

# INTENTIONALITY, NORMATIVITY AND COMMUNALITY IN KANT'S REALM OF ENDS

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## 1. Introduction

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant claims that there is *only one* unconditionally demanding moral law or categorical imperative (CI) (G 4:421, 4:436)<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, he distinguishes several (kinds of) formula's of CI: (i) the formula of a *universal law* (FUL): “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (G 4:421)<sup>2</sup>, (ii) the formula of *humanity as end in itself* (FH): “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” (G 4:429)<sup>3</sup>, (iii) the formula of *autonomy* (FA): “to act only so that the will could regard itself as at the same time giving universal law through its maxim” (G 4:434)<sup>4</sup>, and (iv) the formula of the *realm of ends* (FRE): “act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends” (G 4:439)<sup>5</sup>. In summarizing his account of CI, Kant repeats his claim that these different “ways of representing the principle of morality”

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1 All page references are to I. KANT, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later: German) Academy of Sciences, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–. Used abbreviations: Ak: Academy edition, CPR: *Critique of Pure Reason*, CPJ: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, G: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, LE: *Lectures on Ethics*, LPR: *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, MM: *The Metaphysics of Morals*. All translations are taken from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, edited by Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995–.

2 See also G 4:402, 4:434, 4:437, 4:438; MM 6:389; LE 27:469.

3 See also G 4:433, 4:436, 4:437, 4:438; MM 6:236, 6:410, 6:462.

4 See also G 4:431, 4:432, 4:440, 4:447; LE 27:469.

5 Alternatively: “Every rational being must act as if he were by his maxims at all times a law-giving member of the universal kingdom of ends” (G 4:438).

are to be seen as “only so many formulae of the very same law”, but at the same time he adds that “there is nevertheless a difference among them” (G 4:436). This difference concerns the fact that FRE implies a “complete determination” of CI referring to the harmonization of “all the maxims from one’s own lawgiving [to] (‘zu’) a possible kingdom of ends” (G 4:436).

In this paper we assess the notions of intentionality, normativity and communality in Kant’s ‘realm of ends’. We first argue that FRE reveals not only the commonly acknowledged deontological nature of Kant’s ‘practical reasons’ ethics, but also its essentially *teleological* nature, i.e., its intentional commitment to ends, secondly that FRE, by uniting FUL, FH and FA, grounds a *social* and *communal* morally normative *practice*, and thirdly that FRE requires us to take up an auto-reflexive as well as an *intersubjective* stance in evaluating the moral legitimacy of one’s intentions and (inter)actions.

## 2. Intentionality

Let us first analyse what Kant understands by a ‘realm of ends’, as it will allow us to reevaluate the *teleological* dimension—here understood as the intentional commitment to ends—of Kant’s so-called deontological ethics. Kant defines the ‘realm of ends’ (‘Reich der Zwecke’) as “a whole of all ends in systematic connection (a whole both of rational beings as ends in themselves and the ends of his own that each may set himself)”, and adds that “all rational beings stand under the *law* that each of them is to treat himself and all others *never merely as means* but always *at the same time as ends in themselves*”. This leads to “a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws, that is, a kingdom, which can be called a kingdom of ends (admittedly only an ideal) because what these laws have as their purpose is just the relation of these things to one another as ends and means” (G 4:433).

The ‘realm of ends’ is not merely the union of all rational beings as ‘ends in themselves’, i.e., as ‘persons’ having an incomparable, absolute and ‘inner’ worth instead of a merely comparative ‘price’, but also of “the ends of his own that each may set himself”. This ‘double’ sense of the ‘realm of ends’ is crucial, but is sometimes understated or misconceived even by influential authors such as Rawls (2000) and Hare (1963)<sup>6</sup>. Thus,

6 Rawls takes the ‘realm of ends’ as expressing the idea of a “moral commonwealth” in which we view ourselves as equal “legislators [...] of the public moral law”, but as such leaves out

the 'realm of ends' has a twofold sense for it concerns not only the systematic connection of all rational beings, but also the systematic connection of all their ends. By the latter, Kant refers to those ends that can be called 'morally legitimate', i.e., ends that are directly entailed by the moral law ('ends *as duties*') or ends that are at least not contradictory to or inconsistent with the moral law. In this 'broader' sense, the 'realm of ends' does not by definition exclude the striving for non-moral ends as long as these do not interfere or conflict with the moral law. In the 'stricter' sense, the ends involved are those that *necessarily* belong to the 'realm of ends' because they can be approved and pursued by a community of rational self-legislators. Taking these approaches together, the 'realm of ends' requires both "the *exclusion* of ends that *in principle* cannot be shared between rational beings" and "the *furthering* of ends that unite people (such as those involving mutual respect and mutual aid)"<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, Kant claims that the laws of the 'realm of ends' have as their purpose "just the relation of these things to one another as ends and means" (G 4:433). What could this mean? Just as Kant argues in the third Critique that 'organized beings' have to be judged as 'natural ends', whose parts "are possible only through their relation to the whole" (CPJ 5:373), meaning that "each part is conceived as if it exists only through all the others, thus as if existing for the sake of the others and on account of the whole" (CPJ 5:373f), rational beings can only form a 'realm of ends' insofar as their ends harmonize into a 'system', i.e., insofar as their purposes are both mutually consistent and reciprocally supportive, and hence result in a single *unified teleological system*. As Wood argues, "a 'realm' requires a harmony [...] of ends so that the ends of all can be pursued in common"<sup>8</sup>.

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the second part of Kant's idea, i.e., the unification of all morally legitimate ends. S. J. RAWLS, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 204. Hare interprets the 'realm of ends' as "the liberal's ideal" of "a good society" in which the "ends and interests of all are given equal consideration", but downplays the necessity of a *systematicity* and *totality* of all morally legitimate ends, which is essential to Kant's 'realm of ends' (see further below). See R. M. HARE, *Freedom and Reason*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 179. For accurate accounts, see e.g. J. H. ZAMMITO, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgement*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, p. 319; A. W. WOOD, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 166; and P. GUYER, *Kant*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006.

7 WOOD, *o.c.*, 1999, p. 169.

8 WOOD, *o.c.*, 1999, p. 166.

In sum, the peculiarity of FRE lies in the fact that it reveals an explicitly intentional commitment to ends, and moreover a *duty* to strive for a harmonious unification of all morally legitimate *ends*. As such, FRE unites as it were both Kant's deontological and teleological ethics, i.e., Kant's ethics as a system of duties and ethics as a system of ends. As Kant states in his *Metaphysics of Morals (Doctrine of Virtue)*: "Ends and duties distinguish the two divisions of the doctrine of morals in general. That ethics contains duties that one cannot be constrained by others [...] to fulfill follows merely from its being a doctrine of *ends*, since *coercion* to ends (to have them) is self-contradictory" (MM 6:381). It is precisely in FRE that *deontology* and *teleology* become intertwined. Therefore we now turn to FRE's normative dimension and its connection to the teleological dimension of CI.

### 3. Normativity

Kant calls the 'realm of ends' an "ideal" (G 4:433; 4:462) rather than an "idea". While the latter can be defined as a concept of pure reason, an "ideal" concerns the "representation of an individual being as adequate to an idea" (CPJ 5:232), or "the idea not merely in *concreto* but in *individuo*, i.e., as an individual thing which is determinable [...] through the idea alone" (CPR A:568; B:596). Although being a determinable individual thing, an ideal stands like an 'archetype' ('Urbild') that completely determines its copies: "just as the idea gives the rule, so the ideal [...] serves as the original image for the thoroughgoing determination of the copy" (CPR A:569; B:597). In this respect, Kant mentions the ideal of the stoic sage as an exemplar designing an image of complete conformity with the idea of wisdom. Thus, while virtue is an *idea* of reason generating *rules* for moral judgment, the stoic sage is an *ideal* serving as a *unique standard* or *model* to shape our moral conduct: "we have in us no other standard for our actions than the conduct of this divine human being, with which we compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves, even though we can never reach the standard" (CPR A:569; B:597). Likewise, the 'realm of ends' can be interpreted as the only *ideal* of reason with which to compare our human *relations* and *interactions*: it serves for designing a vivid image of what would be a perfect *social moral practice*, the concept of which is "complete in its kind, in order to assess and measure the degree and the defects of what is incomplete" (CPR A:570; B:598).

Moreover, Kant also assesses the 'realm of ends' in terms of a "practical idea" by opposing it to the 'realm of nature'<sup>9</sup>. Kant makes it clear that the former concerns not "a theoretical idea for explaining what exists", but rather "a practical idea for the sake of bringing about, in conformity with this very idea, that which does not exist but which can become real by means of our conduct" (G 4:436, footnote). Hence, it is obvious that Kant takes the 'realm of ends' as a *normative or constructive* idea of practical reason to model the natural world as it ought to be. Further, Kant argues that, while the 'realm of nature' is only possible on the basis of *heteronomous laws* of "externally necessitated efficient causes", the 'realm of ends' is merely possible through *autonomous maxims*, i.e., "rules imposed upon oneself" (G 4:438). As Kant puts it in his lectures: "If I picture to myself a kingdom of natural things, [...] then that is the kingdom of nature under heteronomy. But I can also picture a kingdom of purposes with autonomy, which is the kingdom of rational beings, who have a general system of ends in view. In this realm, we consider ourselves as those who obey the law, but also as those who give laws." (LE 29:629).

Yet, Kant does not only oppose the 'realm of ends' to the 'realm of nature', but also contends that the former has to be conceived "by analogy with" the latter. This analogy can be interpreted in a twofold way. First, from a general point of view, the analogy concerns the fact that while the 'realm of ends' is governed by laws of freedom and the 'the realm of nature' is governed by mechanical laws of causality, both display a kind of basic universal lawfulness —be it deterministically or intentionally. Secondly, in light of the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, the 'realm of ends' can be conceived by analogy with the 'realm of nature' provided that the latter be *judged* as a *teleological unified system* rather than as a merely *mechanical aggregate*<sup>10</sup>. Just as the whole of nature has to be judged as mutually cooperative in producing the ultimate end of nature (culture), the 'realm of ends' has to be understood as an archetypal world wherein all rational beings cooperate in order to establish a practically reason-based a priori end, i.e., the harmonious consistency of all morally legitimate ends. This analogy leads us back to the teleological dimension of Kant's 'realm of ends', which we discussed above, i.e., its commitment

9 It remains puzzling why Kant assesses the 'realm of ends' alternatively in terms of an "ideal" (G 4:433; 4:462) and a "practical idea" (G 4:436, footnote) and how this twofold assessment is to be understood.

10 On Kant's interpretation of 'system' versus 'aggregate' see especially the *First Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Ak 20:203, 20:206, 20:208-9, 20:247-248).

to establish such a harmonious consistency. Combined with the normative dimension of the ‘realm of ends’, it becomes obvious that FRE expresses a demand to act from moral laws (FRE’s normative dimension) and with an explicit commitment to realise a harmonious unification of rational lawgivers and their morally legitimate ends (FRE’s teleological dimension). In the following section we argue that this demand can only be fully appreciated if the communal and intersubjective dimensions of Kant’s FRE are explicitly taken into account.

#### 4. Intersubjectivity and Communal

As already mentioned, Kant relates FRE to the “complete determination” of CI with which all maxims have to comply, stipulating “that all maxims from one’s own lawgiving are to harmonize [to] (‘zu’) a possible kingdom of ends” (G 4:436). As Kant argues, FRE unites both (i) the *form* of the maxims consisting in their universality, so that maxims have to be chosen as if they held as universal laws, and (ii) the *matter* or absolute end of the maxims, which is related to the demand that the rational being as end in itself has to serve as the limiting condition of all merely relative ends (G 4:436). Obviously, form and matter refer to FUL and FH respectively. However, FA is also incorporated into FRE as is proven by adding “from one’s own lawgiving”. By connecting FUL, FH and FA to one another *in* FRE, the latter resists any *merely formalistic* approach of Kant’s CI. Moreover, FRE expresses a supplementary *communal* dimension that is not made explicit by FUL, FH and FA separately. As Johnson emphasizes: “The intuitive idea behind this formulation [FRE] is that our fundamental moral obligation is to act only on principles which could earn acceptance by a community of fully rational agents each of whom have an equal share in legislating these principles for their community”<sup>11</sup>.

Kant connects this differentiation between form, matter and complete determination to a ‘quantitative’ progress from ‘unity’ of the form of the will and ‘plurality’ of the matter of the will to ‘allness’ or ‘totality’ in FRE (G 4:436). Understanding the nature of ‘totality’ reveals an important, though often neglected aspect of Kant’s ethics. In the first Critique

11 R. JOHNSON, ‘Kant’s Moral Philosophy’, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2004/entries/kant-moral>, § 8. Retrieved on December 6, 2007. Or, as Kant says: “For it is only insofar *all* rational creatures act according to these eternal laws of reason that they stand under a principle of *community* and *together* constitute a system of all ends” [italics added] (LPR 28:1100).

“allness” or “totality” is defined as “nothing other than plurality considered as a unity” (CPR B 110-1), which amounts to saying that totality exists in a kind of harmony of plurality *in* unity. FRE requires that a *plurality* of both rational beings as ‘ends in themselves’ and of their *particular*—morally legitimate—ends is brought into harmony under formal unifying principles of pure practical reason. Hence, FRE once again reveals its essential ‘*social*’ or ‘*communal*’ dimension: it is only in and through a ‘realm of ends’ that a universal valid law can be found for a *plurality* of rational agents *united* in an ideal moral *community*.

Let us further consider the significance of membership in the ‘realm of ends’. The specificity of FRE lies in the fact that it extends the function of autonomy and dignity as *principium executionis* for executing one’s moral actions to all rational subjects *as members* of a moral community. Such membership ‘guarantees’ that the autonomous will can serve both as its *own* and as a *universal* law: the common laws uniting rational beings in a ‘realm of ends’ have to be laws that are *equally valid for* and *equally recognized by* all members, which is only possible if all members are lawgiver of as well as subject to these laws. Further, FRE unites rational beings through moral laws regulating their *reciprocal relations* as *ends and means*. This implies the claim that *only if* one presupposes of oneself and of all others—insofar as these are affected by the actions of one another—that they do not only have their own personal ends, but also possess the capacity to and the interest for universal (self)legislation, a *systematic connection* of *all* morally legitimate ends is *possible*. Hence, it is *guaranteed* that all involved agents are capable of abstracting from their particular ends and of constructing a universally *valid* and universally *acceptable* maxim so that a harmonious unity of all ends can be realized<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, the *culmination* of the formula’s in FRE implies that a ‘realm of ends’ is so regulated that, in striving for particular purposes, each member as a universal lawgiver never restricts other members to do the same: each member has to take into account his own perspective *and* at the same time the perspective of the other members as equal self-legislators<sup>13</sup>. For this reason, Guyer speaks of the ‘realm of ends’ as “a system

12 See also P. GUYER, ‘The Possibility of the Categorical Imperative’, in Paul Guyer (ed.), *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Critical Essays*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, pp. 238-239: “[...] only in a community all of whose members see themselves as universal legislators and not just as pursuers of individual ends will there always be some maxim that is indeed not only acceptable to but well motivated for all.”

13 See also A. W. WOOD, *Kant*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 141-142.

of freedom, in which all agents freely pursue their freely chosen ends *to the extent compatible with a like freedom for all*” [italics added]<sup>14</sup>. Hence, by establishing a *totality* of a *non-conflicting unity* of *common substantive ends*, i.e., the valuation of each other as end in itself, amidst a *plurality of particular relative purposes*, FRE once again resists any *merely* blindly universalistic or *merely* auto-reflexively individualistic approach of Kant’s CI<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, the *communal applicability* of CI gains greater plausibility because FRE entails that the whole of all the subjects’ *maxims (plural!)* has to fuse *into* a ‘realm of ends’, i.e., that all the subjects’ maxims *taken together* have to be universalizable. This demand to construct a universalizable system of maxims is again reinforced by the fact that in conceiving such a system the moral agent “must always take his maxims *from the point of view of himself, and likewise every other rational being*, as lawgiving beings” [italics added] (G 4:438). FRE demands from *every* rational subject to construct an encompassing corpus of universalizable maxims viewed *from* the pluralistic diversity of perspectives of all involved, equally lawgiving members of the community. Hence, FRE not only requires an *auto-reflexive* but also a *communal* and *intersubjective* stance in evaluating the legitimacy of one’s (inter)actions and intentions — although it has to be acknowledged that Kant silently passes over the question of *how* this intersubjectivity effectively ought to take place<sup>16</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

FRE grounds (the possibility of) a *communal moral practice* and thus reveals several subtle dimensions that —historically speaking— have sometimes been downplayed in focussing exclusively on FUL and —as a result of this— in portraying Kant’s CI as rigorously formalistic and one-

14 P. GUYER, ‘Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)’, in Edward Craig (ed.), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1998 / 2004, <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DB047SECT9>. Retrieved on December 6, 2007.

15 See also Thomas W. Pogge, ‘The Categorical Imperative’, in Paul Guyer (ed.), o.c., 1998, p. 202: “In deliberating what maxim I may adopt, I am to ask which maxims I would make universally available, if it were my task to legislate so as to guarantee unity and harmony among a *plurality* of (human) persons [...] involved in the pursuit of their *self-chosen ends*” [italics added].

16 This issue is tackled by e.g. Habermas in his ‘discourse ethics’. See especially J. HABERMAS, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, translated by C. Lenhardt and S. Nicholson, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.



sidedly deontological<sup>17</sup>. It is therefore necessary to fully appreciate Kant's assessment of CI in terms of FRE, especially since Kant himself took the 'realm of ends' to be the ultimate basis of his views on morality. As he argues in the *Groundwork*, "morality consists, then, in the reference of all action to the lawgiving by which alone a kingdom of ends is possible" (G 4:434), or, as he strikingly puts it in his *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, "morality is an absolutely necessary system of *all ends*, and it is just this agreement with the idea of a system which is *the ground of the morality of an action*" (LPR 28:1075)<sup>18</sup>.

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17 See also P. GUYER, *o.c.*, 1998 / 2004, <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DB047SECT9>: "Traditionally, Kant has been seen as an ethical formalist, according to whom all judgments on the values of ends must be subordinated to the obligatory universality of a moral law derived from the very concept of rationality itself."

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