

Published in: Fabienne Peter und Hans-Bernhard Schmid (eds.), Rationality and Commitment, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, 73-104.

HERLINDE PAUER-STUDER

INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY VERSUS PRACTICAL REASON: DESIRES, ENDS, AND COMMITMENT

1. Introductory Remarks

Amartya Sen has repeatedly criticized the standard interpretation of the ‘rational economic man’. His criticism is directed especially against the assumptions that the only goal of a rational person is to maximize his or her own welfare (understood in a self-centered sense) and that the reasons for the choices a person makes are merely dependent on the person’s own goals, more precisely: her self-centered goals.

Sen’s objections to the standard interpretation of economic rationality have a Kantian flavor. Recently, Sen’s thinking seems to go even more in a Kantian direction by the emphasis he places on concepts such as commitment and identity.¹ We need, his argument goes, a picture of the self that is more complex than the one that represents the self by a utility function that expresses the subject’s preferences. We should presuppose instead a concept of the self according to which the self is capable of acting out of a commitment and hence on the basis of norms and principles guiding his or her choices. To claim that the concept of commitment is necessary for a notion of the self as having a will and making choices on the basis of critical reflection is to move towards Kantian ethics. In Kantian philosophy we find a very close connection between commitment and morality, since morality is closely associated with acting from reasons that often are not in conformity with our inclinations. In fact, in Kantian ethics being committed means making choices in accordance with moral norms, or more precisely in conformity with the categorical imperative.

In my paper I will explore whether Sen’s critique of standard economic rationality commits him to a Kantian position. I will discuss two contemporary readings of Kantian ethics, namely Christine Korsgaard’s and Elizabeth Anderson’s interpretations, and I argue that Sen can defend his theoretical aims without having to accept a strong Kantian position. My thesis will be that we should not subscribe to Kant’s account of practical rationality altogether, because

¹ See Amartya Sen, ‘Goals, Commitment, and Identity’, in: Sen: *Rationality and Freedom*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), 206-24.; also: Sen, ‘Social Identity’, in: *Revue de Philosophie Économique* 2004.

Kant simply identifies the rules of practical rationality with morality. A ‘moderate Kantianism’ that demands critical reflection on our ends in addition to means-end reasoning is sufficient for practical rationality. My conclusion will be that Amartya Sen is a very moderate Kantian – and that this is fine.

2. Amartya Sen’s Conception of Rationality

Among rational choice theorists, there is a tendency to ignore the difference between the ascription of a choice to a certain person and a particular interpretation of the content of the choice. In an unreflected way the step is made from the trivial fact that a person’s goals are her goals (in the sense that the person is making the choice) to the problematic assumption that the content of the goals must be self-centered. There is, as Sen has pointed out, an ambiguity in the idea that a person in making choices pursues her ‘own goals’. The goals of a person can be her goals, but need not be egoistic.

The ‘reduction of man to a self-seeking animal’ is a consequence of the assumption that every choice a person makes reveals a preference of the person whose utility is larger than the alternatives not taken.² Thus, in making a choice, a person cannot do other than maximize her utility. The restriction to egoism follows from a restricted interpretation of ‘utility’: it is assumed that the preferences of the person reduce to her specific interest in her goods.

Rational choice theory blurs, as Sen points out, the distinction between maximizing in general (where it is open what is maximized) and maximization as the fulfillment of a person’s self-interest. The maximand is identified with self-interest, the egoistical interests of a person.³

Sen considers the distinction between sympathy and commitment as a way to block the step from the rather innocent assumption that a person who chooses rationally is maximizing her maximand (general maximization) to the controversial and highly implausible assumption that the person is always maximizing her own interest or advantage. A commitment is defined as a practical reason that a person has that is independent of the gains and losses for the person in case he or she acts on that reason.⁴ ‘The characteristic of commitment...is the fact that it drives a wedge between personal choice and personal welfare, and much of traditional economic theory relies on the identity of the two.’⁵ The notion of commitment allows us to

² Sen, ‘Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory’, in: Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 84-106, esp. 88.

³ Sen, ‘Introduction: Rationality and Freedom’, 22ff.

⁴ See Sen, ‘Rational Fools’, 91ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

relativize the picture of the rational man as the man who maximizes his welfare, i. e. pursues his self-centered goals as best as he can.

Sympathy refers to the case where the welfare of a person is dependent on the welfare of other persons; the pains or pleasures of others reduce or increase one's welfare. In the case of commitment, persons act out of a sense that something is right or wrong – independently of its impact on their welfare. A commitment in this sense comes close to a categorical normative reason. Commitments are reasons that have force independently of one's inclinations and that quite often do not allow maximizing one's personal interest; some commitments demand that we go against our own interest.⁶ Yet they are compatible with maximization in general – especially if maximizing just means pursuing those ends that seem to be the best ones in the situation at hand, i.e. ends which seem good and appropriate by the standards of critical reflection.

Sen links commitment to self-scrutiny and social identification. Commitment is the rational recognition of rules associated with social membership. So action based on commitment is non-egoistic, and what might motivate commitment is a sense of loyalty, duty, and obligation. Commitment demands, as Sen emphasizes, that persons have an identity and must be able to develop a reflective and critical attitude towards the reasons guiding their choices.⁷

The move to commitments allows, as Sen points out, accounting for a range of different normative phenomena. Commitment helps to explain phenomena such as social bonds, solidarity, work motivation; it is a way to elucidate and understand all those social rules that work in the background of societies and that are so crucial if we want social life to go well. Sen has broadened the picture of rational choice by adding to the rational choice paradigm a form of reasoning that includes values, rules, and principles and that allows us to critically assess our goals and our prima facie commitments. Maximization, as he says, gives us a good understanding of an important part of the discipline of rational choice. Reason in the sense of critical scrutiny, however, extends beyond that. Maximizing behavior is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for rationality. If the ends are weird or crazy (Sen mentions the example of a person cutting her toes) then maximizing behavior is 'patently stupid' and cannot qualify as rational. As Sen writes: 'Rationality cannot be just an instrumental requirement for the pursuit of some given – and unscrutinized – set of objectives and values.'⁸

⁶ A person can, however, have a commitment to her own development and to her self-centered goals. Sen has given examples of persons for whom it would be important to concentrate on their self-centered goals, e.g. women who willingly submit to their marginalized position.

⁷ See Sen, 'Goals, Commitment, and Identity', 216, 217.

⁸ Sen, 'Introduction: Rationality and Freedom', 39.

So it seems that the rational choice paradigm can at best offer some necessary conditions of what practical reasoning means. Maximization in general is quite innocent. It provides us with a good understanding of an important part of the discipline of rational choice. Reason in the sense of critical reflection and endorsement, however, extends beyond that. The crucial thing is, as Sen emphasizes, the interpretation of the maximand – and this demands ‘careful assessment and scrutiny’ and following rules of ‘reasonableness’ in exercising practical rationality.⁹

One might object that there is a tension in Sen’s position between maximization and instrumental rationality on the one hand and a Kantian-based conception of practical rationality on the other hand. The Kantian conception comes into the picture as a consequence of bringing in the idea of commitment and more generally the demand that we need a deliberative procedure to critically evaluate our ends.

Often the Kantian understanding of practical rationality is interpreted as being opposed to the concept of instrumental rationality. Yet maximization and instrumental reasoning are quite plausible conditions of rationality. So the question is: Do we have two notions of rationality that are incompatible if we emphasize the importance of instrumental rationality and the importance of rationality as a form of critical deliberation taking into account certain normative standards? But if we are looking for a theory of rationality, then we are certainly looking for a conception that covers all forms of rationality.

I think that Sen has not given a definitive answer to this question, though his goal is clearly to have one conception of practical rationality and not several competing one’s.

In the next section I will try to elucidate the connection between instrumental rationality and means-end reasoning. I distinguish between a broad and a narrow sense of instrumental rationality.¹⁰ In the broad meaning ‘instrumental rationality’ is a form of means-end reasoning where the content of the preferences or the ends is not egoistic; the narrow meaning of ‘instrumental rationality’ is self-interest rationality – the content of the preferences or the ends is restricted to egoistic interests (pursuing one’s own advantage). Means-end reasoning is part of both senses of instrumental rationality, the broad and the narrow one, but only in the narrow understanding of instrumental rationality (in the sense of maximizing personal advantage) is means-end reasoning tied to a specific interpretation of ends, namely egoistic ends. Then I will look at the Kantian approach to practical rationality. My main thesis will be that we should not follow Kant’s transcendental project, because it identifies the rules of practical rationality with the rules of morality.

⁹ Ibid., 41.

3. Humean Rationality, Means-End Reasoning, and Instrumental Rationality

Humean rationality is means-end rationality.¹¹ It focuses on desire fulfillment, since the ends are set by the desires one has. Whenever you have an end, you are rational if you pursue it in an effective way. The ends are arbitrary, merely dependent upon whatever our desires, passions and inclinations are directed towards. Each end is worthy to be pursued as long as the desire for it is strong enough. For Hume it is possible that ‘a trivial good’ may cause a stronger or ‘superior’ desire than do valuable ends.¹² David Hume’s normative neutrality in regard to the ends is best expressed by his provocative remark that it is ‘not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger’.¹³ Whatever a person desires, the person has reason to take the most effective means to realize that end. Reason alone, Hume famously said, is not able to motivate. Reason works only in combination with a desire and a belief that a certain means-end relation holds. Hume makes it clear that when our desires or passions do not choose ‘means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn’ them.¹⁴ The only parameter that holds true for the ends is the subjective intensity of the wish. What Hume presents is skepticism towards reason, not rationality.¹⁵

Humean means-end rationality applies to a person driven by her or his impulses and desires, a person who gives in, a person who has no will, a person who has no volitions and resolutions. This is a person who also does not have commitments, neither moral nor non-moral commitments. The Humean conception falls short of a full-fledged account of practical rationality. Practical rationality presupposes persons who reflect on their aims and attempt to

¹⁰ I would like to thank Fabienne Peter for helpful discussions on this point.

¹¹ One has to be careful here: What Hume says about means-end reasoning is not all he says in regard to practical reflection in the sphere of morality. His provocative and sceptical remarks in regard to reason and the capacities of reason to motivate are developed in Book II (*Of the Passions*) of the *Treatise* (esp. Book II, Part III, Section III, ‘*Of the influencing motives of the will*’) and in Book III (*Of Morals*) of the *Treatise*, section I of part I (‘Moral distinctions not deriv’d from reason’). In part III of Book III, Hume, however, is more positive in regard to the possibilities of evaluative reflection. He develops a method of reflective endorsement in regard to moral judgements (by connecting considered moral judgements to an appeal to general and impartial rules of consideration). Cf. Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), Ch. 12. Korsgaard also attributes to Hume a method of reflective endorsement. See Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), Ch. 2.

¹² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edition (text revised by P.H. Nidditch), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 416.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹⁵ As I emphasized in FN 12, Hume defends this position in certain sections of the *Treatise*; it does not represent his position on practical reason altogether.

realize them with resolution. They are committed to their aims in the sense that they do not just blindly follow their desires, but reflect on their preferences and ends.

Humean rationality is restricted to means-end reasoning and does not judge the ends in regard to their 'goodness'. But without such a standard of evaluation it is difficult to assess the rationality of a choice. To just follow the demand that one should take the appropriate means to a certain end does not guarantee overall rationality. If the ends are bizarre or crazy, the person's choice of the most effective means to realize the end does not save an action from the verdict of irrationality. Even if Sen's toe-cutter eventually acts more effectively by using a sharp knife instead of a blunt one, we would not consider his behavior as altogether rational. We must consider the entire action - I do x in order to pursue y (and y is worthwhile) - to be reasonable in order to consider a choice as being rational. We obviously need a standard that allows us to assess the ends as normatively adequate or inadequate in order to judge an action as altogether rational.

Hume tells us that our desires can go anywhere. That is correct. Yet in order for our choices to qualify as being rational, there must be some restrictions in regard to what it is that we can desire. We need a normative standard to evaluate the ends, and means-end reasoning cannot provide it, since its normative devices are only valid relative to the acceptance of the ends. And Humean ends depend on the whims and caprices of one's desires.

The restrictions on our ends can come from different sources: They can consist merely in the demand to move from first-order desires to second-order desires, or simply be conventional directives such as the rules of etiquette or politeness, or be the counsels of prudence or the norms of morality. In any case, the standard of morality has an especially strong word in regard to the quality of the ends.

There are obvious parallels between this account of Humean rationality and its weaknesses and Sen's criticisms of the deficiencies of rational choice theory. The correction that seems adequate in the case of Humean means-end rationality is similar to the one Sen suggests: to develop a theory of practical reasoning that includes standards that allow us to critically assess the ends.

In order to see exactly in what way Sen transcends the notion of rationality directed at maximizing one's own advantage, it is helpful to take a closer look at the notion of instrumental rationality and the principle of means-end reasoning. The principle of means-end reasoning reads: Whenever you have an end, you are rational if you pursue it in an effective way and take the adequate means to realize the end. We know an innumerable number of cases in everyday life that fit this model: You feel hungry and you walk over to a restaurant at

the next corner to eat a sandwich. You want to take a trip to India and you start to save money so that you can buy a plane ticket. The structure of this kind of reasoning is: You desire something, you believe that taking x is the adequate means to realize the end, and so you do x. The combination of belief and desire brings about the action. The principle of means-end reasoning seems indispensable for assessing the rationality of our choices. If you are hungry and you do not go to the restaurant at the corner although you still believe that the best thing to do would be to go to that restaurant, then your behavior is not rational.

Instrumental reasoning in the sense of means-end reasoning is a part of practical rationality. If we accept, however, that practical rationality cannot be end-neutral, then Humean means-end rationality obviously cannot amount to a complete conception of practical rationality. Exactly this is Sen's argument in regard to instrumental rationality: 'Rationality cannot be just an instrumental requirement for the pursuit of some given – and unscrutinized – set of objectives and values.'¹⁶

Instrumental rationality and means-end reasoning are often equated: instrumental rationality, it is claimed, is means-end rationality. We should, however, be careful here. In order to assess the scope and status of instrumental rationality within a theory of practical rationality in general it is, I think, important to distinguish between a broader and a narrower understanding of instrumental rationality. The broader understanding of instrumental rationality is the means-end requirement; the means-end principle and the principle of instrumental rationality understood in the broad sense of simply taking the means to an end can indeed be equated. But there is a narrower, more specific understanding of instrumental rationality according to which instrumental rationality is associated with a specific sort of ends, namely utility in the sense of self-interest maximization. In that case the means-end requirement is directed to a very specific end, namely maximizing one's own advantage in a self-centered way. As a condition of rationality, instrumental rationality, it is often claimed, seems to be self-evident; it amounts, as some Humeans claim, to a condition for identifying a reason for action as a reason at all.¹⁷ What is at stake in these versions of reasoning, rightly judged as self-evident, is, however, the means-end principle, not the concept of instrumental rationality in the more specific sense of self-interest rationality. The self-evidence of the means-end principle as such does not support the evidence of instrumental rationality interpreted as self-

¹⁶ Sen, 'Introduction: Rationality and Freedom', 39.

¹⁷ In defense of Humeanism James Dreier writes: 'The special status of instrumental reason is due to its being the *sine qua non* of having reasons at all.' James Dreier, 'Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality', in: Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (eds.), *Ethics and Practical Reason*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 81-99, esp. 98, 99. It is worth mentioning that Dreier puts forward this claim as a direct reaction against the position defended by Korsgaard, namely that the Kantian moral law is a condition for having reasons at all. What is at stake here is a controversy about the identification of the rules of morality with the rules of rationality.

interest rationality, an interpretation which is often more or less tacitly presupposed in the *homo oeconomicus* paradigm.

The difference between these two conceptions of instrumental rationality lies in the kind and status of the ends. Means-end reasoning as such is neutral in regard to the ends. Whenever you have an end, it is rational to take the means. This is not necessarily an invitation for arbitrariness, since means-end reasoning can be connected with a form of rational deliberation and evaluation, with a reflective endorsement of ends.¹⁸ The means-end principle as such, though neutral in regard to the ends, can be combined with a form of reflective rationality. The ends must be endorsed by the relevant normative or evaluative standards. The defenders of instrumental rationality in the narrow sense of self-interest rationality often rely on the self-evidence of the means-end principle, but forget that the endorsement of specific economic ends like utility maximization ('utility' defined as the person's personal advantage) needs an additional normative justification.

The idea has become quite prominent in current practical philosophy that practical rationality cannot merely build on what we pursue effectively as we desire it or have a preference for it, and has brought an anti-Humean trend along with it. Rationality, it is said, must be directed to the good. We find this idea, for example, in Warren Quinn's statement that practical rationality 'is special by being the virtue *of* reason as it thinks about human good'.¹⁹ A similar move is made in a recent paper by Houston Smit who claims that 'an agent's practical reasoning has the good as its formal end, so that an agent acts rationally only if her end in acting is something that she conceives of as belonging to the good that is practicable for her'.²⁰ So the direction of looking at rationality changes: An action has to be - considered on the whole - good, and then the rationality of the action is established. But what concept of the good is meant here? Is 'the good' just a sort of placeholder for various evaluative standards in different social spheres, or does the term refer to the moral good? Often the good to which practical rationality is directed is understood too exclusively in moral terms. This is especially the case with those Kantian accounts of practical rationality which follow Kant's program closely, since it was Kant who established such a strong connection between practical rationality and morality as a form of the good. But, as I will argue, even if we accept the basic

¹⁸ As David Schmitz expresses this idea: '(A) means-end conception of rationality can be made consistent with our intuition that we can be rational in a more *reflective* sense, calling into question ends we happen to have, revising them when they seem unfit.' David Schmitz, 'Choosing Ends', in: *Ethics*, 104, 2, 1994, 226-51, esp. 226/227.

¹⁹ Warren Quinn, 'Putting Rationality in its Place', in: Quinn, *Morality and Action*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1993), 228-55, esp. 254.

²⁰ Houston Smit, 'Internalism and the Origin of Rational Motivation', in: *The Journal of Ethics* 7, 2003, 183-231, esp. 225. I think it to be wrong, however, to attribute this position, as Smit does, to Kant.

line of these accounts, we should in no way go so far in the Kantian direction as to identify the standards of practical rationality with the rules of morality.

Practical rationality qualifies certain ways of acting as rational when the ends meet the normative standards, and in the case of moral reasons these are the criteria and requirements of morality. But then acting in a way that takes the means to the *right* ends is decisive; that x is the most effective means for y as such is not paramount, since y might turn out to be something entirely bizarre. The special normative force here comes from the fact that something is right, from the normative reason. And since the normative reasons are constituted by a different understanding of rationality than Humean means-end rationality, this means that this conception of rationality is overriding.

4. Instrumental Rationality and Kantian Practical Reason

Let me focus next on Christine Korsgaard's Kantian proposal for how to overcome the limits of the Humean conception of rationality. Korsgaard denies that instrumental rationality is anything like a conception of rationality. Instrumental rationality is, however, not given up or replaced by another account of rationality – it is still considered as being relevant to our being motivated. Instrumental rationality is considered as a principle of reasoning, a principle that gains full justification as a condition of rationality only within a non-Humean conception of rationality, more precisely: it has to be a part of a Kantian account of practical rationality in order to have credibility as a principle of rationality.

I will argue that Korsgaard is correct in considering the principle of instrumental rationality (in the means-end sense) as part of a non-Humean conception of practical rationality.²¹ But I will attempt to show that one's acceptance of Korsgaard's account of instrumental rationality does not commit one to accept her specific transcendental justification of the moral standards that she considers as constitutive of practical rationality.

Korsgaard argues that the principle of instrumental rationality cannot stand alone. It is dependent upon a generic conception of rationality that contains normative principles that allow one to determine which of the possible aims are justified.²² Only in that case does a demand to pursue the end arise: 'Unless there are normative principles directing us to the adoption of certain ends, there can be no requirement to take the means to our ends.'²³ The

²¹ Korsgaard uses the term 'instrumental rationality' in the sense of means-end reasoning. She does not explicitly distinguish between means-end reasoning and instrumental rationality in the self-interest sense.

²² Korsgaard, 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason', in: Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (eds.), *Ethics and Practical Reason*, 215-54.

²³ Korsgaard, 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason', 220.

instrumental principle tells us merely that we should choose the adequate means to our aims. But it can only be normatively effective if we know which of our aims we have good reasons to pursue.

Korsgaard draws a distinction between the instrumental principle and the principle of prudence that advises us to do what is best in regard to our complete good. What holds for the principle of instrumental rationality also holds for the rules of prudence: neither instrumental rationality nor prudence is ‘the *only* requirement of practical reason’.²⁴ For a person to act rationally, she must be motivated to act by her own recognition of an adequate conceptual connection between a belief and a desire to act. The practical insight that a certain way of acting corresponds to a practical principle can be, as Korsgaard states, part of one’s motivational reasons and cause an action.

If we identify the aims of the person with what the person prefers, one is always guided by what one thinks what one’s reasons are. But if any wish is giving us a reason, independently of its content, we are always practically rational. Korsgaard thus thinks the concept of practical rationality is undermined, since the alternative of irrational acting is missing. Instrumental rationality restricts the realm of reasons to the determination of the optimal means to reach and satisfy our aims, but reason cannot evaluate these aims. Because the instrumental principle (IP) cannot be violated, Korsgaard argues, it cannot be a normative principle. Korsgaard’s example is Jeremy, who wants to study, then takes a walk, meets a friend, goes to a bar and in the end comes home without having done anything of what he wanted to do with good reasons.²⁵ Jeremy’s problem is that he does not recognize a superior principle which would allow him to distinguish between important aims or reasons and spontaneous impulses and inclinations.

Korsgaard’s strategy is to show that the principle of instrumental rationality needs backing by a conception of normativity. Instrumental reasons can function as motivating reasons, but they cannot be normative reasons. The normative force of the IP is, according to Korsgaard, dependent upon the fact that we can say of some of our aims that they have a special normative status. Since each practical reason must be a motive as well as a guiding principle, instrumental rationality can only be a partial condition of practical rationality.

There are objections against this way of arguing.²⁶ According to Jonathan Dancy, the principle of instrumental rationality is a meaningful normative principle. Instrumental

²⁴ Ibid., 220 (italics in the original).

²⁵ Korsgaard, ‘Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant’, in: *The Journal of Ethics*, 1-29, esp. 19; Korsgaard, ‘The Normativity of Instrumental Reason’, 247, FN 64.

²⁶ John Broome objects that Korsgaard’s way of arguing in regard to the normative force of the IP does not respect the distinction between reasons and normative requirements. Willing an end requires you to take the

rationality demands of us to take the most effective means to our ends, but, as Dancy points out, one can be motivated by the recognition that the action x is the most effective means to pursue one's aims and one can ignore this fact also in a way that one's irrationality becomes obvious. So instrumental rationality is violated if one does not choose the appropriate means and henceforth the IP is a normative principle.²⁷ Dancy thinks the following statements to be true within the Humean framework: a. The IP is the only rational requirement. b. I have an end x. c. I am taking steps to this end. d. The steps I take are acknowledged to be less effective than others available to me. So it follows that the IP can be normative and motivating as well – and therefore Dancy concludes that Korsgaard's argument fails.

Dancy is right to point out that the IP is a normative principle; we can violate it, and doing so amounts to a form of irrationality. In this respect Korsgaard's claim is wrong; the IP need not be restricted to persons who follow their desires without reflection. In another respect Dancy's objection misses the point. The additional claim at stake in Korsgaard's argument is that the IP cannot stand on its own. Dancy's objection shows that the IP is a normative principle, yet his argument does not justify why the IP should be considered to be the only normative principle.

The statement 'You should take the means to the ends' is only justified if the ends do have a special normative status. If we would admit the IP to be the only normative principle, then irrationality would just amount to the fact that one does not take the most effective means to one's ends. But then the character of the ends would have no say in determining the rationality or irrationality of an action. Yet some of our aims might be so grotesque that it would not be irrational if we did not choose the most effective means to realize them.

(Remember Sen's example of the toe-cutter.) The crucial point is that some of our aims are such that means-end rationality alone cannot save an action directed to those aims from being properly judged to be a form of irrationality. So a conception of practical rationality must contain more than merely the instrumental principle that demands the most effective pursuit of one's ends. This, I take it, is Korsgaard's point.

means, but willing the end is not a reason to take the means. John Broome, 'Normative Requirements', in: Jonathan Dancy (ed.), *Normativity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 78-99. Yet, one might answer, in Korsgaard's strong Kantianism willing amounts to a requirement; 'to have a reason' means being required. Simon Blackburn rejects the assumption that the ends must have a normative status as unconditional and necessary in order that the instrumental requirement to take the means to the ends does have normative force. See Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 242, 243.

²⁷ Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 46, 47.

Korsgaard's argument is not only Kantian in spirit, the way she develops it is in fact Kant's own position.²⁸ Kant himself thought that instrumental reasoning cannot be the only principle of practical reason, and the difference between hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives is a result of this idea. Hypothetical imperatives 'represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means for attaining something else that one wants (or may possibly want)'.²⁹ Categorical imperatives inform us that certain ways of acting are good in themselves. The hypothetical imperative is either a principle of skill or a principle of prudence. In the case of a principle of skill, it is, for Kant, irrelevant whether the end is reasonable or good, the relevant issue is *how* we can reach the end. Kant illustrates the end-neutrality by a rather drastic example: The prescriptions that a doctor needs to cure a man and those that a poisoner needs to kill the man are, as Kant claims, of 'equal value' since each prescription 'serves to bring about its purpose perfectly'.³⁰ One's own well-being or happiness Kant considers to be an aim a priori evident for all rational beings, since it belongs to their essence. The principle of prudence is a hypothetical imperative that tells us to choose the appropriate means to one's own greatest well-being. The categorical imperative, however, commands certain ways of acting without any reference to a purpose that should be attained by it. The validity of the categorical imperative is not dependent upon any condition, but is due to the insight that it is the law of reason, autonomy and morality.

For Kant, these three different sorts of principles, i.e. rules of skill, counsels of prudence and laws of morality, correspond to different forms of necessitation of the will. Moral laws are objective and universally valid and the corresponding necessity is unconditional. The counsels of prudence are necessary, but their necessity is relative to the subjective condition that a person considers this or that purpose as part of her happiness. And the rules of skill are only necessary in regard to the accepted purpose. Kant considers the imperative of skill as an analytic principle.³¹ The imperatives of prudence are not analytic, since there is no determinate concept of happiness - it depends on the circumstances of a life whether long living, being rich or being successful will bring happiness to it. Therefore, the imperatives of prudence are for Kant more like counsels than commands.

Moral imperatives, for Kant, must be justified by reasons that are valid for any rational being. Moral laws should have their origin a priori in reason. If moral laws depend on an empirical

²⁸ Korsgaard has precisely and impressively interpreted Kant's position, and she has made explicit the often missed argument in Kant's work that hypothetical imperatives are part of practical reasoning.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated as *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* by James Ellington, in: Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, 2nd edition, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 25, (Academy edition of Kant's Works, 414).

³⁰ Kant, *Groundwork*, 25, (Academy edition, 415).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 27, (Academy edition, 417).

cognition, then their justification is contingent. Practical principles for Kant ‘should be derived from the universal concept of a rational being in general’.³² Moral laws cannot be hypothetical imperatives, since then their justification would depend on the justification of their condition.

The critique of Kant’s concept of practical reason as being somehow metaphysical or mysterious, since the idea of an unconditional justification seems strange and inadequate is well-known.³³ Kant’s claim that moral imperatives are valid unconditionally has been accused of reducing morality to a system of commands that lack further justification. That, of course, is a misunderstanding. Kant wants to avoid a possible regress of justification, and he tries to do it in a way that the reasons for stopping are evident. Kant’s transcendental move is to demonstrate the moral law to be a necessary condition of the possibility of morality. To deny it would be to deny the possibility of practical reasoning.

Humeans have recently moved much closer to a Kantian position. The criticism of Kant’s conception of categorical imperatives as a form of authoritarian and metaphysical commands is no longer prominent. Many philosophers who still defend a Humean theory of motivation accept that a non-Humean conception of rationality is adequate for the dimension of normativity.³⁴ There are indeed good reasons to follow Kant’s account of practical reason. It is not convincing to draw up a dichotomy between broad instrumental reasoning and a conception of reflective practical reason. Instrumental means-end reasoning is obviously part of practical reasoning, but it is not the whole story. Kant’s explanation of practical reason makes it evident that certain ends deserve a special status and his account undergoes a renaissance in those recent moves that associate the notion of rationality with a standard of the good.

The Kantian account amounts to a unifying conception of practical reason: Since the principle of instrumental reason is a necessary component of practical reason, the problem of a possible split between the instrumental and the non-instrumental level of practical reason no longer arises. This allows for a new perspective on the question of normativity and motivation. Both, the normative dimension and the motivational dimension of practical reasons can be explained now. A practical reason may be motivating but also obligating at the same time. The insight that it is correct to do x generates a commitment and has a motivating effect. The recognition that from the normative perspective there is a reason to do x creates a desire to do x, provided that a person is rational.

³² Ibid., 23, (Academy edition, 412).

³³ An example is Philippa Foot, ‘Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives’, in: Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), 157-73.

The critical question that arises is: Even if we accept the Kantian conception of practical reasoning as adequate, does that mean we also have to acknowledge as correct the specific modus of connection that Kant regards as given between reasoning and morality? This is the relevant question in the debate between Humeans and Kantians. James Dreier expresses this point nicely when he writes: ‘Certain aspects of the Humean position deserve to be abandoned. We should abandon a hard-line metaphysical position according to which the very idea of practical reason is mysterious. Our skepticism should consist in doubts that the content of practical reason is anything like the content of morality.’³⁵

I think this is a good question to focus on. For Kant, the rules of rationality are the rules of morality. Kant says that the concept of a moral imperative should be derived from the concept of a rational being. We might be inclined to follow Kant’s explanation of practical reason. But do we also have to share Kant’s conception of how morality is connected to practical rationality? Kant’s answer is clear: since rationality requires autonomy and since autonomy in the sense of self-legislation entails morality, the idea of practical reasoning prompts us to recognize the categorical imperative as the principle of autonomy.

The question whether and why we should adopt this specific program of justification requires a separate answer. The reasons cannot just be based on the fact that a Humean conception of rationality *per se* is not enough in order to answer the question of normativity. It is necessary to connect rationality with a standard that evaluates the ends. However, the Kantian answer does not stand alone as the only possible answer to the normative narrowing of the content of normative reasons. Take the approaches to morality that are based on a Humean rationality conception that considers morality to be a system of hypothetical imperatives. They are deficient in their understanding of moral statements and maybe in the way they try to justify moral principles. But they, of course, do not admit complete arbitrariness in regard to the ends. They do try to develop normative restrictions in regard to the aims.

Philippa Foot, for example, who explicitly argues against a Kantian position, lays down the ideals of humanity, and the virtues of justice and beneficence as the normative parameters for the appropriateness of the ends.³⁶ She has recently criticized her earlier efforts of restricting the aims we might have as deficient. She acknowledges that just to want to belong to the ‘volunteers banded together to fight for liberty and justice and against inhumanity and oppression’ might be too contingent a basis.³⁷ One also has to address those who do not share those ideals and who have other ends. Her recent strategy is to derive the normative

³⁴ Cf. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

³⁵ James Dreier, ‘Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality’, 99.

³⁶ Foot, *Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives*, 165-67.

restrictions on what people can do from the necessary facts and basic conditions of human life. Human beings as human beings are life forms, and there are natural necessities that set limits on what people can do.³⁸

Yet natural necessities as such cannot create normative necessities. That there are normative limits that are due to natural necessities has to be supported by considerations of reason. The natural necessities by themselves cannot replace our deliberation about what we should do in a certain case, about what is right and appropriate in certain circumstances. Deliberation about different possibilities of normative standards presupposes rationality in a sense that goes beyond Humean instrumental rationality. However, this does not entail that the standards of morality that we approve of have to be identical with the rules of rationality and that only a transcendental justification of the principles of morality as absolutely necessary is appropriate. It results, indeed, in a beneficial enrichment of our idea of morality if one bases the deliberations about what is morally adequate and correct on the standards of reasonable consideration. We should regard this reasoning as a reflective process of consideration where moral judgements and principles correspond to each other and thus support one another, while being at the same time corrigible.³⁹ And again we are back to a position Sen holds.

A strong Kantianism, however, goes further. The moral rules are the rules of rationality. Even more than that: the moral law is necessarily justified because it is part of the concept of a rational being. In my opinion, this strong form of Kantianism is problematic. And I am quite sure Sen does not want to subscribe to it – but as he quite often refers to Kant's account, it might be important to point out why it seems better to hold only a moderate Kantian position. In the following section I would like to discuss the strong Kantian position more carefully. I will first discuss Korsgaard's account of practical reason and compare it with Elizabeth Anderson's moderate Kantian extension of Sen's position.

5. Practical Reason, Morality, and Practical Identity

Korsgaard is a supporter of such a strong Kantianism.⁴⁰ Korsgaard follows Kant in claiming that a notion of reflective practical reason necessarily entails the categorical imperative in its first two main formulas, the Formula of Universal Law and the Formula of Humanity.

³⁷ Ibid., 167. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), Ch. 1.

³⁸ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, esp. Ch. 2 & Ch. 3.

³⁹ Seen from this perspective, an approach such as Philippa Foot's is indeed interesting, because it extends moral reflection to the normative framework our ways of life presuppose.

⁴⁰ Korsgaard herself does not discuss Sen's position, but her arguments are relevant to an assessment of Sen's project of developing an account of practical rationality beyond rational choice theory. This is especially so since Korsgaard argues that the step from instrumental rationality to Kantian practical reason is inevitable.

Korsgaard's argument that brings us to the Kantian laws has two steps: The first part of the argument establishes why we need a law, the second part why this law is the categorical imperative.

In order to be persons we cannot simply follow our impulses, but must be able to reflect on what we are doing. But we can only give reasons for our actions and justify them if there are laws guiding our reflective evaluations. We have to ask whether a certain incentive for action can qualify as a law for us. In order to structure our impulses, to tame them and reflect upon them, we have to be a free will, that means to be guided by a self-given law. The principle of a free will is henceforth a law, and this condition, to be just a law, is exactly fulfilled by the categorical imperative in the universal law formulation, which brings in the moral law in the form of a law. This completes the first part. The second part of the argument tries to establish the categorical imperative as the only solution to the given problem.⁴¹

Korsgaard brings in a second argument to arrive at a substantive conception of morality: To be a person, we need a normative structure. Normative structures are not only supplied by morality, but also by our practical identities, i.e., those normative codes that result from our social roles and social contexts - whether one is a father, mother, mafioso or philosopher. But we cannot develop practical identities, if we do not attribute value to ourselves, if we do not value our humanity. And to value our humanity we have to equally value the humanity of others. That brings us to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the Formula of Humanity.⁴²

Korsgaard is not merely claiming that the categorical imperatives should guide us. Her argument is stronger: namely that this is necessarily so, inevitably so. Her transcendental argument is: The Kantian imperatives are constitutive standards of our identity. They are constitutive standards of us as unified agents. In order to be persons at all, the categorical imperatives must make up our identity.

Action for Korsgaard is self-constitution.⁴³ It is necessary for agency that agents are unified. Otherwise we cannot attribute to persons 'the things that happen because of them' and hold them responsible for what they do. The principles of practical reason, hypothetical and categorical imperatives, are principles of the unification of agency. And this explains their

⁴¹ Korsgaard here omits an ingredient aspect of the first two formulas of the categorical imperative, namely the contradiction in conception and the contradiction in willing test. But these are already substantial criteria that cannot be solely justified by means of the argument that we need a law in order to be able to refer to reasons.

⁴² Behind our practical identities we have a moral identity: We should act only according to those maxims about which all persons can agree in a system of rational cooperation.

⁴³ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Action, Identity, and Integrity*, *The Locke Lectures* 2002, <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaard/>, Lecture One: 'The Metaphysical Foundations of Normativity', 1.3.4.

normativity. As Korsgaard writes: ‘The necessity of conforming to the principles of practical reason comes down to the necessity of being a unified agent.’⁴⁴ What makes actions good or bad is how well they constitute you. A good person is one who is good at his or her unification, is ‘good at being a person’.

To sum up: The reflective structure of our consciousness demands that you identify yourself with a law, and this is the source of normativity. This law is a formal principle, and the material side of this formal principle is to value yourself as a human being.

Why does Korsgaard make such a strong claim and consider the categorical imperatives as constitutive standards of unified agency and of our identity as persons? Her program is truly Kantian, and she shares Kant’s ambitions to remove all doubts in regard to the claims of normativity and of morality. The idea is clear: If the principles of morality are constitutive of us as agents, as necessarily part of us as the categories of understanding and the intuitions of space and time, then the grounds for moral skepticism are gone. Korsgaard’s point is that we cannot consider the Kantian imperatives as principles that we can choose or reject. They are necessary.

Korsgaard offers also another argument to show the necessity of the categorical imperative. This argument starts with the fact that we, as beings with a reflective consciousness, must be normatively structured, we must have a practical identity. This demands that we consider our humanity as valuable and the publicity of reason forces us to consider the humanity of others as valuable.

Even if we accept the argument that to be a normatively structured person means that you must value yourself as a person and, because of the publicity of reasons, also other persons, that by itself does not imply that you value the persons around you in the specific and demanding way that is prescribed by Kant’s idea of treating others as ends in themselves. I can take myself as important and value myself also by following the principle that my interests should be simply prior to those of others – and the publicity condition brings us in this case to make concessions, but not to the deep form of respect for others that Kant had in mind. It seems difficult to imagine why I should be denied identity because of making an egoistic strategy my principle.

Korsgaard presupposes a morally loaded sense of humanity. Our being human already means to be moral beings – in the Kantian sense. Acting demands, as she points out, unified agents to whom we can attribute actions. Unified agents are constituted by the Kantian imperatives

⁴⁴ Korsgaard, *The Locke Lectures 2002*, Lecture One, 1.3.4.

(hypothetical imperative and the categorical imperatives). Hence we are obligated to follow the Kantian imperatives in order to be unified agents.

To claim that the categorical imperatives are constitutive standards of our identity might, if at all, be so on our good or best days when the higher ideals inspire and drive us. But what with our bad days when we fail and do not live up to the demands of morality? Yet how can we miss the moral standards if they are constitutive of us? How can we act badly if the Kantian imperatives are constitutive of our identity?

The familiar reading of Kant's theory is to consider the categorical imperatives as the criteria of a testing procedure. In that case, bad actions are the result of bad maxims – the bad subjective principles of persons. The CI-procedure helps us to find out which of our maxims are good or bad ones. But this is not quite Korsgaard's point of view. She does not want to suggest the categorical imperatives as possible criteria to test our subjective principles. She wants to show that the categorical imperatives are necessary principles of our actions, our acceptance of them is inevitable since they are part of us as unified agents. But then it becomes mysterious to which will our bad actions can be attributed – certainly not to a will whose defining feature is to be made up by the categorical imperative.

An obvious way to a solution of this problem seems to be to distinguish between different forms of identity or different senses of autonomy. And we find in Korsgaard's writings a distinction between practical or social identity on the one hand and moral identity on the other hand. So the way to go would be to argue that someone with the social identity of a gangster does bad acts, but that he would act morally if he would adopt a moral identity. But in that case there would be a gap: The gangster need not necessarily accept the moral law.

Korsgaard sees the problem of bad action, and she tries to solve it. In the *Sources of Normativity* she gives the following account of bad action: The bad person, e.g., a Mafioso, has a practical identity – conforming to the Mafioso code. He just does not think things through, he does not reason. If the Mafioso would reflect on his maxims, he would come to see them as wrong.⁴⁵ This is not specifically Kantian, at least not strong Kantianism – it brings in the CI as a suggestion, not as a necessity.

In the *Locke Lectures* the claim is stronger: Someone who is not constituted and henceforth obligated by the categorical imperatives does not have a practical identity. But this seems to eliminate the possibility of bad action. To distinguish between social identity and moral or constitutional identity does not help here, because the question arises of how the norms making up the social identity can, in the case of a unified agent, be deviant and violate the

⁴⁵ Korsgaard, 'Reply', in: Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 254-58.

Kantian imperatives. Maxims are subjective principles of a will, but if maxims are constructed by a will which is constituted by the Kantian imperatives, then that will cannot produce maxims that contradict these imperatives.

We also do not dispose of that problem if we distinguish between two senses of autonomy, namely autonomy in the sense of self-legislation and autonomy in the ordinary sense of being free within certain legal and moral boundaries to choose our form of life and to do what we think worthwhile. The problem of bad action comes up again, because if autonomy in the sense of self-legislation is constitutive of our identity, then the acts we can choose and hence our autonomy in the second sense is more limited than we usually do think: it is limited to moral actions. What form of identity does a human being have that does not act in conformity with the categorical imperative? Merely a social or practical identity, so that the content of the maxims is determined by her social or group values? But how can this being have maxims at all since unification is missing?

To interpret bad acting as a failure of self-constitution seems strange, because acting, and therefore bad acting as well, already presupposes self-constitution. When we do criticize the actions of persons as morally deficient, we do not evaluate and talk about whether the identity of these persons is badly constituted or not. And equally, if we think of really bad actions, for example, if someone tortures other persons or kills them, it seems odd to say that he is involved in the same activity as the good person, namely in the activity of self-constitution, but that he is just doing that activity badly.

If the activity of self-constitution is necessarily bound to the Kantian imperatives, we cannot, if we act badly, be involved in the same sort of activity as when we act in a morally good way. Usually we say: The good person who acts well keeps to the standards of morality, the bad person ignores the demands of morality and violates them. Of course we can say that the bad person fails to shape himself or herself into a good person – he or she fails at being good at being a good person. But that means only that the person does not live up to certain standards, it does not mean that he or she falls back from his or her constitutional identity. I think there are two ways of understanding our being bound by the categorical imperatives (and this applies to normative principles in general):

A: The agents are, as unified agents, necessarily bound by the CI.

B: The agents see, *via* deliberation and reasoning, the force of the Kantian imperatives; they understand that they have good reasons to accept them.

I consider the second to be more plausible. The solution seems to be to give up the ambitious claim of making the Kantian imperatives necessary and inevitable. We should take them as

plausible criteria to test our subjective principles of acting, our inclinations and dispositions. This means to come back to a more modest form of reflective endorsement, a form that is less ambitious in the goals of justification but broader in the scope of what can be an object of moral evaluation and justification.

Elizabeth Anderson has put forward an interesting proposal for extending Sen's position in the direction of a Kantian account of practical reason.⁴⁶ Anderson agrees with Sen that committed action seems a way out of PD-situations. She criticizes, however, that Sen does not 'propose an alternative, non-preference-based conception of rationality in terms of which committed action makes sense'⁴⁷ and suggests a (Hegelianized) Kantian position as the solution to fill this gap.

The first step to evade a PD-situation is, as Anderson points out, to move from the question 'What should I do?' to the question 'What should we do?' In a PD-situation no common discussion is possible; in a collective deliberation the outcome is the result of a joint strategy. Anderson considers the universalization principle (i.e., to act on principles that it is rational to adopt if one identifies as a member of a collective agent) as the constitutive principle of a collective agent and proposes it as the alternative to the principle of maximizing expected utility. The universalization principle allows, she claims, the step 'from the rationality to the morality of committed action'.⁴⁸

Anderson connects identity and rationality. Conceptions of identity she thinks to be prior to rational principles: the sort of rational principles we choose is a function of the self-understanding of the actors. Whether we choose the principle of expected utility or the principle of universalization depends on whether we see each other as isolated individuals or as cooperating agents. As cooperating agents we need, as she emphasizes, to adopt a more general perspective from which we can coordinate and evaluate the different demands we face as members of different groups. This 'requires that we transcend our various parochial identities and identify with a community that comprehends them all'.⁴⁹ The universalization

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Anderson, 'Unstrapping the Straitjacket of "Preference"': A Comment on Amartya Sen's Contributions to Philosophy and Economics, in: *Economics and Philosophy* 17, 2001, 21-38.

⁴⁷ Anderson, 24. Sen mentions various elements that should be considered in the formulation of an alternative principle of rational choice such as understanding people's identities (their memberships in various groups), their joint strategy, and their ways of discussion. Anderson tries to integrate these ideas into a coherent account.

⁴⁸ Anderson, 24. Anderson demonstrates the impact of this principle with the example of voting. Even if all members of a political party have agreed that the best outcome would be to elect candidate A, this is not a reason for a certain member to elect A if that member finds voting inconvenient or if the person thinks that his or her voting has no utility because it has no effect on the outcome. But this cannot be a valid reason: the universalization of the maxim not to vote because it is an inconvenience or because the impact is close to zero would be self-defeating, since the practice of voting would be undermined.

⁴⁹ Anderson, 37. As examples of such a community, Anderson mentions Rawls's conception of a 'social union of social unions' or the Kantian Kingdom of Ends.

principle reflects the deliberative process in such a community as the principle extends to the point of view of each individual.

Anderson considers the concept of social identity as important for a reformulation of the concept of practical rationality. She argues that the ‘quest for a perspective that can make sense of our experiences and solve our problems leads to more and more expansive, cosmopolitan identifications, in an historical rather than a purely logical process’.⁵⁰ She mentions Hegel’s philosophy as a model of such a way to gain a more general practical outlook and she explicitly separates her ‘dialectical reasoning’ from Korsgaard’s transcendental form of arguing. Anderson admits that she cannot put forward a systematic justification why we should be rationally required to identify with the universal community of humanity. The argument she offers is an appeal to concrete historical experiences: there are so many grave social and environmental problems that result from human actions that there is need for a system of global cooperation based on an identification with humanity. This way, the informational basis of the economic model of rationality is enriched with the concepts of identity, collective agency and reasons for action other than egoistic considerations. The test for valid reasons is ‘universalizability among those with whom one rationally identifies’.⁵¹ Which of these two approaches is more plausible as an extension and unification of Sen’s ideas of rational choice and rationality?

Anderson considers collective action on the basis of group identification as an alternative to PD-situations. However, the appeal to identification has to be seen with caution. Identification with a collective is not necessary to transcend the rational choice paradigm. Anderson moves from the individual to the collective perspective by replacing the principle of maximizing expected utility by the universalization principle. Yet the universalization principle as such does not commit us to an identification with a collective agency. Universalization demands that we consider whether a principle of action can be a principle for all others as well. The Kantian Kingdom of Ends is a society which results if the basic moral principles are adopted by all so that the members respect each other and treat each other not merely as means. But the starting point is the individual decision to adopt the moral principles – a consent that results from insight into the fact that a way of acting is right and not from the identification with a collective and a community. This argument relativizes at least one aspect of Anderson’s claim that we need to adopt a Hegelian instead of a Kantian point of view.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 37, FN 9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵² But this does not require abolishing the perspective of the individual and identifying with a community of all others so that the perspective of the individual is subordinated to the standpoint of the community.

Anderson, following Sen, considers the concept of commitment as part of a form of rational deliberation that is different from the preference-based account. Again, to take commitments seriously does not presuppose the adoption of a collective standpoint and an identification with a social group or community. A commitment is simply, to use Searle's phrase, an external (desire-independent) reason: it amounts to an obligation to act from a principle or a reason that is in conflict with our immediate desires.⁵³ Certainly, how we understand ourselves has an important influence on what we feel committed to. But from the normative perspective, commitments are principles or reasons that have force. And the force or validity of a principle does not depend on the social identity we adopt. Persons often do have reason to act on certain principles, even if their identity is not in conformity with the principle. Though loud behavior seems to be part of the identity of most soccer fans, we would still say that they should respect the principles of politeness if they use the subway to get to a soccer game. Anderson's emphasis on identity raises a question in regard to the systematic force of her position. An account of practical rationality, especially if it should be a basis for justified moral decisions, cannot rest on contingent considerations. Anderson is fully aware that we need a justification beyond contingent factors like concrete historical contexts. This becomes evident when she introduces the notion of practical identity. Unlike 'ascribed social identities of gender, race, caste, ethnicity, nationality' practical identity is an abstract concept of identity that determines which principles of deliberation we choose and consider as adequate.⁵⁴ For Korsgaard 'practical identity' means the abstract moral identity an agent has as a being able to deliberate rationally and to act from reasons. The moral principles are constitutive of the identity of the rational person, they are indispensable for the structure of a person acting from reasons. In Korsgaard's account of rational action, the concept of social identity as such is not specifically important. That we have social identities is simply a fact, but the validity of the principles of morality is established independently of our belonging to various social groups.

The concept of identity as such does not have justificatory power in Korsgaard's approach. Decisive is her version of a transcendental argument. A transcendental argument in the Kantian sense tries to justify x by showing that x is a condition of the possibility of y and therefore necessary, given that y has the status of an objective end. So Korsgaard aims to demonstrate that the categorical imperatives are necessary principles of rationality because they are the conditions of possibility of being a person at all. This is a systematic claim whose

⁵³ Cf. John R. Searle, *Rationality in Action*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ Anderson, 'Unstrapping the Straitjacket of "Preference"', 31.

validity does not depend on social identifications or on the identification with a global community as such.

What is crucial in Korsgaard's account is the claim that the categorical imperatives are constitutive of a rational being. The step from rationality to morality is made by the argument that we need a principle to structure our reasons and that the features of this principle are fulfilled by the categorical imperatives. The systematic point is the functional role the categorical imperatives play as they meet the structural requirements of rational practical deliberation. Practical or moral identity as such is not decisive. Practical identity is just a term to give a name to a being who deliberates in accordance with these principles.

On Anderson's Hegelian account, we need identifications (either with ourselves or with social groups). In the end only a cosmopolitan identity allows us to gain a perspective from which we can come to a solution of the various problems resulting from human actions. So the systematic argument seems to be replaced by a pragmatic one: we need the identification with the 'universal community of humanity' because this standpoint enables us to overcome problems that 'can only be solved within a global system of cooperation'.⁵⁵ Anderson concedes that she has no argument to justify the identification with the universal community of humanity as a rational necessity. But our historical experiences show that the adoption of such a point of view would make us aware of various possibilities of solving collective action problems.

At first sight it looks as if Anderson is offering a too contingent approach. This is supported by the indecision there is in Anderson between the principle of expected utility and the universalization principle. Adopting the universalization principle is more a recommendation than a strict argument. This becomes apparent by the way Anderson uses Sen's work on gender relations as a test case to answer the question which principle of rationality we should accept. The principle of expected utility does not seem outright wrong, since it often would be better for women to see themselves as rational egoists instead of committed wives and mothers. Rational egoism seems the strategy to escape oppressive commitments. Yet, as Anderson argues, the principle of rational egoism is inadequate, because women most of the time are not in a situation that allows them to bargain with others. Their preferences include the well-being of other people; their actions often are the result of commitments. Rational egoism would recommend, for example, that women seek outside employment that would help them to autonomy and independence. But outside employment and the various social contacts it offers would allow women to gain a form of collective identity different from the

⁵⁵ Anderson, 'Unstrapping the Straitjacket of "Preference"', 37.

self-conception the economic model presupposes. The background norms, Anderson points out, must be neither those of egoism nor those of collective identification, because women can be disadvantaged by following the principle of expected utility as well as if they follow the principle of collective action. To grant women justice, a Kantian perspective seems adequate that enables women to have an autonomously defined self-conception so that they can see themselves ‘as a committed member of multiple social groups, among whose claims one must adjudicate in allocating one’s own efforts’.⁵⁶

Compared with Anderson’s pragmatic way of reasoning, Korsgaard’s argument seems philosophically much more stringent.⁵⁷ Yet the way Korsgaard identifies the rules of rationality with the rules of morality is, as I have argued, problematic. In that respect Anderson’s pragmatic justification of different principles of rational action seems more plausible. Anderson’s problem is her ambivalence: She develops a reflective endorsement version of a Kantian justificatory program which entails that the principles of rational choice do not reach all the way to morality; the reflective endorsement procedure has to be guided by additional moral standards and principles to justify choices on moral grounds. But in the end Anderson falls back on the strong Kantian ambitions, namely to identify the rules of rationality with the rules of morality. Anderson does this by claiming that our identity as social actors demands our identification with the collective action principle of a collective agent (the universalization principle), which turns out to be a basic moral principle. This argument is basically the same as Korsgaard’s argument: rationality analytically entails morality. Seen in abstraction from what Anderson says about the identity of rationality and morality, her method is in fact an instantiation of way B which I have outlined above: Agents come to see via deliberation and reasoning the force of moral principles, they understand that they have good reasons to accept them.

6. Concluding Remarks

Why is all this relevant to the discussion of Sen’s notion of practical rationality? I think that in looking at Humean means-end reasoning and Kantian rationality, we do find obvious parallels to the problems Sen discusses. The Kantian position holds that instrumental rationality in the sense of means-end reasoning is part of practical rationality, but it is only a necessary condition of rationality. So one might be tempted to move to a Kantian account of practical

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

rationality if one thinks that instrumental reasoning and maximization are not sufficient for rationality. But, as I have argued, it is sufficient to associate practical rationality (in addition to the means-end principle) with a form of critical reflection that makes use of different normative standards.

Strong Kantianism amounts to an identification of the rules of practical rationality with the principles of morality. That is a step we should not make. Practical rationality should be connected to a pluralism of standards, and morality is one among other criteria that are relevant in a deliberation procedure. The identification of practical rationality with morality is due to the aim of Kantian philosophy to offer a justification of moral rules that cannot be rejected. The idea is that if we identify morality with practical rationality and consider the rules of practical rationality and morality as indispensable for the identity of the person, then the rules of morality are established as inescapable.

Personal identity certainly depends on the rules and standards that we accept. Who we are is also a question of the standards that guide our actions. But this does not support the strong claim that the Kantian principles must be constitutive of our identity. Sen equally emphasizes the connection between identity and the principles of rational choice. He distinguishes between four aspects of the self: 1) self-centered welfare 2) self-welfare goal 3) self goal choice and 4) the self in the form of self-scrutiny and one's own reasoning.⁵⁸ I take it that here a rather innocent sense of identity is at stake: what sort of person we are is connected to the values, goals, commitments and desires we do have. A person who critically reflects on her ends and takes the existence of others into account is a different person from a self-centered maximizer or a dog-like follower of his impulses. And the way the characters of certain persons develop can certainly be a reason to ask for reflection and modification. But this sense of identity does not depend on the assumption that all different forms of social identities must be backed by a identity constituted by principles that are indispensable for rationality and morality. One might object that the identification of practical rationality with means-end rationality and critical reflection and endorsement is too contingent a basis for justification. But I think that coherence between our ends and normative standards is enough. The considerations at stake here are considerations that we can expose and explain to others in a deliberation process where the results are open to modification.

⁵⁷ Anderson's approach is pragmatic since she does not put forward a decisive and final justification of the normative principles guiding rational choice. In the end, as she states, it depends on the context whether the principle of expected utility or the universalization principle should have the normative say.

⁵⁸ Sen, 'Introduction: Rationality and Freedom', 33ff.

Sen is a moderate Kantian when he defines rationality (besides maximizing) as a form of critical scrutiny and assessment – and I think that is fine, and he should not be tempted to adopt a stronger Kantian account.

The question remains: Does Sen's account of rationality as assessment and scrutiny urge us to transcend the paradigm of rational choice or can it be considered as part of the rational choice approach? I cannot give a full answer to this question. At least I can say: If the antagonism between the (broad) principle of instrumental rationality and rationality as critical scrutiny disappears (and it seems worth mentioning that not even Kant believed in that antagonism) then at least one argument that supports the incompatibility of the rational choice paradigm and rationality as critical deliberation is relativized.

Many philosophers claim that instrumental rationality as such is the conception of rationality that underlies rational choice theory. Since maximization is the only standard in rational choice theory, this implies that there is no concern about evaluating or endorsing the ends of action. If, however, we keep separate instrumental rationality in the sense of self-interest rationality and instrumental rationality in the sense of a mere means-end requirement, then we can become aware of the innocence of a formal system like rational choice theory. It all depends on the semantics and the justification of the normative assumptions underlying certain interpretations of this formalism.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For critical comments on an earlier version of this paper I would like to thank Fabienne Peter, Willem deVries, Jay Wallace, and an anonymous referee.