

The Form and Matter of the Moral Law

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Abstract: In this paper I discuss the relationship between the “formal” characterization of the moral law provided by Kant’s Formula of Universal Law (FUL) and the “material” characterization of it contained in the Formula of Humanity (FH). I argue for a novel interpretation of Kant’s argument for the FH, which shows these two formulas to be more closely connected than they are often understood to be - just as Kant claims is the case. The resulting interpretation also helps us to better understand the connections between Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy, thus providing us with a better sense of the unity of his philosophical project.

Kant’s main aim in *Groundwork* II is to present a systematic characterization of the moral law. This he does - not by providing a single formulation of that law - but instead by laying out a series of formulas, each of which he takes to present the very same moral law in a different way.¹ But while Kant insists on the tight relationship between these different

¹“The above three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom only so many formulas of the very same law, and one of them of itself unites the other two in it.” (4:436) See below for some discussion of how this sentence is best translated.

In his recent *Commentary on Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Jens Timmermann stresses that the three formulas are expressions of a single law. But Timmermann weakens this claim by taking some of these formulas to be more or less “metaphorical” representations of the underlying principle. Part of my aim is to show that, at least in the case of the FUL and the FH, the relationship between the different formulas is considerably tighter than Timmermann

formulas, it is far from obvious why he takes them to be three ways of representing a single law. And it is just as unclear how Kant takes himself to be able to derive the formulas that appear later in his discussion against the background of his earlier discussion.

In what follows, I will focus on one of these issues: the relation between the first two main formulations of the categorical imperative: the Formula of Universal Law (FUL) and the Formula of Humanity (FH). The relation between these formulas has been the focus of increasing controversy in recent years. Traditionally the FUL took precedence over the FH in discussion of Kant's work. In fact, many famous criticisms of Kant's ethics are directed at this formula considered in isolation from the others.² It is not surprising, then, that in recent years defenders of Kant have come to de-emphasize the FUL in favor of other formulations of the categorical imperative. Philosophers such as Thomas Hill, Allen Wood, and Christine Korsgaard have increasingly moved toward interpretations of Kant's moral philosophy which view the FH as a more important and plausible statement of Kant's ethical views than the FUL.³

In many respects, this shift of attention is entirely appropriate. As Kant himself stresses, the FH is a more intuitive and complete representation of the moral law than the FUL. Thus, when considering how to apply this law to particular cases, a focus on the FH is perfectly reasonable. But recent Kant interpreters have gone on to insist, not just that the FH is a more intuitive and complete representation of the categorical imperative,

suggests.

²For example, it makes much more sense to criticize Kant's philosophy as "purely formal" if one focuses on the FUL. And the criticisms of Kant's philosophy that focus on the false positives and negatives that the FUL allegedly generates are more impressive, if one focuses on this formula. I think many of these objections to the FUL can be answered. But I will not press this point here.

³For Hill's views on these issues see his *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1992)). For Korsgaard's see her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York: Cambridge University Press (1996)). For Wood's see his *Kant's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press (1999)). Note that Wood believes that it is the third of Kant's main formulas (the Formula of Autonomy) that is most important for his moral philosophy. But it is clear that Wood regards the FH as a more important statement of the core ideas at work in Kant's ethics than the FUL.

but also that the FH stands on its own whether or not we find the claims Kant makes about the FUL compelling. In particular, it has become increasingly common to claim that the FH is not based on the FUL, but rather is derived by Kant from considerations independent from it.

I will argue here that this is a mistake. In particular, I hope to show that, given Kant's aims in discussing the FH, as well as his general philosophical methodology during the Critical period, it is most plausible to understand his derivation of the FH as building upon the argument for the FUL that he gives earlier in the *Groundwork*. Thus, the most natural way of reading Kant's argument for the FH takes it to be implicitly based on the FUL.

These may be surprising claims. For I think it is fair to say that the alternative reading of Kant has gained its popularity, in part, because it is generally taken to be impossible to give a plausible interpretation of the text that has the result that the FH is based on the FUL. Thus, interpretative charity - plus the well-known problems with the FUL - is often thought to force one to consider the possibility that the argument for the FH is wholly independent of the FUL.⁴ In what follows, I hope to answer these concerns by showing that we can understand Kant's derivation of the FH as based on two elements: First, the FUL itself, and, second, the idea, implicit in the FUL, that every rational will must treat *its own* present rationality as an end in itself.

One important consequence of this interpretation is that it allows us to understand the relationship between the FUL and the FH as paralleling the relationship that Kant describes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* between the logical forms of judgment and the (unschematized) categories. Thus, this interpretation allows us to understand the FUL and the FH as formal and material characterizations of the moral law in the same way that the

⁴Of course, I don't mean to suggest that this is the only reason to focus on the FH as opposed to the FUL, but it has served as an important motivation for this shift of attention. For a clear statement of this motivation, see Hill's discussion of "Humanity as an End in Itself" in his *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory*.

logical forms of judgment and the categories are formal and material characterizations of the *a priori* activities of the understanding. This helps us to understand Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy as two expressions of a single way of thinking about the formal and material conditions on thought or reasoning of any kind. So if this reading proves accurate, it will go some distance towards vindicating Kant's insistence that theoretical and practical reason are two sides of a single, unified capacity for rational thought and action.

I. The FUL and the FH

Kant's attempt in the *Groundwork* to give a thorough philosophical characterization of the moral law involves three main formulas and several further variants, of which the two most famous are the Formula of Universal Law (FUL) and the Formula of Humanity (FH).

The first of these states that one should:

(FUL) "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." (4:421)

Kant's arguments for this principle are the focus of much controversy, but I hope to set them aside here. For I am concerned not with the basis of the FUL, but rather with its relationship with the FH. Still, as I briefly discuss below, I believe that the FUL is best understood as following from a very basic (and plausible) conception of what it is to treat a practical principle as *objective* - or, in other words, of what is involved in treating a practical principle as valid for every rational being. Thus, once properly understood, I believe that the FUL is much more defensible than many readers of Kant take it to be.⁵

⁵For two classic discussions of the FUL, see Onora Nell's *Acting on Principle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) and Christine Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

The second of these principles, the FH, specifies a set of morally obligatory ends:

(FH) “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.” (4:429) ⁶

Of course, in reading this principle, we must remember that Kant conceives of ends more broadly than is usual today. In particular, he distinguishes between ends-to-be-effected (“zu bewirkenden Zwecke”) and what are often referred to as “existent” or “independent” ends (“selbstständige Zwecke”). An end-to-be-effected is a state of affairs that one aims to produce by one’s action as a means to an end. An independent end, on the other hand, is something for the sake of which one acts, even though it is *not* produced by one’s action.⁷ In this way, the category of ends includes for Kant anything for the sake of which one acts, whether or not this is something one hopes to bring about through one’s action.

Kant believes, with good reason, that the ends mentioned in the FH must be independent ends as opposed to ends-to-be-effected. For whatever is involved in treating humanity or rationality as an end in itself, it is clear that this is not primarily a matter of trying to “produce” more humanity or rationality through one’s actions as means to an end. Rather, the role that these ends play in practical reasoning is quite different.

As Kant notes, this role has both a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect involves the demand that we not “act against” these ends, while the positive aspect involves the demand that we, insofar as this possible, act in a manner that “harmonizes” with them.⁸ But does this require? To consider this question, it is helpful to consider what Kant says about these matters in the second *Critique*. There he writes, “Just because

⁶This rationally necessary end will imply further rationally necessary ends as well. In particular, Kant believes that one’s own perfection and the happiness of others (in so far as they are moral) are ends that any rational being must make her own. But these ends are necessary only in so far as they follow from the demand that we treat humanity in general as an end in itself. Thus, these are ends that every rational being must accept *because* any rational being must accept the FH.

⁷For a helpful discussion of these issues, see Wood’s *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 114-7.

⁸C.f. 4:430, 437-8.

of this every will, even every person's own will directed at himself, is restricted to the condition of agreement with the *autonomy* of the rational being, that is to say, such a being is not to be subjected to any purpose that is not possible in accordance with a law that could arise from the affected subject himself." (5: 87) Or, we might look at a similar passage in the *Groundwork*, where he writes that, "he who has it in mind to make a false promise to others sees at once that he wants to make use of another human being *merely as a means*, without the other at the same time containing in himself the end. For, he whom I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him, and himself contain the end of this action."⁹

As these quotes indicate, the essence of treating someone's rationality as an independent end is acting in a manner that they could rationally will that one act.¹⁰ Thus, I fail to treat someone's rationality as an independent end just in case they could not rationally accept my acting in this way. Or, more precisely, I fail to treat someone's rationality in this way just in case a fully rational version of them - their rational alter ego as it were - could not rationally will that I, in my actual circumstances, act as I do.¹¹

It is not difficult to see how the negative and positive aspects of treating rationality as an independent end follow from this basic idea. Consider first, the negative aspect. Treating someone's rationality as an independent end in a negative sense requires that I not "act against" their rationality. Now suppose I perform some action A. And suppose that there is some individual who could not rationally will that perform this action. Then

⁹4:429-430.

¹⁰This is not the only way one might understand Kant's conception of a negative, independent end. For example, Alison Hills (in her excellent "Rational Nature as the Source of Value" (*Kantian Review* 10, 2005)) characterizes the demands of the FH in terms a demand not to "undermine" our rational nature and that of others. In interpreting the idea of "acting against" our rational nature in this way, Hills understands independent ends in terms of the effects that our actions are likely to bring about. Thus, to my mind, she continues to understand independent ends as a special class of ends-to-be-effected.

¹¹These qualifications are required to avoid certain familiar objections to rational acceptance theories of this sort. For more on these issues, see e.g. Michael Smith's *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)

there seems to me an obvious sense in which, by A'ing, I am acting against this person's rationality.

The positive aspect, on the other hand, involves acting in a manner that "harmonizes" with the individual in question's rationality. This appears to require that we do what we can to further this individual's rational ends, insofar as this is possible given our other reasons for action. And this too can be seen to follow from the basic demand that we act in a manner that this individual could rationally accept. For there is no reason for *me* to accept your acting in a manner that does not further my rational ends unless *you* have a good reason for doing so. Thus, I will only rationally accept your acting in ways that do not "harmonize" with my rational ends if there are considerations that provide you with a reason to act otherwise, which is just what the positive aspect of treating someone's rationality as an independent end requires.

Thus, we are left with:

(END IN ITSELF) One treats someone's rationality as an independent end just in case one acts in manner that individual's rational alter ego could accept.

Of course, this principle will only generate genuine constraints insofar as it is paired with a conception of practical rationality that tells us what an individual can rationally accept. In Kant's case, this conception rests on the idea that potential reasons for action arise from two sources: (i) the demands that the moral law places on every rational being and (ii) our interest, as sensible beings, in our own happiness, insofar as this is compatible with (i). As a result, on Kant's view, a fully rational individual will be moved by these two factors and these factors alone.

This has a number of important consequences for Kant's views, not least of which is the fact that the moral law is part of the conception of rationality that the FH appeals to in demanding that we treat every rational being as an end in itself. Thus, the FH involves an essential element of self-reference. This has been taken by some authors to render rational

acceptance principles of this sort without content.¹² But this is not the case. As we will see below, it is perfectly possible for a principle of this sort to be self-referential in this way and still generate genuine constraints on action.

II. The Outlines of Kant's Argument for the FH

Kant's argument for the FH begins with the claim that a categorical imperative is only possible if it is grounded in an unconditioned end(s). This claim is controversial, but the basic idea behind it is that any meaningful imperative may be characterized as demanding that we accept a certain sort of end - an end which, in the case of a categorical imperative, will itself be unconditioned.¹³ This claim motivates the search for a material formulation of the categorical imperative, and so sets the stage for Kant's argument for the FH, but it is *not* a premise in this argument proper.

Rather, this argument begins in earnest when Kant provides what appears to be an argument by elimination for the FH. Here Kant considers a series of candidates for the end that grounds the categorical imperative and rejects each of them - coming to the apparent conclusion that the only plausible candidate for this role is the end described in the FH: namely, humanity. The possible ends that Kant discusses are: (i) the achievement of the objects of our inclinations and (ii) the state of having these inclinations itself. Unfortunately, the arguments Kant offers against the claim that these are unconditioned ends are unlikely to convince anyone who is not already sympathetic to Kant's position. For example, it is hard to see why this passage does anything to show that it would be incoherent to believe that a satisfied desire has unconditional value. And if Kant has not

¹²For example, see Japa Pallikkathayil's *Deriving Morality from Politics: Rethinking the Formula of Humanity*, (forthcoming in *Ethics*).

¹³In essence, Kant is claiming here that any substantive constraint on one's choice of maxims must be expressible as a constraint on the ends one chooses. To my mind, it is possible to show that this does in fact follow from Kant's conception of maxims, plus his very broad understanding of what counts as an end. For a contrary interpretation, see Samuel Kerstein's *Kant's Search for the Supreme Principle of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

eliminated this possibility, it is plain that any eliminative argument at work in the passage is very incomplete.

Of course, arguments that Kant gives elsewhere in the *Groundwork* may be used to bolster these claims.¹⁴ But there is another, more basic, problem with the argument from elimination that seems more difficult to overcome. Any such argument can at most eliminate a limited number of candidates for the status of objective ends. And it is far from obvious that Kant has given us the tools necessary to construct an eliminative argument against many of the most plausible candidates.¹⁵ For this reason, most commentators agree that if the best argument Kant can offer for the FH is an eliminative argument, then the status of the FH is open to serious doubt. But if we reject the idea that this argument forms Kant's main support for the FH, where can we look for Kant's real argument for the FH?

One option is to read the argument here as involving something more than an argument by elimination. This, in effect, is the strategy proposed by the "regressive" interpretations of this argument that have been the focus of extensive recent debate.¹⁶ The literature on these arguments is large, so given the constraints of space, it is impossible to give them the attention that they deserves here.¹⁷ But in the end the crucial paragraphs prior to the introduction of the FH do not appear to me to offer the sort of regressive argument that Korsgaard, for example, describes. Of course, there are similarities between

¹⁴See Samuel Kerstein's "Deriving the Formula of Humanity" in Christoph Horn & Dieter Schoenecker (ed.) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter (2006)).

¹⁵For example, while Kant does claim that happiness is valuable only when it is deserved, the arguments he offers for this claim will not be terribly compelling to anyone inclined towards hedonistic consequentialism.

¹⁶For the classic statement of this interpretation, see Korsgaard's "Kant's Formula of Humanity" in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. For an alternative way of developing this line of thought, see Allen Wood's *Kant's Ethical Thought*.

¹⁷I discuss these issues in more detail elsewhere. For some important critical discussion of these arguments, see Allison Hills' "Rational Nature as a Source of Value", Rae Langton's "Objective and Unconditioned Value" (*Philosophical Review* 116 (2007)), and Jens Timmermann's 'Value without Regress' (*European Journal of Philosophy* 14 (2006)).

this argument and the eliminative argument that Kant does give. But in the course of giving that argument Kant never makes the claims he would have to in order to give Korsgaard's regressive argument. In particular, while Kant does echo the very beginning of the *Groundwork* by claiming here that both the objects of our inclinations and those inclinations themselves have only conditional worth, he does not go on to make the claim - which is fundamental to a regressive argument - that it is their relation to a rational will that is the condition of their worth. And while Kant does, of course, accept that all value is conditional on a relation to a rational will, his acceptance of this claim is so closely connected with his acceptance of the FH that it seems an unpromising basis for an interesting *argument* for it. For it follows immediately from the fact that all and only rational wills have unconditioned value that the value of everything else is conditional upon its relationship to some rational will or wills. Thus, far from a premise of Kant's argument for the FH, this claim is, I believe, best understood as a corollary of this argument.

For these reasons, I am skeptical that the regressive interpretation captures Kant's best argument for the FH. But where else might we look to locate this argument? The most salient possibility is the argument that Kant makes in the paragraph following the argument by elimination. For it is here that Kant comes closest to giving a step-by-step, deductive argument for the FH. Unfortunately, the key lines of the paragraph at issue here are notoriously compressed:

“The ground of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself*. The human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far it is thus a *subjective* principle of human actions. But every other rational being also represents his existence in this way consequent on just the same rational ground that holds for me; thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle from which, as a supreme practical ground, it must be possible to derive all the laws of the will.” (4: 428-9)

How should Kant's argument here be understood? Kant begins the argument here by

claiming that each human being necessarily conceives of his own rational nature as an end in itself. Insofar as this is a merely *subjective* principle that applies only to human being, it appears to be a claim about human psychology. But Kant is plainly interested - not in this narrower claim - but rather in a broader claim about all rational beings: namely, that every rational being must represent his own rational nature as an end in itself. And this is not merely a claim about empirical psychology. For if it is true that a creature, solely in virtue of the fact that it is rational, must represent its own rational nature as an end in itself, this will have implications, not only for how this creature does represent itself, but also for how it *should* represent itself.¹⁸

So, at the very least, Kant takes himself at this stage of the argument to have established the following principle:

(SELF) Always treat your own rationality as an end in itself.

But this is not all that Kant claims here. Rather, he also claims that every rational being must represent himself in this manner *on the same rational ground*. And this claim introduces a crucial ambiguity into Kant's discussion. For it can be understood in two, quite different ways. First, we might take Kant to be claiming that there is some consideration that serves as an agent-relative reason for every agent to treat *his own* rationality as an end in itself. Or we might take him to be claiming that there is some consideration that serves as an agent-neutral reason for every agent to treat *every* agent's rationality as an end in itself.

It's not obvious which of these Kant has in mind here - since both fit the letter of the sentence equally well. Fortunately, this narrow interpretative question does not matter very much for the general issues we are considering - for the same basic questions will arise however we read this sentence. On the one hand, if we read Kant to be making the

¹⁸Or, as Kant says in a similar context in the *Metaphysics of Morals*: "it is not a question here of ends the human being *does adopt* in keeping with the sensible impulses of his nature, but of objects of free choice under laws, which he *ought to make* his ends." (6:385)

first, weaker claim, then this claim, like SELF, will only address how every rational being should treat herself. As such, it says nothing about how one should treat other rational beings - which is the primary concern of the FH. Thus, it will remain obscure how it is possible to “derive” the FH from this claim.

On the other hand, if we read Kant as making the second, stronger claim, this claim is very close to the FH itself. But if we read him in this way, we will be left wondering what entitles Kant to move from a claim, like SELF, about how every rational being should treat herself to a stronger claim about how every rational being should treat *all* other rational beings. Thus, on either reading, we are left with the question of how Kant moves from SELF to the FH.

In this way, while there *are* the outlines of an argument for the FH here, there is surely little more than this. For while Kant’s claim that SELF applies to all rational beings may have some intuitive plausibility, he seems to have done nothing to argue for it here. And more importantly, he has said very little about how one can move from SELF to the principle of real interest - the FH itself.

III. Establishing SELF

As Kant makes clear in a footnote to this passage, his answer to the first of these questions does not appear within *Groundwork* II. Rather, Kant writes, the crucial claim that every rational being should represent its own rational nature as an end in itself is only put forward here “as a postulate”, the grounds for which “will be found in the last Section” of the *Groundwork*. (4:429)

Unfortunately, when we turn there, we find little explicit discussion of this issue. In fact, the phrase “end in itself” does not appear in *Groundwork* III. What we do find is the claim that every rational being must act under the presupposition of its own freedom and an argument from this to the claim that every rational being is implicitly committed to accepting that its will is “a law to itself”. (4:447)

Fortunately for Kant, from this claim it is in fact possible to derive the further claim that every rational being is committed to treating her own rationality as an independent end in the sense laid out above. For what is it to regard one's rational will as "a law to itself"? It is just to accept that one ought not to "act against" one's own rationality, but rather ought to make one's further choices "harmonize" with one's rational will. Or, in other words, it is to treat one's own rationality as an independent end.

Unfortunately, this argument rests on the claims about rationality and freedom that Kant makes in *Groundwork* III. And as such, it is unlikely to provide us with an uncontroversial foundation for the claim that every rational being must treat her own rationality as an end-in-itself. Fortunately, even if we are suspicious about Kant's views about freedom, we should still find it plausible that practical rationality requires that we treat our own current rationality as an independent end. After all, as I discussed above, treating one's own rationality in this way is just a matter of acting in a manner one could rationally accept. And it does seem plausible that practical rationality (as such) demands of us that we act in a manner that our fully rational alter ego could accept.

Thus, the idea that each of us should treat her own current rationality as an end in itself can be made plausible without any appeal to Kant's controversial claims in *Groundwork* III. And each of us should do so on the same rational grounds - namely, in virtue of the manner in which practical rationality demands that we act in the manner that our fully alter ego would advise us to. Thus, these considerations establish that every rational being must treat their own rationality as an end in itself on the same rational ground (in the weaker of the two senses noted above).

Moreover, if this is correct, then the demand to treat one's own present rationality as an end in itself can be seen to be *implicit* in the FUL itself. After all, the FUL is a formal standard that is addressed to a *rational will* and, if the above argument is correct, it is implicit in the very idea of a *rational will* that this will aim at acting in ways that it could, if fully rational, accept. Thus, in adding this end to the FUL, we are only making

explicit something that was implicit in the FUL all along - as must be the case if these principles are to be extensionally equivalent.

But this does not show very much. For it is hardly surprising that rationality demands that one aim to act in a manner that one could rationally accept. What would be surprising is a proof that rationality requires that one aim to act in a manner that every *other* person could rationally accept as well. But nothing in the considerations just discussed shows us how to take this final step from SELF to the FH.¹⁹

IV. From SELF to the FH

Thus far, we have only established that it is an objective practical principle that each of us must treat *his or her own* rational being as end in itself. Thus, what we have said is compatible with the idea that each of us has an agent-relative reason - based, say, in the presupposition of our own freedom - to treat his or her *own* rationality as an end in itself, but no reason to treat the rationality of others in this way. To go beyond this, as Kant stresses, we need to examine the nature of the rational grounds we have for treating our own rationality as an end in itself. For if we could establish that any *fundamental* agent-relative reason to treat oneself as an end in itself is *also* an agent-neutral reason for everyone to treat one in the same way, then Kant could infer FH from SELF. After all, if this were the case, then the rational ground each of us has to treat himself as an end in itself would also be a rational ground for everyone else to treat him in the same

¹⁹A powerful source of indirect evidence in favor of the view that the FH is derived in this general fashion from SELF is the emphasis Kant gives elsewhere (for instance, at 6: 417-18 of the *Metaphysics of Morals*) of the primacy of perfect duties to oneself to perfect duties to others. As will become clearer, this way of understanding the relationship between SELF and the FH fits very naturally with the interpretation I will offering here. (For a helpful discussion of the primacy of duties to self in Kant, see Alison Hills' "Rational Nature as the Source of Value". Hills also understands the FH to be derived from SELF in some sense, but her characterization of the nature of this derivation is quite different than the characterization I offer below, resting as it does on a model of value that I think is a consequence of the FH rather than part of Kant's argument for it.)

manner.²⁰ But nothing in Kant's discussion directly prior to the FH - or, for that matter in the relevant section of Section III - gives us a basis for making this further claim.

What, then entitles Kant to treat the rational grounds we have for treating our rational nature as an end-in-itself in this manner? The obvious answer to this question is that Kant takes himself here to have already established that any fundamental agent-relative reason must also be an agent-neutral reason. But why would he have take himself to be entitled to this claim? Well, precisely because he is operating within a context in which the FUL has already been shown to be a moral law. After all, what we need here is a moral principle that captures the idea that fundamental practical principles must be universal in a sense that rules out "making an exception" of one's own rational being *qua* end in itself. And it is just this idea that the FUL expresses. So, given that Kant has already argued that any true system of morality must involve this principle, it is most natural to read these passages as tacitly appealing to this result.²¹

Now, it is true that Kant does not explicitly refer to the FUL in the passage we are discussing. But there are good reasons to think that Kant is working here under the assumption that basic normative principles must be universal in the sense the FUL lays out. For one, this is exactly how we should expect Kant to proceed given his general methodology in cases of this sort. According to this methodology - as it appears throughout the Critical period - in order to give a complete characterization of some concept or some rule for reasoning one must describe this rule in three respects. First, one must characterize the "formal" constraints that the rule places upon the relevant sort of reasoning. Second, one must characterize the "material" constraints that the rule places on such reasoning.

²⁰This, in effect, would take us from the weaker reading of "same rational ground" noted above to the stronger reading thereof.

²¹Allen Wood accepts that Kant's argument for the FH rests on his rejection of purely agent-relative reasons of some sort. (See his *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 128) But he fails to connect this rejection with the FUL which, in my view, is the most basic Kantian expression of this idea. Thus he fails to articulate the manner in which Kant's argument for the FH (*even as Wood interprets it*) implicitly rests on the ideas articulated in the FUL.

And, finally, one must characterize the manner in which the rule fits within a system of more precise and more general rules - what Kant calls characterizing it in terms of its “complete determination”. In *Groundwork* II, Kant’s aim is precisely to provide these three characterizations of the moral law - given, in turn, by the FUL, the FH, and the FA.

In both the theoretical and practical case, the material characterization of a rule characterizes it in terms of the constraints it places on the *objects* of, respectively, our cognition or our will. Thus, a material characterization of a practical principle - like the FH - will characterize the constraints that this principle places on the ends we can will.²²

In giving such a characterization of the moral law, Kant is following a methodology that he follows throughout the Critical period. For example, consider Kant’s discussion in the *Transcendental Analytic* of the *a priori* constraints that the understanding places on us as cognizers. There, just as in his discussion of the practical case, Kant begins by laying out the basic *formal* constraints that the understanding places on theoretical cognition: namely, the “logical forms of judgment”. But, just as in the practical case, Kant’s discussion of these issues does not end there. Rather, Kant’s discussion of the logical forms of judgment is important primarily because it lays the foundation for his subsequent discussion of the categories or *a priori* concepts that are their “material” expression.

In moving from the logical forms of judgment to the categories, Kant proceeds in two steps. First, he derives the unschematized categories from the logical forms of judgment considered on their own. And then he derives the schematized categories from these, plus the additional “material” that the *a priori* forms of intuition (space and time) provide

²²It is worth noting that Kant’s use of these terms varies somewhat. For instance, early in the second *Critique*, he writes, “By the “matter of the faculty of desire” I understand an object whose reality is desired.” (5:21) This quote, and the discussion that follows, makes it sound as if only ends-to-be-effected (and not independent ends) are relevant to the matter of a practical principle. But of course, in so far as the FH gives a characterization of the matter of the moral law, independent ends must be taken to be relevant to the matter of a principle. In any case, Kant most often uses matter in a practical context to refer to *both* sorts of ends.

the understanding.²³ Of these two stages, it is the first that is of interest to us here - as sensibility obviously adds no additional “material” to the FUL in the transition from it to the FH.²⁴ Rather, the FH simply take the formal principle laid out by the FUL and translates this into a material principle that concerns our ends.

In doing so, the relationship between the FUL and FH parallels the relationship between the logical forms of judgment and the unschematized categories quite precisely. For in moving from the logical forms of judgment to the unschematized categories, Kant simply means to translate the formal principles of judgment that the former represent into *a priori* concepts that give these formal principles a “material” form by re-conceiving of them as highly abstract ways of *thinking of objects*.

What this suggests is that we should expect the transition from the FUL to the FH to have the same general structure as the transition from the logical forms of judgment to the unschematized categories in the first *Critique*. In particular, we should expect Kant’s derivation of the FH to involve two main elements: First, it should take Kant’s formal characterization of the moral law - the FUL - and build upon it in establishing the FH. And second, it should do so by taking this formal characterization and making explicit some “material” constraint - i.e. some end - that is implicit within it so as to give it a “material” expression. Or, as Kant writes in the Introduction to the *Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue*, we should expect that his procedure will be to “begin with the maxim of actions in conformity with duty and seek out the end that is also a duty”. (6:382)

It is just such an argument I offer next. In considering the plausibility of this line

²³“Transcendental logic [which considers these *a priori* material constraints], on the contrary, has a manifold of sensibility that lies before it *a priori*, which the transcendental aesthetic has offered to it, in order to provide the pure concepts of the understanding with a matter, without which they would be without any content, thus completely empty.” (A76-7/B102)

²⁴Kant does, of course, rely on an analogy with the schematized categories when discussing the significance of the Formula of a Law of Nature (FLN) in the Typic.

of interpretation, it is important to keep in mind the general methodological comments I have just made. And, it is important to remember that the passage we are considering occurs a mere two pages after the transition from Kant's discussion of the FUL to his discussion of the FH, so it would not be unreasonable for Kant to assume that the results of his discussion of the FUL are still fresh in the reader's mind. In addition, we should remember that Kant's interest in the question of whether there are any ends in themselves is the product of a line of thought that begins with Kant's understanding of the FUL. (4:426-7) In particular, if there is in fact a categorical imperative of the sort described in his discussion of the FUL, Kant believes that this imperative must specify some end or ends that hold for all rational beings. Thus, Kant is primarily interested in ends in themselves because he is interested in the question: what are the ends that ground the categorical imperative I have just described (formally) in terms of the FUL? But if this is the question Kant is attempting to answer, he is surely entitled to take for granted the demands that the FUL places on our choice of maxims and ends. For his aim is not to provide an alternative derivation of the categorical imperative, but rather to understand how the categorical imperative described by the FUL might be characterized in terms of the ends it implicitly sets for all rational wills. And given this aim, it is entirely natural for him to assume that the FUL is still operating as a constraint on our choice of maxims in his consideration of what could count as an end in itself.

V. From SELF and the FUL to the FH

Thus, the materials we have to work with in generating the FH are: (i) the FUL and (ii) the fact that every rational will should treat its own (current) rationality as an end in itself (i.e. SELF).²⁵

²⁵To say this is to claim that Kant's argument for the FH tacitly appeals to the FUL at a crucial step. So it is to claim that our knowledge of the FH is based on our knowledge of the FUL. But this is not to say that the FUL is the *metaphysical* basis of the FH. Here it is helpful to distinguish between what Kant calls the "*ratio cognoscendi*" and the "*ratio essendi*". (See, in particular, Kant's discussion of the relationship

The question is how these generate the FH. Given SELF, no matter what else I am willing at a given moment, I should always *also* be willing that I treat my own current rationality as an end in itself. That is, this end is always implicit in each and every maxim I will. So whenever I test a maxim M using the FUL test, what I need to test for universalizability is not M alone but rather the package of M plus the maxim that one treat one's own current rationality as an end in itself. In saying this, it is important to stress that I am not claiming that it is part of the *content* of M that I treat my own current rationality as an end in itself. Rather, this is an additional maxim that I am committed to in virtue of willing anything at all. Thus, it is more appropriate to view this additional maxim as something one is committed to purely in virtue of the formal elements that are common to any act of will as such.

Nonetheless, when we apply the FUL test to M, we need to test whether it is possible for me to universalize both M and any other maxims that am committed to in willing M. So when consider whether M passes this test, we need to consider whether the package of it plus this additional maxim does so. As a result, the FUL becomes:

(Expanded FUL) Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it *and the maxim that one treat one's current rationality as an end in itself* both become universal laws.

Which, given that treating one's own current rational as end in itself means not acting against one's own current rationality as an "independent end", amounts to the following:

(Expanded FUL*) Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at

between freedom and the moral law in the Preface to the *The Critique of Practical Reason*.) For Kant, the *ratio cognoscendi* of X is that which justifies us in accepting that X exists, while the *ratio essendi* of X is that which actually grounds X's existence metaphysically. On my interpretation, what justifies us in accepting the FH is the FUL. Thus, on this interpretation, the FUL is the *ratio cognoscendi* of the FH. But this is wholly compatible with the claim that the fact that rational beings are ends in themselves is the *ratio essendi* of the FUL.

the same time will that it *and the maxim that one act in a manner one could rationally accept* both become universal laws.

This is what the FUL becomes if we add to it the *a priori* end or “material” discussed above. But how do we get from this to the FH?

One way to close this gap would be to appeal to the sort of argument Kant gives in his discussion of the implications of the FUL with respect to a duty of benevolence. (4:423) This argument is supposed to show us that if we value our own well-being, the FUL demands that we also value the well-being of others. And if this argument is successful, a similar argument will be able to show that if we treat our own rational being as an end in itself, the FUL demands that we also treat the rational being of others as well in the same way.

Such an argument would take the following shape. Consider the maxim that states that I will treat my own rational being as an end in itself, but not the rational being of others. Then in considering the FUL test, we must ask ourselves whether we can will this maxim, while simultaneously willing that it become universal law. If we follow Kant’s discussion of benevolence, we will conclude that we cannot. For, we will argue, even if we can conceive of a world in which everyone conforms to this maxim, we cannot will that such a world be actualized while *also* treating our rationality as an end in itself. After all, the argument goes, there will be some conditions under which having respect for the value of our own rationality as an end in itself is incompatible with being treated by *others* as anything other than an end in itself. If so, at least given these conditions, willing that everyone obey this maxim conflicts with treating oneself as an end in itself.

Unfortunately, most Kant interpreters do not find the argument just sketched terribly compelling, and with good reason. After all, while there will be *some* possible conditions under which treating myself as an end in itself requires that others treat me as an end in itself as well, we may know that these conditions do not obtain. And if we know this, then it is unclear why treating oneself as an end in itself is incompatible with willing that no

one else treat one in this way. For, *given that the conditions we know to obtain do in fact obtain*, it is not yet clear why there is any conflict between these two acts of will.

There is more to be said for Kant's argument in response to these concerns, but this style of argument in any sense misses the real connection between the Expanded FUL and the FH. For what is crucial about the Expanded FUL is the manner in which it captures something about the nature of the rational grounds on which we should treat our own rational nature as an end-in-itself. For, as we discussed above, it is the manner in which these grounds are more than merely agent-relative that is crucial for Kant's derivation of the FH.

To develop this thought fully, we need to notice something further about what happens when we move from the FUL to the Expanded FUL. Suppose I want to see whether some maxim M of mine passes the Expanded FUL test. Then I need to consider whether it is possible for me to rationally will M while willing that M *and* the maxim that one act in a manner one could rationally accept both become universal laws. But what needs to be the case if some maxim X is to be a universal law? Well, at the very least, if X is a universal law, then every rational will must conform to X. Thus, if M and the maxim that one be rational are both to become universal laws, the following things must be the case:

- (a) Everyone must conform to M.
- (b) Everyone must act in a manner they could rationally accept.

Thus, M and the maxim that one act in a manner one could rationally accept can both simultaneously become universal laws only if it is possible for everyone to rationally accept their conforming to M. Now, as discussed above, in order for someone to rationally accept their conforming to M, in the relevant sense, their rational alter ego must be able to will that they conform to M. But remember that one of the demands of rationality is that one comply with the FUL. Thus someone will be able to will they that they conform to M,

while being rational, only if she complies with the FUL in doing so. So a rational will X can will that they conform to M, while being rational, only if the maxim - conform to M - passes the FUL test *as applied by X*. Thus, X can will that she conform to M while complying with the demands of rationality only if it is possible for X to rationally will that she conform to M while also willing that everyone conform to M.

So M will pass the Expanded FUL test as applied to it by me only if it is possible for everyone to rationally will that M become a universal law. In other words, we have moved from the Expanded FUL to:

(Universal Rational Acceptance) Will no maxim that someone could not accept *as a universal law* while being rational.

We've moved rather quickly, so let me lay out the line of thought here a bit more slowly. Suppose we have some maxim M. M will pass the Expanded FUL test only if it is possible for me to do the following simultaneously:

- (i) Will M.
- (ii) Will that everyone conforms to M.
- (iii) Will that I act in a manner I could rationally accept
- (iv) Will that everyone acts in a manner they could rationally accept.

Let's focus on (ii) and (iv). Taken together, these clauses ask me to will that everyone conforms to M and acts in a manner they could rationally accept. So they ask me to will that everyone be able to rationally accept that they conform to M. But remember that one condition on being rational is laid out by the FUL test itself. So if someone is able to rationally will that they conform to M, conforming to M must pass the FUL as applied to it by them. Thus, in order for me to (iv), I must:

- (v) Will that everyone is capable of rationally willing M, while conforming to the FUL.

But someone complies with the FUL while willing M, only if they *can* rationally will that they conform to M while also willing that everyone conforms to M. So, in order for me to will that everyone be able to rationally accept their conforming to M, I must:

(vi) Will that everyone can rationally will that M is a universal law.

But I can will (vi), while being rational, only if the following is the case: for every individual X, X's willing that M is a universal law is consistent with X being rational. So, given that I can rationally will (vi), the following must be the case: for every individual X, it is possible for X to rationally will that M is a universal law. Thus:

(Universal Rational Acceptance) Will no maxim that someone could not accept *as a universal law* while being rational.

Now above I argued that to treat someone's rationality as an independent end is a matter of acting in manner that they could rationally accept. Or, in other words, acting in this manner requires acting in a manner that someone's fully rational "alter ego" could will that I act. So if my maxim M passes Universal Rational Acceptance, willing M will be capable with treating everyone's rationality as an independent end. For in willing M, I do not "act against" anyone else's rationality. Thus, if everyone could rationally accept my willing M, willing M is compatible with treating everyone's rationality as an end in itself in the sense relevant to the FH. And any maxim which passes the Universal Rational Acceptance test will pass the FH test as well.

Crucially, Kant stresses this aspect of the FH throughout his various discussions of it. For instance, in his discussion of the application of the FH to the case of false promises he writes, "he who has it in mind to make a false promise to others sees at once that he wants to make use of another human being *merely as a means*, without the other at the same time containing in himself the end. For, he whom I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him, and himself contain the

end of this action.” (4:429-430) As this quote makes clear, the essence of treating someone as an end in itself is acting on a maxim (and so an end) that he could rationally accept I act on. And this is exactly what will be the case if my maxim satisfies Universal Rational Acceptance. So any maxim that satisfies this principle will also satisfy the FH.^{26 27}

To see how this principle generates genuine constraints on action in a particular case, let’s consider again the example of our duties of beneficence. Following Kant, suppose I intend not to interfere in the lives of others, but also not to help others when they need assistance. Now, let us apply the Expanded FUL test to this intention. To do so, we need to ask a series of questions:

First, in accordance with the standard FUL, I should ask whether I can accept that everyone, including those who need my help, have the same intention. Here, I think, the answer may well be yes. For given my circumstances, I may well not care whether these other individuals will help me. After all, I may know that it is unlikely that I will ever need their help.

Then, applying the Expanded FUL for the first time, I should ask whether I can accept that everyone, including those who need my help, have the same intention, while acting in a manner they could rationally accept. Here again, the answer may well be yes, for all

²⁶Kant also stresses this aspect of the FH in his discussion of it in the second *Critique*: “Just because of this every will, even every person’s own will directed at himself, is restricted to the condition of agreement with the *autonomy* of the rational being, that is to say, such a being is not to be subjected to any purpose that is not possible in accordance with a law that could arise from the affected subject himself.” (5: 87)

²⁷If this is right, then the FH follows from Universal Rational Acceptance. But this latter principle, as many readers will have surely noticed, is also very close to Kant’s third formula, the FA. Thus, we have the materials here, not just for an argument from the FUL to the FH, but also for an argument from these two principles to the FA. This, given what Kant says about the relations between these three formulas should come as no great surprise. For the third formula, according to Kant, follows from the explicit combination of the other two formulas with one another.

we've said so far. After all, given what we've said so far, it might be possible for each individual to rationally accept *herself* intending not to help *others* when these others are in need.

But now, following the reading of the Expanded FUL I've just argued for, consider whether I can will that everyone be able to rationally accept that *everyone* has my intention. And in particular, consider whether I can will that those who need my help be able to rationally accept that I (and everyone else as well) have this intention. Here there is an obvious problem. Remember that, for Kant, what someone can rationally accept is the product of two factors: (i) the moral law itself and (ii) their concern for their own happiness, conditional on (i). Now, suppose that we are considering someone who one could help at relatively little cost to oneself. Could this individual rationally will that you not help them. Given the above assumptions, it seems plausible that they could not. For in order to do so, they would have to, in effect, treat the small costs to you associated with helping them as much significant than their own much more significant needs. And there is nothing in the above characterization of practical rationality to justify such a combination of attitudes.

If this is correct, then individuals who badly need my help can *either* accept that everyone intend not to help others in need *or* they can be rational, but not both. Thus it is not possible for these individuals to accept that everyone share my intention, while being rational. And so my maxim falls to pass the Expanded FUL test.²⁸

Thus, not only does the Expanded FUL give us a basis on which to argue for the FH, it also allows us to give an argument for a duty of beneficence that does not have the flaws that the argument discussed above appeared to. So not only does the FUL support the FH, it also provides a plausible Kantian basis for this duty and others like it.²⁹ Of course,

²⁸A broadly similar line of argument can, I believe run produced in the case of our duty to promote our own talents and abilities.

²⁹This points to important fact about the relation between the FUL and the FH. For what the case of beneficence indicates is that it is very difficult to derive interesting duties from the FUL without at least tacitly appealing to the aspects of the moral law that the FH makes explicit. Thus, even if our arguments

not all of the duties that Kant claims to follow from the FH can be derived in this manner. And in fact many of them will only follow from the FH as I have characterized it once quite substantive further assumptions. For example, Kant famously claims that any act of suicide involves treating one's humanity merely as means to some further end. But it is fair from obvious that this is true in every case. For while suicide surely involves treating one's humanity as a means, it is hardly obvious that it involves treating it *merely* as a means - especially when we consider cases in which one's grounds for suicide are moral as opposed to self-interested. In cases like this one, it hard to escape the suspicion that Kant's own argument moves too quickly from the claim that an action treats someone as a means to the claim that it treats them merely as a means.

In the case of false promising, on the other hand, Kant explicitly appeals to the demand that everyone be able to rationally accept an action in making his argument from the FH to the duty in question. So there is no clearly conflict between the style of argument he offers in this case and my interpretation. What is less clear is that Kant is correct about what this style of argument shows. Kant's argument rests on the simple idea that it is impossible for someone who is being deceived to agree to that act of deception while being deceived. But this line of argument will only be relevant if we read the FH so that it demands that one be able to rationally accept the action in question under one's actual circumstances. Of course, we could read the FH and the Expanded FUL in this manner. But, as noted above, it seems more plausible to read them as demanding that it be possible for one's fully rational alter ego to accept the action in question. And if we read these principles in this way, Kant's argument fails. For those of us who find Kant's blanket condemnation of deception implausible, this is a happy result. But it is easy to see why Kant could have believed the FH to have the implications he takes it to in this case - even if it need not be interpreted in this manner. Once again, then, I take it that the case of deception does not

for the FH are based on the FUL, it only by looking to the FH that we can see what the FUL really demands of us.

pose any deep difficulties for the account I am offering.

Abstracting any from these particular applications of it, let me say a bit about the plausibility of the Expanded FUL as characterized above. One thing the Expanded FUL demands of us is that we be able to view the basic practical principles we accept as principles that every other rational will can accept as universally valid. But such a requirement is often thought to be wildly implausible. For aren't there many perfectly permissive maxims that we would be crazy to view as universal laws?

I believe that this objection and others like it rests on a failure to understand exactly what, for Kant, is involved in accepting something as one's maxim for action. For example, suppose I intend to perform some action that is harmless if only I perform it, but very harmful if everyone does so.³⁰ Then, if I am rational, my intention to perform this action will be implicitly conditional. That is, if I am rational, I will only intend to perform this action on the condition that everyone else is not intending to do the same. But then *this* is really part of the maxim upon which I am acting in this case - and this (conditional) maxim will be harmless when universalized.³¹

To point this out is, of course, not to provide a full defense of the FUL as I am interpreting it. But I do think it indicates that the FUL, when properly understood, is very far from the absurd principle it is often taken to be. In fact, the FUL can be understood as the expression of a very simple and attractive (although far from uncontroversial) ideal of practical objectivity. For suppose we accept that one should treat fundamental practical principles as objective. Then we should accept that these are principles that every rational

³⁰For an excellent presentation of these, and other, potential counterexamples to FUL see the discussion in Wood's *Kant's Ethical Thought*.

³¹Another common objection to the FUL is that it simply provides one with a criterion for the permissibility of maxims and that, as such, it could never explain why some maxim or end is *required* of us. Although there is no space to discuss this issue here, let me simply note that this objection seems to me to rest on a misinterpretation of Kant's understanding of the relationship between permissions and requirements. But it is true that, by tying the FH and the FUL closely together, I make it more likely that this worry - if genuine - might threaten the FH as well as the FUL.

being should (and thus, could) accept. And this alone commits one to essence of the FUL, as I understand it.

In any case, whether or not the FUL is in fact a plausible principle, it is obvious that Kant believes it is. So what is crucial for my argument is not whether or not the FUL is defensible in the end, but whether or not the FH may be derived from it, once the FUL is properly understood. And this is just what the argument above shows is the case. For the argument shows that our maxims will only pass the Expanded FUL test if they are compatible with treating everyone's rationality as an end in itself. In particular, on my reading, the FH is very close to one version of what Derek Parfit calls the "Kantian Contractualist Formula".³² In fact, if my interpretation of the FUL and the FH are correct, these formulas actually imply Parfit's formula, which would mean that Parfit's account of the moral law is even closer to Kant than he himself believes.

VIII. Conclusion

Thus, if we read in the manner I have been urging, Kant's derivation of the FH rests implicitly on the FUL *and* the significance of freedom in Kant's understanding of practical rationality. In the end, this should come as no surprise. After all, Kant writes of the various formulas of the moral law, "The above three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and one of them of itself unites the other two in it." (4:436) Thus, we should expect all of the three formulas to be in some sense implicit in each of them.³³ In this way, my interpretation of the relationship

³²See Parfit's *On What Matters*.

³³There is some dispute about how this sentence is best translated. The German reads: "Die angeführten drei Arten, das Princip der Sittlichkeit vorzustellen, sind aber im Grunde nur so viele Formeln eben desselben Gesetzes, deren die eine die anderen zwei von selbst in sich vereinigt." This, and in particular the crucial "deren die eine", may be read in two ways. First, following Mary Gregor's translation, we may read it to mean that any one of the various formulas Kant offers unities the other two within it. Or second, we may read to mean that *one* of the three formulas (namely the FA) unities the other two within it. For our purposes here, though, we need not decide between these readings. For no matter how we read these lines,

between the three formulas does justice to Kant's conception of the formulas as having a fundamental unity. And it helps us understand the parallels between the relation between the FUL and the FH and the relation between the formal and material principles that Kant discusses elsewhere. For this way of thinking of the FH allows us to see it as the product of two underlying factors: First, the formal requirements of practical rationality that are encoded in the FUL. And, second, the material end which is implicit in the very idea of rational will.

Once again, this suggests that it is a mistake to think that the FH can stand on its own without the support of the FUL or some other formula of a similar sort. For any argument for the FH will have to rest implicitly on the idea that all practical reasons must be based in normative principles that are universal. And it is just this idea that the FUL is meant to capture within Kant's system. Thus, even if we reject the FUL as Kant formulated it, we will still need some other formula that captures this basic idea - some formula that captures the basic demand for universality that the FUL aims to express.

Given the reasons for rejecting the FUL that we began this essay by discussing, some may think this verdict supports a general pessimism about the Kantian project in ethics. For if the best Kantian argument for the FH rests on the FUL (or something like it), then we cannot avoid the traditional criticisms of the FUL by focusing on the FH instead. But such pessimism is premature. After all, one thing we can learn from studying how Kant makes use of the FUL in his argument for the FH is just what the real significance of the FUL in Kant's moral system is. And, if what I have been arguing for is correct, this significance comes down to the idea that there are no reasons for action that are not based on more fundamental normative principles, which we can rationally treat as universally applicable to everyone.

This idea, whatever we think of Kant's attempt to capture it in the FUL, continues to

it is plain that Kant is claiming here that all three of the formulas should be thought of as expressions of a single law.

possess a good deal of intuitive plausibility. Thus, far from heralding the end of Kantian moral philosophy, these reflections suggest another way of attacking the project of giving a Kantian foundation to our most basic ethical ideals. For what they suggest is that it will be possible to provide a foundation of this sort, provided that we are able to argue for two basic Kantian premises:

(1) That practical rationality requires of us that we aim to act in ways we could rationally accept.

(2) That all reasons are based in more fundamental normative principles which are universal in the sense that we can accept that they apply to every rational agent.

Taken together, these two claims imply that all reasons must be based in more fundamental normative principles that everyone could rationally accept. And this remains the core of a Kantian conception of morality. Now, establishing either of the two claims is no trivial task. But each of them seem to me to possess a good deal of intuitive plausibility, once they are properly understood. For the first claim, as I have tried to argue, follows naturally from the very idea of practical rationality itself. While the second claim, once properly interpreted, involves only the demand that I should be able to accept the acceptance by every other rational agent of the *same* fundamental normative principles I am making use of. And this is just an expression of what is involved in treating these principles as objective in a certain sense. So, at the very least, there is a good deal of plausibility to Kant's claim that if there is an objective moral law, it must be compatible with this kind of universality.