

3:AM Magazine

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Treating people as ends in themselves

[Christine M. Korsgaard](#) interviewed by **Richard Marshall**.



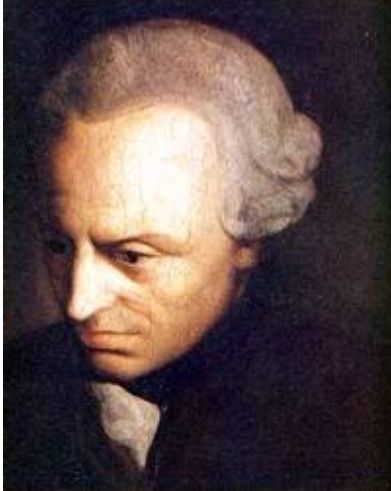
Christine M Korsgaard is a kool kandy Kantian who spins heads in the philosophical pool by being a Kantian naturalist. That's bold. She thinks we are laws to ourselves. She thinks a particular form of self constitution is the source of normativity. She has cool advice for Parfit's Russian nobleman and his wife. Brian Leiter, Pat Churchland and Alex Rosenberg don't give her sleepless nights. And in Jimmy Stewart she finds a lightening rod for moral reflection. Which makes her not just our most important contemporary Kantian moral philosopher but the grooviest of philosophical groove sensations.

3:AM: When did you decide to become a philosopher? Was this a surprise to you or to people who knew you?

KK: Philosophy comes naturally to me, in the sense that from an early age, I kept journals in which I would write down my thoughts and the reasons for them, and have arguments with myself about those reasons. But I am a first-generation college student, so no one around me really knew about philosophy, and it wasn't until something like the end of high school that I learned that this activity had a name and was something you could go into. Even then, though, I had no picture of myself becoming a philosopher, or a philosophy professor. I just wanted to pursue my interest in the subject.

After high school I didn't go to college right away. I hadn't liked high school much, and wrongly supposed college would be more of the same. I was a bookish kid, but I thought I could be an autodidact. So while I was working I tried

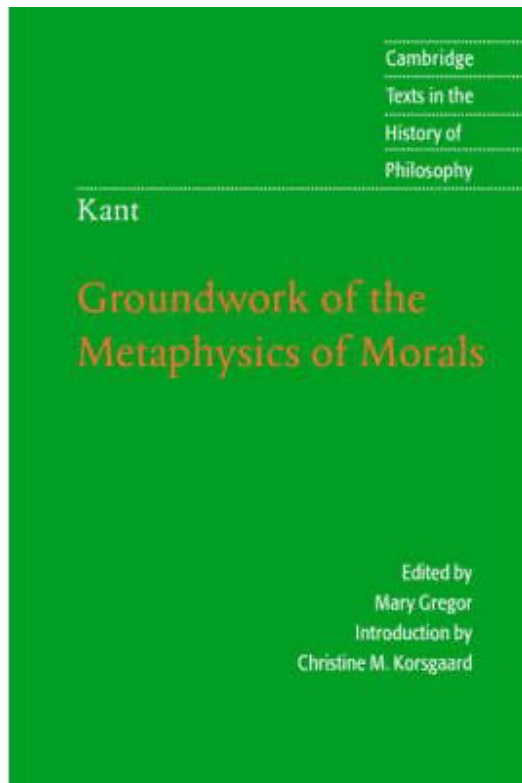
to teach myself philosophy. But it's too hard, so after a while I decided to go to college to study it. I don't think I ever exactly decided to be a philosopher. After college I went to graduate school, not so much to become a philosopher, as just to keep on studying philosophy. In the 70s the job market in philosophy was pretty bad, and when you applied to graduate school, you got a letter from the schools you applied to that basically said "Don't come; we can't find you employment." But since I had done office work before college and in the summers, I figured I could always find employment, so I didn't worry about that. From graduate school of course it was natural to go on the job market, so I became a philosopher. I think I'm still surprised.



3:AM: You are perhaps the most important leading [Kantian](#) moral philosopher. In your early book '[Creating the Kingdom of Ends](#)' you write: 'Reflection ... commits us to the conception of our humanity as a source of value. This is the basis of Kant's Formula of Humanity, the principle of treating all human beings as ends-in-themselves.' This is the core to your approach to morality isn't it? Can you say what this formula is and whether it came to you as a discovery whilst examining Kant's arguments, or else as a sort of confirmation of what you were already thinking?

KK: The specific idea of humanity as a source of value comes from [Kant](#), but it represents the kind of idea that attracted me to Kant in the first place. I have always been suspicious of the idea that values simply, and without further explanation, exist; that they are, as people say, part of the fabric of the universe. I am what philosophers call a "naturalistic" philosopher, in the sense that I assume that the universe is basically the one that the physical sciences describe, and that the existence of anything other than basic material things requires an explanation: sometimes a scientific explanation, but sometimes a different kind of explanation altogether. I am not what philosophers call a "reductive" naturalist, because I believe that there are good explanations of the existence of lots of kinds of things that the physical sciences have no truck with – or rather, that the physical sciences can only approach by way of these other explanations.

For example, functional or purposive objects – furniture and tools – exist only in the perspective of beings who have the purposes in question. The physical sciences can explain the matter of a hammer, but to explain its form and function, you have to talk about the way creatures who sometimes have to pound on things look at the world. I think values are like that – they exist because people, and in a certain way the other animals too, have to value things. Ultimately, there are values because of the way people (and the other animals) have to value themselves and each other, if they are going to value anything at all.



[Philosophers](#) may be startled when I suggest that Kant is a [naturalistic](#) philosopher, because he talks about a distinction between the “noumenal world” and the “phenomenal world,” reality and appearances, that makes it sound like he believes in some realm beyond the natural world. But actually, Kant is the best naturalistic philosopher, because he believes that the existence of pretty much anything that isn’t obviously part of the natural world can be explained in terms of the human perspective and human needs, including our cognitive needs as creatures who try to form a conception of the world. He thinks that even reason itself must be explained in terms of our needs as self-consciously cognitive and active beings. And Kant seeks explanations of these “non-natural” things that aren’t “reductive” in a slightly different sense of the word than the one I mentioned above – explanations that don’t make them turn out to be less deep or important, or in some way cheaper, than we thought they were.

But that answer makes it sound too much as if it is only, so to speak, the metaphysics that attracts me to Kant’s *Formula of Humanity*, and that isn’t true. I also think Kant gets it right here morally, or almost right. I think Kant was correct in pointing to the idea that people should not use each other as mere means as something that is at the core of our moral relations with each other. And it is right to think that the real source of all value in the world lies in people and animals. Kant left the other animals out, which is why I say he only almost got it right.

3:AM: You’ve recently written the introduction to the new edition of [Kant’s Groundwork](#). Can you say why you think Kant’s approach to morality remains extremely relevant?

KK: Partly for the reasons I just mentioned. And partly for a reason that Kant himself insisted on: his theory that obligation is based in autonomy, or rational self-government, gives us the only adequate account of why we have moral obligations. According to Kant, the only way we can actually be obligated to do something is if we ourselves recognize it as a law that we should do that thing – and so, in effect, command ourselves to do it. Kant’s philosophy is an articulation of the view that grown-up people live under their own self-government, and that morality is the ultimate expression of that fact. We are, in St. Paul’s famous words, laws to ourselves.

3:AM: I suppose one of the things that might strike us as being peculiar about Kant is that he thinks that even if I do

good things all the time but am not morally motivated (so I just happen to like being nice) then my actions are morally worthless. How does he justify this position and do you agree with him?

KK: “Moral worth” isn’t a synonym for moral value in general; Kant isn’t saying that such actions have no value at all. Moral worth is the specific kind of goodness that characterizes the will, the faculty of choice. Kant brings the issue up because he believes that by reflecting on what exactly constitutes moral worth, we can discover what the moral law is. The idea is that a good will is the will of a person who does the right thing for the right kind of reason, so by thinking about how a person with a good will makes choices, we can discover how we ought to make choices – what the right kind of reason is.

What Kant discovers is that a person of good will does the right thing because he recognizes that there is a law, that is, a claim on him, to act in a certain way. And that leads to the formulation of the categorical imperative, which tells us to act only on principles that we can regard as laws. And yes, I agree with him. If you feed me when I am starving, or keep your promise to me, only because you “like being nice,” but you do not acknowledge that I have any claim on you, or that you owe this to me, then your actions are without moral worth. You have not reflected deeply enough on the relations in which you stand to other people, and what you owe to them.



SELF-CONSTITUTION

Agency, Identity, and Integrity

CHRISTINE M. KORSGAARD

OXFORD

3:AM: The normativity of self-constitution is a key idea in your philosophy isn’t it? What do you take this to be and why is it so important to you and to what you take philosophizing to be?

KK: It’s not the normativity of self-constitution. It’s that a particular form of [self-constitution](#) is the source of normativity.

All living things are self-constituting, in the sense that they are engaged in a constant process of making themselves into themselves. Living things are made of fragile materials which are always decaying or being used up, and they constantly take in new materials and transform those materials into themselves – that is, into their own parts and organs and energy. In fact, a living thing just is such a process.

Human life is a form of life, and I believe that the things that make human life so different from that of the other animals can be traced to a special feature of the way we carry on this process of self-constitution. There is an aspect of our identity – I call it practical identity – which we construct self-consciously. By that I don't mean that we go around thinking "okay, now I am constructing my identity." I mean that when we decide what to count as reasons for our actions and what principles of action to commit ourselves to, we are also deciding who to be. What makes this possible is the fact that human beings have a particular form of self-consciousness, which makes us aware of the grounds of our beliefs and actions – in the case of actions, the motives that prompt them, in the case of beliefs, the perceptions, the evidence, the arguments that make them seem compelling. The other animals believe and act as their nature prompts them, but they lack the kind of control over their nature which our awareness of the grounds of our beliefs and actions gives us. Being aware of their grounds, we cannot commit ourselves to belief or action unless we can endorse those grounds. To endorse them is to treat them as reasons. That's why human beings need to have reasons for what we believe and what we do.

In the practical case, the case of action, we get these reasons from the roles and relationships that life makes available, and perhaps some we carve out for ourselves. That you are someone's mother or friend, that you have a certain occupation, that you have enrolled yourself to fight for some cause, are all sources of reasons and obligations for you. There are two things interesting about this kind of identity. One is that we carve it out for ourselves and are responsible for it, and the other is that it is normative, or value laden. That is, having a certain practical identity is something that we try to live up to, that we succeed or fail at, that makes us good or bad.

That's something I think is special about being human – having a normative self-conception, wanting, as we say, to respect yourself, thinking of yourself as worthy or unworthy, rating yourself. It's a condition that gives a strange extra dimension to human life, both a special source of pride and interest and a profound cause of suffering. Some of the other animals seem to have moments of pride, but they don't seem in general to think of themselves as worthy or unworthy beings. Some of them certainly want to be loved, but I don't think they worry about being lovable. So having a normative form of identity that you carve out for yourself is one of the most distinctive features of being human. It is because we are self-constituting in this way, I believe, that human beings are governed by rules and laws and norms.



The Constitution of Agency

Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology

CHRISTINE M. KORSGAARD

OXFORD

3:AM: Another big theme, of course linked with self-constitution, is that of agency. You say in your book [Self-Constitution](#) that humans are condemned to choice and act. And that action is self-constitution. Can you say more about what you mean by this and why action is so significant?

KK: Action is significant because people are their actions. If I push you from behind, having been blown over by a strong wind myself, and we fall like a pair of dominos, that's a misfortune. But if I push you from behind, to hurry you along so that I can go faster, or to save you from a truck that's about to hit you, that's me. Philosophers have always insisted on the point that people are supposed to be responsible for their actions, but what I have in mind is something almost more primitive than that. We take people's actions personally: for example, we think we are allowed to love and hate people for their actions, while we think it's wrong to love or hate someone (just) because of his physical characteristics, or where he comes from, or what's happened to him. And this is related to the fact that people are supposed to be the source of their actions in some special way.

Some philosophers think that special way is that people are the causes of their actions. Other philosophers think that people are the sources of their actions because actions have mental causes, like desires or intentions. They think that causal chains that run through our mental lives somehow reflect what we are more intimately than causal chains that run through our physical lives (like the one that leads from the strong wind blowing me over to my pushing you from behind). I think that people are the sources of their actions in the sense that we constitute our identities as agents when we act.

There are two thoughts working together here, and it will help if I separate them. One is that we make ourselves into agents when we act. I know that sounds odd; I'll come back to it. The other is that we make ourselves into the particular agents who we are by the content of what we choose to do. That one is easier to understand, of course. When I take on a role, and act on the reasons and obligations associated with it, I make it part of my identity to have that role.

How do I at the same time make myself an agent? When an agent acts, she deliberately brings about a change in the world by determining her own movements. So the question how I make myself an agent comes down to the question how I make my movements efficacious, and how I make them my own. I make my movements efficacious by choosing the right means to my ends. That's why action is governed by the principle of taking the means to our ends. I make my movements my own by acting on the principles in which I believe, the ones I think of as laws. That's why action is governed by the categorical imperative, which tells us to act on those principles we can regard as laws. So as I see it, human action has an essentially moral dimension. The argument for that is kind of complicated, but here's a fairly colloquial way to put it. We think of any creature as acting when its movements are determined by its mind. Even simple creatures like insects are agents who do things because their movements are determined by their perceptions, by sights and sounds and smells. But for human beings, being determined by the mind means being determined by thinking. And your movements are most your own when they are determined by your own thoughts about what you ought to do. So when your movements are governed by your deepest thinking – by the principles that, on reflection, you believe are the right ones to act on, and that you identify with – then they are most genuinely your own. So by acting on principle, I make myself an agent.



3:AM: One of my favourite chapters of yours is *'The Constitutional model'* where you outline two competing models of the soul. There you engage with issues of the role of instincts and what Hume calls 'the combat of passion and reason.' Could you explain the contrast and why you find the constitutional model the more compelling of the two?

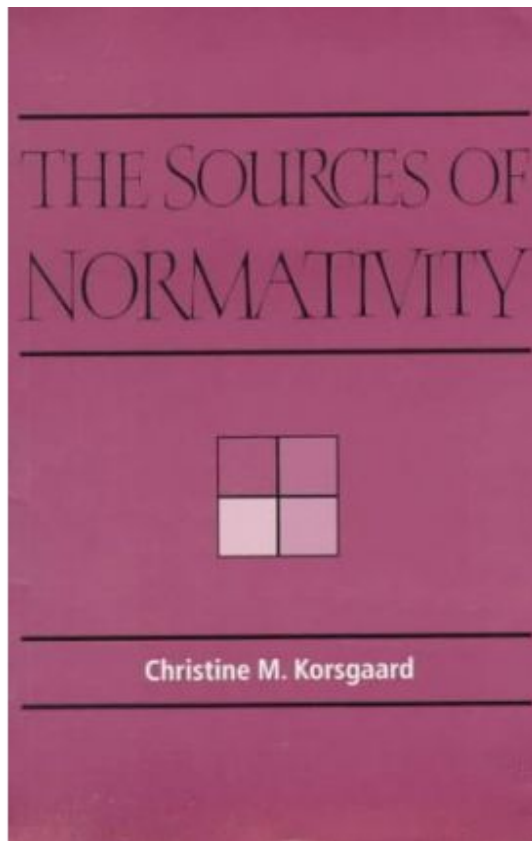
KK: According to the combat model of the soul, reason and "passion" (as the 18th century philosophers like to put it) compete for control of our actions. We act morally and rationally when reason wins. This conventional picture makes very little sense, however. How is an agent supposed to choose between reason and passion, when reason itself is the faculty of choice? Or if the agent does not choose between them, but is simply overwhelmed by one of them, why do we attribute the resulting action to the agent at all? (It's no accident that we speak of being overwhelmed by passion, but not of being overwhelmed by reason.) For that matter, if they serve the same function – providing motives to act – how is the difference between reason and passion any different from the difference between two different passions? According to the constitutional model, which I derive from Plato's famous comparison between the city-state and the soul, reason and passion are not competitors for the same role, but rather serve different functions – roughly speaking, passion proposes and reason disposes. Our emotions, desires, and passions suggest things we might do, but reason decides. If they are in conflict, passion is getting out of line and trying to usurp reason's function, which is the government of the self.



I prefer this model because it makes better sense of our psychic economy. Reason and passion do different things; they

are not just sources of different kinds of motives. But I also like it because the comparison between the city-state and the soul helps to clarify the nature of self-constitution, especially the part about making yourself into an agent. It's easier to see how a city-state makes itself into an agent than how an individual person does that. A group of people make themselves into a city-state by adopting principles together, by making shared laws. And when they make themselves into a city-state, they are making themselves into a collective agent, whose actions are governed by its laws.

3:AM: In one of the essays in the collection *'The Constitution of Agency'* you argue that contemporary moral philosophy is mistaken in viewing its concepts as essentially descriptive rather than constructivist. But some argue that your way of understanding constructivism doesn't distinguish it from pragmatists who define truth in terms of usefulness nor realists who use descriptions to solve practical problems. How do you respond to these critics?



KK: I argue that practical [normative](#) concepts – concepts like “right,” “good,” or “just” which have implications for what we do – are essentially placeholders for the solutions of certain problems that people have to solve. Speaking a bit roughly, “good” names the solution to the problem of what to aim for, what goals to have; “right” names the solution of the problem of what to do, “just” names the solution of the problem of what we may legitimately expect from one another in social and political life.

One advantage of looking at things this way is that it explains what two philosophers who disagree about what, say, justice is, are disagreeing about. Say one thinks justice is maximizing the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and another thinks justice is protecting each person's liberty to the greatest possible extent compatible with a like liberty for others. Why are they disagreeing about “justice” rather than merely talking about two different things? Well, because they are disagreeing about the principles that determine what we may legitimately expect from one another in social and political life.

The difference between my view and that of the realist is that I think that finding the solutions to these problems is essentially a matter of practical reasoning, not a matter of finding out certain truths about the world – say finding out what things have intrinsic value and are therefore “really” worth aiming for. I think we solve these problems by a kind

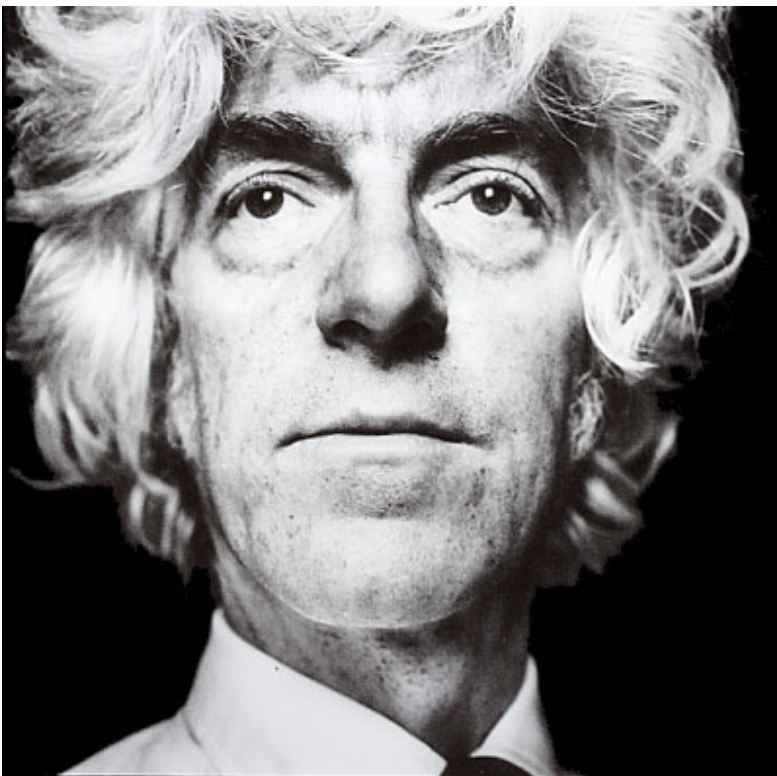
of thinking that is continuous with ordinary practical deliberation, that is, by asking: what should I do and how should I do it? As for pragmatism, before we can know what is useful, we must know what is good, so the pragmatist standard cannot come into play until after the kind of question I am talking about gets settled.

3:AM: A striking conclusion you argue for in that essay and one that runs through much of your work is that reason is no despot. This is because ‘we identify with the voice of reason.’ Can you explain how this is so and whether you think this is true of most people? I guess the worry is that when we go about our ordinary lives so much seems to be irrational and non-reasonable. Is there a worry that this is too refined and unworldly a view of what actual people are like?

KK: “Reason” and related terms like “rational” can be used in either a normative or a descriptive way. When we use these terms normatively, “reason” is synonymous with “good reason.” When we use the term descriptively, a reason is some consideration on the basis of which we decide to do something. In that sense, there things you do for good reasons, things you do for bad reasons, and things you do, but not for reasons at all – like, say, scream when you see a monster at the window. (It’s not like you think, “oh, a monster. I guess I had better scream now.”) It’s because we use the terms both ways that we can say, “that’s a bad reason” (descriptive use) and “that’s no reason at all” (normative use) and mean essentially the same thing.

So a first point is that when I say that we identify with reason, I am using “reason” in a descriptive sense. The fact that we do some things automatically rather than on consideration doesn’t challenge the claim that we identify with reason, since we don’t always identify with such reactions – in some cases we apologize for them and say we couldn’t help ourselves. And the fact that we do many things for bad reasons doesn’t show that we don’t identify with the voice of reason either. It only shows that often we can’t hear it very well.

As I mentioned when I talked about the contrast between the constitutional model and the combat model, we sometimes say we were overwhelmed by passion when we have acted badly, but we don’t say we were overwhelmed by reason when we have acted well. That’s not just because acting well doesn’t require an excuse. It’s because when you do what you wholeheartedly believe you had excellent reason to do, you identify with the action, and don’t wish to chalk it up to some force working within you rather than to yourself.



3:AM: In ‘Integrity and Interaction’ (chapter 9 of *Self-Constitution*) you tell the story of **Derek Parfit**’s Russian nobleman who in his youth was a socialist planning to redistribute his wealth who worries that when he gets old enough to do this he’ll have changed his mind and become conservative. So he decides to act now to make a contract to bind his later self. Only his wife can revoke this contract and he asks that she will not ask him to revoke it even if his later self pleads with her to do so. You disagree with Parfit on this don’t you? Can you say what you take the issue to be and how you resolve it?

KK: “Disagree” isn’t exactly the right word here. **Parfit** uses the example to illustrate the way we might think about someone who predicts that his values will change, and how we should think about the identity of such a person over time. Parfit suggests that both the nobleman and his wife might think of the nobleman’s later self as a different person. In an earlier paper, I argued that there is something already amiss with taking a merely predictive attitude towards your own future values. Our values are, after all, up to us – they are not something that simply happens to us – and that goes with the ways in which our practical identity is up to us.



In the passage you refer to, I am using the example to make a slightly different point. It is an important part of Parfit’s own argument that the example is not supposed to be like the famous story of Odysseus tying himself to the mast to avoid doing something irrational when he hears the Sirens sing. The younger nobleman does not regard his later self as being irrational, merely as being different. I think that’s a problem. I argue first that it is impossible to interact properly with someone who takes this attitude towards himself – the nobleman puts his wife in an impossible position, since she must either wrong his younger self by breaking her promise to him, or wrong his older self by ignoring his right to do as he likes with his own estates. Then I argue that for similar reasons the nobleman cannot interact properly with himself – after all, what his younger self is doing is setting a trap for a future self with whose values he disagrees.

To put it in slightly different terms than I did in the book, the story is supposed to show that you cannot regard your later self’s values simply as different without falling apart. You must either regard them as irrational – in which case the story is like Odysseus and the Sirens after all – or as giving rise to reasons, in which case you ought to take them into account. But since there is no important difference between your relation to your later self and your relation to other people, that means you should regard other people’s values in just the same way – either as irrational or as giving rise to reasons you have to take into account. Values are the kinds of things that, by their nature, must be shared.

3:AM: What are for you the most serious threats to your system of thinking about ethics? Are there philosophical arguments that still give you sleepless nights? For example, how does your idea of agency fit into recent discussions about freewill and agency? Do you find recent arguments and evidence from natural sciences doubting the reality of a rational agency, say in the works of Josh Knobe and the xphi people, or doubts about freewill itself, at all helpful in refining your own approach to agency? I guess this question is about whether you find the naturalist challenge to agency and sovereign will, as presented by the likes of [Alex Rosenberg](#), [Patricia Churchland](#) and [Brian Leiter](#), at all convincing and/or problematic for your approach?

KK: There are philosophical arguments that give me sleepless nights, but the ones you mention here aren’t among them. To see these arguments as a threat would be to make a mistake about what moral philosophy is for. Moral

philosophy isn't armchair theorizing about what people are like. It is addressed to problems that arise when we are deliberating about what to do, problems that arise when we are actually attempting to use reason to determine what we ought to do. There's no point in saying "oh, you can't do that anyway." I believe that the structure of our self-consciousness makes it necessary for us to attempt to use reason to determine our beliefs and actions. As I said earlier, we are aware of the grounds of our beliefs and actions and that makes it both possible and necessary for us to evaluate those grounds, to ask whether they provide good reasons for what we believe and do.

I think it is important to realize that there is no more reason to doubt that reason plays a role in guiding human actions than there is to doubt that reason plays a role in forming human beliefs. In fact there is less, since people believe much crazier things than they do. And all of the people you mention are dedicated to the project of working out what we have good reason to believe. If they came to the conclusion that reason doesn't play much of a role in forming most people's beliefs most of the time, they wouldn't give up that project themselves. They are interested in the kinds of questions that arise when we are trying to use reason to figure out what to believe. As a moral philosopher, I'm interested in questions that arise when we are trying to use reason to figure out what to do.

3:AM: Do you see yourself as developing a metaphysical system of morals? Is this something that you think is sometimes underestimated or missed about your approach to moral philosophy where perhaps people switch too quickly to assessing a particular practical situation rather than stepping back?



KK: It depends on what you mean by "metaphysical." My view is metaphysical if that means that I am concerned to explain why and how values and obligations exist, how there can be such things as values and obligations. As I mentioned above (in reply to your second question), the desire to figure that out is a driving force of my thought. Sometimes by "metaphysical," people mean that you have "non-naturalistic" ontological commitments – that you believe in the existence of facts or entities that are not part of the physical world. If metaphysics includes explaining how such entities or facts can exist, then my views are metaphysical. If the facts or entities are supposed to be fundamental and incapable of being explained, however, then my views are anti-metaphysical.



3:AM: [Peter van Inwagen](#) writes that one of the great risks of anyone involved in metaphysical enquiry is being

meaningless. He doesn't see being meaningless as an insult but merely a danger that comes with the metaphysical territory. Any metaphysician worth her salt will probably say meaningless things from time to time. Do you agree with him and are there things you've argued which now you'd say were meaningless and false?

KK: There is a danger of saying something meaningless. I also think that when you help yourself to views that are metaphysical in the last sense I mentioned – believing in entities or facts that are non-natural but also fundamental and incapable of being explained – there is a very real danger of thinking you've solved a problem when all you've done is given it a name. In response to an earlier question, I talked about how normative concepts actually name, without specifying, the solution to some problem people face. For example, people face the problem of deciding what to aim for, what goals we should have, and that's why we use the concept "good." So here's one kind of thing you find in philosophy: someone wonders how people decide what to aim for, and the philosopher (we could call him **G. E. Moore**) replies: "Well, some things are intrinsically good! And furthermore, we know by intuition which things are intrinsically good!" Nobody knows what intuition is, so all that's really happened here is that the philosopher has affirmed that there is some (unspecified) solution to the problem, and that we have some (unspecified) way of knowing what it is.

I don't recall having said anything that I now think is meaningless, but that doesn't mean I haven't. I've said some things I now think are false, of course. However, I have to admit that my views haven't changed in major ways. Instead I have developed and elaborated them. Some times this seems odd to me – a lifetime spent thinking, with so little change of mind. On the other hand, when I think of other philosophers who have spent their lives developing some system, and I admire their work even though I disagree with it, I think of them as the guardians of some set of ideas and lines of thoughts that philosophers through time have found it fruitful and illuminating to think through. That seems to me a valuable thing to do, even if in the end I don't think their views are right. But it's a little hard to think of one's own work in that way. After all, I believe the things that I believe.

3:AM: [Kant](#) is complicated and elaborate but you argue that his views when properly understood are compelling and superior to alternative attempts to establish the unconditional value of humanity. But does the Kantian moral project suffer from a problem. If only knowledge of its philosophical systems and arguments can justify moral behaviour, then doesn't that imply that only Kantian philosophers can be moral?

KK: No, because [Kant's philosophy](#) is just ordinary reflection – in the case of moral philosophy, practical deliberation – pushed to further limits. Kant undertakes to carry to completion a line of thought on which every reflective person takes the first few steps. Anyone who has ever asked themselves, "What if everyone did that?" or "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" has started a course of reflection that when properly articulated, ends in a commitment to the categorical imperative and the idea that every human being (and in my view, every animal) is a source of value. Decent people can act in a way that embodies these commitments even if they can't always articulate them.

3:AM: Outside of philosophy have there been books or films that you have found enlightening and helpful for your work?



KK: Of course. Here are a few:

Sigmund Freud, [*Civilization and its Discontents*](#)

Charles Darwin, [*The Descent of Man*](#)

Cheney and Seyfarth, [*How Monkeys See the World and Baboon Metaphysics*](#)

Charles Dickens, [*Dombey and Son*](#)

George Eliot, [*Middlemarch*](#)

Robert Bolt, [*A Man for All Seasons*](#)



Movies: Almost any movie starring **Jimmy Stewart**, it seems. His persona seemed to make him a kind of lightning rod for moral reflection. Consider, for example: The [*Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*](#), [*Vertigo*](#), [*It's a Wonderful Life*](#), [*Anatomy of a Murder*](#), and [*Winchester '73*](#). All of these movies reflect in interesting ways on right and wrong, obligation, the nature of identity, and the role of law in our lives.

3:AM: And finally, for the curious, smart but largely philosophically untrained readers here at *3am*, are there five books that you would recommend we read (other than your own which we'll be dashing out to read as soon as we've finished here!) to help us think more profoundly about how to be morally wise?

KK: I assume you mean apart from the obvious classics like Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* and Mill's *Utilitarianism*. I would certainly recommend that anyone interested in morality read those. But for some more recent books, here's a few:

John Rawls, [*A Theory of Justice*](#)

Thomas Nagel, [*The Possibility of Altruism*](#)

Tim Scanlon, [*What We Owe To Each Other*](#)

Bernard Williams, [*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*](#)

Derek Parfit, [*Reasons and Persons*](#), especially Part III

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER



[Richard Marshall](#) is still biding his time.

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