

Happiness Through Virtue

The Egoistic Reasons for Morality

by

Christopher Speth

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Chapter 1

The Hypothetical Nature of Moral Reasons

Human beings are obsessed with the process of justification. As soon as toddlers have a sufficient grasp on language, they ask *why* they must eat broccoli even though they don't like the taste. Schoolchildren want to know the *reason* that two and two make four. Teenagers told to behave certain ways will ask "What for?" and will be unimpressed when the answer is "Because I said so." Upon reaching adulthood, we may largely stop asking others these question of justification, but the dialogue continues internally as we undertake the practice of justifying our own actions and beliefs. Politicians, coworkers, and friends all appeal to us in terms of why we ought to vote for them, do a project, or keep their company. Everything we do or think can have reasons supporting or opposing it, and as we will see, human beings cannot act or believe without consulting at least some of these reasons.

Still, there are some things which we like to believe are above question - things which provide their own reasons somehow. In particular is the topic I wish to address in this paper: morality. Commands like 'do not kill,' 'do not steal,' and 'do not cheat,' are so ingrained in our upbringing that I think I would be taken aback if a grown adult skeptically asked me why he ought to follow these rules. I may distrust this person, and feel unsafe around him. Yet his question is not without merit. Why should we carefully scrutinize our reasons for dozens of other decisions, yet remain wholly unreflective when it comes to morality? If morality really is as necessary to the existence of a worthwhile human being as we are taught, we should be able to provide reasons for why this is so. While we may

deeply *believe* that moral behavior is right, we ought to be able to *justify* why this is so through arguments and the provision of reasons.

As it turns out, we are not without recourse in answering the moral skeptic. One answer, given by Immanuel Kant, is that morality is rationally required. According to Kant, there are certain commands that an agent must heed, regardless of her desires. The requirement to heed these commands (called imperatives) is based on what Kant calls pure practical reason. Pure practical reason, Kant argues, is a faculty of all rational beings that allows them to reason about what they ought to do from a universal perspective (that is, a perspective that all human beings can access and share). The conclusions reached by reasoning from this perspective are given to us in the form of categorical imperatives. The appellation 'categorical' puts these imperatives in contrast with hypothetical imperatives, which are commands to act a specific way *if* some sort of precondition is met. Imperatives that are categorical have no precondition; they apply universally and without regard to any desires of the agent. The difference between these two imperatives will become more clear as the chapter progresses, but it is important at the outset to be aware that the two types of imperatives are thought by Kant to be mutually exclusive, and that only categorical imperatives can yield imperatives of morality.¹

Kant faces numerous criticisms regarding the existence and character of categorical imperatives. Many of the criticisms regard the specific way in which he formulates his defense of pure practical reason. To evaluate these criticisms, we would need a full understanding of the specifics of Kant's argument, no small task in light of the volume of work he published on the subject. Instead of pursuing these criticisms, we will look at philosophers who have raised questions about the task of creating a categorical

¹ Kant. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, sec. II.

imperative more generally. Their arguments stem not from Kant's specific formulation, but the logical problems that categorical imperatives pose as such. These criticisms, if valid, will establish the need to move away from Kant in establishing an answer to the question 'why be moral?' They may also give us a direction to move in when attempting to answer this question outside of a framework of Kantianism and categorical imperatives.

To understand the nature of and problems with Kant's endeavor, we will first turn to Philippa Foot. Kant's overall goal is to defend moral imperatives as a system of categorical imperatives that apply to all human beings. In Foot's essay, *Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives*, Foot discusses why such an endeavor will not work. The words 'should' or 'ought', says Foot, can be used in two distinct ways. The first way is hypothetical - we say that we should go to the show or that we ought to eat our vegetables, with the explicit or implicit caveat that doing so will satisfy an end the agent has (pleasure and health, in the above examples). This is contrasted to the moral 'should,' which we think applies regardless of a person's particular interests or desires. Your claim that I should be kind will not be rebuffed by my response that I do not want to do so. You were not advising me based on what I wanted to do, but were instead giving me a general rule that I should follow regardless of my personal preference. If all Kant meant was that morality is categorical insofar as the 'should' statements regarding it are not predicated on any specific desire of the agent, it would be easily proved.² Any claim could be categorical in this sense as long as it was asserted without an appeal or implicit appeal to an agent's personal reasons. "You should like classical music" could count as a categorical imperative, so long as the statement is being said because the speaker believes it is a universal law that everyone ought to follow.

² *Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives* in *Foundation of Ethics*. pp. 287.

Foot believes Kant wants more than this however, and it is in the quest for this stronger version of the categorical imperative that Foot finds problems. It is understandable that Kant would want to strengthen the sense in which morality is categorical. After all, explains Foot, there are things that are categorical in the first sense that we do not want to equate with the gravity of morality. Any rule that is stipulated universally as an end in itself, such as the rules of etiquette, would be on the same footing as moral imperatives. If someone tells me that I should not put my elbows on the table, she will not retract her statement simply because I say “I don’t give a whit about etiquette.” She will maintain that it is a rule everyone should follow, regardless of their feeling concerning the rule.³ Even so, I am seemingly under no compulsion to obey the rules of etiquette that she gives me. I can choose to live a life completely devoid of etiquette and arguably be none the worse for it.

Because I do not care about etiquette, the assertion that I am being improper does not have any effect on me. If I do not care about being proper, says Foot, being informed that my behavior is against etiquette will not move me to change my behavior. I may even believe that I am in fact breaking the rules of etiquette, but without the desire to conform with those rules, this belief does not provide me with a reasons, and therefore cannot elicit action.

Though etiquette is supposed to be a thing that people “just have to do,” (at least, that’s the position of those interested in etiquette) it is not clear in what sense we have to do it. Foot contrasts this to a more intelligible requirement, such as “you are sick and have to stay in bed.” Here, the ‘have to’ operates as giving an imperative reliant on the fact that you want to relieve your sickness. If you say “I do not care about getting well,” then it will no longer do for me say you have to stay in bed. My saying so was actually

³ Ibid. pp. 288.

based on the assumption that you wanted to get well. So again, we see that stating that someone ought to do something is, in the case of hypothetical imperatives, an assertion that the agent's ends will be satisfied by performing the action. Etiquette, by contrast, does not rest on any assumptions about what the agent wants or doesn't want. As such, we may ask "have to for what purpose?" to claims of etiquette requirements.⁴ In absence of an answer to this question, it is hard to say what reasons we have to follow the rules of etiquette.

What Kant is arguing for are not imperatives that are categorical in the way that imperatives of etiquette may be said to be categorical, but imperatives that both apply to everyone regardless of their interests and desires, *and* give reasons for everyone to follow the rules they specify. In other words, it is a categorical imperative in the weak sense outlined above, but with the added feature of being a source of motivation in itself. If someone asks "what for?" concerning a moral categorical imperative, Kant's answer will be that following the imperative is an end in itself, and needs no further justification. As such, perception that an act is moral is regarded as a sufficient condition to have a reason to do it. No corresponding desire is required.

One strategy for showing how a moral imperative might be both applicable to everyone regardless of their interests and necessarily reason-giving is to argue that moral imperatives are rationally required, and that to fail to be motivated by a moral imperative involves some kind of irrationality. According to this approach, all rational beings, to the extent that they are rational, would have a reason to act morally. This reason would fall directly out of the content of rationality, without the need of any particular belief or desire to use that rationality *on*. This is different from hypothetical imperatives, which only give reasons due to the contingent desires held by the agent.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 289.

For example, if an agent desires food, she will have a reason to eat it. In the categorical imperative offered by Kant, there is no 'if' statement; the reasons we have stand without a desire that they are aiming at.

Foot doesn't believe the existence (or even the possibility) of such a categorical imperative is self-evident, however. "Irrational actions," says Foot, "are those in which a man in some way defeats his own purposes, doing what is calculated to be disadvantageous or to frustrate his ends. Immorality does not *necessarily* involve any such thing."⁵ If we accept Foot's definition of irrationality, it appears that nothing can be categorical in the sense that Kant wants to say moral imperatives are. This is because all reasons are according the ends we hold, while the categorical imperatives are supposed to be requirements that are binding regardless of ends. That many of us do frustrate our own ends by acting against morality is beside the point; for Kant's categorical imperative to succeed, it needs to be that rationality itself reels against the violation of moral imperatives. Showing that violating moral imperatives damages our attainment of our ends only shows that we have a hypothetical reason to be moral.

Having a reason to do something that is not based in any interest or desire we have strikes Foot as odd. She suggests that perhaps what we experience when we think of moral requirements is not a reason to be moral, but rather the *feeling* that there is a reason in light of our psychological conditioning. If there is indeed something that makes us believe that morality is a special case of an imperative that gives us a reason without depending on our desires or interests, we ought to be able to say what that something is. In absence of an account of how a categorical imperative can give us reasons, Foot prefers to think of morality as another hypothetical. The reasons we have for following

⁵ Ibid.

moral imperatives may be quite diverse, but in absence of some reason, Foot cannot see any way that an agent could be motivated to moral action.

If we understand categorical imperatives as Kant intended - as imperatives that provide a reason for action without regard to any end but themselves - then it looks like moral imperatives are not any more categorical than rules of etiquette. In either case, reasons may be requested and rejected if they are inconsistent with the desires of the agent. That many people do in fact have a desire to be moral does not make moral imperatives categorical. It only means that many people do in fact have a reason to follow moral imperatives. As Foot stresses however, this reason is not due to the special status of moral imperatives as rationally necessary, but the fact that justice, openness, and liberty are the kinds of things that often arouse devotion in an agent. The agent who is not aroused by them, however, will not come to be so aroused if someone posits to him that he ought to feel affected by moral imperatives. In other words, there is nothing in the nature of moral imperatives themselves that gives them automatic motivating force. Like all other imperatives examined thus far, the agent will need reasons to justify acting on morality.

James Dreier follows Foot in criticizing Kant's answer to the question "why be moral?" Where Foot's goal is to show that Kant has not established how it is that we can have a reason to act where we have no ends to attain (and thus, he has not established how a categorical imperative of morality can be possible), Dreier goes further, arguing that moral claims can and need to be justified for them to provide reasons. This is at odds with Kant's notion of a categorical imperative, which is self-justifying in a deep sense. Dreier's conclusion is that as the argument stands right now (though he does grant that the Kantian is not completely without hope), there is reason to believe that

moral imperatives are not categorical. I will discuss how Dreier reaches this conclusion momentarily, but in order to fully understand Dreier's argument we must first look at the distinction of different types of reasons as drawn by Bernard Williams.

According to Williams, there are two ways we can think about reasons: first, we may say we have a reason to act insofar as it serves some motive that we possess. If either we lose the motive or come to realize that acting in the proscribed way does not serve the motive, then we no longer have a reason to act in that way. So if I have a motive to be a good dancer, I have a reason to take dancing lessons. But if I learn that the dancing lessons are for salsa dancing when really I wanted to tango, then I will no longer have a reason to take the lessons. Furthermore, if I decide that dancing really isn't for me, I will similarly lose the reason to take dancing lessons. Hence, any reason I have is predicated on the motives I may possess that are served by the dance class. Williams calls my reason to take dancing lessons an internal reason, because it 'emerges,' so to speak, from my subjective motivational set - a theoretical set that contains all my motives, desires, predilections, and any other datum about me that affects the kind of things I seek after. To use William's terms, the subjective motivational set contains all the desires and "embodying commitments" of the agent.⁶

The other conception of reason, called external reasons, is a reason to act that is *not* dependent on any motive being in my subjective motivational set. Most often, external reasons are offered by others, as when a father tells his son that he ought to join the military in order to carry on his family's tradition. The son may not care a whit about family tradition, and will therefore have no internal reason to accept the reason his father has offered him. Therefore, external reasons cannot by themselves explain why an agent acts in the way he does. This is because, as we have seen, external reasons

⁶ *Internal and External Reasons* in *Foundations of Ethics*. pp. 294

can exist without giving the agent any motivation to act. If this is true however, then clearly something being an external reason is not a sufficient condition for motivating an agent to action. Being motivated in some way is the only explanation we have to offer for the intentional actions of agent however, so it looks as if external reasons are not sufficient to explain why an agent acts.⁷

This makes the term “external *reason*” seem like a bit of a misnomer: a reason that does not motivate us is not really a reason at all, at least not in the first-personal sense of the word. Yet it is the case that sometimes people can tell us we ought to care about things, and this brings us in fact to desire them and makes them reasons for us. And this looks like an external reason. To explain this process, Williams argues we need to introduce the concept of beliefs. We might come to believe that an external reason ought move us to action, and this belief will be sufficient to motivate us. The problem comes when we try to account for where this belief comes from. If deliberating on an external reason brings us to realize that we are motivated to act in the way proscribed by the reason, it will be because we recognize it as a reason in terms of our subjective motivational set. In this case, the ‘external reason’ merely turns out to be an internal reason that we were previously unaware of or have come to endorse over the course of the conversation. If the father’s speech to the son stirs him to care about his family tradition, his subjective motivational set will reflect this. Either he cared all along about his family’s tradition, or something his father said changed his mind and got him to care. Either way, he has a reason because he was able to internalize the reason his father offered him.

On the other hand, his father may fail to change his son’s mind about joining the military. No matter what his father says, the son will reply “Yes, but family tradition is not

⁷ Ibid. pp. 295.

a reason for me.” The son is in effect say that family tradition is not part of his subjective motivational set, and as such there is no motive he is satisfying by joining the military. As long as this remains the case, the agent will have no grounds on which to accept the reason he is offered.

Therefore, if a reason is something that motivates the agent, the only reasons that exist are internal reasons. External reasons are nothing more than claims from others that certain reasons should be internalized. So long as they aren't however, they cannot induce an agent to act, and therefore they do not function as reasons.

We could try to conceive of external reasons as reasons that exist regardless of our prior to motivation. This creates a problem in the process of deliberation however, as reasons are reasons *for* something. Reasons are in reference to some end, and it is difficult to see what ends we could have without any motives. When contemplating reasons we ask, “the agent ought to *act for what purpose?*” If an agent has no subjective motivational set, then how can he have reasons to do anything?

Perhaps external reason claims mean that a given reason would be an internal reason for an agent if she were thinking rationally. If this is the case, however, we are using the word ‘reason’ very loosely. We are not describing anything that actually motivates the agent, but merely something that *could*, in other circumstances. As such, this reason is not a reason for the agent. Some philosophers have taken to calling this a normative reason;⁸ it cannot be taken as a motivating reasons. For a reason to motivate, it must first be internalized.⁹ So under this conception, external reasons do no better at

⁸ I mean this in the weak sense that is captured by the limited way in which imperatives of etiquette are normative according to Foot. They tell us what we should do, but do not themselves provide a reason for why we should do so. They are merely a *claim* that an agent ought to behave a certain way, not a *reason* why she should do so.

⁹ Ibid. pp 296-7.

explaining why we do what we do, nor do they get at the reasons we have to act from the first-personal perspective.

With a firmer grasp on what it means to have a reason, we now turn to Dreier's argument against Kant and the moral categorical imperative. The question 'why be moral?', says Dreier, is a question for practical justification of morality. This is a request for the defender of morality to give reasons to the skeptical agent that are capable of moving her to act morally. What the skeptic is requesting here is an internal reason. As such, replying with a normative reason will not satisfy her. Instead, we must appeal to her subjective motivational set. To do this, Dreier says, we must talk to her in terms of one or more of her particular desires and the rules of rationality: in order for me to satisfy the agent's request for a reason to perform any action, I must tell her why doing so should matter to her. The most obvious answer is that performing the action is a means to getting some result, and the agent wants the result. Because it would be rational for the agent to act in light of her desire for the result, we say she has a *reason* to perform the action.¹⁰ For instance, the woman who desires to be a great guitarist will have a reason to take guitar lessons and practice daily. To show why an agent ought to be motivated to act in a certain way (i.e. have a reason), we will need to ascertain something they desire and show why the proposed acts is a means to fulfilling that desire.

This explanation of reasons revisits Foot's criticism of the moral categorical imperative and poses some problems for the Kantian. Kant argues that the reasons we have to act morally are not dependent on our desires, but on the nature of rationality

¹⁰ *Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality in Ethics and Practical Reason*. pp. 82-4.

itself. To investigate this claim, Dreier looks at cases where people do in fact recognize their moral obligations without acting on them. Under Kant's view, this would simply mean that the agent is being irrational. But Dreier thinks that in claiming so, Kant confuses two types of reasons. Moral reasons are *normative reasons*: they are reasons we ought to do things, according to some standard. In Kant's view, we ought to act on moral reasons because they are categorical imperatives. We may question normative reasons however, and when we do so we are asking for a *motivating reason*. We are asking "Yes, but why ought I care for what the categorical imperatives are?" The request for a motivating reason is not a request to cite a normative reason for why we *should* do something. Instead, it is a question of why the agent should care about that particular *should*. "A motivating reason is a reason that *someone has* to do something," says Dreier.¹¹ It is these reasons that explain why an agent does what she does. True to his Humean tradition, Dreier argues that these reasons are wholly dependent on the wants and desires of the agent. So we see once again that an agent does not have a reason for action just because he has been given a normative reason. The agent must also internally accept the reason as his own.

It is important to note that normative reasons may in fact *appeal* to the agent's subjective motivational set, and are thereby attempts to provide motivating reasons. If I tell you that you ought to see *Jaws*, I am giving you a normative reason. If I am suggesting the movie to you on the basis of what I believe to be your subjective motivational set, I am giving you a normative reason based on what I think can motivate you. I may not even like *Jaws*, but I can still recommend it to you based on what I believe your subjective motivational set to be. As we will see soon, however, me giving you a normative reason does not necessarily entail an appeal to your subjective

¹¹ Ibid. My emphasis. pp. 86.

motivational set. I may say “You ought to go vote in order to do your part for the country,” and in doing so I will be giving you a normative reason. But if you don’t care about doing your part for the country, or don’t believe that voting is at all related to such things, my ‘ought’ statement will fail to motivate you. Nonetheless, knowing this may not change my suggestion to you. I might think that you *ought* to care about such things, even if you do not. To recall what we have established from Foot, the second normative statement is a weak categorical imperative, whereas the first is hypothetical.

If we take the hypothetical/categorical distinction from Foot and apply it to Dreier’s endeavor, we will see that it is possible that an agent will not have a *motivating* reason to follow a *normative* reason, since having a motivating reason is a matter of having certain desires. If the agent does not desire to be moral, he will not have a motivating reason to do so. This is not to say that the agent is not in some sense morally wrong. Making this judgment is independent from the reasons an agent has to act. The Kantian may maintain that there is indeed a reason to be moral, but this reason will be external if the agent does not accept it. As such, it will be incapable of motivating the agent without the desire to be moral in their subjective motivational set. What we cannot grant the Kantian, says Dreier, is that the failure of an agent to heed morality is therefore irrational. The Humean conception of irrationality is that an agent is irrational iff he fails to take an internal reason he has to do something.¹² In the case of ignoring or denying a normative reason to be moral, only an external reason has been rejected. The agent has

¹² According to Christine Korsgaard, this is a case of *true irrationality*. True Irrationality consists in either 1) choosing a means insufficient to our ends, even though we are aware that the means we choose *are* in fact insufficient or 2) failing to take a known means to our ends. ‘Ends’ here is used in the strong sense, as in the thing we actually end up pursuing. This precludes the possibility that we are not taking the means to our ends because the ends themselves are less important to us than other ends we can currently pursue. *Skepticism about Practical Reason in Foundation of Ethics*. pp. 304.

no motivating reason to act morally. His failure to act morally, while arguably wrong, is not irrational in the way Kant argues.

The preceding paragraph does reveal that Dreier thinks at least one type of normative reason does in fact provide motivating reasons for all agents. These are reasons of rationality. Reasons of rationality are normative in that we *ought* to follow them. They take the form “if you want X, you ought to Y.” Unlike explanatory reasons, which merely say why we in fact do what we do, we may fail to heed reasons of rationality. And if we do, it is a failure of our rationality.¹³ We will see in a bit why an agent’s desires are not relevant to rules of rationality as they are to other normative reasons. For now, we return to the Kantian attempt to make moral reasons rationally required.

For the Kantian to defend the claim that morality is rationally required, she will have to show that morality gives reasons of rationality. Dreier doubts that this can be done, on account of the fact that reasons of morality seem to function differently than reasons of rationality. If someone asks why she ought to be moral, we understand her question and can give reasons. If we can instill in her the desire to be moral, we will have convinced her to act morally.

Contrast this to someone who is skeptical about the rules of rationality (particularly, Dreier uses the Means/End principle, which says that if an agent desires X and believes Y is a means to X, the agent has a reason to Y). If someone skeptically asks why he should take the means to his ends, Dreier says there is no desire that we can instill in him that will be sufficient to get him to accept the means/ends principle. This is because the means/ends principle is a requirement if we are going to accept the

¹³ *Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality in Ethics and Practical Reason*. pp. 90.

satisfaction of our desires as reasons at all. If someone asks why he must do what will satisfy his desires, it will do no good to tell him that it will satisfy his desires to do so. This is merely reasserting the very thing he is skeptical about.¹⁴ Thus, desires don't seem to be the thing missing when convincing an irrational agent to accept the rules of rationality.

To highlight the irrationality present in this type of case, Dreier gives us an example of a prospective law student named Ann. Ann wants to go to law school, and is wondering how she can maximize her chances of doing so. We advise her to take a prep course for the Law School Admission Test, because doing well on the LSAT will increase her chances of getting into law school. If Ann is rational, she will take the fact that the prep course will bolster her chances of getting into law school as a reason to take the prep course. But what if instead Ann merely shrugs at our suggestion to her? She says that she understand the connection between the two, and very much wants to go to law school, but doesn't feel any reason that she should take the prep course.

Now we can say there is something wrong with Ann. It is not, as in the case of moral skepticism, that she fails to see how the proposed action will serve her desires. Instead, she has the odd problem where her desires are failing to motivate her. Somehow, she has failed to accept the Means/Ends principle. This is the source of Ann's irrationality.

Dreier sets up this contrast to show why rules of rationality are categorical, while moral rules are not. Without the rules of rationality, the practice of reason-giving cannot even get off the ground. So the rational necessity of accepting rules of rationality doesn't depend on an agent having any particular desires. It only depends on the agent being rational (again, we cannot say 'wanting to be rational,' since 'wanting' already implies a

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 92-5.

means/ends relationship). This is a feature that is not shared by rules of morality, which can be defended, justified, and meaningfully argued about. If moral imperatives were categorical imperatives, we would not be able to ask “Why should I be moral?” in a way that was intelligible to our interlocutors. The very questioning of moral imperatives would entail us assuming moral imperatives. Any answer we got to the question would not be very helpful or convincing; instead, our interlocutor would only be able to say “Because they are the moral rules. If you don’t get that then there is no way to reason you to it.” But in fact we do believe, dissimilar to reasons of rationality, that moral reasons can be rationally supported, and are not immediately self-justifying.

We therefore see that “It is rationally required” is not a satisfactory answer to the question of “Why be moral?”, at least not as it stands. Where rules of rationality are preconditions for our ability to rationally justify and give reasons, rules of morality seem to be analyzable in terms of rational justification. As such, it is not the case that moral reasons move all rational agents categorically, insofar as they are rational.¹⁵ Therefore, any reason we have to be moral will need to be grounded in a more practical and substantive investigation than the one that Kant conducts. Arguing that practical reason is itself a justification for morality will only end in a reassertion of Dreier’s argument.

The arguments I have outlined thus far may seem to make the prospect of giving an agent any necessary and internal reasons to act morally tenuous at best. This is not to say moral reasons are never justified. Certainly Foot and Dreier both believe that agents *can* take themselves to have reasons to act morally. They must merely have the desire to do so. But must we simply shrug at the skeptic who asks why he should be

¹⁵ It could still be argued that every rational being has a reason to consider morality, but this argument cannot rely on morality as a categorical imperative. This is what Dreier has rejected.

moral, when he has no inclination to do so? The preceding arguments may give this impression. In fact, I think we do have something to say to this skeptic, something that may actually convince him that he has a motivating reason to be moral.

It will not do for us to try and convince the skeptic that he is being irrational (or at least, not in the straightforward sense that Kant wanted). Instead, we should learn from and incorporate what Dreier argued about our motivating reasons. For a person to have a reason to do something, she must have a desire that will be satisfied by doing it. This does not however, necessarily mean that the skeptic has no reason to be moral. It may be that he does not see how morality is a means to ends he already possesses. If we can show the skeptic that being moral is in fact a means to something he desires, then we will have shown him a hard and fast internal reason to be moral.

I think this endeavor can be very fruitful, and it will be my goal in the subsequent essay to provide the reader with an account of how we can use the means/ends principle as stated by Dreier to give moral reasons that will be internal, motivating reasons for all agents, insofar as they are rational. In explicating my view, I will move away from Kant's ethical approach, and adopt an Aristotelian theory of virtue ethics. While I am certain the Kantian has possible rebuttals to many of the issues raised in this chapter, I share Dreier's doubts that it can be shown that the rules of morality are in fact basic rules of practical rationality. The argument that rules of rationality and rules of morality are categorically different things seems to me quite clear, and also quite devastating to the claim that being moral is part of what it means to be rational. So where the Kantian argues that the rules of morality are just a subset of the items that make up the rules of rationality, I will accept Dreier's argument that rules of rationality stand alone as categorical imperatives. My task will be to show how this can be true while still defending moral reasons that count as reasons for every rational agent. To do

so, I will examine the character of the rational agent, and argue that elements of this character give us an internal reason to be moral. Because my approach relies on the character of the agent, I will be putting forward a virtue ethicist's account of morality. The necessity of casting my argument in the terms of virtue ethics will become clear as we continue.

Chapter 2

The Nature of Happiness

In my endeavor to provide a reason all rational beings have to be moral, I will ultimately argue that the moral virtues contribute to the happiness of every rational being. How morality connects to our happiness will be taken up in chapter 3. In this chapter, I will define what happiness is, and defend the claim that all human beings seek its attainment. Specifically, I will argue that our nature as rational beings limits the options agents have for attaining their happiness, and that the happy agent will be one who comes to value those things which both complement each other and cohere with the basic human identity.

Before I engage in my task of providing moral reasons through virtue ethics, it will be helpful to talk about what virtue ethics *is* and how it is different from other ethical theories. Ethics, loosely speaking (and I speak *very* loosely here), is the study of right and wrong. In the first chapter we looked at Kant's deontological theory. Deontology is an act-centered moral theory that provides us with a system of ethics based the moral value of an act. According to deontology, for an agent to act in a way that is morally right, she must follow the specific rules that apply to the situation she is acting in. What makes the rules of Kant's theory unique is that they are rules of practical rationality. It is practically rational, says Kant to act on a duty to follow the Categorical Imperative. To do this, an agent must first learn what the specific imperatives of the Categorical Imperative are, and then act on these imperatives *because* they are demanded by the Categorical Imperative. So from the Categorical imperative, which gives the general rule, "treat every

person as an end in themselves,” we get specific categorical imperatives such as “do not lie” or “be beneficent.”

Deontology need not be based on Kant’s Categorical Imperative (though it most often is). The ‘Golden Rule,’ a rule that tells agents to treat others as they would like to be treated, is one example of a deontological moral rule. Because we are treating the Golden Rule as a deontological rule, we say that agents have a *duty* to treat people the way they would like to be treated. If the Golden Rule is a part of a broader the ethical theory we are applying, it means that an act that acting on the Golden Rule is *pro tanto* moral (it has moral value, although it may be overridden by other moral considerations if they clash with the Golden Rule), and that any act which violates the Golden Rule is *pro tanto* immoral. If the Golden Rule is only one rule among others in a specific deontological scheme, it is possible that it will conflict with other moral imperatives. If this is the case, the theory must specify how a moral agent (that is, an agent who acts on moral imperatives) ranks and navigates the various rules and duties. A deontological theory of ethics will therefore both contain rules on how to act as well as rules on when to apply the rules of action.

The question I am interested in analyzing, the question posed by Dreier in chapter 1, is what reason we have for acting morally. In terms of Kant, this question is “why should an agent do what the Categorical Imperative instructs us to do?” This question can be answered to many different degrees of detail, and giving a general answer may help us to see more precise questions that we can ask to get to the substance of the matter. For the deontologist, the most basic answer, as we have seen, is that “following the Categorical Imperative is a rational requirement.” We may of course again ask why this is so or why we ought to care about this answer, and this will lead us to a more and more specific understanding of the justification of moral behavior.

Virtue ethics, in wide contrast to deontology, does not make judgments centered around performing certain acts for specific reasons. Although reasons are still important to the virtue ethicist, they do not have the focus on duty that is prevalent for the deontologist. Instead of primarily evaluating the nature and circumstance of the acts performed, the ethical judgments of the virtue ethicists are agent-centered in that they analyze the character of an agent. The acts the agent performs will be important insofar as they are valuable in ascertaining the agent's character. The overall character of an agent is a combination of various traits that an agent may possess or lack to different degrees. These various traits are called the virtues. When used as a tool for the moral evaluation of an agent, the virtues can either refer to the positive moral character traits that an agent exhibits or the various classes of traits a person can (but may not) have.¹⁶ For example, we might say that Sally's virtues are honesty, integrity, and empathy. We can also, however, talk about the virtue of serenity, how someone who is too serene is passive, and someone who lacks serenity is overly aggressive. If Sally falls into the latter category, we do not say she has the virtue of being overly-aggressive. Instead, we say her aggression impedes her attainment of the virtue of serenity.

As we can see, the main focus of the virtue ethicist is not the acts an agent performs, but rather the character of the agent performing the acts. Where the deontologist will judge a lie as a morally wrong act, the virtue ethicist will judge the liar as a morally bad agent. Of course, each moral theory can corroborate the judgment of the other; wrongness and badness do track each other, at least loosely. A Kantian will say that perpetrating wrong actions makes an agent somewhat immoral himself, and hence

¹⁶ I will later investigate the possibility that not all virtues are ethical virtues, and that some positive characteristics have no impact on a person's moral standing. We may ignore this distinction for now in order to lay some groundwork and create a space where evaluating this distinction will be more fruitful.

a bad moral actor. Similarly the virtue ethicist can say that the actions perpetrated by a bad moral agent, insofar as they are a product of his lack of virtue, are wrong actions in the sense that a good moral actor would have acted differently. The different criteria evaluated in coming to ethical conclusions between the theories therefore does not necessitate that the normative judgments reached by the two need be very different - there is no conceptual block that bars one theory from understanding the other theory on their own terms. A Kantian could unproblematically cast virtues as dispositions to refrain from various wrong acts, and similarly a virtue ethicist could defend the moral imperatives of the Kantian as guideposts for what it means to be a good moral actor.

The difference between the primary normative concern of virtue ethics and deontology (good agents versus right acts) does set up a wide difference on the subject of metaethics, however. Dreier's question becomes "What reason do we have to be virtuous?" In one sense, the answer to this question is self-evident: for Aristotle, a virtue is that which allows an agent to effectively pursue a goal. If one's goal is to create beautiful painting, then we would say that it is a virtue to have a steady hand. The answer to the question as posed is therefore that we have a reason to be virtuous because the virtues are a way of advancing our goals. Understood in this way, the virtues function as our means in a hypothetical imperative.

Leaving it at this would be both misleading and unsatisfactory however. Moral virtues are virtues that we think every good agent must possess. If moral virtues are the means to goals, this certainly requires argument. It is not clear that honesty or courage are definite means to any specific goals, or at least not to goals that everyone shares. Having a steady hand is an obvious virtue for a painter, as it is clearly a means to being able to excel at her art. To say that honesty or courage are virtues, however, we will need to identify what it is they are good for. Because we want these virtues to apply

universally, this goal will need to be shared amongst all human beings. Virtues that only have value for specific activities like painting are not legitimate candidates for moral virtues, since not everyone will want to be a painter. Instead, we will need virtues that apply more broadly to life in general. As in the case of the painter however, we will still need a goal in order to determine what the correct virtues are. Virtues are means to ends, as the painter case has shown us. The value of possessing a virtue is completely dependent on the goals one has. Therefore, to establish our moral virtues, we will first need to know the ends that we are aiming at. Since my task is to show that every rational being has a reason to follow the moral virtues, the end we base the virtues on will have to be an end for all people.

What we are looking for then, is the end of human life as such. The moral virtues will be the means to that end. If we can identify an end that all human beings share insofar as they are human and confirm that the virtues are indeed a means to this end, then we will have answered Dreier's question about what reason we have to be moral. The answer will be that the moral virtues are a means to our ends, and that we therefore have a reason to take the means provided by the virtues.

Aristotle himself provides a clear formal definition of the goal of a human life (or, in his terms, the goodness of life). The goodness of life, he says, is a matter of how well the human being fulfills the goals inherent in her nature. Aristotle presents his search for the goals of human life in terms of human ends. It is obvious, says Aristotle, that human beings all hold various ends, and that each agent has his own unique set of ends. Even at first glance, many of these ends are not sufficient in themselves, but rather are held because of what they provide. Wealth, for example, is not desired for itself, but rather for what it can bring to a person. Aristotle believes that nearly all possible ends fit this

category of good that are desired for their effect. Honor or dignity might seem like ends that have no higher purpose than their own fulfillment, but we can intelligibly ask “why should we care about these things?” What is more, we can give an answer. Human beings, says Aristotle, desire these things for the sake of happiness. Because all things are desired for happiness, and because happiness is only desired for itself, happiness is the ultimate end of human life.¹⁷ Happiness here translates from the Greek *Eudaimonia*. It is not hedonistic pleasure, but a lasting fulfillment. Fulfillment, in general terms, is the perception that we have reached our goals through chosen action. Happiness, when used to indicate a sense of fulfillment, is more easily applied to a life or someone’s overall disposition; it is not descriptive of her mood at a given time. Happy people are deeply content people. They are content not only with the current satisfaction of their bodily needs, but also with the state of their more lasting psychic needs; happiness is not just being well-fed and well-rested, but also being loved, self-determining, having a positive image of oneself, and many more of the things that make life as a human being rich and fulfilling.¹⁸ Though I certainly do not know all that a fulfilling life entails, the completely happy agent is one who has discovered and attained these ends. They are content with every facet of their life, and do not see what might be changed to make it any better.

When human beings act, they take themselves to be acting to improve their lives.

This means not only that they are not perfectly happy human beings, but also that

¹⁷ *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Book 1, Part 7.

¹⁸ It is important to note that although the happy agent cannot be a complete wanton, neither can she be always shunning pleasure in pursuit of more long-lasting goods. Having hobbies that one goes to for diversion, immediate pleasure, and good feelings is part of what the virtue ethicist considers to be integral to the good life. Because I am not providing a substantive account of the virtues, I cannot offer the exact way in which we balance pleasure and our more lasting values. The Nichomachean Ethics is an excellent source for a notion for the way that the happy agent balances these competing goods.

happiness (i.e. contentment with the state of things) is very much their end in acting. To the extent that a person aims at any goal, she aims at happiness.¹⁹ Any action that is consciously taken is taken on the grounds that the end the action aims at will provide for the agent's happiness. This end may be implicit instead of explicitly stated by the agent, but if we were to ask the agent for what reason they act, we would receive a more general end that their action is meant to fulfill. If we continue to ask why *this* end is worth striving for in their mind, and ask this question to each subsequent answer they give, we will eventually arrive at happiness as the end at the root of their action. In this sense happiness is the ultimate end, and the standard by which we measure life's success. Whatever it is that a person strives for in life, they strive for it in order to experience fulfilling happiness through its attainment. My goal in this chapter will be to defend Aristotle's view of happiness as the ultimate human end.

After I have given an account of why we all must seek our own happiness, we must then turn our attention to providing an account of how a rational being can find what kinds of things make him happy. This is not an easy thing to know, and people can strive for years after a goal that they believe will make them happy, only to discover disappointment upon attainment. Happiness must consist in more than fulfilling a goal: it is found in fulfilling the right goals. Such a claim is based off the fact that human beings are creatures with specific natures, just like all other living beings. The happiness we seek will only be completely attained when we have lived up to what Aristotle calls our specifically human purpose. Through an examination of some elements of human nature, we will gain insight into what this purpose might be, and why it is essential to our happiness.

¹⁹ This is not to say that every goal or action is equipped to make the agent happy. I only mean to say that an agent cannot reasonably strive for a goal without first believing that its attainment will make her happy to some extent. I will offer a defense of this point shortly.

Before delving into my defense, a note on the focus of this chapter. Though I have mentioned that knowledge of our own nature is essential to creating a substantive system of virtues with which to pursue happiness, I will not attempt to give an full account of our nature here, nor the specific substance of human purpose. Rather, I will elucidate the factors that provide valuable insight into our nature, and show why a rational human being should be concerned with the discovery of her own nature as an individual and human being. Additionally, I will give general guidelines on some considerations that the agent seeking her happiness should use to find what it is that makes her happy.

If we are to build a framework for morality off of general human purpose, we must be clear on what we mean by human purpose. I am not suggesting that nature or a god created human beings with a goal in mind that they were designed to fulfill. All the same, human beings, like all other natural objects, have specific attributes or characteristics inherent in our specific nature: basic human form, self-awareness, advanced cognitive abilities, and so on. These natural qualities form both limitations and possibilities on how we can effectively live. It is not open to a human being to live successfully as a flower, sloth, or frog. We lack some of the capabilities of these organisms, and possess needs that differ from theirs. To say that we must live according to our purpose is to say that we must live according to our various abilities, needs, and limitations. These factors may vary, even between two human beings. My particular interest is in those qualities that all human beings as such share, since these are the qualities that will influence the moral virtues.

Aristotle believed that the character of the needs, abilities, and limitations of an organism fall into three basic categories for a human being. Firstly, there are the facts of

our existence as basic lifeforms. These facts necessitate that we eat, drink, maintain a steady body temperature, and more. The facts of our existence as nutritive beings are not only that we need to replenish the vitamins and minerals in our body in order to survive, but also that we have the capability of digesting certain substances as a means to fulfilling this need. These facts about what our body needs to survive and the processes by which we can use to get this nutrition makes up what I will call our nutritive character. Next, human beings have an animal dimension that yields our hedonistic character. We perceive our surroundings, have emotions based on different stimuli, and interact with others organisms of our species and outside of it. These are all means to fulfilling our drive for pleasure, and our avoidance of pain. Again, the basic facts about what causes pleasure and what causes pain for the human being will be accompanied by facts about how we can achieve the former and avoid the latter. Finally, humans also contain a rational character. This contains the needs of the rational mind, like the need for understanding, for self-worth, and so on. The principle resources contained in our rational character is practical and theoretical reasoning. As we will see, we are also in a way limited to these resources, as human beings have no other tools for solving problems and serving their needs. These three parts together constitute all that it is to be a human being.²⁰

It is the last class of traits which Aristotle took to be relevant to the good and virtuous life of a human being. Because the soul, which judges the good, is situated in this rational element, Aristotle believed the rational virtues were most important to what it meant to live a good, human life.²¹ It is the rational element that gives us the capacity to ponder virtues in the first place, and Aristotle took this to show that human purpose must

²⁰ Ibid. Location 465.

²¹ Ibid. Location 490

be primarily a matter of expressing and perfecting our rational selves. The happy person, therefore, is the one who makes it his goal to fulfill the specifically human purpose.

I must dissent on this point however. To live a good life that fulfills our function as human beings, we must not only think, but also eat. If we are to understand what leads to the lasting, fulfilling happiness of a human life, it will be an inadequate picture to point to the philosopher who has foregone the social and nutritive aspects of her existence in order to live a purely rational life. Surely the rational is what makes us specifically human, but it is not all that human beings are. To live up to our full purpose, we must fulfill the requirements of our entire nature, not just the best part of it. The human being will be happiest when she satisfies *all* that she is, since, as I will show in the subsequent section, no one part can obtain more than fleeting happiness without the satisfaction of the other two.

Though I think he goes too far in declaring our organic and animal characteristics as irrelevant in terms of the virtues of a human being, Aristotle is right to place the bulk of the importance on our rational dimension. The happiness associated with our organic and animal nature is not enough to judge that someone has had a fulfilling life. The man who spends all his time eating and seeking out other hedonistic pleasures is not reaching or even approaching the type of fulfilling existence the virtue ethicist has in mind. The problem is not just that he is not pursuing the virtues that have been arbitrarily chosen as 'the right virtues.' It is that he himself must inevitably recognize the shortcoming of his life. In living a life of pure hedonistic pleasure, he fails to acknowledge and incorporate the fact that he is also a rational being, who must in fact call on his rational nature in order to provide for his nutritive and hedonistic concerns. And just as acknowledging and satisfying his sensory desires brings a kind of pleasure, so too does the satisfaction of his rational nature. Until he satisfies the needs of his rational nature

however, he is unfamiliar with a unique type of happiness available to rational beings. The result will be that he cannot successfully fulfill his purpose as determined by the nature of his existence.

I have not yet shown why it is that the hedonist should care if he is living according to his nature. He might simply respond, "what use have I for the happiness of a rational being? I am doing just fine as a hedonistic one." My response is that he has already committed himself to caring long ago. When a human being pursues an end, even if this end is solely sensuous as in the case of the hedonist, she does not have the luxury of acting on instinct like an animal does. Her very status as a rational being means that she must *chose* to act in order to achieve anything. Just the facts that we digest certain foods and that we have a body and opposable thumbs with which we can lift, carry, and pick at things will not be enough to satisfy the hedonist. She must also use her mind in order to direct these capacities of her nutritive and animal natures. She must choose to use her functions in certain ways that she believes will bring her closer to her ends.

The human mechanism for choosing is rationality. It is the only method we have for pursuing an end. We may think irrationally about how to solve a problem, but this is a sure way of failing to get what we want. Anyone with ends, even if these ends are purely nutritive or sensory, must accept the necessity of acting on reasons. A person who says that she has an end is just speaking nonsense unless she also would take some action to meet this end. Only actions produced by reason, however, can be said to be meaningfully connected to an end. Otherwise, our actor is just stabbing blindly at nothing in particular, even though she has the power of reason available to aid her. Rationality, in other words, is a fact of our nature that not only gives us power, but also limits us to a certain method of fulfilling our needs and desires. As such, even those characteristics of

a human being that aim towards non-rational ends do so by utilizing rational processes. Accordingly, the human being must make use of and cultivate the rational virtues of clear thought and instrumental rationality; his success at achieving any end whatsoever demand this much.²²

Our rational nature confines us to using a means/ends framework to achieve our ends. Human beings, like all living creatures, have needs and wants. Awareness of these needs and wants generally gives rise a desire to fulfill them. It may be a desire that clashes with other desires (I will talk later about what a human being does in this situation). For now, if we can imagine an agent possessing an unopposed desire, we simplify the picture greatly. In this situation, the agent need only be aware that she holds a certain desire to have a reason to act on it. Since this example provides no reason not to act on the desire in question, I will say that she has a motivating reason to act on the desire (that is, an instrumentally rational being would be motivated by the reason),²³ and that acting on this desire is *pro tanto* rational. This is grounded on the Instrumental Imperative as discussed in chapter 1.²⁴

²² Though accepting the supremacy of instrumental reason in one's decision making process is an important first step, it does not by itself commit the agent to any of the moral virtues. Instead, the appeal of these virtues will emerge from the agent's reflection on how his current course of action relates to his overall happiness. The manner in which this process takes place will be discussed once I have finished characterizing the nature of rationality.

²³ I say 'motivating reason' as opposed to a reason *simpliciter* because agents can have reasons to do many things. Reasons may clash. The motivating reason is the reason an agent ends up acting on. For the rational agent, it consists of a balance of all the pros and cons of taking an action. For example, a motivating reason to go to the opera might be "One of my favorite operas is showing tonight, and I can fulfill my other obligations tomorrow." Notice that the motivating reason not only says why I want to go to the opera, but gives a justification for choosing against the reasons not to go to the opera (i.e. because I can fulfill my other obligations tomorrow). A motivating reason is therefore the product of our reasoning that explains the action we take.

²⁴ *Humean Doubts about Practical Reason about the Practical Justification of Morality in Ethics and Practical Reason*. pp. 90-92.

Taking the means to her ends is not the full extent of an agent's rational function however. Not only must she act in a way that utilizes what she knows in order to fulfil her ends, but she must also populate the list of that which she knows. She must form beliefs by reflecting on the world, creating conceptual schemes, and constantly judging her beliefs in terms of what her senses and intellect tell her are true about the world. These are the functions of theoretical rationality, and they are as unavoidable as those of practical rationality. To show this, again consider the hedonist, who sees no inherent value in rational goods. He only wishes to enjoy his sensory pleasures. He has made a slight concession to the rationalist and accepted that if he really is interested in the pleasures of hedonism, he must try as best as he can to match his given end with means that will get him there. Right now he wants an apple. There is not a single one in sight however, and now our hedonist faces a problem. He must create a plan to get the apple, and it is at this point that he will need a belief.²⁵ Action requires not only a desire or end, but also a belief (or several beliefs) about what actions will fulfill the agent's end. In the case of hedonist, he might have a belief that there is a store down the street that sells apples for 50 cents. The hedonist, believing that he has in his possession \$1.25 and that this money is what the store will take in exchange for an apple, sets out down the street.

Arriving at the store with his \$1.25 in hand (all the while utilizing desire/belief combinations to follow signs to the store and obey traffic laws as to not end up in pain), the hedonist finds the produce aisle and picks up what he believes to be an apple. Proud of his accomplishment (though perhaps such a feeling is not strictly speaking,

²⁵ We may want to say that he needed a belief much before this point, in interpreting the feelings he had as a longing for an apple, or the belief that there was no apple around him to be had. Though I think these points could be legitimately argued, I aim only to show that belief-formation must be adopted by the successful human being as some point. The exact point at which we need to be able to formulate true beliefs is of less importance for this endeavor.

hedonistic), he jaunts up to the cash register and hands the bewildered clerk, what she tells him, is a grapefruit and 5 bottlecaps.

The hedonist has gone wrong here because he held several false beliefs. If he is a rational being, the insight of the clerk will help him to avoid such mistakes in the future. He will alter his concept of what an apple is, and will form new beliefs on what constitutes money. He might also notice that the fact that he got across the very dangerous street without incident means that perhaps his beliefs on how traffic works were merited after all. He will begrudgingly admit however, that even in his extremely simple life, he will have to engage in rational belief formation if he is ever to get anywhere. By extension of his evident propensity towards fulfilling his ends, he will be rationally required to do what is in his power to form true beliefs. Otherwise, even his hedonistic pleasures have little chance of getting fulfilled, though a reasonable process of belief formation could save him from this fate. In this way, the means/ends principle entails that the formation of true beliefs is rationally required to some extent, in the case where having a certain belief is operative to achieving a certain end.

The requirement for rational belief formation does not commit us to saying that the rational agent must hold only true beliefs. Because the means/ends principle only requires we accept a means only insofar as we are aware that it is in fact a means to our ends, it cannot be rationally required of him to hold beliefs for which he has no justification. We should be careful to attribute rational necessity only to those things which an agent ought to believe by the knowledge she possesses. We do not want to say that children are irrational because they lack knowledge. If they act irrationally, it is because they have some piece of knowledge (or should have it, given their experience) and fail to incorporate it into their action. Likewise, it would now be justified for the hedonist to believe that grapefruits are not apples, given his experience in the grocery

store. He is not, without prior experience and knowledge however, rationally required to believe that molecules are made up of atoms. It would be irrational to hold a contrary belief if he had persuasive evidence of this truth, but his pure ignorance of the state of molecules is not grounds for irrationality.²⁶ My purpose here is not to explicate a full system of belief formation or to offer an account of exactly which beliefs must be rationally held and when. My purpose is only to show that rationality is not neutral on the topic of belief formation, and that to some extent we are rationally required to form a belief if that belief is useful to the attainment of our ends and it is justified by our experiences and knowledge. I take this to be an extension of the means/ends principle. Forming a true belief is a valuable means to many different ends.

So far we have a picture of a human being who is instructed by her natural capacity for reason to seek the means to her ends and form beliefs that help her to do so more effectively. We have seen how creating and refining beliefs is a way of developing more efficient means to the agent's ends. What does reason have to say about the ends themselves though? The Humean position, the position that Dreier's essay is grounded on, is that ends flow directly from basic desires and are therefore themselves basic. As such, there can be no reasons for our desires. To Hume, a desire that we do not pursue turns out to be no desire at all.²⁷ In order to advance my thesis that all human beings have a reason to be virtuous, I will need to examine Hume's claim about the basicness

²⁶ This view is complicated somewhat by the fact that there are certain subjects a person *should* seek knowledge about. If the hedonist were a molecular biologist for instance (perhaps an odd choice of professions for a hedonist), we would expect him to question the nature of molecules, as their makeup could very understandably impact his study. In this case, we would say that failure to form educated beliefs regarding the structure of molecules is irrational given that his end is the understanding of molecules.

²⁷ Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. pp. 415.

of our various desires, and ultimately offer an alternative way of looking at our desires. Specifically, I will need to show the reader why prudential reasoning is necessary to human life, and how happiness is the end goal of our prudential reasoning.

If no reasoning underlies our desire, then the recognition of a certain desire's presence in ourselves is a sufficient condition for us to pursue the fulfillment of that desire; reasons are in terms of the desires we have, and as such our desires cannot be reasoned about. This strikes Korsgaard as devastating to the notion of practical reason. According to Korsgaard, the means/ends principle states on this view that "if you are going to pursue an end, then you have a reason to take the means to that end."²⁸ This leaves no room to judge whether or not the end itself is a rational one, since the Instrumental Imperative is the only rational imperative Hume recognizes.²⁹

Certainly, says Korsgaard, we *want* to be able to call prudence a rational principle. Someone who rejects the antidote for his deadly disease just because he is afraid of needles *seems* to be irrational to us, and not just missing a desire to do what is in his greater good. Yet Hume says that his choice is perfectly rational. As it turns out, the agent's desire to avoid needles is greater than his desire to overcome the mortal disease he is afflicted with, as so he has a reason to prefer the first course of action.³⁰

Korsgaard goes on to argue that Hume's rejection of prudence as a rational principle threatens the normativity of the instrumental principle itself. If we cannot say it is irrational to indulge our terror over our health, she says, then we can never say what

²⁸ *The Normativity of Instrumental Reason in Ethics and Practical Reason*. pp. 223.

²⁹ Korsgaard's essay *The Normativity of Instrumental Reason* contains an in depth exposition of Hume's view on how our rationality relates to the ends we pursue. Korsgaard's main point is to show that Hume views prudence (balancing one's overall good with one's current desires) is not seen as a rational principle by Humeans, but as a general desire that most human beings do in fact possess.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 227.

we did was irrational at all. Our actions will reveal what it is that our actual end was, and therefore we will always have taken the means to our end. "Whatever you do is the mean to the end which you are *going* to pursue."³¹

Now, I think this argument makes a mistake. Though it may be odd to picture it in a Humean scheme where current desires lead directly to ends (and therefore there is little reflective distance in which we can evaluate our ends as separate from what we do), our actual ends may be ill met by the means we select. We may select what we believe to be means to a specific end, but discover that these means are insufficient. We may even try to attain an end with means we know to be insufficient, as in the cases of irrationality discussed by Dreier in chapter 1. This will still be counted as irrational, and thus, the means/ends principle retains its normativity under a Humean account.

All the same, I do not think this commits us to accepting the Humean claim that prudence is just a desire we may or may not possess. Instead, we can see it as the rational conclusion to the empirical fact that we value different things to varying degrees, and that the value you place on some things is due to the value you place on others. I can neither deny that I have a reason to write this essay nor deny that the reason I have to write this essay relies on the reason I have to be intellectually curious. If I had no reason for intellectual curiosity, my reason to write this essay would go by the wayside. This fact can tell us something very concrete about the reasons we have in regards to various ends. In fact, I think reason plays two distinct roles in regards to our ends as they relate to prudence. First, it creates new ends that serve as means to more basic

³¹ Ibid. 228-9.

ends, and second, it helps us to choose between competing ends.³² I will address the latter function first.

Reason, as I have discussed before, is the required framework for human action. Human beings lack the instincts to act without reflection, and this requires that we think about action and make choices concerning it prior to actually acting. Certainly we may apply more or less thought to our actions, and this may have an effect on how good we are at meeting our ends. To act rationally entails thinking clearly about our actions so that we may effectively fulfill our ends. Even the irrational actor, however, is not free from thinking before he acts. Rather, the problem is that he thinks about the wrong things or fails to consider all the relevant information. He cannot so much as get out of bed without first directing himself to do it, at least at some level of dim self-awareness. In order to direct ourselves to an end, we must at least implicitly have reasons.

This complicates human action enormously however, since it is likely we have reason to do more than one thing at any given time. The unreflective agent may not be aware of it, but human life is fraught with constant choice between actions. It is impossible to act in two ways at once. I cannot choose both to go back to sleep and start my work for the day at the same time. I must choose one or the other. To do this, it is perfectly natural for me to consult reasons. I may say “Well, I am still very tired, but given that I have already slept 9 hours, perhaps this is just a product of my inactivity. Besides, I do have a rather large workload for the day, and I will put myself in a very tight spot if I do not finish it. Knowing this, I better get up.” Over the course of this monologue, I was

³² It is worth noting that the picture I am presenting preserves desires necessary for the development of reasons. What I deny in the Humean picture is that all our desires are basic. As I will argue in subsequent sections, happiness is the only truly basic desire. All other desires turn out to be rationally constructed by our pursuit for happiness.

doing more than acting on desire: I was examining the reasons I had for fulfilling each of my competing desires, and then deciding between them.

Of course, our reflection is rarely so explicit as to form full sentences to ourselves. Many of these choices are taken up with a kind of shorthand, with the reasoning taking place ahead of time. For example, an agent might just consider it lazy to stay in bed after she has had enough sleep, and have a desire not to be lazy. This desire is actually based on ends and reasons that have been predetermined by the agent. I might conclude that it is always unacceptable to stay in bed once I have slept at least 8 hours if I have work to do. Once I have made this conclusion, I need not deliberate whether or not I ought to get out of bed each morning. Instead, I can quickly apply the pre-made rule for action. If I have determined the behavior to be lazy and have a desire not to be lazy, it will be enough to know that I have slept for more than 8 hours to give myself a reason to get up. Much of our life is lived utilizing this shorthand. Most of the actions we take we had to be taught or figure out ourselves (therefore at some point we had to rationally connect means to ends). After doing them for years however, they require only the most minimal mental energy to actually undertake.

Nomy Arpaly has an argument that preempts my assertion that all action is a matter of weighing our various ends. Her argument is that agents *can* act without deliberating between their ends, and that these actions can be judged as rational or irrational. I think some of the tension between Arpaly and myself can be relieved by granting her that agents can indeed act rationally without engaging in a full process of deliberation. The word 'deliberation' invokes a slow, calculated processes that would simply be impractical as the sole means of decision making. My above example about the nearly unconscious decision to get out of bed admits as much. Neither do I contest Arpaly's claim that deliberation is itself a planned action (we must consciously choose to

deliberate on some subject or another); if deliberation is the only rational choice making mechanism, that means there must be a deliberation about when to deliberate. This opens the way for an infinite regress that both Arpaly and I want to avoid.³³

We can accept the premise that not all action involves deliberation as Arpaly defines it, yet still defend my claim that human beings must act through reflection. I think it best to show this using Arpaly's own example of a tennis player. If there is ever a place where there exist no time for reflection, a fast paced sport like tennis seems to be a perfect example. She goes on to say that what makes a good tennis player good is the keenness of her instincts. Rational action in this situation is acting on a good instinct.

We must tread a very narrow path to make sense of this claim. Rationality is not just about taking the means to one's ends, but doing so knowingly and in a way that can be justified. The man who declares he wants to go to the store right before blindfolding himself and walking aimlessly will not be considered rational, even if he gets to the store. He has not achieved his end by pursuing it with an efficient means. Rather, blind luck favored him. We would never say that blindfolding oneself and walking without direction is a rational way of getting somewhere. So human 'instincts' must be more than a blind internal mechanism that we can choose to follow. They must have rational justification.

I suggest that what Arpaly describes as instincts are incongruent with what we think of when we consider animal instincts. The tennis player or witty conversationalist does not in fact act without thought directed to their purpose. Instead, I say we recognize the talent of these people because they can vastly shorten the length of time they need to think about something and still make a good decision. The tennis player's good reactions need not be described as a blind benediction. Rather, we may think of her as able to see the trajectory of the ball, the position of the other player, and know her own

³³ *Unprincipled Virtue*. pp. 57.

position. From these facts, she is able to make a split decision on the best course of action. The time between her perception and when she must act is indeed very short, but I do not think this fact can be construed to show that no thought can take place. This is not to say that the tennis player must engage in a full on deliberation: in the context of a match, we can assume she has already deeply internalized both her ends and many of the means to her ends, just like the sleepy but determined student in my example above. Because she has practiced for much of her life, she knows that hitting the ball certain ways will have certain results. In the match then, she need only correspond these ways of hitting the ball to the other relevant factors of her situation, such as the position of her opponent.

To act on instinct, by contrast, conveys a notion of acting without any belief or conscious end. I do not think this is what Arpaly has in mind, since she describes our instincts as things that can be rationally analyzed, but it is instructive to my point to show that truly unconscious action is not open to human beings. Consider the tennis player again. It may be odd to think of all her actions as entailing the end that she wants to win the game (we probably think that in the heat of the game her ends are probably more immediate, like 'I want the ball to go there'). But at the same time, it is true that if her overall end changes, she will behave differently. Suppose she starts to get a bad pain in her leg, and is worried about aggravating it (she is after all, a career player, and one bad match is better than a debilitating injury). She will probably change the way she plays. Before, her end was so obviously to win that it did not need to be stated to explain her actions. But the introduction of other ends highlight that the goal of winning is still very much a decision she makes.

New beliefs can also affect the way she plays. If the tournament hosts unveil a new court for the match, using a heretofore unknown species of grass, it might

profoundly affect the way the ball behaves. We may think that the tennis player's beliefs about ball behavior are so ingrained that she need not consult them when playing a match, but the change in court material shows otherwise. It is merely that usually she need not reflect on her beliefs during a match, since she has no reason to doubt them. Change the conditions of the game, and the belief/desire pairs that informed her action will reassert their existence.

I bring up Arpaly's point to demonstrate that even though a different amount of thought goes into the various actions we take, the actions are still either consciously self-directed or directed by prior conscious thought. The ways in which we act are not automatic, and thus it is not an option of the human being to live life without thinking. For a person to be completely devoid of thought is not for him to act irrationally, it is for him to be inactive. The problem with irrational actors is that they do not think enough or about the right things in the right ways. It is not that they are not thinking at all. I take this to be outside of the capabilities of any acting human.

Though this claim seems deeply intuitively right to me, I cannot provide an adequate logical defense for it. This does not pose a problem for my theory however, as there is one thing I can say with philosophical confidence: we cannot take ourselves to act without reasons. We can explain and attempt to justify every minute action we take; acting apart from reasons is therefore an alien experience to the human mind. A means/ends framework is necessary for any agent who wants to make sense of her own affairs or explain them to others. Even if we could frame human action in the same terms we think of animals acting, this would not illuminate the process of what we perceive ourselves to be doing. As Korsgaard points out in *The Sources of Normativity*, we need a reasons-based framework for action by our very nature as the kind of creatures that can reflect on our own actions. Human beings are simply incapable of not reflecting on

themselves and the choices they make, and so we need to act on reasons in order to make any sense of the world as we see it from this reflective standpoint.³⁴

The reflective quality of our humanity gives rationality supremacy over the other two parts of our nature as defined by Aristotle. Unlike our nutritive and hedonistic aspects, the rational aspect of our humanity passes judgments. Not only is rationality our way of actually satisfying the nutritive and social desires (the above argument shows that even our hedonist must utilize rationality to get what he wants), but it is responsible for endorsing the desires we choose to pursue. To the extent that we are reflecting, the mind is judging the reasons we have for pursuing our various desires. But what is the standard by which these desires are judged? Before, I rejected Hume's claim that desires were basic and unanalyzable, but I did not give an alternative. After the examples of why choosing between desires is a fact of everyday life and how some of our the desires can change in response to the acquisition of new beliefs, I am ready to say what the alternative is.

As it turns out, I agree with Hume that no action, even reflection, takes place in absence of a desire that we perceive the action as a means of fulfilling. Unlike Hume, however, I think these desires are not all basic, and that many of them are desires we hold contingently, based on our desires for other things. So when we reflect on our various desires, we analyze them in terms of what desires they in turn attempt to satisfy. This means that in order to compare two desires to one another, there must be a preceding desire that both appeal to. Otherwise the two desires are incommensurable, with no standard that puts them on the same metric to be valued together.

³⁴ *The Sources of Normativity*. pp. 95-7.

It is clear that at least some desires are commensurable, and so I think it best to start there. Consider two very similar desires,³⁵ for example. I may desire to go for a jog and also to do sit-ups, but I only have time to do one or the other. To decide which to do, I will consult the reason I have for doing both, namely, getting in shape. Both jogging and sit-ups are lower-order or constitutive desires belonging to my higher-order desire of getting in shape. If one is obviously a better tool than the other to meet this goal, then it would be rational for me to choose the one better suited to their shared goal. So it is easy to see the standard for choosing between desires when they are both derived from the same higher-order desire.

More difficult is when we have two competing desires that do not appear to be towards the same end. Say now my choice is between a night of exercise or a night at the movies. The former I desire for my health, the latter so that I might relax for a bit. People do in fact make these sorts of decisions all the time, but what can we say about the process? I submit that this decision just calls for a more protracted analysis of the same kind as took place when comparing sit-ups and jogging. The difference is that I will not be directly comparing exercise and the movies, but instead the benefits each gives me. Like in my first comparison, this can only be done by a higher order desire that I take as a standard. Otherwise, I will be hopelessly trying to compare two things without any way of weighing them against one another.

Is there a common standard that can help us decide between health and entertainment? To answer this question, it is helpful to ask why we desire each. If we can give an answer to the question 'why do I want to be healthy?' and 'why do I want to be entertained?', then we have discovered desires that are of a higher order still. If, while climbing up this chain of higher order desires, we come to a desire that is satisfied

³⁵ Constitutive desires are desires we have as a means to something else.

by both health and entertainment, we have found a standard to compare the two. And if there are desires of still higher orders, we will be able to evaluate health and entertainment on these standards as well.

There must, of course, be a top of this ladder. This will be a desire that is not analyzable in terms of anything else. Everything below it will be judged in terms of it, and it will be in terms of nothing but itself. If this desire is the only one of its kind (there may turn out to be more than one irreducible desire), then it will be the thing that all our choices can be evaluated by. It will be the ultimate desire. This is the thing Aristotle took the desire for happiness to be, and I will defend it as the ultimate justification of all our actions.

I take the desire for happiness to be the ultimate desire (and therefore happiness to be the ultimate end) because it is the only thing that cannot be sought as a means to something else. When we ask for a reason to do something, we can see this as a question of what desire we are fulfilling by performing the action in question. But happiness, as we will remember from Aristotle is the state of fulfillment itself. To ask, 'what is the reason to strive for happiness?' is to ask 'what desire am I fulfilling by seeking fulfillment?' If one were not already seeking fulfillment however, by whence did one come to ask this question about whether happiness would be fulfilling? No standard for judging the value of happiness can exist, because happiness is itself the standard we are ultimately appealing to when giving reasons.

We see that there is no higher-order end than happiness, but is there another desire that is incommensurable with happiness? Given the choice between having all things needed for our happiness and having X, is there any possible X that would make this a difficult choice? My intuition is to say no: anything that I can think of myself desiring will also contribute to my happiness upon its attainment, or at least so I will

believe at the time I have the desire. I do not know how to offer a better defense of the desire for happiness as the sole ultimate desire. To argue against things that we might desire independent of our own happiness is to argue against things that I have no conception of, or even a conception of how they might be possible.

I will say that even things that do seem at first glance to be disassociated with happiness can conform to commensurability. For example, consider a monk, who is fasting as a test of his faith. We may say that his perceived duty to his god is something he takes up in spite of his own happiness (which would require him to eat). I think it is safe to say that the monk believes there is something beyond his own happiness. I think in saying so, however, we use happiness in a sense that is too narrow to capture what Aristotle had in mind. Happiness is not only the contentedness of the body, but also of the mind. By his actions, it is clear that the monk's devotion to his god holds significant mental sway on him. I don't think there is any inconsistency in framing the monk's actions as the actions of a man who wants to conceive of himself as someone who goes to great pains in order to honor that which he values. Of course, in casting his decision in this light, he can be fit into the framework of action that is guided by a desire for happiness. For the monk, his happiness is strongly dependent on devotion to his god. Lacking that devotion, his self-image would suffer dramatically.

Chapter 3

How the Human Drive for Happiness Motivates Morality

In the previous chapter I defended Aristotle's claim that happiness is the ultimate end of human life. In this chapter, I will use this premise to establish my answer to the question "why be moral?" As I have already indicated, I think happiness is a reason to be moral. In this chapter, I will argue that virtuous behavior is a means to happiness, and end which all human beings share. If I am successful, it will establish a reason that all rational beings have to be moral.

Because happiness is the ultimate end that all other ends are based off of, we can measure the value of these constitutive ends via happiness. In this task, we are measuring the happiness we think we will gain from pursuing a specific end to the happiness we actually feel upon completion of that end. For example, I might believe that the one thing in the world that will make me the happiest is to have an expensive gold necklace. I do not have the money to buy it though, so I resolve to steal the necklace. The heist goes off without a hitch, but when I finally have the necklace, I feel guilt for what I have done, not happiness at its possession. What I thought would make me happy has actually made me miserable. My end of happiness was not achieved. Contemplating why the action failed to make me happy will tell me something about myself, namely that knowing myself to be an honest man is very important to my happiness.

Of course, not everyone will have such a visceral reaction to their own wrongdoings. It is conceivable that some people actually get a sort of happiness out of

dishonesty. They may enjoy the challenge of the heist more than anything else. So far, I have not explained how the desire for happiness obligates anyone to anything in specific. In this form, an imperative to pursue one's own happiness might seem like a device for validating very cruel and antisocial behavior. Something more is needed if I am to present a defense of morality.

The key to solving this quandary is found in the fact that certain things are better suited to making a human being happy. As I have mentioned before, it is perfectly possible that I believe something is going to provide me happiness when in reality it makes me less happy than I was before. In some cases this will only reveal certain things about my own personal character, but I submit that there are characteristics of our humanity itself that can also make it difficult to be happy in certain situations. Our capacity for rationality is one of these characteristics. As I have mentioned before, no human being is free to act without his rational capacities. Because rationality is source of our action (either through active deliberation or decisions made previous to acting), rational judgments have particular force. If our rationality rebels against a certain prospective action, I submit that we will have a very difficult time bringing ourselves to perform the action. We will need to resolve our rational hesitation before moving forward.³⁶ If the desire we are analyzing is hedonistic and opposed to a rational desire we possess, a tension arises. In this case we are using our rational capacity to discover the best means to obtain something that contradicts our rational interests. Acting in such a way is possible, but it comes at a cost.

³⁶ This will not preclude the phenomenon of "acting without thinking." Many times we do something that we immediately think we ought to have done differently. It may be relatively easy to act in a way that our rationality condemns, but only if it can 'slip by' our rational reflection. And we do not want these things to slip by, as that would amount to a desire to be irrational. Such a desire is incoherent, however, since it would entail using the means/ends principle in order to violate it.

Consider an honest but starving man. He has never stolen a thing in his life, and is strongly opposed to any dishonest activity. He is, however, starving, as he has not eaten in more than a month. In the market, he sees and smells warm loaves of bread, unguarded and easily lifted. The man knows he could get the bread and satisfy his hunger, but he is also aware that in doing so he would be stealing from someone who owes him nothing. The man has a choice to make: on one hand, he can forgo the bread and wait to see if his prospects improve another day. On the other hand, he can take the bread, and satisfy his hunger. Doing so, however, will compromise a principle that he generally takes to be an essential part of himself. His choice of action is a conscious choice between upholding his principles and satisfying a nutritive need. If he chooses the latter, he knows he will have to deal with the psychological consequence of compromising his principles. He may make a deal with himself, vowing that if he steals the bread this once he will make it up to the store-owner threefold when he is able. Thus, even if the nutritive wins out over the rational desire, the man will take care that he maintains his principles (which in this case is a desire of his rational self).

Why does the man take this decision so seriously? The answer, says Christine Korsgaard, has to do with identity. One of the features of the reflective nature of a human being is a conception of self. In order for us to be happy, we must be satisfied with how we see ourselves. This is just an assertion for now, but I hope to defend it by elucidating the process of identity construction. Our self-identity is how we perceive ourselves. We perceive ourselves as having certain virtues, but we also feel that we have a choice over what these virtues are. We act to preserve the virtues we desire to have, and jettison those that we once believed to be virtues, but which have been revealed as defective. We may even act to incorporate new virtues into our lives. In all of this, our goal is to perfect our character, aligning how we actually live with how we

believe we should live as humans, parents, friends, and all of the other relationships we form. These beliefs will change over time, and as a product, so too will our identity. But wherever our identity ends up, we must follow it. The alternative is that we act against that which we think we are. Such actions, says Korsgaard, threaten identity. She says:

It is the conceptions of ourselves that are most important to us that give rise to unconditional obligations. For to violate them is to lose your integrity and so your identity, and to no longer be what you are. That is, it is to no longer be able to think of yourself under the description under which you value yourself and find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. It is to be for all practical purposes dead or worse than dead.³⁷

Korsgaard certainly places a lot of stock in identity. What could be so important about upholding one's identity that death seems like an appropriate alternative? I think there are a couple candidates for answering this question. First of all, identity helps us decide what kinds of reasons are valid for us. As I said before, reasons are a necessity of living life as a rational being. But because reasons are subject to reflective criticism, they must stand up to review. Telling myself that I ought to go to the park to practice my throwing arm will only count as a reason if I care about playing baseball. If I do not, then no reason that is contingent on me playing baseball will be able to motivate me to act. I really do not have a reason to go to the park, because my throwing arm simply does not matter to me. I do not take playing baseball to be part of my identity, and so reasons that appeal to that identity will have no force over my decision making process. In this way, our identities affords us with a consistent framework for evaluating what kind of reasons actually count as reasons to us. Without identity, rationality would have no manner of evaluating the validity of a given reason. It is only in the framework of identity that reasons can be validated by our reflective minds. Therefore, it is only through identity that we can effectively act towards an end.

³⁷ *Sources of Normativity*. pp. 102.

This may not satisfy the skeptic who denies the importance of a cohesive identity. Certainly, even someone who just broke one of their core principles has some identity with which to act. It might have changed rather dramatically, but there is still something salvageable. We will never therefore get to a place where nothing at all can count as a reason to us.

I think the skeptic is wrong to assume that a person cannot lose all sense of self by repeatedly violating his own standards, and thereby be paralyzed in a practical sense. Still, this would probably take many successive identity crises, and it does not tell us why we might want to hold on to one particular identity. To understand this, I think it is worthwhile to look at another, related phenomenon of rational reflection. Rational reflection is not limited to evaluating reasons for action; it also prompts questions about our nature independently of practical concerns. We may ask how we should act given our natures, but we may also ask why we must act at all. What is it about action that makes it preferable to inaction? Certainly the former leads to a continuation of life while the latter to an ending of it, but why ought we care about this either? This is essentially a question of purpose or meaning. We act for a purpose, act out of meaning, but at the root of things, "what is the purpose to continuing life?" is a valid question. The oblivion of non-existence makes this existentialist concern difficult to completely overcome, as any concern that we can think of alleviating through action ceases to exist when we do.

The kind of extreme skepticism is the focus of one of Christine Korsgaard's sections in the sources of normativity. The example goes that an agent, lacking any standard of value whatsoever, comes to place no value in life itself. In this state, suicide

seems like a legitimate course of action. Because he has no values, he is not violating any values in doing so; as such, he is under no form of obligation to maintain his life.³⁸

I think there is a consideration that Korsgaard misses here that complicates the issue further, and perhaps gives the skeptic who doubts the value of life itself an internal reason to prefer improving his life instead of committing suicide. Korsgaard says this skeptic has no ends, since reasons to do things come from the values we hold. If this is true however, the practice of suicide looks as paradoxical as any other choice the agent might make. Though I suppose one could let themselves starve to death without food or water, most suicide involves some sort of active practice. In fact, perhaps even starving oneself does, as I imagine we would have to actively suppress our desire to go get food and drink in order to die in this manner. So suicide itself becomes an end, and as such the agent comes to value the end of life. Now, as Korsgaard says, to have values at all, we need life. Therefore, by willing suicide we are placing a value on the obliteration of value. While I do not think this contradiction will stop many from actually going through with their plans for suicide, I think it does indicate that the choice to kill oneself is not without logical problems.

Korsgaard does not come to this conclusion herself because she believes that human beings can have desires without them therefore creating a corresponding end. Instead, we only have ends once we have reflectively identified the thing that we desire *and* endorsed that thing as worth seeking after. Otherwise, an actor would merely act on whatever desire took hold of her at the time, with no normative principle to guide which of her actions were conducive to her overall identity. This is not a picture of agency, and Korsgaard wants to reject it as a possibility for the human actor. I think Korsgaard is right to conceive of action without reflection as a failure to create ends. Rather, my

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 162-3.

disagreement comes over the notion that a person is not acting on an end in killing himself. No matter how I try to conceive of the specifics of a suicide, it seems to me to be a willful, intentional act. One does not kill oneself without thinking, as we sometimes think a barroom brawler to punch a fellow patron without thinking. To believe the world is completely without value is not something one comes to on a whim. It is itself a perverse type of reflective result. And then to bring oneself to commit the actual act, it seems to me that one would need to overcome the rebellion of years of internalized social stigma and their own animal disposition towards self-preservation. Indeed, the agent may come not to care about these things (as I believe they must in order to commit the act), but it is hard for me to believe that the mind is not active in the process.

If my intuitions on this subject are correct, there seems to *always* be a reason against suicide (at least suicide stemming from value skepticism. Dignity suicide, where a person kills herself to save face or the like is a different story entirely). The decision to commit suicide is a reflective result to end reflection. But if even suicide cannot be a rational course of action, then the skeptic has recourse to alleviating the skeptical rut he is in. He must admit that in reflecting, he has been placing value on the product of his reflections all along. He must acknowledge that whenever he has come to some action, it has been the product of his own mind that got him there. And this should indicate to him that he ought to value himself. He is, as I have said, free to continue with his plans for suicide, but he must do so in a state of confusion or frustration. One cannot be reflectively resolute in destroying themselves.

If the agent recognizes the dark irony in using her will to destroy her will, she may look for other courses of action. If she retains that amount of rationality that even the suicidal skeptic may retain, she will admit to herself that, if nothing else, the products of her mind have some value to her. And once she has this, she has a reason to craft an

identity that centers around the valuation of her own mind. It is this identity that forms the core of all our other values and the endeavors we undertake. As such, she will find reasons to re-engage the pursuit of her own general happiness.

To see how a basic respect for our own minds can bring us to investing ourselves into various values and ends, consider friends playing a recreational game of chess on a relaxing Sunday afternoon. Both players are aware that the outcome of the game does not matter, or at least no more than trivially. Still, once they have committed to playing the game, they will probably do their best to win. Perhaps they want to be the kinds of people who can set their mind to something and achieve it. Perhaps they just want to be known as good chess players. Whatever their motivation, something piques the interest of their rational capacities enough to get them to fully engage in the game, even though they recognize its lack of any larger meaning. If they are going to play chess, there is no reason not to play their best; at least they can test the ability of their rational minds to make and meet goals. And they cannot see any reason not to play chess. After all, they have got to do something with their time, so it might as well interest them in the way that chess does.

Creating an identity for oneself is much the same notion. If one fails to see any meaning inherent in life, she will also inevitably fail to see any meaning in death, and as such she might as well do something that interests her. Creating an identity is perhaps the most interesting practice she can engage in, and if she engages in it, it will impose a sort of meaning on her life. She must set up a system of rules for playing the identity game, and set goals that cater to the desires that are most prevalent in her nature. It is these goals that will hold her attention most. Like chess holds the attention because its

strategy both challenges³⁹ and satisfies the problem-solver, creating an identity holds our attention if the identity we are creating is based on values that both challenge us and satisfy us through their attainment. In the case of the human being as such, this will mean setting ambitious goals informed by her human nature.

Though I have nowhere near the knowledge needed to provide a full account of the essential characteristics of a human being as such, the requirement that the identity we craft for ourselves is both challenging and rewarding is a standard by which we place limits on how we pursue and achieve happiness. As we navigate the various options for forming and shaping our identities, we will receive various indicators for how we are doing. Depression, anxiety, and lack of enthusiasm stemming from a certain aspect of our life can indicate that the way we have crafted our identity in that area may need to be reexamined. If meeting new people is a persistent cause of anxiety, this is reason for me to examine the exact source of my anxiety (for instance, am I worried that I will be boring to those I meet?). With the source found, I can work on a solution. In this case, maybe I will make an effort to be more open to new experiences. In this way, we can be driven towards the virtues just through our reasoning over how we can improve those aspects of our lives we are unsatisfied with.

Of course, we need not feel a problem in order to determine that we ought to adopt a specific type of character. Certain things we can reason to just by reflecting on what we think would make for a good life. For example, I would think a fairly

³⁹ I think the appeal we find in challenges can easily be explained by our reflective nature. Overcoming a challenge is generally a matter of will - the agent must exercise her will to a degree not generally demanded of her. We can therefore commend ourselves for having the resolve to utilize our resources in such an intensive way. Challenges are the only way we can really test the limits of our various virtues, and so they function as guideposts for our reflective evaluation of ourselves. To meet a challenge confirms that we are moving forward on the path to what we believe will make us happy.

incontestable facet of our fundamental nature as human beings is the capacity for rational thought. As such, base hedonism, which pointedly avoids rational pleasure, and nihilism, which seeks to avoid making rational connections by spurning rational belief formation, will probably not be good candidates for producing a happy human being. These principles of living bore our rational capacities, and any hedonist or nihilist who gives the slightest bit of reflection to their condition will realize that they cannot in fact expunge rationality from their existence. The question of purpose will assert itself, as it does whenever we think to act. In order to satisfy this nagging question however, the would-be anti-rationalist will have to plunge fully into the rational world. One cannot maintain the illusion of fulfillment by ignoring the questions raised by a rational mind.

On the other hand, we *can* construct a picture of a satisfying life being pursued through moral virtues. I do not wish to provide a full taxonomy of the moral virtues, but it is informative to see that things like honesty and industriousness can be challenging goals, and that persevering through these challenges yields satisfactory results. Industry fits this framework easily: motivating ourselves to do hard work may be difficult when a relaxing day of TV and video games is right in front of us, but the result of that hard work will be the attainment of one of our more elusive ends. For example, I could very much want to be able to play the guitar, but not want to take the time to learn. The virtue of industriousness could help me to overcome my laziness and lead me to develop a new talent. In the end, I will be happy both with the new skill I acquired and the fact that I displayed a virtue that I value. The latter speaks to the rational happiness gained from crafting a positive identity for ourselves, and the former speaks to the fulfillment of reaching a specific goal I have set for myself, and thereby acquiring a new positive feature of my character.

The virtue of honesty looks very different from industriousness, since it is not clear that there are always advantages that result from possessing the virtue. Before we say that the individual pursues an honest life because it is another challenging and satisfying virtue, we must examine how satisfying it actually is. The fulfillment available by overcoming a challenge is of course present in honesty like any of the virtues; given an individual's goal to be honest, they will be happy with themselves so long as they uphold this aspect of their character. Yet if this alone is indicative of which virtues lead to a good and happy life, it seems like anything could be such a virtue. An individual with a goal to dupe as many people as possible would find the ability to cheat people a virtue, and would be happier the more elaborate his con.

The cheat must admit, however, that people are not playing his game. He is taking advantage of ignorance; if the world sees his ruse, he can no longer effectively pursue his goal. If the people around him were wiser to his con, his own success would dwindle. Because being a successful con man depends on other people, it is incongruent with the virtues we typically identify as moral. Moral virtues do not depend on the action or virtues of others. A man can be perfectly kind, honest, or prudent, regardless of the people around him. He cannot be perfectly wily regardless of his surrounding however. His wilieness is always in terms of those around him. So wilieness cannot be a virtue of human beings as such; it must be seen in light of a human being as related to other things. We may call it a 'virtue' of the human being as a social competitor. But unlike fulfilling the role of a human being as such, fulfilling the role of a human being as a social competitor has no intrinsic worth to it. If this is not a valuable role for the human being to fill according to the nature of what it is to be human, then the virtues associated with it will have no bearing on an individual's ability to live a happy

life, and may conflict with it if the virtues espoused are contrary to the ones that a human must adopt to be happy.

In point of fact, I think the virtues needed to be an effective competitor with other members of society *do* clash with innate virtues of human nature: though it is more up to biologists or evolutionary anthropologists to provide information on the natural character of human beings as such, it seems intuitively correct that the human animal thrives through inclusion in a society with other humans. Any characteristics that clashes with this aspect of human nature would tend to inhibit the human's thriving. Therefore, knowledge about our nature will also give us knowledge about the best way to pursue our own happiness and thriving. In the case of honesty, a desire to have the types of mutually beneficial relationships that are open to social creatures like human beings will be the satisfying end that comes out of our nature.

It is difficult to say why it is that the virtues seem to me to be good candidates for the means to happiness, but let us examine what we know about what happiness is. I have argued for a conception of happiness that is somewhat broader than what may strike some people when the word is used vernacularly. Happiness is not just pleasantness, it is contentment. It is the feeling that things ought not be other than they are in terms of how one's life is going. Complete happiness is not our natural state - one would have to be so satisfied with her achievements and position in life that she saw no way of improving it further. I do not know if any person has ever felt this way, but I imagine it is an exceedingly rare position to be in.

Assuming he is not *perfectly* content with his life, the rational agent will seek out ways to make his life better. This process starts by identifying what is currently wrong or unsatisfactory in some way. If he can identify ways in which some parts of his identity do not cohere with the others, this is one way of improving his life. Part of what it means to

be perfectly content is to be free of conflict or tension, since these things are a natural stimulus for change and action. But the agent whose identity is not a coherent whole is at conflict with herself. In order to be happy, she will need to resolve these conflicts in the best way possible.

This leads us to our next question: how does the agent discover the best way possible to resolve conflicts in her identity? Most simply put, she rationally evaluates her conflict. Her goal is to resolve her identity in a way as to make it a coherent whole. She will also want that coherent whole to accord with her sense of human nature. Humanity is an unavoidable part of her identity, (she must acknowledge that she is human), and if she believes that this identity carries any substantive content, it will be part of her goal in creating a coherent identity to take necessary human traits into account. Of course, the agent can believe whatever he likes about human nature (he may believe they are naturally combative, for example). What he believes will color the ability of living a truly happy life however, as some coherent views of human identity (say, as an isolated warrior who lives by continuously proving his ability to take what he wants), will have conflict sewn deeply into the fabric of an identity.

The life in conflict, as I have mentioned, is not a content life. One is always striving to keep what one has or to make the preparations to do so. But as I've said, perfect contentment is about the cessation of desire. So it looks like identities that naturally breed conflict will be imperfect tools for achieving happiness. If we can find a coherent identity that is less conflictual, then we will have found a better answer to the question of happiness.

This is the strength of the virtues. Unlike an identity based on oneself as a warrior, the identity of the virtuous agent is consistent with the termination of conflict. To call this the goal of morality might be too strong (at least for some philosophers who did

work in moral theory), but it is unmistakably a boon that morality provides. Moral virtues like honesty, kindness, and cool-headedness all tend towards defusing conflicts, and not creating them. When conflict does break out between two people (or even two nations), we can often provide a narrative as to what virtues one or the other party was lacking that would have saved them from such a conflict. If the agent can construct a coherent identity based on the virtues, it is a way of avoiding conflict, both within and with other people. Since happiness, the notion that our life in general cannot be improved upon, cannot be maintained if the agent is in conflict (because conflict implies an unfulfilled end, and happiness requires being completely fulfilled), the power of the virtues to minimize conflict is a very strong point in favor of their conduciveness to happiness.

I think providing an example will help make this point clearer. Consider the example of George, who sometimes cheats when playing games with friends. If George reflects on his actions, he must have some sort of endorsement or rejection of this behavior. He may say to himself, "George, you ought not cheat in games. It does not make much sense when you really think about it." Alternatively, he could defend the practice by insisting to himself that he plays games to win, and that he will take whatever means he can to this objective. If the former route is followed, George is in conflict with himself whenever he cheats. He believes that this part of identity does not cohere with the other parts, and knows, at some level, that he should expunge it. If George takes the latter route, he has now set up a value that puts him in conflict with others. If his overriding and ultimate purpose in playing games is to win, George will undoubtedly see those playing with him as rivals that are in the way of his goal. George will interpret the act of game-playing as one rife with conflict, where his own values are constantly in peril from those playing with him. George may gain some temporary fulfillment from winning a game, but if his competitive attitude extends beyond single games and to the practice of

game-playing in general, he will never be content by the standard he has set. There is always the chance that he will be defeated in the next game, and so George cannot be wholly happy. Because the 'virtues' of a great competitor are bounded by the ability of those around him, happiness based on the attainment of these 'virtues' can never be secure.

Contrast this to Mary, who plays games to perfect the virtue of insight as it relates to problem-solving. Mary, regardless of who she plays with, can work towards this goal. Furthermore, it is possible for Mary to become a perfect problem-solver, to the extent that she knows what she must do, whatever the situation she is presented with. So the goals Mary sets for herself are obtainable and independent of external forces such as the people she is playing with. Furthermore, there is no obvious way in which being a good problem-solver clashes with any of the other virtues Mary might espouse. So it looks like by making this her end in playing games, Mary has avoided George's problem of valuing something inherently conflictual. By adopting a virtue, Mary has therefore chosen an identity that is consistent with her happiness.

I have not provided a foolproof reason for why virtuous behavior is a rational necessity. This would require a full examination of all the virtues I wished to defend and an explanation of how they are necessary for happiness. What I have aimed to give the reader, however, is a reason to prefer virtuous behavior to non-virtuous behavior. I have followed Korsgaard in arguing that forging an identity is a necessity for the human actor, and that some identities are demonstrable more conducive to happiness than others. In particular, I have argued that an agent cannot be completely happy while he is in conflict, and that unvirtuous or immoral behavior is a common source of conflict in human life. I would now like to turn to an examination of the implications of my view that

our reason to be virtuous comes from our own desire for happiness, and respond to some of the possible objections that could be raised against this view.

Chapter 4

Objections to my View

I have argued for a reason that every rational being has to be moral. In doing so however, I may have advanced a view that faces unique problems in other areas of ethical theory, such as moral responsibility, moral supremacy, and moral knowledge. Though I do not have the space to do an in-depth analysis of how the theory I have put forward answers the questions asked by the topics above, it will be useful to examine some of the most likely criticisms and the possible responses available. The criticisms I examine will not be an exhaustive list of the possible avenues of critique, nor do I intend to give a full argument dispelling the critiques I pose. My goal is to give the reader an idea of how my theory might fare in other areas of ethical theory, and answer some questions that may have come up regarding my argument thus far.

In Chapter 1, I said that I would not be challenging Dreier's claim that the means/ends principle is the only categorical imperative. Yet in chapters 2 and 3 I argued that everyone has a reason to be virtuous. It may seem as if I have therefore broken my promise in chapter 1 and attempted to create a new categorical imperative.

In fact, I have done no such thing. Though I think the reason we have to be virtuous is a reason that *all* people share (that is, the attainment of happiness), I still believe that the reasons we have to be moral are in fact dependent on having a certain desire. That this desire is one which is held by every rational being does not lessen the fact that my justification is hypothetical. What makes the means/ends principle a categorical imperative is not that everyone has a reason to follow it, but that asking what

that reason is nonsensical. It is a founding principle of what it means to have reasons, and in this sense it is self-justifying. If an agent were to ask for the reasons to be virtuous, however, there would be no similar paradox. My theory is meant to show that we could indeed answer her question, and in doing so we would still be appealing to her desires and the rules of rationality. Because we can understand this question for reasons, the imperative to behave virtuously is not categorical. Instead, it is a hypothetical imperative that applies universally.

It may be argued that the hypothetical imperative that I have provided is so broad that it ceases to be practically useful. The agent may accept that virtuous behavior is a means to happiness, yet still be lost as to what virtuous behavior is, how various virtues interact with one another, and the relation between the virtues and other interests that are essential to the agent's happiness. Hence, the moral imperative I have given yields very little substantive moral knowledge. We may accept why being virtuous ought to motivate us, but still be very unclear on what the virtues are. I have no satisfying answers to these questions. Nonetheless, I do not think we need to be overly anxious about our lack of a definite answers in the realm of substantive morality.

I believe the anxiety that might arise from uncertainty about the answers to these questions is a product of the pervasiveness of rule-based systems in our moral thinking. In rule-based ethical systems like Kant's, there is no moral content outside of what we must not do and what we must do. To be unclear as to what the rules are would mean having no moral system to speak of. This is not the case with agent-based theories of morality. Agents come into the world with factors to shape their identities. Children are not immoral beasts just because they have not had time to discover the rules of morality. They have been taught by their parents, and surroundings, given rules that they don't quite understand but tend to follow nonetheless. They therefore have answers to the

moral questions, though they may not be justified answers (nor are they necessarily very good answers).

This unjustified position is of course insufficiently reflective to be a resting point, but it does give people a foundation to base their moral enquiries on. As an agent matures, she will move forward in her moral development. Because the purpose of the moral reasoning I have argued for is to create happy human beings, it will not do for the agent to merely apply given rules. She must *see* how the actions she takes and the virtues she strives for are connected to her happiness. She cannot truly internalize the virtues until she understands their importance, and I think the process of self-discovery is an effective means to coming to this sort of understanding.

To illustrate the point that the uncertainties surrounding my theory need not be the source of practical or moral anxiety, consider the example of Jane, a teenager who is just starting to give conscious thought to the topic of morality, deciding for herself which of the moral standard she grew up with are actually sound standards to live by. The evaluation of her moral standards will probably start with a sense of unhappiness or uncertainty regarding an aspect of her life. Perhaps Jane's parents have always told her that the most important thing in life is to be forgiving of others shortcoming. Jane has generally lived with this as the principal virtue she strives for. One day, she witnesses a boy lifting her cellphone from her backpack. She confronts the boy and gets him to return her phone to her backpack, but does not tell anyone else. The boy, she figures, is probably misguided and doesn't know better. It won't help the situation to get him in trouble. She forgives the boy and resolves to keep his actions a secret. The next day, the class finds that the boy is gone and that he has taken the possessions of several of Jane's class mates with him.

It is likely that Jane will feel bad about her actions. Had she not been so forgiving, she could have prevented the injustice to her classmates. She still sees the value in forgiveness, but in the future resolves not to let it go so far as facilitating injustice. The exact way in which Jane resolves the tension between forgiveness and justice will be a complicated choice based on all the specifics of Jane's value system, but we can expect some sort of renegotiation of her values. In this way, Jane moves from a rough understanding of the virtues to a slightly more refined notion of them. Of course, her conception will still not be perfect, but it will be improved.

This kind of situation will happen often throughout Jane's life. She will be confronted with the feeling that things should have gone differently, and that feeling will prompt Jane to evaluate her values and reorganize them in the way she thinks best. So even though Jane admittedly doesn't know the substantive quality of all the virtues, how they interact with one another, or exactly how virtues should fit into her life in general, she has an idea about these things just by growing up as a human being. Her main goal as she matures (and this kind of maturation takes place over a lifetime) is to renegotiate her answers to these questions in a way that fits best given what she knows and believes. As we live, each subsequent renegotiation is itself challenged, and this leads to further development.

Someone skeptical of this account of moral growth and the acquisition of moral knowledge might argue that Jane is not moving towards what is going to make her happiest, but that she is simply moving, with no discernible path to or away from happiness.. Certainly I think we can misstep when forming our values. We can become overly influenced by a single life-changing experience or jaded by seeing our virtues unappreciated or ineffective at eliciting the kind of change we would like to see. But even when we allow these things to happen, we do so believing at the time that we are going

to be happier because of the shift. If healthy skepticism turns into outright cynicism because we have been duped one too many times, we make this transition believing that its the best way to protect our happiness from the outside world. We will not be free from wondering if we have overcompensated however. This wondering will naturally bring us to be more trusting than we were in the extremely jaded position. It is hardly a rationally defensible position to believe that *no one* can be trusted, and if we can work out a system whereby we only place our trust in those who deserve it, we will be better off than not having trusted anyone at all. Therefore, I think we can be said to move forward as we live and adjust. There may be small steps back, but we have a habit to correct them over time, as it is in our own interest to do so.

The reasons we do not tend to get stuck in ruts of pessimism, cynicism, or jadedness are the same reasons we fall into them in the first place. It is because we are uncertain and critical of our own values that we can come to doubt the positions we hold. But cynicism is itself predicated on holding a certain sort of belief, and so we can be no more certain that it ought to guide us than any other value we hold. The belief that the world is not worth the effort is falsifiable, and as such absolute cynicism is never our only option. If we have not closed ourselves off to the process of rational belief formation entirely, we would expect raw cynicism to be tempered over time. It is part of our nature as self-aware beings that we root out our own imperfections.

In short, the fact that our moral knowledge is imperfect should not be discouraging. Most of us are raised with general notions of what the moral facts are, though the disagreement between various people signifies that this knowledge is not perfect. Our parents and teachers tell us what they take the facts to be and we subsequently judge these offerings of facts by our own evolving standards. The tension between many of the competing values we are offered is often quite small. We generally

don't face questions about whether or not murder is wrong. Instead, we might face questions about exactly when killing becomes murder instead of defense of one's life and property. We get many competing views that can pull us in different ways when navigating these sorts of questions, and our exact views on each subject may change over the course of a lifetime. But we never find ourselves completely without guidance about what we should do; there are always reasons for acting is one way over another. Though our mechanism for evaluating these reasons is itself imperfect, this should not stop us from exercising it to the best of our ability. Indeed, in order to act at all, we need to be able to make choices based off of imperfect information. No matter how ignorant we take ourselves to be, it does not relieve our need to act.

If knowing the right thing to do or character to adopt is as difficult as it seems on my account, it could be said to severely limit the notion of moral responsibility. As I have mentioned before, learning how to be virtuous is a lifelong process. But a key component to holding someone responsible is that they ought to know to behave differently. If some people are largely ignorant of what they ought to do because they lack the knowledge of virtue that comes with age, this reduces their culpability. This is why we generally don't hold children fully responsible for their actions. Under my view however, mitigating culpability for those who lack sufficient knowledge to make good decisions could threaten to reduce all actors to a less-than-responsible state.

There is a problem with applying this mitigated responsibility to adult agents however. Even if an agent has not come to the point where they have reflectively internalized a moral virtue, they will have been exposed to the fact that others view it as such. Once I give you a reason not to kill, you are not completely free to ignore that reason. If you listened to what I said, you will consider my argument. If the reason I gave

you cannot be overcome by a reason of your own, you have no reason to believe that killing is still permissible. At this point, you will be culpable if you kill.

This line of argument takes its cue from Korsgaard, who argues in *Sources of Normativity* that someone who merely states something to you in a language you know is offering you a reason, albeit a weak one, to act in a certain way.⁴⁰ This offering has force on us because we recognize others as rational agents who have given some thought to their values and actions. That they have come to a conclusion that differs from our own is enough to prompt us to question how certain we are in our reasons for acting. If I am sufficiently reflective, someone telling me to cease taunting her because I am being needlessly cruel will make me think for a moment. Is my taunting cruel? Is the cruelty needless? Do I care about being needlessly cruel? Certainly the person imploring me to stop thinks I ought to. If I want to be able to defend my actions to myself and to others, I will need answers to these questions that support my actions. But upon finding no good reasons to defend my actions (and in fact finding reasons that count against my actions), choosing to continue acting in such a way is indefensible, and I will be morally responsible for the choice to act cruelly.

In reality, we are getting these offerings of moral reasons frequently. Social norms function in this way, constantly asserting certain moral stances that an agent must accept *prima facie* if they cannot be rejected by concrete reasons. Virtues like non-aggression, kindness, and honesty are so ingrained in our culture that practically no one can escape culpability for ignoring them. They are reasserted so often that the reasons for adopting them become well known. In absence of other reasons which trump these given reasons, it looks like the violating agent is being willfully irrational. The fact that

⁴⁰ *Source of Normativity*. pp. 140.

they are not perfectly aware of the exact extent to which they should espouse these virtues is generally not a legitimate defense for their wanton disregard.

Of course, the blame we assign to people cannot be unrelenting in every case. Not only are there some agents who are too young to understand even the most basic reasons for moral behavior, but there are difficult cases, where two virtues clash with one another. In these cases, we can mitigate responsibility to some degree without forfeiting responsibility more generally. The amount of responsibility that is mitigated will depend on how tough a moral problem the agent is faced with, but consider your thoughts about something as serious as murder. For myself at least, I find a planned murder much more reprehensible than one done in the heat of the moment. The first scenario shows the perpetrator as one who disregards the virtues, while the second may just be too weak to apply them at times. This is itself a fault, and I am not advancing an argument for complete forgiveness of unplanned murders. But I do think we are right to think about them as less morally reprehensible than their planned counterparts. This is only one example of how we may assign more or less moral blame depending on the circumstances of the situation and the values called on to inform the decision that was made.

Consider Romeo's slaying of Tybalt in *Romeo & Juliet*. Had Romeo merely walked up to Tybalt, unprovoked, and stabbed him, the act would seem villainous through and through. That Romeo attacks Tybalt after seeing Tybalt kill Mercutio, however, should count towards a mitigation of his moral guilt. Through his actions, Romeo reveals that he is moved deeply by the virtue of loyalty. That he chooses to act on the virtue of loyalty over that of peacefulness may in fact be misguided, but the presence of a countervailing virtue makes Romeo's aggression less evil, if not mitigating it completely.

Of course, we need not think Romeo is completely without blame. Rather, his blame is mitigated. As it turns out, Romeo did in fact have a reason to be more peaceful and control the loyalty that threw him into a rage; his actions ultimately contribute to the destruction of that which makes him happiest: his life with Juliet. Of course, we do not need to say he had a reason to be more peaceful just because of the way things turned out. Even if he and Juliet had escaped successfully, he would have had to deal with effects of his actions on his own self-image. If he came to regret his decision to duel with Tybalt, it would give him a reason to change the way in which he ordered his virtues.

I think a major boon of virtue ethics is its ability to cast an agent in many different shades, so to speak. In reality, most of the bad actions people take have one or more mitigating circumstances surrounding them. These do not relieve the agent of all wrongdoing, but they serve as an explanatory device whereby we can understand why the agent did what she did. This is important because while we don't want to completely forgive most wrongdoings, we must still continue to live and interact with imperfectly moral agents, and so it will help us to know the nature of their imperfections. I doubt we completely approve of anyone else's value scheme; even our closest loved ones probably have what we take to be imperfections in their character. Knowing what these imperfections are helps us tailor our relationship with them in a way that is best for both parties.⁴¹ By examining a person's character in terms of the virtues they possess and the

⁴¹ Another useful tool that my theory provides to those looking to tailor their relationships is the ability to differentiate aspects of a person's character. Under virtue ethics, we need not be content with just calling an agent bad, good, or somewhere in between. Instead, we will be able to say that he is very honest but somewhat unfeeling, or that she is peaceful but lazy. The ability to examine a character in this piecemeal fashion is of great use to the agent who is looking to fit his actions towards others to how they will respond to those actions. Appellations of good and bad are of limited usefulness in practical life; we all have character traits that could be labeled as either. What is more important is to truly understand an agent so that we may relate with her in a manner that is effective for us both.

weight they give to each, we can understand much of what motivates them and tailor our own interactions with them accordingly.

I realize I have been conducting my discussion of moral culpability under the assumption that what we have reasons for doing is in some way connected to what we are blameworthy for failing to do. My position regarding moral reasons is egoistic in nature, and it may strike the reader as odd to judge an agent morally guilty if what he has failed to do is successfully pursue his own happiness. Where there is no duty to others, says the objector, there can be no moral guilt.

I am willing to concede that moral guilt will not be as prominent in my theory as other, duty-based theories. Rather, the actor who has acted immorally will have two reactions: first, the recognition that her actions were irrational (i.e. against her pursuit for happiness), and second, the knowledge that other people will take her actions into account when assessing her character. She may come to regret her actions on the second effect alone, since immoral actions tend to color the way in which others interact with us. If the agent told a lie and got caught, it would make others less likely to trust her in the future. So while I do not think what the agent is feeling here is classifiable as moral guilt in the sense that we usually understand it, it will nonetheless be the case that she has a reason to treat others in a specific way, and not just a reason to develop her own character in a specific way. Treating others well allows us to benefit from their friendship, trust, and goodwill. Lacking these goods, we are likely to be at eternal conflict with our neighbors, and as I have mentioned before, I do not think happiness can thrive in such an environment.

In light of this view, we can see guilt not so much as an ill that people try to avoid as a label that one person gives to another to indicate that they disagree with their actions or the reasons for taking them. If an agent is deciding whether or not to commit

theft, he will have two major considerations. First, he will consider how this act will affect his own self-image. Secondly, he may consider what others will think of him. The concept of guilt is a product of the second consideration. It is the knowledge or fear that someone will think of you in a way you do not wish to be thought of. This can certainly be a source of motivation, though if it is motivating, it will be so from a position of self-interest.

Another source of discomfort for some of my readers may be the fact that basing moral motivation on the agent's own happiness does not leave grounds for distinguishing moral from non-moral virtues. The reasons an agent has to be kind will be the same reasons he has to be hard-working or good at chess. Though the importance of these virtues in reference to one another will vary, all of them are motivated by the desire for happiness. This means that on some level, they are commensurable. Theoretically, the prospect of a very large gain in an individual's ability to play chess might provide a stronger reason than the virtue of kindness that he would have to let atrophy to attain it (perhaps he must quit his volunteer position at the hospital so that he may take lessons from the chess world champion).

At issue here is the supremacy of moral virtues. The Kantian picture of morality is that moral rules operate as side constraints within which actions are morally permissible. Anything outside of the side constraints is morally impermissible. There is no grey area, save any confusion over what the moral rules actually demand. Virtue ethics cannot set up such stringent side-constraints however, since it makes no basic distinction between moral and non-moral choices. To the virtue ethicist, all actions are judged by the same standard, so there can be no formal separation of different categories of action. If the

virtue ethicist wants to argue for the case that moral concerns will always trump non-moral concerns, he must do so substantively.

In my own theory, this amounts to showing that moral behavior is always the most conducive to an agent's happiness, or that immoral behavior is always most damaging to it. I think a stronger argument can be made for the latter than the former. The human mind is counterfactual, meaning that we can imagine what things would be like if we had acted differently, and before we act we can imagine what sort of consequences will fall out of each possible course of action. This feature of our mind means that we are prone to recounting what we could have done differently that would have made a situation better. The distress that we get from this recounting must be factored into our analysis of what the best course of action will be.

In chapter 2 I gave an example of an honest but starving man who is choosing whether or not to steal a piece of bread. But now consider that it is not he who is starving, but his family. If moral supremacy is true within a virtue ethics conception, must we say that the man will be happier letting his family starve than he would be stealing bread in order to feed them. This seems like a very alien use of the term "happiness." Of course, if he steals the bread and prevents his family from starving, every time he looks at them he may remember the desperate action he took, and his happiness will be less for this fact. But can we say that this is anything compare to the memory that he could have done something to save his family and did not?

This final question makes me believe that perhaps the virtue ethicist has a different kind of answer. Perhaps the question of whether or not to steal bread to feed one's family is not a question of whether the agent should act morally or immorally. Rather, it is a question of what the moral action is. Generally speaking, honesty is the kind of virtue that does not need limits or exceptions. But there is something to be said

about the willingness to protect your loved ones. It is a form of loyalty, I would think. While generally claims of loyalty just don't seem to match up to claims of honesty (we do not forgive the woman who steals a gold ring so that she may give it to her brother), every virtue has its limits. If the claims of loyalty are so great (and the claims of honesty relatively small), it could be immoral *not* to act in a way that saves one's family.

The persistent critic will note that I have dodged the original question in providing my answer. The question was not how we decide between two moral demands, but how we decide between a moral and non-moral virtue. I think part of the reason I slipped so easily into the former question is because the virtue ethicist can easily see all of life through a moral lense. To go back to my original example, the man who quits his volunteer position in order to work on his chess game need not see himself as subjugating the moral to the amoral. Moral virtues, if we will recall, are just those virtues that are required for the happiness of a human being as such. One likely candidate for such a virtue is having a pleasurable hobby that one can use as an outlet for life. Without these seemingly non-moral areas where we can develop our skills and get enjoyment from the craft, I think we would be altogether less human. When the man chooses to pursue chess over volunteer work, therefore, he may still be comparing two competing moral claims.

That no virtues seem to have absolute dominance over others reinforces the concern that the account of moral reasoning I am providing complex and cumbersome. I accept this, and embrace it as a credit to my theory in light of the real challenges we face in our practical reasoning. The fact is that we often do not know what we should do. We face hard decisions where the moral rules we are given seem intuitively wrong. One answer is to steel ourselves against our intuitions and do what our moral code tells us.

But we would do just as well to critically evaluate our moral code and see if there really isn't a better solution than what it offers. If my theory seems like it provides no easy answers, this is possibly because life itself is full of complications and competing concerns.

Although the non-absolutism that my theory touts can make decision-making more difficult at times, the commensurability of all values in terms of happiness ensures that all our decisions do in fact have a right answer. Because all our possible courses for action can be judged by how they will affect our overall happiness, it means that we never encounter a situation that is literally "lose-lose." We can compare things like our starving family with the prospect of stealing and be happy with choice that we make, so long as we are certain it was the right one.⁴² The knowledge that we did what was best for the situation we were in provides a great deal of comfort where we might normally live with a measure of guilt for choosing "the lesser of two evils." My theory discourages this way of thinking: we find ourselves in various positions in life, and all we can do is that which we reflectively think best. If we have fulfilled this criteria, we have no reason to think poorly of ourselves.

⁴² Of course, in a real life, the necessity of making this choice would probably be contingent on one or more mistakes we made leading up to our extreme poverty. We may still rue those mistakes even as we come to our understanding that given the situation we put ourselves in, we did the best we could.

Chapter 5

Final Conclusions

Though the virtue ethics account I have provided would need to be developed much more in order to pass as a general normative theory for moral action, I have at least provided the reader with a reason to believe that virtue ethics can serve as a standard by which we shape our moral reasons. The virtue ethicist approach I have taken has preserved the possibility for universal moral reasons in light of James Dreier's argument for difficulty of basing moral reasons on Kantian categorical imperatives. In doing this, I have embraced Dreier's argument that the means/ends principle is the sole categorical imperative, but argued that this need not dispel the possibility of universal moral reasons. Instead, I have argued that a universal human desire for happiness commits the rational agent to accepting moral reasons.

Because I have based my justification of moral reasons on an agent's happiness, any philosopher seeking to use my framework to arrive at substantive moral knowledge will need to discover what goods are essential to human happiness. If one or more goods can be defended as necessary for the happiness of the human agent, all agents will have a reason to pursue the means to those goods. As I have indicated, I believe the virtues I have used as examples are very likely some of these goods, and that acting in accordance with them is therefore a means to happiness.

If a theory of virtue ethics is to move forward, it is imperative that we come to understand the nature of the human being as such. I believe we already possess much of this knowledge (or at least hold reasonable beliefs regarding it), but we can improve

nonetheless. As our understanding of humanity develops, so too will our account of the virtues and morality. Though we may never know all there is to know about the human animal, I hope we will continue to uncover this mystery through scientific and philosophical inquiry.

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