**Kantian Respect and Particular Persons[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Robert Noggle**

**Central Michigan University**

**Mount Pleasant, MI 48859**

**R.Noggle@cmich.edu**

**This is an author’s archived manuscript. The final version is published in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 29 (1999): 449-478. Any references should be to the final, published version.**

**INTRODUCTION**

A person enters the moral realm when she affirms that other persons matter in the same way that she does. This, of course, is just the beginning, for she must then determine what follows from this affirmation. One way that we treat other persons as mattering is by respecting them. And one way that we respect persons is by respecting their wishes, desires, decisions, choices, ends, and goals. I will call all of these things “aims.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Sometimes we respect another person’s aims simply by *refraining* from doing certain things, such as treating her in ways that thwart her aims, or interfering with her attempt to pursue them. Other times we respect a person’s aims by taking positive action to help her pursue them.

But how exactly does respect for *persons* translate into respect for their *aims*? And which aims merit respect? One answer comes from Kant. Kant claims, roughly, that we must respect persons because of their rationality, which includes their ability to set ends for themselves. Respect for persons as end-setters requires that we respect the ends that persons set. So for Kant, the only aims that are worthy of respect are ends, and they are worthy precisely because they *are* ends. A second answer is found in utilitarianism, which treats the claim that aims merit respect as axiomatic: All aims (and not just those that Kant would call ends) have moral status just because they are aims. In this paper I will examine both views, suggest that each has problems, and offer an alternative.

**I. TWO THEORIES OF RESPECT**

**Kant’s Theory**

Kant claims that we should respect each person’s "humanity" by treating it always as an end and never as a mere means. Kantian respect has both a positive and a negative aspect. It involves a negative duty to refrain from using another person as a mere means. Kant explains that an action which uses a person as a mere means is one such that the victim “cannot possibly concur with my way of acting toward him and hence cannot himself hold the end of [the] action.”[[3]](#footnote-3) We are, in effect, to take the ends of others as moral boundaries that we must not cross: if an action uses another person for an end she cannot share, then it is forbidden. Kantian respect for humanity also involves a positive duty as well: Kant says that “the ends of any subject who is an end in himself must as far as possible be my ends also.” Thus, the moral agent is to “strive, as much as he can, to further the ends of others.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Kant’s claim, then, is that respect for persons is properly manifested in our treatment of the person’s *ends.* To understand this doctrine and its practical implications, we must first understand what Kant has in mind when he speaks of a person’s ends. An end, according to Kant, is not just any aim; it is something that the rational agent chooses or “sets.” Thus an inclination, desire, or other motive that has not been chosen or “set” is not an end. The obvious question, of course, is how the agent comes to choose the ends that she does. As we know, Kant thinks that the choice of certain ends is dictated by practical rationality itself: the moral law, as embodied in the Categorical Imperative, is the most notable example. Such ends are, according to Kant, rationally mandatory.

While rationality mandates certain ends and forbids certain others, it also seems to leave the choice of many more ends up to the agent. That is, some ends seem to be permissible but not mandatory, and Kant seems to leave the choice about which of these “optional” ends to adopt up to the agent. But if rationality does not dictate our choice among optional ends, then what does? On what criterion am I to choose between, say, the end of doing philosophy or the end of practicing law? The moral law and practical reason apparently have little to say about such choices: It is difficult to see how practical reason alone can provide a criterion for making such choices. Yet if we are to choose our optional ends *without* criteria, then it seems that these choices would be arbitrary rather than rational.

Although the text is a bit sketchy on this point, I think that it is most plausible to read Kant as claiming that many of our optional ends start out as mere desires or inclinations, but that they become ends through an act of choice by the rational agent. In other words, we can see end-setting as an activity which *tests potential ends* for their rationality, rather than an activity which invents ends out of the blue. If the inputs for the end-setting procedure consist of the person's desires, rather than the set of all possible ends, then such a procedure could produce a set of ends of a manageable size simply by filtering out those desires which are irrational or immoral and adopting or “setting” those that remain as ends. So I think that the most plausible way to see the relation between Kantian ends and other aims (such as desires and inclinations) is this: desires, inclinations, and the like present themselves to the agent as potential ends, and the agent must decide which of them to adopt or “set” as her ends.[[5]](#footnote-5) Thus we can think of the Kantian agent as examining her desires, subjecting them to rational scrutiny, filtering out any that violate rationality or the moral law, and adopting those that survive as her ends. Kant’s position is that the only aims we must respect are ends, but it seems that most of a person’s non-obligatory ends are “promoted” from desires. Thus we can attribute to (or at least derive from) Kant the view that aims are worthy of respect when and because they have been set as ends.

But *why* does being set as an end make an aim worthy of respect? For Kant, the morally significant feature of persons is their rational agency, including the capacity to choose (or “set”) ends. This is the feature of persons to which he refers when speaking of “humanity." And *humanity* is the feature of persons that we are to respect, for it is the feature of persons that makes them *worthy* of respect. Respecting the ends that a person sets is supposed to be a way of respecting this capacity to set ends. Thus Kantian respect gets transferred from the person to her ends because the person “sets” them.[[6]](#footnote-6) The idea seems to be that if the end-setting capacity demands respect, then respect should “rub off” onto the ends that it sets. This respect does not “rub off” onto any aims that are not chosen as ends through the exercise of the end-setting faculty of rationality.

**WORRIES ABOUT KANTIAN RESPECT**

I have two closely related worries about Kant’s understanding of respect. The first is that it rests on a questionable conception of the relation between persons and their ends. Kant claims that as a rational agent, a person must view himself as an inhabitant of the “world” of practical reason. He goes on to say that “in such a world he is his proper self only as intelligence. . . . Consequently, incitements and impulses [including, presumably, desires] . . . cannot impair the laws of his willing insofar as he is intelligence.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Kant sees the person (at least from the practical-deliberative point of view) as a pure rational will who rationally selects all of her ends. And this seems to imply a radical separation between the self conceived of as a chooser and the ends that she chooses (except, perhaps, those mandated by practical reason[[8]](#footnote-8)).

This feature of Kant's ethics has, of course, been the subject of much criticism. Many people argue that the conception of a self as bare rational will is incoherent. This is not exactly the criticism I have in mind, however. I don’t deny that our (optional) ends are contingent, at least in the sense that there is no (optional) end that we could not decide to reject. Instead, my worry is that Kant’s view seems to put *the same* distance between the choosing self and *all* of its (optional) ends. In other words, the problem with Kant's view is not so much that it makes our (optional) ends contingent; it is that it seems to make them all *equally* contingent.

Yet some of our (optional) ends do seem *less* contingent than others. Some are little more than whims: I may adopt the end of learning to play tennis for lack of anything better to do. Others are defining features of who I am: My end of promoting the welfare of my family is a fundamental commitment, a significant defining feature of my life. Tennis is a trivial end for me: I could give up without much trouble.[[9]](#footnote-9) But giving up the end of promoting the welfare of my family would require a major change in my approach to life. It would take far more to convince me that I should even *consider* abandoning it. Furthermore, if I *were* to reconsider my commitment to my family, or my career, or my moral or political outlook, or any other end to which I am profoundly committed, my deliberations would almost certainly have to involve *other* deeply held, less contingent ends. Only an equally strong commitment could drive me to consider giving up such an end.

So my worry with Kant is not *only* that his view subjugates a person’s deeply held ends to her rational agency (though I do not deny that this may be a real worry). Rather, my worry is that on Kant's view, profoundly significant ends bear *the same* relation to the person that trivial ends bear. From the moral point of view, all (optional) ends seem to have exactly the same status: for they are equally separate from the rational faculty of end-setting that is the principle focus of Kantian respect. All (optional) ends are equally outside my rational agency which, according to Kant, I must regard as my “proper self.”

This brings me to a second, related, worry about Kant's account of respect. Kant’s ethical theory focuses respect on persons *qua* rational wills. Kantian respect is not to be directed primarily toward the *whole* person in all of her particular psychological detail, but toward her "humanity," her status a rational agent, a setter of ends. Kant’s insistence that rational agency is *the* morally significant fact about us--the fact toward which our respect is to be directed and in virtue of which it is warranted--strikes many people as somewhat narrow-minded. Few people would deny that our status as rational agents *is* enormously valuable. But it is far from clear that it is the *sole* feature of persons in virtue of which they have value, the *single* feature toward which we should direct our respect, and the *only* feature which makes persons worthy of that respect.

By insisting that we are to be respected only as instances of rational will, Kant seems to be ignoring a crucial fact of human existence, namely that we exist not only as instances of rational will, but that we live our lives as particular individuals. A person is much more than a mere instance of rational agency. She is a being with a particular life, a particular psychology, and a particular set of attachments, goals, commitments, and so on. To be a person is not merely to be an instance of rational agency; it is also to be some *particular* individual. It seems that if we are really serious about respecting persons, we ought to respect them not only as instances of rational agency, but also as the particular individuals that they are. Because Kantian respect is not directed toward persons as particular individuals, one might argue that it only respects persons half way.

Now Kant *does* seem to think that empirical details about the person and her circumstances will determine how we put our respect into practice. For Kant claims that we have a duty (beneficence) to take up not only those ends of the other person that pertain to her rational agency, but also those that pertain to her “happiness.” What contributes to a person’s happiness will apparently depend on her particular ends and her particular circumstances.[[10]](#footnote-10) And thus the *manifestation* of the duty to contribute to her happiness will depend on the particularities of her personality and her situation. So Kant does not hold that we must *ignore* the particular ends and circumstances of persons when we put our respect *into action.* Yet he clearly does want us to think of those particularities as being in no way constitutive of the person, and thus not the primary focus of our respect. So while the *manifestation* of our respect might respond to particularities of persons, the respect *itself* is directed at persons insofar as they are generic instances of rational will.

Kant’s view makes moral respect into something like a mass mailing directed to anonymous "occupants" of the kingdom of rational agents. It is not *addressed* to us as the particular persons that we are. Our regard for the particular identity of the persons whom we are supposed to be respecting is almost an afterthought. It is *derivative* of our respect for her rational agency. Kantian respect for generic rational agency “trickles down” from the end-setting faculty to the particular ends it sets. And it trickles down equally onto each end, for each end is equally a product of the end-setting faculty. In short, the Kantian conception of respect not only makes our ends morally secondary to our status as rational agents, but it obscures important differences among those ends.[[11]](#footnote-11)

These brief remarks probably will not convince the die-hard Kantian that something is irreparably defective in Kant's account of respect. (That's why I call them “worries” rather than "objections.") But I hope they will at least make clear why one might want to consider alternatives. One alternative--which I will develop later--would be to replace Kant's claim that rational agency is *the* feature of persons which matters morally with the claim that a person’s identity as the *particular* person she is *also* has fundamental moral significance. Before developing that view, however, I'll say a bit about a second alterative, one that derives from utilitarianism.

**Aims as Morally Basic**

I began with the question: How does respecting persons lead us to respect their aims? Kant's answer is that our respect for the person's end-setting faculty "rubs off" onto a subset of her aims, namely those aims that she sets as ends. One might simply reject the premise on which the question is based, and hold that the moral status of aims is basic. This seems to be the stance of many forms of utilitarianism. There is no “official” utilitarian answer to the question of why aims are to be respected. Utilitarianism treats all aims as having the same moral status, simply treating them all as preferences. And it affirms their worthiness to be respected as a basic axiom.

However, nothing *forces* the utilitarian to see the moral status of preferences as basic. It is certainly possible (and perhaps desirable) for a utilitarian to tie her account of the value of preference-satisfaction to a prior claim about the value of persons. In fact, at least one philosopher has suggested something along these very lines. Lawrence Haworth argues that, instead of taking preference-satisfaction to be an ultimate value, a utilitarian may claim that preference-satisfaction is a value because of its relation to a more fundamental value, namely, the persons who *have* the preferences. Haworth speculates that part of what underlies the plausibility of utilitarianism is a view that “respecting a person’s preference serves as a way of showing respect for the person whose preference it is.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Haworth tells us little about this move from respect for persons to respect for preferences, but he appears to conceive of preferences as possessions of the person. Thus we respect the person by respecting the preferences which belong to her: our moral attitude toward her transfers to the preferences she possesses.[[13]](#footnote-13)

It is important to note an implication of both the view that the moral status of preferences is basic, and Haworth's reconstruction on which the moral status of preferences derives from their status as possessions of persons who are the ultimate objects of our respect. That implication is that preferences are in a certain sense morally equal. Both views bestow moral status evenly upon all of my preferences, for they are all equally my preferences.[[14]](#footnote-14) Thus it would appear that the only *moral* distinctions among preferences arise from differences in their intensity, duration, and the extent to which they affect the satisfaction of other preferences. Two preferences of equal intensity and duration, and which have an equal effect on the satisfaction of other preferences are, on either view, morally equivalent. I will argue below that this view is too blunt an instrument to account for important distinctions among our aims.

**II. AN ALTERNATIVE**

Earlier I suggested that a worry about Kantian respect is its presupposition that the fundamental value of persons lies in their status as rational wills rather than their status as beings with particular identities. What might the duty to respect persons look like if we think of the moral value of persons as attaching not only to their status as rational wills, but also to their status as particular individuals? I think that the answer to this question will provide a direct link between respect for persons and respect for their aims. For if a person’s aims help to constitute her particular identity, and if our basic moral respect for a person is to be directed at her as a being with a particular identity, then we seem to have a fairly direct link between the claim that we must respect persons and the claim that we must respect their aims. The view seems promising enough to merit further development. To that project I now turn.

**Psychological Webs and Particular Identity**

A person’s particular identity--her status as the particular person she is--is a matter of her specific psychology, including her desires, convictions, ends, values, attachments, and commitments.[[15]](#footnote-15) If I had a radically different psychology, then I would not be the particular person that I am. And if my current psychology were to change abruptly and radically, then my particular identity would change as well. So if we want to direct our respect toward that which makes someone the particular person she is, then we would apparently want to direct our respect at some aspect, part, or feature of her psychology. Let us define the terms "self" and "identity" here to refer to that aspect, part, or feature of a person's psychology that makes her the particular person she is.[[16]](#footnote-16)

A person's psychology is not merely a *list* of her psychological states. Rather, it is a complex *system* in which her mental states interact with and bear complex relations to one another. For this reason, I suggest that we think of a person's psychology in a way that highlights these relations and interactions. In particular, I suggest that it would be useful to think of human psychology as consisting of an interlocking *network* or *web* of beliefs, aims, and other attitudes.

It seems clear, both from philosophical work like Quine's and from work in cognitive psychology, that a person’s cognitive inventory can be represented as a sort of doxastic network or “web of belief.”[[17]](#footnote-17) At each nexus is some belief, its position in the network determined by the inferential, semantic, and epistemic relations it bears to other beliefs. These relations can be represented as strands in a web or network that links each belief to the beliefs from which it derives, by which it is supported, or to which it gives support.

As Quine observes, some beliefs are closer to the center of this web than others. Some of these core beliefs are simple logical truths and truths of basic arithmetic. Others are the sorts of things Kant took to be *a priori* synthetic: the belief that cause precedes effect, and so on. Such beliefs form the foundation of a person’s world-view or conceptual scheme. Also at the center of the web are fundamental *convictions* according to which a person lives her life. They are commonly religious, moral, or political in nature, though they may also include fundamental beliefs about science, sociology, and metaphysics. Other beliefs lie on the periphery. Some of these merely reflect one's current perceptual state--one’s perception that there is now a cat on the mat, for example. Though memories of them may help to lay the foundations for more central beliefs (via processes like generalization and abstraction), they themselves form the periphery of the cognitive network. If they are incongruent with the contents of more central beliefs, then they may be rejected, disregarded, or reinterpreted. A kind of cognitive privilege attaches to beliefs that are more deeply embedded in the network. When a deep belief conflicts with a peripheral one, the deep one generally wins out.

A similar picture can be drawn for human motivation. Evidence from motivational psychology, as well as armchair introspection, strongly suggests that a few core motives, needs, and drives underlie much of our motivation.[[18]](#footnote-18) It appears that the structure of motivation is something like a web or network of motivation, in which core motives combine with beliefs to support layers of more peripheral motives.[[19]](#footnote-19) The links of this “web of motivation” will typically mirror the practical syllogism, with a motive and a practical belief (about means and ends, for example) linked to a new motive whose existence is practically rational given the belief and the original motive. The contents of the core motives will usually specify their objects only in very general terms. Means-end beliefs contribute to the production of more specific motives, ultimately motives to perform specific actions at particular times. Thus, the central motivations will provide the “practical” foundations for a network of more specific peripheral motives, just as the central beliefs provide the “theoretical” foundations for one’s more specific peripheral beliefs.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Some core motives--for such things as food, love, self-esteem, achievement, and pleasure--are biological needs apparently hardwired into almost all of us. Others are particular to individuals. These constitute our core values and what Bernard Williams calls "ground projects": those goals, attachments, and commitments that give meaning and purpose to our lives.[[21]](#footnote-21) Some of these core motives are so deeply embedded in the person’s motivational network that they are not only what the person wants, but what she *values*. The objects of such motives are things that, given the person’s psychological identity, she cannot help but to see as worth wanting. So the core of the motivational network is also, in part, an *evaluative* system, for many of the core motives will be basic values of the person. And in the same way that a person’s most basic beliefs will provide a cognitive framework for interpreting the world, so her most basic motivations will provide an evaluative framework for guiding her action within it.

**Identity, the Self, and the Core of the Web**

Two considerations favor identifying a person’s identity or self with the core of the psychological network. First, beliefs and motives at the center of the web will be far more stable than those at the periphery. If two beliefs or two motives conflict, the peripheral one is far more likely to be discarded or modified than the core one. In part, this stability is a result of a kind of psychological conservatism that attempts to deal with conflict by making the fewest changes possible. In order to change a core belief, we would also need to change many if not all of the beliefs based on it. Similarly, a change to a core motive will tend to undercut the motivation for all the peripheral motives based on it. For this reason, our psychological processes tend to favor the retention of core attitudes over peripheral ones when two attitudes are incompatible. Because core attitudes tend to remain stable when other parts of a person’s psychology change, it seems reasonable to think of a person's identity or self as being constituted by these attitudes rather than by the constant flux of attitudes at the periphery. And certainly the thing that we want to make the focus of moral concern and respect should not be something that is continually disappearing only to be replaced by a different one. We want to direct our moral respect toward some relatively stable feature of the person.

Second, the core attitudes, because of their position as foundations for other attitudes, play a crucial role in shaping the person’s total psychology. They are the logical, semantic, motivational, evaluative, and epistemic anchors for the rest of the person’s psychological network. They cannot be changed without seriously disrupting the rest of that network. In this way, core beliefs and motives form the cognitive and evaluative anchors for one’s identity as the particular person one is. Because they play this role, it seems reasonable to think of them as constituting the person's identity or self.

Two complications to this basic picture require examination. While it is convenient to speak of “the” core of the psychological network, this is a bit misleading. There is no single core belief or motive around which the rest of the psychological network of a normal human being is woven. Human beings typically have many different core beliefs, each of which forms the center of its own local section of the web, the master of its own cognitive domain. Similarly, we seem to want irreducibly different things, and any attempt to derive all of our motivation from a single most basic motive either fails to do justice to the complexity of human motivation, or stretches the content of the putative ultimate motive beyond recognition, so that it becomes merely a place-holder for “preference-satisfaction.” But while the network will not have a single core, the local cores will be relatively stable over time, and they will form multiple anchor-points, as it were, for the person’s psychological network.

A second complication is that there will be no sharp division between the core and the periphery. Embededness in a network is a matter of degree. So on this view, the boundaries of the self are not clear-cut. Thus we must replace judgements about what is or is not part of a person's identity or self with judgements about what is more or less central, more or less constitutive of the identity or self. But while there may be no strict answer to the question of whether a given attitude is part of the self, we can often compare pairs of attitudes in terms of the *degree* to which they are constitutive of the self: Attitudes are constitutive of the self *to the degree* that they are embedded in the psychological network and support other attitudes. As I will suggest below, such comparisons may turn out to be quite useful.

**Time and Change**

A major challenge for any version of the claim that the particular identities of persons are constituted by their psychological states is to provide an account of the stability of identity, the unity of the self over time and through change. We have already partly addressed this problem by identifying the self with the person’s core attitudes rather than with her total psychological configuration. Changes to the periphery of the web do not threaten a person’s identity, for they do not change the core attitudes which are most constitutive of the self. What happens, however, if those core attitudes change? Can a person retain her identity if the very things which constitute it change?

The answer, I suggest, depends on seeing that *certain* changes to a person's core attitudes are *intelligible reflections* of their contents. Suppose that someone has two conflicting core attitudes. Changing or abandoning one of them would seem natural--it would make sense given the contents of the conflicting attitudes. Intelligible changes resolve contradictions, inconsistencies, or other kinds of tension among core attitudes, or between a core attitude and persistent information about the outside world. A change to a core attitude that has nothing to do with its content would not be intelligible in this way. This idea captures part of what seems compelling in the idea of *narrative* as a key to understanding the self and its journey through time. For it makes the continuity of the self depend on whether an *intelligible story*--one which involves the content of the person’s attitudes--can be told about why and how it changed over time.

Such a narrative will consist of “episodes” of three main kinds: First, a person might see that her existing core attitudes are in some sort of conflict, and to eliminate the conflict she might revise or abandon one or more of them. Second, she might adopt a new core attitude that is in conflict or tension with her existing core attitudes. She might then revise or give up one or more of the older attitudes in order to “make room” for the new one. Third, a conflict might arise between a core attitude and persistent attitudes in the periphery (such as those which contain perceptual information). If the conflict is great enough, if the peripheral attitudes are persistent enough, and if their contents cannot be altered or reinterpreted in such a way as to resolve the conflict, then the person might adjust or even abandon her core attitude. In each of these kinds of cases, the change is neither arbitrary nor completely caused by something external to the self. The existence of a narrative consisting of such episodes means that the changes in one’s core attitudes constitute an intelligible unfolding of the self. It means that the self is an evolving entity that is a source of its own growth, as it changes over time in response to internal conflicts, new commitments, and changing external circumstances. So long as each change preserves a subset of the core, and so long as the content of the part that remains explains the change, then the self persists.

“Narrative,” on this view, is thus a shorthand for a mode of explanation in which changes to the core of the self have intelligible interpretations.[[22]](#footnote-22) These interpretations must be more than just a bare chronology, more than a bad history lecture, consisting of (as my college roommate used to say) “just one damned thing after another.” Nor is a narrative simply a chain of overlapping intervals over which mere psychological *similarity* is preserved.[[23]](#footnote-23) Two features distinguish such narratives from simple chronologies and chains of overlapping psychological similarity. First, the continuity of the core is far more important than the continuity of the periphery. Second, this continuity is not simply a matter of similarity, but rather of the changes being intelligible given the contents of the core attitudes.

Once we see what is involved in the narrative structure of the self, we can see why having such a structure is important to personhood. And this will in turn help us to see why the person’s identity or self, construed in this way, should be a fitting candidate for moral respect. To have a persisting identity or self is to have one’s mental life unfold in a way that embodies and preserves rational agency. To be a rational agent is to be a creature whose mental states bear intelligible relations to one another. It is to have one’s beliefs and desires change in orderly ways in light of the contents of other beliefs and desires or new information.

Narrative evolution involves having the *causes* of one’s psychological evolution correspond to *reasons* for it. To be a persisting rational agent, who possesses a unity of self through time, is to be rationally self-determining in the sense that one’s evolution is self-motivated in an intelligible way. This is why having a self with this kind of structure is a good thing, and why such a self is a fitting object of respect. This claim is rather Kantian, of course, for it trades on the idea that rational agency is valuable and worthy of respect. But it cashes out the notion of rational agency in a different way from the way Kant does. Instead of thinking of rational agency as a property of an entity whose existence is somehow independent of--and thus abstractable from--a set of beliefs and aims, it conceives of rational agency as something that can only be instantiated within some particular evolving system of beliefs and aims. It makes rational agency more like a property of a particular dynamic cognitive-motivational system, and less like a faculty which is ontologically prior and thus morally superior to such a system.

**Autonomy as Self-Determination and Self-Rule**

This picture of the evolving-but-persisting self is compatible with the very common and attractive conception of personal autonomy as the ability to reflect upon and revise one’s attitudes. This ability even extends to the core attitudes. However, in order for autonomy to be preserved, this reflection and revision must be performed from the standpoint of other core attitudes not currently under review, much as Neurath rebuilds his ship by replacing some of its planks while standing on others. This means that autonomous changes to the self must be motivated and considered at least in large part *from within* the self. Often such changes occur when the person is committed to logically incompatible beliefs or aims, to beliefs that are persistently at odds with experience, or to aims that are in conflict with one another. If such a conflict becomes too great, the person may consider giving up one of the conflicting core attitudes. If this happens, the self is preserved and a new episode of its narrative is written.

The exercise of this sort of autonomy will generally take the form of attempting to fit the bulk of one’s core aims into a coherent system. The autonomous person, then, will undergo intelligible transformations, each of which preserves the part of the core that supplies the evaluative criteria for deciding to make the change. This does not mean that any particular portion of the core is forever privileged. A series of coherent changes could alter all or almost all of the original core attitudes. In this way, the autonomous self can be the author of its own evolution, even if that evolution turns out to be fairly extreme.

This autonomous evolution will be governed by central attitudes, such as personal ideals, goals, moral commitments, and plans for character development. These will contain or imply criteria for assessing one’s current aims, character traits, and other attitudes. These criteria will often endorse or repudiate various other aspects of one’s psychology. In this way, some of a person's core attitudes will at times produce what are commonly called second-order desires which endorse or repudiate other desires. When this happens, it will often be appropriate to speak of the repudiated desires as “less truly one’s own,” for they will be in conflict with ideals that are more deeply embedded within and thus more constitutive of the self.

This observation is similar to the key insight of hierarchical desire theories of personal autonomy, namely, that the autonomous person sits in judgement over herself, and that a condition for autonomy is that these judgements must be positive. Hierarchical desire theories develop this insight by claiming that a desire is heteronomous--not truly one’s own--if it is repudiated by a second-order desire.[[24]](#footnote-24) Despite their popularity, theories of this sort seem to mis-develop the intuition that some of a person’s desires (or other attitudes) can be at odds with one’s own self. For while it is sometimes correct to link the self with second-order desires, there is no guarantee that a higher-order desire is always more constitutive of the self than a lower-order desire. Sometimes the second-order desires are *less* authentic--less constitutive of the self--than the first-order attitudes over which they pass judgement. For second-order desires can themselves be inculcated by oppressive socialization, brainwashing, psychological conditioning, and similar processes which are commonly thought to undercut a person’s autonomy. In addition, second-order desires can repudiate desires that seem, intuitively, to be perfectly at home within the self. Examples are familiar enough: disapproval of one’s own sensual desires inculcated by Victorian society, the disapproval by women socialized by patriarchal societies of their own desires for career, equality, and the achievement of their own ambitions, and so on. Such examples generate the notorious “regress problem” for hierarchical desire theories of autonomy. The temptation for hierarchical desire theories is to posit a *third*-order desire to repudiate the second-order desires generated by oppressive socialization, conditioning, and the like. The problem is that this does not really solve the problem; it simply moves it up a level. The same problem can then be raised about this third-order desire, and so on, ad infinitum.[[25]](#footnote-25)

On the view I am suggesting, desires are more or less constitutive of the self because of their location in the psychological network; whether or not they are endorsed by higher-order desires is irrelevant. Thus, when a lower-order desire is closer to the core than a higher-order desire that repudiates it, it is the *lower*-order *core* desire, rather thanthe higher-order peripheral desire, that is more constitutive of the self. In other words, a core desire--regardless of whether it is higher- or lower-order--is more authentic, and action upon it more autonomous, than a peripheral desire.[[26]](#footnote-26) To see the superiority of this theory of autonomy over hierarchical desire theories, one has only to consider examples of the following sort. Consider a person with a core desire to remain committed to her partner. The relationship is a key constituent of her identity and plays an important role in making her the person that she is. Her commitment to the relationship is a motivational and evaluative anchor-point for her psychological network. Now suppose that in a moment of passion, she not only desires to transgress her commitment to her partner, but she even wishes--fleetingly, perhaps--that her commitment to her partner were not there to get in the way of her passion. Her passion thus produces a second-order desire repudiating her first-order desire to remain committed to her partner. Yet surely the mere fact that a second-order desire is a desire *about* some other desire cannot make it more constitutive of the self than the first-order desire upon which much so much of her psychology and identity is built. Being second-order is simply a logical feature: it just means that the content of the desire makes reference to some other desire. This merely formal feature tells us nothing about how the desire fits into the psychological economy that constitutes the self of the person in question. The web of self view seems to provide a more adequate theory about which attitudes are most constitutive of the self.

**Kantian Particularism**

I take this basic picture of a psychological web or network to be an empirically plausible way to think of the complex systems which make up human psychology.[[27]](#footnote-27) It contains a notion of self or identity that can be the focus of respect for particular persons. Now suppose we retain Kant's insight that the heart of morality is the duty to respect persons. But instead of following Kant in focusing our respect for persons *primarily* on their generic status as rational agents, suppose we also focus our respect directly on their status as particular individuals. It will be helpful to have a name for this view. I'll call it "Kantian Particularism," since it borrows certain key insights from Kant’s ethics, but combines them with the view that persons are to be respected as particular individuals they are.

What would it mean to direct one’s respect toward a person’s particular identity? In answering this question, I want to borrow another insight from Kant, namely that to respect a thing is to treat it as an end. When combined with the decision to focus respect on persons as particular individuals, this insight implies that we must treat those aims that constitute a person’s identity not only as aims-for-her, but as aims *simpliciter*. If we want fully to respect persons by treating them as ends, then we should treat each person’s identity-constituting aims not just as the desires of one person, but as aims that we all have at least a prima facie reason to promote.

So Kantian Particularism begins with the Kantian ideas of respect for persons as morally fundamental, and of the connection between respecting a thing and treating it as an end, but adds two other ideas. One is “merely” non-Kantian, the other is decidedly *un*-Kantian. The non-Kantian idea is that we can describe a person’s psychology as a network or web of the sort I described above. I call this a “non-Kantian” idea because, while it does not appear in Kant’s work, it may not turn out to conflict very much with it. On what has become the standard reading of Kant’s ethics, the more exotic features of Kantian moral psychology--detached rational wills, autonomy as freedom from causal determination, and so on--are not meant to describe a person’s empirical psychology. Instead, they are features that we must take ourselves to have when we deliberate.[[28]](#footnote-28) This means that Kant *could* apparently adopt the network-based theory as an *empirical* theory of human psychology. Although it is not an empirical description Kant gives, I can see no compelling reason why he--or an “orthodox” follower--could not do so.

Of course the reason that Kant’s ethics is not strongly committed to any specific empirical psychology is that he thinks that empirical psychology is irrelevant to the basic nature of respect. The decidedly *un*-Kantian idea in Kantian Particularism is at odds with this moral denigration of the empirical. What makes Kantian Particularism most distinct from Kant’s own ethics is the claim that we must focus our respect on some *empirical* aspects of persons, namely their particular psychological identities. This seems to be a fairly dramatic departure from Kant’s moral theory, which is based on the thought that what makes persons worthy of respect is their status as rational wills. So it is not so much the addition of the network-based moral psychology that distinguishes Kantian Particularism from Kant. Rather it is the idea that a person’s particular, empirical identity is a fit object toward which to direct moral respect.

It is perhaps a bit ironic that the focus on identity should be what separates Kantian Particularism from Kant. For some recent and very compelling Kant scholarship--most notably by Christine Korsgaard and Barbara Herman--has attempted to use a notion of identity to explicate and amplify key Kantian doctrines. One might have expected that an emphasis on identity in Kantian Particularism would bring it *closer* to Kant, or at least to Kant as Herman and Korsgaard read him.[[29]](#footnote-29) Both Korsgaard and Herman stress connections between morality and identity, and attempt to use them to help make sense of Kant. Korsgaard’s suggestion is, roughly, that we see a person’s “practical identity” as a source of obligation. Particular practical identities--such as one’s identity as a parent or citizen or teacher or friend--generate obligations. As a citizen I have an obligation to pay taxes, as a professor I have an obligation to hold office hours, and so on. Korsgaard suggests that we think of Kantian obligation as deriving from practical identity in a similar way, except that Kant is concerned with the most general practical identity possible--the identity that we all have as rational agents. This most general identity is one we all have; therefore the obligations that it generates are binding on all of us. Barbara Herman develops a similar idea. She suggests that we understand acceptance of the moral law as a way of changing our identities. In this way, she suggests, we can come to see morality not as an alien force making demands and placing constraints on us, but rather as a part of who we are, as a force that shapes our lives.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Both Korsgaard and Herman seem to be on to the same idea: that morality springs from the identity that we have as rational agents, and that is why it obligates us. And they both seem to hold that obligations--or at least reasons--can spring from more particular parts of one’s identity. However, both focus on how morality springs from that part of one’s identity that is common to *all* rational beings.[[31]](#footnote-31) So while both authors seem to accept a claim similar in spirit to that on which Kantian Particularism is based, namely that a person’s particular identity can generate moral reasons, their emphasis is still on deriving Kantian duties from our generic identities as rational agents.[[32]](#footnote-32)

In addition to this difference in the *aspect* of identity that is being emphasized (general identity as rational agents in Herman and Korsgaard’s work, but particular identity in Kantian Particularism) there is also a difference in the *role* that the appeal to identity plays. Kantian Particularism appeals to (particular) identity to explain how we should direct and focus our moral respect: Identity is that toward which moral respect should be “targeted.” Herman and Korsgaard appeal to identity to explain how moral duties are “launched,” that is, how they are generated and made obligatory in the first place. They are concerned with identity as an explanation of the origin and authority of the moral law. Kantian Particularism is concerned with identity as the focus of the respect that the moral law demands.

Despite these differences, however, it is certainly true that some of the themes found in the work of Herman and Korsgaard--namely the concerns about context and particularity, and the idea that identity can be a source of moral reasons--are similar to those that motivate Kantian Particularism. This similarity in themes raises the question of whether Kantian Particularism could borrow the insights of Herman and Korsgaard. The answer seems to be yes. Indeed, this would be a fairly natural move. It is important to see that Kantian Particularism is a very modest and limited theory. It is only a theory about the proper object of respect for persons. It has nothing specific to say about the source of the authority of the obligation to respect persons. So the proponent of Kantian Particularism would be quite free to borrow Herman’s and Korsgaard’s insights about how identity creates obligation.

Similarly, Kantian Particularism is not committed to any specific view about how demanding the duty of respect is. Nor is it committed to any particular view about the relative strength of its positive and negative aspects. Thus a proponent of Kantian Particularism could borrow Kant’s doctrine that the negative duties that flow from respect are perfect, while the positive ones are imperfect. On the other hand, Kantian Particularism could be joined instead to the view that there is no morally relevant distinction between positive and negative duties, between acting and refraining. Depending on one’s other theoretical commitments, then, Kantian Particularism could be developed in either a Kantian or a utilitarian direction.

Another issue on which Kantian Particularism is silent is that of whether there are other conditions on the normativity of aims. Kant, of course, holds that certain ends are impermissible. A proponent of Kantian Particularism could make a similar claim: She could claim that aims that are incompatible with respect for others or respect for oneself are not to be respected. Adding this proviso would help to answer questions about the moral status of evil aims and servile aims. But while I think that any plausible moral theory which takes aims to have moral status must find *some* way of excluding evil and servile aims from the set of aims that merit respect, Kantian Particularism is not committed to any specific way of doing so.

To summarize: Kantian Particularism is a limited theory of the nature of moral respect which replaces Kant’s focus on the ends set by a rational will with a focus on those core motives that constitute the person’s identity. In this way, a core motive plays much the same role in Kantian Particularism as an end does in Kant's theory. However, there are two important differences. First, on the moral psychology on which Kantian Particularism is based, the only real distinction between a person’s “mere” desires on the one hand, and her identity-defining values, goals, commitments, or attachments, on the other, is just that the former is on the periphery and the latter are at the core of her motivational network. So what makes an aim worthy of moral respect is not anything (like setting or choosing or endorsing) that a person *does* to it. Rather, it is just a matter of how the person’s particular identity *is* *constituted*, in short, of *who* the person *is.* Second, the distinction between core and peripheral motives is a matter of degree. This means that the moral status of aims is also a matter of degree. This is very different from Kant's view, which makes the moral status of an aim an all-or-nothing affair: either it has been set as an end or it has not.[[33]](#footnote-33)

**PART THREE: KANTIAN PARTICULARISM AND THE PRACTICE OF RESPECT**

Kant’s theory and utilitarianism are both extremely blunt instruments through which to examine the moral significance of aims. Theories that take the moral status of aims to be basic, or that claim that the moral status of persons is transferred to the aims that she possesses or to those aims that have been sets as ends, all have an important feature in common: They claim that those aims that merit respect do so because they have a property that they all have to the same degree. All aims are *equally* aims. All my aims are *equally* my possessions. All aims that pass the test of not being irrational or immoral *equally* have the property of being aims-which-did-not-fail-the-test-of-rationality-or-morality. All aims that are ends that I set are *equally* ends that I set. Because these theories attribute the same property that grants moral status equally to all aims that they claim have moral status, they can apparently only distinguish between aims that merit respect and those that do not; and among those that do merit respect, they can base further distinctions among aims only on their *quantitative* aspects, that is, their duration, intensity, and the effect on the satisfaction of other aims.

Kantian Particularism, on the other hand, ties the moral status of aims to a feature that aims have to greater and lesser degrees. Like Kant’s theory and Haworth’s theory, it transfers moral status from persons to aims, but it does so *differentially*, granting moral status to an aim according to the *degree* to which it is incorporated into the identity of the particular person to whom we are directing our respect. Not all aims are equally constitutive of a person’s identity, because they are not all equally close to the motivational core. This features allows Kantian Particularism to reflect fine-grained distinctions among aims. According to Kantian Particularism, the aims to be most respected are those that are most constitutive of the person's identity. Normatively speaking, not all of a person’s aims are created equally, even if they are equally intense, of equal duration, and equally conducive to the satisfaction of other aims. Other things being equal, aims on the periphery of the web of self are less morally authoritative than those at the core. This allows Kantian Particularism the flexibility to say that an aim calls out for respect, but that the strength of this call depends on the role that the aim plays in constituting the identity of the person to whom it belongs.

This feature of the theory accounts for some very natural judgements. Consider the following examples.

(1) The desire to face Mecca and pray is far more significant for a devout Muslim than for an atheist traveler to a Muslim country who wants (perhaps desperately) to blend in with the locals.

(2) The desire to go to law school is far more significant for someone who wants to develop her intellectual talents in order to do *pro bono* work to further her commitment to helping the downtrodden than for someone who simply wants to earn enough money to buy a BMW.

(3) The desire to smoke peyote is far more significant for someone who subscribes to a Navaho spiritual system than for someone merely seeking (perhaps very doggedly) an interesting psychedelic experience.

(4) The desire to avoid eating meat is more significant for a person who is a vegetarian for deeply held moral reasons than for someone who simply dislikes the taste of meat (even if the dislike is extreme).

(5) The desire to skip your evening class is more significant for a devoutly religious student who is observing a holy day than for a student who simply wants (perhaps very ardently) to stay home and watch the last episode of *Seinfeld.*

(6) The desire to learn Irish step dancing is more significant for someone seeking to affirm his Celtic heritage than for someone simply wanting some form of aerobic exercise (even if this is a strong want).

In each case the significance of the first person's aim seems much greater than that of the second, and it seems to have a much greater claim on our respect.[[34]](#footnote-34) To see this, consider what you would do if you had to decide which of two applicants to select for the last remaining place in a step dancing class. Or which student to excuse from your class. Or whom to give the last veggie-burger. And so on. Intuitively, this difference is a function of the different roles the aims play in the psychologies of the two persons in each example.

The web metaphor captures this insight very well, for it shows how the first person’s aim can be constitutive of her identity in a way that the second person’s aim is not. But the insight is not an artifact of the metaphor: In each case, the aim of the first person does seem to matter more, to make a stronger claim on us. It is important to see that the extra significance of the first person’s aim is not *merely* a function of its quantitative aspects (intensity, duration, and so on). Indeed, we can imagine versions of each example in which the intensities of the aims are the same; in fact, we can even imagine versions in which the second person’s aim is stronger than the first person’s aim. Yet the first person’s aim still seems to retain a stronger claim on our respect. The moral significance of aims, it seems, is not reducible simply to their quantitative aspects. Although quantitative aspects surely *do* matter, the moral significance of an aim also depends crucially upon the role that it plays in the psychology of the person whose aim it is.

If we strip an aim from its psychological context and treat it simply as a motivating force with such and such intensity, duration, and effect on the satisfaction of other aims, then we will fail notice its full significance. Consider the Navaho’s aim to smoke peyote. The meaning and significance of this aim is inextricably entwined with such things as his commitment to keeping his culture alive, his own project of spiritual development, his holding of a certain world-view that gives significance to the visions and endows them with a certain meaning (which might vary depending on the metaphysical and epistemic significance he attaches to them), and so on. The psychedelic thrill-seeker, on the other hand, has what may *look* like the same desire, but in his case, it plays a very different role in his cognitive-motivational system. The web metaphor helps capture this idea: One cannot fully understand the full significance of an aim except in relation to its psychological context.

This context is often crucial for knowing how best to respect the aims to which we are granting normative force. For what *counts* as satisfying an aim, or, more importantly, what counts as *almost* or *partially* satisfying it, will depend crucially on its context within the person’s psychology. The person wishing to smoke peyote as part of his Navaho heritage might be willing to settle for some other ritual that does not involve the drug. The psychedelic thrill-seeker might be satisfied by some other drug, but have no use for any rituals at all. Psychological context will also tell us much about what the person might risk in order to fulfill his aim. For example, it tells us whether the person who wants peyote is willing openly to defy authority in pursuit of his allegiance to a traditional way of life, or whether he simply wants any hallucinogen that he can get without getting caught.

Because it is based on a moral psychology which recognizes the importance of the psychological context of aims, Kantian Particularism demands a kind of respect that is sensitive to that context, and in particular to the difference in the extent to which aims may be identity-constituting. Kantian Particularism will urge us to direct our moral attention not just at *any* strong aim a person happens to have, but to concentrate instead on her most central aims. In this way, Kantian Particularism provides a rationale for what I suspect are very common intuitions and practices. For example, suppose we are contemplating a suitable gift for a friend who has a peripheral desire for fine dining, and a more central aim to read great literature. A copy of the collected works of Shakespeare would make a better gift for her than an expensive meal. Both would satisfy aims that she has, but the first satisfies an aim that is more central to her identity, and for that reason, satisfying it is a more apt way to respect who she is.[[35]](#footnote-35) Or suppose that I know that you wish to quit smoking because of a deep desire to improve your health, or a deeply held character ideal of self determination and freedom from addictive substances and the effects of manipulative advertising. Now, if you ask me for a cigarette, I have all the reason I need to refuse. And this reason persists even if your desire for a cigarette becomes quite intense. For if I want to respect *you*, and if the desire not to smoke is more closely connected to the ends and values that make you who you are, then I display a greater respect toward *you* by refusing to satisfy your peripheral desire to smoke, and by honoring your more central desire not to do so.

This last example shows that directing our respect primarily at someone's more central aims may require us to bypass, neglect, and sometimes even thwart some of her more peripheral aims. In this way, Kantian Particularism will license a very limited paternalism. Neglecting or thwarting someone's peripheral aim could be justified, if doing so is necessary to satisfy a more central aim *of that same person*. But while this weak form of paternalism does allow for action against *some* of a person's aims "for her own good," it defines "her own good" in terms of other, more central aims that she herself has.

This limited paternalism will only be an option for persons who know each other extremely well. For one will have to be extremely close to another person to know which of her aims are most constitutive of her identity. There will typically be no shortcut for such knowledge. As we saw before, a person's simple expression of a second-order desire for or against a desire is no guarantee of the relative position of the first-order desire within the person's psychological network. Clearly, then, Kantian Particularism will not license paternalism on the part of strangers, much less the state. Strangers and the state will seldom be in a position to know which of a person’s aims are most constitutive of her identity. They can best manifest their respect in two ways. First, they can refrain from interfering with the person’s pursuit of her aims. Second, they can bestow on the person primary goods--goods that are all purpose means to whatever ends the person happens to have. This strategy will also be appropriate when we are dealing with persons whose identities are in flux, such as friends going through a transition, or children. Despite their generality--indeed, because of it--primary goods can sometimes best express our unconditional devotion to a person by saying, in effect, that however her identity develops, we remain devoted to her. The provision of primary goods that will be of use to the person no matter how her identity does turn out would seem to be one way of giving concrete expression to such devotion.

One will typically be in an epistemically favorable position to know the psychological context of a person’s aim--and thus to know its full moral status--only when one has the kind of intimate knowledge about the person that is seldom possible outside of some close relationship. Effective respect requires more knowledge than is available to strangers because the moral status of an aim depends upon the details of its psychological context. This makes Kantian Particularism compatible with an important insight from feminist ethics, namely that morality has its fullest expression within relationships rather than among strangers. Indeed, one might speculate that Kantian Particularism’s ethic of particularistic respect--especially in its positive, benevolent aspect--might be a close cousin to a feminist care ethic.

**CONCLUSION**

Kantian Particularism translates respect for persons into respect for their aims in a very direct way: for the aspect of the person which we are respecting--her particular identity--is constituted by some of her aims, and so respecting her just *is* respecting those aims. This does not mean that we must respect all of a person’s aims equally, however. For the more identity-constituting an aim is, the more respecting it is a part of respecting the person whose aim it is. This latter fact has important practical implications, as we have seen.[[36]](#footnote-36) The network-based moral psychology of Kantian Particularism is a source of the *practical* advantage over Kantian respect and over utilitarianism. The fact that Kantian Particularism directs respect at a person’s particular identity is the source of its main *theoretical* advantage over Kantian respect. For Kantian Particularism casts the net of respect far more widely than Kant does, so that it applies not only to what makes persons rational beings, but also at what makes them the particular persons they are. It seems to me that this model of respect succeeds far better than either the Kantian or the utilitarian model of respect at doing proper justice to the moral complexity of real life and to the particular persons who make it interesting and worthwhile.

1. . Earlier versions of this paper were presented at colloquia at Simon Fraser University in October, 1997 and at Central Michigan University in March, 1998. Parts of this material were presented at the 1998 meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association (under the title, “The Web of Self”). I am grateful to Juliet Christie, who commented on the APA presentation, for her insightful and challenging remarks, and to the members of all three audiences for extremely helpful suggestions and comments. I would also like to thank Don Brown, Colin McCleod, and, most especially, Sam Black for very helpful conversations about the project of which this paper is a part. I also want to thank Ken Rogerson, John Wright, and Bob Stecker for their assistance with the penultimate draft. Finally, excellent comments by two anonymous reviewers and an editor for this journal forced me to improve this paper in various ways, and for that I am also grateful. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Thus I am using the term “aim” to refer to any spring of, or tendency toward, intentional action. Many philosophers simply use “desire” to cover all these things. “Conation” is perhaps a bit better (though somewhat arcane). “Motive” is ambiguous between “reason for action” and “cause of action.” The reason for using the term “aim” rather than “desire” is that Kant distinguishes sharply between ends and “mere” desires or inclinations. I mean the term “aim” to apply both to Kantian ends and to desires, inclinations, and other action-producing or action-guiding states. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (translated by James W. Ellington Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), page 430. All references to Kant’s work are given in Prussian Academy pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . *Groundwork* 430. For a discussion of the meaning of “as much as possible” here, see Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995; pp. 88-107). In *Doctrine of Virtue* (p. 450), Kant adds that the ends to be furthered must not be immoral. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . See Thomas Hill, “Kant’s Theory of Practical Reason,” in *Dignity and Reason in Kant’s Moral Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). See also Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 228. See also Onora O’Neill, *Acting on Principle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp.106-110, Christine Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 108-113, see also, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 88f. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . See *Groundwork*, 437-9. For commentary, see Hill, “Humanity as an End in Itself,” in *Dignity and Reason*, pp. 85-87. See also Christine Korsgaard, "Kant’s Formula of Humanity" (*Kantstudien* 77 [1986]: 183-202), pages 186-190; Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant’s Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pages 197-8; See Richard Dean, "What Should We Treat as an End in Itself?" (*Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 77(1996): 268-88) for a slightly different reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . *Groundwork* 457-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . This qualification is necessary because on the Kantian view there is arguably no such separation between the rational agent and those ends which are dictated by reason itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . But that’s just me. Andre Agassi might have more trouble doing so: Tennis is far less contingent an end for him. In missing the distinction between a deeply held end and a trivial end, Kant also misses the fact that persons vary in how their ends are structured. More on this below. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . Kant claims that “what they count as belonging to their happiness is left up to them to decide.” *Doctrine of Virtue,* 388. For more on the attempt to show how Kant's ethics can allow context-responsive flexibility in moral practice, see Barbara Herman, *Practice*, esp. chaps. 4, 7, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . On certain readings of the idea of end-setting, there may be bigger problems as well. I have suggested that we see end-setting as a fairly passive activity--one which merely weeds out any irrational or immoral aims and promotes the rest to ends. On this view, pretty much all of our permissible aims will also count as ends. But if we take end-setting to be a decision or choice in a stronger sense, then there could be non-irrational aims that are not ends, but which play a large role in making the person who she is. Many of our most central aims are not deliberately and rationally "set" in any strong, active sense. Consider such things as one’s devotion to family. Most people never deliberately chose to have this aim. Similarly, many people never deliberately chose their friends, or their religion, or their moral outlook. Yet these things are as much a part of the person (whom we were supposed to respect) as ends which she does deliberately set. If the reason we are to promote a person's ends is just that she has *chosen* them, then it appears that any chosen end ipso facto has moral status that no other aim has, no matter how much a part of the person’s life it might be. So if one deliberates about something trivial, like the best time to go get a chocolate shake, but treats some deeply held aim as an unchosen starting point rather than an object of deliberation, then on this reading, Kant would be committed to the implausible claim that the former is more deserving of respect than the latter. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . Lawrence Haworth, “Autonomy and Utility” (*Ethics* 95 [Oct., 1984]). Will Kymlicka offers a similar view in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pages 30-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . One might wonder whether this account is adequate as it stands. For it is not obvious that just because someone *has* preferences, that respecting the person involves respecting those preferences. After all, a person may *have* lots of things that I don’t need to respect and promote even if I respect *her*. An overdrawn checking account. A bad hangover. An obnoxious dog. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . Actually, Haworth wants to resist this claim. And he wants to do so for the same reason I do: that certain preferences seem to lack moral status. His solution is to introduce a notion of autonomy according to which a person's preference has moral status “only insofar as the preference genuinely is his.” But while I think he is on the right track, this just adds an epicycle, for now it is simply autonomous preferences rather than preferences simpliciter that get an equal share of moral status. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . I mean this list to be construed broadly enough to include any representational, motivational, or affective mental state, including such things as memories, patterns of socialization, and attitudes that underlie one's relationships to others. Thus we can think of a person's psychology as reflecting or carrying the traces of her history, relationships, connections, culture, and community. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. . Terms like “self” and “identity” are ambiguous between two closely related but not quite identical ideas. When (analytic) philosophers worry about “personal identity,” or about “future selves,” they are typically worried about a very abstract ontological question: what is it for a person at time ***t*** to be the same person as a being at time ***t+n***? In addition to this *ontological* question about personal identity, we can ask a more *psychological* question: what makes me the psychological entity that I am? My concern here is the *psychological* notion of identity rather than the ontological one. I leave it open whether a person’s psychological identity may dissolve and a new one be constituted in the very same person, that is, whether ontological identity follows psychological identity. I borrow much of my thinking about the distinction between these two notions of identity and self from Marya Schechtman’s work. See her *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. . See *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 9-13; "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" in *From a Logical Point of View* (New York: Harper 1953), pp. 42-46. See also W. V. Quine, *The Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 1-16; and W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), pp. 14-19. See also Christopher Cherniak, *Minimal Rationality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) pp. 49-71; Neil Stillings, et al., *Cognitive Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 19--), esp. pp. 26-30, 73-86, and 142-67; J. R. Anderson, *The Architecture of Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *Human Associative Memory* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. . See John Atkinson and David Birch, *An Introduction to Motivation* (New York: Van Norstrand, 1978); Robert Audi, "The Structure of Motivation" (*Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 61 [1980]: 258-75); Heinz Heckhausen, *Motivation and Action* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1991); Frederick Toates, *Motivational Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Aaron Sloman, "Motives, Mechanisms, and Emotions" (*Cognition and Emotion* 1 (1987): 217‑33; Reprinted in *The Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence*, ed. M. Boden. Oxford: Oxford University Press). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. . I’ll use the term “motive (or motivation) to Φ” here to apply to any psychological state that tends to cause its owner to try to Φ intentionally. (The concept of motivation turns out to be very slippery. See my “The Nature of Motivation,” *Philosophical Studies* 87 [1987]: 87-111.) If a Kantian end is such a state, then “motive” is synonymous with “aim.” I use a separate term, however, since some people may think that a Kantian end is not an empirical psychological entity at all, but rather an entity that is only defined from the practical-deliberative point of view. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. . Of course, not all of the implications of a person’s beliefs and motives will be instantiated in her psyche. And new beliefs and motives are often derived from old ones in ways that are not warranted by (or which may even be prohibited by) theoretical or practical reason. But while the actual web will sometimes diverge from the ideally rational system derivable from the core beliefs and motives, the structure of our psychological networks will, for the most part, roughly correspond to rational derivations of new beliefs and motives from existing ones. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. . See Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality" as well as "A Critique of Utilitarianism" (in J.J.C Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 108-118. Compare Norvin Richards, "A Conception of Personality" (*Behaviorism* 14 [1986]: 147-57). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. . I take this kind of narrative structure to exist independently of any attempt by the person actually to *tell* the story of her life. The *act* of narration is not necessary for the unity of the self through time and change. This makes my account of the narrative unity of the self somewhat deflationary, as compared to other possible views which emphasize the importance of narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. . Philosophers concerned with the ontological notion of personal identity sometimes suggest that ontological personal identity is maintained over some long interval of time if the person’s psychology remains similar between each successive shorter interval of time. See, for example, Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) page 206ff. Schechtman has a helpful discussion of Parfit’s view in *The Constitution of Selves*, pages 43-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. . Classic examples of such theories of autonomy can be found in Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (*The Journal of Philosophy* 68 [1971]:5-20); and Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. . Classic formulations of this objection can be found in Irving Thalberg, “Hierarchical Analyses of Unfree Action” and Gary Watson, “Free Agency,” and Susan Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility.” These are all usefully collected in John Christman, ed., *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), the introduction to which also provides an especially clear formulation of this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. . I develop and defend an alternative to the hierarchical desire view of autonomy in “Autonomy, Value, and Conditioned Desire” (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995): 57-69). There I suggest that certain radically heteronomous desires arise from informational states that are causally and informationally isolated from normal beliefs. One result of this isolation is that they are maximally peripheral in the sense defined here. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. . I admit that it is in some ways quite sketchy and metaphorical. Even so, the sketch is actually a bit more detailed than necessary for my purposes here. As will become apparent, the key ideas that I need are, first, that attitudes play a role in constituting one’s particular identity; second, that not all attitudes play the same role; and third, that the role that any given attitude plays in the constitution of a person’s identity depends on complex relations that it bears to other parts of that person’s psychology. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. . This interpretation of Kant is deftly presented by Thomas Hill, in “Kant’s Theory of Practical Reason” in *Dignity and Reason.* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. . I thank an anonymous reader for *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* for raising this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. . For Korsgaard’s views, see *Sources*, chap. 3. For Herman’s, see *Practice*, chaps. 2, 4, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. . Indeed, both seem to take the idea that identity is a source of obligation as a premise, and then to argue that our common identities as rational agents give us the kinds of obligations Kant posited. Korsgaard argues in *Sources* that since our particular identities are sources of obligations, then so must our general identities as rational agents. See esp. pp. 115-119. See Herman, *Practice*, p. 38, where she notes that “an attachment to morality can itself be a project that gives life meaning. . . . One basic attachment, one self defining project, is morality itself.” Presumably she means that morality is one such attachment *among others.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. . In Herman’s work this emphasis is tempered by an interest in “deriving Kantian duties from the situation of real agents” (*Practice*, page 205). The thought that Kant’s ethics, at least as traditionally read, could benefit from more attention to particularity is, of course, an idea that Kantian Particularism shares. But Herman goes about “particularizing” Kant in a rather different way. She argues that particular context enters into moral deliberation by way of the faculty of moral judgment which determines what particular features of a situation are morally relevant. Kantian Particularism, on the other hand, introduces sensitivity to particular features of a person by directing moral respect specifically toward the particular features of that person’s identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. . Many Kantian ends--aims that have been the subject of deliberation and choice--will probably turn up near the core of one’s motivational network. That is because they will often be chosen according to those criteria that are at the core. In addition, there will probably be some correlation between the strength of an aim and its location in the network: Often a more central desire will be more intense than a more peripheral one. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. . At least given the most natural filling out of the details of the examples. It is certainly possible, however, to imagine individuals for whom driving a BMW or psychedelic thrill-seeking is a major “ground project” or for whom one’s ethnic heritage or religious background meant little or nothing to her. If one has such people in mind, then the remarks here and below would have to be adjusted accordingly. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. . This is not to say that we must always refrain from satisfying frivolous preferences, or even that we must always give priority to core aims. Frivolity certainly has its place, but that does not make it any less frivolous. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. . I’ve discussed certain other implications of this basic view in “Integrity, the Self, and Desire-based Accounts of Individual Good” (forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*). There I argue that the network-based moral psychology has important implications for ideal desire accounts of well-being. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)