

THESIS

A KANTIAN INTUITIONISM: INTEGRATING KANTIAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY INTO
AN INTUITIONIST FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

A KANTIAN INTUITIONISM: INTEGRATING KANTIAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY INTO AN INTUITIONIST FRAMEWORK

In this thesis, I claim that Rossian intuitionism and Kantian moral philosophy are not only compatible, but complementary. Intuitionism, as I understand it, is the view that it is possible to know some moral truths non-inferentially; these moral truths are accessed without explicit or implicit inference from premises. Rossian intuitionism, a brand of intuitionism inspired by the views of W. D. Ross, is also committed to an irreducible plurality of self-evident moral duties. On the other hand, a core component of Kantian moral philosophy is that all moral duties center around a single moral principle: the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative has various formulations, but I focus on the Formula of Humanity.

Taken at face value, intuitionism and Kantianism seem to be at odds with one another. I will address what I take to be the two primary tensions between these views in Chapter 1. First, one might worry that Kantian monism—the commitment to a single guiding moral principle—and intuitionistic pluralism—the view that there is a plurality of irreducible moral duties—are fundamentally incompatible. Second, there is a potential metaethical incongruity between intuitionistic moral realism and Kantian constructivism. Rossian intuitionism is committed to moral realism, the metaethical view claiming that moral truths are mind-independent and “out there” to be discovered. While intuitionism is traditionally viewed as moral realist, there is debate over whether Kantianism is better understood as realist or constructivist. On a Kantian

constructivist view, moral truths are generated from the standpoint of practical reason and are thus mind-dependent.

In Chapter 2, I aim to resolve these tensions and, building on and clarifying the work of Robert Audi, argue that intuitionism and Kantianism are compatible. I first seek to resolve the apparent metaethical inconsistency between these views by arguing that Kantianism is best understood through a realist lens. I then consider the tension between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism, arguing that we may preserve pluralism and reject monism. I argue that there is an irreducible plurality of moral duties and that the categorical imperative can be used to generate the Rossian duties. The Rossian duties may be *derivable* from the categorical imperative without being *reducible* to it. Further, while the Rossian duties are indeed self-evident and therefore do not *require* additional proof, they may nonetheless be *provable*. After presenting these arguments, I consider objections to my view and clarify my position in my third chapter.

In my view, the individual problems that Kantianism and intuitionism face are resolved when the views are merged. Intuitionism, taken alone, lacks a unifying moral theory as its basis; incorporating Kantianism into an intuitionist framework dissolves this problem by grounding the Rossian duties in the categorical imperative. In contrast, Kantianism can be seen as too abstract and far-removed from moral practice. Partnering with intuitionism alleviates this worry; insofar as intuitionism allows for specific moral truths to present themselves to us almost immediately, we are no longer forced to explain how abstract moral principles are connected to everyday moral decision-making. In merging these two frameworks, my hope is to utilize intuitionism to soften the abstract, distant nature of Kantianism and to utilize the categorical imperative to unify and ground the Rossian duties.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to argue that Russian intuitionism and Kantianism are not only consistent, but complementary. I believe that both intuitionism and Kantianism offer valuable insight into the nature of morality. Intuitionism, the metaethical view which claims that some moral truths can be known non-inferentially, emphasizes the self-evidence of some moral truths, maintaining the commonsense idea that the truth of some moral judgments, such as “harming others is generally morally wrong”, seems immediately clear to us, even without reflection. Additionally, intuitionism accounts for cases of conflicting moral duties—a phenomenon which we seem to undoubtedly experience—by appealing to an irreducible plurality of duties. On the other hand, Kantianism provides a unified principle to ground all moral duties—the categorical imperative—and offers a useful way to test whether a given action is right or wrong. In this way, Kantianism provides us with strong justification for our moral beliefs, an explanation for *why* certain moral duties are binding, and guidance in determining our moral duties.

Building on the work of Robert Audi (2001), I hope to demonstrate how we might combine these views while maintaining their individual strengths. To do this, I must first address two key tensions between Kantianism and intuitionism. The first of these potential conflicts centers on Kantian monism contrasted with intuitionistic pluralism. Insofar as Kantianism is committed to the categorical imperative as the single guiding principle of morality and intuitionism is committed to an irreducible plurality of moral duties, we might worry that these frameworks are fundamentally incompatible. The second potential conflict between these views is the metaethical incongruity between intuitionistic moral realism and Kantian constructivism. Moral realism is the view that moral truths are mind-independent and “out there” to be

discovered, while constructivism is the view that moral truths are mind-dependent and in some way generated from the minds of agents.¹ While intuitionism is traditionally viewed as a moral realist view, there is debate over whether Kantianism is best understood as realist or constructivist. These tensions must be addressed and resolved before we are able to examine how Kantianism and intuitionism fit together.

In arguing that we should preserve pluralism and realism while rejecting monism and constructivism, I aim to resolve these potential inconsistencies. Once the tension between Kantianism and intuitionism is dissolved, we may then recognize the ways in which these two views complement one another and—when taken as a whole—resolve some of the problems that each view faces individually. In arguing that Kantianism and intuitionism are harmonious, my hope is to illustrate a moral framework that accurately reflects the reality of moral experience and simultaneously unifies and grounds our moral duties in a systematic way.

I will now take a moment to briefly outline the general structure of this thesis. In Chapter 1, my goals are to give accounts of both intuitionism and Kantianism and to draw attention to the potential conflicts between these views. In Section 1, I will explain the key features of intuitionism as formulated by both W.D. Ross (1930) and Audi (1997) and offer my own account of intuitionism.

In Section 2, I will touch on some of the core components of Kantian moral philosophy that I will be focusing on in this thesis. Here, I will outline Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative and its formulations—focusing on Onora O'Neill's (1985) interpretation of the

¹ I will provide more in-depth definitions for both of these views later in the thesis.

Formula of Humanity—and explain how the Formula of Humanity generates various moral duties.

In Sections 3 and 4, I describe two potential conflicts between intuitionism and Kantianism, which I intend to resolve in Chapter 2. The first conflict—addressed in Section 3—revolves around the seeming incompatibility between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism. Kantianism is monist insofar as Kant defends the existence of a single moral principle, i.e. the categorical imperative, which grounds morality and to which all particular moral duties are reducible. On the other hand, Rossian intuitionism features an irreducible plurality of moral duties and is therefore a pluralist view.

In Section 4, I will consider the second apparent inconsistency between these views: the possible metaethical conflict between intuitionistic realism and Kantian constructivism. Rossian intuitionism is committed to moral realism, but Kantian moral philosophy is often understood as constructivist. In this section, I sketch the general constructivist position and consider Christine Korsgaard’s account of Kantian constructivism (1996).

In Chapter 2, I turn my focus towards resolving the tension between Kantianism and intuitionism. Section 1 centers on resolving the metaethical conflict between Kantian constructivism and intuitionistic realism. I begin this section by offering motivation for why we might seek to reconcile Kantianism and intuitionism. I then argue that Kantianism is best understood through a realist lens, asserting that moral realism is compatible with both intuitionism and Kantianism and thereby resolving the apparent metaethical conflict between these frameworks.

Section 2 of this chapter focuses on resolving the potential conflict between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism. I begin this section by distinguishing the notions of derivability, reducibility, and self-evidence, arguing that the *derivability* of the Rossian duties from the categorical imperative does not entail that these duties are *reducible* to the categorical imperative. I make this point by sketching three arguments for the irreducibility of the Rossian duties: an argument based on an indefinite disjunction of Rossian duties (Section 2.3.2), an argument based on supervenience (Section 2.3.3), and an argument based on the possibility that Rossian duties and Kantian duties are not entirely coextensive (Section 2.3.4).

In Section 2.4, I flesh out the notion of self-evidence and argue that the self-evidence of the Rossian duties does not suggest that they are not derivable from the categorical imperative. Here, I argue that the Rossian duties—despite being independently justified—can nevertheless be provided with additional support from the categorical imperative.

Towards the end of this section, I clarify that my view attempts to preserve pluralism and reject monism (Section 2.5). I also distinguish my framework from Audi's (2001) and present a criticism of his view (Section 2.6). I conclude this section by sketching the “big picture” of this thesis and illustrating how the various moving parts within my framework can be pieced together (Section 2.7).

In my third and final chapter, I briefly address various potential objections to my view. I end this chapter by emphasizing the ways in which Kantianism and intuitionism reinforce one another. Namely, I aim to demonstrate that intuitionism narrows the gap between Kantianism and everyday moral practice, and that Kantianism provides unity to the Rossian duties.

CHAPTER 1 – INTUITIONISM, KANTIANISM, AND INCOMPATIBILITY

Section 1: Intuitionism

Section 1.1: Basics of Intuitionism

In this chapter, I will begin by clarifying both intuitionism and Kantianism. I will present Ross's and Audi's intuitionism, as well as my own account of intuitionism. I then highlight some key features of Kantian moral philosophy that I will be focusing on throughout this thesis. Specifically, I will spell out the role of the Formula of Humanity in Kantian philosophy. After presenting these views, I will outline the two main potential conflicts between intuitionism and Kantianism: the conflict between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism, and the metaethical conflict between Kantian constructivism and intuitionistic realism. In the following chapter, I aim to resolve these two potential conflicts.

Intuitionism is a metaethical view that claims that it is possible to know some moral truths, such as “lying is morally wrong” or “being beneficent is morally right”, non-inferentially. When we make judgments about such moral truths, we do so without explicit or implicit inference from premises. Moral truths, therefore, are evident in themselves. Intuitionism captures the idea that when we make moral judgments in practice, we do so without reasoning from premises; it seems that we make moral judgments quickly and—oftentimes—reliably, despite the fact that we do not normally stop to reason through the morally salient facts.

Intuitionism is a branch of cognitivism, the view that “[moral] claims, when literally construed, are literally true or false” (Sayre-McCord 1988, 5). In other words, there are moral facts, and these moral facts have truth-values (Brink 1989, 18, 23).

Cognitivism branches into two opposing views: error theory—the view that all moral statements have a false truth-value—and success theory—the view that at least some moral statements are true (Sayre-McCord 1988, 10—11). While error theorists and success theorists both accept cognitivism, they disagree on whether or not there are some moral statements with a true truth value. Intuitionism is a type of success theory.

Additionally, intuitionism is an objectivist metaethical theory, meaning that the truth of moral statements does not depend on any actual or hypothetical agent's beliefs, desires, preferences, or practices. Objectivism emphasizes the mind-independence of moral truths. Moral truths are “out there” in the world, and their truth does not rely on whether anyone believes them. For example, intuitionism defends some moral judgements, such as “harming others is morally wrong”, as objective moral truths. It is worth noting that there is debate over how to understand objectivity in moral realism. Specifically, it is unclear which psychological states must be independent on a realist view (Tropman 2018). I do not intend to resolve the issue of moral objectivity here, so, for the purposes of this thesis, I understand moral objectivity as the view that the truth of moral statements does not depend on any actual or hypothetical agent's beliefs, desires, preferences, or practices.

Intuitionism is thus a branch of moral realism. For the purposes of this thesis, I define moral realism as the metaethical view claiming that (i) moral statements have truth values (cognitivism), (ii) some moral statements are true (success theory), and (iii) the truth of such statements does not depend on any actual or hypothetical agent's beliefs, desires, preferences, or practices (objectivism).²

² My views of objectivism and moral realism are based on Sayre-McCord's (1988) account of moral realism.

My focus in this thesis is to defend the view that Kantianism and intuitionism are complementary, which, in my view, requires accepting moral realism to be true. Since the focus of this thesis is not to defend moral realism, I will assume here that it is true.³ While I do not attempt to offer a comprehensive argument for moral realism here, it is worth noting that the assumption that moral realism is true is not far-fetched; many metaethicists argue that we have good reason to believe that moral realism is true (Brink 1989; Railton 1986; Sayre-McCord 1988). This claim that moral realism is true seems to be in line with common sense moral thought. Brink (1989) argues that the everyday use of moral statements indicates a reason to accept cognitivism:

As many have observed, moral discourse is typically declarative or assertive in form. We say things like 'The government's tax plan is unfair', 'Waldo is just', 'It would be wrong to work for that cause', and 'My obligation to Maurice is greater than my obligation to Malcolm'. This language is putatively fact-stating (because it is declarative in form) and certainly seems to ascribe moral properties to persons, actions, policies, and so forth.

Our moral judgments not only have fact-stating and property-ascribing form; they have cognitivist content as well. Many common moral judgments themselves make reference to moral properties, moral facts, or moral knowledge (cf. Sturgeon 1986a: 125—6). For instance, it is often claimed that one should not be held responsible for actions one could not have known were wrong, that goodness deserves reward, that the turpitude of a crime should determine the severity of punishment, and that good intentions do not always excuse. In making such moral judgments, we (or at least those who make them) certainly seem to presuppose the existence of moral facts and properties and the possibility of moral knowledge. (Brink 1989, 25—26)

Brink's point suggests that there is a good reason to believe that cognitivism is true; if noncognitivism was true, we would be forced to explain why our commonsense use of moral statements is somehow fraudulent or meaningless. In ordinary life, we seem to use moral language to pick out real features of the world, and many of our practices seem to rely on the assumption that morality is real. Further, when we make claims such as “torturing others for fun is wrong”, we seem to be picking out an *objectively* wrong feature rather than merely describing

³ However, I do provide a more in-depth defense of Kantian realism against Kantian constructivism in Section 1.3 of Chapter 2.

a judgment that is entailed from the point of view of an ideal observer. It seems plausible to say that torturing others for fun is wrong not simply because someone believes it to be wrong, but rather because it *actually is* wrong. Thus, for my purposes, I assume that we have reason to maintain moral realism.

Section 1.2: Ross's Intuitionism

Since intuitionism claims that moral beliefs are not the product of inference, it is left to explain how some moral beliefs can be known and how we may consider them reliable. Ross answers this question by arguing that moral truths are self-evident (1930). Ross distinguishes seven general *prima facie* duties, which he believes are self-evident: duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and non-maleficence (1930, 21). A *prima facie* duty, according to Ross, is “the characteristic (quite distinct from that of a duty proper) which an act has, in virtue of being a certain kind (e.g. the keeping of a promise), of being an act which would be a duty proper if it were not at the same time of another kind which is morally significant” (1930, 19). In other words, a *prima facie* duty is an act that we recognize as morally required as long as it is not overridden by another duty. We would recognize a *prima facie* duty as “the right thing to do” in a given situation, unless there is another *prima facie* duty at work. For example, let us imagine a scenario in which the *prima facie* duties of reparation and self-improvement conflict; an undergraduate student, Mabel, wishes to improve herself by cultivating her interest in philosophy, so she applies to graduate school. However, Mabel recently cheated on a final exam, and, despite her guilt, she is aware that confessing this wrong would significantly decrease her chances of being accepted to graduate school. In this scenario, Mabel recognizes both her *prima facie* duty of self-improvement—to develop her interests and pursue further education—and her *prima facie* duty of reparation—to confess her wrongdoing and

accept the consequences. However, Mabel cannot act in accordance with *both* prima facie duties in this case. The prima facie duties are conflicting, meaning that Mabel must choose between them by determining which duty will override the other. I will further clarify the relationship between prima facie duties and final duty shortly, after a brief explanation of Rossian self-evidence.

Ross's exact definition of self-evidence is a bit unclear, but he emphasizes that moral truths are not self-evident in the sense that they are always immediately obvious to us. Rather, moral truths are self-evident in the sense that "when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself" (Ross 1930, 29). Ross compares the self-evidence of moral truths to the self-evidence of mathematical axioms and logical truths. For example, take the following logical argument:

A.
If A, then B.
So, B.

Once we adequately understand this argument, we know that it must be valid. It is self-evident and therefore independently justified; no additional information is required in order to know that the argument is valid. Ross believes that prima facie duties are self-evident in an identical way. The claim "it is prima facie right to be beneficent", for example, has the same self-evidence as the logical conditional given above. Ross believes that this kind of moral claim, like a logical argument, requires no further proof of validity. Once we adequately understand the moral claim "it is prima facie right to be beneficent", we know that it is true and, consequently, that we stand under the prima facie duty of beneficence.

Ross distinguishes between prima facie duties and final duties. When several self-evident prima facie duties conflict with each other, Ross believes that we then must consider our choices until one of our duties reveals itself as our final duty in a given situation. A final duty, or actual duty, is our “all-things-considered” duty; it is the moral obligation that is most relevant or binding in a given situation, considering the context of the situation and the—possibly conflicting—prima facie duties that might be at play. Ross is clear that final duties, unlike prima facie duties, are not self-evident; “our judgments about actual duty in concrete situations have none of the certainty that attaches to our recognition of the general principles of duty” (1930, 30).⁴ Our judgments about our final duty in a given situation can only ever be a carefully considered opinion.

According to Ross, both general moral judgments, such as “lying is prima facie wrong”, and particular moral judgments, such as “Jack was prima facie wrong to steal the bread”, can be self-evident. On his view, we begin the process of “intuitive induction” by apprehending the self-evident prima facie rightness of a particular act. We then move from this, via reflection, to apprehend the self-evident general principle of prima facie duty. Finally, according to Ross, we form the (non-self-evident) belief that a particular act is *actually* right (1930, 33). Thus, the self-evidence of particular moral judgments is essential for Ross insofar as it is the first step in the process of intuitive induction. We could not apprehend the self-evidence of our general moral duties or select a final duty without first apprehending the self-evident prima facie rightness of particular acts.

⁴ For Ross, certainty is an essential part of self-evidence, although some intuitionists do not share this view.

Section 1.3: Audi's Intuitionism

Unlike Ross, Audi does not allow for the possibility that particular moral judgments can be self-evident. Audi defines a self-evident proposition as:

a truth such that understanding it will meet two conditions: that understanding is (a) sufficient for one's being justified in believing it (i.e., for having justification for believing it, whether one in fact believes it or not)—this is why such a truth is evident in itself—and (b) sufficient for knowing the proposition provided one believes it on the basis of understanding it. (Audi 1997, 114)

In other words, a proposition is self-evident when (i) merely understanding the proposition—the proposition *alone*—provides one with justification for believing it, and when (ii) understanding *and* believing (on the basis of one's understanding) the proposition provides one with knowledge of the proposition. While this definition does allow general moral judgments, such as “lying is *prima facie* wrong” to be self-evident, it does not allow *particular* moral judgments, such as “the way that Jack acted (when he lied) was *prima facie* wrong”, to be self-evident. These kind of particular moral judgments fail to meet Audi's first requirement for self-evident propositions; truly knowing the proposition “the way that Jack acted (when he lied) was *prima facie* wrong” requires more than a mere conceptual understanding of the words in the proposition, so a mere understanding of the proposition *alone* does not provide justification for believing the proposition. When we examine particular judgments such as “the way Jack acted (when he lied) was *prima facie* wrong”, a conceptual understanding of what the words in the judgment mean is not enough to know that the judgment is true. Knowing whether or not Jack's action was *prima facie* wrong depends on additional knowledge about the way he acted. Audi's view therefore rules out the possibility of self-evident particular moral truths.

Audi's intuitionism and his account of self-evidence thus clashes with traditional Rossian intuitionism. Specifically, Ross's process of intuitive induction is impossible under Audi's view. The process of intuitive induction begins with the apprehension of the self-evident *prima facie*

rightness of a particular act, moves to the apprehension of a self-evident prima facie moral principle of duty, and concludes with the belief that a particular act is finally right. If particular moral judgments cannot be self-evident, then the apprehension of the rightness of particular acts cannot possibly be the first step in this process. Audi's conception of self-evidence therefore undermines Ross's intuitive induction. Additionally, some intuitionists might argue that to deny the self-evidence of particular moral judgments is to remove a key feature of intuitionism: the idea that "intuitions" are consistent with the immediate way in which we make moral judgments about particular instances in real life.

Section 1.4: My Account of Intuitionism

Audi's conception of self-evidence might seem problematic to Rossian intuitionists, but I do not believe that it is necessary for intuitionism to allow particular moral judgments to be self-evident. Audi's definition of self-evidence *does* allow for the self-evidence of general moral principles, and I believe that this is enough to provide moral knowledge about particular instances. When we recognize that Mary telling a lie is prima facie morally wrong, I believe that this involves recognition of the self-evident general principle that lying is prima facie wrong, followed by the inference that Mary's action was prima facie wrong because it involved lying.

Although particular moral judgments might be inferential, I believe that the inference involved is usually almost immediate, which accounts for the intuitionists' feeling that moral judgments about particular instances often come to us immediately. The almost immediate recognition of rightness or wrongness in particular instances is a natural consequence of applying familiar moral principles to specific cases throughout the courses of our lives. We recognize self-evident general prima facie moral principles, such as "lying is prima facie wrong", and, over time, we become familiar with the inferential process of applying this principle to cases which

involve lying. It seems natural that, eventually, we would become capable of quickly recognizing cases that involve moral principles. Furthermore, it seems that when we encounter unfamiliar confusing/complex moral situations, we might take longer to pronounce such cases *prima facie* right or wrong, since we might not immediately know which general moral principles are involved and how they play out in the given situation. This is consistent with the idea that we recognize self-evident general moral principles and use them to infer when a particular act is right or wrong.

Following this view, it seems that final duties in particular situations are also inferential. We first recognize a self-evident general *prima facie* duty and infer a particular *prima facie* duty from this general principle. If there is no conflicting duty present, then this inferential particular *prima facie* duty is our final duty. In cases of conflicting duty, we must weigh our opposing particular duties in order to select a final duty. This final duty will be related to a particular situation and is therefore inferential.

To summarize my view, I take intuitionism to be a type of moral realism, meaning that it is a branch of cognitivism, success theory, and objectivism. Specifically, intuitionism is the view that some moral truths can be known non-inferentially. In my view, general *prima facie* moral principles can be known non-inferentially and self-evidently, while particular moral judgments and judgments regarding final duty cannot. Following Audi, I argue that only general *prima facie* moral judgments are self-evident. Nonetheless, knowledge of particular *prima facie* moral judgments is possible through the inferential process of applying general moral principles to specific instances. While this inference from general to particular moral judgments is not immediate, it can often happen extremely quickly; in my view, our familiarity with applying

general moral principles to relevant experiences over the courses of our lives allows us to make these inferences almost immediately.

For the purposes of this thesis, by ‘intuitionism’, I am referring specifically to the account of Rossian intuitionism that I have developed in this section, which is committed to Rossian pluralism. I also define intuitionism as a type of moral realism, along with Ross. According to Ross, moral truths exist independently of any agent’s beliefs, attitudes, or psychological states. Moral realism—as well as my account of intuitionism—thus directly opposes mind-dependent metaethical views, such as constructivism.⁵ Sharon Street defines the core constructivist view as follows:

Normative truth consists in what is entailed from within the practical point of view. The subject matter of ethics is the subject matter of what follows from within the standpoint of creatures who are already taking this, that, or the other thing to be valuable. In response to the question 'What is value?' constructivism answers that value is a 'construction' of the attitude of valuing. What is it, in other words, for something to be valuable? It is for that thing's value to be entailed from within the point of view of a creature who is already valuing things. (Street 2010, 367)

In Street’s view, a standpoint—the practical point of view—refers to one’s attitude of valuing, which centers on what is involved with valuing anything at all. Depending on the branch of constructivism, the standpoint of valuing may or may not give rise to *moral* truths. According to Kantian constructivism, the valuing attitude—practical reason—*does* generate substantive moral values. On the other hand, Street’s constructivism—a version of Humean constructivism—argues that substantive moral values are generated from an agent’s evaluative standpoint *in combination* with their given set of particular evaluative starting points. Like all constructivist views, Kantian and Humean constructivists both claim that moral truths are dependent on the minds of agents.

⁵ I will provide a deeper analysis of constructivism in Section 4.2 of this chapter. I raise the core constructivist view here in order to clarify that my account of Rossian intuitionism is committed to realism and thus opposes constructivism.

Intuitionism, on the other hand, involves picking out objective moral truths. These moral truths are “out there” to be discovered in the world, not constructed by the human mind. For example, self-evident general moral principles, such as “lying is *prima facie* wrong”, are objective, mind-independent moral truths. On the intuitionist perspective, the claim “lying is *prima facie* morally wrong” would still be true even if nobody recognized or believed it. Additionally, moral realism does not require that moral truths always be epistemically available to us. Rossian intuitionism states that *prima facie* moral truths are self-evident and certain, but final duties are not. However, this does not suggest that Ross is not a realist when it comes to final duty. It is possible for there to be an objective moral truth that determines our final duty in a given case, despite the fact that this truth is uncertain and epistemically unavailable to us.

For my purposes, I will take Ross’s seven *prima facie* duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and non-maleficence to be the primary moral duties. As general principles, these *prima facie* duties are self-evident and non-inferential, unlike particular *prima facie* moral truths and final duties. Additionally, I believe that the *prima facie* rightness of a principle is self-evident when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and given sufficient attention to the proposition.⁶

To note, some scholars (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006; Väyrynen 2008) raise concerns about intuitionism and, specifically, its reliability and appeal to self-evidence. While I recognize these potential vulnerabilities, the scope of my project is not to provide a comprehensive defense of intuitionism but rather to investigate and clarify its relation to Kantianism.

⁶ Ross claims, “that an act [...] is *prima facie* right is self-evident; not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself” (1930, 29).

Section 1.5: Pluralism

A key feature of Rossian intuitionism is its pluralism. According to Ross, our seven *prima facie* moral duties are irreducible to one another (Ross 1930, 24). The duties which we stand under are not derived from a single uniting moral principle, such as Kant's categorical imperative or the consequentialist principle to maximize pleasure and minimize harm. Ross writes,

There is no reason to anticipate that every act that is our duty is so for one and the same reason. Why should two sets of circumstances, or one set of circumstances, *not* possess different characteristics, any one of which makes a certain act our *prima facie* duty? When I ask what it is that makes me in certain cases sure that I have a *prima facie* duty to do so and so, I find that it lies in the fact that I have made a promise; when I ask the same question in another case, I find the answer lies in the fact that I have done a wrong. And if on reflection I find (as I think I do) that neither of these reasons is reducible to the other, I must not on any *a priori* ground assume that such a reduction is possible. (Ross 1930, 24)

In other words, intuitionism involves a plurality of moral duties. This pluralism emphasizes Ross's argument that final duties do not possess any of the certainty of *prima facie* duties; since selecting a final duty involves weighing which *prima facie* duty is the most binding in a given context, and *prima facie* duties are irreducible, it follows that, in cases of conflicting *prima facie* duties, judgments about final duties will not be certain.⁷

Pluralism seems to best reflect the complexity of moral life and the difficulty of selecting between conflicting duties. In such cases, we often feel as though two conflicting duties are *both* the right path. This seems better explained by the idea that both choices represent irreducible moral duties than by the idea that there is only one right answer, as is the case with views that take all duties to be reducible to a single moral principle. If we took this kind of ethical monist view, we might worry that the answers to morally complex questions would become rigid and unforgiving.

⁷ It is important to note that other intuitionists, such as Audi, do not hold that certainty is required for self-evidence.

On the other hand, intuitionism allows an action to be both *prima facie* right and *prima facie* wrong, in cases of conflicting duty. For example, if Jason steals food for his starving family, we might recognize the *prima facie* wrongness of stealing, as well as the *prima facie* rightness of helping one's family. We recognize the moral complexity of his choice and acknowledge that there might be no certain right answer. This lack of certainty surrounding final duties explains another aspect of moral life: the fact that we tend to be more forgiving of those who have committed wrongs for the sake of adhering to a different, conflicting duty than we are of those who have committed wrongs for no "good reason". For example, we might condemn a thief who steals for fun far more than a thief who steals in order to help his family. This demonstrates that our moral thinking is suited to pluralism.

Furthermore, Ross emphasizes that when we choose one duty over another as our final duty, we still feel guilt and the desire to make amends for breaking the duty that we did not choose, despite the feeling that we have done the (finally) right thing in breaking this duty. Ross explains,

When we think ourselves justified in breaking, and indeed morally obliged to break, a promise in order to relieve someone's distress, we do not for a moment cease to recognize a *prima facie* duty to keep our promise, and this leads us to feel, not indeed shame or repentance, but certainly compunction, for behaving as we do; we recognize, further, that it is our duty to make up somehow to the promise for the breaking of the promise. (Ross 1930, 28)

The fact that we still feel the need to make amends for a broken promise, despite feeling that we have chosen the finally right action, shows how pluralism is at work in common moral thought. Even if we break a promise for a good reason, we still acknowledge that promise-breaking is wrong and thus feel the need to make amends for our behavior. It seems clear from these points that pluralism best suits the way we experience morality. Initially, it would seem that pluralist philosophies, like intuitionism, would be fundamentally incompatible with monistic traditions, such as Kantianism, but I will argue that intuitionism and Kantianism are complementary in the

following chapter. To do this, I must first give an account of the core features of Kantianism and contrast Kantian monism with intuitionistic pluralism.

Section 2: Kantianism

Section 2.1: The Categorical Imperative and Its Formulations

The Kantian view that I will examine throughout this thesis involves the features of Kant's ethics that I take to be central to a Kantian moral framework. I do not attempt to offer a complete interpretation of Kant's philosophy, but rather an account of some of the distinctive features of a Kantian moral system.

A key feature of Kantian ethics is the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is the moral principle that, in Kant's view, all moral duties fall under. I will briefly explain each of the various formulations of the categorical imperative, focusing on the Formula of Humanity. I will then review the four examples of duty that Kant derives from the categorical imperative.

The categorical imperative is central to Kantian ethics. Kant introduces the categorical imperative as follows:

Finally there is one imperative that, without being based upon and having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by certain conduct, commands this conduct immediately. This imperative is categorical. It has to do not with the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but with the form and the principle from which the action itself follows; and the essentially good in the action consists in the disposition, let the result be what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality. (Kant 1996, 4:416)

The categorical imperative works as a unifying principle that all moral duties will fall under.

There are three main formulations of the categorical imperative: the Formula of Universal Law, the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends, and the Formula of Humanity. I will now briefly explain each of these formulations.

The Formula of Universal Law states, "act only in accordance with that maxim which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant 1996, 4:421). Understanding

this formula requires that we understand what a “maxim” is for Kant. Essentially, a maxim, according to Kant, is the subjective guiding principle from which a person acts. I will draw on O’Neill’s reading of the universalization test to understand Kantian maxims, which she defines as “those underlying principles or intentions by which we guide and control our more specific intentions” (1998, 508). O’Neill stresses that maxims are not simply one of the many principles that an agent acts on, but rather the *fundamental* guiding principle. O’Neill’s reading of Kantian maxims therefore avoids the issue that it might be possible to find at least one morally acceptable principle within *any* action, even those which intuitively seem deeply immoral:

Notoriously some Nazi war criminals claimed that they were only 'doing their job' or only 'obeying orders'—which are after all not apparently morally unworthy activities. The disingenuousness of the claim that such acts were not morally unworthy lies in the fact that these Nazis were not only obeying orders, and indeed that in many cases their specific intentions were ancillary to more fundamental intentions or principles that might indeed have revealed moral unworthiness in the agent. (Such fundamental intentions or principles might range from 'I'll do whatever I'm told to so long as it doesn't endanger me' to a fundamental maxim of genocide.) (O’Neill 1998, 510—511)

Additionally, O’Neill is clear that the categorical imperative does not include reference to desires. The universalization test, in her view, is designed to test the consistency of actions committed by autonomous agents, whose actions are not determined by their desires or inclinations. Maxims are thus not ‘subjective’ in the sense that they rely on desires, but rather in the sense that they are fundamental principles of action for particular individuals.

The Formula of Universal Law instructs us to act only in ways in which we could will that our guiding principle of action became universal law. According to O’Neill, the universalization test has two components: maxims must be both internally consistent for a given agent—without universalization—and consistent when universalized. An action is moral if and only if one’s maxim for action is conceptually consistent and volitionally consistent at both of these levels. A universalized maxim is conceptually inconsistent when the maxim cannot be adopted without contradiction; the maxim is self-defeating when universalized. A universalized

maxim is volitionally inconsistent when it contains a contradiction in will, meaning that the universalized maxim is inconsistent with the specific intentions that would be necessary to realize the maxim (O'Neill 1998, 523). O'Neill explains why willing a given action necessarily involves willing the means to achieve said action:

Willing requires also the adoption of more specific intentions that are guided by, and chosen (in the light of the agent's beliefs) to realize, the underlying intention, or, if that is impossible, as appropriate moves toward a situation in which such specific intentions might be adopted. Whoever wills a maxim also adopts more specific intentions as means to or constituents of realizing that underlying intention, and is also committed to the foreseeable results of acting on these more specific intentions. (O'Neill 1998, 523)

In summary, morally acceptable maxims must be both conceptually and volitionally consistent at both the internal level and the universal level.

Another formulation of the categorical imperative, the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends, states, “act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends” (Kant 1996, 4:439). A kingdom of ends, in Kant’s view, is “a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws” (1996, 4:433). Since all rational beings stand under the moral law and must treat each other as ends in themselves,⁸ a kingdom of ends arises as a systematic union of rational beings—ends in themselves—who have equal statuses as legislators of the universal law, which binds all rational beings. Essentially, this formulation of the categorical imperative commands us to act only according to maxims that would be accepted by the fully rational members of a kingdom of ends.

I recognize that my treatment of these formulations of the categorical imperative is quite brief and that there is a great deal more to say here, but, for the purposes of this project, I set aside these two formulations in order to devote my attention more carefully to the Formula of Humanity.

⁸ I will further explain the meaning of “ends in themselves” in my discussion of the Formula of Humanity.

Section 2.2: The Formula of Humanity

Throughout this thesis, I will focus largely on the Formula of Humanity. The Formula of Humanity states, “so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant 1996, 4:429).

This formula can be read in various ways. In particular, the meaning of the phrase “mere means” is controversial. I will be focusing on O’Neill’s (1985) reading of the Formula of Humanity. O’Neill draws our attention to the two components of the Formula of Humanity: the negative command to never treat others as mere means and the positive command to treat others as ends. I will briefly explain how each of these components function in O’Neill’s reading. To use another person as a mere means, in her view, involves acting on a maxim which the other person could not possibly consent to. O’Neill distinguishes between actual consent, hypothetical consent, and possible consent, arguing that possible consent is the view of consent that we should adopt to understand the negative component of the Formula of Humanity.

Actual consent, according to O’Neill, is consent that is literally given—either implicitly or explicitly. This includes formal procedures to give consent, such as signing a contract. Actual consent raises various complications; in particular, it is difficult in these cases to understand the “boundaries” of consent. When we consent to a certain action, it is unclear exactly which further implications of the initial action we are also consenting to. Even when people give actual consent, they might not understand what they are consenting to. O’Neill remarks:

When we consent to another's proposals we consent, even when "fully" informed, only to some specific formulation of what the other has it in mind to do. We may remain ignorant of further, perhaps equally pertinent, accounts of what is proposed, including some to which we would not consent. ("I didn't know I was letting myself in for that!" we may protest). (O’Neill 1985, 256)

The second type of consent that O'Neill considers is hypothetical consent, which refers to consent that fully rational agents would give to the proposal. O'Neill points out a clear problem with hypothetical consent:

If treating others as persons requires only hypothetical rational consent, we may, as Berlin long ago pointed out, find ourselves overriding the actual dissent of others, coercing them in the name of higher and more rational selves who would consent to what is proposed. It seems implausible that treating others as persons should even sometimes be a matter of overriding what others as we know them actually choose. (O'Neill 1985, 257)

In other words, treating others as ideally rational beings—rather than as the people that they actually are—might involve dismissing their actual dissent as “irrational” and coercing them into consenting to “rationally superior” proposals to which they do not genuinely wish to consent. There seems to be a problem with ignoring the clear dissent of others, even if we believe their dissent to be irrational.

Finally, O'Neill turns to the notion of possible consent, arguing that this is the most plausible way to understand consent within the context of the Formula of Humanity. O'Neill writes, “it is important that consent be possible for others, but of less concern whether what they consent to is what they want” (1985, 261).

This notion of possible consent is how O'Neill understands the Formula of Humanity's command to “never use people as mere means”. To use another person as a mere means is to act on a maxim that they could not *possibly* consent to. Someone who is used as a mere means is denied the choice between consent and dissent.

O'Neill then considers how we should understand the positive component of the Formula of Humanity—the command to treat other people as ends in themselves. Treating people as ends in themselves requires sharing the ends of others. According to O'Neill, sharing others' ends involves both respect and love (beneficence).

Respecting others as others as ends in themselves limits our actions in certain ways. We must respect other people and their ends by keeping a healthy “distance” from them (Kant 1996, 6:449). Regarding policies of respect, O’Neill writes, “they must avoid merely taking over or achieving the aims of [other persons’] maxims and projects, and allow others the ‘space’ in which to pursue them for themselves” (1985, 265). We must respect others by ensuring that their ends remain their own and that we do not take over their ends entirely.

On the other hand, treating others as ends in themselves also involves the principle of mutual love, which “admonishes men constantly to come nearer to one another” (Kant 1996, 6:449). Loving others involves recognizing the unique ends of particular people and assisting them in achieving these ends. O’Neill connects this requirement to support others’ ends to the notion of beneficence:

Love requires us to adopt maxims of "active practical benevolence (beneficence) which consists in making another's happiness my own" (ibid., p. 45). To do this is to make the other's ends, whose achievement would constitute his or her happiness, in part my own. (O’Neill 1985, 265)

It is important to note that, in Kant’s view, all humans are ends in themselves insofar as they are rational beings. Kant is clear here that we must regard both ourselves *and* other rational beings as ends in themselves:

The human being and in general every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end. (Kant 1996, 4:428)

Importantly, we should note that, on O’Neill’s view, the command to love others and further their ends depends on the nature of the relationship at hand. In other words, we are not instructed to actively love *literally* everyone. O’Neill clarifies:

Nor can we lead lives in which we at all times help all others achieve all their ends. Justice and respect vary with circumstances, and beneficence is in addition unavoidably selective. Nevertheless there are occasions when action of a specific sort is required: there are contexts and relationships to others in which to do nothing would be sufficient evidence that the underlying maxim or principle is unjust or lacking in respect or nonbeneficent. Although love and beneficence are unavoidably selective, this does not mean that when

we act on these maxims we can neglect all the central projects of lives with which ours are closely involved. (1985, 266)

Our duty to treat others as ends in themselves by acting on maxims of love applies predominantly to the relationships that are most central to us. O'Neill is clear, for instance, that intimate relationships provide greater opportunity to treat others as ends in themselves; "it is in intimate relationships that we are most able to treat others as persons—and most able to fail to do so" (1985, 270). We can therefore acknowledge the command to act on maxims of love without fearing that we must constantly further the ends of all people at all times.

In summary, O'Neill's reading of the Formula of Humanity interprets the positive and negative components of the formula through the lens of possible consent, respect, and love. We must only treat others in ways that they can possibly consent to, which ensures that we do not treat people as mere means. In addition, we must also treat others as ends in themselves, which calls for both *respecting* the ends of others—without taking them over—and acting on maxims of *love* to further their ends and make their happiness our own.

The Formula of Humanity does not suggest that we can never "use" other people to help us achieve our own ends; rather, we cannot use people *merely* as means, in ways that fail to recognize and treat them as ends in themselves. We might "use" others as a means to help us reach our own ends, but we cannot use them as *mere* means, by acting on maxims that they could not possibly consent to.

Importantly, Kant argues that all formulations of the categorical imperative are equivalent and that they are united insofar as they represent the same moral law. He claims, "the above three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and any one of them of itself unites the other two in it" (1996, 4:436). There is

debate over how exactly to interpret this claim, but it seems clear that, at the very least, all formulations of the categorical imperative are supposed to generate the same moral duties. As I have previously stated, I will focus on the Formula of Humanity throughout this paper, but let us assume for the sake of argument that any claims regarding the Formula of Humanity will be consistent with both the Formula of Universal Law and the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends.

The formulations of the categorical imperative are typically viewed as somewhat abstract, purely rational principles which we can apply universally to all people in all situations. Kantian moral philosophy seems not to consider the specific intricacies of particular situations when it comes to applying moral principles. However, some Kantian philosophers, such as O'Neill, argue that an application of Kantian principles must consider particularities of people in specific contexts, rather than considering people as abstract, ideally rational beings:

We need to understand what would be right or wrong in actual, determinate situations. Kantian maxims do not entail rules or prescriptions for all possible contexts. Since a maxim is the *maxima propositio* or major premise of a piece of practical reasoning, it is not there that we should look for details about determinate situations. But when a maxim is supplemented by an account of a particular situation—the minor premise of practical reasoning—we may discover which sorts of outward performance are required, compatible, or proscribed in that situation. We may, for example, find that in *these* circumstances there is no way in which *that* sort of action could be compatible with justice; or on the other hand, that in *this* situation we must, if fundamentally committed to a maxim of love or respect, include something of *that* sort. The conclusions of such reasoning will not be unrestricted; they will hold good not for rational beings as such, nor even for the human condition, but for quite specific human conditions. (O'Neill 1985, 267—268)

In O'Neill's view, the Formula of Humanity is applied to *specific* situations. The Formula of Humanity not only forbids us from using other people as mere means, but also instructs that we share the ends of others. This does not mean that we should treat others as ideally rational agents who share all the same ends (an interpretation that O'Neill considers); rather, we should share the ends of *particular* people in *particular* contexts. According to O'Neill, "all claims about what is obligatory, permissible, and forbidden hold only for determinate contexts" (1985, 268).

Section 2.3: Generating Duty from the Formula of Humanity

The categorical imperative generates all moral duties that we stand under as rational beings. Kant provides four examples of duties that we can derive from the categorical imperative: the duty of self-preservation, the duty of honesty, the duty to cultivate one's talents, and the duty of beneficence (1996, 4:429—430). It is complicated to understand how the duty of self-preservation can be derived from O'Neill's consent reading of the Formula of Humanity, so I will focus on the other three examples of duty that Kant offers. I will now briefly explain these three examples and how they stem from the Formula of Humanity.

The second example of duty that Kant examines is the duty of honesty. This example involves a person who borrows money from another and promises to repay their debt, while having no intention of doing so. If we consider whether making such false promises can be permissible under the moral law, we can immediately see that making false promises involves using another person as a mere means. Kant claims that the person who is lied to in this instance “cannot possibly agree to my way of behaving toward him” (1996, 4:430) and therefore could not possibly contain in themselves the end of this action. O'Neill remarks, “the failure is dual: the victim of deceit cannot agree to the initiator's maxim, so is used, and a fortiori cannot share the initiator's end, so is not treated as a person” (1985, 262). The Formula of Humanity thus generates the duty of honesty.

The next example of duty that Kant addresses involves a person who discovers a talent within themselves that they *could* work to cultivate, but rather than improving their talent, they choose to remain in their comfortable circumstances. Kant emphasizes that to neglect our talents—rather than to cultivate them—is consistent with the *preservation* of our humanity as an end in itself, but not with the *furtherance* of our humanity as an end in itself (1996, 4:430). We

would fail, in this case, to help *ourselves* further our own ends; we are failing to act with love as our maxim. Therefore, we have a moral duty under the Formula of Humanity to cultivate our talents.

The final example that Kant addresses is a person who sees the hardships of others but does not contribute anything to assist them or improve their welfare. While this may fulfill the negative component of the Formula of Humanity—to not use others as mere means—it fails the positive requirement to further the ends of others and to have love as our maxim of action. Kant argues that we have a duty to recognize the autonomy of others by supporting their ends and projects. This is how the duty of beneficence is generated from the Formula of Humanity.

Section 3: Conflict Between Kantian Monism and Intuitionistic Pluralism

I will now present the apparent conflict between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism. Monism and pluralism clearly cannot coexist within a single framework, so this tension must be addressed in order to argue that Kantianism and intuitionism are compatible. In this section, I will outline this apparent inconsistency between monism and pluralism. The following section lays out a second conflict between these positions: the metaethical incongruity between intuitionistic realism and Kantian constructivism. I seek to resolve these two primary tensions between Kantianism and intuitionism in the following chapter.

Kant believes that these examples of duty—and all other duties—are derived from one and the same moral principle. Consequently, it is impossible, on Kant's view, that moral duties could come into conflict with one another:

A conflict of duties (*collisio officiourum s. obligationum*) would be a relation between them in which one of them would cancel the other (wholly or in part). But since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain actions and two rules opposed to each other cannot be necessary at the same time, if it is a duty to act in accordance with one rule, to act in accordance with the opposite rule is not a duty but even contrary to duty; so a collision of duties and obligations is inconceivable (*obligationes non colliduntur*). (Kant 1996, 6:224)

In other words, Kant views the notion of conflicting duties as impossible because all duties fall under a single supreme principle of morality. Since all duties are derived from the categorical imperative, it is impossible for them to conflict with each other. This monism is central to Kantian moral philosophy, but it raises questions about how we might practically apply the categorical imperative to apparent cases of conflicting duties in the real world.

Kantian monism seems clearly at odds with intuitionistic pluralism; intuitionistic pluralism involves many irreducible moral duties, while Kantianism centers on a single “supreme principle” of morality from which all moral duties can be derived. The seven Rossian *prima facie* duties—fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and non-maleficence—have no single uniting principle from which they are derived. Rather, Ross generates each of these duties by arguing for their self-evidence, and he acknowledges that his division of duties might be incomplete (1930, 20). It may be possible that there are other *prima facie* duties that Ross does not acknowledge, but these duties will also be realized by recognizing their self-evidence. Kantian duties, on the other hand, are all derived from the categorical imperative. Like Ross’s seven *prima facie* duties, Kant’s four examples of duty—self-preservation, honesty, the cultivation of one’s talents, and beneficence—do not represent a complete enumeration of duties. Nonetheless, all Kantian duties are generated by the categorical imperative directly.

Since there is no single principle that unites our *prima facie* duties under intuitionism, these duties are irreducible. They are not derived from or dependent on a single principle; rather, they are independently true. For this reason, it is possible that our duties will sometimes come into conflict with one another. For example, if Olivia promises to meet her friend, Rose, at noon, but notices someone severely injured and in need of immediate help on her way to Rose’s house,

then she might judge her duty of beneficence—to help the injured person—as more binding than her duty of fidelity—to keep her promise to meet Rose at noon.

In contrast, Kant denies the possibility of conflicting duties, since all duties are derived from one and the same supreme principle (1996, 6:224). In the above case, it seems impossible, in a Kantian moral framework, that we stand under both the duty to keep our promise and the duty to help the person in need. In such a case, one of our apparent “duties” is truly required, while the other must, in reality, be contrary to duty. This inability to resolve cases of seemingly conflicting duties seems like an unfortunate consequence of Kantianism.

These aspects of Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism have further implications surrounding the notion of “final duty”. Ross distinguishes between *prima facie* duties and final duties, arguing that final duties do not possess the epistemological certainty of *prima facie* duties (1930, 30). Since intuitionism allows for cases of conflicting *prima facie* duty, we are left with the question of what to *actually do* in such cases. According to Ross, there is no certain “right answer” regarding how to proceed in these cases. There can be no epistemological certainty regarding final duty, although it might be the case that there is, metaphysically, an objective truth of the matter. In the previously mentioned case of conflicting duty, it is both *prima facie* right for Olivia to keep her promise to Rose *and* *prima facie* right for Olivia to help the injured person. No matter which duty Olivia chooses to prioritize, we cannot say with certainty that her choice was right or wrong; her final duty is uncertain.

Kant, on the other hand, does not distinguish between *prima facie* duties and final duties. Rather, when we are faced with apparently conflicting duties, we simply misunderstand the situation. According to Kant, there is a metaphysically certain “final duty” in such cases. Furthermore, it seems possible, at least in some cases, that this final duty could be

epistemologically certain. Unlike *prima facie* duties in intuitionism, apparently conflicting Kantian duties do not possess certainty simply in virtue of being apparent duties. Selecting a “final duty”, according to Kant, requires discerning which option is our *true* duty, derived from the categorical imperative, and which option is illusory and contrary to duty. Thus, Kantian duty can never be metaphysically uncertain, although it could be epistemologically uncertain.

Section 4: Metaethical Conflict

Section 4.1: Intuitionistic Realism

In addition to the apparent conflict between intuitionistic pluralism and Kantian monism, there is a potential metaethical conflict which must be addressed. As I have previously stated, I understand intuitionism as a moral realist view, as does Ross. Moral realism, as I define it, is the metaethical view claiming that (i) moral statements have truth values, (ii) some moral statements are true, and (iii) the truth of such statements does not depend on any actual or hypothetical agent’s beliefs, desires, preferences, or practices. The core of moral realism is that moral truths are mind-independent; they are objectively “out there” in the world. Moral truths, according to realism, would still be true even if nobody believed them. Additionally, it is possible, on realist views, for a moral claim to be false even if everyone believed it to be true.

On the other hand, there is debate over whether Kantianism should be classified as a moral realist view or a constructivist view. I will argue in the following chapter that Kantianism is best understood as a kind of moral realism, but I will first address how Kantianism can be interpreted through a constructivist lens.

Section 4.2: Kantian Constructivism

Street’s metaethical constructivism states that “the truth of a normative claim consists in that claim’s being entailed from within the practical point of view, where the practical point of

view is given a formal characterization” (2010, 369). A thing is entailed from the practical point of view when it follows logically from the evaluative standpoint of an agent. In Street’s view, moral values are entailed from one’s evaluative attitude in combination with their particular set of values. A moral claim is true if it is consistent with both the agent’s other values and the relevant non-normative facts.

On a Kantian constructivist view, such as Christine Korsgaard’s (1996), the practical point of view is practical reason, which has a formal characterization insofar as it does not presuppose any values, and the moral law is entailed from the point of view of practical reason. Furthermore, the moral law is entailed from the standpoint of *any* rational being, no matter their evaluative attitudes. Street raises the possibility of “someone who values above all else, and in a way that is utterly consistent with his own other values plus the non-normative facts, torturing others for fun” (2010, 371). In such a case, torturing others for fun would be morally right insofar as it is entailed from the torturer’s evaluative standpoint.

Korsgaard and other Kantian constructivists would argue that such a person is nevertheless acting incoherently. It is impossible, on Kantian constructivist views, for an agent to coherently act against the moral law. Korsgaard’s Kantian constructivist theory of reflective endorsement illustrates how moral duties are generated from the standpoint of practical reason. Reflective endorsement is the process of examining our impulses and judging whether these impulses might provide us with normative reasons to act. Korsgaard explains how reflective endorsement is tied to the Kantian process of universalizing maxims to generate duty:

According to Kant, as each impulse to action presents itself to us, we should subject it to the test of reflection, to see whether it really is a reason to act. Since a reason is supposed to be intrinsically normative, we test a motive to see whether it is a reason by determining whether we should allow it to be a law to us. And we do that by asking whether the maxim of acting on it can be willed as a law. (Korsgaard 1996, 89)

In other words, when we have the motive to do a certain act, we must assess whether this motive is a good reason to act, i.e. whether it follows coherently from our standpoint—practical reason. We determine whether our motives are good reasons to act by subjecting our maxim of action to the universalization test. If we can consistently, given our standpoint of practical reason, will this maxim of action as a universal law, then our motive to act is a good reason to act.

In this way, reflective endorsement generates the rightness or wrongness of certain maxims. Korsgaard points out that our ability to reflect separates us from our impulses, compels us to act for reasons, and allows us to identify ourselves as the sources of these reasons (1996, 113). Our legislative wills create universalizable maxims. “In that sense, values are created by human beings. Of course we discover that the maxim is fit to be a law; but the maxim isn't a law until we will it, and in that sense create the resulting value” (Korsgaard 1996, 112). Korsgaard stresses that Kantian reflective endorsement not only justifies morality but *is* morality itself (1996, 89); on Korsgaard’s Kantian constructivist view, morality itself is dependent and constructed from the procedure of reflective scrutiny.

Kantian constructivism is unique from realism insofar as constructivism is mind-dependent, and realism is mind-independent. While torturing others for fun is wrong for all rational beings on both views, realism and constructivism explain the wrongness in very different ways. On a realist view, torturing others for fun is wrong because there is a mind-independent fact of the matter about wrongness. The claim “torturing others for fun is wrong” would be true even if no agent acknowledged or believed it. Conversely, on a Kantian constructivist view, torturing others for fun is wrong because it follows from the practical point of view—practical reason—of all rational beings that one ought not to torture others for fun. The truth of the claim “torturing others for fun is wrong” is generated from the standpoint of rational agents. It makes

no reference to moral facts that exist mind-independently as things that are discoverable “out there” in the world. Accordingly, if the standpoints of moral agents were otherwise (i.e. something other than practical reason—which is not possible on this reading of Kantian ethics), then the claim “torturing others for fun is wrong” might be false. Despite Kantian constructivism’s ascription of the same evaluative standpoint—practical reason—to *all* rational beings, Kantian constructivism still depends on the minds of agents.

With these considerations in mind, it seems possible that intuitionism and Kantianism are metaethically inconsistent; intuitionism is a realist view, while Kantianism is often viewed as constructivist. Resolving this potential inconsistency requires demonstrating either that intuitionism can be constructivist or that Kantianism can be realist. In the following chapter, I will defend a realist interpretation of Kantianism. Additionally, I will show how the apparent conflict between intuitionistic pluralism and Kantian monism can be resolved while both maintaining a unifying principle of duty and accounting for cases of conflicting, irreducible duties.

CHAPTER 2 – RECONCILIATION

Section 1: Resolving the Metaethical Conflict

Section 1.1: Motivation for Reconciliation

In this chapter, I turn my focus towards resolving the tension between intuitionism and Kantianism. I will first address the metaethical conflict between these views by defending moral realism and rejecting constructivism. In arguing that Kantian philosophy is better understood through a realist lens, I resolve the apparent metaethical conflict between these frameworks. I will then consider the conflict between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism, arguing that we should preserve pluralism and reject monism.

Before resolving the potential inconsistencies between Kantianism and intuitionism, it is worth discussing why we might believe that these two—seemingly very different—disciplines should be reconciled in the first place. I believe that these views face individual problems that are resolved when the views are merged.⁹ Kantianism faces the significant issue of being too abstract and far-removed from actual moral practice. While Kant’s view *does* provide us with moral instruction—the command to treat others as ends in themselves and never as mere means—this singular command is often seen as vague and too simplistic. The categorical imperative is difficult to apply to the complex moral landscape that we live in; specifically, the categorical imperative gives little to no guidance for what to do in cases of apparent conflicting duty. In contrast, intuitionism can be seen as lacking a unifying moral theory as its basis. Without a unifying theory to ground intuitionism, it seems difficult to justify Ross’s *prima facie*

⁹ See Audi (2001)

duties. This leaves one with the uneasy feeling that Rossian duties are seemingly pulled out of thin air.

When Kantianism and intuitionism are combined, we may be able to resolve these individual problems. The categorical imperative could offer a justification for Ross's prima facie duties, grounding them in a unifying principle of morality. On the other hand, Ross's account of prima facie duties seems to draw the categorical imperative closer to actual moral practice. Additionally, Ross allows for cases of conflicting moral duties, providing an explanation for this aspect of moral life that Kant cannot.

While combining Kantianism and intuitionism certainly leaves us with unanswered questions that must be addressed, I believe that there is prima facie motivation to reconcile these views. I will further clarify my view on how exactly Kantianism and intuitionism fit together later in this chapter, but I turn my focus now to my defense of Kantian moral realism.

Section 1.2: Defending Rossian Moral Realism

While I do not argue that a constructivist intuitionism is impossible, I believe that Kantian realism is a more plausible way to resolve this potential inconsistency than a constructivist intuitionism. As discussed in Chapter 1, my account of intuitionism is committed to moral realism. In the upcoming section, I will argue that moral realism can escape the objections posed by constructivists such as Korsgaard. For the purposes of this thesis, I aim only to show that both Kantianism and intuitionism can be plausibly understood as kinds of moral realism, and that we have good reasons for wanting to preserve realism.¹⁰

¹⁰ I discussed some reasons for wanting to preserve moral realism in Section 1.1 of Chapter 1.

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, Ross seems to express a clear commitment to moral realism throughout his presentation of intuitionism. For example, in his discussion of prima facie duties, Ross writes:

What I am speaking of is an *objective fact involved in the nature of the situation*, or more strictly in an element of its nature, though not, as duty proper does, arising from its whole nature. (Ross 1930, 20) [emphasis mine]

Prima facie duties, in Ross's view, seem to arise from the nature of the situation itself, not from any given agent's particular standpoint. He emphasizes that prima facie duties are *objective* facts that arise in given situations. This objectivity suggests that moral truths exist as "out there" in the world. A commitment to moral realism also seems present in Ross's discussion of the self-evidence of prima facie duties:

The moral order expressed in these propositions is just as much part of the fundamental nature of the universe (and, we may add, of any possible universe in which there were moral agents at all) as is the spatial or numerical structure expressed in the axioms of geometry or arithmetic. (Ross 1930, 29—30)

This suggests that the objectivity of moral truths is a core component of Rossian intuitionism. Moral truths, in Ross's view, are not constructed from the standpoints of agents, but rather are parts of the 'fundamental nature of the universe'. This implies a clear commitment to moral realism for Ross.

Section 1.3: Defending Kantian Moral Realism

Kantian moral realism is seemingly more complicated to defend, given a constructivist reading of Kant's moral philosophy. I will now argue for Kantian realism and attempt to defend it from the constructivist reading discussed in the previous chapter. Notably, while there do not seem to be any defenses of constructivism among intuitionists, there is significant disagreement among Kantians regarding whether Kant is best read as a moral realist or a constructivist. Many Kantian scholars defend versions of Kantian realism, such as Karl Ameriks (2003), Paul Guyer

(2006), Patrick Kain (2004), Rae Langton (2007), Robert Stern (2009; 2015), and Allen Wood (1999).¹¹

As I have stated, I define moral realism as the metaethical view with the following three requirements: cognitivism, success theory, and objectivism. Kantianism undoubtedly meets the first and second criteria for moral realism insofar as it endorses both the idea that moral statements have truth values (cognitivism) and the idea that at least some of these moral statements are true (success theory).

It is less clear that Kantianism meets the third criterion for moral realism—the objectivist idea that the truth of moral statements does not depend on any agent’s beliefs, attitudes, or psychological states. While Kantian constructivists, such as Korsgaard (1996), would argue that Kantianism fails to meet this criterion, this does not seem obvious. While it is clear that the moral law is *accessed* through practical reason, this does not suggest that the moral law must be entirely *constructed* by practical reason. It is possible that practical reason, despite being a process within the human mind, picks out objective, mind-independent moral truths that are “out there” in the world. The mere fact that our epistemic access to these truths is dependent on the standpoint of practical reason does not entail that moral truths themselves do not exist mind-

¹¹ While these scholars offer somewhat differing accounts of Kantian moral realism, they share the core feature of my definition of moral realism: that moral values are in some way objective, i.e. “out there” to be discovered rather than created by the human mind. These authors cash out this objectivity in various ways. Ameriks (2003) argues that the moral law is objective in the sense that it does not gain its validity from the mind, even if it is revealed via mental processes. Stern argues that while moral *duties* are results of mental processes, moral *values* are objective and woven into the “fabric of the world” (2015, 91). Wood claims, “since Kant holds that moral truth is irreducible either to what people think or to the results of any verification procedures, he is a moral realist in the most agreed-upon sense that term has in contemporary metaphysics and metaethics” (Wood, 1999, 157). Langton, referencing the Euthyphro problem, argues that the moral law is prior to reason; she writes, “our reason commands this or that because it is a moral law and because the virtuous will coincides with the moral law, and while moral laws may be commandments of the rational will, they do not originate in the commandment of that will, any more than they originate in God’s commandment” (Langton 2007, 183). While these scholars take different approaches in their defenses of moral realism, they share the general anti-constructivist view that moral facts are in some way objective.

independently. I will now briefly review Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism and examine how her view does not best reflect moral value as Kant describes it.

On Korsgaard's constructivist view, the truth of the moral law is entailed from the standpoint of rational beings—practical reason. Moral duties, according to Korsgaard's view, are generated from practical reason via the process of reflective endorsement, the process of judging our maxims and deciding whether they provide us with consistent, normative reasons to act. If we can consistently universalize a given maxim, then we know that the maxim is a morally good way to act. In Korsgaard's view, this process of reflective endorsement *is* morality itself. Moral value, according to Korsgaard, is created by our legislative wills.

I argue that Korsgaard's notion of reflective endorsement does not suggest that the process of reflective endorsement is prior to moral value itself. While the process of reflective endorsement is undoubtedly essential to Kantian philosophy, I do not believe that Korsgaard's constructivist understanding of reflective endorsement is necessary. While our ability to test our maxims and discover universal moral duties depends on the process of reflective endorsement, this does not entail that the *validity* of moral duties also depends on reflective endorsement. Although our ability to self-impose moral duties is certainly a central part of Kantian moral philosophy, the *actual* rightness/wrongness to which such duties *refer* may still be 'out there' in the world. Various Kantian scholars, such as Ameriks, defend such views, claiming that moral laws do not gain their validity from mental processes.

Ameriks (2003) defends Kantian realism against the constructivist notion that there is an apparent disconnect between autonomy/self-legislation and moral realism. Before presenting this

objection and Ameriks's response, I will briefly review Kant's notion of autonomy or self-legislation. The *Cambridge Kant Lexicon* clarifies the meaning of Kantian autonomy:

Meaning "self-legislation" or "self-legislated," the term [autonomy] indicates that the moral law is given by the pure will, which is identical with pure practical reason, and not by any object or inclination for an object external to pure practical reason itself. (Guyer 2021, 54)

The term 'autonomy', directly translated from Greek, means 'self-legislation'. Autonomy or self-legislation refers to the will's ability to give the moral law to itself. This is a central feature in Kantian philosophy; Kant identifies the autonomy of the will as the 'supreme principle of morality':

Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy is, therefore: to choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choice are also included as universal law in the same volition. [...] But that the above principle of autonomy is the sole principle of morals can well be shown by mere analysis of the concepts of morality. For, by this analysis we find that its principle must be a categorical imperative, while this commands neither more nor less than just this autonomy. (Kant 1996, 4:440)

The will—or pure practical reason—is autonomous, meaning that it makes laws for itself based on pure practical reason alone. This lawmaking involves choosing only those acts whose maxims are universalizable. Kant then identifies this feature of the will with the supreme principle of morality, or the categorical imperative. It is evident from this passage that Kant's notion of autonomy is essential to his moral philosophy.

Kantian critics of moral realism, such as Korsgaard, might argue that the importance of autonomy and self-legislation—our ability to impose the moral law on ourselves—suggests that moral truths exist and apply to us *because* of this process of self-legislation. In other words, the moral law is not "out there" to be discovered but rather depends on our autonomous ability to self-legislate.

Ameriks responds to this view by arguing that one can agree that there is an essential tie between autonomy and self-legislation, “and yet one need not believe that for Kant any of these terms has to be understood as a matter of giving principles *validity* simply by ‘imposing’ them on ourselves in any ordinary sense as an efficient cause” (2003, 278). Autonomy allows us to self-legislate, but it nevertheless involves the self-legislation of moral truths that have independent authority and objective value. Kantianism can thus maintain both autonomy and moral realism. Ameriks then goes on to further explain how the activity of self-legislation is consistent with the existence of objective moral truths that are valid independently of this self-legislation:

Insofar as [moral rules] involve ‘activity’, it is in a harmless way, having to do with the fact that they entail principles that every rational will is supposed to approve and act from in order to fulfill rational activity in general. This approval and activity is important, but it is not a condition of the validity or authority of the rules themselves. Readers might be misled here by the fact that Kant speaks of ‘maxims’ as being ‘imposed’, but this can be literally true at an individual level (since the ‘incorporation’ of a maxim in one’s life *is* a matter of contingent Self-imposition), even while the *laws* that proper maxims observe are not themselves ‘imposed’ in any troublesome particular sense. (Ameriks 2003, 281)

In other words, while the categorical imperative might entail that every rational will should recognize the moral law and act from appropriate maxims, this does not suggest that the *validity* of the moral law itself is dependent on any rational will or self-imposed maxim. Although the *application* of the moral law is undoubtedly dependent on the process of self-legislation, the validity of the moral law is not. This realist approach seems to better account for the relation between the moral law and the process of self-legislation/reflective endorsement than Korsgaard’s constructivism.

Furthermore, Korsgaard’s constructivist reading seems to be in conflict with Kant’s own claims regarding objectivity. In his discussion of the good will, for example, Kant seems to endorse the view that some things have objective value simply because of the kinds of things that they are:

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations. Even if, by a special disfavor of fortune or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose - if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing and only the good will were left [...] - then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself. (Kant 1996, 4:394)

Kant emphasizes here that the good will has objective value simply in virtue of its nature. The value of the good will, as Kant describes it, ‘shines like a jewel’. The good will has objective value because of the kind of thing it is, not because we confer value on it. Kant also directly expresses the view that moral laws, despite being given through the process of reflective endorsement, are not *validated* by their lawgivers—a view directly contradictory to Korsgaard’s constructivism:

Whilst it is true that the moral laws are commands, and whilst they may be commandments of the divine will, they do not originate in the commandment. God has commanded this or that because it is a moral law, and because His will coincides with the moral law. [...] No one, not even God, can be the author of the laws of morality, since they have no origin in will, but instead a practical necessity. If they were not necessary, it is conceivable that lying might be a virtue. But the moral laws can nevertheless be subject to a lawgiver. There can exist a being which has the power and authority to execute these laws, to declare that they are in accordance with his will, and to impose upon everyone the obligation of acting in accordance with them. This being is therefore the lawgiver, though not the author of the laws. In the same way, God is in no sense the author of the fact that the triangle has three angles. (Kant 1963, 40, 51—52)

In this passage, Kant argues that the value of the moral law does not originate from the wills of lawgivers; rather, lawgivers tailor their wills to the objective value of the moral law.¹² Kant stresses that no one, ‘*not even God*’, can be the authors of the moral law, strongly suggesting that moral values exist as ‘out there’ in the world. This seems inconsistent with Korsgaard’s constructivism. Kant goes as far as to compare moral truths to mathematical truths; the mere fact that we are able to calculate and determine that triangles must have three angles does not entail that triangles have three angles *because* we determine them to be as such. Similarly, our ability

¹² Langton (2007) further explores this apparent Euthyphro problem and defends Kant’s moral realist answer to the problem.

to self-legislate the moral law does not entail that the moral law has value simply *because* we legislate it. It seems worth noting that Kant's notion that moral truths exist in a manner similar to mathematical truths is a striking parallel to Ross's claim that moral truths are self-evident in the same sense as mathematical truths (Ross 1930, 29).

On a moral realist reading of Kant, the categorical imperative is not constructed. Rather, it refers to an objective moral principle that exists independently of any agent's beliefs, desires, preferences, or practices. The various formulations of the categorical imperative, as well as the more specific duties that we may derive from them, can be understood, from a realist lens, as objective moral truths. For example, the Formula of Humanity's claim that we are morally required to treat others as ends in themselves and never as mere means can be understood as an objective moral fact, not merely a conclusion that is entailed from our standpoint as rational beings. It involves a recognition of an objective moral truth that is "out there" in the world. On a realist reading, the moral law would be true even if there were no agents to recognize or follow it.

It seems plausible that Kantianism is best understood through a moral realist lens. As stated previously, this perspective has been endorsed by a number of Kantian scholars.¹³ Considering that moral realism is also a core feature of Rossian intuitionism, it seems that preserving moral realism and rejecting constructivism is a reasonable path.

This resolves the potential worry that there is a metaethical conflict between intuitionism and Kantianism. Acknowledging that moral realism is compatible with both intuitionism and Kantianism leaves a remaining potential conflict: the apparent inconsistency between

¹³ Ameriks (2003), Guyer (2006), Kain (2004), Langton (2007), Stern (2009; 2015), Wood (1999)

intuitionistic pluralism and Kantian monism. In the following section, I turn my focus towards resolving this issue.

Section 2: Resolving the Monism/Pluralism Conflict

Section 2.1: Derivability without Reducibility

I will now address the potential conflict between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism. As I have explained in the previous chapter, the worry here is that the Kantian commitment to a single moral principle from which all moral duties stem and the Rossian view that there is a plurality of irreducible *prima facie* moral duties are incompatible positions.¹⁴ Before I present my own view of how these positions nonetheless fit together, I will first review the notions of derivability, reducibility, and self-evidence, with the aim of laying a foundation for how we might understand the relation between Kantianism and the Rossian duties.

Kantianism expresses the view that all moral duties are derivable from the categorical imperative. During his discussion of the four examples of duty (self-preservation, honesty, cultivating one's talents, and beneficence), Kant makes this point clear:

There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this: act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. Now, if all imperatives of duty can be *derived* from this single imperative as from their principle, then, even though we leave it undecided whether what is called duty is not as such an empty concept, we shall at least be able to show what we think by it and what the concept wants to say. [...] These [four examples of duty] are a few of the many actual duties, or at least of what we take to be such, *whose derivation from the one principle cited above is clear*. (Kant 1996, 4:421—424) [emphasis mine]

Kant's commitment to the view that all moral duties are derivable from the categorical imperative therefore seems evident. While this may seem to suggest that all moral duties must also be *reducible* to the categorical imperative, this is not the case. It is important to note the

¹⁴ As I have stated in the previous chapter, my view of intuitionism is a kind of Rossian intuitionism and is therefore committed to Rossian pluralism.

differences between derivability and reducibility. Specifically, we should realize that a thing being derivable does not entail that it is reducible.

To note, I understand the notion of reducibility in terms of identity; if A, B, and C reduce to Y, then A, B, and C are identical to Y. To say that A, B, and C are reducible to Y is to say that, while there may *appear* to be multiple distinct things, there is really only *one* thing into which the others collapse. If A, B, and C are reducible to Y, then they are identical to Y insofar as each shares all of the same properties as Y.

It is possible for X to derive Y without Y being reducible to X. For example, from the claim “all people should be vegetarians”, we might derive the claim that “Oscar should not order and eat three buckets of fried chicken from his local fast-food restaurant”. However, this does not suggest that the latter claim is *reducible* to the former. While the latter claim certainly *follows* from the former, it is not *reducible*; the two claims undoubtedly cannot be identical. The latter claim about Oscar introduces new information that is absent in the claim that “all people should be vegetarians”. It is possible that the judgement that Oscar should not order the chicken from the restaurant would still be true, even if “all people should be vegetarians” was false. It is possible that “Oscar should not order and eat three buckets of fried chicken from his local fast-food restaurant” is derivable via alternate routes. For example, we might also derive this judgment from claims such as “Oscar’s New Year’s resolution is to stick to his low-sodium diet to lower his risk of heart disease”, “Oscar’s local fast-food restaurant has failed their last six health inspections”, or “nobody should give money to fast-food restaurants”. Furthermore, all of these claims may be true, and the judgment that “Oscar should not order and eat three buckets of fried chicken from his local fast-food restaurant” may be derivable from each of them. The claim that Oscar should not order the chicken from the restaurant may be *derivable* from the claim “all

people should be vegetarians”, but it is clear that it holds unique meaning related to the particularities of Oscar’s situation and therefore cannot possibly be identical to the claim that “all people should be vegetarians”. To consider this claim reducible to the claim that “all people should be vegetarians”—simply because one is derivable from the other—would be a failure to understand the big picture and to acknowledge the specific factors at play in Oscar’s case.

Additionally, the fact that one thing derives many others does not suggest that the many are all reducible to the one. It is possible for X to derive Y, Z, and Q without Y, Z, and Q being reducible to X. Y, Z, and Q might be entirely separate and unique results, all of which logically follow from X, but none of which is reducible (identical) to X. To use the previous example, the claim that “all people should be vegetarians” can derive both of the following claims: (i) “Oscar should not order and eat three buckets of fried chicken from his local fast-food restaurant” and (ii) “Juliet should make a salad for lunch instead of eating the leftover steak in her refrigerator”. While it is clear that these two claims share a common thread—that is, the judgment that people should not eat meat—they are surely not reducible to or identical to this common thread. Both claims involve deeper considerations of the relevant aspects of each situation; for example, the claim regarding Juliet might involve weighing concerns about wasting leftover food, and the claim regarding Oscar might involve concerns about his health. Despite being derived from a single principle, neither of these judgments can be boiled down to the given principle.

Section 2.2: Irreducibility of Rossian Duties

Section 2.2.1: Reducibility Overview

Now that I have illustrated how we might understand the relationship between derivability and reducibility, I will argue that Rossian prima facie duties are irreducible to the categorical imperative. As previously stated, I understand the notion of reducibility in terms of

identity; if A is reducible to B, then A is identical to B. A and B collapse into one another; they are essentially one and the same thing.

I will reject that the Rossian prima facie duties are reducible to the categorical imperative in this sense. However, for the purposes of defending the irreducibility of the Rossian duties, let us assume for a moment that the Rossian duties *are* reducible to the categorical imperative.¹⁵ On my understanding of reducibility, to say that the Rossian duties are reducible to the categorical imperative would be to say that the Rossian duties are identical to the categorical imperative and that they essentially collapse into the categorical imperative. If the Rossian duties reduced to the categorical imperative, it would then be impossible for them to express anything ‘over and above’ the categorical imperative.

Section 2.2.2: Indefinite Disjunction

Considering this notion of reducibility, let us examine how the possibility of an indefinite amount of prima facie duties could potentially give us reason to believe that the Rossian duties are irreducible to the categorical imperative. Ross acknowledged the possibility that his enumeration of the prima facie duties could be incomplete (1930, 23). While I do not intend to defend or reject this claim here, I provisionally accept the possibility of an indefinite amount of prima facie duties, with the aim of showing that we may have—at the very least—some reason to reject that Rossian duties are reducible to the categorical imperative.

Since Ross did not claim completeness for his enumeration of general prima facie duties (1930, 23), it is possible to understand the list of prima facie duties as being potentially

¹⁵ In the following sections, I will argue that following where this assumption takes us will lead to implausible conclusions. I make the assumption here that the Rossian duties are reducible to the categorical imperative for the purposes of presenting this *reductio ad absurdum*.

indefinite. With this in mind, we can understand the claim that the Rossian duties are reducible/identical to the categorical imperative as follows:

$$CI = \{r_1 \vee r_2 \vee r_3 \vee r_4 \vee r_5 \vee r_6 \vee r_7 \vee \dots\}$$

This is equivalent to the claim that the categorical imperative is identical to an indefinite disjunction of Rossian *prima facie* duties. Assuming that there can be no identity relation between infinitely disjunctive relata, there seems to be reason to reject the identification of Rossian duties with the categorical imperative.¹⁶ Brink expresses a parallel view in his discussion of moral properties and natural properties:

Moral properties could have been realized by an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of sets of natural properties. If we deny that identity is a relation that can hold between relata that are indefinitely or infinitely disjunctive—say, because we insist that identity holds only between genuine properties and we deny that disjunctive properties are genuine properties (cf. Armstrong 1978: II, 19—23)—then the multiple realizability of moral properties provides us with a reason for resisting the identification of moral and natural properties. (Brink 1989, 158—159)

If the Rossian duties and the categorical imperative are not identical, then one cannot be reducible to the other. We therefore seem to have some *prima facie* reason to reject that the Rossian *prima facie* duties are reducible to the categorical imperative. I do not intend to argue that there is *in fact* an indefinite (or infinite) amount of *prima facie* duties; I raise this provisional argument simply for the aim of showing that there is at least *some* reason to support the irreducibility of the Rossian duties.

¹⁶ One might think that this problem (i.e. the issue that there can be no identity relation between infinite disjuncts) remains even if there really *are* only seven *prima facie* duties. After all, it does seem slightly odd to say that one thing is truly identical to a disjunction of *seven* unique things (although admittedly less puzzling than one thing being identical to an *infinite/indefinite* disjunction). However, I do not attempt to tackle this possibility here.

Section 2.2.3: Supervenience

Additionally, the fact that identity entails supervenience (van Roojen 2015, 220) also seems to support a rejection of the reducibility of Rossian duties. I understand supervenience as follows:

Supervenience is a metaphysical relation linking the extension of one property with the extension of another. One set of properties supervenes on another set of properties if the extension of the first supervenient set cannot be different unless the extension of the second subvenient set is also different. So, for example, if the rightness or wrongness of actions supervene on their nonmoral features, and we know what these nonmoral features are, we might use that knowledge to figure out whether they are right or wrong. (van Roojen 2015, 44)

In other words, to say that X supervenes on Y is to say that there can be no change in X without a change in Y. It is clear from this definition that—insofar as every property necessarily supervenes on itself—identity entails supervenience. For example, consider the fact that water is identical to H₂O. This necessarily means that water and H₂O supervene on one another; a change in the chemical composition of H₂O would necessitate a change in ‘water’ because water just *is* H₂O. There can be no change in water’s properties without a parallel change in H₂O’s properties because they are necessarily one and the same. The fact that they are identical entails that they are mutually supervenient.

If Rossian duties were reducible/identical to the categorical imperative, then Rossian duties would supervene on the categorical imperative, and vice versa. It is difficult to imagine how such a supervenience relation might function. Supervenience would mean that a change in the categorical imperative would require a change in Rossian duties. This seems highly unlikely, since Rossian duties are self-evident and would thus seem to hold independently of any change in the categorical imperative. This provides further reason to deny that Rossian duties are reducible to the categorical imperative.

Considering this supervenience argument, we must also acknowledge the possibility that the categorical imperative is a necessary truth that could not change or be false. It certainly seems highly unlikely that the categorical imperative could change *so much* that seemingly obvious moral claims such as “it is wrong to kill people for fun” could become false, but perhaps smaller changes could be possible. If it *is* the case that the categorical imperative is a necessary truth that could not change *at all*, it is unclear whether we could nonetheless speak of the categorical imperative as *hypothetically* changing,¹⁷ or whether this kind of talk would simply be simply logically incoherent. However, sorting out these possibilities involves answering complex questions of modal logic that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Section 2.2.4: Possibility of a Rossian Duty that Violates the Categorical Imperative

We might also consider the possibility that the Rossian prima facie duties and the categorical imperative may not be coextensive. Audi suggests that not all prima facie duties are in accordance with the categorical imperative (2004, 102). If this claim is true, we would have good reason to reject that Rossian duties are reducible to the categorical imperative.

Given that my interpretation of the categorical imperative centers on possible consent, respect, and love, a Rossian duty that is *not* in accordance with the categorical imperative would involve at least one of the following: (i) treating others in ways where consent is impossible, (ii) failing to respect others by taking over their ends entirely, and/or (iii) failing to further the ends of others. It seems possible that a Rossian duty could fail to meet one of these conditions. For example, perhaps the Rossian duty of reparations, which commands us to make amends for prior wrongdoing, does not further the ends of others; it seems that making amends with someone or

¹⁷ Perhaps we can say that a supervenience relation would mean that a *hypothetical* change in the categorical imperative would require a change in the Rossian duties, which would seemingly also provide us with reason to reject the reducibility of the Rossian duties.

apologizing for wronging them is intended to preserve an interpersonal bond or to take accountability, not to further the ends of the person one has wronged. In our daily lives, apologies do seem aimed at mending relationships and taking responsibility for prior wrongdoing. It seems plausible that making amends for one's wrongful behavior is a moral duty not insofar as it furthers the ends of the person who is wronged, but insofar as it strengthens the relationship and encourages accountability.

I do not claim that the duty of reparations cannot *possibly* be in accordance with the categorical imperative. Perhaps the duty of reparations *does* further the ends of those who are wronged. I simply raise this as a provisional case to demonstrate the possibility that the Rossian duties and the categorical imperative might not be entirely coextensive.

The above three arguments—the indefinite disjunction argument, the supervenience argument, and the possibility that Rossian duties and Kantian duties are not coextensive—give us reason to believe that the Rossian duties are irreducible to the categorical imperative. Now that the notion of reducibility has been clarified and the irreducibility of Rossian duties has been illustrated, we may turn our focus from reducibility to self-evidence. In the following section, I will examine how the Rossian commitment to the self-evidence of general *prima facie* moral duties is compatible with Kantianism.

Section 2.3: Self-Evidence

Intuitionism expresses the view that moral duties are irreducible and self-evident.¹⁸ The irreducibility of intuitionistic *prima facie* moral duties aligns with my understanding of Kantian duties, as I have shown above. Furthermore, I argue that the self-evidence of Rossian duties is

¹⁸ Although not all intuitionists are committed to the self-evidence of some moral claims, the Rossian intuitionism that I refer to throughout this thesis *is* committed to the self-evidence of general *prima facie* moral principles.

also compatible with Kantianism. While we might initially think that a duty being self-evident suggests that it can have no principle as its ground or justification, this is not the case. Audi defines a self-evident proposition as having the following criteria: (i) understanding the proposition alone provides one with justification for believing it, and (ii) understanding and believing (on the basis of one's understanding) the proposition provides one with knowledge of it (1997, 114).

We can better understand these conditions by examining how they apply to the self-evident proposition, "all triangles have three sides". The first condition for self-evidence is that understanding the proposition alone—i.e. the literal conceptual content of the proposition—provides one with justification for believing the proposition, whether or not one actually *does* believe it. Since the concept of 'triangles' *essentially* includes having three sides and three angles, it seems clear that one would be justified in believing the proposition without any additional proof. 'Three-sidedness' is baked into the concept of 'triangles', so no other justification beyond an understanding of the proposition itself is required to believe that "all triangles have three sides". We should also note that while understanding the proposition provides *justification* for belief, it need not provide *actual* belief. If Amelia understands the proposition "all triangles have three sides", then she has justification for believing it, but it may still be the case that, for whatever reason, Amelia does not actually believe that all triangles really do have three sides.

The second condition for self-evidence is that understanding the proposition and believing the proposition (on the basis of one's understanding) provides one with knowledge of it. This condition builds on the previous condition; *understanding* a self-evident proposition provides *justification* for believing it, and *believing* the proposition on the basis of this

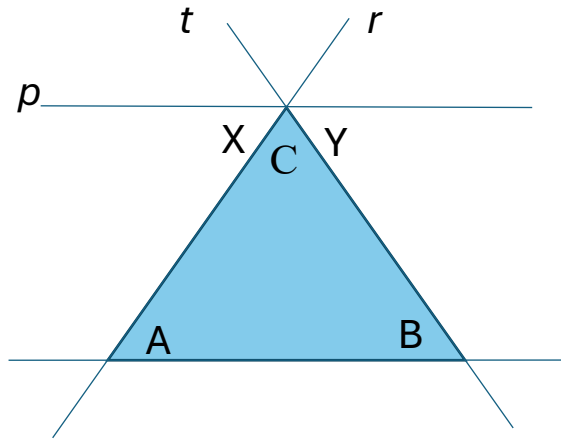
justification provides one with *knowledge* of the proposition. Assuming that the first condition for self-evidence is fulfilled, then Amelia has justification to believe that “all triangles have three sides” in virtue of her conceptual understanding of the proposition. The second condition for self-evidence adds that, if Amelia believes that “all triangles have three sides” (on the basis of her understanding of the proposition), then she would *know* that “all triangles have three sides”. Amelia’s justified belief of the self-evident proposition (which is based on her understanding of the content of the proposition alone) is sufficient to provide her with the knowledge that “all triangles have three sides” is true.

This definition of self-evidence does not preclude the possibility that a self-evident proposition may be *provable*, despite the fact that it does not *require* proof.¹⁹ The first condition for self-evidence—the claim that understanding a self-evident proposition provides one with justification for believing it—allows for a self-evident proposition to be provable. Let us examine the self-evident proposition that “a triangle has three angles that add up to 180 degrees” to demonstrate how this is possible. Understanding the mere conceptual meaning of this proposition provides us with justification for believing it. However, we may also provide additional support for this proposition by using the following geometric proof.

First, take a triangle ($\triangle ABC$) and create a straight line by extending the base ($\overline{AB}$) of the triangle. Next, draw a parallel line (p) that passes through the top vertex (C) of the triangle. We may then extend sides $\overline{AC}$ and $\overline{BC}$ of the triangle, creating two transversals (t and r) that intersect our two parallel lines. Since the alternate interior angles theorem tells us that alternate interior

¹⁹ Audi distinguishes the self-evident from the strongly axiomatic; “ p is strongly axiomatic provided it is not only (a) immediately self-evident (which is often taken to be roughly equivalent to simple axiomatic status), but (b) also unprovable from anything epistemically *prior*” (Audi 1999, 216). While some immediately self-evident propositions *do* indeed fall into this category, Audi emphasizes that not all self-evident propositions are strongly axiomatic and criticizes Ross’s apparent implication that *prima facie* moral duties are strongly axiomatic.

angles are congruent, we know that $\angle A = \angle X$ and that $\angle B = \angle Y$. We can see that $\angle X$, $\angle C$, and $\angle Y$ form a straight line, and we know that the angle of a straight line is 180 degrees. We can then deduce that a triangle's three angles ($\angle A$, $\angle B$, and $\angle C$) also add up to 180 degrees.



The second condition for self-evidence—the claim that believing a self-evident proposition (on the basis of one's understanding) provides one with knowledge of it—also does not preclude the possibility that a proposition is provable. Considering the previous example, one's justified belief (based solely on their understanding of the conceptual meaning of the proposition) that “a triangle has three angles that add up to 180 degrees” would provide them with knowledge, even if they were unaware of the geometric proof supporting this proposition. Nonetheless, this geometric proof *does* provide additional support the self-evident claim that “a triangle has three sides that add up to 180 degrees”. While this claim does not *rely* on the geometric proof for support, it may still be *reinforced* by the proof.

As Audi explains, a self-evident proposition cannot rely exclusively on premises, but there may nonetheless be a deeper epistemological ground for the self-evident proposition (1999, 216). Audi further explains this view:

Just as a building that rests directly on bedrock can be additionally supported by stays attached to its sides or by pillars beneath it anchored in yet deeper rock, a belief may epistemically rest on the non-inferential ground of adequate understanding but admit of epistemic support from 'below'. (Audi 1999, 216)

Self-evident propositions are independently justified and thus do not *solely* depend on external support, but they may still be provided with *additional* justification. We then can therefore acknowledge the fact that Rossian general prima facie moral duties are self-evident without rejecting the possibility that these duties may still be justifiable or provable.

I will now demonstrate how the categorical imperative generates various Rossian duties and argue that, although these Rossian duties are self-evident, they can nevertheless be proven or justified using the categorical imperative. Specifically, let us examine how the Formula of Humanity yields Rossian general prima facie duties. Recall that the Formula of Humanity has two components: (i) the negative command to never treat others as mere means by ensuring that consent is possible, and (ii) the positive component to treat others as ends in themselves by acting on maxims of respect, love, and beneficence. O'Neill further explains the notion of possible consent:

Those closely involved in or affected by a proposal have no genuine possibility of dissent unless they can avert or modify the action by withholding consent and collaboration. If those closely affected have the possibility of dissent, they will be able to require an initiator of action either to modify the action, or to desist or to override the dissent. (O'Neill 1985, 259)

We can now examine some of the Rossian prima facie duties through the lens of possible consent, respect, and love to understand how they are generated from the categorical imperative.

First, let us consider how the categorical imperative may generate the Rossian prima facie duty of fidelity. This duty seems to involve a maxim along the lines of "I will always keep my promises, including implicit promises". Acting with such a maxim clearly avoids treating people as mere means; keeping one's promises allows those affected to possibly consent. Likewise, the *failure* to keep one's promises would seem to treat others in ways that they cannot possibly

consent to, since a victim would be unable to stop the promise-breaking/dishonesty by dissenting. Furthermore, a victim in such a case may be not only *unable* to consent but also—due to the agent’s dishonesty—*unaware* that they are in a position in which consent is impossible. Additionally, acting on the maxim to keep one’s promises treats others as ends in themselves insofar as we act with respect and love; we recognize others as autonomous beings and therefore choose not to hide the truth from them.

Let us also consider the Rossian prima facie duty of justice. The corresponding maxim here seems to be “when there is a distribution of happiness that is not in accordance with merit, I will correct this injustice”. Insofar as those who experience an injustice are not prevented from consenting or dissenting, correcting injustice does not treat others as mere means. After all, victims of injustice are able to dissent and effectively “opt out” of correcting the injustice. Attempting to help those who have suffered an injustice does not prevent them from refusing help, should they choose to do so. Adherence to the duty of justice also fulfills the Formula of Humanity’s positive command to treat others as ends in themselves by acting with maxims of love and respect. This duty commands us to respect the autonomy of others and promote their ends by correcting injustices that they may have suffered.

As a final example of how the Rossian duties are generated from the categorical imperative, let us examine the Rossian prima facie duty of non-maleficence. This duty involves the maxim “I will avoid causing harm to others”. Acting on a maxim of non-injury seemingly does not preclude the possibility of consent. Intentionally causing unwanted harm to others undoubtedly prevents them from being able to dissent, so we have a duty to not intentionally cause harm in such cases. The duty of non-maleficence therefore seems to avoid treating others as mere means. Additionally, this duty treats people as ends in themselves insofar as it involves

respect, love, and beneficence. We respect others by allowing them to pursue their own ends without interfering or harming them. If we failed to adhere to our duty of non-maleficence, we would surely fail to treat others with love and beneficence. However, the duty of non-maleficence is complicated by the hypothetical case in which one *does*—for whatever reason—consent to injury. In this instance, it seems that consent and dissent *are* possible and that the injured person is therefore not treated as a mere means. It seems possible that, in such cases, the duty to treat others as ends in themselves takes over and commands us not to cause harm, even when the harm is invited.

Considering these examples, we may recognize how the categorical imperative can be used as further proof for the self-evident Rossian prima facie duties. To determine whether a given duty can be said to be “proven from” or “grounded in” the categorical imperative, we must first determine the duty’s relevant maxim, as well as the negation of that maxim. If the negated maxim violates the categorical imperative, then we must have a duty to act according to the original (non-negated) maxim. The original maxim must therefore fulfill the Formula of Humanity’s requirement to treat people as ends in themselves and never as mere means.

For example, the Rossian prima facie duty of fidelity’s corresponding maxim is “I will keep my promises”, and the negated maxim is “I will not keep my promises”. As demonstrated above, this negated maxim would clearly violate the categorical imperative. On the other hand, the maxim to keep one’s promises fulfills both the negative and positive requirements of the Formula of Humanity. Therefore, the categorical imperative may be used as additional proof for the general prima facie duty of fidelity. In this way, general prima facie duties can be supported by the categorical imperative.

One might also wonder whether the categorical imperative is—like the Rossian duties—self-evident. It seems plausible that the categorical imperative is independently justified. After all, it is difficult to imagine the categorical imperative—a fundamental, necessary, a priori principle—as requiring proof, and even more puzzling to imagine what such a proof could be. Moreover, the fact that Kant compares the categorical imperative to self-evident mathematical truths—such as the fact that a triangle has three angles—also gives us further reason to believe that the categorical imperative may be self-evident (1996, 52). While the truth of the categorical imperative might not seem intuitively obvious to us, we should remember that self-evident propositions need not be immediately obvious (Ross 1930, 29). We therefore seem to have at least some reason to believe that the categorical imperative is indeed self-evident. Despite the plausibility of this claim, the question of whether the categorical imperative is self-evident is not particularly relevant to my arguments throughout this thesis, so I do not address this issue any further.

As I have shown throughout this section, the Rossian general *prima facie* duties are self-evident and thus do not *require* proof, but they are nonetheless *provable* from the categorical imperative. Notably, Kant stresses that the categorical imperative is a fundamentally rational principle (1996, 5:31).²⁰ Since the moral law is based on pure reason and is therefore necessary, it offers solid, valid support for the Rossian principles of duty—regardless of whether the categorical imperative is indeed self-evident. With these points in mind, it seems that the potential conflict between Kantian monism and intuitionistic pluralism could be resolved.

²⁰ Kant's emphasis on the rationality of the moral law is evident throughout his *Practical Philosophy*, and he is clear that violations of the categorical imperative lead to literal contradictions (in thought or in will) (1996, 4:422–425).

Section 2.4: Preserving Pluralism

While I claim that the categorical imperative is a single principle that is capable of deriving and unifying the Rossian *prima facie* duties, I argue that my view nonetheless preserves pluralism and dismisses monism. Although the Rossian duties can be derived from a single principle, they do not reduce to it.²¹ The Rossian duties are self-evident and are therefore independently justified; the categorical imperative can provide *further* justification and support for the Rossian duties, but the Rossian duties are irreducible and do not *rely* on the categorical imperative. There is therefore a plurality of moral duties, insofar as there are multiple irreducible moral duties.

One possible way that we might understand how this view preserves both pluralism and the categorical imperative is to grant the categorical imperative a place within the plurality of moral duties. We may view the categorical imperative itself as yet another duty—in addition to the seven Rossian *prima facie* duties—within the plurality of moral duties. While each of the duties may be irreducible to one another, this does not prevent them from being related to each other in various ways; specifically, there could potentially be a relationship in which one duty is derived from another or provides additional support for another. Pluralism, after all, does not claim that the entities within the plurality cannot be logically related to one another in any way.

Furthermore, Audi points out that Ross seems to speak as if it is possible to derive *prima facie* duties from other *prima facie* duties (Audi 2001, 604).²² If it is possible to derive *prima facie* duties from other *prima facie* duties while maintaining pluralism, then it seems possible to

²¹ It is worth noting that Audi also defends pluralism and accepts the view that the Rossian duties are irreducible to the categorical imperative, although his arguments—unlike mine—center on epistemological reasons (2004, 104–105).

²² Ross writes, “even before the implicit undertaking to tell the truth was established I had a duty not to tell lies, since to tell lies is *prima facie* to do a positive injury to a person” (Ross 1930, 55). Audi claims that “this seems implicitly to countenance a derivation of a duty of fidelity from one of non-injury” (Audi 2001, 604).

derive *prima facie* duties from another duty within the plurality—the categorical imperative. On this framework, we might view the categorical imperative and the seven Rossian *prima facie* duties as existing in an interconnected ‘web’ of moral duties, in which the categorical imperative is capable of deriving each of the Rossian duties, and some of the Rossian duties are (potentially) capable of deriving each other. However, each of the duties in the ‘web’ is an irreducible member of the plurality. My view is therefore not monist, despite the fact that the Rossian duties share a connection to the categorical imperative.

While some might view the incorporation of the categorical imperative into a pluralist framework as problematic, the benefits that the categorical imperative brings to intuitionism—that is, the unification, clarification, and additional justification for the Rossian duties—seem to far outweigh the potential risk of weakening the commitment to pluralism.²³

Section 2.5: Problems with Audi’s View

Audi has attempted to merge intuitionism with Kantianism in previous works (2001; 2004). He claims that Kantian ethics is often seen as too abstract, while Rossian intuitionism lacks a unifying moral theory as its basis, arguing that both views can be clarified when the categorical imperative is used to ground Rossian duties. While this project is very similar to my aim in this thesis, I believe that Audi’s interpretation of the Formula of Humanity—specifically, his reading of what it means to treat others as ends in themselves—weakens his view.

Audi describes his interpretation of the Formula of Humanity’s command to ‘treat people as ends in themselves’ as follows:

Treating someone as an end [...] surely embodies caring. More specifically, it entails treating the person in a way that is governed, and to some extent motivated, by caring about the good of the person (1) for its own

²³ To note, Audi’s “Kantian Intuitionism” (2001) also aims to preserve intuitionistic pluralism and reject monism.

sake (hence non-instrumentally) and (2) under some objectively satisfactory description of that good. (Audi 2016, 85)

This reading emphasizes that ‘treating others as ends’ is centered on treating others in ways that promote their good. While caring about the good of others certainly seems worthwhile, I do not believe that this is the best way to interpret the Formula of Humanity. The Formula of Humanity can be understood through the lens of either a teleological approach or a recognitional approach. The teleological reading of the command to treat others as ends focuses on promoting the happiness or good of others, while the recognitional reading focuses on recognizing and respecting the inherent status of rational beings (Walden 2016). Audi’s reading seems to fall under the teleological approach, since he understands ‘treating others as ends’ as caring about promoting the good of others. I do not believe that this approach adequately captures the nature of rational beings for Kant. Kant emphasizes that treating others as ends involves recognizing their inner worth:

But a human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, *that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world.* He can measure himself with every other being of this kind and value himself on a footing of equality with them. (Kant 1996, 6:435) [emphasis mine]

For Kant, it is clear that treating others as ends in themselves requires acknowledging and respecting their inherent dignity as rational beings. Insofar as it focuses on promoting the good of others rather than recognizing their inherent dignity, Audi’s reading of the Formula of Humanity seems to be in conflict with Kant’s description of what it means to treat others as ends in themselves. A Kantian reading of the Formula of Humanity should surely capture the inner value of rational beings as ends in themselves.

I believe that O’Neill’s interpretation of the Formula of Humanity offers a better reading of what it means to treat people as ends in themselves. On O’Neill’s interpretation, treating

others as ends in themselves involves respecting them as autonomous beings—by ensuring that we keep a ‘healthy distance’ from them and prevent ourselves from taking over their ends—and treating them with love—by making their happiness our own and assisting them in achieving their own ends. O’Neill’s emphasis on treating others with the respect that they deserve as autonomous beings seems far more consistent with Kant’s description of treating others as ends in themselves than Audi’s reading. O’Neill’s commitment to the recognitional approach can be seen throughout her discussion of the Formula of Humanity:

Whenever treating others as persons goes beyond not using them, we must take into account ‘humanity in their person,’ i.e., their particular capacities for rational and autonomous action. [...] To treat human beings as persons, rather than as “ideal” rational beings, we must not only not use them, but must take their particular capacities for autonomy and rationality into account. Since other humans have varied ends, are precariously autonomous and rational, and far from self-sufficient in other ways, sharing even some of their ends may make varied demands. Kant claims that these demands can be grouped under the headings of respect and love (or beneficence). (O’Neill 1985, 264)

In this passage, O’Neill expresses a clear commitment to the view that treating others as ends essentially involves recognizing their natures as rational and autonomous beings. Treating others as ends is not merely a matter of promoting their happiness or good, but rather a matter of recognizing their status as rational beings and acting in ways that honor this status.

Section 2.6: Big Picture Sketch

We are now in a position to sketch exactly how Kantianism and intuitionism fit together. At the center of this framework is the categorical imperative, which can be understood via the Formula of Humanity. The Formula of Humanity involves two commands: (i) to never treat others as a mere means to an end, and (ii) to always treat others as ends in themselves. The first of these commands involves only treating others in ways that they can possibly consent to, and the second involves treating others with respect and love by assisting them in reaching their own ends without taking them over entirely.

From the categorical imperative, I argue that we may derive general prima facie moral duties, such as the duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and non-maleficence that Ross enumerates (Ross 1930, 21). These general prima facie moral claims, such as “lying is prima facie morally wrong”, do not *require* proof, but they are nonetheless *provable* via the categorical imperative. Although these general prima facie duties can be derived from the categorical imperative, they are also self-evident. These duties are self-evident in the sense that (i) a mere understanding of them provides justification for believing them and (ii) understanding and believing them (on the basis of one’s understanding) provides one with knowledge of them. Furthermore, general prima facie duties are not reducible to the categorical imperative, despite being derivable from it.

From these general prima facie duties, we may derive *particular* prima facie duties, such as “Eleanor prima facie ought not lie to her parents about failing her chemistry test”. Unlike general prima facie duties, particular prima facie duties are not self-evident. However, knowledge of particular prima facie duties is possible through the inferential process of applying general moral principles to specific instances. As we learn to apply general moral principles to particular instances over the courses of our lives, the inferential process becomes almost immediate.

Deriving particular prima facie duties from general prima facie duties necessarily involves considering the particularities of the individuals involved. As O’Neill argues, we must consider moral duties within determinate situations. Our aim must be to share the ends of *particular* people within *particular* contexts (O’Neill 1985, 267—268). While general prima facie duties may hold as sweeping, universal rules, particular prima facie duties must consider the intricacies of unique individuals in determinate situations. Since deriving particular duties

necessarily involves considering the specific contexts of unique situations, particular duties are irreducible to general duties. Additionally, particular prima facie duties—like general prima facie duties—are irreducible to the categorical imperative.

In practice, irreducible particular prima facie moral duties may come into conflict with each other. In such cases, one must consider which prima facie duty is more pressing and determine their final duty. Final duties are uncertain and not self-evident. One may choose to look to the categorical imperative for guidance in determining final duty; perhaps one's final duty will be revealed by assessing which prima facie duty more closely adheres to the command to treat others as ends in themselves and never as mere means.

CHAPTER 3 – OBJECTIONS

Section 1: Addressing Potential Objections

Section 1.1: Outlining Objections

Now that we have an understanding of how this framework operates, I will take a moment to address various objections to my view and illustrate how Kantianism and intuitionism benefit one another. In this chapter, I will first address the worry that the individual value of both Kantianism and intuitionism fades to the background when these views are merged. Next, I will respond to the objection that my view attempts to maintain both monism and pluralism. I then focus on the concern that my view weakens the notion of self-evidence. Finally, I examine the possibility of another “unifying principle” that might, alongside the categorical imperative, ground the Rossian duties. I conclude this chapter by drawing attention to the ways in which Kantianism and intuitionism enhance one another.

Section 1.2: Does Kantianism Become Irrelevant?

First, I will address the worry that this attempt to merge intuitionism and Kantianism renders Kantianism useless or irrelevant. One might claim that, since the Rossian duties are self-evident and thus seem to “stand on their own two feet” with or without Kantianism, the categorical imperative will become an abstract, irrelevant principle that needlessly floats around in the background of intuitionism. If the categorical imperative is reduced to an unnecessary background principle that we need not consider, one might worry that the project of combining Kantianism and intuitionism is futile.

I believe that this worry dissolves once we recognize the role of Kantianism within this framework and draw attention to the benefits that Kantianism brings to the table. First of all,

Kantianism brings a unity to the Rossian principles that seems absent in intuitionism alone.

While the Rossian duties are indeed self-evident individually, there is no unifying force within intuitionism that draws the duties together or explains why it is that *this specific set* of duties are all called “right”. There is a sense that morality should be something a bit deeper and more grounded than a (mostly) disconnected set of arbitrary self-evident duties. Incorporating Kantianism is helpful because we can recognize not just *that* the Rossian duties are binding, but also *why* these duties are binding. Kantianism tells us that the Rossian duties are binding insofar as they—for the most part—share a common moral thread, i.e. the command to treat others as ends in themselves and never as mere means. While intuitionism simply informs us that the Rossian duties stand insofar as they are self-evident, Kantianism provides an explanation for why the Rossian duties stand by drawing attention to their shared moral principle.

Additionally, the Formula of Humanity seems to add a personal level to duty that is absent in intuitionism alone. Unlike the Rossian duties, the Formula of Humanity—on O’Neill’s (1985) reading—involves a consideration of particular individuals and their unique ends. In this way, Kantianism, although admittedly more abstract than the Rossian duties, seems to better consider specific people and their actual ends. This connection to unique people and relationships seems like a valuable addition to intuitionism. Furthermore, perhaps this focus on particular individuals could provide guidance in selecting a final duty; when faced with conflicting *prima facie* duties, we might choose to assess which duty better serves the ends of the *specific* people involved.²⁴

²⁴ Audi also raises this possibility that the categorical imperative might be helpful in selecting a final Rossian duty. He writes, “suppose an associate uses ‘mitigate against’ to mean ‘militate against’ (as is not uncommon in America). To promote knowledge, as a Rossian duty of beneficence, should I politely note the substitution, or is this patronizing toward an adult who is not my student? It might be felt to be; but doesn’t treating others as ends require helping them avoid embarrassing slips? And wouldn’t a rational person want to learn here? It turns out that *how* I

Section 1.3: Does Intuitionism Become Irrelevant?

We should also consider the parallel objection that there is no genuine benefit of working intuitionism into Kantianism. If the Rossian duties stem from the categorical imperative anyway, one might then wonder why—if we already have a single moral principle to which we may refer—we should posit the seemingly superfluous Rossian duties at all. One might question what purpose the Rossian duties serve and what benefit they bring to Kantianism. If the incorporation of the Rossian duties does not provide any benefit, it seems unclear what Kantianism truly stands to gain from partnering with intuitionism.

In my view, intuitionism is a valuable addition to Kantianism. One of the primary ways in which intuitionism benefits Kantianism is by better explaining cases of conflicting duty. The fact that we experience apparent conflicts of duty in common moral life is undeniable, yet Kant denies the possibility that moral duties can ever genuinely conflict with one another. In arguing that there is a plurality of self-evident *prima facie* duties and that one must choose between conflicting *prima facie* duties to select an uncertain final duty, intuitionism is able to better account for cases of conflicting duty. Intuitionism's ability to explain this aspect of moral life seems to be a valuable addition to Kantianism.

Moreover, intuitionism also seems to better reflect the experience of making moral judgments. After all, many of our everyday moral judgments seem to come to us almost immediately, and certainly without pausing to consult abstract moral principles such as the categorical imperative. The “right thing to do” oftentimes seems apparent to us in the moment,

can point out the slip is crucial for *whether* I should. This bears on both what counts as treating someone as an end and on when the duty to enhance knowledge is final. There may still be no clearly right choice; but reflection on the Kantian notion can bring insight to the determination of Rossian duties, and the habitual adherence to those can set one in the right general direction to understand and realize the standards abstractly expressed in the categorical imperative” (Audi 2001, 625). This suggests that reflection on the categorical imperative may provide guidance for selecting a final duty.

which gives us at least some reason to believe that some moral duties are self-evident judgments rather than abstract theorems. By incorporating intuitionism into Kantianism, the Kantian moral framework is drawn closer to the reality of moral experience.

Section 1.4: Does this View Attempt to be Both Monist and Pluralist?

One might raise the objection that my view incoherently attempts to somehow preserve both monism and pluralism. Although I considered this point in the previous chapter, I think that it will be helpful to address it a bit more directly here. The concern is that my framework—insofar as it seeks to have a plurality of duties that are grounded in a single duty—claims to be *both* monist and pluralist, which is impossible.

I do not believe that my view falls prey to this objection. As I have argued, I do not claim that my view is monist. Although monism is a key feature of Kant's philosophy, I do not attempt to maintain this aspect of Kantian philosophy throughout this thesis. While I allow that the categorical imperative is an irreducible moral duty and that it may be understood as the "common thread" that grounds other moral duties, I deny that the categorical imperative is the *only* irreducible moral duty; for this reason, my view can be understood as pluralist.

My view is pluralist insofar as I defend an *irreducible* plurality of moral duties. While the Rossian duties can indeed be *derived* from the categorical imperative, they do not *reduce* to it. Each of the Rossian duties is irreducible and self-evident. These duties do not require external justification and thus do not rely on a single principle. Nonetheless, the categorical imperative can provide *additional* support for the Rossian duties. As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, we might think of the categorical imperative as yet another irreducible duty existing amongst the irreducible plurality of Rossian duties. This interconnected 'web' consists of a plurality of irreducible duties which may be related to one another in various ways; for example,

the Rossian duties might be derivable from the categorical imperative or from other Rossian duties. The fact that the categorical imperative plays a unifying or grounding role within this plurality does not suggest that all duties *reduce* to the categorical imperative. My view therefore preserves pluralism and rejects monism.

Section 1.5: Is the Notion of Self-evidence Weakened?

One might also raise the potential objection that, in my framework, the notion of self-evidence becomes too watered down. We might worry that if the general prima facie Rossian duties can be proven by the categorical imperative, then the claim that they are self-evident becomes irrelevant and weakened. I will now address this worry that my approach weakens the notion of self-evidence and removes what is essential.

I do not think that my view distorts the notion of self-evidence in any significant way. The core role of self-evidence within intuitionism is to demonstrate why some moral claims can be known non-inferentially, and my framework preserves this role. The fact that general prima facie duties are self-evident entails that they can be known without proof, not that they cannot be proved. General prima facie duties, on my view, can be said to be self-evident insofar as they are independently justified; this seems like the essential component of self-evidence, and a feature that is undeniably preserved by my view. The claim that some moral judgments are self-evident does not preclude the possibility that they can be proved or given additional support. The role of the categorical imperative is to unify the Rossian duties and provide them with additional support, not to undermine the fact that they are independently justified. It therefore seems that the core of self-evidence remains intact and that the general notion of self-evidence is not significantly weakened.

Additionally, the claim that general *prima facie* Rossian duties are self-evident is useful insofar as it provides an explanation for how some moral truths seem almost immediately knowable to us. In everyday life, we make moral decisions without pausing to reflect on abstract moral principles such as the categorical imperative. This aspect of moral life seems best explained by the fact that some moral judgments are self-evident and can be known non-inferentially. For these reasons, it seems that we have a clear reason to preserve the notion of self-evidence, despite the fact that the self-evident propositions in question may also garner support from external principles.

Section 1.6: The Possibility of an Additional “Unifying Principle”

As I have argued, the Rossian duties are self-evident but nonetheless provable and unified by the categorical imperative. This leaves us with an interesting question: does this framework rule out the possibility of yet *another* general moral principle that could also ground the Rossian duties, or even the categorical imperative itself? In other words, one might ask whether this framework leaves room for other potential “unifying principles” that could exist alongside the Rossian duties and the categorical imperative, and whether this could be a concern for my view.

I do not believe that the possibility of another principle grounding the Rossian duties is an issue for my view. However, intuitionism is undeniably more compatible with deontological frameworks than it is with utilitarian ones.²⁵ It therefore seems difficult to imagine how a utilitarian principle could ground the Rossian duties. However, it seems entirely possible that

²⁵ Ross’s criticism of utilitarianism is clear throughout his work. For example, he writes, “In fact it seems, on reflection, self-evident that a promise, simply as such, is something that *prima facie* ought to be kept, and it does *not*, on reflection, seem self-evident that production of maximum good is the only thing that makes an act obligatory” (1930, 40).

there could be another deontological principle—in addition to the categorical imperative—that could coexist in this framework and offer additional grounding for the Rossian duties.

The question of whether there could be another principle that grounds the categorical imperative itself is more complex. Even if the categorical imperative is—like the Rossian general *prima facie* duties—self-evident, I have argued that self-evident propositions *admit* of proof but do not *require* proof. It therefore seems theoretically possible that there could be another moral principle that grounds the categorical imperative (and, consequently, the Rossian duties). However, it seems notably difficult to imagine another moral principle that could be broader or more general than the categorical imperative itself. After all, Kant seems to believe that the categorical imperative is fundamental and basic in a sense; he refers to the categorical imperative as the “supreme principle of morality” (1996, 4:392, 4:440, 6:226, 6:395). Since Kant seems to view the categorical imperative as necessarily basic, it seems unlikely that there could be a broader moral principle that encompasses the categorical imperative.

Section 2: Concluding Remarks

Throughout this thesis, I hope to have shown that intuitionism and Kantianism are not only consistent, but complementary. In my view, the individual problems that these views face are resolved when the views are merged. First of all, intuitionism, taken alone, faces significant problems. Namely, it lacks a unifying moral theory as its basis, and it is only able to claim *that* certain moral duties are required (insofar as they are self-evident) without explaining *why* they are required. While intuitionism makes it clear that we have a duty to keep our promises, for example, it fails to explain *why* promise-keeping is a duty; we are left to wonder what it really is about promise-keeping that can be called “morally right”, and why it is that promise-keeping

and, say, self-improvement are both moral duties—since there is seemingly no “common moral thread” between them.

When Kantianism is applied to an intuitionist framework, these problems are dissolved. The categorical imperative acts as a unifying moral principle between the seemingly disconnected Rossian *prima facie* duties. This principle provides the Rossian duties with additional support and explains why it is that *these specific actions* are considered moral duties. In other words, the categorical imperative is the moral connection between the Rossian duties, and it explains *why* the Rossian duties are moral: they treat people as ends in themselves and never as mere means.

On the other hand, Kantianism also faces problems that seem resolvable through an intuitionist lens. In particular, Kantianism can be seen as too abstract and too far removed from actual moral practice. In everyday life, it seems unrealistic to claim that we make moral decisions by reflecting on a vague, distant moral principle. Furthermore, Kant denies the possibility of conflicting moral duties (1996, 6:224), thereby failing to account for an undeniably common aspect of moral life.

Partnering Kantianism with intuitionism seems to eliminate these concerns. Intuitionism draws Kantianism closer to everyday moral practice; insofar as intuitionism allows for specific moral truths to present themselves to us almost immediately, we are no longer forced to explain how abstract moral principles are connected to everyday moral decision-making. Intuitionism seems to better explain the fact that we are often able to make moral judgments without pausing to reflect on moral principles. Additionally, since intuitionism posits an irreducible plurality of *prima facie* moral duties and claims that—when these duties conflict—we must select an uncertain final duty, intuitionism is able to account for cases of conflicting duty.

Considering these benefits, one might wonder whether intuitionism or Kantianism has more to gain from this partnership. As I have shown, both views are undoubtedly benefitted by one another. However, it seems to me that—at least at face value—intuitionism's lack of a unifying moral theory is a potentially more pressing concern than Kantianism's distance from moral practice. It therefore seems likely that intuitionism reaps greater benefit from this pairing than Kantianism, although both views improve one another significantly.

We might also consider whether this project should be primarily thought of as a Kantian intuitionism or an intuitionistic Kantianism. In my view, this framework is better understood as a Kantian intuitionism. I aim to pull aspects of Kantian moral philosophy and apply them to Rossian intuitionism in an attempt to clarify both positions. Since the scope of Kantian philosophy is extremely vast and complex, it seems natural to focus only on a limited range of Kantianism—i.e. Kantian moral philosophy and, specifically, the Formula of Humanity. My aim throughout this thesis has been to apply this focused area of Kantian philosophy to intuitionism without sacrificing the core of intuitionism.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to show that Kantianism and intuitionism are compatible by addressing the two primary tensions between Kantianism and intuitionism: the metaethical conflict between intuitionistic realism and Kantian constructivism, and the conflict between intuitionistic pluralism and Kantian monism. I have argued that these tensions are best resolved by defending realism and pluralism and rejecting constructivism and monism. I have also aimed to illustrate how Kantianism and intuitionism, when combined, reinforce and improve one another. In merging these two frameworks, my hope has been to utilize intuitionism to soften the abstract, distant nature of Kantianism and to utilize the categorical imperative to unify and ground the Rossian duties.

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