

Humanity as a Duty to Oneself

SUNDAY ADENIYI FASORO*

Technical University of Berlin, Germany

Abstract

This paper analyses the thorny interpretative puzzle surrounding the connection between humanity and the good will. It discusses this puzzle: if the good will is the only good without qualification, why does Kant claim that humanity is something possessing an absolute value? It explores the answers to this question within Kantian scholarship; answers that emanate from a commitment to the human capacity for freedom and morality and to actual obedience to the moral law. In its final analysis, it endorses Richard Dean's good will reading as the most reflective of Kant's ethics. It claims that in order for a person to reach the moral ideal of acting rightly and giving priority to moral law, he must always honour his duties to himself. Accordingly, it argues that before a person can be deemed as an object of respect, he must first respect the right of humanity in his own person.

Keywords

humanity, good will, moral law, honour, respect, duty to oneself, Kant

Introduction

The second formulation of the categorical imperative, that is the humanity formulation, states that: "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (*GMS* 4:429).¹ It is suggestive of this formulation that every person is an end in itself and

* Technical University of Berlin, Germany. Email for contact: adeniyi.fasoro@win.tu-berlin.de The publication was supported by a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service. Personal ref. no.: 91606230.

¹ References to Kant's works are cited by the volume and page numbers of the German Academy edition: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*. All translations are taken from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge University Press, with the exception of *Lectures on Natural Law Feyerabend*, which is taken from Lars Vinx' translation (2003). This paper has used the following abbreviations for Kant's works:

an object of respect, insofar as he has humanity in his own person. But Kant has made some contradictory claims that conceal whether humanity in our own persons is unconditionally an object of respect. For instance, Kant says there is a “certain [humanity or] dignity and sublimity in the person who fulfils all his duties” (*GMS* 4:440). In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he claims that only “the moral law is an object of the greatest respect” (*KpV* 5:73). At the start of the first section of the *Groundwork*, Kant unequivocally claimed that the only unconditional good that is good without qualification and having an absolute value is the good will (*GMS* 4:393).

In the second section of the *Groundwork*, however, Kant also claims that humanity is an end in itself and possesses an absolute value (*GMS* 4:428-9). Kant claims that this is because “rational nature exists as an end in itself” (*GMS* 4:428). For this reason, the human being (inasmuch as he is rational) must never be treated merely as a means but always as an end in itself. In fact, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that “[we] cannot deny all respect to even a vicious man as a man; [we] cannot withdraw at least the respect that belongs to him in his quality as a man, even though by his deeds he makes himself unworthy of it (*MS* 6:463). But he again made a counterclaim that “he who violates duties to himself, has lost his humanity, and he is no longer suited to perform duties to others” (*Collins* 27:341).

This paper investigates these thorny interpretative puzzles. It explores the different interpretative accounts within Kantian scholarship. It examines the works of Christiane Korsgaard, Barbara Herman, Allen Wood, Thomas Hill, Richard Dean, and a large number of others. After assessing these different interpretative accounts, this paper endorses Richard Dean’s good will reading as the most reflective of Kant’s ethics and thus, considers humanity and the good will as identical concepts. It contributes to the discussion by claiming that humanity is a duty to oneself.

This paper shall claim that in order for a person to reach the moral ideal of acting rightly and giving priority to moral law, he must always honour his duties to himself. It shall argue that he must always respect the right of humanity in his own person before he can be deemed as an object of respect. This paper is rejuvenating Oliver Sensen’s initial claim that ‘dignity is always connected to a duty to oneself’ which he later abandoned.² It identifies the limitation of Sensen – that he could not successfully defend this claim because he did not indicate exactly what constitutes the capacity for morality. It argues that

<i>Br</i>	<i>Briefe (Correspondence)</i>
<i>Collins</i>	<i>Moralphilosophie Collins (Lectures on Ethics Collins)</i>
<i>GMS</i>	<i>Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals)</i>
<i>KpV</i>	<i>Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (Critique of Practical Reason)</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Die Metaphysik der Sitten (The Metaphysics of Morals)</i>
<i>NF</i>	<i>Kants Naturrecht Feyerabend (Lectures on Natural Law Feyerabend)</i>
<i>Vigil</i>	<i>Die Metaphysik der Sitten Vigilantius (Lectures on Ethics Vigilantius)</i>

Citations from Kant’s texts are taken from the following books: (Kant, 1991, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007)

² Sensen, initially, supports this claim: (Sensen, 2011, pp. 169–170), but he has now abandoned it: (Sensen, 2015, p. 107,128)

in order to claim that humanity is always connected to a duty to oneself, it is required to first claim that ‘humanity’ and the good will are identical – because such a claim entails a commitment to actual obedience to the moral law.

Humanity and the Good Will: Thorny Interpretative Puzzle

In the second section of the *Groundwork*, Kant asserts that there must be something in existence which is an end in itself and an absolute value. But his rendering of the magnitude of such a thing is well captured in his *Naturrecht Feyerabend* lecture notes. There, Kant says:

[Something must exist that] is an end in itself, ...[because] it is impossible that all things exist as mere means, [the existence of something that is an end in itself] is as necessary in the system of ends as an *ens a se* is necessary in the progression of efficient causes. A thing that is an end in itself is a *bonum a se*. Something that can only be regarded as a means has value as a means only if it is used as such. But this requires a being that is an end in itself. In nature, one thing is a means for some other things, and this goes on and on. It is therefore necessary to conceive of a thing at the end of the progression that is an end in itself. Otherwise, the progression would not have an end” (NF 27: 1321).

That thing which is the source of value for mere things and an end in itself is the human being. Kant claims that it is because “rational nature exists as an end in itself” (GMS 4:428) that the human being is an end in itself. For this reason, the human being must never be treated merely as a means but always as an end in itself. As Kant puts it:

the human being and in general every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end (GMS 4:428).

Kant asserts that every human being essentially represents his own existence and, in turn, makes the derivation of the categorical imperative possible. It entails that all laws of the will are derived from rational nature. Indeed, Kant derives the second formulation of the categorical imperative on account of that. “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (GMS 4:429).

But there has been disagreement among Kantians on how to interpret the Formula of Humanity, and whether this ‘rational nature’ (or humanity) is what Christine Korsgaard understands as the capacity to set ends (Korsgaard, 1996), what Allen Wood describes as the capacity to set ends in addition to other capacities that are associated with this end-setting (for instance, the capacity to coordinate those ends into an adoptable end) (Wood,

1999), what William Nelson regards as the capacity for self-governance (Nelson, 2008), and what Thomas E. Hill, Jr., describes as the capacity to legislate and act on moral laws.³

Besides this problem of the meaning of humanity, there has also been an interpretative problem about what constitutes absolute value and unconditional good. At the opening of the first section of the *Groundwork*, Kant unequivocally claimed that the only unconditional good that is good without qualification (good in itself) and having an absolute value is the good will (*GMS* 4:393). In the second section, however, Kant again claims that humanity is an absolute value (*GMS* 4:428). If, for Kant, the good will is the only good without qualification, why does he say that humanity is the only thing possessing an absolute value?

The position widely held in the literature is that humanity is possessed by all human beings prior to human life: that we have humanity in virtue of the substantive value (the capacity for rationality) which we possess. Despite the popularity of this position and its immense acceptance, there are divergent views among its adherents about how the human being has humanity. Some of the recent Kantians who have attempted to offer new insights into this thorny interpretative puzzle include Korsgaard, Hill, Wood, Herman, Sensen, Klemme, Timmermann, Watkins, Bojanowski, Formosa, Nelson, Schönecker, and some others. Putting aside the differences in their interpretations, Korsgaard, Hill, Wood, and perhaps most significantly, Herman continue to be the most influential Anglo-American Kantians who consider the substantive value of rational nature as the unconditional good.

Korsgaard, for instance, argues that the reason why the object of our choice is unconditionally good (or without qualification) “is that it is the object of a rational choice” (Korsgaard, 1986, p. 196). As she explains it,

since we still *do* make choices and have the attitude that what we choose is good in spite of our incapacity to find the unconditioned condition of the object’s goodness in this (empirical) regress upon the conditions, it must be that we are supposing that rational choice itself *makes* its object good (Korsgaard, 1986, p. 196).

Korsgaard argues that Kant considers our rational choice to be a “value-conferring status” (Korsgaard, 1986, p. 196, 1996, p. 125). She suggests that under the Formula of Humanity we must acknowledge in our conduct the value-conferring status.

In her analysis of the principle of humanity, she contends that Kant’s claim must be read thus:

in our private rational choices and in general in our actions we view ourselves as having a value-conferring status in virtue of our rational nature. We act as if our own choice were the sufficient condition of the goodness of its object: this attitude is built into (a subjective principle of) rational action [...]. If you view yourself as having a value-conferring status in virtue of your power of rational

³ (Hill, 2002). See also, (Dean, 2006b), (Dean, 2006a, pp. 5–6).

choice, you must view anyone who has the power of rational choice as having, in virtue of that power, a value-conferring status. This will mean that what you make good by means of your rational choice must be harmonious with what another can make good by means of her rational choice – for the good is a consistent, harmonious object shared by all rational beings. Thus, it must always be possible for others to contain in themselves the end of the very same action (Korsgaard, 1986, p. 196).

Her rendering of the passage just quoted is that what we are to treat as an end in itself, which is considered to be an unconditional value and unconditional good, is nothing but our rational nature. This implies that, for her, rational nature is the limiting condition on our rational choice and action; since “no choice is rational [if it] violates the status of rational nature as an end” (Korsgaard, 1986, p. 197). To put it differently, since rational nature is an unconditional end, it would be contradictory if one acts against it.

The fundamental claim of Korsgaard’s argument is that rational nature, or the capacity to make a rational choice, is the unconditional good, rather than the good will. But on Korsgaard’s reading, I do not see how a rational being can respect his inner disposition to act on moral principles if the most important thing is the liberty to exercise the power of choice, rather than to strive to acquire a good will or his commitment to act on moral principles.

Hill has also raised sceptical notes about the good will for its excessive moralistic demand. He suggests that Kant has overrated the good will by stating it is the only good without qualification (Hill, 2002, p. 58). Considering that the good will, for Kant, “is the moral disposition expressed in morally worthy acts and the indispensable condition of being a good person” (Hill, 2002, p. 4), it must be of special value. In his interpretation of the special value of a good will in Kant, Hill argues that:

it is not that our decisions should be dominated by a self-righteous concern for our own moral purity but rather that we should not pursue any goods by means that we recognise to be morally wrong. The thesis, I suggest, is best understood, not as a guide to praise and blame, but as an indeterminate practical principle that becomes action-guiding only when supplemented by a standard of right and wrong (e.g. the Categorical Imperative) (Hill, 2002, p. 4).

In the just quoted texts, Hill proposes a new perspective on how he understands a good will, as something that is a practical and choice-guiding principle, which can be used only in combination with Kant’s broader picture of the fundamental aspects of a moral attitude. In our deliberative moral considerations, Hill suggests that we must override “excessive moralistic attitudes towards others or undue preoccupation with one’s own moral purity” (Hill, 2002, p. 38). Instead, the good will needs to be understood as being action-guiding in the manner that it can serve to determine human will or prescribe how human beings ought to choose to act, rather than just being a moral assessing concept that is based on

praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. However, what particular features of a will can qualify it for the special evaluation of ‘good without qualification’?

According to Hill, “a good will is a will to act as reason prescribes... [because] a good will[...] is a ‘will’ to act well; and the relevant standards of ‘acting well’ are those of ‘reason’” (Hill, 2002, p. 46). His interpretation of Kant is that “there is an equivalence between what it is rational to will to do and what it is good to will to do; but we cannot determine the latter first independently of the former” (Hill, 2002, p. 47). The centrality of Hill’s argument is his interpretation of how Kant understands or interprets a person’s ‘will’ – as the capacity to act for reasons, good or bad. In a similar vein, Herman posits that the will’s activity to adopt an end is an expression of the capacity to act for reasons. Since a person’s will rests on their capacity to act for reasons, rational nature exists as “a value of a special magnitude” (Herman, 1993, p. 237). Therefore, “rational nature is the regulative and unconditioned end of willing, for it is the condition of its own goodness, goodness independent of any further end” (Herman, 1993, p. 238).

Both Hill and Herman seem to overemphasise the importance of the capacity to act for reasons over the need to act on moral principles. In the *Groundwork*, Kant did differentiate the capacity to make choices about adoptable ends (*Willkür*) from the capacity to self-legislate moral principles (*Wille*). There, he emphasised the *Wille* as the basis of obeying the moral law, on the condition that a rational being makes proper use of his *Willkür* to act on moral principles legislated by the *Wille*. The dilemma in Hill and Herman’s reading (and perhaps, Korsgaard’s too) is that we are not certain about whether what we are to treat as an end in itself is the *Willkür* or the *Wille* or even both (Dean, 2009, p. 85).

The trending held view among Kantians is that a man has a substantive value, in virtue of rational willing alone. Some would defend this: Herman, Hill, Korsgaard and Wood, but others would dispute it, such as Sensen and Dean (who believe that the moral law is the substantive value to be treated as an end in itself, although Dean thinks that what we are to treat as an end in itself is only actual obedience to the moral law, whereas Sensen thinks it is the capacity for morality that is respected, whether or not the person obeys the moral law. Sensen’s position is widely held among Kantians; Dean’s position much less so). Those defending the widely held view tend to argue that the moral law does not exist, but rational nature does, as a substantive value and as the ultimate determining ground of “the wrong-or-right-making characteristics of action that renders moral requirements intelligible in a way that is then able to guide deliberation” (Herman, 1993, p. 216).

Herman, for instance, argues that Kant presents the notion of “rational nature as an end in itself because the moral law cannot be the final determining ground of a will unless it provides the will with an end that is a noncontingent condition of choice-worthiness or goodness, that is, a final end” (Herman, 1993, p. 228). Herman interprets Kant as saying that rational nature is itself a substantive value, and hence, the grounds of practical reason and morality. Furthermore, both Herman and Wood claim that since all laws of the will proceed from pure reason, the moral law cannot be conceived as constraining the will in determining choice-worthiness or goodness. Wood, Herman, Guyer, and Hill have also

raised sceptical notes about the prospect of moral constraint on the human will if it is devoid of value: “Without a theory of value the rationale for the moral constraint is a mystery” (Herman, 1993, pp. 210–11). The implication of their interpretations is that humanity and a good will are two sides of the same coin, as they are very closely related but different.

However, a new picture emerges if one appraises Kant’s description of humanity and good will very closely. In the following, I shall defend Richard Dean’s novel solution to this problematic interpretive puzzle. Dean trenchantly challenges the consensus and argues that it is misguided. I shall endorse his argument that humanity and the good will are identical. Dean’s interpretive solution is key to this paper; specifically, it helps to defend its claim that humanity is always connected to duties to oneself. Since humanity and the good will are identical, it is actual obedience to the moral law that we must treat as an end in itself. Therefore, in order for a person to act on moral principles, he must first fulfil his duties to himself because they are the highest duties of all, according to Kant.

Humanity as the Good Will

If, for Kant, the good will is the only good without qualification, why does he say that humanity is the only thing possessing an absolute value? Dean’s answer to this question is that, for Kant, humanity, really is the good will. He argues that the two terms are identical, and therefore, humanity is something to be realised by those who consistently strive to acquire a good will, and not something that all human beings possess intrinsically or prior to life. As Dean puts it,

‘humanity’ is Kant’s name for the more fully rational nature that is only possessed by a being who actually accepts moral principles as providing sufficient reasons for action. The humanity that should be treated as an end in itself is a properly ordered will, which gives priority to moral considerations over self-interest. To employ Kant’s terminology, the end in itself is a good will (Dean, 2006a, p. 6).

Dean’s good will reading of the principle of humanity is a thoughtful challenge to the consensus that exists in Kant scholarship and in contemporary moral debates that every human being merits basic moral respect in virtue of having an inner value and the dignity of humanity. Some commentators have embraced Kant’s humanity formulation solely because it serves as a “compelling intuition about the inalienable worth of humanity” (Dean, 2006a, p. 3). But Dean contends that Kant’s use of ‘humanity’ is warily ambiguous because it does not primarily speak of ‘human beings’, but rather describes some property that rational human beings have.

In his book, entitled *The Value of Humanity in Kant’s Moral Theory*, Dean equates the principle of humanity with the fundamental principle of morality. He provides a compelling explanation for why the principle of humanity should be regarded as the good will and how Kant derived certain moral duties from it. Before Dean’s publication, Korsgaard, Wood, Hill, and O’Neill tried to correct the misleading use of ‘humanity’ to

refer to all members of the human species. They argue that, for Kant, it is not all human beings that must be treated as ends in themselves, but ‘rational nature’ – as a property ‘in’ a person (O’Neill, 1990, p. 137; Hill, 1992, p. 39; Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 110–11; Wood, 1999, pp. 119–20). Kant, indeed, emphasises this point in (*GMS* 4:429–39). It seems correct that only rational beings have humanity. But it becomes controversial when philosophers began to describe ‘rational nature’ or humanity as follows: Korsgaard describes it as the capacity to set ends; Wood describes it as principally this end-setting capacity, Guyer describes it as “normative essentialism” (Guyer, 2016a, p. 428), Nelson describes it as the capacity for self-governance, Hill describes it as the capacity to legislate and act on moral laws, and several others: Sensen, Hill, etc. describe it as the capacity for morality.

The peculiar issue with these descriptions is that they do not specify exactly how the human being possesses these capacities and, in particular, the capacity for morality. Before Dean’s publication, the fundamental problem of the irreconcilability of these different readings of ‘humanity’ was considered to be superfluous. Perhaps, since they all agree that ‘humanity’ is a certain feature of rationality, it seems to them that there are no controversial claims to be challenged. But Dean finds it controversial and believes it is mistaken to refer to ‘humanity’ in the Formula of Humanity to all minimally rational beings, rather than as some feature possessed by rational beings (Dean, 2006b, p. 6).

Dean begins his analysis by noting that some Kantians do not specify which features represent humanity and who has humanity. As he puts it: “It has become common to think that ‘humanity’ refers to some minimal feature or features of rationality, necessarily possessed by any rational agent. I think this is mistaken, and that ‘humanity’ instead refers to a good will, the will of a being who is committed to moral principles” (Dean, 2006b, p. 18). Dean contends against Wood and Korsgaard, in particular, who have argued that humanity is something that every minimally rational being inevitably has. Both Korsgaard and Wood have maintained that every rational being alive, including all functioning adult human beings, must automatically be considered as having humanity in their own person. For instance, they claimed that the Formula of Humanity cannot be equated with a good will (Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 123–4; Wood, 1999, pp. 120–1) because “‘humanity’ belongs to all mature members of human biological species” (Wood, 1999, p. 119).

In his analysis, Dean identifies three categories of the minimal reading of the humanity formulation: First, those who consider humanity as the capacity to set ends or make choices. Second, those who identify humanity with some necessary features of rationality and its description as the capacity to legislate moral principles to oneself. The second category also includes “the power to act on the Hypothetical Imperative, the ability to compare one’s various contingent ends and organize them into a systemic whole, and the ability to employ theoretical reason to understand the world” (Dean, 2006b, p. 25). Third, those who describe humanity as the capacity to act morally (Dean, 2006b, p. 25). He, specifically, criticises the adherents of the third category for failing to tell us what exactly constitutes the capacity for morality.

One important poser that Dean has made against the minimal reading, in general, is that it does not provide us with any reason to never act immorally. This seems correct to me. If all the emphases are placed on the importance of different capacities that are derived from some features of rationality, what becomes of the importance of the actual commitment to act as morality demands or actual obedience to the moral law? If one chooses to act in accordance with any of the three categories, there is no motivation to act morally since rational nature is the highest value that all persons possess and that cannot be forfeited. So, there is no moral incentive for a rational agent to choose to act morally since if he acts immorally, he would not be losing something of incomparable value. This, indeed, marks the difference between Dean's good will reading and the minimal reading. As Dean emphasises it:

An agent choosing to act immorally could be fully aware that she still possesses the capacity to act morally, so she need not take herself to be losing her most valuable possession. It is not surprising, of course, that any minimal reading of 'humanity' must see humanity as something that cannot be lost. That is what distinguishes the minimal readings from the good will reading. The minimal readings make humanity something that every rational agent necessarily possesses. So, the good will reading offers a reason for refraining from immoral actions that the minimal reading does not (Dean, 2006b, p. 45).

Furthermore, Dean argues that Kant attributes the highest magnitude of value to humanity and affirms it as an ideal that all human beings should strive for. By this, Dean is claiming that, for Kant, 'humanity' is an ideal because all rational beings "must seek to reach a moral ideal of acting rightly and giving priority to moral law" (Dean, 2006b, p. 47). He argues trenchantly against the third category of the minimal readings of 'humanity' for claiming that humanity has the capacity to act on moral principles or the capacity for morality. If humanity is something that all persons (inasmuch as they are rational) possess unconditionally, it is impossible to conceive how humanity can be a moral ideal. To put it differently, if everyone already has humanity, it is counter-intuitive to concurrently say rational beings would strive toward humanity as a moral ideal.

But 'humanity' is a moral ideal for Kant, as is the good will (Dean, 2006b, p. 47). Kant preaches that all human beings must strive toward the moral ideal of acting rightly and to prioritise obedience to the moral law. As Dean explains it:

We must strive to make moral law a sufficient motive for our choices and must try to act in the ways that morality demands. These are precisely the distinguishing features of a good will. The fact that Kant uses the name 'humanity' for this ideal standard shows that he means 'humanity' to be a name for a morally good will. Both a good will and humanity provide the archetype toward which imperfect humans must strive, both good will and humanity possess an incomparably high value, and they are in fact the same thing (Dean, 2006b, p. 48).

In the quoted texts, Dean's argument is that humanity does not possess incomparably high value in all instances, but even if it did, it only shows that one must "strive toward the moral ideal of humanity at all times" (Dean, 2006b, p. 48).

One other important benefit of Dean's good will reading is that it helps to justify why one may exclude the immoral ends of others from the duty to promote their ends. His reading renders Kant's ethics more realistically relevant, as it points to "a treatment of Kant's 'kingdom of ends' as a constructivist device for moving from general moral principles to more particular guides to action" (Dean, 2006b, pp. 9–10). In addition, it does not allow the mistreatment of others who lack good wills; rather it offers the derivation of the duties of acting respectfully to others, even if they do not wholly merit this respect (Dean, 2006b, p. 50).

In fact, the benefit of the fundamental moral principle of good will as humanity includes the incentive it provides that every rational being must "strive for a good will, must seek to accept moral reasons as sufficient reasons for acting. Therefore, with regard to oneself, [Dean's reading] does give very direct guidance" (Dean, 2006b, p. 258). As Dean argues:

In order to preserve one's good will, one is obligated to 'strive with all one's might that the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty'. In addition, the humanity formulation would seem to lead in the most direct way possible to a duty not to damage permanently one's basic powers of rationality, since to damage one's will is also to damage one's good will (Dean, 2006b, pp. 138–9).

In light of this, I shall argue, in what follows, that humanity is always a duty to oneself and that all human beings must strive to acquire a good will at all times by acting from duty alone and respecting the right of humanity in their own person.

Humanity as a Duty to Oneself

Dean's criticism of the third category of the minimal reading is central to the claim that I make in this paper. It is central because it provides a clue as to why Sensen could no longer defend his initial claim that dignity is always connected to a duty to oneself. Sensen had earlier claimed that having the capacity for morality yields a sort of duty to oneself (Sensen, 2011, pp. 169–70). But, contrary to the account he gave in his book, *Kant on Human Dignity*, Sensen has now conceded to Bacin (Bacin, 2015, pp. 97, 101; Sensen, 2015, pp. 169–170) that: "[he does] not believe any longer that... dignity is always connected to a duty to oneself, and [he] grants that [dignity] has often been used as an intuitively plausible but incomplete shorthand argument for the requirement to respect others" (Sensen, 2015, pp. 107, 128).

I maintain that in order to 'reach a moral ideal of acting rightly and giving priority to moral law' one must always honour one's duties to oneself. I think the reason for Sensen's concession to Bacin is that he does not indicate exactly what constitutes the capacity for morality. He does not clearly distinguish whether the capacity for morality is

merely the act of striving for it (whether or not the person obeys the moral law) or an actual commitment to act on moral principles. As I understand it, his rendering of ‘this capacity’ seems to be the former, but in order to claim that humanity is always connected to a duty to oneself, it is necessary to first claim that ‘humanity’ and the good will are identical – because such a claim entails a commitment to actual obedience to the moral law. With that limitation sorted out, I maintain that ‘humanity’ is always connected to a duty to oneself.

I contend that in order for a rational agent to be an object of respect from others, he must first respect the right of humanity in his own person. The humanity formulation states that: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (*GMS* 4:429). The first example as to whether this can be carried out that Kant illustrated was the “concept of necessity of duty to oneself” (*GMS* 4:429). This is no coincidence. Kant was concerned that the principle of humanity would be ineffectual if we despised the very humanity in our own person without giving it the proper respect it duly deserves (Atwell, 1986, pp. 125–137). According to Kant, every person has a duty to live in such a way that is “consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself” (*GMS* 4:429).

Not only that! Even if I act in a way that ensures my action will not contradict humanity in my own person as an end in itself, I still need to ensure that my action is in harmony with the principle of humanity (*GMS* 4:430). Kant draws a distinction between the preservation of one’s humanity and furtherance of humanity as an end in itself. As rational beings, we have a predisposition to striving to become moral beings, which is in the final end of nature with regards to humanity in our own person (Bayefsky, 2013, p. 825). If we neglect this predisposition and merely ensure that our actions are not in conflict with humanity, we simply act in a way that is “consistent with the preservation of humanity as an end in itself and not for furtherance of this end” (*GMS* 4:430).

By emphasising the need to harmonise our actions with the principle of humanity, Kant is asserting that the practical necessity of acting according to the principle of humanity is first a duty to oneself. This practical necessity fundamentally rests on the idea of *equality*. He puts it thus: “it merely rests on the relation of rational beings to one another” who are equal members of the kingdom of ends (*GMS* 4:434). If the value of every rational being is a prescription of reason, it means that “every maxim of the will [that is] giving universal law [is giving the law] to every other will and to every action toward oneself” (*GMS* 4:434).

This means that the “principle of humanity... is the supreme limiting condition on the freedom of the actions of each [member of the kingdom of ends]” (*GMS* 4:430-1). The ends of one person are subject to the ends of another. But in order for a will not to be subordinated to any other object, the principle of humanity and the principle of universalizability must be identical. I have satisfied this requirement by endorsing Dean’s good will reading. The reason the two principles must be identical is that Kant believes the restriction of freedom can only be made possible through a universal rule. As he puts it:

“There must be universal rule under which the freedom of [one member] can coexist [with the freedom of another member]” (*NF* 27:1320). And the only universal rule, for Kant, runs as follows: “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (*GMS* 4:421). Therefore, the humanity formulation and universalizability formulation are identical.

In all moral judgements, we are bound to ask: what becomes of the action that is universalizable? According to Kant, whenever “an action is made into a universal rule, the intention agrees with itself, the action is morally permissible; but if not, then it is morally impermissible” (*Collins* 27:1428). But “an immoral action, therefore, is one whose intention abolishes and destroys itself if it is made into a universal rule” (*Collins* 27:1428). Therefore, “a moral action has a value not when it originates from inclination but when it originates from duty... We must perform moral actions, without the least incentives, but only out of duty and respect for the moral law” (*NF* 27:1326). If we must only act for the sake of duty and respect for the moral law, does this include a duty to respect the right of humanity in our own person? If we are ends in ourselves, duties to ourselves seem superfluous to respect since if we do not respect it, we are still ends in ourselves regardless and can never be treated as a means to someone else’s ends.

Kant establishes morality as the precursor for universalizability of our maxims. This is because whatever is contrary to morality cannot serve as a universal rule. For Kant, the task of universalizability of maxims is a duty to oneself, a striving to always act on moral principles. Although, Kant admits that duties to oneself are harder to discuss because we take them for granted, and as such, they are least familiar to us. In Collins’ lecture notes, Kant asks some questions, “for example, can a person, for the sake of profit, do harm to himself in his own body? Can he sell a tooth, or offer himself for money to the highest bid? What does morality consist in here?” (*Collins* 27:1427). In his answers to these questions, Kant says that:

I examine by the understanding whether the intention of the action is so constituted that it could be a universal rule. The intention is to magnify one’s advantage, and I now see that in such a case the man is making himself into a thing, and an instrument of animal gratification; but as men we are not things, but persons; so here one dishonours humanity in one’s own person (*Collins* 27:1427).

As Kant often accentuates, “fulfilment of duties to oneself is a necessary condition for the fulfilment of one’s duties to others” (Guyer, 2010, 2016b). If I have not perfected myself to become a moral being, I cannot fully know my duties to others or be motivated to fulfil them, and if I have not endeavoured to perfect my talents or skills (the capacities: reason, freedom, etc.), I will not be suited to practically fulfil my duties to others, even when I know them and I am motivated to fulfil them. One particular reason for this is that the respect I owe to others is an indirect duty to myself because its opposite is prohibited. My respect for the self-esteem of others is also, indirectly, respect for my own self-esteem. Hence, my respect for others and my duties towards them are, first of all, a duty to myself

(Paton, 1990, p. 228). My duties towards them are, therefore, obligations that prohibit me from either exalting myself above them or being scandalous towards them (*MS* 6:450, 465, 467; see also *MS* 6:394).

Even though Kant describes one's duties to oneself as "the highest duties of all" (*Vigil* 27:604), he still encounters difficulties discussing it explicitly because it involves self-contradiction. As Kant puts it:

For I can recognise that I am under obligation to others only insofar as I at the same time put myself under obligation, since the law by virtue of which I regard myself as being under obligation proceeds in every case from my own practical reason; and in being constrained by my own reason, I am also the one constraining myself (*MS* 6:417-8; see also, *Vigil* 27:521, 579).

If I am the one who is imposing an obligation and at the same time, I am the one bonded by the obligation, then I am one and the same person who imposes the obligation and is also bonded by it. Since I am the same person, it is likely that I release myself from the obligation I have placed upon myself. Can I act in a way that my action would be for the sake of duty alone, without involving myself in contradiction?

Kant suggests that the contradiction is of motives rather than duty (*Collins* 27:261). In the later part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant laid out the foundational role of duties to oneself and submits that regardless of this contradiction, man has duties to himself. As he puts it: "For suppose there were no such duties: then there would be no duties whatsoever, and so no external duties either" (*MS* 6:417). Here, Kant is stating an antinomy to the thesis that states there are no duties to oneself at all. If I have no duties to myself, I have no external duties whatsoever; but I have duties to others, hence I have duties to myself. (Timmermann, 2006, p. 509) But some commentators have not been impressed with Kant's solution to the self-contradiction associated with the duties to oneself (Singer, 1963, p. 138; Gewirth, 1978, p. 334). For instance, his explanation has been severely criticised and called a "blatant non-sequitur" by Marcus G. Singer (Singer, 1963, p. 138). However, these objections are not really fatal to Kant's elucidation of duties to oneself, as many of his critics do agree that agents do have perfect duties to respect the right of humanity in their own persons.

Albeit, Kant is unapologetic about the need to respect one's duties to oneself. For instance, in his reply to Johann Benjamin Erhard's letter, dated December 21, 1792, Kant puts two footnotes that further elaborate his exposition of "Duties to Oneself" that he had already discussed in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. In those two footnotes, Kant says that:

The moral law prescribes to me not only how I should be treated by others but also how I should allow myself to be treated by others; it forbids not only that I misuse others but also that I allow them to misuse me, that is, that I destroy myself. Therefore, I am just as much commanded not to suffer an injustice as not to commit injustice [...]. Therefore, I and all men have the task of finding a

means of making my physical powers equal to my moral obligations. From this there derives the moral drive and the need for society (*Br* 11:399).

It is clear that, for Kant, the moral law prescribes that in order for anyone to be worthy of respect, he must first fulfil his own duties to himself because this is the only way to obtain the esteem of others. In other words, for a rational agent to be an object of respect from others, he must first respect his own duties to himself.

My duties to others are, first of all, a duty to myself. According to Kant, my duties to others are connected to the duty I have towards myself because:

I have a self-love for myself which I cannot separate from my need to be loved by others as well, I hence make myself an end for others; and the only way this maxim can be binding is through its qualification as a universal law, therefore through my own will I make others my ends as well (*MS* 6:393).

By acting in accordance with the moral law, I am an end for myself as well as for others; generally, I assume it is my duty to make everyone my end. Since my capacity for ends stems from practical reason, my relation to myself and others can only be an end through practical reason. It would then be a contradiction if practical reason were to take no interest in my relational activities – otherwise, it would cease to be practical reason. Practical reason cannot prescribe ends for me and others without first giving duties (*MS* 6:395), and such duties are moral obligations because “in assessing the worth of one’s actions, one must not only assess them by their legality alone but also by their morality” (*MS* 6:393). For Kant, it is not enough to treat another as an end by respecting the other’s rights. I might respect the other’s rights because the law requires it and not because I am acting from duty.

In order for the human being to be an object of respect who obtains esteem from others, he must act from duty alone. Specifically, from respect for his own duties to himself. As Kant asserts in the *Groundwork*, the human being can only have “[humanity]... insofar [as] he fulfils all his duties” (*GMS* 4:440). But all his duties include those that he has towards himself and those he has towards others. In Collins’ lecture notes, Kant says, “all duties [he has toward himself] makes... reference to respect in [his] own eyes, and approval in that of others” (*Collins* 27:281). This is because he must always strive to act in such a way that “[he] would be worthy of honour and deserve respect and esteem from [others]” (*Collins* 27:281). For instance, if he degrades his own person, anything can be asked of him: “For he who violates duties to himself, has lost his humanity, and he is no longer suited to perform duties to others” (*Collins* 27:341).

The degree of offence that is committed in failing to fulfil one’s duties to oneself and one’s duties to others are not judged the same by Kant. Kant says that one may still possess certain inner worth if one has diligently observed one’s duty to oneself, even when one has performed one’s duties to others poorly. But if one has violated one’s duty to oneself, one has no claim to humanity (*Vigil* 27:667). Since one deliberately violates a self-regarding duty, one disposes oneself to “the shame of humanity, and acts contrary to the right thereof” (*Vigil* 27:667). Therefore, the human being has a baseless right claim to

humanity after he has deliberately forfeited it. For the violation of his duties to himself takes away his worth from him, but the violation of his duties to others take away his worth only in that regard (*Collins* 27:341).

Kant's claim is that the human being has a general duty to himself, not to dispose himself so that he "may be capable of respecting all moral duties... [for this to happen, he must] establish moral purity and principles in himself and strive to act accordingly" (*Collins* 27:348). Kant calls this "the primary duty to oneself", which involves "self-testing" and "self-examination" (*Collins* 27:341). These two forms of duties to oneself have been further appraised by Stephen Darwall as "Two Kinds of Respect," namely 'recognition respect' and 'appraisal respect' (Darwall, 1977). Kant's intention of introducing these two forms of duties to oneself is to ensure that our dispositions have moral purity. Since we have a lesser inner worth as imperfect human beings, Kant asserts that we must examine the bases of our dispositions if they rest on "honour or delusion, on superstition or pure morality" (*Collins* 27:348). Kant concludes that if we neglect the significance of the highest duties of all (i.e. one's duty to oneself), we are doing great harm to morality. In order to avoid harming morality, Kant says the human being must have autocracy over all his inclinations by ruling himself. As good actions are not those done from inclinations but on moral principles.

Can Someone Lose His Right of Humanity?

But what offence can a man commit that would make him violate the right of humanity in his own person? According to Kant, there is no excuse whatsoever for anyone to subvert the humanity in his own person. Acting contrary to duty for whatever price cannot match up to the primacy of one's morality and humanity (*Vigil* 27:629; *Br* 10:332; *MS* 6:464). A man subverts himself of freedom, morality and humanity when he transgresses from all his duties, particularly those towards himself. Kant argues that if this happens, he forfeits his true honour and virtue. Since transgression of duty is the antonym to fulfilment of duty, it is an obstacle in fulfilling the obligation to commit himself to actual obedience to the moral law (*Vigil* 27:608; 27:629-30).

As I have argued earlier, a person's duty to others is an indirect duty to himself. But the degree of the offence that a person commits in failing to fulfil his duties to himself is higher than the degree of offence he commits in failing to fulfil his duties to others. This is because Kant believes that the transgression of duty that is committed disregards his duty of respect for himself, and so, in turn, "he violates a higher duty than that which he owes to others" (*Vigil* 27:605; *MS* 6:427). Kant says:

Assuming there are duties to oneself, the duties of right in that regard are the highest duties of all. They relate to the corresponding right of humanity in our own person, and are therefore perfect duties, and every act of duty is indispensably required by the right of humanity and is a duty in and for itself. Any transgression is thus a violation of the right of humanity in our own person; we thereby make ourselves unworthy of the possession of our person that is entrusted

to us, and become worthless, since the preservation of our own worth consists solely in observing the rights of our humanity. We lose all inner worth and can at most be regarded as an instrument for others, whose chattel we have become (*Vigil* 27:604).

Kant strongly suggests that duty to oneself is not negotiable but must be respected at all times, and a transgression that leads us to become an instrument for others. It follows that if all moral actions must be done from duty and originate solely from the moral law, then any transgression of duty and of the moral law must be imputed (Guyer, 2005, p. 123). This is because any object of action coming from inclination would be deemed impermissible, for it must be assumed that the transgressed action is performed willingly, contrary to the moral law. As he puts it: “everything that contravenes the moral law is transgression of duty” (*Mrong* 29:615). Transgressing the moral law simply means the transgressor knowingly chooses to adopt contrary law into the maxims of his action. But why does Kant think respect for the moral law is identical with the respect for humanity, either in our own person or in the persons of another?

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant describes “the moral law [as] an object of the greatest respect” (*KpV* 5:73). And “the moral law is in our eyes estimable, treasurable and worthy of respect” (*Collins* 27:322). So one’s respect for one’s duty to others is a respect for the law because “everyone must have respect for the rights of others” (*Collins* 27:417, 462). Since respect for others must be called “actions of honour” insofar that “it deters us from transgression of the moral law” (*Vigil* 27:527). It follows that our observance of the law is the source of reciprocal respect that we have toward one another. Therefore, Kant must be interpreted as saying that duties to others or oneself can only be realised if there is respect for a universal rule or law. The mutual respect for humanity lies in the mutual restriction of reciprocal respect through the observance of the law. And this is only possible through the harmonisation of the principle of humanity with the principle of universalizability.

Conclusion

In this paper, I claim that in order for the humanity formulation to be plausible, it must be harmonised with the principle of universalizability because humanity and the good will are identical. I argue that in order for a person to reach a moral ideal of acting rightly and giving priority to moral law, he must always honour his duties to himself. I rejuvenate Sensen’s initial claim that ‘dignity is always connected to a duty to oneself’ which he later abandoned. I identify the limitation of Sensen – that he could not successfully defend this claim because he did not indicate exactly what constitutes the capacity for morality. I argue that in order to claim that humanity is always connected to a duty to oneself, it is required to first claim that ‘humanity’ and the good will are identical – because such a claim entails a commitment to actual obedience to the moral law. After establishing this fact, I argue that ‘humanity’ is always a duty to oneself. I show that in order for a rational agent to be an object of respect, he must first respect the right of humanity in his own person. I provide

textual evidence that, for Kant, immoral actions are considered superficial moral precepts because they are impervious to the demanding precept of duty and lack any respect for the dignity of humanity in our own person and in the person of others. I conclude that insofar as ‘humanity is always a duty to oneself’, the highest duty one has is to never commit a transgression of duty to oneself.

References

- Atwell, John E. (1986), *Ends and Principles in Kant's Moral Thought*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Bacin, Stefano. (2015), “Kant’s Idea of Human Dignity: Between Tradition and Originality.” *Kant-Studien* 106 (1): 97–106.
- Bayefsky, Rachel. (2013), “Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant’s Perspective.” *Political Theory* 41 (6): 809–837.
- Darwall, Stephen. (1977), “Two Kinds of Respect.” *Ethics* 88 (1): 36–49.
- Dean, Richard. (2006a), *The Value of Humanity in Kant's Moral Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dean, Richard. (2006b), *The Value of Humanity in Kant's Moral Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dean, Richard. (2009), “The Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself.” In *Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*, edited by Thomas E. Jr. Hill, 83–101. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Gewirth, Alan. (1978), *Reason and Morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Guyer, Paul. (2005), *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guyer, Paul. (2010), “Moral Feelings in the Metaphysics of Morals.” In *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*, edited by Lara Denis, 130–151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guyer, Paul. (2016a), “Kant’s Politics of Freedom.” *An International Journal of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law* 29 (3): 427–432.
- Guyer, Paul. (2016b), *Virtues of Freedom: Selected Essays on Kant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Herman, Barbara. (1993), *The Practice of Moral Judgment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hill, Thomas E. Jr. (1992), *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hill, Thomas E. Jr. (2002), *Human Welfare and Moral Worth: Kantian Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1991), *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1997), *Lectures on Ethics*. Edited by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind. Translated by Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kant, Immanuel. (1998), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Edited by Mary Gregor and Christine M. Korsgaard. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1999), *Correspondence*. Edited and translated by Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (2000), *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (2002), *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Kant, Immanuel. (2003), *Lectures on Natural Law Feyerabend*. Translated by Lars Vinx. Unpublished.
- Kant, Immanuel. (2007), *Anthropology, History, and Education*. Edited by Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden. Translated by Mary Gregor, Paul Guyer, Günter Zöller, Robert B. Louden, Arnulf Zweig, Holly Wilson, and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. (1986), “Kant’s Formula of Humanity.” *Kant-Studien* 77 (1–4): 183–202.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. (1996), *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nelson, William. (2008), “Kant’s Formula of Humanity.” *Mind* 117 (465): 85–106.
- O’Neill, Onora. (1990), *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant’s Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paton, Margaret. (1990), “A Reconsideration of Kant’s Treatment of Duties to Oneself.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (159): 222–233.
- Sensen, Oliver. (2011), *Kant on Human Dignity*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Sensen, Oliver. (2015), “Kant on Human Dignity Reconsidered: A Reply to My Critics.” *Kant-Studien* 106 (1): 107–129.
- Singer, Marcus G. (1963), “Duties and Duties to Oneself.” *Ethics* 73 (2): 133–142.
- Timmermann, Jens. (2006), “Kantian Duties to the Self, Explained and Defended.” *Philosophy* 81: 505–531.
- Wood, Allen W. (1999), *Kant’s Ethical Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

