. It is thus an existing end.
- It is the limiting condition of all merely relative ends or ends to be brought about. Thus, it sets limits to other ends and associated actions, i.e., it selects inadmissible ends and actions.
- The end in itself as an existing end is, like every end, always a kind of reason for action or it provides reasons for action.

Finally, let us look at the defining properties formulated by Guyer.

Kant’s [...] suggestion that rational being is not an end ‘to be effected’ may mean that, unlike other ends, rational being is not something that has to be brought into existence – it is already there in the person of oneself and every other human being.¹³

Again, nothing new: Man as an end in itself, that is, as an existing end, is nothing to be brought into existence because he already exists. Let us summarize the main characteristics of an existing end given by the authors:

- *It is a thing or state of affairs which already exists, i.e., prior to actions which are performed for the sake of it. It is hence not brought into existence by action.*
- It is not a goal of an intentional action.
- It sets limits to other ends, that is, it says which ends are legitimate and which are not.
- It provides reasons for actions and other ends, or it is itself such a reason.
- It is, like all ends, something for the sake of which action is performed.
- It is, like any end, an objective ground of self-determination of the will.

Only a few authors do not just provide examples of what an existing end should *not* be, but try to construct *positive* examples, for example Wood in the passage already quoted:

We are tempted to think that the concept of an end is nothing but the concept of a not yet existing object or state of affairs whose existence we desire and pursue. But we also include among our ends existing things, such as our own self-preservation [...]. They are constantly ends for us, setting limits on what we are willing to do in pursuit of our other ends [...]. In the broadest sense however, an end is anything for the sake of which we act.¹⁴

In this passage, self-preservation shall serve as an example of an existing end. Self-preservation clearly satisfies the following mentioned attributes of an existing end: It sets limits to other (usually all other) ends and end-realizing actions. Thus, in the pursuit of other ends, we will never perform actions that endanger our self-preservation. It is something for the sake of which action is performed. It is itself a reason for action or a source of reasons for action. It is, as we will see, also an objective ground of the self-determination of the will. But what about the, in my opinion, crucial defining property of an existing end? Does self-preservation exist *prior* to actions that are performed for its sake? To find out, we

¹³ Guyer, P. *Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. New York, 2007, p. 95.

¹⁴ Wood, A. *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

should first ask what exactly is meant by self-preservation as an end. As I see it, when we speak of self-preservation as an end of actions, we mean that we *ensure* the continuation of our lives through our actions or intentional refraining from actions. Put more precisely: my decisions and the actions resulting from them lead to *circumstances* in which the continuation of my life is ensured. Seen in this way, self-preservation as the end of actions obviously means something that is *realized* through actions or their omission. This understanding of self-preservation as an end may perhaps be possible only because Wood does not construct his example with sufficient precision. In any case, his example, as he puts it, in no way compels the assumption that there must be such a thing as an existing end. Let us also address an example given by Allison:

For example, when people doff their hats to their country's flag, they usually have no ends to be effected in mind, but they nonetheless act for the sake of an end, namely, the revered object to which a symbolic value is attached.¹⁵

Also, in case of this example one must ask what here exactly the end is. Obviously, it is not the flag as a mere material object, but rather the flag insofar as it has a symbolic value. But how exactly are we to conceive of the connection between action (tipping one's hat to the flag) and the end here? What do I actually *intend* with my action? Do I not intend the *expression* of a patriotic attitude and perhaps also the *actualization* of this attitude in me and for me? If this is true, however, something is indeed realized by the action, namely this expression or actualization of a patriotic attitude. Therefore, also in this case we must state that the given example – perhaps due to its little precise construction – does not force us to assume that there are existing ends.

What does Kant mean by an end of action?

To answer this question, we will discuss the definitions of a practical end that Kant provides in his critical writings. It will turn out that these definitions are very similar and – this is crucial – always present a practical end as something to be *realized*. If the definition of a practical end given in the GMS also conforms to these definitions, this provides very strong evidence that Kant does not know such a thing as an existing end. Then, however, the end in itself must also be thought of as something to be *realized*.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, one finds an 'end according to its transcendental determination'¹⁶, a subjective and an objective end¹⁷, a final end of nature¹⁸, natural ends and ends of freedom¹⁹. This list could be extended and clarifying what the several concepts of an end refer to and how they are related to each other would justify an investigation of its own. Fortunately, in a prominent passage of the third *Critique*, Kant combines the definition of an end in general with a definition of the will. This enables us to reconstruct a general definition of an end of action. In this passage, Kant defines an end as:

¹⁵ Allison, H.E. *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 209.

¹⁶ CPJ, 5: 32.

¹⁷ Cf. CPJ, 5: 34f., 399.

¹⁸ CPJ, 5: 336.

¹⁹ Cf. CPJ, 5: 346, 430.

[...] the object of a concept insofar as the latter is regarded as the cause of the former (the real ground of its possibility); and the causality of a concept with regard to its object is purposiveness (*forma finalis*). Thus where not merely the cognition of an object but the object itself (its form or its existence) as an effect is thought of as possible only through a concept of the latter, there one thinks of an end. The representation of the effect is here the determining ground of its cause, and precedes the latter. [...] The faculty of desire, insofar as it is determinable only through concepts, i.e., to act in accordance with the representation of an end, would be the will.²⁰

The concept here is “cause” of the object, the “real ground” of the “possibility” of the object. This suggests that the object is also ‘real’, in the sense of a (potential) causal effect, consequently a phenomenal thing or state of affairs. An end, then, according to this definition, is a phenomenon whose cause is a “concept,” that is, a *rational* representation. Crucial for us is that the concept here shall be at the same time the representation of an “effect” (*italics by R.P.*), thus represents something to be *realized*. The third sentence of the passage now confronts us with some difficulty. For not the “representation of the effect” itself is cause here, as it was in the first sentence. Rather, it is “the determining ground” (*italics by R.P.*) of the cause. That which is determined Kant makes clear in the last sentence. It is the will. For the will is a faculty of desire that is determinable to actions “only through concepts, i.e., [...] in accordance with the representation of an end”. Accordingly, the will is understood as practical reason.²¹

Let us hold: *In this passage Kant speaks of an end when the will is determined by a concept in such a way that it causes the object of this concept, i.e., the “representation of the effect” conceived in it. This effect is a phenomenal thing or state of affairs brought about by intentional action. Thus, according to this passage, an end is clearly something to be realized by intentional action.*

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant writes that

[...] reason alone is capable of discerning the connection of means with their purposes (so that the will could also be defined as the faculty of ends, inasmuch as these are always determining grounds of the faculty of desire in accordance with principles) [...].²²

Let us first hold: The connection between means and purposes is clearly a *causal* connection. Now Kant further claims: Because reason is the faculty of insight into causal relations between means and purposes, we can define will as the faculty of ends. Purposes must therefore have something to do with insights into causal relations. Kant now further defines ends here as “determining grounds of the faculty of desire in accordance with principles”. As is well known, in the famous definition of the GMSII Kant defines the will as “the faculty to act *in accordance with the representation of laws*”. So, principles are obviously represented laws. If we follow this definition of a principle, ends are determining grounds according to principles that have the form of represented laws. But ends at the same time always represent an *object*, so they cannot be mere representations of laws. Rather, the object is presented in the end in such a way that,

²⁰ CPJ, 5: 219f.

²¹ On the concept of will, end and purposiveness in the CPJ cf.: Berger, L. *Kants Philosophie des Schönen. Eine kommentarische Interpretation zu den §§1–22 der Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Baden-Baden, 2022, S. 555–594.

²² CPrR, 5: 58f.

in a manner of speaking, it implies the idea of laws. This can be understood to mean that ends represent an object in such a way that insights into causal relations can be gained from the representation. If, to take up one of Kant's examples on the CPrR²³, I want to eat bread, bread is therefore, generally speaking, my end, I have to represent bread in such a way that from this representation insights can be generated, how to make bread, etc. So, I must have a *concept* of what bread is. Thus, there is no notable difference between the definitions of an end as put forward in the second and the third *Critique*.

In the *Metaphysics of Morals* the concept of an end is defined as follows: "An *end* is the object of free choice, through the representation of which choice is determined to an action to bring this object about."²⁴ For an adequate interpretation it is crucial to have in mind that Kant in this definition refers to *free* choice (*freie Willkür*). For regarding the first paragraph of the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*²⁵ free choice can be defined as a *conceptually* and *rationaly* determined faculty of desire which at the same time is accompanied by the consciousness of really being capable of performing the corresponding actions.²⁶ If then this free choice is determined by the representation of an object to carry out actions which produce the represented object, Kant speaks of an end. This concept of an end can therefore be added easily to the list of definitions given so far. Here, too, an end is the *rational* representation of an object, which at the same time is the cause of the object's reality. We can now turn to the *Groundwork*:

The will is thought as a faculty of determining itself to action *in accord with the representation of certain laws*. And such a faculty can be encountered only in rational beings. Now that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the *end*, and this, if it is given through mere reason, must be equally valid for all rational beings. By contrast, what contains merely the ground of the possibility of the action whose effect is the end is called the *means*.²⁷

The idea of an end that is the objective ground of the will's self-determination becomes clearer if we consider the concept of the practical good as it is defined in the context of the first definition of will in *Groundwork* II:

Practical *good*, however, is that which determines the will by means of representations of reason, hence not from subjective causes, but objectively, i.e., from grounds that are valid for every rational being as such.²⁸

If one considers only this sentence, separated from the context, one might think that the practical good coincides with the morally good. For according to this passage, the practical good is "objective" insofar as it represents a will-determining ground valid for *every* rational being. This interpretation is misleading, however, as a brief glance at the very context of this sentence reveals. For it refers to Kant's shortly before given introduction of the concept of an imperative in general, that is, before the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. In the sentence directly preceding the quotation, Kant writes that imperatives say, "that it would be good to do or refrain from something". Imperatives –

²³ Cf. CPrR, 5: 26.

²⁴ MM, 5: 384.

²⁵ *The Relation of the Faculties of the Human Mind to the Moral Laws*, cf. MM, 5: 211–214.

²⁶ Cf. MM, 5: 211.

²⁷ GMS, 4: 427, 19–26.

²⁸ GMS, 4: 413, 18–21.

both hypothetical and categorical – thus represent the practical good. The will, according to the most prominent definition of the GMS, is defined, as is known, as “the faculty to act *in accordance with the representation of laws*”²⁹. The will, we are further told, is therefore “nothing other than practical reason” because “for the derivation of actions from laws *reason is required*”³⁰. Such derivations from laws or “objective laws”³¹ of reason further give us actions which are “recognized as objectively necessary” or “recognize[d] as practically necessary, i.e., as good.”³² Thus, that imperatives “say that it would be good to do or refrain from something” means that they represent practically necessary actions, that is, actions derived from (objective) laws of reason. In so far as they are derived *solely* from objective laws of reason (and there is no reason to understand Kant differently here) the actions thus derived also apply to every rational being, in such a way at least that every rational being must recognize them as – relatively or absolutely – good. It be repeated: Kant gives this definition of the practical good before his distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives; consequently, it applies to both – and thus to a sensibly affected as well as a morally determined will. Referring to this understanding of practical objectivity and goodness, it is natural to understand the property of an end to be the *objective* ground of the self-determination of the will in such a way that an end owes itself to the derivation from objective laws of reason – and is rational to that extent.

However, the *will itself* is already the faculty of self-determination according to the representation of rational laws (“in accordance with the representation of certain laws”). An end, as a *ground* of this self-determination, must therefore be more than a faculty that gives rational representations. What this additional property is, in my opinion, can be understood by looking at the definition of a means, which follows immediately after the definition of an end: “By contrast, what contains merely the ground of the possibility of the action whose effect is the end is called the *means*.” Thus, a means enables actions that bring about and hence realize an end. If in the very context of the definition of an end a means is defined as that which brings about an end, it is more than natural to conclude that an end is something to be *realized*. Thus, what is true for the other writings discussed is also true for the GMS: *An end is something that is brought about or realized by intentional action, the ground or cause of which is a rational representation*.

In sum: We can confirm that the definition of an end given in the *Groundwork* is no exception to the discussed definitions in other writings. Hence, in the *Groundwork* as well as in CPJ, MM and CPrR Kant understands a practical end as something to be effected by a rational representation. Furthermore, in the *Groundwork* Kant introduces the end in itself immediately after the definition of ends in general discussed above. Indeed, it seems as if he gives this general definition precisely with the aim of leading up to the concept of the end in itself. Up to this point, then, there is very much to be said for the assumption that the end itself is something to be realized.

²⁹ GMS, 4: 412, 17f.

³⁰ GMS, 4: 412, 29f.

³¹ GMS, 4: 413, 04.

³² GMS, 4: 412, 32f.

II. The end in itself as something to be realized

Now that the existence thesis has been shown to be hardly plausible nor compatible with the textual basis, we must discuss what it precisely means that the end in itself is something to be realized. We will first examine whether the concept of the end in itself has a kind of general content, which thus applies to all things Kant calls ends in themselves. Secondly, I will argue for a close structural parallel between empirical ends and hypothetical imperatives on the one hand and the end in itself and categorical imperative on the other. Thirdly, keeping in mind the results achieved, we will consider what kind of actions the categorical imperative would precisely have to prescribe demanding the realization of the end in itself.

Does the concept of the end in itself have a genuine content?

As already noted, Kant refers *prima facie* to many different things as ends in themselves and attributes absolute value to them. I, nevertheless, believe the concept of the end in itself has a primary or genuine content underlying all the determinations of the end in itself. Grasping this content would enable us to understand why and in what respect Kant is justified in ascribing the property of being an end in itself to these different things.³³ In the present paper, however, we must limit ourselves to identifying the primary or genuine content of the concept of the end in itself. How exactly this genuine content relates to the many different determinations of end in itself remains to be explored in future papers. Let us begin with the following sentence in which the concept of an end in itself occurs for the first time in the *Groundwork*:

But suppose there were something *whose existence in itself* had an absolute worth, something that, *as end in itself*, could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it and only in it alone would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, i.e., of a practical law.³⁴

Directly after this sentence, we read that 'the human being, and in general every rational being, *exists as end in itself* [...]'³⁵. Kant then traces this existence of rational beings as ends in themselves back to their 'nature'³⁶. For rational beings 'are called persons, because *their nature* already marks them out as ends in themselves [...]'³⁷. By this 'nature' of rational beings, Kant obviously means a property which distinguishes a rational (and willing) being *per se* from all other beings. This property must be attributed to *each* of these beings *a priori* as a defining aspect of their genuine constitution. Obviously, what *per se* distinguishes all rational beings from other beings is rationality or *reason*. Since, here, we are dealing with the ground of the categorical imperative, i.e., of a *practical* rule, we are concerned, more precisely, with all rational and *willing* beings; their

³³ Cf. Porcheddu, R.: *Der Begriff des Zwecks an sich selbst in Kants 'Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten'*. Berlin; New York, 2016, S. 20–26, 149–153; Idem., "The Relationship between Dignity and the End in Itself in Kant's *Groundwork* for the *Metaphysics of Morals*", *Kant's Theory of Value*. Berlin; New York, 2022, pp. 105–123.

³⁴ GMS, 4: 428, 03–06.

³⁵ GMS, 4: 428, 07.

³⁶ GMS, 4: 428, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, italics by R. Porcheddu.

defining property is therefore *practical* reason. Inasmuch as practical reason is a defining property of all rational beings, it belongs to them independently of all contingent properties and empirical determinations. Hence, as this a priori property of all rational and willing beings, practical reason can be called “pure”. The concept of pure practical reason thus denotes practical reason as that faculty that belongs to all rational and willing beings per se. If then, rational nature is the ground on which rational beings (persons) are ends in themselves; and if rational nature is nothing but practical reason, then practical reason is the genuine end in itself. The introductory passage of the end in itself thus provides textual evidence for the thesis that the end in itself in essence is nothing but pure practical reason.

It is worthwhile to take a somewhat closer look at the line of argument Kant provides in that passage as doing so allows a more precise insight into the relation of rational nature and the rational or human being as an end in itself. Shortly before the introduction of the formula of humanity, we find a claim highlighted by Kant himself: “*Rational nature exists as end in itself*”.³⁸ The fact that Kant himself emphasizes this sentence is important because it can be interpreted as an indication that this sentence functions as the last step of a line of argument. This line of argument would contain the following steps:

1. The ‘human being, and in general every rational being, *exists as end in itself* [...]’³⁹.
2. Their ‘nature’ marks out humans and all rational beings as ends in themselves (and, therefore, they are called persons).
3. Their nature endows them with this property because this nature itself originally and genuinely exists as an end in itself. Rational beings are thus, one might say, mere individuations or manifestations of rational nature, the latter itself existing genuinely as end in itself.

If this interpretation is correct, then existence as an end in itself can be attributed to rational beings and, consequently, to human beings only in a kind of derivative sense, i.e., only in the form of the abovementioned “individuation” of pure practical reason.⁴⁰ This finding could *prima facie* appear as confirming the existence thesis since the rational nature, respectively, the rational being, *exists as an end in itself*. However, it all depends on how we understand the term *existence* here. Indeed, the following will show that this existence is to be understood in a very close parallel to empirical ends.

A structural Parallel between empirical and pure will

Taking a brief glance at the principle of autonomy and the systematic reasons for its introduction enables us to draw a clear picture of some crucial structural parallels between empirical and pure willing. Tracing these structural parallels will help us to understand what the categorical imperative is prescribing

³⁸ GMS, 4: 429, 02f.

³⁹ GMS, 4: 428, 07.

⁴⁰ This interpretation would explain, for example, why in the formula of humanity, we must use ‘humanity... *in the person* of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means’ (GMS, 4: 429, 10–12, italics by R. Porcheddu). Morality, in this reading, would consist in bringing the capacity of pure practical reason, individualized in each person, to actual, real unfolding.

under the presupposition that the end in itself is an end to be realized. In the following passage, Kant introduces the principle of autonomy in the *Groundwork's* line of argument:

The ground of all practical legislation, namely, lies *objectively in the rule* and the form of universality, which makes it capable of being a law (at least a law of nature) [...], but *subjectively* it lies in the [...] end in itself [...]: from this now follows [...] the idea of *the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law*.⁴¹

In this sentence, Kant traces practical legislation in general back to two elements: the rule's strict universality or character as a law and an end in itself on which the legislation is based. The systematic reasons for grounding practical legislation on these two elements, and consequently for the introduction of the principle of autonomy, can be summarized in the following way: In *Groundwork II*, Kant develops the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives starting from the concept of an imperative in general, which he defines as a necessitating expression of a rational determination of the will.⁴² An imperative is thus always the expression of a will as being determined in a certain manner. This is also true of the *categorical* imperative. The categorical imperative is an expression of the pure will that – since the categorical imperative is a law – must be a law-giving will. Because Kant understands the concept of an end as a defining aspect of the concept of the will in general – specifically, as the “objective ground of the self-determination to action”⁴³ – there must be an end of the pure, law-giving will. This end is the end in itself.

If we assume that the end in itself is something to be realized, and if, in addition, we recall that it is introduced by Kant as the ground of the categorical imperative, then we can legitimately extend the above-outlined parallel between the empirical will and the pure will.⁴⁴ For this purpose, one should first recall how Kant understands the connection between empirical ends and *hypothetical* imperatives. He traces the validity of hypothetical imperatives back to an “analytical”⁴⁵ relationship between the willing of an end and the willing of the end-realizing means. This is because, to will an object, in his view, means to determine oneself as the cause of an action whose effect is the reality of the willed object. Means are the prerequisites of the object-realizing, i.e., end-oriented actions. Hypothetical imperatives express, in a coercing manner, the action that is analytically inherent in the willing of an end. An end, understood as the action-motivating representation of an object, would then be the *ground* of the corresponding hypothetical imperatives.

A possible parallel between the empirical and the moral or pure will would read as follows: On the side of the moral will, the end in itself in its function as the ground of the categorical imperative would be an action-motivating representation of an end to be *realized*. Since, as we have seen, there is good reason to identify the end in itself with pure practical reason, the content of the representation grounding the categorical imperative would be pure practical reason as

⁴¹ GMS, 4: 431, 09–18.

⁴² Cf. GMS, 4: 413, 09 – 415, 05.

⁴³ GMS, 4: 427, 21–23.

⁴⁴ On the parallel between categorical and hypothetical imperatives, see Schönecker, D. and Schmidt, E. *Op. cit.*, pp. 90–92.

⁴⁵ Cf. GMS, 417–419.

something to be realized. Accordingly, the categorical imperative should prescribe actions that realize pure practical reason. Therefore, the following formula could be an adequate expression of the categorical imperative: *Act only in such a way that through your volition and action pure practical reason becomes real.* The following remarks intend to present textual evidence for precisely this interpretation of the categorical imperative.

The content of the categorical imperative

The following section will address passages supporting the claim that the categorical imperative represents and prescribes nothing other but pure practical reason and its reality. We shall begin with another brief glance at Kant's concept of autonomy in the *Groundwork*. In at least two passages, Kant identifies autonomy not merely as self-legislation, e.g., as the faculty of law-giving, but as the property of practical reason to *be* a law for itself.⁴⁶ He gives this description (for example) in the first section of *Groundwork* III, in which he presents his well-known thesis of the analytical connection between freedom and morality. This section begins with a definition of the will, followed by a definition of freedom:

The *will* is a species of causality of living beings, insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that quality of this causality by which it can be effective independently of alien causes *determining* it [...].⁴⁷

If one takes this definition seriously, free actions are performed due to the will's *own, immanent* causes, which are not "alien [...] determining causes". The question arises how such an immanent cause is to be understood. Kant contrasts the negative concept of freedom as formulated in the definition quoted above (freedom as a *lack* of alien causes) with a positive concept of freedom, i.e., freedom of the will as *autonomy*. This positive concept of freedom is put forward in the abovementioned self-reflexive formulation: "[...] what else, then, could the freedom of the will be, except autonomy, i.e., the quality of the will of *being* a law to itself?"⁴⁸ If the will *is* a law for itself and at the same time *gives* itself the law, then the given law must obviously be the will itself. However, what does it mean that a practical rule, i.e., the law, is the will? To understand what is meant by this, we must first bracket the law's property of being a rule and focus on its content. Also, we should speak of practical reason instead of the will.

Thus, the law of autonomous practical reason demands an action that is done solely out of pure practical reason and, moreover, is carried out solely for the sake of pure practical reason. Since Kant defines the will as practical rationality, morality – understood as action determined and caused by the pure representation of practical rationality – would be a *pure self-reflexiveness of practical rationality*. In other words, morality, in Kant's view, means that the will wills nothing other but *itself*. The categorical imperative would then be the expression of this self-reflexive willing, addressed to a will that also knows incentives and therefore does not necessarily do what is rationally required. The categorical imperative is thus nothing else but the expression of the pure practical reason under empirical conditions.

⁴⁶ Cf. GMS, 4: 440, 17f.; 447, 02.

⁴⁷ GMS, 4: 446, 07–1.

⁴⁸ GMS, 4: 446, 24 – 447, 02, italics by R. Porcheddu.

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Понятие цели с философской точки зрения.

Заметки об отношении между кантовским понятием цели и цели в себе

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Цель данной статьи – показать, что та интерпретация цели в себе, которая широко принята в исследованиях по критической философии Канта, по меньшей мере заслуживает отдельного обсуждения. Под целью в себе я понимаю ее интерпретацию как так называемой существующей цели (т.е. того, ради чего мы предпринимаем действия, но что мы при этом не осознаем просто потому, что оно уже существует).

Автор отстаивает позицию, согласно которой данная интерпретация не учитывает существенный аспект цели в себе, т.е. его свойства быть *целью*. Бытие целью, целью в себе, должно согласовываться с кантовским общим определением практической цели и, следовательно, быть чем-то, что может быть *реализовано*.

Ключевые слова: Кант, этика, категорический императив, «Основы метафизики нравственности», достоинство, цель в себе, ценность

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