

KANTIAN REASONS FOR REASONS

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Abstract

Rüdiger Bittner has recently argued against a Kantian ‘maxims account’ of reasons for action. In this paper I argue – against Bittner – that Kantian maxims are not to be understood as reasons for action, but rather as reasons *for reasons*. On the interpretation presented here, Kantian maxims are the reasons for an agent’s being motivated by whatever more immediate reasons actually motivate her. This understanding of Kantian maxims suggests a recognizably *realist* Kantian position in ethics.

1. People can apparently be motivated to act in certain ways just because, as it seems to them, certain facts of their situations count in favor of acting like that.¹ One’s reason for acting temperately in a certain situation might just be, for instance, *that one is waiting to see whether one is HIV positive, or that she said ‘no’*.² If that is true, and if, in addition to that, we could earn the right to speak of people being *correct* when they make this kind of practical, or deliberative judgment, then when someone thinks correctly that a certain fact of her situation counts in favor of a certain course of action, that fact really *does* count in favor of it. Whether she is aware of it or not, that is, a particular fact of her situation *is* a reason for her to take that course. That is a recognizably realist conclusion. And yet

¹ The contemporary impetus for the view that a pre-existing desire need not be any part of what motivates someone to act – her ‘motivating’ reason for acting as she does – is presumably Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). More recently see (e.g.) Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), and G. F. Schueler, *Desire: Its Role in Practical Reason and the Explanation of Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). My aim in this paper is not to establish this account of motivating reasons, but rather to draw out some of the apparently unappreciated consequences of it. I have at least a bit more to say about these motivational issues (and about what I have called ‘deliberative judgments’) in “Moral Realism without Values,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 31 (2006) pp. 81–102.

² The examples are from Rosalind Hursthouse, “The Virtuous Agent’s Reasons: A Reply to Bernard Williams,” in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. Robert Heinaman (Boulder: Westview, 1995), pp. 24–33. Hursthouse is admittedly not interested in establishing any general conclusion about the metaphysics of reasons for action.

establishing that such deliberative judgments might be quite simply correct relies crucially, I believe, on an appeal to substantive ethical theory, to a theory that allows for the attribution of truth to the judgments in question. For the purposes of this discussion, I want to consider Kant's ethical theory in particular.

In order to focus the discussion, I want to consider some of what Rüdiger Bittner says about Kant's ethics in his provocative recent book, *Doing Things for Reasons*.³ Bittner's main objective in that work, which I applaud, is to develop an account of reasons for action according to which reasons for action need not be identified with, nor constituted by, any of the psychological states (e.g. beliefs and desires) of the agent whose reasons they are.⁴ But in the course of developing his own account, Bittner provides a fruitful discussion of the apparently Kantian idea that to do something for a reason is to act on, or to act in accordance with, a general principle of action. It is this apparently Kantian conception of reasons for action that I want to call into question here, in order to make room for what I consider to be a much more satisfying conception. According to the account that emerges, Kantian maxims are, not reasons for action, but reasons *for reasons*: Kantian maxims are the reasons for an agent's being motivated by whatever reasons – by whatever facts of her situation – actually motivate her.

2. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant apparently maintains that all intentional actions are performed on, or in accordance with, what he calls a 'maxim'.⁵ This immediately suggests the following possibility: that for Kant, acting on a maxim is the same thing as acting for a reason. Kant defines a maxim as a "subjective principle of action," by which he means that a maxim is held by, and is therefore rationally binding upon, a particular

³ See especially ch. 3 of Rüdiger Bittner, *Doing Things for Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). All page references to Bittner are to this work.

⁴ Bittner explicitly rejects the account that I endorse: that certain facts can be reasons for action. He does so for the highly metaphysical reason that facts do not occur at any particular place and time, and that an agent's reason for doing what she does must be some aspect of her situation, i.e., something capable of occurring at a particular place and time (69). But as I have mentioned elsewhere, the agent in question presumably has to believe there *are* such aspects of her situation, if she is going to act on them, and this seems to indicate that her reason for doing what she does is: *what* she believes about the situation, i.e., something capable of being the case.

⁵ See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (G)*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4:402, 4:421, 4:432, 4:434.

agent at a particular time.⁶ A maxim is therefore to be contrasted with an objective principle of action, or practical law, a principle that an agent *should* act on, whether or not she has made it her maxim to do so.⁷ But Kant also maintains, of course, that rational agents are able to determine, at least in principle, whether any proposed course of action is morally permissible by testing the maxim of that action by what he calls the ‘supreme principle of morality’, the categorical imperative. Now the categorical imperative is meant to apply to all actions that are so much as available for moral assessment. This excludes from consideration not only bodily movements such as mere reflexes, but also unreflective intentional actions which are of no particular moral interest: the way you adjusted your hat just then, the way you drink your tea, and so on. But with respect to those actions that are indeed available for moral assessment, Kant’s position is that all such actions are performed on, or in accordance with, a subjective principle of action. According to Kant, that is, all such actions are performed on, or in accordance with, a maxim.

As Bittner points out, this has led some of Kant’s more prominent contemporary interpreters to insist that the concept Kant employs when he appeals to the notion of a maxim is precisely the concept of an agent’s reason for action, something that would explain and to some extent make transparent the actions the agent performs.⁸ In order to see why that reading of Kant seems attractive, consider the following way of understanding what it means to act on a maxim. One of Kant’s examples is of someone who reasons thus: “I have made it my maxim to increase my wealth by every safe means. Now I have a deposit in my hands the owner of which has died without leaving a record of it” (*Critique of*

⁶ There need not be any suggestion that a maxim is subjective in the stronger sense that it aims merely to satisfy the desires of the agent whose maxim it is. As Bittner notes, maxims seem to be subjective in their *scope* (my maxims apply only to me), in their *authority* (my maxims might not be objectively authoritative, but they are accepted by me as authoritative), and in their *source* (my maxims are in some sense endorsed by me). Compare Talbot Brewer, “Maxims and Virtues,” *Philosophical Review* 111: 4 (2002) pp. 539–72.

⁷ See G 4:401, n. 1. Compare Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 348, n. 9.

⁸ See especially Thomas E. Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Moral Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). There is something similar in Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant’s Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): Sullivan writes that “an agent’s maxim normally could be stated by that agent if he or she were asked to set out the reason for acting in a particular way” (p. 28). This passage is also quoted in Brewer, “Maxims and Virtues.” Brewer himself maintains – like Hill and Sullivan – that we can understand an agent’s maxims as her motivating reasons for acting as she does.

Practical Reason 5:27). Presumably, if the person in this example goes on to embezzle the unrecorded deposit, one thing we *might* appeal to (but see below: section 6) in order to explain her doing so is that she has made it her maxim to increase her wealth by every safe means. We might very well be inclined to say that the person's motivating reason for embezzling the money is the particular maxim she holds.

Bittner's question, however, is whether this conception of reasons for action is an adequate conception; the question is whether a maxim, as Kant understands that notion, can adequately serve as an agent's motivating reason for acting as she does. Bittner's own answer to this question is that it cannot. And while I agree with Bittner – that an agent's motivating reason for doing whatever she does cannot convincingly be thought of as a Kantian maxim – I do not myself see why Kant has to be saddled with a position according to which maxims are supposed to play that role.

Bittner's two main objections to the idea that Kantian maxims provide an adequate conception of an agent's motivating reasons are: that there are grave problems in trying to specify what exactly it means for an agent to *hold* a maxim, and that (even without the first difficulty) there are grave problems in specifying what exactly it means for an agent to *act on* a maxim. If we cannot make sense of these two notions, Bittner thinks, then "we cannot really understand maxims, and neither do we understand an account of doing something for a reason that is based on maxims" (64).

3. The most plausible understanding of what it means for an agent to hold a maxim, as many commentators have thought, is simply this: that an agent holds a maxim, a subjective principle of action, when she has an intention to act in accordance with it. Certainly some of Kant's more prominent contemporary interpreters have taken this line: Bittner mentions explicitly, for instance, that he wishes to consider, in the context of his discussion, the work of Onora O'Neill.⁹ In order to see the plausibility of this interpretation of what it means to hold a maxim, consider again Kant's example. Someone has made it her maxim to increase her wealth by every safe means. According to the sugges-

⁹ See Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially chs. 5 and 8.

tion put forward by O'Neill and others, what this means is that the person has formed an intention to do so. Then, of course, seeing an opportunity to do so, she embezzles the deposit.

Bittner, however, objects to this understanding of what it means for an agent to hold a maxim. For Kant apparently maintains that all morally assessable intentional actions are performed in accordance with a maxim; but Bittner contends that *not* all intentional actions are performed after forming an intention to do so, and so he concludes that holding a maxim cannot be the same as having an intention to act in accordance with it. In order to make his case, Bittner calls our attention to an intentional action that does not seem to be the result of forming an intention. "For example," he writes, "you enter the room where you will be giving a talk, and there you see an old friend in the audience of whom you had long lost sight – you immediately greet her with joy." He then goes on to ask:

Was greeting her an intentional act? Certainly. You did not do it inadvertently, nor was it a mere reaction on your part. Did you intend to greet her? No. When you saw her, you greeted her right away, you did not go first through a phase of intending to do so; and before you saw her, you did not intend to greet her either since you did not think of this possibility. Nor do you go to your talks intending to greet any old friend who might happen to show up, or with other general intentions of this sort. (52)

Bittner therefore concludes that holding a maxim cannot be the same thing as having an intention to act in accordance with it; for an agent can apparently hold a maxim without having any relevant intention. And since Bittner thinks there is no more plausible account of what it means for an agent to hold a maxim, he ultimately concludes that there is no adequate understanding of what it means to hold a maxim. According to Bittner, then, the prospect of constructing a plausible account of motivating reasons out of Kantian maxims seems quite unlikely to succeed.

The argument here, however, seems to me to rely on an unduly restrictive conception of what it means for someone to have an intention. While Bittner is certainly correct to insist that intentionally greeting a long-lost friend need not involve forming a specific intention to do so (on this day, at this precise talk, and so on), what is to prevent the possibility that Bittner brushes aside in

the final sentence of the quoted passage? What argument is being offered here against the possibility that people often *do* go to talks with long-term general intentions? At one point Bittner is willing to consider this seemingly promising suggestion: "Let us say that the maxim you acted upon when you greeted your friend in the audience was this: within the limits of custom always openly to express your feelings." But then he immediately adds: "You may not have at any point intended to do so" (53). Unfortunately, however, there is no further argument provided here for Bittner's final verdict on the matter. (Bittner does at one point refer to Michael Bratman's work on intention (p. 52 n. 26), perhaps in order to support the view that Bittner himself endorses. But in the work that Bittner cites, Bratman explicitly maintains that there may indeed be a general intention at work even in a case as spontaneous as catching a ball that someone throws at you. Bratman writes that, "it may be in some cases that in catching the ball I am executing some long-standing personal policy. I do not have a present-directed intention specifically to catch this very ball, but my action still involves an intention, namely: my general intention to protect myself in such circumstances.")¹⁰

4. Now while it is of course surprising to see Bittner offer so little argument in support of his final verdict here, it is especially surprising given his professed aim of considering O'Neill's interpretation of what holding a maxim amounts to. For O'Neill's quite plausible suggestion is, not that we identify holding a maxim with having some very specific intention, but rather that we identify it with having what she has called a general, '*underlying*' intention'.¹¹ One of her examples is that of making a new visitor feel welcome by making her a cup of coffee. Of this example O'Neill points out, rightly, that Kant simply cannot have meant that holding a maxim involves an intention so specific as that of making a cup of coffee (on this day, in this precise mug, and so on). Such a specific maxim would jeopardize the moral relevance of (at least) the first formulation of the categorical imperative ("Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should be a universal law," G 4:421); it would also (at least) be in tension with Kant's claim that maxims are often considerably less specific

¹⁰ See p. 126 of Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

¹¹ See for instance chs. 5 and 8 of *Constructions of Reason*.

than that, in such a way that each virtue and each vice has its own distinctive maxim (*MS* 6:404, 6:432–33), or indeed that individuals have a ‘supreme maxim’ governing the choice between the moral law and self-love (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, passim). O’Neill’s alternative suggestion is therefore that “the various specific intentions with which I orchestrate the offer and preparation of the coffee are all ancillary to an underlying principle.” According to her interpretation, “*Maxims are those underlying principles or intentions by which we guide and control our more specific intentions.*”¹² Thus the relevant maxim in O’Neill’s example is the quite general one of making a new visitor feel welcome; and, according to O’Neill’s quite plausible view, it is precisely this sort of underlying general principle the permissibility of acting on which is determined by the categorical imperative. Therefore, although Bittner offers excellent reasons for denying that to hold a maxim is to have some very specific intention, he leaves open a possibility indicated, or at least suggested, by O’Neill. Holding a maxim can be understood as having an *underlying intention* to act on a *general practical principle*.

The plausibility of this suggestion is only reinforced by considering another (though somewhat less forceful) objection to the idea that to hold a maxim is to have an intention to act on it. For Bittner rightly points out, that, as a subjective principle of action, a maxim is supposed to place a kind of requirement or obligation on the agent who holds it; but Bittner claims that intentions do not exert any kind of requirement or obligation on the agent whose intention it is (52). Here again, however, the strictures may simply be too tight. For while it is plausible to suppose that a very specific intention attaching to a discrete act does not – being as specific as it is – place any kind of obligation on the agent whose intention it is, it remains open to suppose that someone who has a more general, long-term intention to (e.g.) be a considerate spouse, is someone who displays a failure of practical reason in not doing so. And it is simply unclear whether Kant means for the obligation imposed by adopting a maxim to be anything stronger

¹² See p. 84 of *Constructions of Reason* (original emphasis). At p. 84, n. 3, O’Neill reports that she would no longer feel comfortable using the term ‘intention’, for she thinks it obscures the fact that “maxims, unlike certain intentions, can be hidden from those whose maxims they are.” It should be clear, however, that she need not have made this concession; for while it may be true that a long-standing general intention can be hidden from someone whose intention it is, this, by itself, is a fairly weak reason to stop considering them intentions, as Bratman’s work already suggests.

than an obligation or requirement of precisely this sort: an obligation or requirement of practical reason.

It seems, therefore, that we can indeed provide something that Bittner thought we could not have: an adequate understanding of what it means for an agent to hold a maxim. An agent holds a maxim, a subjective principle of action, when she has an underlying intention to act in accordance with it.

5. Bittner's second major objection to the 'maxims account' of motivating reasons is that there are grave problems specifying what exactly it means for an agent to *act on* a maxim. Bittner's strategy here is once again to direct his objections at the most plausible account of the phenomenon under question; and, in this case, the most plausible account of what it means for an agent to act on a maxim is, according to Bittner, one in which a Kantian faculty of judgment plays an essential role. Appealing to Aristotle's familiar model of practical reasoning, Bittner characterizes his target as one according to which 'judgment' is different "both from taking in the situation (what Aristotle calls 'perception') and from holding the rule" (59), where the rule in question is a maxim held by a particular deliberating agent. The position under discussion is therefore this: that action issues from a particular maxim, along with a judgment about what sort of situation one is in, along with yet a *further* judgment determining how the maxim in question, in precisely this situation, is to be manifested in action. A special Kantian faculty of judgment is necessary, it is claimed, because practical reasoning modeled on Aristotle's syllogism cannot by itself determine which action in a particular situation should be performed.¹³ That is: "Going from law to action takes an extra step, and thus it takes an extra capacity" (60).

Now Bittner's most virulent objection to this account of acting on a maxim is simply that "the very idea" of a separate Kantian faculty of judgment operating here may be "incoherent" (61). In order to see Bittner's point, notice that the account under consideration is intended to solve a particular problem: namely, the problem of moving from a state in which one holds a subjective principle of action, to actually performing an action required by, or at least consistent with, that principle. So the problem is one of

¹³ Bittner attributes (59) this to Kant on the strength of Kant's claim that: "the universal of *our* (human) understanding does not determine the particular" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 5:406).

moving from universal to particular; and Bittner's claim is that a special Kantian faculty of judgment is useless for solving this problem. If providing the minor premise is not by itself sufficient to determine action, then the determination of action must be arrived at by way of an *independent*, non-deductive, faculty of judgment. But in that case the determination of action is not the result of *applying* a general practical principle to a particular situation, since the faculty of judgment determines action independently of a merely deductive application of the relevant maxim.

Of course one may want to insist that some sort of practical judgment is necessary at least in to supply the minor premise in a practical syllogism; and yet, crucially, Bittner simply concedes the difficulty here. He is perfectly willing to admit that "the first and often the most difficult problem agents face is that of recognizing what kind of situation it is in which they find themselves" (62). Moreover, referring to the quite general maxims of being helpful or being loyal, Bittner writes that, "often it is difficult to see what helping somebody, or being loyal to somebody, would consist in" (62). But then this does indeed seem to be a point at which to insist that a certain sort of practical judgment, or a certain kind of practical insight, is after all necessary in order for someone to act on a maxim. But Bittner is willing to stand his ground, concluding that understanding one's situation is *not* a task that calls for a special kind of practical judgment. Arriving at such understanding is rather, he says, "a problem of cognition, of finding out how things stand" (62). But he also says that:

To be sure, to find out how things stand is not just a matter of opening one's eyes and looking. It takes practice, it takes education, to see what in some situation needs seeing. Yet it is an accomplishment separate from, and preliminary to, figuring out what according to one's maxim one should do in this situation. Hence it is irrelevant to the present task, which is to explain what it is to act on a maxim. (62)

In this passage Bittner disposes of a special practical faculty of judgment on the grounds that one can arrive at the minor premise in a practical syllogism without it. After all, he says, the relevant faculty of judgment is, for Kant, something different from cognition, different from "what Aristotle calls 'perception'." And yet even if Bittner is right to insist that a special *Kantian* faculty of judgment is unnecessary here, perhaps it is worth asking what

exactly is involved in the type of ‘cognition’ Bittner mentions. Perhaps we should explore whether “what Aristotle calls ‘perception’ ” might help to develop an adequate account of acting on a maxim.

Of course what Bittner means to refer to when he makes the reference to Aristotle is what Aristotle calls *phronêsis*, ‘practical wisdom’ (see especially *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI). And while it may be somewhat misleading to say, as Bittner does, that *phronêsis* is what Aristotle calls ‘perception’ (as if Aristotle never called anything else that), Aristotle does indeed say that *phronêsis* is a kind of perception (1113a1–2, 1143b4–5). According to Aristotle, that is, *phronêsis* is a paradigmatic form of practical discernment: that which allows agents to determine, in particular situations, what the virtuous thing to do would be. This includes the ability to determine what kind of situation the agent happens to be in, which itself in turn requires noticing whatever morally relevant aspects of the situation there happen to be. It is therefore an ability that, as Bittner rightly says, amounts to more than simply opening one’s eyes and looking (and to this extent it obviously differs from perception strictly so-called). The way someone sees the practical relevance of various aspects of her situation may of course be shaped by (among other things) the particular ethical upbringing she has had – the upbringing that is at least partially responsible for shaping her ethical character.

What this suggests is a general Kantian account along the following lines. For an agent to hold a particular maxim is for her to have an underlying general intention to act in accordance with it, even though her holding that maxim may be something of which she is unaware: she need not (and perhaps cannot) be certain whether she holds any particular maxim at a particular time. But however that may be, she will still, if she is to act at all, make judgments as to which of the various facts of her situation count for or against particular courses of action. She will therefore employ a more or less adequate form of practical judgment, where such practical judgment amounts to an assessment of the kind of situation in which she finds herself, an assessment that determines which aspects of her situation are practically or morally relevant to what she will do.¹⁴

¹⁴ Compare Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), especially ch. 4, as well as her “Making Room for Character,” in

The crucial point is that whatever she takes to be practically or morally relevant about her situation is something that will be colored by the maxims she happens to hold, even though she may not be aware of precisely which maxims those are. Suppose, for instance, that what she takes to be especially relevant about this particular situation is that she has in her hands a deposit whose owner has died without leaving any record of it. The fact that she holds the maxim she does (to increase her wealth by every safe means) certainly seems to explain why she takes this particular fact to be especially relevant for what she will do, and it explains this even if she is unaware that she holds the maxim in question. Moreover, if she does go on to embezzle the deposit, thus acting on what she takes to be the most relevant aspect of her situation, surely she has also acted on the maxim she holds, even if somewhat indirectly. Of course, as Kant says, in many cases it may be quite difficult, or maybe even impossible, to ascertain which particular maxim one acts on in a particular situation. Nevertheless, whichever maxims someone actually holds will influence the way she sees the situation in which she finds herself. And when someone acts on her particular conception of her situation she also thereby acts on the maxim that explains her conceiving of the situation in precisely the way she does. I think this sort of an account does indeed provide what Bittner thought we could not have: an adequate understanding of what it means for an agent to *act on* a maxim.

6. Where does this leave us? So far I have pushed the suggestion that to hold a maxim is not to have some very specific intention attaching to a discrete act – which would make it appropriate to serve as a motivating reason, or as a ‘motive’ – but rather that to hold a maxim is to have an underlying intention to act on a general practical principle.¹⁵ But if maxims are not to be thought of as the reasons that motivate individual agents, we still need to provide an account of that notion. What I have urged is that

Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting, eds., *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36–60.

¹⁵ Compare Marcia Baron’s thought that, in opposition to an empiricist conception of ‘motives’, “the more appropriate Kantian focus is on conduct, viewed over a stretch of time and guided by reasons. Maxims, unlike motives, have no closer tie to individual action than courses of conduct; in fact maxims connect more naturally to courses of conduct than to individual actions.” See p. 190 of Baron’s *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Kantian maxims serve as general practical principles which, when held by a particular agent, shape or influence the deliberative judgments she makes in particular situations, judgments about whether certain facts are also reasons for acting in certain ways. But if a person can be motivated to act in a certain way just because, as it seems to her, certain facts of her situation count in favor of acting like that,¹⁶ then what motivates her are those very facts – facts which, as it seems to her at least, are themselves reasons for action.

The question that remains is therefore whether deliberative judgments (to the effect that certain facts are also reasons for action) can be quite simply, within a Kantian framework, correct. The question is whether Kant allows for the attribution of truth to the deliberative judgments in question; and surely the answer to this question is that he does. A Kantian account of an *appropriate* or a *decent* ethical upbringing – a shaping of ethical character which issues in correct deliberative judgments – is presumably one which results in people setting for themselves morally appropriate ends, and, in particular, the end of respecting the dignity of rational nature (both in their own person and in the person of others).¹⁷

Kant's idea of setting morally appropriate ends, generates, in the second part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the division of ethical duties that Kant first introduced in the *Groundwork*.¹⁸ This is the division between duties to oneself (both perfect and imperfect) and duties to others (both duties of respect and duties of love). In the case of strict or perfect duties to oneself, and of duties of respect to others, failure to fulfill a duty is morally blameworthy, and so the facts of the situation in which one has such a duty will be reasons to act so as not to violate it. Thus, for instance, the

¹⁶ On the relationship between judgment and motivation here, see especially ch. 4 of Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy As Critical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Ameriks provides a forceful answer to Bittner's worry that we need to know "what a judgment to the effect that this or that ought to be done has to do with doing this or that" (61).

¹⁷ See G 4:429: "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means." The account in the text is indebted to various discussions of Allen W. Wood. See especially Wood's "The Final Form of Kant's Practical Philosophy," in Mark Timmons, ed., *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–21; "Kant's Practical Philosophy," in Karl Ameriks, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 57–75; and *Kant's Ethical Thought*.

¹⁸ See G 4:421–30, and "Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue," Part II of *The Metaphysics of Morals (MS)*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

fact that someone has made a promise is a reason for her to keep that promise (barring exceptional circumstances perhaps), given that a failure to do so would involve failing to respect the dignity of rational nature in the person to whom the promise was made (*G* 4:429–30). Similarly, in the case of a strict, or perfect duty to oneself, the fact that someone has had too much to drink is a reason for her not to have another, given that getting very drunk would, in Kant's view, involve failing to respect the dignity of rational nature in one's own person, leaving one, as it does, in a state "below even the nature of an animal," a state in which one is "not to be treated as a human being" (*MS* 6:427). Therefore, in both the case of perfect duties to oneself, and in the case of duties of respect toward others, Kant's view does indeed entail that the facts of someone's situation are themselves reasons for action: they are reasons to fulfill the ethical duty in question (or, alternatively, reasons not to act so as to violate that duty).

In the case of imperfect duties to oneself, and the case of duties of love toward others, things are admittedly more complicated. The morally appropriate ends to be inculcated in a decent moral upbringing are the end of one's own perfection (both natural and moral) (*MS* 6:448), and the end of the happiness of others (*MS* 6:385). Here Kant allows that there is a certain latitude in the extent to which someone acts toward satisfying either of these ends. It is up to individual agents to decide, for instance, whose happiness they will strive to bring about, on which occasions, and to what extent. And this same latitude applies in the case of someone's efforts to bring about her own natural perfection (the development of her natural talents) as well as to her efforts to bring about her own moral perfection (the purity of her motivations and the cultivation of virtue). The problem for my view can seem to be that since Kant allows a certain latitude in the extent to which one fulfills these sorts of duties, it must be the agent's desire to fulfill them on any particular occasion that partially constitutes her reason for acting in that way. But there need not be, even in this case, any obstacle to concluding that the natural facts themselves are reasons for action. The fact that someone is in need, for instance, is indeed a reason to provide it, given that on Kant's view we should have the happiness of others as one of our ends; but the reason is not meant to be decisive for what one should do, in the sense that a failure to act on such a reason on any particular occasion will not be something for which moral blame is appropriate (unless, of course, doing so would violate some other duty).

In that sense, then, the facts that are reasons to promote the ends in question serve as opportunities for moral action; but this need not, in any way, denigrate their status as genuine reasons for action. (The relevant consideration will also be the reason that motivates a particular person, in the event that she holds the relevantly related maxims.)

What this shows is that Kant's ethical thought does indeed provide for the attribution of truth to deliberative judgments as I have construed them. And, if that is right, then a recognizably realist position in ethics can be defended by appealing to a substantive ethical theory, in such a way that the traditionally sharp (twentieth-century) distinction between 'normative ethics' and 'metaethics' should come to seem suspect. Moral philosophers who oppose realism in ethics should therefore feel compelled to grapple with the full force (whatever its ultimate strength) of the substantive ethical theories that seem to entail a distinctive version of ethical realism.¹⁹

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