'Why be moral?': How to take the question seriously (and why) from a Kantian perspective[1]

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Appropriately specified, the question, 'why be moral?', addresses important and legitimate topics of a broadly meta-ethical nature. The aim of the paper is to use this question as a dialectical tool, in order to identify the core theoretical commitments of Kant's ethics.[2] Because well-founded worries have been raised about the question itself, I consider these first. The purpose of this preliminary discussion is to determine the sort of question we are dealing with and to introduce the main topics for discussion.

Philosophical resistance to the question 'why be moral?' comes from suspicion of the underlying radical skeptical position that is thought to motivate the question. Indicative of the arguments that have been used to give reasoned support for the stance, Francis Herbert Bradley's among the simplest and most effective. Bradley argues that the question has 'no sense at all; it is simply unmeaning' (Bradley 1876, 59). The reason is that this question allows the putative defender of morality no standpoint from which to make their case: if they presuppose that there is value to being moral, they beg the question, if they do not, and attribute instrumental value to morality, they go seriously off topic (Bradley 1876, 56). This is because, he explains, 'if we look on [morality] only as good for something else ...we never in that case, have seen her at all' (Bradley 1876, 53). Expanding on this point, Harold Arthur Prichard argues that successful instrumentalist defenses can at most make us want to do the moral thing, they do not explain why we ought to do it (Prichard 1912, 3). This is because, Prichard argues, any decent response to 'why be moral?' must include as a reason the intrinsic goodness of what ought to be done (Prichard 1912, 5). If a question is posed in a way that does not allow such inclusion, then the

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[1] I use 'Kantian' in the title to signal the reconstructive and argument-based methodology of the paper. Since my aim is to present core elements of Kant's position, I consider the paper to be a contribution in the history of philosophy.

[2] There are usually two versions of the question treated in the relevant in the literature, 'why be moral?', which predominates in the contemporary discussion (see Darwall 1990, Copp 2007), and 'why should I be moral?', which is the one Bradley and Prichard use. I prefer the former as my main topic because of its wider reach, which can encompass first-personal versions of the question, as I show in subsequent sections of the paper.

question is suspect and must be treated as expressing an unfulfillable and illegitimate skeptical demand (Prichard 1912, 15).[3]

In this paper I want to consider an alternative possibility, in which 'why be moral?' is a genuine expression of reflective moral agency; as such, I want to argue, it gives voice to important concerns, which are of particular interest from a Kantian perspective.

'Why be moral?' arises internally to morality with a simple generalizing step going from asking for reasons for complying with specific moral requirements, which Bradley and Prichard grant as perfectly appropriate, to asking about the class of moral requirements. The local enquiry about reasons, for or against specific requirements, aims to establish what speaks in favor of the disputed requirement, in short, its goodness. The general enquiry is about the goodness appropriate to the class. Whereas the skeptic asks what being moral is good for, the reflective moral agent asks about the nature of moral goodness, the good of being moral and whether or not such good is conceivable apart from all other indexed goods. I offer Kant's answer to this question in section 1, under the heading 'foundation'.[4]

The discussion of moral goodness generates a question about how moral considerations can be thought to generate obligations. In this second sense, 'why be moral?' asks about the conditions of receptivity to moral oughts as practical requirements. I examine this topic under the heading 'source', in section 2.

Since receptivity depends on, among other things, recognition of the authority of morality, 'why be moral?' turns naturally to the topic of the *quid juris* of moral oughts. In this third sense, the question asks about the rightful claim of the moral norm to which the agent is meant to comply. I discuss this topic in section 3, under the heading 'ground'.

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[3] Darwall 1990, 257-8 considers more constructive uses of the question, as I do here. Others, notably Korsgaard 1996, interpret it as a core normative question, 'what justifies the claims that morality makes on us?' (Korsgaard 1996, 9-10). Following a similar approach, Bagnoli 2012 argues that Kant's ethics, as interpreted by Stephen Engstrom, has the resources to address skeptical doubts (see esp. Bagnoli 2012, 64-9).

[4] Although the terms I use for section-headings come from Kant's texts, my intention is not to claim that Kant employs them consistently in the sense I do here. I provide textual references and explanation for my choices in each section.

Related to the question about the authority of moral oughts is a separate one gives a new sense to 'why be moral?' The question is about what it takes to recognize and submit to the authority of moral oughts. It asks, therefore, what is fundamentally at stake in Kant's account of reflective moral agency. I discuss this topic, in section 4, under the heading 'origin'.

1. Foundation

'Why be moral?' asks about the goodness of being moral. As such, it belongs to a general type of evaluative reflection with the form, 'what is the goodness of ...?', which is a request for an account of value in question that explains the nature of the value.[5] The object of the particular evaluative reflection introduced by 'why be moral?' is moral goodness. The purpose of engaging in such inquiry is to further our understanding regarding the nature of moral goodness. In contrast then to global demands for the justification of moral value, evaluative reflection into the nature of moral goodness presupposes that there is such a thing as moral value and depends on such presupposition for its conduct. The explanatory aims and internal character of the inquiry are in tension with one another but not mutually incompatible. This is perfectly illustrated in Kant's account of moral goodness and his central argument in defense of the distinctive character of moral value.

Kant inherits a tradition of theorizing about moral value that is attentive to the conceptual distinction between what is desired and what is worth desiring. What is desired encompasses any good that appeals immediately and as such indicate where an agent perceives value. What is worth desiring answers to the thought that what is immediately appealing is not always good. On classical views, what possesses genuine value and is therefore a proper object of desire can be

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[5] As stated, the explanatory demand is deliberately vague, to recognize the explanatory value of non-reductive accounts, such as those that merely contextualize the good in question, accounts that do not cite ultimate facts, natural or supernatural, and those that do not measure success on the basis of the elimination of primitives from the explanation. Though liberal, the demand excludes trivial and circular explanations.

determined given a sufficiently broad and sufficiently rational conception of the agent's interests or happiness.[6]

Kant's position on moral goodness establishes his critical distance from this tradition by way of a further distinction between what is in the agent's interests, in the expanded sense just given, and what is morally good. To defend the distinction, it is essential to show that 'morally good' is not a null set. Kant shows this by means of a contrastive definition that allows him to set the two notions apart. 'In my interests', whether narrowly or broadly conceived, designates conditional goods. These goods are indexed to people, time, locations, situations. Information about the relevant conditionals that qualify conditional goods is given in the conditional antecedent of the consequent that spells out the good.[7] The definition of conditional goods has the formal structure of an 'if…, then...' proposition, that is, a proposition with deniable antecedents.[8] By contrast, the definition of 'morally good' does not have this formal structure: it is a good without qualification or 'without limitation' (*GW* 4:393).[9]

The negative and contrastive definition of 'morally good' just given serves to mark a conceptual distinction and introduce a different way of thinking about moral goodness than is available within the classical tradition. This distinction,

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[6] By 'classical' I mean mainly Aristotelian conceptions of the good that treat it as homogeneous, that is, on such accounts moral goodness, interests, and happiness cohere in a way that they do not for Kant; see Wilkes 1978 and Broadie 1991 and Kekes 1992, chaps 1 and 2. For a broader conception of the classical tradition see the articles collected in Bloomfield 2008.

[7] I say 'relevant' conditionals in a nod to pragmatic uses, 'bravery befits the Spartan' or 'wealth is good if you are poor', which pragmatically limit the explicit content of such antecedents. Kant touches on this when discussing the conditionality of various accepted goods in *GW* 4:393.

[8] At issue is not the truth of the conditionals, nor their fate once the antecedents are denied; the point is purely formal and used to define an alternative sort of good.

[9] All references to Kant's works are given to the volume, indicated by Roman numeral, and page number of the Akademie edition: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*: *herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (formerly *Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*), in 29 vols. Walter de Gruyter (formerly Georg Reimer): Berlin and Leipzig, 1902 -. The only exception are references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where I follow the convention of referring directly to the A and B editions. References to the English edition of his works, followed by a coma, is given to *The Cambridge Edition of The Works of Immanuel Kant*, under the general editorship of Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. I give information about the specific volumes used in the Bibliography.

however, can prove futile, if 'good', as Peter Geach (1956) originally argued, is an attributive not a descriptive adjective. Descriptive adjectives, as in the sentence 'this is a red shoe', can be parsed as 'this is red' and 'this is a shoe', attributive ones, such as 'this is a good horse' cannot be so parsed. Geach's claim is not just grammatical and logical, it is substantive; it entails that ascriptions of 'good' can be meaningful, if attached to an object that can be judged according to standards of excellence appropriate to that object. If Geach is right, 'good without qualification' is the result of misuse of 'good'. The fact that 'without qualification' fails to pick any attributes whatsoever seems to confirm Geach's point. The question is then whether a positive definition of moral goodness is available and whether it is such that can be used by morally reflective agents as answer the question 'why be moral?'

In the opening sentence of the *Groundwork*, Kant invites his readers to think about a good without limitation (*GW* 4:393). He assumes without stating it, that the good sought is practical, that is, a good relating to choices, decisions, actions and so on. He thus introduces the idea of a good will, which gives 'good without qualification' an explicitly practical character and has the added advantage, Kant claims, that it is an idea rooted in ordinary moral thinking. More importantly, with respect to the Geachian point, 'good will' helps specify the idea of 'good without qualification' by contributing the idea of a will whose goodness is not dependent on anything external to it, such as inducements or consequences (*GW* 4:394). While this is a negative definition of the good will it is not a mere re-iteration of the definition of 'morally good'. It advances the discussion by directing us to consider a dimension of evaluative thought, which is not about how some given object -or action, or behavior- fits standards of excellence. To appreciate what makes the will good -and allows it truly to be so called- requires attending to the formal possibilities of evaluative reflection: something can be 'good in itself' (*GW* 4:396) by virtue of its form. The only information we have about the form of such good is that it is without limitation or qualification, which is not immediately helpful. We also know from the contrastive definition that it is unconditional. Considered as modifiers of a form of goodness, the privatives 'without limitation' or 'without qualification' are readily analyzable to 'unconditional'. This is helpful because unconditionality has a criterial function, that is, it can be used to describe an exceptionally demanding standard of objectivity. Conceived formally, in other words, conceived without reference to an object, unconditionality translates readily and

without loss to the idea of universal validity. Universal validity advances the argument because it names a reflectively assessable standard. The object of assessment is the form of individual willing given in putative principles of willing and the assessment is through the universalizability test.[10]

In conclusion then, the analysis of universal validity in terms of the application of the universalizability supplies a positive definition to the idea of moral goodness and an interpretation of the privatives 'without qualification' and 'without limitation' that serves the needs of morally reflective agents. Kant's answer to 'why be moral?' is responsive to the moral nuance of the question, because it explains the goodness of morality by defending the distinctiveness of 'morally good', while at the same time, it satisfies the requirements of evaluative reflection, because it explicates moral goodness in terms that do not presuppose it.

The reason for placing this discussion under the heading 'foundation' is that goodness without qualification is the foundation for ethics -a *Grundlage* (*GW* 4:391-2, 4:443).[11] The reason for this is simple. Ethics does not designate just a domain of value, providing us with a set of evaluative concepts. Ethics designates a practical domain, that is, it provides us with a set of concepts that express obligations and have a role in shaping conduct. To serve as a foundation for ethics, a notion must be capable of supporting authoritative requirements. Requirements that are objective in the demanding sense of 'unconditional' are prime candidates for authoritative requirements -an argument for this claim is examined in of section 3. Provided that unconditional is understood to mean not subject to deniable antecedents, it captures the sort of objectivity Kant identifies as essential for the form of moral goodness. Moral goodness supports then

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[10] The previous paragraph gives is an outline reconstruction of the peculiarly ampliative conceptual analysis contained in *GW* I and II. The interpretation is based on Deligiorgi 2012, 44-62. The focus here is the theoretical argument Kant presents about the nature of moral goodness, which concludes with the universalizability test. The test marks a transition to topics in normative ethics and moral psychology, which are extensively debated in the Kant literature, concerning how the test can be used to define the good and how individuals will anything at all.

[11] I use 'foundation' to refer to the concept of goodness Kant introduces in the *GW* to emphasize its role in Kant's presentation of the moral law, in particular its contribution to the notion of unconditionality. Foundation is to be distinguished from 'ground [*Grund*]' (*GW* 4:389), which I discuss below.

unconditional requirements in the sense that they alone share its form, being unconditional or 'categorical'.[12]

2. Source

The claims about the practicality of ethics made in the previous section are in need of explanation. I argued earlier that Kant's reasons for introducing the idea of good will have to do with the practical nature of the inquiry into moral goodness, its relation to choices, decisions, and actions. The claim that the good is in question is practical is not an identity claim. It states a thesis about the practical role of the good. The reference to choices, decisions, and actions is intended to show that besides its evaluative role, moral good has a role in guiding conduct. The two roles combine in the idea of good will, which is both a basis for the evaluation of moral worth of particular action but also for guidance to will in accordance to what is morally required. What needs explaining is the idea what is morally required informs willing by creating an obligation to will accordingly. The claim that the good is practical amounts to the thesis that for a set of propositional thoughts, that such and such is morally required, it is the case that they are necessarily connected with dispositions to act. This practicality thesis gives rise to a new version of 'why be moral?' that targets the asserted bond between thinking and willing.

There are different ways to approach this question. From the perspective of moral psychology, for example, it can be used to address issues concerning motivation and justification, by asking, respectively, whether, in the absence of concurrent desires, the mere idea of goodness suffices to push the agent to action and whether considerations that justify a course of action are plausibly detachable from the practical outlook of individual agents.[13] The immediate

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[12] It is important not to confuse unconditional or categorical with 'overriding', a tendency that is widespread in contemporary literature, possibly because of Foot's influential paper (Foot 1978, 181-188). Briefly, 'overriding' belongs to moral psychology whereas 'unconditional' to meta-ethics, the conceptual architectonic of the ethics; as I argue in the last section, the unconditionality thesis does not entail overridingness.

[13] I devote a chapter to each of these topics in Deligiorgi 2012, 63-141. While I attempt to do justice to the complex variations and ramifications of the contemporary debate, I conclude that it is on the whole distracting from Kant's own views. A better way into the psychological assumptions guiding Kant's moral philosophy is by attending to his model of mind, especially the role he gives to the faculty of desire (see e.g. *MM* 6:211; for discussion see Frierson 2005,

context in which the question arises here, however, is not moral psychology but moral goodness. Specifically, the question arises because the practical role of the moral good, explained by reference to the type of ought that can express a good that is unconditional, generates a puzzle about the powers ascribed to the thought of such an ought.

'Why be moral?' targets the following implication: if one has the thought that one ought to do such and such, one does not have information about an obligation, one has an obligation to do such and such. To have an obligation is a disposition to act. This disposition can be described as a practical response to the thought that one ought to do such and such. The introduction of the notion of a practical response indicates that practicality is a feature of agency, it is people who do things. We could say then that the moral ought is practical because this is how people use it, namely to do things. This is not entirely satisfactory: the answer effectively states that people do things because they attend to the practical -or especially practical- character of the thought of the moral ought. The question is whether anything can be added to this. The idea of a practical response suggests the idea of a practical address. 'Why be moral?' can be used to challenge the idea of moral address by asking where it comes from. To force specificity the question can be re-formulated first-personally: 'who says I should respond practically to the moral ought?'

The question assumes that individual agents are in position to understand and respond practically to specific demands that are formulated in terms of an 'ought' and addressed to them by appropriately positioned others. This is not a controversial assumption. It describes a rather ordinary aspect of human life. This unremarkable phenomenon can help with the puzzle of practicality. Understanding and responding to demands formulated in 'ought' terms presupposes the existence of relations between those involved in such exchanges. If we narrow to exchanges relating to moral oughts, these relations can be characterized in terms of reciprocal expectations of being treated in as morally capable and morally answerable. These expectations are subject to revision, so they do not describe a metaphysical fact; rather they describe a general fact of human moral life, namely that receptivity to moral notions is a

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McCarty 2009, Deligiorgi 2017), to his account of human nature, in particular his theory of dispositions (see e.g. *CprR* 5:151; for discussion see Varden 2017), and his empirical psychology, prominent in his anthropological and educational writings (see Cohen 2014).

feature of the interpersonal practical involvements of agents. This general fact is the presupposition sustaining the practicality thesis. Agents encounter oughts as making a claim on them, through their interactions with others who treat them as agents. The moral ought is a statement of moral requirement that creates an obligation because the thought of the ought is extensionally related to the practical involvements of agents.

The reason for addressing the topic of practicality under the heading of source is to bring to the foreground Kant's regard for moral experience, the 'common cognition', which he describes as 'source [*Quelle*]' (*GW* 4:392; see too 4:405) of the supreme principle of morality.[14] Aside from sustaining a connection, which Kant considers to be vital, between moral theory and moral life, the claim about source can be understood narrowly as a reference to the practical attitudes of treating and being treated in certain ways embody the oughts that structure the 'observance of common and everyday obligations' (*CprR* 5:155). The source claim holds the key to understanding practicality, in a way that is neutral with respect to moral psychology. It states that the source of the practical address of the moral ought is the practical relations in which agents are involved as a matter of course and ultimately those with whom agents are in such practical relations and who can expect practical responses to ought demands. These practical relations are both a starting point for moral theory and an end point, insofar as the final purpose of theory is to revitalize and strengthen these bonds (see esp. *CprR* 5:154-5).

The source claim contextualizes talk of moral ought and agency, drawing attention to a relational feature of moral agency that is about treatment meted and received. Idealized, this relational aspect acquires a normative role in Kant's description of moral deliberation as a process of co-legislation in which a will of every rational being is a universally legislating will (*GW* 4:431), his explanation of moral law-giving in terms of a 'kingdom of ends' (*GW* 4:434-6), and his maxim for critical thinking in general, as thinking with others in all

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[14] Usually Kant employs 'source' in the context of faculties or to distinguish empirical and non-empirical provenance of ideas or principles (see e.g. *CprR* 5:47 and 5:53). As used here, sourcehood is a limited claim about practicality. For more ambitious claims on behalf of the practical involvements of moral life, see the discussion of ground in Darwall 2006 and neo-Strawsonian accounts of responsibility such as Wallace 1994.

matters (*WOIT* 8:144, *CJ* 5:295, *Anth* 7:200).[15] The advantage of settling the question in this way, by referring it to a general fact of human life-which we might call, for this reason, an anthropological fact- is that it separates it from substantive questions, indeed doubts, individual agents can entertain about particular moral oughts they are presented with. These substantive questions do not touch and are not touched by the general answer. This is because the general answer, rightly and properly, says nothing about whether there is a problem with the receptive abilities of the particular agent or with the specific ought, leaving such matters to substantive investigation in psychology and normative ethics.

3. Ground

The idea that ultimately other people are sources of moral demands leads directly to a new version of 'why be moral?'. The moral demands or obligations one encounters in daily life, provided they have a genuine claim to being moral, are particular instantiations of the requirements that express what is morally good. They have, in short, a *prima facie* claim to objectivity. Other people are the source in the sense of being the conduits of putatively objective moral obligations. They are not the source in the sense of creating or inventing them (though of course they might do such things). The parent who tells the child they ought to visit her grandfather in hospital relays an obligation to her or reminds her of it. Assuming that the recipient of the demand is satisfied that what is demanded, the obligation, is a genuine expression of moral goodness, and therefore expresses in the particular context what an unconditional ought looks like, they may wonder about the commanding nature of the demand, that is, whether the obligation has independent force or it is dependent on the social forces of compliance available to the particular communities to which agents happen to belong. 'Why be moral?' captures this concern when it is interpreted as asking about the authority of moral obligations. Spelled out, the question asks: 'with what right are you placing this demand on me?'

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[15] The counterpart of idealization is Kant's substantive treatment of interpersonal practical relations as a temporally extended fact under the general term of 'cultivation', which ties with the temporality of the development of human moral capacities and sensibilities (see *CprR* 5:157-163 and *CJ* 5:430).

The answer to the authority question guides us to search for the ground of moral obligations. The notion of ground is apt, as well as textually warranted, because of a characteristic feature of ground in both its historical and contemporary uses.[16] Ground is cited in explanations that describe a one-way relation of dependence between ground and grounded. Because we want to explain with what right moral demands are issued, the dependence that concerns us here is deontic, we seek to identify an authority that is sufficiently empowered or adequately placed to issue such commanding oughts.

One-way deontic dependence relations are common. One example is the relation between a university library and the users of the library. If a borrower is late returning a book, the library has the authority to issue a fine. Although the borrower may be dealing with an individual librarian, the individual is acting with the authority invested on them by the library. The library has the right to issue fines because of the kind of thing it is, namely a part of the university, constituted by a set of rules, which lay the law with respect to library users. The idea of ground is particularly useful for deontic dependence, because it makes it easier to see why the right to issue fines is unaffected by evaluative considerations, such as whether the policy is a good one or not.[17]

Kant believes that the only conceivable ground of obligation is *a priori* (*GW* 4:389) and that moral laws hold as laws only if they have 'an *a priori* basis [*a priori gegründet*]' (MS 6:215). Defined negatively *a priori* stands for 'cleansed of everything empirical' (*GW* 4:388); positively Kant describes a priori as a 'rational cognition' (*CprR* 5:12) and such cognition with freedom (e.g. A 802/B 830, *GW* 4:460, *CprR* 5:55). The aim of this section is to isolate the specific role of *a priori* ground from other functions of the a priori in his ethics in order to understand his answer to the *quid juris* question and also his reasons for giving such an answer.[18] To do this, I plan to focus initially on the negative

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[16] Kant uses the notion of ground (*Grund*) quite consistently in the sense I discuss it here; see GW 4:389. For an overview of contemporary uses of 'ground' see the essays collected in Correia and Schnieder 2012.

[17] The point made by the library example can be illustrated with the Euthyphro dilemma, which can be resolved if 'the action is good because it is loved by the gods' is understood as a statement about moral authority and 'the gods love the action because it is good' is understood as a statement regarding moral goodness.

[18] In Deligiorgi 2012 chaps 2 and 4, I argue that these other functions include the *a priori* justification of the principle that expresses the moral law (the *a priori* touchstone see *CprR* 5:14, also 5:46 passim) and the conceivability of the existence of a single principle for

definition of a priori, which allows us to consider a range of candidate options, which by elimination contribute to a better understanding of Kant's position.

The negative definition gives a useful conception of the *a priori* as a norm, rule or standard that has a constitutive role for a practice and is not empirical in the sense that it functions as a priori condition for engaging in the practice. Borrowing John Mackie's examples, there are standards for classing wool, grading apples and so on (Mackie 1970, 26). These standards have authority and they are a priori for the same reason: they constitute the practice. By the same token, however, both the currency and authority of the standards depends on the persistence on the practice; if the practice becomes obsolete because for some reason it fails to recruit practitioners, so do the standards that constitute it. The combination of constitutive function and authority is to the detriment of the latter.

A solution to the problem can be found if authority is attached to a standard that has a wider currency and constitutive role, over and above any local practice-defining standards. Rationality is a good candidate for such a standard because its *apriority* and authority is preserved both when the role of particular standards is subject to re-evaluation internally to the practice and when a rational account is given of the demise of a practice.[19] On the rational constitutive a priori conception of deontic ground, the authority of moral commands is tied to their being rational. It is rationality that is authoritative; the authority of moral commands then is derivative and conditional on their rationality. Conditional authority, however, cannot be reconciled with the conclusion we reached earlier about the unconditional character of moral requirements.

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morality. Section 1 touched on justification when treating the topic of the objectivity of the form of moral goodness and of the moral requirements that express it.

[19] Kant makes the general point that it is vain 'to prove by reason that there is no reason' (*CprR* 5:12). However, in that context he is not discussing deontic ground but rather the objectivity of moral principles, and thus the rational justification of moral principles. The model of constitutive *a priori* from which I draw here is the one defended in Friedman 2001. Friedman argues that transition from one set of locally constitutive principles to the next can be described in ways that allow us to rationally make sense of the change. This matters in the context in which Friedman is making his argument, because it matters to show that scientific practices are shaped by rationally accessible framework rules. Friedman is careful not to present the constitutive *a priori* and its mode of revision as a general model for all scientific practices let alone all practices full stop. I touch briefly on Christine Korsgaard's conception of rational constitutivism in note 20 below.

At this stage, it is important to note how both versions of the constitutive *a priori* tie authority to some value.[20] This can be shown by how questions about the authority of the standard are answerable by citing its value. On the first model, the value of a standard can be described in terms of its contribution to the practice with reference to some relevant domain of value or simply in terms of its constitutive role. If the value of the standard to the practice or the value of the practice is in dispute, then the authority of the standard will remain in doubt. The standard of rationality introduces a value that cannot be rationally challenged in the same way. The authority of rationality seems safe then: rational requirements realize a value that enjoys wide acceptance. One can raise issues of detail regarding this last claim concerning the possibility of non-overlapping content among different conceptions of rationality that spell out what is valued and among different interpretations of the requirements of rationality given some conception of its value. However, the main problem is the threat of absorption of the *quid juris* question to a cui bono question, authority is to the benefit of rationality. The purpose of illustrating deontic ground with the library example is to show that whether and why a rule has authority is separate from its value, the goodness served by the rule. This is not to deny that value, in particular, the value of moral goodness, matters; a morality that boasts only authority and remains indifferent to goodness is a desperate prospect.[21] Rather it is to consider what resources Kant gives us to tackle independently the *quid juris* question.

One way of thinking about deontic ground without attaching it to a value is to make the authority of moral commands a brute fact about them, something that just happens to be the case. While this is not Kant's answer, it is quite close to it

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[20] An alternative conception is given in Korsgaard's rationalist consitutivism. Korsgaard does not tie authority to a value but to the status of being an agent. In Korsgaard 1996 and more clearly in 2009, she defends a normative conception of agency, where to be an agent is to conform to certain standards. These standards which have authority for agents, qua constitutive of their agency spell out a value that is more or less realized, the value of agency. Because the full account of the value of agency is presented in terms of rational agency and a the value of a conception of rationality, Korsgaard's account of rationality carries ultimately the probative weight for the authority of rational agency. Therefore, for the purposes of the present discussion, it falls in the broad category considered here.

[21] Not only is the connection of ought and good important if the ought is to be credibly moral but also when it comes to seeking guidance in particular cases, it is this connection that makes it possible to trust that we find out what is good as an end of the will through submitting to the law (*CprR* 5:62). I return to this topic at the end of this section.

and so it is instructive to consider its chief advantages and drawbacks. One advantage of invoking brute facts in this context is that such facts are not of any special kind, they are not a metaphysical category; anything counts as brute fact if it answers 'why?' questions without triggering further such questions. They are good candidates for ground because they explain in a way that respects the asymmetrical relation of ground/grounded and the notion of an authority whose authoritativeness is not derivative. The problem is that the brute fact answer to the quid juris question is that explanatory success is secured ultimately by blocking the prospect of finding what if anything makes moral authority special and therefore both distinct and distinguishable from the authority that other institutions and individuals have in our lives.

Before turning to consider Kant's position, I want to examine an option for understanding a priori deontic ground in terms of primitive natural normativity, an option Kant explicitly rejects (e.g. A 547/B 575) despite its numerous attractions, which include an understanding of a norm that is more informative than a mere bruteness and is practice-defining while being practice-independent. The specific conception of primitive natural normativity that has these advantages is given by the idea of function, of x being good for y. Telling for function is not only an important tradition of ethical thought shaped by Aristotle, but also the successful application of the model in biological sciences. Its explanatory power depends on identifying the job performed by the feature of the biological organism under consideration, which serves as the answer to the question about what that feature is for. The normative element is introduced with the idea that the feature in question must conform to certain standards in order to do its job.[22] Although not unconditional in the sense Kant seeks, the primitive natural normativity of function sets a pretty unforgiving condition: when functions are not performed, organisms die. The problem with function is that it forces us to attach moral authority to the fitness of the moral ought to promote some moral or natural end, hence again making authority conditional on the goodness or inescapability of the end in question. If no particular moral end is specified and moral standards are considered authoritative to the extent

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[22] Kant examines in detail the form and scope of teleological arguments in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, and uses the argument from function to show its limitations when applied to human beings. He argues that a different approach is needed to accommodate the fact that human beings are capable of setting their own ends (*CJ* 5:431). For the recent revival of interest in the explanatory notion of function, see Ariew, Cummins and Perlman 2002.

that they serve moral ends in general, then the teleological form of explanation shows up as problematic, since moral standards can serve moral ends in general, insofar as they are authoritative.

The discussion of the range of possible conceptions of *a priori* ground helps contextualize Kant's position and his choice of a rational primitive for this role. Ground is neither a brute nor a natural fact, it is a rational fact, or more precisely a fact of reason. Kant's solution to the ground problem works like the brute fact answer in that it is intended to explain moral authority without justifying its normativity, that is, by making moral authority *sui generis*. Unlike brute facts, however, the fact of reason says something about the nature of the authority of moral norms, namely that there are no reasons that can challenge this authority. The 'no reasons' claim is not a deliberation directive, that moral reasons should take precedence over other reasons; nor a factual statement that moral reasons override all other considerations in practical deliberations. The claim states a metaphysical thesis about the nature of moral authority, namely that it is not subject to rational challenge because it is not reasoned 'out of antecedent data of reason' (*CprR* 5:31). The fact of reason asserts the absolute superiority of such authority as a rational primitive.

The conception of authority captured by the fact of reason lends support to the thought that moral obligations have independent force. At the same time its independence from evaluative concerns is troubling. As noted earlier, it is important to establish that moral authority connects with moral goodness. The connecting notion is that of unconditionality. On the side of goodness, unconditionality specifies the form of good without limitation as good that is not subject to deniable antecedents, which expresses a demanding conception of objectivity that finally translates into universal validity. On the side of authority, unconditionality describes the nature of the authority of moral oughts, namely that they command categorically. Thus good and ought meet, and do so non-contingently without belonging to the same deductive argument.

Before drawing the conclusion of this section, it is important to examine briefly how the positive description of the *a priori* as a rational cognition and its association with freedom fit the argument so far. The claim about cognition is best seen as a contribution to the notion of formal objectivity, encountered in the context of the discussion of the good and analyzed in terms of universal

validity for the purpose of showing that the good is a well-defined concept. What the positive description of the a priori adds to the earlier discussion is a general characterization of the process by which the notion of formal objectivity is arrived at; it is a reference to the activity of pure reason in its practical employment. Formal objectivity is a product of pure reason as it spontaneously makes 'its own order [*eigene Ordnung*] according to ideas' (A 548/B 576) thereby giving the law to intuition, for the purpose of making its objects real (*CprR* 5:89).

The relevance of the link Kant envisages between the *a priori* and freedom is to the topic of ground emerges when we ask: how is the authority of moral oughts enforced? The account of authority defended in this section gives a clue to the answer. The deontic ground is a rational primitive, a fact of reason. This is a relatively uninformative claim. Still it makes plausible the thought that submission to moral authority is not something that merely happens to prospective agents. The reference to reason indicates that the authority grounded in such a fact engages rationally those who submit to it. The fact of reason addresses agents who are in position to recognize the commanding nature of moral authority and to submit to this authority deliberately for the purpose of working out which ends are morally obligatory. As I argue in the final section of the paper, the condition that enables agents to recognize moral authority is freedom. The topic of freedom moves the discussion away from the nature of moral authority to its enforcement. This turn is not contrived; it results from reaching the limits of the investigation into the ground of moral authority. The traditional search for an explanatorily complete notion along the lines of a principle of sufficient reason is inadequate in the present context, because it does not serve, on the contrary, it undermines the idea of authority we seek to understand. In light of this, we can say that the fact of reason takes the investigation as far as it can go, while hinting, in the reference to reason that we should look to complement our understanding of moral authority by considering those who are expected to comply with its commands.

4. Origin

The emphatic defense of the unconditionality of moral authority generates the following new version of 'why be moral?' that forcefully brings the addressee of

moral commands back into the discussion: 'why should any of this matter to me?' The question invites us to consider what matters and can matter to prospective agents. The implication is that the stronger the claims about unconditionality the more distant they become from things that matter to agents. There is a gap, in other words, between metaphysics, which is concerned with investigating the nature of moral goodness and of moral authority, and moral psychology, which is concerned with showing how various theoretical commitments of ethics fit within a plausible account of how people do things. The purpose of this final section is to give an account of agency that straddles metaphysics and moral psychology, for the purpose of showing that there is no structural gap between the two. I start with outlining two strategies for dealing with the question. While I consider them both unsuccessful, this discussion is a useful, because it helps render more precise the target of area of the question.

The first strategy aims to undermine the possibility of posing the question 'why should any of this matter to me?' by aligning metaphysics and moral psychology. The alignment consists in making the fact of reason generative of reasons of a superior sort. As a result, it is possible to argue that if a set of reasons flows from reason itself, then we have in our possession a category of reasons that any fully rational agent cannot but recognize. The aim of the strategy is to show that the question 'why should this matter to me?' version of the 'why be moral?' question is not well-formed. 'Why?' asks for reasons and so it presupposes a questioner sensitive to reasons and capable of reasoning. But such a questioner knows why moral reasons should matter. Therefore the question will not arise for them; at least on reflection, they would realize that morality is integral to rationality. Persistence indicates that the questioner has taken a step outside the authority of reason. In this case, it is not possible to go on with a rational discussion of the topic and there is no duty of response.

The success of this strategy depends on the alignment of metaphysics and psychology on the basis of which reason is seen as generating reasons. Whatever the merits of the strategy, it does not fit the Kantian account at least as it is given so far. The hitch is that the fact of reason is not a luminous fact. The identification of deontic ground with a fact of reason satisfies the regressive search for ground, by positing a fact that explains the authority of moral commands as *sui generis*. The *sui generis* -and therefore, in that sense, unconditional- character of this authority is safeguarded by the dissociation of

authority from value and indeed from any kind of normative reasoning. Therefore, the mere identification of the fact of reason does not warrant any steps in a downward deduction from this fact to moral oughts, the normative reasons that play a role in moral deliberations. The fact of reason is, as I said, not a luminous fact.

A way round this problem can be found by pegging the superior reasons generated by reason to a substantive conception of reason. Since the fact of reason is of reason, it must be possible, in principle, to characterize 'reason' more fully. Following such fuller characterization, it can be asserted that the commands of reason are perspicacious to an agent who is sufficiently rational, that is, who excels to some degree in a sufficient number of the elements that make up the more fully characterized, substantive conception of reason. The main point telling against this strategy is its reliance on a substantive conception of reason, which generates reasons for those who are skilled at it and only for them. This result, and the prospect of a tiered morality that goes with it, makes a nonsense of the core normative notion of Kant's ethics that the moral law addresses each and everyone the same.

The second strategy purposely avoids dealing with the question as raising a general concern about moral demands and treats it instead as a first order question expressing agential disconnect from a particular obligation. The 'remedy', Prichard argues, 'lies not in any process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of the situation' (Prichard 1912,17). This fits well with the assumption guiding this paper that the question expresses doubts that arise for reflective moral agents. Prichard does not envisage that the doubt can be about how agents connect to oughts, since his background assumption is that the connection is one of moral commitment or 'conviction' (Prichard 1912, 16). Given this, the only question that can arise is whether some putatively moral obligation is genuine and demanded in the context in which particular agents find themselves. By contrast, the problem raised by the question 'why should any of this matter to me?' can be described as local failure of conviction occasioned by a specific duty placed on them. We can apply Prichard's remedy in such cases, if we attempt to revive the conviction, by showing, for example, how the troublesome moral 'this' belongs, upon examination, with those things the agent deeply cares about. Of course, because the particulars of the situation are the primary material for this strategy,

there is no guarantee that it will succeed in addressing the agent's doubts.[23]
This is not a problem; what is, as I argue now, is the failure to recognize the
theoretical significance of the question as a general question.

'Why should any of this matter to me?' is a general question. This means that it
asks about moral obligations as a class. All that is needed for such a question to
make sense is that the agent posing it can tell moral obligations apart from other
sorts of obligation. This they can, since they are expressing a concern about
those that are moral. To understand the concern expressed, we should not ask
about the criterion used to identify moral from other sorts obligations, because
this would immediately make the question specific to a certain view or theory of
moral obligation. Rather we should attend to implied contrast with a class of
obligations that are not moral and do not generate concern. In this light, the
question is revealed to be about deliberate choice. Questions about deliberate
choice presuppose the existence of alternatives and the ability of the agent to
evaluate them. This is exactly what is at stake in the general question 'why
should any of this matter to me?'. To ask why something matters is to engage in
the sort of evaluative reflection that guides and justifies choice. To ask why
something should matter to some agent is to ask, in addition, how the results of
evaluative reflection make contact with the agent posing the question. Stated in
general terms then, this is a request for an account of agency that supports
morally determined choice. This is a challenge, because the independence of the
moral ought from attachments and commitments that usually define agency; the
ought 'embraces nothing charming, but requires submission' (*CprR* 5:86).

The single consideration that must guide an answer that fits the argument about
authority is the unconditional character of the moral oughts that prescribe
obligations. This consideration rules out as possible candidates, normative
conceptions of agency, because on such conceptions evaluations that justify and
guide moral choice are attainments of agency. Empirically, of course, we do
view agency in such terms. However, were this the whole story, there would be
no answer possible to the question posed that also recognizes the unconditional
character of moral oughts. What we need is an account of agency that identifies

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[23] Prichard's remedy is effectively an empirical enquiry and like other empirical enquiries it
must be true to the particulars it investigates. This means that it can only yield *pro tanto*
results. If, having particularized to answer the question, the strategy then adds a generalizing
step to assert a thesis about the conditional nature of moral obligations, then it would be over-
reaching.

just those properties by virtue of which agents are receptive and answerable to unconditional commands. Only essential and categorically predicable properties of agency can satisfy this demand. The property in question, I argue, is freedom. I conclude the discussion of the dialectic of reflective agency begun in section 1 with foundation, by explaining how free agency answers the question 'why should any of this matter to me?'.

An explanation why I treat the topic under the label 'origin' helps introduce the argument. I take my clue from Kant's usage origin to talk about the root of the moral ought in the 'personality' of the human being, as a member of the intelligible world (*CprR* 5:87-8). Origin does not have implications of authorship, that is, of something made, created, or invented by someone, it is strictly about the root of duty in free agency.[24] The property 'free' designates possession of transcendental freedom, which stands for absence from necessitation by antecedent determinations. Transcendental freedom is an essential possession of agents on Kant's account; this is what the term 'noumenal' signifies in this context. Being free in the transcendental sense is that property of agency by virtue of which agents are receptive and answerable to the moral ought. This is because possession of transcendental freedom ensures that human agency in not exclusively a product of natural necessities and so, that it is, in principle, amenable to the species of necessity expressed in the moral ought (see esp. A 547/B 575).[25] Kant's denial that possession of transcendental freedom can be proven brings this line of thought to an abrupt stop. At the same time, reaching a theoretical dead-end presents an opportunity for gaining access to that same thought in a different way.

The question we are dealing with applies the general structure of deliberate choice to moral choice. The demand is for an evaluation that justifies choices and which can plausibly guide the agent's deliberation and practical attitudes. This demand is readily met by reference to agents' interests, values, commitments and so on. On this model, moral choices are explained in exactly the same way. A consequence of applying this model across the board is that moral choice translates as a choice of an option that is supported by moral

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[24] I discuss the connection of metaphysics and psychology in Deligiorgi 2017 and 2020 forthcoming.

[25] See esp A 547/ B 575. Although the context of the discussion of the 'ought' in the cited passage indicates that Kant means to narrow down to the moral 'ought', what he says is tenable for 'ought' as such; the distinguishing characteristic of the moral 'ought' is that it alone is objective in the demanding sense of unconditionally valid.

considerations, which hold sway -or not as the case may be- depending on how they make contact with the practical circumstances of choice. On this model, the agent's freedom is a relative and comparative property of choice, which, importantly, has no special role in the account, it is one among other contingent features that make up the practical circumstances of choice. On the Kantian account, human agents can lay claim to a different conception of practical freedom and through it to a view of themselves as transcendentally free. On this account, moral choice is not the choice of an option supported by moral considerations. Moral choice is the deliberate subjection by the agent of their power to choose between alternatives to the authority of morality, which commands unconditionally. Understanding moral choice on the Kantian model then requires a revision of the assumptions about evaluation and explanation guiding the question confronting us. What counts in favor of such revision is that it yields an ambitious conception of practical freedom as rational determination of ends that the alternative account cannot accommodate. At the same time, the request for revision is a reasonable one, on the grounds that the idea that agents set ends for themselves, which is preserved intact only in cases of moral choice on the Kantian model, is what motivates the question in the first place. The question demands that agential end-setting is recognized and accounted for in the evaluation of different sorts of ends. Kant's account does exactly that by providing a moral defense of agential end-setting. Moral end-setting holds the key to the Kantian answer to the question: because moral choice is defined exclusively in terms of submission to the moral ought, it grants agents practical insight into their essential character as transcendentally free. The origin of agents' connection to the ought lies in their identity as free beings.

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