WILLING THE END MEANS WILLING THE MEANS: AN OVERLOOKED READING OF KANT

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In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant famously claims that it is analytic that whoever wills the end also wills the indispensably necessary means to it that is within his control. The orthodox consensus has it that the analytic proposition expresses a normative principle of practical reason. In this paper, I argue that this consensus is mistaken. On my *resolute reading* of Kant, he is making a descriptive point about what it is to will an end, and not making a normative claim of any sort. Kant's argument is that when you know that some object is a necessary means to an end, you do not count as willing the end unless you also will the means, because of the distinctive content of willing: when you will an end, what you will is that you do whatever is necessary to bring about the end. I show how the resolute reading of Kant's analytic proposition explains the possibility of hypothetical imperatives and defend the resolute reading from the charge that it makes instrumental irrationality impossible.

IN his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant famously calls the following proposition "analytic": "whoever wills the end also wills (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that is in his control" (4:417).¹ Read naïvely, with little attention to the caveat in the parenthesis, this proposition is most straightforwardly interpreted as specifying a *descriptive* relation between willing an end and willing the necessary means to it. It simply tells us what we *do* in willing an end, not what we *ought* to do.

1. Page references are to the Akademie edition pagination. I use the translations that appear in the bibliography.

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However, contemporary commentators near-unanimously reject the naïve reading of the analytic proposition. Their basic idea is that the analytic proposition specifies a requirement of practical reason telling us that we rationally *ought* to will the necessary means to the ends we will. Call this the *normative* reading of the proposition. This wide acceptance of the normative reading is hardly surprising, since Kant repeatedly describes hypothetical imperatives as *imperatives*, that is, as claims about what we ought to do, as opposed to what we do, which can be hard to understand if the analytic proposition is a descriptive claim about willing an end.

My aim in this paper is to argue that this orthodox consensus is mistaken, despite the initial attractions of the normative reading. To this end, I consider two salient readings of the analytic proposition that have appeared in the literature, and argue that each is incompatible with what Kant obviously commits himself to in the text (Sections 2 and 3). When the normative reading comes into conflict with Kant's more obvious philosophical commitments, it is the normative reading that has to go. Having rejected the normative readings, I defend a version of the naïve reading of the analytic proposition, which I call the *resolute reading*. This preserves the basic idea of the naïve reading, that Kant is identifying a descriptive relation, while at the same time giving due regard to the caveat in the parenthesis. The crux of the resolute reading lies in interpreting the caveat as referring to the conditions under which you have the knowledge of the means: if you *know* the means, then willing the end entails willing the means. I shall defend the resolute reading by showing how it sits well with what Kant obviously commits himself to (Section 4), by showing how nicely it explains the possibility of hypothetical imperatives (Section 5), and by responding to the objection that this view is too implausible to be Kant's (Section 6).

1. The Normative Reading

According to the normative reading of the analytic proposition, it expresses a normative principle of practical reason, which tells us what we *ought* to do. It finds its explicit expression at least as early as 1947 in H. J. Paton's *The Categorical Imperative*:

First of all, we have the objective principle of practical reason, 'Any rational agent who wills the end will necessarily—so far as reason has a decisive influence over his actions—will the means which are in his power.' This proposition, which is still analytic, appears as an imperative to us because reason, though present in us, has no such decisive influence. It then takes the form 'If any rational agent wills the end, he *ought* to will the means.' (Paton 1947: 124)

The normative reading is explicitly endorsed in a large number of writings on Kant's view of hypothetical imperatives.² Indeed, strong reasons have been offered in the literature to favor the normative reading over the naïve, descriptive reading.

To begin with, it is widely agreed that the analytic proposition seems simply false unless qualified by the caveat in the parenthesis. First, you might fail to will the necessary means to your ends if you don't *know* what they are. As Christine Korsgaard points out, "It is not true that if someone wills to be healthy, then he necessarily wills to exercise. He must also know that exercise is the cause of health" (1997: 236). Second, it has been taken to be obvious that you can sometimes fail to will the necessary means to the ends you will even when you know the means, owing to your *irrationality*: you might will the end of building muscle, know that taking exercise is a necessary means to it, and yet irrationally stay in bed, due to your laziness.³

It is also widely agreed that the naïve reading is difficult to reconcile with Kant's conception of an *imperative*. Kant states the proposition in the context of explaining the possibility of hypothetical imperatives, which, according to Kant, are expressible by an 'ought', representing the "practical necessity" of a particular action for a presupposed end. Such necessity counts as an "imperative", and hence normative, only for an imperfectly rational being whose will is not always in line with reason (4:413). But if the naïve reading were true, it would be impossible for one to fail to will the necessary means to the ends one wills, and the sense in which a particular hypothetical imperative like 'if you want to build muscle, you ought to take regular exercise' is an *imperative* would be unclear.⁴

The normative reading is reached by paying closer attention to the caveat in the parenthesis, *insofar as reason has decisive influence*, which seems to imply that only a *fully rational* person, whose will is decisively influenced by reason, would always will the necessary means to her willed ends. If we took the claim to be

2. Besides Paton (1947), see Beck (1960), Hill (1973; 1989), Korsgaard (1986; 1997; 2009), O'Neill (1989), Hampton (1998), Wood (1999; 2013), Rawls (2000), Reath (2006), and Galvin (2009).

3. See, e.g., Beck (1960: 87): "Since beings like us do not, in fact always will the means necessary to their ends, even when they know the means, the hypothetical imperative expresses a constraint of reason upon impulse." Hampton (1998: 131–132) dismisses the naïve reading as "highly implausible", because "not only does introspection controvert it, more importantly, it is a psychological thesis that would make irrational action impossible." This point is made repeatedly in Korsgaard (1986; 1997; 2009), in her critique of the Humean account of instrumental rationality. See also Wood (1999; 2013).

4. See, e.g., Paton (1947: 124): "If to will the end is to will the means, how can it be said that a rational agent *ought* to will the means? Does not the latter statement imply that in fact it is possible to will the end and yet not to will the means?", and Hill (1973: 431): "Kant explicitly refers to 'the imperative which commands him who wills the end to will the means,' and there could be no such *command* or *imperative*, by Kant's doctrines, if failure to conform were impossible." See also Korsgaard (1997) and Wood (1999; 2013).

that if you will an end you will the means in so far as you are *fully rational*, the analytic proposition would plausibly be equivalent to: if you will an end, you *rationally ought* to will the necessary means to it.⁵

The normative reading is immune from the problems. First, it is consistent with the fact that we can fail to will the necessary means to the ends we will, and therefore doesn't conflict with Kant's view that ordinary hypothetical imperatives are *imperatives* for imperfectly rational beings like us. Second, the normative reading specifies one way in which the analytic proposition, as Kant intended, explains the possibility of hypothetical imperatives: the analytic proposition expresses a general principle of practical reason that justifies or grounds ordinary hypothetical imperatives like 'if you want to build muscle, you ought to take regular exercise', which we might call the Instrumental Principle ('IP', henceforth).⁶

The normative reading, then, is the view that the analytic proposition is a version of IP. The influence of the normative reading can also be shown by considering how it has been presupposed in some recent philosophical debates. First, consider the dispute about whether the 'ought' in IP, 'if you will an end, you ought to will the necessary means to it', logically takes wide or narrow scope over the conditional. All participants in the debate take it for granted that the analytic proposition is equivalent to some version of IP, and disagree over which version correctly represents Kant's view.⁷ The whole debate, however, would turn out misconceived if Kant didn't put forward any normative principle like IP.

Second, it is also presupposed in so-called "neo-Kantian" arguments against the neo-Humean view on which instrumental rationality is all there is to practical rationality.⁸ The gist of the arguments is that there is no principled reason not to accept other rational norms like the Kantian categorical imperative, once we accept IP as a principle of rationality: since IP must be a requirement which is valid for all rational beings as such, anyone who accepts IP as a principle of practical reason is committed to accepting the existence of a non-hypothetical imperative, whose validity does not depend upon our contingent ends. Such arguments, whether successful or not, would not be *Kantian* if Kant himself did not accept a principle like IP.

5. This reasoning is most explicit in Korsgaard (1997: 240).

6. Hill (1973: 431) takes IP to be a general premise in practical reasoning, which justifies particular premises. Schwartz (2008) disagrees, arguing that it is rather a rule of inference which doesn't itself figure as a premise in reasoning.

7. See, e.g., Greenspan (1972), Hill (1973; 1989), Darwall (1983), Schroeder (2005; 2015), Siyar (2013), and Rippon (2014).

8. See, e.g., Korsgaard (1986; 1997; 2009), Hampton (1998), and Wood (1999).

2. Variations on the Instrumental Principle

Supposing that Kant accepted IP, how exactly should it be formulated? It would posit a *normative relation* between willing an end and willing the necessary means to it. Since Kant thought that imperatives are requirements of *reason*, expressed with ‘ought’, I will use the concept of *rational ought*, although nothing substantial hinges on my choice of the specific normative relation. All that matters is that it is a concept of normative *necessity*, and the necessity has its source in *reason* or *rationality*. Since Kant did not make all of the fine-grained distinctions between normative concepts familiar to contemporary writers, one might make do with other normative concepts, such as: *is obligated to*, *is rationally required to*.⁹ With this in mind, let’s formulate IP as follows:

(Bare) Instrumental Principle: If an agent wills an end, then they rationally ought to will the necessary means to it that are within their control.¹⁰

As recognized in the literature, IP admits of the following readings, depending on the logical scope of ‘ought’ in IP:

IP-Wide: An agent rationally ought to be such that if they will an end, they will the necessary means to it.¹¹

IP-Narrow: If an agent wills an end, then they rationally ought to will the necessary means to it.¹²

Let me formalize each in a way that makes explicit the subject-predicate structure in it. This is because Kant famously held that a proposition is analytic just in case the predicate concept is “contained” in the subject concept, and one must be able to identify a subject-predicate structure in order to establish either IP-Wide or IP-narrow as the correct interpretation of the analytic proposition. If we let ‘A’ stand for *being an agent*, ‘We’ for *willing an end*, and ‘Wm’ for *willing the necessary means to the end*, IP-Wide and IP-Narrow can be formalized as follows:

9. I shall not split hairs over the normative word itself, and simply assume that ‘ought’, in Kant’s own usage, expresses a concept of necessity. But the idea that ‘ought’ expresses necessity could be controversial. See, e.g., Sloman (1970). Paradigm words for necessity are ‘must’ and ‘have to’, rather than ‘ought’. Kant even uses ‘good’, which obviously does not express a concept of necessity: “[imperatives] say that to do or to omit something would be good . . .” (4:413). Again, I simply assume that it expresses the same concept as ‘ought’ in Kant’s usage.

10. For the sake of simplicity, I shall deliberately omit Kant’s phrase ‘that is within your control’, unless it becomes particularly relevant.

11. See Greenspan (1972), Hill (1973), Darwall (1983) and Rippon (2014).

12. See Schroeder (2005).

IP-Wide: $A \rightarrow \text{Ought: } (We \rightarrow Wm)$

IP-Narrow: $We \rightarrow \text{Ought: } Wm$

In IP-Wide, ‘ought’ takes wide scope over the whole conditional, whereas it takes narrow scope over the consequent of the conditional in IP-Narrow. IP-Wide and IP-Narrow differ in two important respects: (i) the *jurisdiction* of the requirement, or when an agent is under the requirement; (ii) the *object* of the requirement, or what the agent who is under it is required to do. *Every* agent is under IP-Wide, and is rationally required to satisfy a *disjunction*, with respect to any end: either not have the end or will the necessary means to it. Since you are required to satisfy the disjunction, you can comply with IP-Wide in two ways: either by giving up the end or by willing the means.¹³ On IP-Narrow, only those who will an end are under the requirement to will the necessary means to it. IP-Narrow itself does not require anything of someone who doesn’t will the end. Moreover, the object of the requirement is not disjunctive: once you are under a requirement, you can only satisfy it by willing the means.¹⁴

3. Problems with the Instrumental Principle

This section argues that neither IP-narrow nor IP-Wide can be a plausible interpretation of the analytic proposition, because each runs contrary to Kant’s more obvious philosophical commitments. For each reading, I shall survey some standard objections to it, consider existing responses, and argue that they are not satisfactory.

13. As an anonymous referee points out, the idea that you can comply with a hypothetical imperative in either way can be problematic, when it comes to hypothetical imperatives telling us what we ought to do in order to achieve *happiness*, or what Kant calls “counsels of prudence”. For Kant, happiness is an end all human beings have “according to a natural necessity”, as they belong to the sensible world (4:415). This implies that you, as a human being, *cannot* give up the end of being happy. If so, it would be (biologically) impossible for us to comply with counsels of prudence by giving up the end, which leaves us with only one way of compliance: willing the means. While this could be a significant problem for the wide-scope reading, I will not pursue this line of criticism here.

14. It should be noted that IP is, in a crucial way, distinct from the following principle, which the recent debate on the scope of instrumental rationality concerns: you are rationally required to intend *m*, if you intend *e* and believe that *m* is a necessary means to *e*. Here, the relevant normative relation is taken to hold between intending an end and intending what is *believed to be*, rather than what *in fact* is, a necessary means to it. While such a principle merits a discussion in its own rights, it is at best unobvious how it could serve as the correct interpretation of the analytic proposition, since no condition about *belief* is present in the proposition. For a variety of wide-scope interpretations of this belief-relative instrumental principle, see Way (2010), Brunero (2012), and Broome (2013). Prominent defenses of the narrow scope reading include Kolodny (2005), Bedke (2009), and Schroeder (2009).

3.1. IP-Narrow and the Problem of Immoral Means

There is the notorious problem of *immoral means* for IP-Narrow, which has been the main reason for rejecting the narrow-scope interpretation of IP.¹⁵ The basic assumption generating the problem is Kant's *ethical rationalism*: an act is wrong only if it is rationally impermissible; and this means that the maxim on which the act was performed fails the test of the categorical imperative. On Kant's view, therefore, it is implausible that for any end you might happen to will, you rationally ought to will the necessary means to it.

This is because, first, the end itself can be immoral. Suppose your end is to kill an innocent person grotesquely, and a necessary means to doing so is to use the electric saw near you. IP-Narrow would predict that you rationally ought to will that you use the electric saw (to kill the person), but this is clearly unacceptable from the standpoint of Kant's ethical rationalism. Second, even when the end itself is permissible, a necessary means to it might be immoral. To cite a familiar example, if your end is to save dying patients but the only available way to do so is to pull out organs from a healthy, innocent person around you, IP-Narrow would predict that you rationally ought to will that you do so. In either case, you would be rationally required to will the immoral means, which is, at the same time, prohibited by rationality. But the idea that rationality could make such conflicting demands is dubious.¹⁶

There have been attempts to defend IP-Narrow from the problem of immoral means. The general tactic is to give up the idea that hypothetical imperatives apply to agents independently of the categorical imperative and see hypothetical imperatives as rationally binding an agent only when their ends meet the constraint given by the categorical imperative. For example, Mark Schroeder (2005) argues that the categorical imperative, for Kant, is a constitutive principle of willing. Thus, immoral ends failing its test cannot be willed. Jamsheed Siyar (2013) argues that while it is possible for you to will immoral ends, the consequent of a narrow-scope requirement detaches only if you *permissibly* will the end. In any case, the solution lies in reinforcing the antecedent of IP-Narrow so that the consequent does not detach when the end is immoral. As a result, we get:

Sophisticated IP-Narrow: If an agent permissibly wills an end, then they rationally ought to will the necessary means to it.

15. See Hill (1974; 1989), Darwall (1983), Korsgaard (1997). A more general form of this problem has been called the *bootstrapping* problem in recent literature on rational requirements. See Broome (1999) and Kolodny (2005).

16. See, e.g., Hill (1973: 436).

IP-Narrow, however, hardly solves the problem of immoral means.¹⁷ When introducing the problem, I considered two kinds of cases. In the first, the end itself is immoral. In the second, the end is permissible but the necessary means is immoral. Sophisticated IP-Narrow deals with cases of the first kind by not allowing the consequent to detach when the end is impermissibly willed, but it cannot handle cases of the second kind.

To see why, we only need to suppose that when you (permissibly) will an end, you need not be aware of *all* of the necessary means to it. This assumption should not be controversial, since we often set up an end first without having all of the means in view, and then go on to deliberate about how to achieve the end. If this is right, it seems perfectly possible for you to will an end, some of the necessary means to which is, *unbeknownst to you*, clearly immoral. In such a case, Sophisticated IP-Narrow requires that you take what is *in fact* a necessary means to the end, which is immoral. So the problem of immoral means remains.

One might reply that an end cannot be permissible if what is in fact a necessary means to it is impermissible, and so IP-Narrow does not imply that you are required to will the immoral means in such a case. This response is problematic, however. Even when M-ing is clearly immoral and M-ing happens to be a necessary means to E-ing in a particular situation S, and it is therefore in fact impermissible for you to E in S, you can still *permissibly will* E-ing, if you are ignorant of the fact that M-ing is the only way to E-ing in S. Suppose my end is to get my child's favorite toy for her birthday and I am not aware of any immoral means to doing so. It clearly seems that I can still permissibly will the end. Suppose, however, that the toy is in fact out of stock, and the only way to get it is to steal it from someone who already has it. Sophisticated IP-Narrow implies that I ought to will that I steal the toy, which is immoral.

3.2. IP-Wide and the Problem of False Categoricity

IP-Wide avoids the problem of the immoral means. Even when the necessary means to your end is immoral, IP-Wide wouldn't imply that you ought to will the immoral means, because you have the other option: giving up the end. However, it faces problems of its own.

One important problem for IP-Wide, already recognized in the literature, is that IP-Wide seems to imply that it is a categorical imperative, rather than a hypothetical imperative.¹⁸ To see why it has such an implication, recall that IP-Wide is a requirement applying to all agents, irrespective of their particular desires or ends: all rational agents, regardless of their contingent ends, are required to satisfy

17. See Brunero and Kolodny (2013) and Rippon (2014) for other independent problems for Sophisticated IP-Narrow.

18. See Schroeder (2005) and Schwartz (2008).

a disjunction. Moreover, even ordinary hypothetical imperatives must share this feature, since they are supposed to be grounded by or derived from IP. But this just is what Kant takes to be the essential feature of a *categorical* imperative.

This implication is problematic in two ways. First, it obscures the sense in which hypothetical imperatives are *hypothetical*. Kant makes it clear that a hypothetical imperative is an imperative only for those who will the relevant end. After classifying hypothetical imperatives into *rules of skill* and *counsels of prudence*, he writes,

[Since] both merely command the means to that which *one presupposes one wills as an end*, the imperative that commands willing the means for *someone who wills the end* is in both cases analytic. (4:419, emphases added)

Second, this is inconsistent with Kant's claim that there is only a "*single categorical imperative*", which is his famous Formula of Universal Law: act only according to the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law (4:421, emphasis added). Surely, however, the Formula of Universal Law is not equivalent to IP, since IP is in no way a principle about the universalizability of your maxim. If they cannot be equivalent, then Kant's claim that there is only one categorical imperative must be false. Call this the *problem of false categoricity*.¹⁹

Rippon (2014: 786–787) replies to the problem of false categoricity by identifying a different sense in which an imperative can be hypothetical.²⁰ A wide-scope imperative like 'you rationally ought to be such that you will that you take regular exercise if you will the end of building muscle', on his view, is still *hypothetical* in the sense that it provides *normative guidance* only for those who satisfy the antecedent of the conditional, that is, who will the end of building muscle. If you lacked this particular end, for example, this wide-scope requirement would be entirely irrelevant to your practical deliberation.

19. One might worry that this is not a significant problem, on the grounds that Kant in fact offers three formulations of the moral law in *Groundwork*. One might argue that these formulations might not be equivalent, as a number of writers (Wood 1999; Kerstein 2002; Formosa 2017) argue, and if so, we should not take Kant's claim that there is a single categorical imperative seriously. What matters in this context, however, is that Kant *himself* thinks that the three formulations "are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and any one of them or itself unites the other two in it" (4:436), and it is obvious that he does not regard anything like IP, which has nothing to do with morality, as an expression of that law.

20. Hill (1973: 443) also defends IP-Wide from the problem of false categoricity by offering a different sense in which it can be hypothetical: "Imperatives are hypothetical if *either* they support particular prescriptions for a person only in conjunction with premises describing that person's ends *or* they cannot themselves be supported without premises describing the ends of the person to whom they are directed." Hill thinks that IP-Wide satisfies the first disjunct and therefore is hypothetical. But I think this is vulnerable to the same objection I raise against Rippon's suggestion.

This response to the problem of false categoricity is problematic, because the wide-scope interpretation still fails to capture the sense in which a hypothetical imperative is supposed to provide normative guidance *only* for those who satisfy the antecedent of the conditional. To be sure, wide-scope imperatives can be guiding, in the way Rippon suggests. Someone who wills an end might, on the basis of her recognition of a relevant wide-scope imperative, conclude that either she ought to will the means or give up the end, and decide to satisfy a particular disjunct, perhaps by reference to further normative principles. The wide-scope requirement plays a guiding role in her deliberation, in the sense that her recognition of it leads her to deliberate further about which disjunct to choose, and eventually leads her to satisfy it.

The problem is that this kind of guidance is not offered exclusively to those who will the end. Imagine someone who hates taking exercise and firmly believes that he will never take regular exercise in his life. Suppose he comes to recognize the wide-scope hypothetical imperative, ‘you ought to be such that if you will the end of building muscle, you will that you take regular exercise’, and takes measures to prevent himself from willing the end, in order to comply with the requirement. In this case, the person never satisfies the antecedent: he only *considers* the end without willing it. Still, the wide-scope requirement seems to provide him with normative guidance *of the same kind*: his recognition of the requirement leads him to deliberate further about which disjunct to choose, which eventually leads him to satisfy it. Thus, there is no clear sense in which wide-scope requirements are normatively guiding *only* for those who will the relevant ends, and so the sense in which they are *hypothetical* is still obscure.

3.3. IP-Wide and the Problem of No Subject (or No Predicate)

Another problem for IP-Wide, posed trenchantly by Schroeder (2005: 362–367), is that it doesn’t seem to be what we can derive straightforwardly from the analytic proposition, if we assume Kant’s own notion of *analyticity*. Recall that a proposition is analytic just in case the predicate concept is “contained” in the subject concept. The target proposition, *whoever wills the end also wills the means (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions)*, has the form ‘all Fs are Gs’, which analyzes the subject concept of *being F* into the predicate concept of *being G*. So understood, the analytic proposition is clearly supposed to be an analysis of *willing an end*.

As Schroeder (2005: 363) points out, however, IP-Wide does not derive the *ought*-claim from the concept of *willing* at all. It says that *all agents* have the following property: they rationally ought to satisfy the relevant disjunction. But this is an analysis of the concept of *an agent*, rather than the concept of *willing*.²¹

21. See Shaver (2006) for a similar point.

Indeed, some wide-scopers interpret the analytic proposition as the analysis of the concept of *rational agent*. For example, Hill (1989: 365) casually recasts the analytic proposition as follows: “any fully rational agent (necessarily) wills the necessary (and available) means to his ends.”²²

This slide from *willing* to *agency* or *rational agency*, however, puts pressure on IP-Wide, since Kant asserts outright that the analytic proposition is an analysis of the concept of *willing*. We can of course grant that IP-Wide might be a successful analysis of (*rational*) *agency*. It could be argued, for example, that since (i) rationality (analytically) requires us to do what a *fully rational agent* would do²³ and (ii) it is analytically true that a fully rational agent wills the necessary means to the ends she wills, IP-Wide must also be analytically true. The problem is just that this is inconsistent with Kant’s claim, since Kant’s *analysandum* is not the concept of *rational agent*. Call this the *problem of no subject*.

In response to the problem of no subject, Rippon (2014) concedes that it is hard to make sense of IP-Wide as an analysis of the concept of *willing*, but argues that we need not narrowly restrict ourselves to the subject-predicate conception of analyticity. According to the alternative view of analyticity he attributes to Kant, “a claim is analytic just if its negation would be a contradiction when its conceptual containments are fully spelled out” (Rippon 2014: 787).

However, this response at best gives us reason to think that Kant might have multiple conceptions of analyticity, not that this alternative conception of analyticity *is* invoked in the particular context in which Kant states the analytic proposition. The textual evidence strongly suggests that it is the subject-predicate conception of analyticity that Kant has in mind, as he makes it explicit that the proposition is analytic “as far as willing is concerned” and also that a hypothetical imperative “extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end merely from the concept of a volition of this end” (4:417). So the problem of no subject remains.

One might justify taking the proposition as an analysis of *agency*, arguing that there is no deep distinction between the project of analyzing the concept of *willing* and the project of analyzing the concept of *agency*: after all, it is only agents who will in the first place, and it might seem quite natural to think that Kant’s analytic proposition is an analysis of the concept of an agent as *qualified* by the concept of willing.

But this response fails, for it falls prey to what I call the *problem of no predicate*. This is just the same problem seen from the other side: so long as one removes the concept of *willing an end* from the subject-place, one cannot but find a place for it in the predicate-place, which leads to an implausible reading of the

22. Korsgaard (1997) also suggests that Kant derives the normative principle in the same way, but that it is a slip into his “pre-critical rationalism” for Kant to do so.

23. One might think, however, this is false, let alone analytically. See, e.g., Smith (1995).

proposition. To see this, note that Kant is just as explicit on the *analysans* as he is explicit on the *analysandum*. On the most straightforward reading of the analytic proposition, the predicate concept he wants to derive from the subject-concept is the concept of *willing the necessary means that is in his control*. The same is true of another proposition which he calls “analytic”: “When I know that only by [an action] can the proposed effect take place, then it is an analytic proposition that if I fully will the effect I also *will the action requisite to it*” (4:417, emphasis added).

According to IP-Wide, however, the predicate concept must be (*being rationally required*) *either not to will the end or to will the necessary means to it*. This would be a surprisingly artificial way of identifying the predicate in the sentence, “whoever wills the end also wills . . . the indispensably necessary means to it.” Moreover, the disjunction under the scope of the requirement is logically weaker than *willing the means, simpliciter*. So if IP-Wide were the correct interpretation of the analytic proposition, it would remain unexplained why Kant would make the stronger claim that the predicate concept is the concept of *willing the necessary means*, instead of *either giving up the end or willing the necessary means*.

4. The Resolute Reading

Here is an interim report. The available normative readings of the analytic proposition, as we have seen, confront serious interpretive problems, because of the assumption that the analytic proposition expresses a principle about *rational ought*. But we have also seen that the naïve reading, in leaving no gap between willing an end and willing the necessary means, flies in the face of the obvious fact that we often fail to will the necessary means to our ends. The task, therefore, is to find a reading which does not turn the analytic proposition into a normative claim about rational *ought*, but still leaves a gap between willing an end and willing the necessary means to it, a gap sufficient to avoid denying the obvious.

In this section, I outline such a reading of the analytic proposition. I shall call it the *resolute reading*, not just because I need a label that distinguishes it from the obviously false naïve reading, but also because it remains most faithful to what Kant says. The orthodox view fills the gap with a normative condition, but as we have seen, this is what leads it into problems. The resolute reading fills this gap, instead, with an *epistemic* condition: when you are ignorant of, or mistaken about what the means are, you can fail to will the means. On this reading, the caveat in the analytic proposition, *in so far as reason has decisive influence on your action*, refers to the conditions under which you have full knowledge of the means. This is consistent with Kant’s view of the roles of reason, because Kant is explicit that it is reason’s job to figure out the means to our ends: “appraisal of the relation of

means to ends certainly belongs to reason" (5:59).²⁴ But the resolute reading has it that, when the epistemic condition is met, and you have the knowledge of the means, you cannot fail to will them. This reading leaves a gap between willing the end and willing the means, but captures the essence of the naïve reading: the idea that the analytic proposition expresses a *descriptive* relation.

The resolute reading focuses on Kant's remarks immediately following his statement of the analytic proposition, on which commentators have been surprisingly silent:

In the volition of an object as my effect, my causality as acting cause, that is, the use of means, is already thought, and the imperative extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end merely from the concept of a volition of this end. . . . *When I know* that only by [an action] can [the effect] take place, then it is an analytic proposition that if I fully will the effect I also will the action requisite to it. It is *one and the same thing* to represent something as an effect possible by me in a certain way and to represent myself as acting in this way with respect to it. (4:417, emphases added)

Kant's intriguing argument in this passage proceeds as follows. When you will an end, you represent an object as something to be brought about, that is, as an end. Since it is through your action that it is to be brought about, to represent it as an end *just is* to represent it as a possible *effect* to be brought about by your action, which is its cause. This is the sense in which the "use of means", which is your action, is already thought in willing an object. What this means is that when you will an end, the *content* of your willing is, strictly speaking, *your acting so as to bring about the end*, where your action is conceived of as using a means to the end.

The sentence 'you will that you take what is a necessary means to your end E' is ambiguous, however. On the first, *de re* reading, it means that for any object that is in fact a necessary means to E, you will that you take it. On the second, *de dicto* reading, it means that the content of your willing is: to do whatever is necessary to E.²⁵ Kant's claim up to this point is that when you will an end, you will, *de dicto*, that you take the necessary means to it. On the *de dicto* reading, it is true, without any reservation, that in willing an end you also will the necessary

24. See also 5:61: "The human being is a being with needs, insofar as he belongs to the sensible world, and to this extent his reason certainly has a commission from the side of his sensibility which it cannot refuse, to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to happiness in this life."

25. Here I adopt Dreier's (2000) explanation of *de dicto* and *de re* readings of a *desire*-ascription sentence.

means to it. But you can still fail to will the necessary means *de re*. You can will, *de dicto*, that you take whatever means is necessary for your end, without having any idea about what the means are: you might be ignorant of, or mistaken about them. On this reading, therefore, it is still possible for you to fail to will the necessary means to your end *de re*, because you might not have the right beliefs about the necessary means.

This is why Kant needs to add the *epistemic condition* “when I know”. Willing the end implies willing the means *de re* only when you *know* what the necessary means are. Suppose that you come to have the knowledge of the necessary means to your end, which combines with your *de dicto* willing of the end. Since the content of your willing is that you take whatever is necessary to your end, willing the end and willing the means come down to “one and the same thing”. Given the content of your willing of the end and your right belief about the objects that are the necessary means, you will the necessary means to your end, both *de dicto* and *de re*, so long as you will the end. This implies that if you do not will the necessary means to the end, in the knowledge of the necessary means, you do not count as willing the end.²⁶

One virtue of the resolute reading is that it avoids all of the exegetical problems for IP. On the resolute reading, Kant is making no claim about what you rationally ought to do, and for good reason: nowhere does Kant explicitly assert the existence of a requirement of practical reason to will the means to your ends. It avoids the problem of false categoricity: since there is no rational requirement that Kant is identifying, there is nothing to function as a categorical imperative besides the moral law. Since it is explicitly about the concept of willing an end, and derives directly the concept of willing the means, the problem of no subject does not arise. It also evades the problem of immoral means: Kant’s claim is not about what we *rationally ought* in virtue of having ends, but rather about what is *constitutively* involved in willing an end. To see this, return to the example of willing the end of killing an innocent person grotesquely. The resolute reading of the analytic proposition does not say that you rationally ought to use the electric saw. It only says that you *will* also will the use of the saw if you also know that it is a necessary means, without saying that it is what you rationally ought to do.

5. The Resolute Reading and the Possibility of Hypothetical Imperatives

Recall one of the main reasons for accepting the normative reading (Section 1). The task Kant sets for himself in 4:417 is to explain the *possibility* of hypothetical

26. This argument bears striking resemblance to Finlay’s (2009) argument that instrumental irrationality (with respect to *intention*) is impossible.

imperatives, and the normative reading suggests one way it can be carried out: since IP is a normative principle about what we rationally ought to do, we can explain how the normative *ought*-claims made by ordinary hypothetical imperatives can be true in term of IP. On the resolute reading, however, the analytic proposition is a descriptive claim about the will. So it remains to be shown how hypothetical *imperatives* are possible. If this can be done without invoking IP, one of the major reasons cited for accepting the normative reading will no longer have force.

5.1. Hypothetical Imperative as “Theoretical Principles”

What is a hypothetical imperative, the possibility of which is the *explanandum*? It is a proposition representing an action as *practically necessary*, but necessary as a means to some presupposed end. What matters is the *kind* of necessity it expresses. Proponents of IP assume that since the possibility of hypothetical imperatives is explained by IP, which expresses *rational* necessity, particular hypothetical imperatives must also express rational necessity.

However, an imperative like ‘you ought to take regular exercise in order to build muscle’ is most naturally seen as a *factual* statement about what is *needed* for a possible end, despite its use of an apparently normative word ‘ought’. Call this sort of necessity *instrumental* necessity. Kant’s remark on rules of skill suggests that they express instrumental necessity, as opposed to *rational* necessity:

There is no question here whether the end is rational and good, but only what one must do in order to attain it. The prescriptions for the physician thoroughly to cure his man, and for a poisoner reliably to kill him, are of equal worth, insofar as each serves to effect its purpose perfectly. (4:415)

Since the poisoner’s end is rationally impermissible, in the sense that it fails the test of the categorical imperative, using the prescriptions for this end cannot be rationally willed. In that case, the sentence ‘the poisoner ought to use the prescriptions’ is false if it is taken to express rational necessity. Kant’s point is that the sentence is true because it, as a rule of skill, expresses instrumental necessity: he ought to use the prescriptions *in order to reliably kill his man*. A rule of skill merely tells us that a certain result is caused (only) by a certain action.

Moreover, Kant explicitly commits himself to the idea that rules of skill (or “technical imperatives”) are not normative propositions but rather theoretical propositions in his later works. See his remarks in *Critique of Practical Reason*, for example: “Principles of self-love can indeed contain universal rules of skill, . . . but in that case they are only *theoretical principles* (such as, e.g., how someone who would like to eat bread needs to construct a mill)” (5:26, emphasis added).

A similar thought appears in his *Critique of Judgment*: “all precepts of skill belong to the *technic* of nature, and hence to our theoretical knowledge of nature” (20:200).

Counsels of prudence, hypothetical imperatives of the other kind, are no different in this regard: they are theoretical principles about how to attain *happiness*. Indeed, Kant later denies that there is a significant distinction between the two kinds of imperative. In *Groundwork*, Kant calls rules of skill “problematic imperatives”, which presuppose merely possible ends that need not be had by any actual agent, and calls counsels of prudence “assertoric imperatives”, which presuppose ends actually had by agents (4:416). In *Critique of Judgment*, he dismisses this distinction as mistaken, and includes the latter under the former. This makes perfect sense if we take hypothetical imperatives to be theoretical truths, because whether you have the end is irrelevant to the truth of a theoretical proposition, such as *you ought to take exercise in order to build muscle*. Thus, understanding hypothetical imperatives as theoretical truths not only has intuitive grounds, but renders Kant’s view in *Groundwork* continuous with Kant’s later works.

5.2. Why Call them “Imperatives”?

But the deeper interpretive question is the following: if a hypothetical imperative is in itself a factual judgment, which expresses instrumental necessity rather than the kind of rational necessity invoked by IP, in what sense is it an “imperative”? If we heed our ordinary practice, for instance, there is the fact that we issue hypothetical imperatives to others in the forms of command or advice, and also the fact that we, as deliberating agents, are *guided* by hypothetical imperatives in our deliberation about what to do.

My answer is that ordinary hypothetical imperatives can play such guiding roles because such imperatives are, on Kant’s view, addressed to an *imperfect* will, which seeks an end but lacks perfect knowledge of the necessary means to it. Consider such truths from the deliberative standpoint of an agent who wills an end E, or who is set to bring about E. From this standpoint, E presents itself as the thing to be brought about and theoretical truths can play a guiding role in her deliberation about what to do, in the sense that they lead her to make further choices in such a way as to bring about E. That is, they can *inform* or *correct* her decision about what to do when she is ignorant of, or is mistaken about, the necessary means to E. In this way, theoretical truths about the means, when addressed to an imperfect agent, can be an *imperative*.²⁷

Kant never explicitly puts forward an account of how hypothetical impera-

27. Finlay (2009) proposes a similar account of the role ordinary hypothetical imperatives play in our practical life.

tives can play such a guiding role in practical deliberation. But the following passage from *Critique of Practical Reason* strongly suggests that Kant holds a view like this about counsels of prudence:

If the determination of his will rests on the feeling of agreeableness or disagreeableness that he expects from some cause, it is all the same to him by what kind of representation he is affected. The only thing that concerns him, in order to decide upon a choice, is how intense, how long, how easily acquired, and how often repeated this agreeableness is. (5:23)

Here, Kant is discussing how someone whose will is determined by his desire for *happiness* would deliberate, as he defines *happiness* as “a rational being’s consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence” (5:22), or “a maximum of well-being in [his] present and every future condition” (4:418). Kant’s claim seems to be that, so long as his will is determined to bring about happiness, his sole concern in practical deliberation is to find out the means to it. For this person, counsels of prudence, despite being theoretical propositions about how to attain happiness, can provide normative guidance, leading him to “decide upon a choice”.

Kant’s view on how counsels of prudence can provide guidance can be generalized to cover all kinds of hypothetical imperatives. So long as you will an end E in your practical deliberation, you are determined to bring E about, and your sole concern in deliberation is to find out the means to E. Then hypothetical imperatives can engage your deliberation, leading you to reach an informed decision about what to do.

This is the point where the crucial explanatory role of the analytic proposition comes on the scene: it is possible for theoretical propositions to play the role of an imperative for an imperfect agent, precisely because Kant’s analytic proposition is true. If it is true, then my willing of an end constitutively involves the willing of its necessary means (*de dicto*): from my deliberative standpoint, whatever is necessary to build muscle, as well as the end of building muscle itself, will at the same time present itself as an object to be brought about through my action. Since I will be pursuing the necessary means in virtue of pursuing the end, the fact that taking exercise is a necessary means can lead me to decide to take exercise.

By contrast, suppose that the analytic proposition were false, and the act of willing the necessary means were a separate act of volition from the act of willing the end. Then it would be conceptually possible that building muscle presents itself as an object to be brought about, but the necessary means does not, from my deliberative standpoint. In such a case, it would be mysterious how facts about the means can engage my deliberation, for the means might not be represented as the objects to be brought about my action.

In sum, the fact that willing an end conceptually entails willing whatever is the necessary means to it (*de dicto*) explains the sense in which theoretical facts about the means can be *imperatives* for those who will the end. The resolute reading offers a clear way the analytic proposition explains the possibility of hypothetical imperatives without problematically turning the analytic proposition into any rational principle.

6. Worries about the Resolute Reading

One problem for the naïve reading of the analytic proposition (in Section 1), is that it denies the obvious: you can fail to will the necessary means to the ends you will. One way in which this can happen is through your ignorance of the means. The resolute reading avoids this problem by explaining the possibility of failing to will the necessary means to your willed end in terms of the epistemic condition. As we have seen, however, commentators often have in mind failure of some other kind, which they regard as distinctively *practical*: failing to will the means in the knowledge of the means. Korsgaard (1997: 229) most explicitly argues that this can happen due to impeding psychological factors, such as “terror, idleness, shyness, or depression”, which can make you practically irrational. She argues that any theory of means-end rationality should allow room for failure of such kind, which she calls “true irrationality”, since denying its possibility is intuitively unacceptable (Korsgaard 1986: 12).

Thus, one might worry that the resolute reading also denies the obvious in denying the possibility of what Korsgaard calls “true irrationality”. This is an important *interpretive* objection, because the charge is that the analytic proposition, on the resolute reading, is too implausible to be accepted by anyone. I meet this objection by arguing (i) that there is no place for (allegedly) “true” irrationality in Kant’s picture of reasons’ failure to determine the will and (ii) that its possibility is at best unobvious, given Kant’s concept of willing.

6.1. Did Kant Acknowledge (Allegedly) “True Irrationality”?

Kant identifies two ways in which reason might fail to have decisive influence on actions:

[An] imperative thus says which action possible by me would be good, and represent a practical rule in relation to a will that does not straight-away do an action just because it is good, partly because the subject does not always know that it is good, partly because, even if he knows this,

his maxim could still be opposed to the objective principles of practical reason. (4:414)

So there are two kinds of failure: the first is failure of *knowledge*, which is nothing more than the failure to meet the epistemic condition, and is already accommodated by the resolute reading. The second concerns failure *in the presence of* the knowledge of the good, which is characterized in more detail in another passage where Kant discusses reason's failure to determine the will:

If, however, reason all by itself does not sufficiently determine the will, if it is also subject to subjective conditions (to certain incentives) that are not always in agreement with the objective ones . . . , then actions objectively recognized as necessary are subjectively contingent. (4:412)

So the question is how we should interpret the second kind of failure, which occurs when one's subjective principle of action fails to accord with the objective principles of a practical reason, even when one knows what is good. If it consisted in what Korsgaard calls "true irrationality", we would have reason to rethink the resolute reading.

But it does not. Kant famously distinguishes between two kinds of principles: (i) objective principles of action that are valid for all rational beings *as such* and not just contingently upon their individuals ends or desires, which he calls "laws"; and (ii) subjective principles that are not so valid, and only contingently upon the agents' particular ends or desires, which he calls "maxims" (5:19). As Kant makes it clearer in *Critique of Practical Reason*, whether a principle is objective depends on the determining ground of the will that adopts the principle. A principle is *objective* only if the will is determined by the pure form of a rule, without reference to any object of desire, and *subjective* if otherwise.

On this view, no principle grounded in an object of desire can afford us a practical "law", even if the desire itself is universally shared. For example, what he calls the "principle of self-love", cannot serve as a "practical law", despite its universal acceptance by all possible (finite) rational beings who cannot but seek happiness due to their biological nature, since the will is still determined by an object of desire, that is, happiness. Only when the will determined by pure reason, by "the mere form of a practical rule" can the principle serve as a practical law, or an objective principle (5:26).

Now, there is every reason to think that moral duties deriving from the categorical imperatives are clearly one species of such "objective" principles, on Kant's scheme. The categorical imperative, recall, tells you only to adopt a maxim that you can at the same time will that it become a universal law, without any

reference to any particular object of desire. If this is the only sense in which one can go against the objective principles of practical reason, it is bad news for the defenders of true irrationality, since immorality is not equivalent to true irrationality.²⁸ An amoralist who, in the knowledge of the immorality of her action, flouts the duties of morality and pursues only her self-interest would be acting contrary to reason on Kant's view. But she need not be someone who is "truly" irrational in the sense Korsgaard specifies.

Things would be different if hypothetical imperatives, like moral duties, were *objectively* valid. But Kant denies that hypothetical imperatives are valid in this way. It is part of the definition of a hypothetical imperative that it is valid only contingently for agents who have the end it presupposes. That is, hypothetical imperatives are only addressed to an agent whose will is already determined by objects of desire. This is precisely why Kant states that "the categorical imperative alone expresses a practical **law**, and that the others can indeed one and all be called principles of the will, but not laws" (4:420). Since a hypothetical imperative is not a law, or an objective principle, true irrationality cannot consist in failing to will what it prescribes.

Therefore, if true irrationality could count as violating a principle valid for all rational beings as such, there must be, independently of individual hypothetical imperatives, an objective principle of practical reason saying that you rationally ought to will what you *believe* to be the necessary means to your ends. Such an objective principle, applying to all rational beings, would amount to the following, wide-scope principle:

Belief-Relative IP-Wide: An agent rationally ought to be such that they will *m*, if they will an end *e* and believe that *m* is a necessary means to *e*.

However, Belief-Relative IP-Wide is not derivable from IP-Wide in any obvious way, since the analytic proposition does not contain any clause about belief. Moreover, it inherits all of the problems facing IP-Wide: the problem of false categoricity and the problem of no subject (and no predicate). So it is implausible that Belief-Relative IP-Wide is Kant's own principle.

The above discussion suggests that what Kant means by "reasons' failure to fully determine the will" is either *ignorance* or *immorality*.²⁹ If so, you might fail to

28. It is telling, in this regard, that Kant's example (in the opening chapter of *Critique of Practical Reason*) of a maxim opposed to an objective principle of practical reason concerns immorality, or a maxim that is not universalizable: "someone can make it his maxim to let no insult pass unavenged and yet at the same time see that this is no practical law but only his maxim—that, on the contrary, as being one and the same maxim a rule for the will of every rational being it could not harmonize with itself" (5:19).

29. This view ties in nicely with Kant's other remark on the two roles reason plays in a human being: "no doubt once [the] arrangement of nature has been made for him he needs reason in order

will the necessary means to your end because you do not know what the means is, or you might fail to act in accordance with the categorical imperative, but nowhere in Kant's scheme would "true irrationality" fit, and there is no reason to ascribe Kant the view that it is possible.³⁰

Admittedly, Kant criticizes agents not only on moral but also on *prudential* grounds, which might be taken to suggest that *imprudence* is another, independent way in which reason can fail to fully determine the will.³¹ For example, Kant defines a *passion* as "[an] inclination that prevents reason from comparing it with the sum of all inclinations in respect to a certain choice" and claims that passions lead one to violate the principle telling one not to "please one inclination by placing all the rest in the shade or in a dark corner, but rather to see to it that it can exist together with the totality of all inclinations" (7:266). Simply put, this principle tells one to be happy, given Kant's definition of happiness (from Section 5.1).

But on Kant's view, imprudence is not a failure independent of ignorance. In the context of establishing the supreme authority of moral law over precepts of happiness, he writes:

A command that everyone should seek to make himself happy would be foolish, for one never commands of someone what he unavoidably wants already. One would have to command him only the measure—or better, provide him with them, since he cannot do all that he wants to do. But to command morality under the name of duty is quite reasonable; for . . . it is not the case that everyone willingly obeys its precepts when it is in conflict with his inclinations. (5:37)

Kant's point is that precepts of happiness give us only "the measure", because we are often *ignorant* of how to attain happiness by resolving the conflicts be-

to take into consideration at all times his well-being and woe; but besides this he has it for a higher purpose: namely, not only to reflect upon what is good or evil in itself as well—about which only pure reason, not sensibly interested at all, can judge—but also to distinguish the latter appraisal from the former and to make it the supreme condition of the former" (5:62).

30. This reading of Kant, which is consistent with denying the possibility of "true irrationality", has been suggested (in passing) by Lavin (2004). Lavin refers to the following sentence as favoring the possibility of true irrationality: "[imperatives] say that to do or to omit something would be good, but they say it to a will that does not always do something just because it is represented to it that it would be good to do it" (4:413), which seems to suggest that, when applied to hypothetical imperatives, you can fail to will the means even when you know that it is good for the end you will. But the very next sentence makes it clear that Kant is here referring not to a hypothetical imperative, but to the categorical imperative, or what is *objectively* good: "*practically* good, however, is what determines the will by means of representations of reason, hence not from subjective causes, but objectively, i.e., from grounds that are valid for every rational being, as such."

31. I thank an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

tween our individual desires. Once we *know* how to harmonize our desires in a way that leads to happiness, no further guidance of reason is required, and we “willingly obey” the precepts of happiness. Going against a principle of reason in full knowledge of the principle is possible only in the moral case.³²

6.2. *How Plausible is the Analytic Proposition?*

The only remaining worry for the resolute reading, then, must be the following: “Isn’t it still obvious that you *can* exhibit ‘true irrationality’? If so, wouldn’t the resolute reading, in denying the possibility of ‘true irrationality’, uncharitably make Kant’s view false?”

Offering a sustained argument for the impossibility of Korsgaard’s “true irrationality” is beyond the scope of this paper and my points will only be defensive.³³ Still, we can blunt the force of this worry, once we attend to what is constitutively involved in *willing* an end, as opposed to merely *desiring* an end. The will, according to Kant, is the capacity to act in accordance with a principle of action, a *maxim*, which is the capacity distinctive to rational beings (4:412). Thus, to will an end is to adopt a principle to act in such a way as to bring it about. This is plausibly seen as *committing* oneself to a course of action: a person who adopts a principle is someone who commits herself to living up to it, in the sense of being ready to resist any temptations to deviate from it and being ready to take what she regards as effective steps to bring about what it prescribes.³⁴

It is clear that not any old desires involve this element of commitment. My strong, momentary *urge* to smoke a cigarette, for example, does not involve my commitment to smoking. When extremely stressed out with work, I sometimes *wish* that someone else write a paper for me, but it falls short of committing myself to the end of getting someone to do so. I can *hope* that no one in the world suffers from poverty without being ready to take any effective steps towards reducing poverty, but it is only when I am so ready that I can be said to have committed myself to reducing poverty.

So understood, Kant’s analytic proposition is not at all implausible. On any plausible account of willing, there must be some element, such as *being committed*, which sets willing apart from other conative attitudes like urge, wish, hope, etc. But then it is hard to see how one could recognize something as a *necessary*

32. A full account of rational failure would plausibly make a distinction between ignorance that is criticizable (e.g., when one neglects available evidence) and ignorance that is blameless (e.g., when the available evidence is misleading), since one need not be irrational at all in exhibiting the latter. Developing such an account is a task for another occasion. My main point here is that even the former would be a failure in the *theoretical* use of reason, far from being a distinctively *practical* failure that is alleged to be involved in “true irrationality.”

33. See, however, Finlay (2009).

34. See, e.g., Hill (1973), O’Neill (1989), and Korsgaard (1997).

means to achieving the end one wills and yet not will it. For example, you would be able to intelligibly attribute the attitudes I claim myself to have if I said, ‘I *want* to build muscle. I know that getting exercise is a necessary means to it, but I just don’t want to get exercise—I’m too lazy.’ By contrast, it would be difficult to intelligibly conceptualize my attitude towards building muscle as that of *willing* if I said, ‘I shall build muscle. I know I need to take regular exercise in order to do so. But I don’t feel like it, so I shan’t do it. I didn’t say I would take whatever it takes to do so. But you know—I shall build muscle!’³⁵ Kant’s analysis of *willing*, reconstructed along the lines of the resolute reading, offers a nice explanation of why: what is distinctive about willing is that if you know the necessary means to your end, willing the end entails willing the means. Since you do not will the known necessary means to your end in this case, you do not count as willing the end. This gives us at least a *prima facie* case for the resolute reading of the analytic proposition.

Finally, it is important to note that the resolute reading of the analytic proposition is entirely consistent with another prominent form of practical weakness, *akrasia*, or acting against one’s *normative judgment* about what one ought to do. For example, you *can* judge that you ought to build muscle, believe that taking regular exercise is necessary, but fail to will the exercise. This is because the resolute reading is silent on the possibility of the conflict between one’s cognitive state (such as belief) and one’s conative state. What the resolute reading *does* deny is the claim that your willing of the end (building muscle) is still present in such a case, which, as we have seen, is at best unobvious.

7. Concluding Remarks

On the resolute reading defended in this paper, Kant takes it as a conceptual truth about willing an end that you will what you believe to be the necessary means to the ends you will, rather than a rational *requirement* on willing. The genuine norms of rationality governing the imperfect will are norms of morality through and through. The categorical imperative, the only objective law of practical reason, gets our ends right, and hypothetical imperatives tell us the right means to attaining our ends, but there is no further requirement telling us to will the necessary means to our ends: there is no such normative principle as IP.

Let me conclude with upshots. First, so-called “neo-Kantian” arguments against Humeanism aren’t Kantian at all. These arguments all begin by deriving a general normative principle from Kant’s analytic proposition and proceed to

35. See Worship (in press) for a similar point about *intention*. This is not a coincidence, because intention is commonly regarded as involving distinctive commitments that distinguish it from ordinary desires. See Bratman (1987).

argue that it is no less mysterious than the categorical imperative itself, or that IP is incoherent unless backed up by some categorical norm of reason. The resolute reading has it, however, that the very first step of such a project is not Kantian. Whatever the merits of such neo-Kantian arguments might be, they do not reflect on Kant's actual argument for the possibility of the categorical imperative. Secondly, Kant leaves no room for "true (instrumental) irrationality". He even offers a serious argument for its impossibility from the analysis of *willing*, which suggests a careful reexamination of the idea that its possibility is a desideratum any theory of instrumental rationality should satisfy.

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