

The Hypothetical Imperative?

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Abstract: According to the standard view, Kant held that hypothetical imperatives are universally binding edicts with disjunctive objects: take-the-means-or-don't-have-the-end. But Kant thought otherwise. He held that they are edicts binding only on *some* – those who have an end.

On the other hand, the question as to how the imperative of morality is possible is undoubtedly the only one requiring a solution. For it is not at all hypothetical; and hence the objective necessity which it presents cannot be based on any presupposition, as was the case with the hypothetical imperatives.

– Kant, *Groundwork* [4:419]¹

I.1 Introduction

The contrast between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is central to Kant's ethical theory. According to Kant, all imperatives present a practical kind of objective necessity, but with hypothetical imperatives that necessity is *based on a presupposition*, while with categorical imperatives it is not. Hypothetical imperatives commend taking the necessary means to a certain class of agents – those who have the end. *If* you have the end, *then* you ought to take the necessary means. But many contemporary commentators on Kant disagree. According to them, Kant believes in a Hypothetical Imperative that is not based on any presupposition; instead, it has a disjunctive *object*. It tells everyone to '[t]ake the necessary means or else give up the end' [Hill 1973: 436]. They say that, '[t]aken strictly, it [the hypothetical imperative] counsels us *either* to take the means *or* to give up the end' [Darwall 1983: I6].

¹ Page references in the text are to the Prussian Academy edition of Kant's works, by volume and page number, except where indicated otherwise.

One of the ways in which the problem can be seen to arise² is to follow deontic logicians in interpreting ‘ought’ as a sentential operator, on the model of ‘necessarily’ and ‘possibly’. In deontic logic, ‘ought’ assigns *practical*, as opposed to *alethic* or *metaphysical* necessity to propositions. So, in the generic statement of hypothetical imperatives – ‘if you will the end, then you ought to take the necessary means’ – there are two salient choices for how to interpret the scope of the ‘ought’, since there are two salient sentential clauses in which it figures. One choice is to give it scope merely over the consequent of the conditional. Let us call this the *Consequent Scope* reading of the conditional. The other choice is to give it scope over the entire conditional. Let us call this the *Wide Scope* reading.³

Consequent Scope: $\forall x \forall e (\text{if } x \text{ wills end } e, \text{ then } x \text{ ought } (x \text{ takes the means to } e))$

Wide Scope: $\forall x \forall e (x \text{ ought } (\text{if } x \text{ wills end } e, \text{ then } x \text{ takes the means to } e))$

It is important to notice *two* obvious differences between Consequent Scope and Wide Scope. Because the difference between them derives from whether ‘if x wills end e ’ qualifies which x ought to do something, or whether it qualifies what the x ought to do, Wide and Consequent Scope disagree not merely about what kind of thing hypothetical imperatives enjoin us to do. They also differ with respect to *who* they enjoin to do it. According to Consequent Scope, hypothetical imperatives enjoin *those with the end* to take the necessary means. Their mandate is, as Kant puts it, ‘based on a presupposition’, and they don’t mandate it to those who don’t satisfy the presupposition. But according to Wide Scope, the Hypothetical Imperative is not based on any presupposition. It applies to everyone unconditionally, no matter what they are like. It sounds, in short, very much like a special kind of *categorical* imperative.

² “Ought” is probably not a sentential operator [Schroeder *forthcoming*], and Kant certainly didn’t think that it was. Kant held that ‘ought’ express a relation between someone who ought to do something, and an *action* – not a proposition – which she ought to *do*. Imperatives, that is, ‘say that *something would be good to do* or to refrain from doing, but they say it *to a will* that does not always’ do it [4:413, my italics]. Fortunately, however, we don’t need this assumption in order to get this dispute going. Kant never actually says, ‘if you will the end, then you ought to will the necessary means.’ He only says things like, ‘[a] hypothetical imperative thus says that an action is good for some purpose, either possible or actual’ [4:414-415]. So we don’t need the thesis that the sentence is actually ambiguous – we only need ideas like those of Hill and Darwall for what hypothetical imperatives might require.

³ Stephen Engstrom [1993: 408] classifies the central options slightly differently. He seems to think that there is only one possible version of the Consequent Scope view, and it is that it is to be restricted to ends that are ‘set by reason’ [408], and hence obligatory. He calls this view the ‘material’ reading of hypothetical imperatives, and contrasts it with the ‘formal’ reading, which is essentially Wide Scope. His ‘material’ reading of hypothetical imperatives, however, is itself merely a special case of the consequent scope reading – it is *possible* to hold a Consequent Scope view which applies even to ends that are not ‘set by reason’. This non-exhaustive classification of views might appear to be a slight problem for Engstrom, since his argument in that paper is supposed to pose a dilemma for one of Allison’s views. But as we’ll see in section IV, I do hold that a version of the ‘set by reason’ view is in fact that way that Kant’s Consequent Scope view works.

The dominant view of Kant on hypothetical imperatives is that Kant accepts hypothetical imperatives only with a Wide Scope reading.⁴ But in this paper I'll explain why this is a clear mistake, at least with respect to the Kant of the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*. I'll point out, in fact, that the only serious motivation for this interpretation of Kant stems from considerations which are entirely extra-textual,⁵ and I'll argue that Kant's view plausibly possesses other resources to deal with these considerations. It will be a consequence of my interpretation that, *contra* interpreters like Korsgaard and Hill, Kant never seriously took there to be a Hypothetical Imperative, capital-H, capital-I, an independent and fundamental objective principle of practical reason of which hypothetical imperatives are the expression, in the way that categorical imperatives are expressions of the Categorical Imperative.

The structure of the paper is simple. In the remainder of part I, I present two arguments in favor of the Consequent Scope reading of hypothetical imperatives, either of which I think ought to be conclusive. Then in part 2 of the paper, I turn to Kant's famous argument that hypothetical imperatives are analytic. I argue that given Kant's conception of analyticity, there is only one viable way of interpreting this argument, and that on this interpretation the argument only supports Consequent Scope. Finally, in part 3 of the paper I turn to consider the motivation for the Wide Scope interpretation. I note that while my arguments are textually based, this motivation derives from an extra-textual philosophical problem faced by contemporary interpreters of Kant. And I note that if my interpretation of the analyticity argument is correct, then Kant already has a solution to this problem.

I.2 Wide Scope and Categoricality

Among imperatives, as I noted above, Kant distinguishes between those which are *categorical*, and those which are merely *hypothetical*. Categorical imperatives are addressed to all finite rational agents, and are not also hypothetical imperatives. Hypothetical imperatives, according to Kant, address themselves only to those who have certain ends. This doesn't mean that they don't address themselves to all finite rational

⁴ [Hill 1973] is the classic and one of the clearest statements of this interpretation and its motivation. Hill also later reiterates his position [Hill 1989: 365]. I take it that Rawls would agree, since Hill cites his lectures as inspiration [Hill 1973: 429]. Korsgaard endorses Hill's reading [Korsgaard 1997b: footnote to 234], and offers two detailed accounts of what Kant's arguments were for this view at different points in his career, which I'll consider in part 2 [Korsgaard 1997b: 238-240, 245-247]. Barbara Hermann follows Hill at least as far as talking about 'the Hypothetical Imperative' in the singular [Hermann 1993: 144, 214-5]. Stephen Darwall [Darwall 1983: 16, 47] and Jean Hampton [Hampton 1998: 144, 165] certainly commit to the view, and I suspect that many if not most contemporary Kantian thinkers in ethics are guilty of making the same mistake. H.J. Paton is extremely unclear about how he uses the word 'conditioned' in his *The Categorical Imperative* [Paton 1947], but he clearly thinks, like Hill, that individual hypothetical imperatives are 'conditioned' on the Hypothetical Imperative, which is in turn not 'conditioned' on ends at all, but only on the moral imperative. See section 3.3.

⁵ [Greenspan 1975], [Gensler 1985], [Hampton 1998], [Broome 1999], Schroeder [forthcoming]. Simon Blackburn [Blackburn 1998] also endorses this reading of hypothetical imperatives. Decision theory, conceived as a theory of instrumental reason, is probably also of the Wide Scope variety, and for similar reasons [Dreier 1996].

agents. The imperative of prudence, according to Kant, *is* addressed to all finite rational agents. *Everyone* ought to act to ensure their own happiness. But this is only because an agent's happiness is determined by what her ends are – it is whatever would fulfil them. So no matter what ends an agent wills, acting to ensure her happiness is taking the means to her ends. And so she ought, because of the ends that she wills, to act to ensure her happiness [4:415]. Real categorical imperatives, in Kant's sense, aren't like this. There need be and can be *no* explanation in terms of agents' ends as to why a real categorical imperative is addressed to everyone [4:416]. We cannot, as Kant says in my epigram, base it on any presupposition about the agents to whom it is addressed.

According to Kant, moreover, hypothetical imperatives are much easier to understand than categorical ones. We can show by means of a simple analysis of the concept of willing an end that hypothetical imperatives are possible. But we need a substantive, synthetic argument, and an appeal to the autonomy of rational agents, in order to discover how categorical imperatives are possible. Moral imperatives, according to Kant, statements about what people ought, morally, to do, are addressed to all finite rational agents. And even though such imperatives aren't *thereby* categorical – the imperative of prudence, after all, is addressed to everyone, but isn't categorical – Kant doesn't see how the *content* of moral imperatives could be derived in the same way as his imperative of prudence, since they are not, like that imperative, seemingly 'empty'. So he concludes that they must in fact be categorical. And so moral imperatives turn out to be much harder to understand than hypothetical ones, in part *because* they are categorical. This is what he says at [4:419] of the *Groundwork*, the passage I took as my epigram.

All of this makes Wide Scope initially very hard to credit as an interpretation of Kant's account of hypothetical imperatives. For according to that interpretation, if people with playing the cello well as their end ought to practice, it is only because everyone ought to ensure that if he has an end, then he takes the necessary means. That is, according to Wide Scope, hypothetical imperatives depend on the truth of an *ought* which applies to everyone. Moreover, this *ought* cannot in turn be explained by appeal to everyone's ends, in the way that the imperative of prudence was. For it is itself supposed to *explain* how *any* 'ought'-statements can follow from facts about ends. So it must be an imperative which is *categorical* in Kant's sense. And thus, contrary to Kant's claim that what makes moral but not hypothetical imperatives puzzling is that they alone presuppose a *categorical* imperative, it turns out that even hypothetical imperatives presuppose a categorical imperative.

Jean Hampton, who seems to take the wide-scope approach to giving an account of practical reason to be the only possible view, bites the bullet quite explicitly:

Kant's position on the nature of hypothetical imperatives must be construed (**contra his explicit wishes**) such that understanding the bindingness of a hypothetical imperative is no easier than understanding the bindingness of a categorical imperative. My interpretation cannot save Kant's belief that the former is more straightforward than the latter; **indeed, my argument is that Kant's belief is wrong**. The only way to analyze Kant's analyticity claim is to do so in a way that locates in hypothetical imperatives the same mysterious objectivity that attends the categorical imperative. Even more strikingly, I have argued that the force of hypothetical imperatives is dependent on, and *is at least in part constituted by*, the force of some antecedent categorical imperative that is in part definitive of instrumental rationality.⁶

As I've noted, if Kant intends hypothetical imperatives to be understood on the model of Wide Scope, Hampton is right that they presuppose a categorical imperative. But given that it is at the absolute centre of Kant's practical philosophy that hypothetical imperatives are merely analytic, but we cannot show that a categorical imperative is even possible, except by synthetic means, this really ought to suggest to us that we should think rather harder about whether to interpret him on that model.

If it is possible to use analytic means to show the possibility of hypothetical imperatives, and the existence of hypothetical imperatives entails the existence of a categorical imperative, then it turns out that it's possible to demonstrate the existence of a categorical imperative by analytic means after all. So it becomes extremely puzzling why Kant would have thought that it was the very *categoricity* of moral imperatives which meant that we needed a synthetic argument and an appeal to the autonomy of rational agents in order to see how they are possible. It must have been entirely different reasons which made Kant think that the moral imperative was more puzzling or difficult to understand. Thomas Hill's 'The Hypothetical Imperative' [Hill 1973], one of the classic sources for the Wide Scope interpretation of Kant, is mostly devoted to defensive manoeuvring on just this front.

It's not that the considerations which Hill offers are irrelevant. On the contrary, he highlights a number of features of the moral imperative *besides* its categoricity which distinguish it from the Wide Scope version of the hypothetical imperative. But none of this gets past the point that Kant obviously thought that *categoricity* was *also* an important distinguishing characteristic of moral imperatives, and the Wide Scope interpretation makes this out to be complete nonsense, and obviously so.

⁶ [Hampton 1998, 165-6]. The boldface type is my addition, but the italics are her own emphasis. Hampton certainly seems to be offering a wide-scope reading: '[s]o although in fact there are agents who desire the end, but not the means to the end, this principle says that they ought not to do so, and will be condemned as irrational to the extent that they do so' [Hampton 1998: 133]. But in fact, much of her discussion is ambiguous or unclear on this point, and what really seems to be important for her argument are the claims I've put in boldface, and the last quoted sentence. So long as hypothetical imperatives must derive from some categorical imperative, Hampton ought to be happy, even if that categorical imperative isn't of the Wide Scope variety. I discuss another possible interpretation of what Hampton might actually have been thinking in my unpublished paper, 'Normative Explanations'.

I.3 The Problematic Assertoric Distinction

In the *Groundwork* and in a set of lectures given at about the same time the record of which we owe to Mrongovious, Kant draws a distinction that makes no sense if his view is Wide Scope, but which is enormously important, if his view is Consequent Scope. The distinction is that between two kinds of hypothetical imperatives – ones which are *assertoric*, and ones which are merely *problematic*. Assertoric hypothetical imperatives are ones whose end is actually given, while problematic hypothetical imperatives are ones in which someone doesn't actually have the end. Kant clearly thinks that this is a philosophically important distinction,⁷ but it is hard to make sense of this on a Wide Scope reading. On the Wide Scope reading, after all, *whether or not* you have the end, you ought to ensure that *if* you have it, you take the necessary means. The fact that you actually *have* the end doesn't actually make any difference as to what you ought to do. But on the Consequent Scope reading, your having the end makes *all the difference*. If you have the end, then there is something that you ought to do, that it wouldn't have been the case that you ought to do, if you didn't have the end. We can *assert* of you, that you ought to take the means, for you now fall under the application class of the *ought*, while before you did not.

Very interestingly, the 'assertoric'/'problematic' distinction is one that Kant later rejects, in a footnote to his original, unpublished introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*. There he writes that

[t]his is the place to correct a mistake I made in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*: having said there that imperatives of skill command only conditionally – namely, under the condition of merely possible, i.e., *problematic* purposes – I called such practical precepts problematic imperatives. **But in fact this expression is contradictory.** I should have called them technical, i.e., imperatives of art [20:200, boldface added for emphasis].

Here Kant claims to eschew his earlier distinction on the grounds that strictly speaking, the phrase 'problematic imperatives' is actually contradictory. On the Consequent Scope view, but only on that interpretation, it is easy to see why. Since the antecedent of a problematic imperative is not satisfied, strictly speaking there is *no* imperative – only a hypothesis about what imperative there *would* be, if things were different. Since Kant himself claimed to hold that this phrase was incoherent, that highly suggests that he did hold the Consequent Scope view.⁸

⁷ Perhaps Kant does sometimes make distinctions more in the interest of taxonomy than philosophical importance. But it's extremely hard to imagine that this is the case in this instance. For one, it's hard to even see what the distinction *is* on the Wide Scope reading, much less why it is important, or why Kant's terminology for it makes sense.

⁸ One might question whether an obscure footnote from an introduction that Kant himself chose not to publish should be given very much weight. But it is worth noting that after writing this introduction, Kant insists nearly uniformly on using the term

2.1 The Analyticity Argument at [4:417]

Kant finds hypothetical imperatives less puzzling than categorical ones, because he thinks that they are *analytic*. And according to Kant, what makes a claim analytic is that its predicate is contained in a correct analysis of its subject. So, for example, it is analytic that bachelors are unmarried, because the proper analysis of ‘bachelor’ is ‘unmarried man’. So saying that bachelors are unmarried is saying that unmarried men are unmarried.⁹ Let us, therefore, try to separate Wide Scope and Consequent Scope into subject-predicate form, in order to see how an argument that each was analytic would have to go. Kant himself, after all, does provide such an argument, in the *Groundwork*, at (4:417). It would therefore be worth our while to take a look at the form that that argument actually takes, and the form that it would have to take, in order to be an argument for Wide Scope or for Consequent Scope.

According to Wide Scope, every agent has the following property: she ought to ensure that if she has an end, she takes the necessary means. According to Consequent Scope, everyone who has an end has the following property: she ought to take the necessary means to it. ‘Agent’ is the subject of Wide Scope. So Wide Scope would only be analytic if ‘ought to ensure that if she has an end she takes the necessary means to it’ could be analyzed as a constituent of ‘agent’. So it looks like an argument for the analyticity of Wide Scope would have to start by analyzing ‘agent’ and finding ‘ought to ensure that if she has an end she takes the necessary means to it’. But Kant’s analysis isn’t an analysis of ‘agent’ at all. On the contrary, ‘[t]he imperative derives the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of *willing the end*’ [4:417, italics added].

Now there are a couple of different ways of reading what is going on at [4:417] of the *Groundwork*. According to folklore, it is that ‘wills the necessary means’ is part of the concept of ‘wills the end’. *He who wills the end wills the means*. But this isn’t what Kant actually says. If this were true, as Korsgaard is fond of pointing out [Korsgaard 1997b: 229-230], then it would be impossible to will an end and not will the necessary means, and if so, there would be no sense in saying that one who wills the end *ought* to will the necessary means. This is just a point of which Kant himself is fond – imperatives are only *imperatives* insofar as it is possible to fail to conform to them [4:413]. If it’s not possible to will the end and fail to will the means, then neither a Wide Scope nor a Consequent Scope hypothetical imperative will really be an imperative.

‘technical’ to refer to hypothetical imperatives, and abstains from using the term ‘hypothetical’ – a marked departure, if Kant weren’t serious about what he says in this passage.

⁹ It is important to note the possibility that Kant has a different conception of analyticity in the practical domain than of analyticity in the theoretical domain, as in the first *Critique*. I’ll address this question in section 2.3.

As Hill points out, what Kant says at [4:417] is only that ‘[w]hoever wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means that are indispensably necessary to his actions and that lie in his power’, or that ‘[t]he imperative derives the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of willing the end’. From the latter quotation, it seems clear that Kant *is* analyzing the concept of willing the end, but from the former that what he gets is not ‘wills the necessary means’, but ‘wills, insofar as he is rational, the necessary means’, or simply ‘ought to will the necessary means’.

If this is the right interpretation of the passage, then this fits the Consequent Scope interpretation, but not the Wide Scope interpretation. For Wide Scope to be the correct interpretation, Kant would have to be analyzing instead the concept ‘agent’. I’m not arguing, here, that Wide Scope couldn’t be analytic, on some conceptions of analyticity. It clearly can be. On some conceptions of analyticity, something is analytic if it is accepted by every speaker of the language competent with the terms involved. Someone might think that Wide Scope is so uncontroversial as to be analytic in this sense. I don’t think it is this uncontroversial,¹⁰ but someone might. Nor am I arguing even that Wide Scope couldn’t be analytic on Kant’s conception of analyticity. It could be thought that there is an analysis of ‘agent’ from which we get ‘ought to ensure that if she wills the end, she takes the necessary means to it’. I don’t think there is such an analysis, but that’s not what I’m arguing, here. What I’m arguing, is that this is not what is going on in Kant’s *actual* supposedly analytic argument for the possibility of hypothetical imperatives. What is going on in this argument is that he is analyzing the concept of willing an end, and finding ‘ought to will the necessary means’. This particular argument only supports Consequent Scope, and not Wide Scope.

2.2 Korsgaard on [4:417]

Admittedly, despite Kant’s own words: “[t]he imperative derives the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of willing the end,” others have supposed that the analysis in the passage is really an analysis of something else. Christine Korsgaard, for example, seems to think that it is an analysis of ‘rational agent’, and her proposal for how to understand the passage is worth considering.¹¹ According to her interpretation, in ‘rational agent’ we find the concept, ‘if she wills the end, she takes the necessary means’.

¹⁰ Schroeder [forthcoming].

¹¹ It is important to note that Korsgaard offers *two* interpretations of Kant’s argument for the possibility of hypothetical imperatives. One is the argument that she finds at [4:417], the passage which I am now considering. This interpretation is at [Korsgaard 1997b: 238-240]. But since Korsgaard believes that this is not Kant’s considered view of the matter, but only a relic of his pre-critical rationalism [1997b: 239], she also has a view about his mature account. This is the final view that she offers in her [1997b] and which she alludes to at [1997a: xvii], and I will consider it as well.

The model suggests that the normativity of the *ought* expresses a demand that we should emulate more perfect rational beings (possibly including our own noumenal selves) whose own conduct is not guided by normative principles at all, but instead describable in a set of **logical** truths. [Korsgaard 1997b: 240, boldface added]

So, according to Korsgaard, ‘a rational agent takes the necessary means to her ends’ turns out to be analytic, because ‘takes the necessary means to her ends’ turns out to be part of the analysis of ‘rational agent’. Indeed, one of Kant’s formulations in this very passage is, ‘[w]hoever wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means that are indispensably necessary to his actions and that lie in his power’, and Korsgaard’s interpretation gives us a reasonable interpretation of this claim, standing by itself.

But this does not yet give us a statement of Wide Scope. To get Wide Scope as a result of analysis, we would have to analyse ‘agent’. But as I interpret Korsgaard, she is suggesting that this is the first step toward deducing Wide Scope. According to Korsgaard, as I understand her, Kant thinks that from this it *follows* that anyone, rational or not, ought to emulate the rational agent, by making sure that she does so, as well.¹² So on my reconstruction of Korsgaard’s view, she holds that Kant is not deriving Wide Scope directly, by means of an analysis, but merely claiming that it *follows* from an analytic truth. And that is how, according to Korsgaard, the passage at [4:417] gives us an analytic argument for Wide Scope.

Unlike most philosophers in the twentieth century, however, Kant doesn’t seem to have a conception of analyticity on which the consequences of analytic truths are also analytic. On Kant’s conception, the analytic truth itself must have its predicate contained in its subject. Still, granting Korsgaard two assumptions will get her interpretation going. All that she needs is 1) allowing Kant a more generous account of analyticity, so that analytic truths are those whose predicate is contained in their subject *or else* which follow from such claims, and 2) the claim that it is analytic that any agent ought to do what *rational* agents do. If we grant these assumptions, then Korsgaard’s interpretation is one on which the argument, even though it is not an analysis of ‘agent’ turns out to successfully make Wide Scope analytic.

¹² Korsgaard also thinks that this kind of argument is a relic of Kant’s precritical rationalism, and doesn’t represent his mature view: ‘[A] perfectly rational being *would* take the means to his ends, therefore I *ought* to take the means to my ends. The model suggests that the normativity of the *ought* expresses a demand that we should emulate more perfect rational beings’ [Korsgaard 1997b: 239-240]. Notice that what the (imperfectly rational) agent ought to do is to emulate the perfectly rational one. And the perfectly rational one is this way: she *either* takes the necessary means to an end, *or* she doesn’t will it. So an imperfectly rational being ought to be *like that*. And so account of hypothetical imperatives derived is Wide Scope.

But I don't see why we should prefer this reading to my own. Kant himself tells us that it is an analysis of willing an end, and *contra* Hill,¹³ the argument can be an analysis of willing an end *without* being the analysis that this concept contains the concept, 'wills the necessary means'. It might, as I've suggested, be an argument that the concept of willing an end contains the concept, 'ought to will the necessary means'. And in any case, this alternative reading only works, if we broaden Kant's conception of analyticity, and I know of no independent reason to do so. Moreover, it requires a further argument that it is analytic that any agent ought to do what a rational agent would do, something that even Korsgaard thinks is merely a relic of Kant's precritical rationalism. The most natural way to understand what is going on at (4:417) is to agree that it is what Kant tells us is going on: '[t]he imperative derives the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of willing the end'. And that means that it can only be an argument for Consequent Scope.

2.3 Korsgaard on Kant's Mature View

So *holding fixed* Kant's account of analyticity, it seems that there is only one viable interpretation of the analyticity argument at [4:417]. And this interpretation forces us to conclude that the argument is an argument for Consequent Scope, rather than for Wide Scope. It might be thought, however, that Kant had a quite different conception of analyticity in the practical domain, than in the theoretical one, as in the first *Critique*. And in fact, this interesting view seems to be presupposed by Christine Korsgaard's preferred version of Kant's account of hypothetical imperatives.¹⁴

Korsgaard says that "willing the means is conceptually contained in willing the end" [Korsgaard 1997a: xvii], but she also claims that it is possible to will the end without willing the means [Korsgaard 1997b: 238]. Now this view would be incoherent, if Korsgaard meant that 'wills the means' was literally part of the analysis of 'wills the end', in the way that 'unmarried' is part of the analysis of 'bachelor'. Since 'unmarried' is part of the analysis of 'bachelor', it simply isn't possible for there to be a married bachelor. So Korsgaard must mean something else by her claim about conceptual inclusion.

I think that the clue to what she means comes from what she says in the rest of the same sentence: 'if you will the end and yet fail to will the means to that end, you are guilty of a practical contradiction.' [Korsgaard 1997a: xvii]. So Korsgaard doesn't seem to think that willing the end but not willing the

¹³ After arguing against the 'folk' belief that Kant is arguing that the concept of willing the necessary means is contained in the concept of willing the end, Hill straightaway concludes that the passage supports the Wide Scope reading. He seems not to have noticed that there is any further issue at stake in the interpretation of the passage, and further seems to think that this point is the only controversial aspect of any part of his interpretation worth mentioning. He says almost as much [Hill 1989: 366].

¹⁴ Compare note II.

means is like being a married bachelor. She seems to think that it is like *believing* that John is a bachelor but not believing that John is unmarried. This is a contradiction (at least, a failure to believe the consequences of one's beliefs) not because of the analysis of 'believes that John is a bachelor', but because of the analysis of 'John is a bachelor'. So for the analogy to be complete, Korsgaard must apparently be thinking of the analysis as not literally of 'wills the end', but of some kind of distinctive practical *content* of willing an end. And this interpretation of Korsgaard is well-supported, I think, by her 'solution' in [Korsgaard 1997b: 245-247] and by her statement of her positive view in [Korsgaard 1996].

This leaves a serious and intriguing question about what Kant meant by 'analytic' in the practical domain that there is no space here to adequately explore. But I want to consider Kant's specific claim that,

Whoever wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means that are indispensably necessary to his actions and that lie in his power. *This proposition, as far as willing is concerned, is analytic.* [4:417, italics added]

The chief problem with Korsgaard's proposed account, as I understand it, is that although it makes *something* turn out to be analytic, it doesn't make *this* proposition turn out to be analytic.

For according to the Korsgaardian conception of analyticity in the practical domain, what is analytic is something like 'if WILL(the end), then WILL(the necessary means)', where 'WILL' expresses the distinctive practical *content* of willing something, of which the account is supposed to provide an analysis. And if this is right, then those who will an end but don't will the necessary means are relevantly analogous to those who believe that John is a bachelor but don't believe that he is unmarried. Now it may be *irrational* to be like this. It may be that you *ought* not to be like this. But it isn't *analytic* that it is irrational to believe that John is a bachelor but not that he is unmarried. At least, if it is, we need an analysis of rationality in order to see why. Similarly, even if this Korsgaardian account is correct, it simply isn't *analytic* that it is irrational to will the end but not will the means. But Kant clearly claims that it is.

I find the alternative conception of analyticity in the practical domain that we seem to need to attribute to Korsgaard greatly intriguing. Unfortunately there is no space, here, to adequately address its merits. But for the main reason just cited, I don't see how it would be able to aid us in explaining the *analyticity* of 'If you will the end, then you ought to take the necessary means'. So I conclude that since Kant does claim it to be analytic, he must understand it as taking Consequent Scope, and his argument must work in the straightforward way that I've outlined: he analyzes 'wills the end', and finds 'ought to take the necessary means' as part of the analysis.

3.1 So Far

This, finally, gives us three strong considerations in favour of Consequent Scope over Wide Scope. 1) Only it, I argued, can make sense, rather than foolishness, of Kant's assertion that it is the categoricity of the moral imperative which is the, or even *a*, distinguishing feature which merits it special treatment. 2) Moreover, the distinction between assertoric and problematic hypothetical imperatives only makes sense on the Consequent Scope Reading. And finally, 3) Kant's argument can only be made proper sense of, given his conception of analyticity, as an argument for the analyticity of Consequent Scope. Perhaps other arguments might have shown that Wide Scope is analytic, but he doesn't appear to have given them. The argument analyzes the wrong concept to be an argument for Wide Scope.

So I take it that we would need rather strong reasons to reverse our interpretation in favour of Wide Scope. But so far, we have still to come across *any* reasons to attribute Wide Scope to Kant. I hold that this is not a coincidence. Wide Scope has been attributed to Kant for one principal reason only, and it is not based in the text at all. This consideration, as I'll argue in the next section, is plausibly much less compelling for Kant than for the contemporary theorists who offer it, and my interpretation of the analyticity argument at [4:417] lets us immediately see why. Since he has a way out of the problem which they lack, it's anachronistic to think that the considerations which compel them would also have compelled him.

3.2 Detaching

The problem, as contemporary theorists see it,¹⁵ is that Consequent Scope has commitments which are simply intolerable. Take the case of someone who wills the end that he robs a bank at gunpoint. If we accept Consequent Scope, then all we have to do is to apply *modus ponens* in order to yield the conclusion that she ought to bring a gun. Take the case of someone who wills to be an axe-murderer. If we accept Consequent Scope, then all we have to do is to apply *modus ponens* to yield the conclusions that he ought to sharpen his axe and that he ought to stake out victims. Indeed, that he ought to swing his axe at someone. According to the lingo, deriving particular 'ought' statements from hypothetical imperatives and their antecedent conditions is called *detaching*. The worry is that Consequent Scope lets us detach *too much*. It lets us detach 'ought'-statements which are patently false. So it must be false.

¹⁵ [Gensler 1985], [Broome 1999], and [Schroeder forthcoming] give perspicuous treatments of the motivation which follows. [Hill 1973] spells out carefully how these considerations get applied to the interpretation of Kant. Similar considerations can be found in [Darwall 1983] and [Korsgaard 1997b].

Wide Scope, on the other hand, doesn't have this feature. Nothing follows from the fact that someone wills to be an axe-murderer, and ought to ensure that he either takes the necessary means to being an axe-murderer or doesn't will to be one. It certainly doesn't follow that he ought to take the necessary means. Perhaps the thing for him to do is to cease willing to be an axe-murderer. That is what the Wide Scoper would like to say. Since Wide Scope lets him say it, and Consequent Scope seems not to, she infers that Wide Scope has got to be the way to go. It lets us maintain that there is an important normative connection between ends and means, but all it does is to *transfer* the force of reasons from ends to means, as Stephen Darwall puts it [Darwall 1983]. Willing to do things one patently ought not to do doesn't make it the case that one ought to do these things.

And Kant, as I read him, would agree wholeheartedly about all of this. *Except* the bit about any of it telling against Consequent Scope. It's only an argument against Consequent Scope, after all, insofar as Consequent Scope is committed to thinking that it's *possible* to will ends to which one ought not to take the necessary means. The contemporary naturalists about which Wide Scopers are usually worried have to think this. They think that it's possible to give an account of having an end in wholly non-normative terms. Willing an end is, for example, desiring it. Or desiring to desire it [Williams 1981; Frankfurt 1971; Lewis 1989]. Or both. Or it's valuing it, where this *sui generis* mental state is explained by its cognitive and evolutionary role [Watson 1975; Gibbard 1990]. Or it's a desire which would survive cognitive psychotherapy or exist in reflective equilibrium [Brandt 1979; Smith 1994]. Whatever the proposal, the naturalist is going to fall short of concluding that having totally immoral or irrational ends is completely impossible, and so – so far as it goes – the objection that he will detach too much is a good objection against him, if he wants to believe in Consequent Scope.

But Kant isn't this kind of naturalist. In fact, as I've already argued in the previous section, the proper way to understand his argument for the possibility of hypothetical imperatives commits him to thinking that one simply *can't* will an end, unless it could be the case that one ought to take the necessary means. So the scenario that the Wide Scoper envisions is one that Kant will simply find impossible.

What makes it impossible, after all, is the *Categorical Imperative*. The Categorical Imperative is, after all, the centrepiece of Kant's ethical theory. It sets forth the *constraints* on what ends an agent can will. If an end doesn't pass the test of the Categorical Imperative, then it can't be *willed*. The whole idea of the Categorical Imperative is that it is derived merely on the basis of constraints that any will would have to satisfy.

Now it's not that there isn't a sense, for Kant, in which you can will bad ends – you certainly can. For the Categorical Imperative is the expression of a *normative* law, and one which its subjects – imperfectly

rational wills – do not necessarily obey. Kant uses the term *willkür* to refer to the will conceived of as the generic capacity for choice. In this sense, animals as well as humans have wills. The animal *willkür*, however, is merely set by its desires. If an animal desires something, then that automatically becomes its end. And that condition is *heteronomy*. Heteronomy of the will is the condition of having one's *willkür* set by the object of one's desires. And this contrasts, for Kant, with *autonomy*. Humans have a capacity for autonomy of the will which animals lack, according to Kant, because in addition to mere desires, their *willkür* can also be governed by *incentives* set by their *wille*. The *wille* is the will conceived of as the faculty for determining the *law* by which you will be guided. And what the Categorical Imperative tells us, is what things could possibly be products of our *wille*, since it tells us what things could possibly be laws, and what the *wille* does is to determine laws. So though bad ends can be set by your *willkür* and thus be the product of your *choice*, they can't be the product of your *wille*. You can't *will* them, in the sense that I claim is appropriate to hypothetical imperatives, on Kant's view.

I don't claim that this is the only way of understanding the relationship between hypothetical imperatives and the Categorical Imperative, for Kant. But I do claim that it is enough to show that if he likes, Kant *can* get his solution to the 'detaching' problem for free. His moral theory is already deeply engaged in the project of setting constraints on what can be the product of an autonomous will, and his moral psychology specifically locates in the human will a part that is the source for such autonomous willing. And if my interpretation of the analyticity argument at [4:417] is right, then this is what Kant *has* to say. For it simply follows from that interpretation that you can't will ends unless you ought to take the necessary means to them. So 'detaching' too much turns out not to be a problem for Kant at all. It's certainly not one worth overriding all of the serious textual evidence *against* thinking that Kant's hypothetical imperatives are Wide Scope.

3.3 A Final Thought

Korsgaard and Hill, among others, have attributed to Kant a special Principle of Practical Reason – the Hypothetical Imperative, which governs the instrumental realm in the way that the Categorical Imperative governs the moral realm. This may or may not be slightly suspicious, given that Kant tells us in the second *Critique* that the Categorical Imperative alone is 'the fundamental law of pure practical reason' [5:31]. But either way, the foregoing suggests that there is a legitimate sense in which making such claims might be a mistake. Whether it is, depends on what we take Kant to mean by 'principle'. We might think that principles of practical reason are simply truths about practical reason, and their being objective is a matter

of their being properly judgeable by any rational being. If this is what it is to be an objective principle, then Wide Scope fits the bill. It is a truth about what people ought to do, and since it is analytic, anyone possessing the concept of willing an end must rationally accept it.

But it often seems that Kant, and his interpreters, mean something quite different by principle. Korsgaard, for example, tells us that '[t]he familiar view that the instrumental principle is the *only* requirement of practical reason is incoherent.' [Korsgaard 1997b, 220]. She means to be arguing, in part using Kant as an authority, that it is incoherent to think that there are only hypothetical imperatives, as the naturalists discussed in the last section seem to believe. The 'instrumental principle' is supposed to be the Hypothetical Imperative. But here she is claiming that the instrumental principle is a *requirement*. This seems to presuppose a much different sense of 'principle' than the innocuous sense of the last paragraph. Consequent Scope is not a requirement. It may be a truth about requirements, and about when agents are under them. It says, after all, that if an agent wills an end, then she is required to take the necessary means. But it is not *itself* the requirement that the agent take the necessary means, just the fact that there is such a requirement.

Kant also sometimes seems to have this sense of 'principle' in mind. Sometimes he seems to use 'principle' merely in such a way as to overcome the generality problem generated by the fact that imperatives apply only to *finite* rational beings, and not to infinite rational beings who always do what they ought. Principles, in this sense, are like we have been understanding imperatives to be. They *apply* to agents, *directing* them to do one thing or another. Although Consequent Scope is *about* agents, however – it says when and how they can come under obligations to do one or another thing – it does not itself *apply* to them. It does not *direct* them to do anything, in the way that Wide Scope claims that there is some directive applying to any agent, directing her to either take the means to her ends or else give them up. If this is the sense of 'principle' that interpreters like Korsgaard and Hill have had in mind, then I've been arguing that there is no fundamental principle of instrumental reason, no Hypothetical Imperative, capital-H capital-I.

The moral, then, if there is one, is that it's no coincidence that Hill has to stretch to come up with a passage to cite in which Kant refers to 'the' hypothetical imperative, in the singular.¹⁶ It's not *the* Hypothetical Imperative, binding on everyone, but *hypothetical imperatives*, binding on those with certain ends, which interest Kant. Or so I've tried to illustrate.¹⁷

¹⁶ He does stretch. He cites only one passage, and cites it twice, but both times removes it from context which makes it look like Kant is really referring to more than one imperative in the quoted passage.

¹⁷ Special thanks to Maurice Goldsmith, David Sussman, Stephen Darwall, Ant Eagle, Gideon Rosen, graduate student audiences at Princeton University and at the University of California at Berkeley, and to two anonymous reviewers for the Australasian Journal of Philosophy.

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