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Kant's Moral Theory Meets Evolutionary Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the intersection between Kant's moral theory and evolutionary perspectives on *personhood*. It explores how Kant's emphasis on rationality in moral agency aligns with evolutionary studies on the development of moral behaviors. By examining the transcendental implications of Kant's Categorical Imperative (CI) and the evolutionary origins of moral agency, this study aims to illuminate the link between Kant's conception of *moral agency* and *personhood*. Additionally, it investigates how Kant's call for CI resonates with evolutionary insights on the adaptive nature of social cooperation in human societies. Through this analysis, we seek to deepen our understanding of the cognitive, social dimensions of moral agency and moral status within the framework of Kant's moral theory and evolutionary perspectives on *personhood*.

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Introduction

One of the key features of Kant's moral theory is that *persons*, as *rational* agents, have a special value and deserve moral respect (Kant, 1998). To be a *person*, for Kant, is to have the ability to act autonomously, that is, to follow one's own *reason* and not external forces or desires; to have a rational will that is capable of giving universal laws, and to be an end in itself with dignity and respect. Acting autonomously means exercising one's rational will in accordance with the principle of universal law, and being free from domination by one's own inclinations or those of others. Therefore, to be a *person* and to act *autonomously* are inseparable, since only by acting autonomously can one realize one's personhood and dignity, and only by being a person can one have the capacity and obligation to act autonomously (G, 4, 440, 432; Guyer, 2003). Although the concept of *personhood* is crucial for Kant's moral theory, he did not develop a comprehensive theory of it. However, philosophical and empirical approaches, informed by evolutionary biology and psychology, challenge the idea that *personhood* is a *static* or *innate* attribute. Instead, they propose that personhood is a *dynamic* and *relational* notion that arises from the interplay and adaptation of living beings in complex environments (Barresi 1999; 2001; 2016; Moore & Lemmon 2001; Popper & Eccles, 1985, Ch. 4; Thompson, 2006). For instance, Barresi (1999; 2016) contends that personhood is a cognitive and social construct that evolved in humans as a result of their capacity to think of themselves and others as equivalent agents, and to participate in reciprocal and cooperative behaviors. He also maintains that personhood is closely linked to *moral agency*, as it enables humans to apply ethical norms and principles to themselves and others, and to respect the dignity and value of persons. Therefore, it is essential to investigate whether Kant's moral theory can accommodate these evolutionary insights, and what implications they have for his ethical principles and arguments.

According to Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (G)*, the *Categorical Imperative (CI)* is the supreme principle of morality. Kant defines the CI as an objective, rationally necessary, and unconditional principle that we must always follow regardless of our natural desires or inclinations (G, 4, 415; Johnson and Cureton, 2022). Barresi (2012, 128) briefly suggests that Kant's notion of personhood is based on a human conception of self and others as persons. However, evolutionary studies show that conception has an evolutionary origin in developing reciprocal altruism in hominids. This paper aims to explore this suggestion and examine the link between Kant's moral agency and the evolutionary origins and functions of personhood. It argues that Kant's idea of 'person' as a rational and moral agent needs to be illuminated within a theoretical framework incorporating evolutionary insights into the nature and emergence of personhood.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 examines the central role of 'personhood' in Kant's formulations of the CI. Section 3 contends that an evolutionary perspective on personhood enriches Kant's moral theory and illuminates its relation to personhood. Section 4 is the conclusion.

1. Kant's Moral Theory and Personhood

Kant proposed various formulations of the CI. We contend that the CI, in all its formulations, entails that an agent needs to reach a level of cognitive capacity, namely *personhood*, to be able to make moral judgments. *Personhood* is a concept that allows us to understand both self and others as agents of the same kind, with shared intentional relations and agent-neutral perspectives (Nagel, 1986). We will discover how different formulations presuppose this cognitive ability:

The Universality Formula. Kant's Universality Formulation of the CI states '

> act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law' (G, 4, 421).

This implies that *the act we are morally obligated to do is motivated by adherence to a principle that could, without inconsistency, be held to apply to any (and all) rational agents.* This formulation underscores the necessity for moral obligations to be based on principles that could apply consistently to all rational agents. However, to ascertain the *universality* of a moral law, one must first possess the cognitive capacity to empathize and recognize oneself and others as *persons* who could be subject to that principle. This transcendental argument highlights the pivotal role of *personhood* in the Universality Formulation, as individuals must attain a level of cognitive ability that enables them to adopt an agent-neutral perspective and consider moral principles universally applicable to all rational beings. In fact, the Universality Formulation underscores the inherent connection between personhood, moral judgment, and the capacity to conceive of moral principles that transcend individual inclinations and desires.

The Humanity Formula. Kant's Humanity formula of the CI states (G, 4, 29):

> So act that you treat 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.

This formula implies that one should respect the dignity and worth of every human being, not use them as mere instruments for one's own purposes, but treat them as rational and autonomous agents with their own ends and values. To treat humanity as means is to disregard the autonomy and freedom of human beings, and to treat them as objects or resources that can be manipulated or exploited. Kant wrote elsewhere (G, 4, 428):

> Beings the existence of which rests not on our will, but on nature, if they are beings without reason, still have only a relative worth as means, and are therefore called *things*. Whereas rational beings are called *persons* because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself.

This view draws on Kant's conception of *humanity as an end in itself*, and highlights his distinction between rational beings and non-rational beings. It aims to show that the value of an

individual does not depend on its relation to others, but on its own *rational* nature, which makes it a moral agent. It also implies that treating individuals as means violates their rational nature and reduces them to non-rational beings.

The Humanity Formula relies on the idea of the unconditioned good and the role of *reason* in setting *ends* (Korsgaard, 1986). In other words, the concept of humanity refers to the capacity of human beings to set their own *ends* by using *reason*, which sets them apart from animals. However, humanity is not fully rational, as it can be affected by inclinations and passions that are not based on reason. The concept of *personhood* denotes the state of being fully rational and acting from duty, which is the respect for the moral law as the only motive of the will. Therefore, personhood is the fulfillment and perfection of humanity, as it realizes the full potential of rational nature (Korsgaard, 1986). The Humanity Formula suggests that *personhood* involves a cognitive capacity that enables the fulfillment of rationality and humanity. It allows agents to acknowledge the moral law as the only reason for the will and apply it universally to all rational beings. Personhood also enables agents to adopt an agent-neutral perspective, in which they consider what is morally required by the universal law rather than what is dictated by their desires. This perspective transcends individual interests and focuses on the objective demands of morality.

Furthermore, this capacity leads to understanding the principle of reciprocal exchange, in which agents treat others as ends in themselves and expect the same respect in return. Thus, in another way, we come to this conclusion that the Humanity Formula's requirement to treat humanity as an end in itself depends on the cognitive capacity that is related to *personhood*, and this capacity allows agents to recognize universal moral norms, adopt an agent-neutral perspective, and appreciate the reciprocity involved in moral interactions.

The application of the Humanity Formula also implies personhood. Applying the Humanity Formula requires one to possess the ability to identify and appreciate humanity as an end in itself, in their selves and others, and to behave accordingly. This means that one must respect the rational nature of individuals, which is the source of their intrinsic worth or dignity. It also means that one must acknowledge the autonomy and freedom of individuals, which is their ability to act according to their own reason, without being determined by external factors, influences, and desires, *in any given situation* (Kant, 1998; Wood, 2011, 58-82). This implies that the moral agent must have the capability to conceive *abstract person*. Hence, the Humanity Formula presupposes that the agent has the cognitive capacity of *personhood*.

In sum, the Humanity Formula connects personhood, as the ability to adopt an agent-neutral perspective, with the moral value of rational beings as ends in themselves, and by doing so, it supports the idea that true moral agency depends on a level of cognitive development. Furthermore, this perspective highlights the importance of acknowledging and respecting the personhood of individuals in ethical decision-making. It also stresses the transcendental condition for moral

agency as attaining a stage of personhood where one can recognize the inherent worth and dignity of all rational beings as *persons*.

Furthermore, personhood manifests in Kant's concept of 'respect for person'. the idea that *respect for persons* comprises the core of morality has long been associated with Kant and his ethics in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.* As a received view, the Humanity Formula is often glossed as enjoining us to respect persons as such. However, while Kant does remark that, inasmuch as 'their nature already marks them out as an end in itself' persons are *objects of respect*, he does not explicitly characterize the Humanity Formula as a principle enjoining respect for *persons*. Kant even repeatedly tells us in the *Groundwork* that the only proper *object of respect* is the *moral law* (G, 4, 400-1, 403, 405, 436).[1] There have been attempts to give an account of *respect* that could reconcile the scattering remarks of Kant (Klimchuk, 2004). But I think if we take 'person' as an *abstract concept*, independent of individuals, we will find that *respect for the law* and *respect for an abstract person* are two sides of the same coin as they depend on each other, being interdependent concepts. Respecting a moral law in relation to an individual means acknowledging their freedom, and respecting an abstract person means respecting their humanity, that is, acknowledging their freedom and autonomy. In addition, acting according to rules requires a conception of *person* that has the ability to follow rules. In other words, she has the capacity to set and pursue ends. "A being who has *humanity* can also act with the help of rules that have a wider scope, indeed ones that apply to all persons.", namely, act according to universal laws; and according to the Humanity Formula, in moral behavior, the end is 'humanity' itself (Kerstein 2013, 17; 2023). In sum, it seems in Kant's moral theory 'respect for persons' presupposes an abstract sense of 'person' which demands the conception of *personhood*.

The Autonomy Formula. As Kant writes, it is 'the idea of the will of every rational being as a *will giving universal law*' (G, 4, 432). Although Kant does not state this as an imperative, as he does in the other formulations, it is easy enough to put it in that form: Act so that you could be a *legislator of universal laws* through your maxims. In this formula, Kant sees the individual as a *legislator* of universal laws. A 'rational will' merely bounded by universal laws could act according to natural and non-moral motives, such as self-interest. However, in order to be a legislator of universal laws, such contingent motives must be set aside (Johnson & Cureton 2022). Because for Kant, moral action should be in accordance with 'duty', and we do our moral duty when we act

[1] One may question the possibility of acting purely out of respect for the moral law. For instance, if we claim that we keep the promise only for *desire-independent reason* – for the sake of the moral law – someone may object that there are various prudential reasons that motivate us to keep the promise. However, following Searle (2005, 21), this objection can be countered by distinguishing between thought experiment and empirical hypothesis. It may be the case that there are various prudential reasons involved in fulfilling my promise, but the crux of the matter is that fulfilling the promise as a moral act requires imagining a situation in which all those prudential reasons are absent and it is only the call of duty with the intention of respecting the moral law that guides my action. Irrespective of any empirical hypothesis, nothing precludes us from conceiving such a thought experiment.

according to a *principle* recognized by reason, rather than the *desire* for achieving a *consequence* or emotional feeling.

Human beings possess *reason* regardless of any specific level of cognitive ability. However, our *reason* (or our intellectual faculty) can only act according to *principles* only if it has the cognitive capacity to differentiate between actions based on *principles* and actions based on *desires*. This cognitive capacity is a faculty that allows moral agents to conceive of themselves and others as *persons*, and the *Autonomy Formula* assumes that humans have this faculty. Hence, this formulation also implies that legislation is impossible without the ability to adopt a first- and third-person perspective and unite them (personhood), which enables acting according to laws rather than desires.

The Kingdom of Ends Formula. This is the fourth formulation of CI. Though *'Reich der Zwecke'* is usually translated as 'Kingdom of Ends', the German word *Reich* is perhaps more appropriately translated as 'realm'. Kant introduced this concept in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (439), envisioning a world in which all human beings are treated as ends, not merely as a means to an end for others. He used this concept to mean 'a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws' (G, 4, 433). These common laws, established by the CI, are the gauge used to evaluate the worthiness of an individual's actions. This systematic whole is the Kingdom of Ends, which contributes to universalizing ethical theory for society.

When all the kingdom's individuals live by the CI—particularly Kant's second formulation—each one will treat all of his fellowmen as ends in their selves, instead of means to achieving one's own selfish goals. This means that they must judge themselves and their actions from the perspective of a *person*. Therefore, as implied by the second formulation, each individual in this kingdom needs a cognitive capacity for the conception of *personhood*, which goes beyond individuals' desires.

Equivalency claim. Another reason for supporting the idea that 'personhood' plays a central role in different formulations of CI is Kant's *equivalency claim*. Unfortunately, Kant does not say in what sense different formulations of CI are equivalent. All that he *says* is that 'the above three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and any one of them of itself unites the other two in it' (G, 4, 436), and that the differences between them are 'subjectively rather than objectively practical' in the sense that each of them aims 'to bring an idea of reason closer to intuition (by a certain analogy), and thereby closer to feeling' (G, 4, 436). He also says that one formula 'follows' from another (G, 4, 431) and that the concept that is foundational to one formula 'leads to' a concept that depends on another formula (G, 4, 433).

Kant's remarks on the *equivalency claim* can be understood in different ways. A simple interpretation might be that each formula generates the same and only the same duties, if followed or applied (Allison, 2011; O'Neill, 1975; Engstrom, 2009; Sensen, 2011). However, Allen Wood

rejects this interpretation. He argues that Kant's formulas do not *prescribe* actions. They assign a distinct function (or set of functions) to each formula, and in that fairly obvious sense, they are not *equivalent*. Wood points out that for Kant these are 'so many formulas of the very same law' But 'he *never* says: that they are *equivalent*' (Wood, 2017, 74-76).

We can interpret Kant's project as aiming to provide a 'metaphysics of morals' that explores the basis of moral obligation in the nature of a rational being. In doing so, he confronts a *transcendental question*: What constitutes *moral agency*? Kant's CI, by transcendental reasoning, seeks to provide the ontological and metaphysical condition for 'being a moral agent'. This reading might become more plausible, especially if we consider that Kant's general transcendental approach implies deriving from these formulas some kind of *transcendental condition* for the applicability of the CI. Assuming CI formulas as different versions of the same law entails that understanding and applying such a law requires the ability to conceive oneself and others as *persons*. In other words, despite their differences, every formulation of the CI could reveal a transcendental condition under which an agent could be a *moral agent*. This condition could be the cognitive capacity of *personhood* for the applicability of the CI. Kerstein (2013) and Wood (1998) have offered similar interpretations of this idea. Wood argues that the Humanity Formulation of the CI need not lead Kant to conclude that only *actually rational* beings are ends in themselves. This consequence only arises because Kant also accepts what Wood dubs the 'personification principle, ' which states that 'rational nature is respected only by respecting humanity *in someone's person*, hence that every duty must be understood as a duty toward a *person* or persons' (Wood, 1998, 198). Therefore, Wood's view seems to support our suggestion regarding the *centrality of personhood* in different formulations of the CI.

Furthermore, according to Wood, a plausible interpretation of Kant's view of *respect* for the rational nature requires that children and people with mental disorders should not be treated as mere things or mere instruments; they should be regarded as 'persons' in the *extended sense*. Persons in the *extended sense* do not have precisely the same *moral status* as persons in the strict sense. But they do not have a *lesser* status. Their lack of rational capacities to autonomously direct their own lives implies that they do not have the same right to self-determination that persons in the strict sense possess. However, persons in the extended sense have the same right to life as persons in the strict sense, and we have the same duties to respect their interests and regard them as ends in themselves (Wood, 2008, 97-100). However, Wood does not clearly explain this extended sense of person. For him, this extended sense of person seems to require a 'right relation' towards rational nature, so part of respecting rational nature is respecting its *potential* within a young child. Thus, although young children are not, strictly speaking, Kantian *persons*, their potential rationality bears a 'right relation' to actual rationality, so they must be treated as an end in themselves (Wood, 1998, 197, 198).

We concur with the part of Wood's approach that emphasizes the *extended sense of person*, yet suggesting a *theory* of personhood might be preferable to an explanation based on *potential rationality*. This theory should account for the emergence of personhood exclusively among humans as rational beings. The following section will explore how an evolutionary view of personhood can shed light on Kant's moral theory.

2. Personhood: An Evolutionary Approach

As mentioned above, *personhood* has a pivotal role in Kant's moral theory and his CI. In his view, personhood involves the ability to act autonomously, guided by one's own reason rather than external influences. Autonomy allows individuals to make moral choices based on rational principles. In order to elucidate Kant's conception of 'personhood', we need to offer an explanation of it. Nevertheless, this requirement does not seek to supply some descriptions for the idea of personhood. Rather than concepts, which may have a lot of suggestive power, *theories* are what matter. what should interest us are theories, truth, problems, and arguments. Many philosophers and scientists erroneously assume that concepts and conceptual systems (and problems of their meaning, or the meaning of words) have a similar importance to theories and theoretical systems (and problems of their truth, or the truth of statements). While concepts are partly means of formulating theories and partly means of summing up theories. In any case, their significance is mainly instrumental'; and they can always be substituted by other concepts (Popper, 1979, 123-4). Consequently, concepts such as 'personhood' derive meaning and importance from theories and serve them instrumentally. Therefore, the appropriate way to formulate the above question is to seek a satisfactory *theory of personhood* and its relation to morality.

The possibility of providing an evolutionary explanation of human morality has attracted much attention in recent decades (Binmore 2005; Boehm 2012; de Waal 2006; Greene 2013; Haidt 2012; Joyce 2006; Kitcher 2011; Krebs 2011; Nichols 2004). Following this line of thought, Barresi (2012; 2016) proposed an *evolutionary account of personhood* and its connection to morality, which integrates first- and third- person perspectives. Based on his account, we offer an understanding of personhood from an evolutionary perspective, which may illuminate Kant's moral view and the CI.

Building on this evolutionary perspective, we explore the idea that a significant evolution occurred from emotion-based pro-social motives to explicitly moral motivations in humans. Kitcher (2011) argues that altruism based on sympathetic responses found in chimpanzees is insufficient to sustain a large society. Collective intentionality and normative rules, which transcend emotion-based motives, are necessary for achieving a high level of collaboration in large societies. Similarly, Barresi (2016) claims that the normative foundation of human moral life depends on the cognitive capacity to conceive of their selves and others as *persons*. The essential requirement for moral norms to be universal and independent of one's emotional tendencies is to

conceive both self and others equally as members of a class of agents whose duty is to accede to those demands. For instance, when we say one should not cause pain to another human being, it implies that pain should be avoided regardless of whose pain it is. In doing so, a concept of 'agent' that bridges the gap between the self and other is needed. That concept is 'person'. Nagel (1970) aptly expresses this notion of person when he depicts the situation of one individual standing on the foot of another. 'Recognition of the other person's reality, and the possibility of putting yourself in his place, is essential. You see the present situation as a specimen of a more general scheme, in which the characters can be exchanged' (82). Nagel considers the concept of the 'agent-neutral' as a pre-condition for moral experience (Parfit 1984; Nagel 1986). Because he holds that moral experience entails impersonal motives and reasons, unlike emotional experience, which is 'agent-relative' and typical in other animals. As Barresi (2016, 103) puts it:

> In imagining the exchange, you would expect the other person to release his or her foot, not because it would reduce 'your' pain, but because it would reduce 'someone's' pain, some 'person's' pain. This is a unique aspect of the human moral order not found in other animals. Humans can conceive of themselves as just another person and that all persons should be treated equally with respect to moral norms. ... Without a rich capacity for perspective taking that makes possible full imagination of the reversal of positions, mere aversion to pain in another would vary with one's personal relationship to the other, and this would make it a self-interested motive, not a motive based on a conception of self and other equally as persons whose pain ought to be avoided.
>
> We experience the personhood of self and others in different ways. Our experience of our own personhood is a first-person experience of our self, while our experience of each other's personhood is from a third-person perspective (Barresi, 2016, 107).

During the evolutionary process and pressure, humans, unlike chimpanzees and other animals, have been able to unite the two experiences through the need for a high level of *cooperative activity*. Barresi suggests that the human organism is the primary source of unity for the ontological, experiential, and social dimensions of person, and that the first-person experience of self and the social relations with others are essential aspects of personhood and selfhood (2012, 124). He points to various experiments to show that in humans, the first-person and the third-person are combined in a single common format that applies uniformly to self and others and could engage in normative guidance based on agent-neutral situational rules generated within one's group, not just on personal relations (Barresi, 2016, 104). Humans' conception of the self and others as *persons* becomes available in the second year of life and goes through several development stages crucial to our way

of life as cooperative organisms. This development leads to passing through emotional and social motivations and reaching the stage of personhood (Barresi, 2016, 104).

Raising infants in humans are among the needs that have required collective cooperation. In the case of chimpanzees, this breeding takes less time and is only with the mother's help. However, in humans, parents and other group members are also involved in caring for the baby (Chapais, 2008; Hrdy, 2009). Therefore, the difference between humans and chimpanzees is not in degree but in quality. It requires a kind of equality- and equity-demand that is seen only in humans. The evolutionary scenario explains this by the cognitive capacity of personhood which is specific to humans (Barresi, 2016; Binmore, 2005; Sterelny, 2012).

A related phenomenon is the contrast between adults and children in their adherence to promises. Research suggests that 2- and 3-year-olds have developed a sense of self and others as persons, and can reason about them in agent-neutral ways. Consequently, these children are very concerned about following rules and expect others to do the same. Moreover, they can differentiate between moral and conventional norms, regarding the former as universal and the latter as contingent and group-specific (Nichols, 2004; Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013; Tomasello & Vaish, 2013). However, their conception of *person* and *self* is limited to here and now, or extended only with respect to well-known routines. Whereas for participating in normative and moral activities, it is necessary that one be conscious, at different times, of the numerical identity of its self. Two more significant advances are required for children and adolescents to achieve an adult concept of 'person' (Barresi 1999; Thompson, 2006). These two advances are the concept of a temporally extended person and self, and a life-course narrative identity. Both of these concepts are essential for recognizing and performing adult activities, like keeping promises, in an agent-neutral manner. A major change occurs during the fourth and fifth years of growth. At this time, self-reflection enters fully into the temporal domain, and the child can perceive personal identity over time (Barresi 2001; 2016, 112; Moore & Lemmon, 2001). At this stage, the child can distinguish between her past and future representations of reality as distinct from her present representations. At this point, they begin to appreciate their selves as well as others as selves extended in time. Before this time, their experiences are not linked to an autobiographical stream. But now, retrospective memory and future anticipation have this structure (Barresi, 2016, 111-112). Thus, only in adolescence do human beings acquire the ability to differentiate between temporary laws and moral norms, and to extend their perception of 'person in the present' to individuals' past and future situations. This ability is essential for keeping promises, as the agent must comprehend an abstract concept of their self beyond the present time. This ability results from the cognitive capacity of personhood, which is unique to human beings and develops further during the developmental stages. Personhood emerges from the interaction of the self with other selves and objects in the environment (Popper, 1985, Ch. 4). Therefore, personhood in humans is not static

but dynamic and evolving. Wood's interpretation of Kant supports this view, as he refers to this development (Wood, 2008, 99):

> Of course, it is one thing to say that parents should be thought of as bringing a person into being, and even that they have duties of care to their offspring from conception. It is quite different to say that the offspring is a *person* from conception onward. The first two things Kant does appear to say; the third is something he never quite says.

At a certain stage of development, humans can conceive themselves and others as *persons* with consistent individual personalities as well as life-course identities in agent-neutral ways (McAdams, 1990; Barresi, 2016, 112). Popper emphasizes this point when he says: for Kant 'a person is something that is conscious, at different times, of the numerical identity of its self' (translated and quoted by Popper (1985, 115).

Barresi argues that our conception of person and self evolves as we grow and gain more capacity for more comprehensive agent-neutral forms of representation. The earlier concepts of person and self are more restricted and agent-relative than the higher levels. Only an advanced conception of the person, which only humans have achieved, enables agent-neutral cooperative and moral activity. Without the adaptive need for more intense forms of cooperation than chimpanzee life requires, our ancestors may not have developed the kind of agent-neutral thinking that treats self and others equally as persons, which is a necessary conceptual capacity for human moral life (Barresi, 2016, 113).

Conclusion

Evolutionary studies may shed some light on the role of *personhood* in Kant's moral theory. They also seem to support Kant's distinction between moral and emotional actions. Kant maintains that actions based solely on emotional motives are *not* moral; they must stem from a sense of 'duty' and acceptance of a universal moral rule or principle. Two conditions are necessary to accept and act on normative rules as a duty: first, the rules must be the same for everyone. Second, each person must regard themselves and others as agents whose duty is to follow those rules. Hence, performing a duty requires the ability to view a situation from first- and third-person perspectives and unite them, which entails reaching the advanced level of personhood. Only at this stage can the agent see the rules as universal principles; disregard their feelings and preferences, and follow the law and the rule as a 'duty'. Laws may coincide with individual or collective desires, but for collective cooperation to take place, their application must be independent of desires and feelings. Therefore, the CI could be seen as an agent-based prescription.

This conclusion implies that *personhood*, rather than *reason* and *rationality*, might be the focus of Kant's moral theory. This might make his moral theory more defensible and avoid the criticism

of the sort of *moral patient*. Taking personhood seriously does not necessarily force us to deny the moral status of non-rational beings, because the evolutionary scenario suggests that there is no necessary symmetry of personhood between moral agents and moral patients. Moral duty can only be attributed to those beings who have attained the cognitive capacity of personhood. Thus, adults may have a moral duty towards children or infants, who have moral status. However, an infant cannot be a moral agent, nor have any moral duty, because they have not reached the stage of personhood. Therefore, the infant has no duty or responsibility. Moral patients are beings towards whom moral agents may have moral responsibilities but do not have to be moral agents themselves. Only moral agents can act as the bearers of moral obligations towards others. While moral patients can be the recipients of the moral obligations of others, they do not need moral agency capacity because they may not have achieved an advanced level of personhood. In this line of thought, even non-human animals that lack the cognitive capacity to conceive personhood for moral agency, could be classified as moral patients.

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