A Kantian Rationale for Desire-Based Justification

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Section I

On one common view,¹ the only justifications for agents' actions are grounded in their wants and desires. A weaker version of this view holds that at least some justifications for actions can be grounded in appeals to such attitudes. The stronger view is sometimes expressed by the claim that all practical rational imperatives are hypothetical imperatives of the form, "If one wants X, then one ought to do Y."² The practical 'ought' is binding upon the agent only if she has this or some other relevant propositional attitude. Kantians defend a starkly contrasting position, denying not only the strong version of the first view but the weak version as well: desires, properly understood, never justify an agent's intentions and actions. I will refer to this position in what follows as the strong Kantian result.³


² Such a formulation is employed by John Mackie in Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong, esp. ch. 1, secs. 6 and 10.

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Must a Kantian endorse this strong result? I will argue that the answer is ‘no’—that a rationale for a circumscribed form of desire-based justification can be developed out of a contemporary Kantian account as a natural extension of such an account. In particular, I will develop this rationale through an examination of certain arguments for the strong Kantian result recently put forward by Christine Korsgaard. Korsgaard maintains the compatibility of these arguments with certain central features of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of mind and epistemology. Indeed, she suggests that Wittgenstein’s private language argument may well provide the key to completing the argument for a Kantian ethics. I will demonstrate that specific steps in her argument for the strong Kantian result are in considerable tension with these same Wittgensteinian commitments. Moreover, I will show that one attractive strategy for resolving this tension within the Kantian ethical framework supports rather than undermines a role for desire-based justification, at least in certain cases.

Certain of Korsgaard’s recent arguments establish only that in order for wants and desires to justify actions, they must have features that cannot be reconciled with a merely instrumental account of practical reasoning. Certain other arguments that she puts forward purport to establish the strong Kantian result: not that desires and wants must have certain features antithetical to instrumentalism in order to play a justificatory role, but that because they do not have these features, they cannot play such a role. Although these arguments are presented together, there are good reasons to distinguish them. First, the separation reveals the possibility of an interim position that rejects instrumentalism while retaining desire-based justification. This is the position that results from acceptance of the arguments for the weaker result coupled with rejection of the arguments for the stronger result. Second, it is not the arguments for the weaker claim, but those purporting to extend it to the strong result, that are difficult to reconcile with her philosophy of mind. Finally, it is the weaker result, coupled with an account that accommodates her Wittgensteinian commitments, that suggests a limited defense of desire-based justification within Korsgaard’s own Kantian framework.

In the next section, I will briefly sketch the arguments for her weaker result. I will not try to defend these arguments, only to clarify their implications for desire-based justification. In Sections III and IV, by contrast, I will not merely present her arguments for the strong Kantian result, but highlight the tensions between certain of the claims upon which these arguments are built and Korsgaard’s own Wittgensteinian commitments. Sections V and VI will draw upon recent work by John McDowell to demonstrate that an obvious strategy for reconciling her Kantian ethics with these Wittgensteinian commitments generates a rationale for desire-based justification.

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University Press, 1999], pp. 51-53). Neo-Kantians such as Thomas Nagel and Tim Scanlon sometimes defend a slightly weaker version of this strong result. Thus, although Nagel doubts that "a present desire for future satisfaction...can be the source of reasons..." he argues only that even if "such desires do provide reasons they are merely whims, to which it is irrational to attach excessive importance" (The Possibility of Altruism [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970], pp 44-45). Similarly, Scanlon does not deny that any desire can ever provide a reason, maintaining only that "desires almost never provide reasons for action in the way described by the standard desire model" (What We Owe to Each Other [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998], p. 43).

4 The Sources of Normativity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Lecture 4, esp. 136-147.

5 On such a view practical rationality would be no more than rationality in the pursuit of ends that are simply given, such that these ends cannot themselves be assessed as rational or irrational. (See, for example, Alan Gibbard’s characterization in Wise Choices, Apt Feelings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 10-18.)
Korsgaard's focus, in her arguments for the weaker result, is not upon deflationary accounts such as Hume's but upon accounts that take desires to ground distinctly practical justification. On these views, a person's aims are set by her wants, and practical justification for her actions is supplied through appeal to such wants. If the agent wants $X$, and doing $Y$ is the means to $X$, such views maintain that she rationally ought, at least prima facie, to do $Y$. Her argument for the weaker result has two steps. The first step clarifies the nature of this practical 'ought'—that it is a rational 'ought' rather than a causal or logical 'ought'. The second step demonstrates that propositional attitudes, if they are to ground such an 'ought', must have certain features. Specifically, they must have features that allow them to supply a reason, and a distinctively practical reason. These steps taken together undermine instrumentalism.

The first step demonstrates that even an account that grounds certain practical justifications in desires, if it is non-deflationary, must see the agent as "guided by reason, and in particular, guided by what reason presents as necessary." To clarify the implications of this claim, Korsgaard has recourse to a theoretical variant upon such desire-based justification: If I believe that $X$, and that $X$ implies $Y$, then I rationally ought to believe that $Y$. Reason requires me, in such a case, to believe $Y$. But it does not follow logically that I will believe what I ought to. A person may well "fail to accept the logical implications of her own beliefs, even when those are pointed out to her." Although the relevant 'ought' requires that the agent believe $Y$, the necessity embodied in such a requirement is not logical necessity. So too, Korsgaard argues, with the 'ought' of practical justification. The practical 'ought' necessitates my actually doing $Y$, or at least attempting to. But it is not logically necessary that I do $Y$, or even try to, given my awareness of my desire for $X$ and that $Y$ is a means to $X$. I may well fail to do what I ought to in such cases, as a result of weakness of the will, say, or depression, even when I recognize that I ought to do it. The practical 'ought' indicates the rational necessity of doing $Y$, not the logical necessity. Not doing what I ought to is not logically impossible, it is irrational—a failure to act as reason requires.

Nor is this an 'ought' of bare causal necessity. For the person to act rationally, the mere causal necessity of doing $Y$ given the relevant wants and beliefs is not sufficient. Rather, the agent must be motivated to do $Y$ by the rational requirement, "the rational necessity...of taking the means to an end." Just as the 'ought' of belief-based justification presents the rational necessity of believing some $Y$ relative to the antecedent belief, so too the 'ought' of desire-based justification must embody the reasonableness, the rational necessity, of doing $Y$ relative to the desire in the antecedent. The rational agent, on such accounts, is guided to believe or do $Y$ by her recognition of the reasonableness of doing or believing it relative to the beliefs/desires that she has.

The first step in the argument thus purports to clarify the nature of the normative force of the practical rational 'ought'. The second crucial step towards her weaker result establishes certain features that desires would have to possess in

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7Ibid., p. 222. She introduces the belief-based, theoretical rational 'ought' on this same page.
8Korsgaard invokes Nagel's example of the agent who, whenever he wants a drink and believes the object before him is a pencil sharpener, is led by deviant conditioning to put a coin in the sharpener. Such an action is clearly mad. But Korsgaard's point is that even when the agent does the action that a rational agent would do, "If the belief and desire...operate on that person merely by having a certain causal efficacy when co-present, the rational action is only accidentally or externally different from the mad one" (ibid., p. 221).
9Ibid.
order to support such practical rational necessity. Korsgaard argues that desires, understood as mere dispositions, cannot provide a basis for the prima facie rational necessity of taking the means to an end thus desired. To claim that they could would be to claim that one can have a reason to take the means to an end merely in light of the fact that one is disposed to pursue that end. But if Hume is right about anything, she argues, it is that an 'ought' cannot in this way be derived from an 'is'. An 'ought' can be derived only from an 'ought'; hence any adequate account must derive "a reason from a reason, something normative from something normative."¹⁰ The practical 'ought' is something normative—to this the defender of desire-based justification must be committed. But such a practical rational requirement cannot come from something non-normative. It appears that whatever can ground such a practical rational requirement must itself involve a practical normative commitment.

It may seem that this argument flies in the face of Korsgaard's own appeal earlier to theoretical justification based in belief. There she allowed that from my belief that $X$, coupled with the belief that $X$ implies $Y$, it follows that I ought to believe $Y$. Isn't this a case of a theoretical rational 'ought' following from an 'is'—from the psychological fact that I believe that $X$? If beliefs were understood merely dispositionally, as dispositions to act in accordance with something's being the case, the Humean argument could indeed be redeployed here. But Korsgaard argues that this is the wrong way to understand belief. Beliefs are not mere dispositions; rather, they are propositional attitudes constituted by theoretical rational commitments.¹¹ The theoretical rational 'ought' can be based in beliefs, properly understood, because to cite such a belief is, at least in part, to cite this rational commitment. It is because belief does bring reasons in that it can ground the theoretical rational 'ought', i.e., generate reasons out. If desires are understood as mere dispositional states, then the appeal to such desires cannot give us a practical reason to do anything. The only way for wants to establish the reasonableness of actions is to be seen as at least in part constituted by rational commitments—for example, along the lines suggested by Korsgaard for belief. Only such desires can provide "something normative" that can ground the normative force of the practical rational 'ought'.

We have now arrived at the interim position. If desires ground practical rational 'oughts', as beliefs ground theoretical rational 'oughts', they can do so only if they are constituted at least in part by normative commitments. Such an account of the desires in which practical justification is based, however, must concede that there is more to rationality than the traditional model of instrumental rationality can allow. A justificatory grounding in desire is not the grounding of a reason in a propositional attitude that is beyond reason. Rather, just as beliefs can provide theoretical reasons precisely because they are theoretical rational attitudes, desires, if they are to provide practical reasons, can do so only if they are practical rational attitudes—attitudes constituted in part by rational commitments. Yet it is the nature of such rational attitudes that the commitments which in part constitute them are themselves open to rational challenge.

Nothing in these arguments requires the abandonment of the view that desires can provide justifying reasons. Indeed, it seems that Korsgaard has already gestured in the direction of an account of how propositional attitudes such as desires can play such a justificatory role, since beliefs are paradigmatic examples of propositional attitudes, and they play precisely such a role in the theoretical sphere. The argument that beliefs must involve a theoretical rational commitment

¹⁰Ibid., p. 223
¹¹Ibid., p. 248.
in order to justify holding other beliefs does not lead Korsgaard to jettison such attitudes as sources of theoretical justification. Instead, it leads her to reject a view of beliefs as mere dispositions or given phenomenal experiences in favor of a richer account of these attitudes as constituted (at least in part) by rational commitments. The arguments presented so far could just as readily be taken as setting the stage for a similarly nuanced and sophisticated account of desires as sources of practical justification.

Section III

Korsgaard has provided an argument that desires can justify only if they are propositional attitudes constituted, at least in part, by some form of rational commitment. Only if they put a reason in can they ground a rational 'ought'. It is clear that instrumentalism is not tenable upon such a view of desires. But she combines this argument with an argument that desires are not in fact constituted by such rational commitments. What desires must be to play the role of practical justifiers, they cannot be. Thus, any practical justification must appeal to something other than desire. The argument can be presented most clearly by way of contrast with her account of belief-based justification. Beliefs, for Korsgaard, are constituted by rational commitments. But the role played by these beliefs, she argues, is not a role that can be played by desires in the practical sphere. Beliefs are rational commitments that are the products of mental operations upon pre-rational states. The mind is confronted with certain perceptual states, "items that are given to it." Rational principles are "descriptive of the mind's activity" upon such states. The product of this rational mental activity upon

pre-rational states is a rational commitment, a belief: "to believe something is not to be in a certain mental state, but to make a certain commitment." The account suggests a line between justifiers and non-justifiers that is demarcated by three features. Below the line are (1) states that are (2) pre-reflective and (3) pre-rational. Above the line are (1) commitments that are (2) reflective and (3) rational. Beliefs are located above this line. Reasons can be provided only by such rational commitments (not pre-rational, and not states) that result from the appropriate rational operations upon states (hence are not given prior to reason).

Desires cannot justify rational 'oughts' precisely because they are the practical analogues of the states that fall below the justificatory line in the theoretical sphere. Desires are but pre-rational, passively experienced states of the agent, inclinations towards certain objects. As with their theoretical analogues, Korsgaard takes it to follow that such states "have no normative force; they are not reasons." Only rational commitments that are made to the objects of such states, commitments resulting from the relevant form of rational activity, can provide the reasons going in that will justify the practical 'oughts' that come out. Such rational commitments, which Korsgaard identifies as willings or volitions, play a role in practical justification analogous to believings in theoretical justification: "when we decide to act on an inclination...then its object becomes an object of volition."

The mistake involved in appealing to desires to play a justificatory role is one of equating rational reflective theoretical commitments—beliefs—with pre-rational, pre-reflective practical states—desires. Clarification of the relation-


13Ibid., p. 13.


15Ibid., p. 234.

16Ibid., p. 234.
ship between pre-rational, pre-reflective theoretical states and beliefs allows us in turn to clarify the relationship between desires and willings, and to recognize that justification can only be provided by the latter component of each pair. To see why the belief-willing theory is true is to see why the belief-desire theory must be false. Indeed, distinguishing between rational commitments and pre-rational states in the theoretical and practical spheres allows Korsgaard to show where the desire-based theorist has gone wrong. By failing to distinguish between desires and willings, the theorist can attribute aspects of both to desire as suits his purposes. He combines the justificatory role of the latter and the pre-rational status of the former to create the illusion of a state that can justify although it is itself prior to reason. The result is not only an argument for the stronger result, but one which provides an augmenting explanation—via the conflation of above-the-line willings with below-the-line desires—of how others could mistakenly come to believe that the strong result can be avoided.

Much of what Korsgaard claims about desires is uncontroversial. It is certainly the case that desires are states of the agent. Moreover, it is certainly the case that certain desires are pre-reflective. Indeed, just those desires that empiricists appeal to as a source of ultimate practical justificatory grounds, desires not arrived at through deliberation, would appear to be states that assail us pre-reflectively. If such pre-reflective states are as a result pre-rational, then Korsgaard has indeed provided an argument that desires cannot provide a justificatory ground for the practical rational ought.

Section IV

But it is at this point that the parallel between the theoretical and practical spheres begins to work against Korsgaard’s argument. Consider, for example, her suggestion that the items below the justificatory line in each sphere are states, while the items above the line are commitments. Within the context of this claim, the fact that desires are states suggests that they are properly assimilated to pre-rational states rather than beliefs. But the appearance of an either/or choice here is illusory. Nothing about being a state precludes commitment: matrimony is a state, but a state that essentially involves commitment. So too beliefs are paradigmatic examples of states of the agent, states that are distinctive, if Korsgaard is right, in virtue of the fact that they are constituted in part by rational commitments. They are propositional attitudes, mental states of a distinctive sort. Granting that they involve commitments, as Korsgaard argues, does not demonstrate that they are not states. Rather, it indicates the sort of states they are.

The fact that desires are states, then, does not tell in favor of their assimilation to pre-rational states rather than beliefs—of their location below rather than above the justificatory line. Perhaps, however, the fact that certain desires assail us pre-reflectively, and are not arrived at through rational mental activity, demonstrates that they cannot be constituted by rational commitments, hence cannot provide a justificatory ground. Here again, however, the case of beliefs appears to tell against any such inference. Perceptual beliefs, like such pre-reflective desires, do not appear to be arrived at through any sort of reflective process. We simply see that such-and-such is the case, and in typical cases such seeings are believings. Yet such beliefs can justify other beliefs, hence (by Korsgaard’s earlier argument) involve rational commitments. It simply does not follow from the fact that a state is not arrived at through a process of rational reflection that it is "prior to reason" in the relevant sense. This is a point often emphasized by other Kantians. Thus, Barbara Herman emphasizes that "judgment about reasons for action need not involve deliberating or ratiocination" ("Making Room For Char-
pre-reflective nature of certain states simply cannot serve as a criterion for placing them below the line, in the group of conscious states that cannot justify.

Perceptual beliefs, then, are states of the agent, states that are not typically arrived at through a process of rational reflection upon more basic states. Yet they are paradigmatic examples of beliefs that can justify other beliefs. To play this role, Korsgaard argues, they must be constituted, at least in part, by normative commitments. The fact that desires are, like such beliefs, states of the agent, and often pre-reflective states, does not impugn their status as candidates for justifying other wants, intentions, and actions. The strong argument can still be made, however, if desires, in contrast with willing and believing, are pre-rational. But are desires properly understood as pre-rational states? Many Kantians readily allow that typical desires, even pre-reflective desires, involve some aspect of rational commitment. Thus, Barbara Herman writes:18

The desires of a mature human agent normally contain, in addition to a conception of an object, a conception of the object’s value—for itself, as determined by its fit with other things valued, and as its satisfaction...comports with the principles of practical reason. We might say that desires so conceived have been brought within the scope of reason...

Normal desires, then, like normal beliefs, present themselves to us as states within the scope of reason. We have already seen that their status as states, and even as pre-reflective states, does not locate desires below the justificatory line, since perceptual beliefs are located above the line, yet are states of just this sort. Now it is unclear that their status as pre-rational states can justify locating desires below the justificatory line—not because pre-rational states are not below this line, but because typical desires, like typical beliefs, are not pre-rational states.

Still, there might seem to be an obvious proposal which can allow both that there are practical analogues of perceptual beliefs—pre-reflective practical states that can justify—and that there is nonetheless a clear sense in which desires, properly understood, are pre-rational states of the agent that belong below the justificatory line. The proposal, articulated most clearly by Barbara Herman, is that states that assail us pre-reflectively can involve the rational commitments they do only because they present themselves to the agent already "normalized to" or "humbled" by the rational principles that structure the agent’s perceptual or deliberative field.19 Although the explanation of how such states present themselves to the agent does not involve a conscious reasoning process, their status as involving rational commitments is a result of the modification of states that are given prior to reason by the rational principles that structure the requisite field. Perhaps Korsgaard is best understood as maintaining that it is the unmodified, pre-normalized items of practical and theoretical experience that are desires and their theoretical counterparts, properly understood. Such states of the agent would clearly fall below the justificatory line.

Yet such a solution brings with it a new set of problems.

18"Making Room For Character," p. 48.

19See her account of desires as "normalized to" the deliberative field within a framework of rational principles in "Agency, Attachment, and Difference," pp. 198-201. She characterizes such desires as "humbled" by reason in "Making Room For Character," p. 44.
Her argument for the strong Kantian result presupposes that there are pre-rational conscious mental "items" that are "given" passively to the agent, desires and their theoretical analogues. It is just such states that become perceptual beliefs and their practical analogues through the operation of reason. We are presented with "given" states, and commitments result from rational operations that we perform upon them. On this revised model, however, the states that typically present themselves to us are attitudes that involve rational commitments. What is "given" is not what assails us; rather, it must be arrived at by filtering out the rational structure from the commitment-involving states that do assail us.

Clearly, the sense in which the pre-rational conscious states are "given" to the agent is in need of clarification. Indeed, it needs to be shown that once the rational structure of the states that present themselves to us is removed, there are such passively given items of conscious experience that remain, either practical or theoretical. Consider, for example, that the obvious theoretical analogues of desires, understood as passively given pre-rational states of the agent, are not conscious mental items such that rational commitment to their objects can yield beliefs. But for the same reason desires conceived as pre-conceptual, pre-rational states of the agent cannot be given items of conscious experience such that the practical rational commitments to their objects yield the practical analogues of perceptual beliefs.

Against an assimilation of desires to sensations, however, it might be objected that whereas sensations thus understood are the result of filtering out both the conceptual and the rational structure from perceptual beliefs, desires and their theoretical analogues need only be given prior to reason, not prior to conceptualization. The idea, then, might be that desires and their theoretical counterparts are actualizations of normatively structured conceptual capacities (an idea that avoids unacceptable appeals to a private given), while beliefs and their practical counterparts, properly understood, are rational commitments to the objects of these pre-rational (but not pre-conceptual) states. Here again, Korsgaard takes Wittgenstein to block any such strategy. To employ concepts in characterizing something (even a sensation) as, for example, red, is to be committed to that thing's being of one sort rather than another. This is to employ "public" norms in a way to which the agent may or may not be entitled, i.e., to take up a position in the space of reasons.21

When you call something S, it must be that, and if you call something else S you must be wrong.

It is true that concepts without intuitions aren't beliefs, but

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21 Ibid., p. 137.
only because they are empty. Merely entertaining the concept 'radio' is neither desiring a radio nor the theoretical counterpart of such a desire. To be in one of these states is to have, in addition, a characteristic stance or attitude towards the object or state of affairs conceptualized.

Moreover, Korsgaard takes Wittgenstein to provide grounds for rejecting wholesale the interiorizing picture that such an account presupposes, upon which rational commitments all involve rational disposals of internal proposals.22

Wittgenstein is attacking a certain picture of what it is like to be conscious, which reduces all mental activity to the contemplation of sensations and ideas.

Nor, again, does a characterization of such desires and their theoretical counterparts as mere dispositions seem promising as a candidate for yielding anything recognizable to the Kantian as a desire or its theoretical counterpart. This point is made forcefully by Tim Scanlon. He argues that such bare dispositions to realize some object, far from serving as a model of pure, unfiltered desires, do not even "fit very well with what we ordinarily mean by desire."23 The idea of such a purely functional state, he argues, "fails to capture something essential in the most common cases of desire: desiring something involves having a tendency to see something good or desirable about it."24 Korsgaard emphasizes such a feature of desires in her explication of Kant. It is precisely because "we take the objects of inclination to be good for us...," she argues, that "we treat our inclinations as reasons...."25

The Kantian ethicist who embraces Wittgenstein's insights cannot provide an account of desires along the lines of sensations. Nor does it seem tenable for her to treat such states as bare conceptualizations or as bare dispositions. Following Scanlon's suggestion, it is tempting to conclude that what is missing in such bare sensations, conceptualizations, or dispositions, and present in desires, is that desires essentially involve experiences of their contents as "good or desirable," as appropriate ends of intentional action. Similarly, what is present in the theoretical analogues of such desires, and missing in mere conceptualizations, dispositions, or sensations, is that the relevant states involve experiences

22Ibid., p. 147.
23Scanlon, What We Owe To Each Other, p. 38.
24Ibid., p. 38. G.E.M. Anscombe arrives at a similar result through her Wittgensteinian examination of wanting: "Now if the reply is: 'Philosophers have taught that anything can be an object of desire; so there can be no need for me to characterize these objects as somehow desirable; it merely happens that I want them', then this is fair nonsense" (Intention [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957], p. 71). And again: "The conceptual connection between 'wanting' ... and 'good' can be compared to the conceptual connection between 'judgment' and 'truth'. Truth is the object of judgment, and good the object of wanting" (p. 76).
of states of affairs as true or believable. To be in such a practical or theoretical state is to experience its content as purportedly believable or desirable. But such experiences involve practical and theoretical endorsements, rational commitments to which one may or may not be entitled. I will follow John McDowell and others in characterizing this essential feature of such states as their objective purport.

To take away this purported appropriateness is to take away one of the features in virtue of which these states are intelligible as desires and their theoretical analogues. But this is to allow that such states, properly understood, essentially involve defeasible endorsements of their contents as appropriate objects of rational commitment, whether practical or theoretical. In the theoretical sphere such states are perceptual beliefs, and it is in virtue of these commitments, Korsgaard argues, that such beliefs can justify. In the practical sphere, desires understood as analogues of such beliefs would have the same capacity to justify—albeit practically not theoretically—as do such perceptual beliefs themselves. Such states are not prior to reason. Rather, they appear to be states that assail the agent as defeasible non-inferential reasons. For Korsgaard's Wittgenstein the "below-the-justificatory-line" sensations upon which reason purportedly operates to yield perceptual beliefs are exposed as fictions. But similar considerations appear to undermine the parallel appeal to desires as "below-the-justificatory-line" states in the practical sphere.

This is certainly not the interpretation that Korsgaard is putting forward in the strong argument. On her interpretation, desires and their theoretical counterparts are pre-rational proposals to reason. If pre-reflective states involve a rational commitment, it is only because pre-rational items have somehow already been operated upon by reason. I have been suggesting, however, that the very aspects of Wittgenstein's account she emphasizes are at odds with this appeal to desires and their theoretical analogues as items of pre-rational conscious experience. Korsgaard takes Wittgenstein to demonstrate "that if a word just refers to the very sensation that makes you feel like saying that word, then you cannot be wrong." But nor, as I have already shown, does she accept that beliefs can be the product of reflection upon sensations: there cannot be such pre-rational conscious states upon which one can "peer inwardly." Perceptual beliefs, then, are not pre-rational sensations. But nor are they products of active reflection upon such sensations. Her point is that a parallel to the first half of this argument holds in the practical sphere. Just as error is precluded if a word just refers to a sensation, so too "if you always act from your strongest desire, then...you cannot be wrong." Desires understood as the practical equivalents of pre-rational sensations cannot coherently be invoked to justify actions.

My point is that she is committed to extending the parallel to the second part of the Wittgensteinian argument as well. Just as perceptual beliefs cannot be the products of reflection upon pre-rational sensations, the practical equivalents of such beliefs cannot be understood as the products of reflection upon pre-rational desires. There are practical as well as theoretical propositional attitudes that assail us. But Korsgaard's Wittgensteinian arguments suggest that these practical attitudes are not the practical equivalents of sensations, nor are they products of active reflection upon desires understood as the practical equivalents of sensations.

\[\text{26} \text{"Having the World in View," p. 445. McDowell's account of objective purport focuses exclusively upon theoretical states. For a use of 'objective purport' that generalizes over both the theoretical and practical spheres, see Stephen Darwall's discussion of Hobbes in \textit{Philosophical Ethics} (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 90-93.}\]

\[\text{27} \text{The Sources of Normativity, p. 146.}\]

\[\text{28} \text{Ibid., p. 146.}\]
Rather, any propositional attitude that occupies a position within our deliberative or perceptual field would appear to involve normalization (to invoke Herman’s terminology) within the rational framework that structures such a field. This normalization brings such states, perceptual beliefs and their practical equivalents, within the space of reasons.

Section V
Yet such an account might itself seem to be open to an obvious and debilitating objection. The account denies that there are pre-rational conscious mental states upon which reason operates to produce beliefs and their practical counterparts. But it seems clear that we often experience impulses towards things we have no reason to pursue, and experience states of affairs as obtaining that we have no reason to believe obtain in fact. For example, the states reported by such utterances as "X looks (seems, appears) bent" clearly involve conceptualization. But just as clearly they need involve no rational commitment to the object in question actually being bent: We report that the half submerged stick "looks bent" secure in the knowledge that it is not. By analogy, practical states reported by utterances such as "I have an urge/desire/impulse to X" clearly involve conceptualization. Yet at least certain of these urges—e.g. to drink paint or drive into oncoming traffic—clearly involve no rational commitment to X's actually being desirable. Might not the defender of the strong argument claim that these are examples of precisely the sorts of pre-rational states to which she appeals, states from which perceptual beliefs and their practical analogues can be justified (or not) inferentially? Can the account in question allow for such states that we appropriately report as mere seemings in the theoretical sphere, and mere impulses or urges in the practical sphere, states that clearly lack a rational commitment to the believability or desirability of their contents?

A Wittgensteinian approach does in fact suggest a general strategy to account for such states in the theoretical sphere. It is the practical analogue of this account that completes a positive rationale for desire-based justification within a Kantian ethical framework. Korsgaard gestures in the direction of such an account with her suggestion that for Wittgenstein a "seems red" report is best understood as a report that you "feel like saying that a thing is red." In making such a report, she suggests, you "are simply announcing what you are inclined to say." An assertion such as "X is red" reports a belief that X is red; an assertion such as "X seems red" reports an "inclination" to make the report expressing such a belief, but it doesn't actually make the report or express the belief. "X is red" commits to X's being red; "X looks red" reports one's inclination to say "X is red," hence to make such a commitment, but it withholds the commitment. This approach suggests an account that avoids appeals to given items of experience, and problematic interiorizing moves, by rejecting the assumption that perceptual beliefs or their practical analogues are justified by applying the appropriate rational principles to more basic desires or their theoretical analogues. Rather, Korsgaard’s remarks suggest that the actual relationship between the states reported by "looks" reports and the beliefs expressed by assertions is something along the following lines: the former are resisted "inclinations" to express the commitments in the latter.

Section VI
On such an account these "seems" reports signal the withholding or withdrawal of something that in part constitutes...
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a perceptual belief. We don't infer from some given experience of an internal object, with the help of the appropriate principles, to perceptual beliefs. Rather, we in effect withhold something from perceptual beliefs in making such a perceptual report that something "seems" to be the case. John McDowell has elaborated a view that incorporates the core insight in such an account, but in such a way as to make clear its compatibility with many of the central features of Kant’s epistemology and philosophy of mind. On McDowell’s version, perceptual beliefs are immediate presentations of objects to the conceptually shaped sensory consciousness of thinkers.31 Our experiences of the world flow into belief "by a sort of default,"32 through a process that involves no active reflection, and does not involve seeing such beliefs as conclusions arrived at through inference. But although perceptual beliefs are not conclusions of rational inferences, they are nonetheless actualizations "of capacities of a kind, the conceptual, whose paradigmatic mode of actualization is in the exercise of freedom that judging is." Such freedom is "essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations."33 Perceptual beliefs are not arrived at through judgment, but they are positions in a conceptual space properly understood as the space of reasons. As such, they are constituted in part by rational commitments that can themselves be challenged in the face of relevant rational considerations.

To master the conceptual space necessary for seeing the world is in part to develop an awareness of those circumstances—peculiar angles, nonstandard lighting, viagra consumption, etc.—in which the default flow into belief should be halted, and to be prepared to withhold, in such cases, the commitment that in part constitutes such a belief.34 Here, then, is one role for "appears/looks/seems" talk, to signal the withholding of the rational commitment that typically flows by default into beliefs, specifically in those cases in which countervailing rationally relevant considerations are present.35 Notice that such an account of these states expressed by such "seems" reports supplies them with many of the features Korsgaard attributes to her own pre-rational states. Although they report conceptual states, these states do not involve a rational commitment of the sort found in perceptual beliefs. Moreover, Korsgaard’s point still holds that such states reported by "looks X" reports cannot play the justificatory role of beliefs reported by "is X" reports. But—and here is the crucial point—it simply does not follow that there are no non-inferential, pre-reflective states that ground theoretical justifications. On the contrary, the account presupposes precisely that typical perceptual beliefs are states of just this sort.

To implement Korsgaard’s parallel between the theoretical and practical spheres, on this account, is to identify certain states in the practical sphere that play a role parallel to that of states expressed by such "looks" reports in the theoretical sphere. Wayne Davis has argued that we commonly use the "x has a desire [urge, impulse] to y" locution (as contrasted with "x wants/desires to y") to play a role of this

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 434. See also Mind and World, pp. 5-13.
35 This account does not presuppose that withholding commitment is the only function, or even the primary function, of "looks" talk. It merely suggests that "looks" talk is one way to signal that countervailing considerations are present such that the default flow into belief has been halted. See also the analysis of "looks" talk presented by Wilfrid Sellars in secs. III and IV of Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).
sort. On this alternative interpretation, such reports are appropriately understood as signaling the withholding of a commitment that typically flows by default into the practical analogues of perceptual beliefs. These practical analogues of perceptual beliefs are to be understood as actualizations of conceptual capacities whose paradigmatic mode of actualization is in the free exercise of judgment, albeit practical rather than theoretical judgment. Like perceptual beliefs, such propositional attitudes are not arrived at through judgment. But again like perceptual beliefs, they are positions in the conceptual space of reasons, albeit the space of practical rather than theoretical reasons.

On such an interpretation, to master the conceptual space necessary for acting in the world is in part to develop an awareness of those circumstances in which the default flow into these practical analogues of beliefs should be halted. "Has a desire [urge, impulse]" reports, understood as the practical analogues of "seems" reports, can be used to signal such withholdings of rational commitments. Both "has a desire" reports and the practical analogues of beliefs have objective purport: each proposes states of affairs as ends, appropriate objects of intentional action. Withholdings of rational commitments to such ends—expressed by "has a desire" reports—are appropriate precisely in those cases in which countervailing rationally relevant considerations are present.

Such an account of "has a desire [urge, impulse]" reports captures many of the aspects of Korsgaard’s account of desires. They report conceptual states, but states that are without the relevant practical rational commitment. Moreover, this account supports Korsgaard’s contention that such states cannot ground practical justifications as the practical analogues of beliefs can. "Has a desire" reports are precisely reports of states that are evacuated of the rational commitment necessary to play such a justificatory role. But such an account will not support the strong argument. Quite the contrary. The justificatory inadequacy of states reported by such "has a desire" reports simply does not establish that there are no non-inferential, pre-reflective states that can provide practical justificatory grounds. Indeed, it presupposes that there are states just like that. "Has a desire" reports signal the withholding of practical rational commitments that otherwise flow by default into states of precisely this sort, states that can provide practical justificatory just as perceptual beliefs can provide theoretical justification. This account of "has a desire" reports presupposes that there are non-inferential, pre-reflective practical states that can justify, just as the account of "seems" reports presupposes that there are non-inferential, pre-reflective perceptual beliefs that can justify.37

37The arguments in section IV establish that within the framework of a Wittgensteinian account, beliefs and desires must be understood as essentially involving rational commitments. But such involvement of reason in belief and desire is not sufficient to demonstrate that justification can be based in such states. If the nature of this involvement is mere dependence upon or sensitivity to rational commitment by the propositional attitude, for example, then it is possible to maintain that it is only these rational commitments upon which beliefs and desires essentially depend—not the states themselves—that can provide justification. See Tim Scanlon (What We Owe to Each Other, pp. 17-64) and Joseph Raz (Engaging Reason [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 22-66) for accounts that suggest a view of involvement as mere sensitivity to (Scanlon) or dependence upon (Raz) the relevant judgment.

The arguments in this section complete a rationale for desire-based justification by motivating an account upon which this "involvement" of rational commitment in such attitudes goes beyond mere dependence. They suggest that for the Wittgensteinian, beliefs and desires depend upon other rational commitments precisely because they are rational commitments to their contents as true and as good. "Seems" and "has a desire" reports are best understood as withholding the commitments that comprise (at least in part) such attitudes. It is be-

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At points Korsgaard herself appears to characterize desires as such non-inferential justifying attitudes. Such desires, she argues, "have standing with us, an automatic right at least to be heard." Elsewhere, she appears to suggest that this automatic standing is a rational standing:

So the first point here is that the reasons of others have something like the same standing with us as our own desires and impulses do. We do not seem to need a reason to take the reasons of others into account. We seem to need a reason not to.

This characterization invites the view that desires, practical states that assail us, have a defeasible rational standing. To have such a desire is to have a practical reason to act in some way, albeit a reason that is defeasible in the face of other reasons. Such desires have roughly the same standing in the practical sphere as do perceptual beliefs in the theoretical sphere: both are attitudes that provide non-inferential reasons, albeit reasons for believing in the one case and for acting in the other. States of both sorts are defeasible in the face of countervailing reasons—Korsgaard's "reasons not to." In cases the agent suspects to be of this sort, she withholds the rational commitment that otherwise flows by default into such beliefs and desires. Such suspended rational commitments are reported through "seems" talk in the theoretical case, and via (for example) "has a desire [urge, impulse]" talk in the practical case. The shift here is subtle but profound. On Korsgaard's strong argument account, desires are prior to reason; on this alternative model, desires are defeasible reasons. On the strong argument account, desires cannot cause such attitudes are (at least in part) rational commitments that they can provide the agent's reasons.

38 The Sources of Normativity, p. 140.
39 Ibid., pp. 140-141.

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My suggestion has been that Korsgaard's argument against desire-based justification relies upon claims about mental states, justification, and the space of reasons that she has jetisoned in other contexts. It simply does not follow from the claim that the justificatory ground for the practical rational 'ought' must involve a rational commitment that the commitment cannot be supplied by a desire that assails us pre-

38Korsgaard elsewhere presents her approach as providing an alternative to the "combat model" of the relationship between reason and desire ("Self-constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant," The Journal of Ethics 3 (1999), pp. 2ff.). The alternative I have sketched also rejects such a combat model: typical non-inferential desires do not conflict with reason on this account; they are reasons, albeit defeasible ones. It is not her rejection of the combat model, then, that cannot be reconciled with this alternative account, or with her own Wittgensteinian commitments. Rather, it is her acceptance of an alternative to that model upon which reason and desires play certain fundamentally different "parts" (e.g., p. 5), the latter as pre-rational states below the justificatory line. I have argued that within the context of these commitments, beliefs and desires cannot play the part of pre-rational proposals to be disposed of by reason, nor that of commitments that result from disposals of pre-rational proposals. Rather, they are best understood as non-inferential rational attitudes that can justify other beliefs, intentions, and actions. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for help in clarifying these points.
reflectively and non-inferentially. Indeed, the best way to avoid the myth of the privately given, and debilitating interiorizing moves, may be precisely to see desires as states constituted in part by just such commitments. McDowell has argued that a full appreciation of the resources of Kantian epistemology and philosophy of mind allows us to recognize beliefs that play such a role as pre-reflective, non-inferential justifiers. My suggestion is that similar reasons lead Korsgaard in the direction of just such an account of desires in the practical sphere.

Notice that this "Kantian" rationale for desire-based justification does not suggest that all practical justification is based in pre-reflective desires. It suggests only that "mere" appetitive urges, like "mere" perceptual appearances, are best understood as suspensions of the commitments that do flow by default, non-inferentially, into certain states that can provide theoretical or practical justification. Such a rationale allows ample space for beliefs that are not justified through appeal to such non-inferential beliefs, and for actions that are not justified through appeal to such non-inferential desires. It in no way challenges the claim that certain non-desire-based requirements of reason can defeat any and all purportedly desire-based reasons. Indeed, it provides a rationale for understanding how such impulses and urges can present themselves as defeated by just such non-desire-based considerations, hence as merely purporting to provide countervailing reasons. Moreover, the concession that there is desire-based justification of the sort supported by the rationale does not in any way directly threaten robust ethical objectivity, as critics have feared. Desire-based justification is taken to undermine objectivity because a rational grounding in desires is taken to be a grounding in reasons that are themselves beyond reason, hence beyond rational criticism. But Korsgaard's argument for the weaker result demonstrates that only desires that embody a rational commitment can provide such justification. Such desires are not beyond reason; they are positions in the space of practical reasons. As such, their rational commitment can always in principle be challenged.

It is also important to emphasize how little turns upon whether these practical justifying states are ultimately labeled "desires." At times Korsgaard stresses that in ordinary language 'desire' is not used to refer to something constituted even in part by the requisite sort of rational commitment; indeed, that we have other terms for signaling such practical rational commitments. But although there clearly are locutions involving 'desire' that appeal to states not comprised by rational commitments of the appropriate sort—e.g., certain claims that I have a desire or urge to X,—there are also other contexts, as Wayne Davis and Donald Davidson have pointed out, in which 'desire' and 'want', like 'belief', seem to express states that are constituted in part by such rational commitments. Whether or not the relevant attitudes are labeled "desires," the preceding arguments suggest an account upon which there are practical propositional attitudes paralleling perceptual beliefs, attitudes that can ground practical justification just as such beliefs can

41McDowell, "Having the World in View."

42It is of course another question whether these commitments are sufficiently substantive to underwrite robust ethical objectivity. On this question, see my "Sellars's Ethics: Variations on Kantian Themes," Philosophical Studies 101 (2000), pp. 302-319.

43For example, "The Myth of Egoism," p. 5: "When we say that someone 'has a desire' for something, we are naturally understood as talking about an item in his natural psychology, an urge, or an attraction, or a disposition to find something pleasurable, or something of that sort."

44See, for example, Davidson's discussion on p. 6 of "Actions, Reasons and Causes," in Actions and Events (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), and Davis's account of "volitive desires" in "The Two Senses of Desire," pp. 70-71.
Nor does there appear to be any obvious inconsistency between this account of desires and the Kantian account of freedom. At certain points Korsgaard appears to suggest that voluntariness is a prerequisite for freedom, hence that voluntary choice, understood as rational activity on the part of the agent, is necessary for the result to be a commitment that is in the sphere of reason. Yet other Kantians deny that Kant is committed to the claim that any state that can justify must somehow be the result of a voluntary doing on the part of the agent. McDowell has gone a step further, and suggested what instead he takes Kant’s position to be:

This freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the realm of freedom ... can be identified with the space of reasons.

Notice that on McDowell’s interpretation, states that are in the space of reasons, and as such responsive to reasons, are in the realm of freedom. Desires understood as constituted by rational commitment, albeit a commitment not arrived at through inference, are positions in the space of reasons that are responsive to reason in the requisite way. It simply is not clear that this modification to which Korsgaard’s account is led is at all at odds with the Kantian account of reason and freedom.

One of Korsgaard’s significant contributions to recent work on the nature of practical reason is her demonstration that theoretical justification can be used to illuminate aspects of practical justification. Another is her insistence that a viable Kantian account must incorporate certain important developments in epistemology, philosophy of language, and the philosophy of mind. I have been suggesting that her argument against desire-based justification is the result of a failure to incorporate these important developments consistently and to carry through the lessons of her own illuminating theoretical/practical parallel. My contention is that when these shortcomings in her account are corrected, a very surprising space opens up within the framework of what is still readily recognizable as a Kantian ethics—a space for desire-based justification.

See, for example, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason," pp. 234: "Volition consists in adopting a maxim of acting on some incentive or other. When we decide to act on an inclination...then its object becomes an object of volition. The essential point here is that the adoption of an end is conceived as the person’s own free act. Inclination proposes, but it is the person herself who disposes."

"Herman, "Making Room For Character," p. 40.
"Having the World in View," p. 434. Rachel Cohon has recently argued that Korsgaard’s account of desires and their role in our reasons for action cannot be reconciled with her strong form of voluntarism ("The Roots of Reasons," The Philosophical Review 109 (2000), pp. 63-85). The alternative account of desire that I have developed out of Korsgaard’s account, coupled with McDowell’s suggestion that Kantian freedom does not require such a strong voluntarist component, would enable Korsgaard to address many of Cohon’s criticisms.

Ibid., p. 434.

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