

Kantianism and its Commitment to Non-Naturalism

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## ABSTRACT

Kantian ethics has a strong following amongst the philosophical community when it comes to morality and ethics. Many Kantians, including Christine Korsgaard, subscribe to the view that Kantianism is opposed to Non-Naturalism. This view, while understandable, is incorrect. In fact, the Kantian approach to ethics has a strong commitment to Non-Naturalism in its metaphysical construction. The purpose of this paper is to prove this dependence by showing the inferences and concepts of Kantianism that one cannot accept without accepting Non-Naturalistic principles. To demonstrate this connection between Kantianism and Non-Naturalism, I will give a summary of Kantianism through the interpretation given by Velleman (2005). Then I will present Non-Naturalism as presented by Fitzpatrick (2008) and Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014). After explaining these views as clearly as possible, I will explain why Kantianism is committed to Non-Naturalism, address the possible contradiction of Kantianism and Fitzpatrick's idea of "ethical truths being independent of any perspective," as well as address the issues raised by Korsgaard (2003) concerning the realist approach to Kantian ethics.

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## **Kantianism and its Commitment to Non-Naturalism**

Kantian ethics has a strong following amongst the philosophical community when it comes to morality and ethics. Many Kantians, including Christine Korsgaard, subscribe to the view that Kantianism is opposed to Non-Naturalism. This view, while understandable, is incorrect. In fact, the Kantian approach to ethics has a strong commitment to Non-Naturalism in its metaphysical construction. The purpose of this paper is to prove this dependence by showing the inferences and concepts of Kantianism that one cannot accept without accepting Non-Naturalistic principles. To demonstrate this connection between Kantianism and Non-Naturalism, I will give a summary of Kantianism through the interpretation given by Velleman (2005). Then I will present Non-Naturalism as presented by Fitzpatrick (2008) and Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014). After explaining these views as clearly as possible, I will explain why Kantianism is committed to Non-Naturalism, address the possible contradiction of Kantianism and Fitzpatrick's idea of "ethical truths being independent of any perspective," as well as address the issues raised by Korsgaard (2003) concerning the realist approach to Kantian ethics.

## **Kantianism**

### **Obligations**

The overarching theme of Kantian ethics is that as rational beings, there are moral obligations that we owe to others and to ourselves. By analyzing the definition of an obligation we will arrive at the conclusion of what it is we are obligated to do.<sup>1</sup> When we are obligated to do something, that obligation remains in place regardless of whether or not it coincides with our desires, aims, or intentions. From this perspective, an obligation turns into a duty, a “practical requirement to do something or not to do something”.<sup>2</sup> These duties are inescapable, meaning there are no circumstances in which we should not carry out the duties that we are obligated to do. These inescapable duties are what Kant refers to as categorical.<sup>3</sup> Due to Kantian morality being categorical, we should not question why we ought to obey duties. From this perspective it follows that our moral obligations must not depend on any external source for authority, rather, our moral obligations must contain their own authority intrinsically. It can thus be concluded as Velleman states that “the concept of an obligation is the concept of an intrinsically authoritative requirement – a

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<sup>1</sup> Velleman, J. David. 2005. *A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics Self to Self*: Cambridge University Press. P.26

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.16

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.17

requirement that, simply by virtue of what it requires, forestalls any question as to its authority.”<sup>4</sup> However, that leaves us with the puzzle that any source of practical authority must give us some reason for why we are required to obey it. This point will be addressed in the following.

### **Authority of Reasons**

Those who are not convinced of Kantian ethical theory are justified in asking why we are obligated to do what Kantian duty commands, i.e. why such commands have authority over our wills as rational agents. Velleman quickly points out that in asking the question of why we are required to act for a reason (that reason being an authority or any other reason for that matter), we are asking for a reason to justify whether or not we are required to do something. This illustrates how it is impossible to justify anything without appealing to reason and some form of authority for that reason. If we are subject to any requirements at all, then we must be subject to reasons. This concept is what draws us to Kant’s conclusion that we must act for reasons. Acting for reasons is the essence of what our obligations depend on.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.18

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.19

In acting for reasons, a moral requirement must be acceptable for anyone who is under similar circumstances.<sup>6</sup> An immoral action is acting on considerations in a way that others (in a similar situation) could not, after contemplation. We see that we are required to act for reasons that will be justified both to one's-self and all others who can practically reason as well. This implies that there exists a universally accessible perspective of practical reasoning that all practical reasoners should be able to obtain.<sup>7</sup> This perspective calls for deliberation along with their practical implications in constructing an "all things considered judgement." The "all things considered judgement" is a realization that can only be grasped from a third-person perspective, a perspective that is attained through reasoning as well as analyzing different points of view from different angles. We can only reach this perspective due to what Velleman describes as being "autonomous." Autonomy as I understand it means self-governing behavior. As long as we are responding to reasons, then we must be autonomous, since we base our actions on the conclusions drawn from our reasoning. So, acting for reasons is the "ultimate requirement" in which all practical requirements that depend on some authority (that depends on reasons for obeying it) are

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.25

justified, because we can only come to this realization due to being autonomous.<sup>8</sup>

### **Personhood**

The last part of Kantianism that must be addressed is the position, according to Velleman, that “acting for reasons is essential to being a person, something to which we unavoidably aspire.”<sup>9</sup> Kant argues that to be a person (a good person) we must treat others as “ends” and avoid treating people as a means to some other end. Persons, according to Kant, have inherent value, and that a universe without persons would be “pitch dark with respect to value, so persons are things for the sake of which other things have value.”<sup>10</sup> This is why persons, as ends, should not be exchanged for things, because in these situations persons would amount to means instead of ends. It is only persons that can reach the transcendent third-person perspective discussed in the last section. Our impulse as persons to decide on the basis of reasons is an impulse to reach the all-encompassing point of view from which a moral decision can be made. A person consists of being a rational creature both cognitively and practically, and as rational creatures, persons can reach a shared perspective.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.34

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.33

We can now conclude that acting for reasons is essential to being a person, “something to which we unavoidably aspire,” and through personhood we can reach the perspective of the world that is “sufficiently coherent and consistent to qualify as a single point-of-view [shared amongst all persons].”<sup>12</sup> An issue raised about this shared perspective is that it is impossible to construct a perspective that is universally shared. In acknowledging this as fact, Kant says that we are to “act only on a maxim that you can at the same time will to be universal law.”<sup>13</sup> Maxims allow a person to avoid “contradictions in conception” and “contradictions in will.”<sup>14</sup> Kant’s “contradiction in conception” allows us to reject the justification of intentionally deceiving someone because we simply wanted them to believe otherwise. Kant’s “contradictions in will” captures how it would be impermissible to act in a way that benefits oneself, while expecting others to act in the permissible way of which only you will benefit. The discussion of the prisoner’s dilemma is a good example of this. In the prisoners’ dilemma, there are two prisoners being interrogated for a crime in separate rooms. Each prisoner is given the opportunity to implicate the other in the crime in exchange for a reduced sentence while increasing the other prisoners sentencing time. Here we see that if one prisoner acts on a supposed maxim

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.27

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.38

of ratting out the other in exchange for a reduced sentence, as a maxim, if the other prisoner does the same thing, they will both end up with longer sentences. It would be a contradiction of will for one prisoner to snitch on the other with the expectation that the other prisoner will not snitch on you. Whereas if both prisoners act on the supposed maxim of not ratting out the other, they will both have shorter sentences. In closing, Velleman's interpretation of Kantian ethics ends with the conclusion that "reasons matter because persons matter, and so we cannot show our regard for reasons by showing disregards for persons.

## **Non-Naturalism**

### **Commitments**

According to FitzPatrick, Non-Natural Ethical Realists are committed to these claims:

1. Ethical claims purport to state facts (attributing ethical properties to actions, persons, policies, etc.), and so are straightforwardly true or false in the way that other purportedly fact-stating claims are, by accurately representing the facts or not.<sup>15</sup>
2. At least some ethical claims, when literally construed, are true.  
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<sup>15</sup> Fitzpatrick, William. 2008. "Robust Ethical Realism, Non-Naturalism, and Normativity." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3:159-205. P.161

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. P.161

3. There are ethical facts that obtain independently of our actual ethical beliefs or attitudes or practices, both on an individual and a societal level, at least in the sense that such facts about what is right, or what is good for us, or what reasons exist are not simply a direct function of these things as they stand (as on crude subjectivism or relativism).<sup>17</sup>
4. There are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective.<sup>18</sup>
- 4.\* Ethical standards and facts are independent of us in the sense that they are not constituted by the actual or hypothetical results of any ethically-neutrally specifiable set of conditions or procedures applied to our beliefs, desires, attitudes, etc.<sup>19</sup>

These premises give us the main tenets of what it is required to be a Non-Naturalist. We see that ethical claims must state facts that are true or false, some of the facts must be true, the ethical truths obtain independently of our actual beliefs and of any preferred perspective, and lastly, the ethical truths are independent of us. In order for something to be considered non-natural it must meet all of these requirements.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.162

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.164

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.166

## **Robust Non-Naturalism**

FitzPatrick goes on to state the position of the Robust Ethical Realist which is “the irreducibly evaluative or normative character of ethical properties and facts, the non-relativity of ethics, the autonomy of ethics, and the categoricity of moral requirements.”<sup>20</sup> Robust Realists state that ethical facts exist independently of ratification and that the way to recognize them is through deliberate reflection that will require the right starting points.<sup>21</sup> The only way to answer the question of why we should do “x” or what is good and worthwhile, is for a rational agent to engage in ethical argument in which he appeals to understanding and experience of what it means for a good life.<sup>22</sup> The Robust Realist is also committed to the stance that if values are objective, they must be so in their own right and not through reducibility to some other kind of objective fact.<sup>23</sup>

### **Autonomy**

According to the Non-Naturalists’ view ethics is autonomous. As described by Fitzpatrick, “what is good can be accurately and justifiably arrived at only through engaged first order ethical

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.166

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.168

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.173

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.179

reflection and argument employing its own internal standards, and not from the outside through some other form of inquiry, such as psychology or biology.”<sup>24</sup> Goodness then, is a property that commands our interests. We should promote it, acknowledge its “deliberative weight,” and even if someone does not have goodness, it does not change the fact that they ought to.<sup>25</sup> Moral wrongness, in contrast to goodness, is a property that merits disapproval. With Autonomy in mind Non-Naturalists are committed to:

- F. Some forms of ethical upbringing, or sets of sensibilities are better than others, constituting the right starting points for ethically accurate deliberation.<sup>26</sup>
- G. The moral wrongness of an act is a property that does not merely tend to cause a feeling of disapproval in us, but merits such a reaction, along with the act’s dismissal from deliberative consideration.<sup>27</sup>
- S. For all  $w$  and  $w^*$ , if  $w$  and  $w^*$  are exactly alike descriptively, then they are exactly alike ethically.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. P.172

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.182

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.184

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.185

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.198

## Non-Naturalism and Kantianism

Now that we have a clear conception of Non-Naturalism and Kantianism we can discuss why the Kantian form of ethics is committed to the Non-Naturalists' view of morality. The most basic commitment that binds Kantianism to Non-Naturalism is the Kantian commitment to personhood. Not only is personhood a non-natural concept, but its authority, that is inherent with personhood, is what obligates us to act.

In Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, another point is brought up time and time again that Velleman does not directly acknowledge in his discussion of Kantianism. That point being that moral law is knowledge gained a priori.<sup>29</sup> This distinction made by Kant is crucial to understanding why it must be the case that Kantianism is rooted in Non-Naturalism. Moral actions according to Kant are moral when they are done out of pure respect for morality instead of after considerations pertaining to ulterior motives or the consequences of the action itself. The only way for these criteria to be met is through formulations using a priori concepts. A priori knowledge is knowledge that is obtained independent of experience.

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<sup>29</sup> Bowie, Bob and Robert Bowie. 2004. *Ethical Studies*: Nelson Thornes. p.55 (Kant 1788 p.193, 259)

By using a priori concepts, moral actions can be applied and realized universally by all rational beings. If it was the case that appropriate moral action could only be discovered a posteriori, then moral action could not be universal, because the experiences of the individual would play a large role as the determining factor of what is the true moral action to take. By having experiences play a role as the right course of moral action, morality could not be universal; it would be subjective based on each individual's experience.

### **Irreducibility, Authority and Action**

The first claim that is the foundation for my argument that Kantianism is committed to non-naturalism is that Kantianism's moral truths have to be non-natural. There cannot be natural truths in ethics for the Kantian because the Kantian's truths cannot be gained through empirical facts, therefore the truths must be a priori. Empirical facts and natural facts are both facts that can be observed. By accepting that Kantian truths are neither empirical nor natural, but these truths exist, the only possible explanation is that these truths must be non-natural, hence a priori. These truths become apparent through reasoning, but

that does not mean that reasoning constitutes the formation of the moral truths; reasoning merely serves as a means by which we realize these truths. In acknowledging that moral truths exist a priori, and are not constituted by empirical or natural facts, again they must be non-natural. Given the Velleman account of Kantian ethics, it seems apparent that Kantian ethics must depend on the existence of non-natural ethical truths. Kantianism is justified and based on the moral fact of personhood and the moral truth that this end is something to “which we all unavoidably aspire.”

The Kantian view of Personhood is committed to persons being the only ones capable of making rational moral deliberations and decisions. A Person represents an end in which all other things have value, meaning that everything that has value, only has value because we as persons ascribe value to it. For example, diamonds are valuable, expensive stones, but they are only valuable and expensive because people have placed that value on them. If we as people hadn't done that, diamonds would be just as valueless as any other rock you could find outside. The only thing that in fact has true value is personhood, as illustrated in the previous section on personhood. Everything else is merely a means that serves towards an end.

Fitzpatrick states that “actions stand in relation to the non-natural facts and that’s what makes them good, bad, etc.” The “means” that stand in relation to personhood are the same “actions” that stand in relation to non-natural facts to which FitzPatrick is referring. Personhood is a non-natural fact; it is not reducible to anything empirical or natural. Since Kantian logic all revolves around the means-ends relationship of persons as ends and everything else as means, it is evident how Kantianism depends on the non-natural, that non-natural fact, being personhood. Personhood is subject to moral law, and moral law is a priori. Only persons have the ability to comprehend the categorical imperative and to realize moral truths which can only be obtained a priori. Fitzpatrick explained “what is good can be accurately and justifiably arrived at only through engaged first order ethical reflection and argument employing its own internal standards...” Fitzpatrick’s explanation justifies how non-natural moral truths like “goodness” can only be obtained through reasoning, a priori reasoning, “ethical reflection,” which is the only way Kantians can reach these ethical truths too. This is an ability that can only be used by persons. The ability to rationalize, contemplate, reason, and so on are all abilities that only persons are capable of. These abilities are

not empirical, therefore they must be non-natural. It could be argued that rationalization, contemplation, and reasoning can be understood empirically. But as of now I am unaware of any proven methods of evaluating these things. IQ tests were once a method of evaluation, but today have been proven to be fundamentally flawed and not sufficient to measure cognitive ability by itself. While we may have ways to measure whether or not these processes occur, we do not have conclusive and exhaustive explanations as to how they occur especially in persons and not in other creatures. Cuneo also states that the concepts of being wrong and so on cannot apply to the behavior of non-rational beings, only rational, intentional, agents can grasp these concepts.<sup>30</sup> While it is the case that often times we try to apply these concepts to non-rational animals (like when we say “bad dog” for instance), I would argue that the animals do not understand the concepts of right and wrong, but they do understand being rewarded vs punished, praised vs scorned.<sup>31</sup> Thus the Kantian idea of Personhood is further grounded by non-naturalism.

Kantian truths are committed to non-natural truths because the authorities that the truths depend on are not reducible either.

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<sup>30</sup> Cuneo, Terence and Russ Shafer-Landau. 2014. "The Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalism." *Philosophical Studies* 171(3):399-443. doi: 10.1007/s11098-013-0277-5. p.435

<sup>31</sup> An issue raised by Dr. Klagge

Authority is inherent according to Kantians, and the concept of inherent authority is not reducible, especially into natural terms. According to Thomas Nagel's take on Robust Realism, if values are objective they must be so in their own right and not through the reducibility to some other kind of objective fact.<sup>32</sup> "Objective in their own right," is the Kantian principle of inherent authority that the ethical facts have. FitzPatrick stated that goodness commands our interests and that badness demands our disapproval, hence these concepts have authority. FitzPatrick goes on to say in premise G, (The moral wrongness of an act is a property that does not merely tend to cause a feeling of disapproval in us, but merits such a reaction, along with the act's dismissal from deliberative consideration.<sup>33</sup>) that "wrongness...merits such a reaction, along with the acts dismissal from deliberative consideration," this illustrates that the authority inherent in moral truths commands us to act accordingly. Kantianism's acting for reason, commands us to act in the inherent authority of moral truths in the same way premise G states. With personhood being the moral fact by which Kantians justify what is good, bad, right, and wrong, premise G illustrates why we must act for

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<sup>32</sup> Fitzpatrick, William. 2008. "Robust Ethical Realism, Non-Naturalism, and Normativity." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3:159-205. p.179

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.185

reasons, in accordance with the Kantian means-ends relationship. Fitzpatrick acknowledges that by committing to G. there must be a theoretical commitment to non-natural facts (which we see now as personhood for the Kantian).<sup>34</sup> As stated by Cuneo, “moral truths will employ normative concepts to express negative and positive moral assessments and certain kinds of behavior will as a conceptual matter necessarily merit moral censure,” in the same way the Kantian’s idea of personhood requires that we act and use moral censure in preserving this non-natural truth.<sup>35</sup> By acting for reasons based on the inherent authority of ethical truths, Kantians are again committed to non-naturalism.

### **Premises 3, 4, and 4\***

Premises 3, 4, and 4\* could seem to pose a problem for Kantians, in stating that ethical truths obtain independently of us, “the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective” and that the “moral fixed facts are independent of us...” I do not see these premises as causing a problem for Kantians because Kantianism is merely the process by which we try to determine how to go about

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.185

<sup>35</sup> Cuneo, Terence and Russ Shafer-Landau. 2014. "The Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalism." *Philosophical Studies* 171(3):399-443. doi: 10.1007/s11098-013-0277-5. P.406

discovering moral truths, it does not imply that Kantian reasoning is what constitutes the existence of these moral truths. This same logic is why premise 3 does not pose a problem either, which emphasizes how ethical facts exist independently of our actual beliefs and desires. The moral truths, non-natural truths, do not change. Correct Kantian reasoning serves to help us to make decisions that would reflect as closely as possible what the moral truths would dictate, not what makes the moral truths.

As previously shown, premise 3 states that “There are ethical facts that obtain independently of our actual ethical beliefs or attitudes or practices, both on an individual and a societal level, at least in the sense that such facts about what is right, or what is good for us, or what reasons exist are not simply a direct function of these things as they stand (as on crude subjectivism or relativism).” This premise of Non-Naturalism according to FitzPatrick, specifically supports that ethical facts are a priori. “Attitudes or practices” as mentioned above, are a posteriori facts. They both depend on experience. In order for something to be a practice, it has to be exercised. To have a specific, justified attitude toward something would require having experience with that thing at some point in time. Premise 4 and 4\* both require

moral and ethical truths to be a priori as well. If we can agree that our perspectives are influenced by our socio-economic status, influenced a posteriori, it would seem that experience would play a large role in our perspectives. So a person in the Congo for instance may not hold the same moral viewpoint on eating meat as a person in London due to the political, social, and economic environment in which they were raised. So in order for there to be any universal moral truths, according to non-naturalism, they have to obtain independent of “any preferred perspective” or “independent of us in the sense that they are not constituted by the actual or hypothetical results of any ethically-neutrally specifiable set of conditions or procedures applied to our beliefs, desires, attitudes, etc.” This can only be so through a priori reasoning, which will allow a universal perspective because if done correctly, the moral truths will be realized independent of a person’s socio-political or socio-economic conditions.

### **Addressing Premise S and Premise F**

Premise S, the Supereminence claim, given by Fitzpatrick illustrates how if two situations are alike descriptively, then they are alike ethically. This premise justifies why Kantian ethics needs the

concept of a Universal Perspective. The same action that a person is attempting to justify through a maxim would have to be applicable in all descriptively identical situations. This premise as I have interpreted it captures the idea that there cannot be multiple situations in which all of the facts are the same but the moral judgement can differ. From a Kantian perspective premise S not only grounds how there are objective moral truths, but it also grounds the need for Kantians to strive for a Universal Perspective where they can know these moral truths. Premise S explains the Universal Perspective that Kantians attempt to attain; a perspective in which across scenarios, when presented with the moral facts we should all arrive at the same moral conclusion, and that moral conclusion would be applicable in all identical scenarios. An objection to premise S that has been brought to my attention, thanks to Tristram McPherson, is that if we maintain the truth of premise S, then it would hold true that through premise S, something can be right for me that is wrong for someone else. In other words premise S alone does not justify universality, just because two situations are similar, doesn't mean that they merit the same response. I am not convinced that this is the case however, because if the situation for me is the same descriptively as a situation that someone

else is in, in order for the moral action to be right for me and wrong for someone else, there would have to be some fundamental difference between us two people for the outcome to merit a different response. If that is the case, then the scenarios could not have been alike descriptively. In this case, we see that maxims place a stipulation on premise S, but do not do so in a way that would cause Kantianism to violate that premise because we could not act on a maxim that only serves to benefit us at the expense of someone else otherwise it would violate the principle of universal legislation, i.e. that maxim would not hold as good for everyone but only for oneself.

One last objection that could be raised against the argument that Kantianism is committed to Non-Naturalism could be that premise F prevents everyone from being able to use Kantian logic. Premise F claims that “some forms of ethical upbringing, or sets of sensibilities are better than others...” and as a result of this some will not realize the moral truths or be able to use the correct reasoning to reach the moral truths. According to Kantianism however, as persons we all possess the ability to reach the correct moral truths, because this is something that only persons can do. If for some reason a person arrives at a conclusion or maxim that is in fact incorrect, a Kantian

would simply attribute this to a flaw in the reasoning. All persons have the ability through correct reasoning to reach the proper maxims; incorrect reasoning is the only way in which a person would not reach the appropriate maxim. Correct moral reasoning, in accordance with Kantianism, would not give incorrect maxims. I would even go so far as to argue that both premise S and F are not essential claims to Non-Naturalism, meaning that even if Kantianism did not meet these two requirements, that is not enough to say that Kantianism couldn't be Non-Natural.

Another objection could be that through claiming “ethical upbringing” can influence “ethically accurate deliberation” as stated in premise F, a posteriori knowledge would seem to play a role in one's ability to realize ethical truths. This objection isn't a strong one though because while a posteriori knowledge may help to better prepare a person to reach a moral truth a priori, it isn't stating that these a posteriori conditions are necessary in order to reach an a priori realization. In the same way that a mathematician may be better equipped to explain how  $2+2=4$ , and may be able to reach that conclusion faster than someone who has not been trained in mathematics, it does not mean that a non-mathematician will cannot

reach that some conclusion a priori. It will just happen at different speeds. So some a posteriori knowledge may help in reaching moral truths at a faster rate, having a posteriori knowledge is not essential to reaching a moral truth.

### **Korsgaard's Kantianism**

Christine Korsgaard's view of Kantianism is quite different from that of Velleman. Korsgaard's main issue with the interpretation of Kantian ethics is that it is being treated as a philosophical theory in explaining how it is that we come to have morals, instead of being treated as a practical framework in which we can determine the proper forms of action in real life situations. As Korsgaard explains it, the "moral realists thinks of practical philosophy as an essentially theoretical subject, its business is to find or to argue that we can find some sort of ethical knowledge that we can apply in action." Korsgaard states that moral realism:

"...is a view about why propositions employing moral concepts may have truth values because moral concepts describe or refer to normative entities or facts that exists independently of those concepts themselves.<sup>36</sup>"

Korsgaard also states that the "ability to apply knowledge presupposes the ability to act" and that as a result of this the "realist account of means to

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<sup>36</sup> Korsgaard, Christine M. 2003. "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy." *Journal of Philosophical Research* 28(Supplement):99-122. P.100

ends is incoherent; it assumes that we all have the capacity to realize the means to the ends relationship.”<sup>37</sup> More bluntly Korsgaard refers to the shortcoming of the naturalist’s views as assuming that we all have a map, and that we all possess the ability to read it. Korsgaard’s objection is stating that it cannot be assumed that we have the level of reasoning abilities as others, and thus we all won’t reach the same conclusion due to the differences in levels of reasoning ability. This is a troubling assumption. If it is the case that we all do not possess the capacity to rationalize and contemplate in the same way, then Velleman’s version of Kantianism would fail as well as premises S, 4 and 4\* which require for a non-naturalist view of Kantianism to be a priori and universally accessible. Korsgaard also raises an issue over the concept of the “normative question,”<sup>38</sup> the question of whether or not the reasons we use for acting are “trivial” or are they “genuine” considerations for why an agent must act. Korsgaard feels that the realist’s approach to Kantianism does not answer the normative question. Korsgaard also poses the “ultimate extension of the open question argument (UEOQA),” where any fact as to what action is good, could be questioned if that action should be applied to the relevant situation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. P.110

<sup>38</sup> FitzPatrick, William J. 2005. "The Practical Turn in Ethical Theory: Korsgaard’s Constructivism, Realism, and the Nature of Normativity\*." *Ethics* 115(4):651-91. P.654

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.657

Korsgaard argues that Kant is in fact a constructivist. Kantian ethics are “not a matter of finding knowledge to apply it in practice, instead it is “the use of reason to solve practical problems.”<sup>40</sup> The Categorical Imperative then is a “principle of the logic of practical deliberation, and a principle that is constitutive of deliberation, not a theoretical premise that is applied to practical thought.”<sup>41</sup> The constructivist perspective sees normative concepts as the names of the “solutions of problems” that we name as objects for “practical thought” instead of the moral realist’s view in which concepts are the names objects “or of facts of the components of facts that we encounter in the world.”<sup>42</sup> According to Korsgaard, the purpose of practical philosophy is to move from “concepts to conceptions” and that the necessity of the concepts of right, wrong, good, etc. are needed before we know how to apply the concepts<sup>43</sup>. From the constructivist approach, Korsgaard argues that “the only piece of knowledge that could be relevant here is knowledge that the problems represented by our normative terms are solvable, and the only way we can find out whether that is so is by trying to solve them.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Korsgaard, Christine M. 2003. "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy." *Journal of Philosophical Research* 28(Supplement):99-122. p.115

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.115

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.116

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.116

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.118

## **Constructivism vs Non-Naturalism**

I found Korsgaard's argument very convincing and motivating in stating how the true purpose of Kantian Ethics is to be used to help us solve practical problems. While I admire this view and acknowledge the discrepancies that Korsgaard brings forward with the issues of the realist's approach, the problem with Korsgaard's argument is that it allows us to pose the metaphysical question, from where does the Kantian logic originate? The constructivist approach tells us how we should go about solving problems, but not why we should do anything at all. This is where constructivism falls short.

Here that question is not a hindrance to constructivism; it actually proves why the Realist approach to Kantianism is necessary. Constructivism and Moral Realism complement each other when discussing Kantian Ethics because the constructivist approach shows us how to apply Kantianism to specific practical situations while realism explains the origins of Kantianism and how it is that we come to know Kantianism. Even Korsgaard herself admits that moral realism is the better alternative to other metaphysical accounts of morality such as relativism, skepticism, and subjectivism, whose accounts of ethics "may seem hopeless."<sup>45</sup> Korsgaard's objection to the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.105

universal attainability of the categorical imperative by all persons is an objection that seems to be based purely on conjecture without being adequately defended to merit a methodological response in this work.

### **Addressing Korsgaard's Normative Question and UEOQA**

Korsgaard's normative question does not seem to offer an actual objection to Kantianism. It would seem that labeling some reasons as "trivial" and others as "genuine" only adds value judgement to deliberations which would only serve to delegitimize some reasons over others.

Korsgaard's normative question is essentially putting some reasons over others while Velleman's Kantianism uses all reasons as considerations for reason's realizing moral truths. This enables Kantianism to answer all questions that could be used against it for reasons to act whereas Korsgaard would rather be able to simply dismiss some questions as "trivial" instead of addressing those concerns. Korsgaard even leaves her version of Kantianism open to the question of how does one determine what question is trivial from one that is genuine. Korsgaard's "ultimate extension of the open question argument" doesn't seem like an issue for Velleman's Kantianism either. If UEOQA is the question of how any fact as to what action is good, could be questioned if that action should be applied, it would seem to me

that Velleman's explanation of obligations and duty has already answered it. According to Velleman, Kantian ethics includes moral obligations that we owe to other persons. Obligations are inescapable duties that represent a "practical requirement to do something or not to do something" and intrinsically contains its authority. So in response to UEOQA it is the case that out of duty, or moral obligation, we have to act. Once we have ascertained what the "right" thing to do is, duty requires that we do it. So there is no question of should the appropriate action be applied, because once we have realized what action is good we are required to do it out of moral obligation. An example would be if one were to say that they were against police brutality and that actions of police brutality are morally wrong, by not taking action against police brutality, you would be allowing it to continue. If you are allowing it to continue, thereby being complicit, then it would seem that you cannot claim to be against it otherwise you would not allow for it to continue. Hence we are obligated to act, otherwise through inaction we would be allowing for those actions to continue that we claim to disapprove of. That being said, it would be impossible for us to act in every situation that we morally disapprove of. For example I could not dedicate all of time to solving issues of police brutality while at the same time giving the same amount of energy to fighting global warming. The

argument is that we should all be working to combat something that we morally disapprove of instead of doing nothing to work towards any of the problems we dislike.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the discussion of this paper we now have an understanding of Kantianism and Non-Naturalism. It is apparent that Korsgaard's Constructivist's approach needs the Realist conceptualization of Kantianism in order to provide answers to the epistemological questions that constructivism cannot and does not attempt to provide answers for. The relationship between Kantianism and Non-Naturalism has been laid out and leaves us with the fact that Kantianism is committed to Non-Naturalism in justifying personhood, as well as more moral truths into non-reducible entities that have inherent authority and that only through possessing autonomy can we strive to grasp moral truths. It would seem after reflection now that one could even go so far as to state that Kantianism is an example of a Non-Naturalists' conception of morality.

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