

**Self-Constitution: Action, Identity, and Integrity**  
**Lecture Two: Practical Reason and the Unity of the Will**  
**Christine M. Korsgaard**

**The Principles of Practical Reason**

I. The Hypothetical Imperative:

Instrumental Reason – take the means to our ends

“Constitutive” Means – choose some object or opportunity that will realize your end

Judgment in General – guide your action by the application of concepts to objects in the world

\*\*The Hypothetical Imperative as the General Principle of Practical Application

II. Moral Principles

≠Moral Principles as rational by some other standard – i.e. neo-Hobbesian

theories according to which morality serves one’s self-interest

Substantive Principles – rules in favor of act types, substantive reasons

Maximizing Principles

The Categorical Imperative, a Formal Principle:

Act only on a maxim you can will to be a universal law

III. The “Middle Principle”

The usual candidates: e.g. Kant’s imperative of prudence, principles of self-interest, principles instructing us to maximize the satisfaction of our own interests or desires, or our own good

A standard confusion about the middle principle: it is a hypothetical imperative or even just an extension or application of instrumental reason.

Why that’s a confusion: the principle of instrumental reason does not tell us to seek the greater good or prefer it to the lesser good

Why we need a middle principle: it is natural to believe we should prefer to satisfy more of our ends rather than fewer, and once that is established we need a way to resolve conflicts

Unity of Agency as the *formal ground* of the middle principle

**The Empiricist Account**

Instrumental or Hypothetical Imperatives automatically motivate

Hume’s view: the desire for the end passes along the causal relation to the means

Why tautology threatens: if I don’t form a desire for the means, then the original object is not “my end.” More generally, if my end is whatever I actually pursue, it is conceptually impossible for me to fail to take the means to my end.

Theoretical Error vs. Practical Irrationality (violation of a rational principle)

What a “rational principle” is for Hume: a description of the effects certain ideas or judgments regularly have on the will

Why this cannot support the normative ought: when I say you have a reason to do action-A, all I mean is that if you realized action-A will cause desired object-D, you will in fact be motivated to A. That’s not a consideration *on which* you can act.

A problem: many judgments or ideas have predictable effects on the will

**The Rationalist Account**

Rational standards are truths that we apply when we choose actions

Hume’s complaint: this view is externalist about motivation

A better version of Hume’s complaint: this view is externalist about normativity

Why rationalism can’t work for the standard set by the hypothetical imperative:

– it is itself the principle of application, we are already using it when we apply it

Why rationalism can’t work for moral standards:

- we apply truths by way of the hypothetical imperative, but the hypothetical imperative doesn't bind us to any ends – we might happen to make it our end to apply moral standards, but we don't have to

This argument parallels the argument that logical principles can't function as premises. Adding logical principles as premises doesn't bind you to accept the conclusion. Adding rational standards as premises doesn't bind you to act.

### **Kant's Account of Normativity**

The hypothetical imperative binds us because willing just is determining yourself to be the cause of an end (constituting yourself as its cause).

Rational Principles in general as principles of self-determination

Self-Determination and the Categorical Imperative: the Argument Against Particularist Willing

- What the argument aims to show: you cannot determine yourself to action (constitute yourself as the *cause* of your action unless you will universally. If particularist willing isn't possible, universal willing must be necessary.

Particularistic willing = willing to act on a reason that applies to this case only and has no implications for any other case.

Why particularistic willing isn't possible:

To will is to determine yourself to be a cause.

To determine yourself to be a cause is to identify yourself with the principle of choice on which you act.

Particularistic willing eradicates the distinction between incentives and principles of choice, and so eradicates the distinction between your incentives and you: it reduces you to a mere heap of incentives

Particularistic willing lacks an agent, and therefore isn't willing.

If particularistic willing is what breaks us down, universal willing is what unifies us. Action on universal maxims constitutes us as single unified agents.