

## **Practical necessity and agential autonomy**

### **A Kantian response to Williams' objection of misrepresentation**

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#### **Abstract**

On a prominent philosophical view, moral reasons exhibit a special kind of force, akin to necessity. Practical necessity is a mark of objectivity in ethics, which is experienced as an inescapable constraint. First, I distinguish some varieties of arguments that appeal to moral experience to either defend or explain away the authority of moral reasons. Second, I present Williams' objection that there is a mismatch between the objective requirements of ethical theory and the agent's experience of moral objectivity, so that any objectivist reconstruction inevitably misrepresents the subjective experience of moral objectivity. Finally, I show that Kant's argument of the "fact of Reason" survives this critique, as it takes the (subjective) authority of moral reasons to be constitutive of moral objectivity, together with the (independent) validity of the moral law. The argument deploys a dialogical conception of respect as the normative basis of rational agency and agential autonomy.

## 1. The appeal to moral experience

On a prominent philosophical view, moral reasons exhibit a special kind of force, akin to necessity. Practical necessity is a mark of objectivity in ethics and is experienced as an irresistible constraint. When pressed with the question as to what is special about moral reasons, and why they claim a peculiar authority on us, objectivists divide into two camps. Some respond that the special force of moral reasons depends on their objective content: they point at special kinds of facts, facts of such importance that nobody can ignore. Others argue that it is the reasoning leading to or producing such reasons that explains their special authority.

Objectivists typically treat the special authority associated with moral claims as a phenomenon that is constitutive of morality, and purport to explain it in a way that is consistent with our common experience of it. That is because, in spite of large and divisive disagreements about the content of moral reasons, moral reasons are commonly held in special consideration. In fact, one may claim that moral disagreements tend to be so divisive and profound exactly because moral reasons have such distinctive authority. The *onus probandi* is thus not necessarily on the objectivists: the denial that moral reasons have special authority demands an explanation as well as the claim that they have it. How to discharge the burden of proof is, however, a matter of contention.

While skepticism about practical necessity and surrounding phenomena may be a revisionist philosophical attitude, to unmask morality and expose its fraud is not its distinctive task. In fact, debunking morality is perceived as an unwelcome byproduct of skepticism as a claim about the ontology of values. It is to correct such undesirable effects, that anti-realists devise error theory and more benign forms of projectivism.<sup>1</sup>

Whether ultimately successful or not, these attempts show that appeal to ordinary moral experience does not directly provide a convincing case for the realist. The aspiration to objectivity of our ordinary moral claims should not be taken at face value, because it can be explained otherwise, by exposing the patterns of objectification. Error theory may sound fishy if one continues to moralize, after discovering the mistake. Likewise, it may be objected that projectivism does not leave our confidence and moral conviction intact, as it purports to do. The point is that, ultimately, the issue is not determined by directly appealing to moral experience, but by the adoption of some specific desiderata for ethical theory.<sup>2</sup>

It may seem as though recent arguments about moral objectivity have not profited much from earlier debates about moral experience. To begin with, it is difficult to distinguish moral experience from non-moral normative experience.<sup>3</sup> How could one claim that moral norms enjoy a special kind of authority if one cannot tell them apart from non-moral norms? The question, we are told, depends on whether moral experience picks out something in the world, that is, specifically moral properties or moral facts. Most arguments from moral phenomenology are indeed used to produce answers of this question. They are interested in determining whether it is an introspectively accessible fact that moral experiences carry ontological objective purport, and end up with realist or anti-realist verdicts about it. Such arguments move directly from considerations about moral experience to claims about ontological objectivity. This variety of phenomenological arguments is not very promising, for reasons that emerged in earlier debates about the varieties of projectivism. Their weight in determining the objectivity of moral claims depends on factors that are extraneous to moral experience itself, such as

what counts as the explanatory adequacy of ethical theory or what makes moral experience intelligible to ourselves.

There is a second variety of arguments from moral experience, however, that makes no such move to ontology.<sup>4</sup> Arguments of this latter sort are used to defend objectivity while denying that moral judgments are “robustly objective”, or that their key function is to represent and describe moral reality/realities. This approach is particularly congenial to those who defend non-realist, proceduralist, or pragmatist conceptions of ethical objectivity.<sup>5</sup> The talk of moral experience is not about the truth-value of first order ordinary judgments or how we have access to moral properties. Rather, it refers to the subjective experience of moral claims. It allows us to consider how we are bound by practical reason, develop appropriate moral sensibility, and display the appropriate kinds of normative guidance.

Because of its lack of ontological commitments, the second variety of phenomenological argument seems less ambitious and problematic than the realist one. The question is whether it delivers what it promises. According to Bernard Williams neither varieties of phenomenological argument achieves its intended result and successfully explains the special authority of moral reasons.

## **2. Williams’ objection of misrepresentation**

While the realist and rationalist approaches to moral experience are clearly distinguished in terms of their ontological implications, according to Williams they commit the same mistake.<sup>6</sup> As theoretical models of ethical objectivity, they require the agent to step outside herself and, from that point of view, evaluate her dispositions, projects, and

desires *in toto*. We are hardly ever successful at this alienating exercise. But regardless of whether we can ever overcome our normative horizons altogether, the objective picture thus obtained involves a dangerous misrepresentation of what is going on in our ethical life. The agent's projects and desires are not merely means to produce desirable states of affairs. They lend meaning and importance to the agent's life, and it is under this description that they are perceived as important and authoritative. In looking at them from the point of view of the universe, we simply miss their distinctive function, and the reason of their significance. We obtain objectivity at the expense of explaining authority.

Intuitionism, a variant of the first sort of phenomenological argument, is the obvious target of this objection. But Williams argues that Kantian ethics, an exemplar of the second way of appealing to moral experience, is also vulnerable to it. On the Kantian view, moral reasons are categorical demands deriving from reason and equally recognizable by all rational beings. This claim imposes a kind of estrangement akin to the Intuitionist exercise of looking at one's desires as if from nowhere. Kant makes morality an alien force that expropriates agents from their own life and systematically discounts their subjective experience of morality. Williams' conclusion is that the very project of providing morality with an objective foundation is ultimately self-defeating, and his argument is that moral experience testifies against any objectivist theory. Interestingly, Williams makes neither the factual claim that we do not experience morality as objective, nor does he invoke any sort of error theory. Rather his argument is that the experience of morality as carrying objective purport cannot be vindicated by objectivism in either form. There is a huge and inevitable mismatch between ethical life and the requirements of the objectivist ethical theory. The falsifying factor is ethical theory:

Suppose that the ethical life could be objectively grounded in one of these ways. One could come to know that it was so grounded by developing or learning philosophical arguments which showed that ethical life satisfied the appropriate condition, of being related in the right way to practical reason or to wellbeing. But ethical life itself could continue to involve various experiences and judgments of the kind that present themselves as ‘objective’ – and what they present is not the objectivity that, on these theories, they would genuinely possess. They are not experienced as satisfying any such condition.<sup>7</sup>

Objectivism is disappointing as to the explanation of such experiences, because it inevitably dismisses, distorts, and misunderstands the experience of the subject. Our experience does not concur with any theoretical reconstruction of ethical objectivity. The misrepresentation occurs in both directions. The subjective experience fails to be up to the standards of objectivity that objectivist theories propound; hence, the subject is bound to misrepresent the objectivity that morality is said to exhibit. Conversely, such accounts of ethical objectivity inevitably misrepresent the agent’s experience of the objectivity of moral claims. Call this the objection of misrepresentation.

### **3. Kant’s alleged misrepresentation of moral experience**

According to Williams, the discrepancy between the pretenses of ethical theory regarding the objectivity of moral claims and the subjective experience of them is particularly acute

in Kantian ethics. Kant constructs a world where the subject is bound to misrepresent ethical objectivity as she experiences it. The subjective experience of practical reason necessarily involves a form of misrepresentation; or, rather, no experience could adequately capture the kind of objectivity that Kant envisions. There is an insuperable gulf between the objectivity of practical reason and the special way in which the subject experiences it. According to Williams, Kant is well aware of this result, and this is shown in his discussion of respect as reverence for the law:

Kant saw the point himself. In acknowledging the categorical demands of obligation or recognizing a moral requirement (the kind of thing expressed in saying, for moral reasons, 'I must'), one does not experience it as an application of the demands of practical reason, but as something more immediate than that, something presented to one by the situation. That is one reason why Kant identified an empirical psychological surrogate of one's rational relations to morality, in the emotional phenomenon of the sense of reverence for the Law. That feeling does, on Kant's theory, represent objectivity, but it also misrepresents it, by making it seem something different from what it is.<sup>8</sup>

Respect for the Law (that is, for the capacity for legislation) is for Kant the subjective experience of the objectivity of the moral Law. Insofar as it represents the empirical dimension of pure reason, it is a mere misrepresentation of it. This is to say that one

cannot regard moral experience as conducive to reality or expressing “the right sort” of objectivity.

Williams seems to suggest that on Kant’s view, the subjective experience that the agent has of the objectivity of the moral law cannot be veridical because it is subjective. The implication is that Kant treats moral experience the same way as realists do, that is, by supposing that such experience carry objective purport. By this standard, the experience of respect counts as a misrepresentation of the objective content of moral claims, as it only conveys the agent’s subjective take on it. The sort of misrepresentation that the subject is said to commit in the Kantian story is different (and more radical) than the sort of misinterpretation that occurs in the realist picture. On the realist view, the subject misrepresents the objectivity of moral claims insofar as she looks at them from her situated perspective, that is, through the partial filter of her particular interests and beliefs. On the Kantian view, instead, the subject misrepresents ethical objectivity by “making it seem different from what it is”,<sup>9</sup> namely, by reducing it to a subjective feeling. It looks as if the misrepresentation that goes on in the realist picture is merely a matter of degrees, whereas the Kantian subject mistakes a subjective feeling for objective reality.

To see how misleading Williams’ diagnosis is, we should consider the nature and role of respect. For Williams, respect is “an empirical psychological surrogate of one’s rational relations to morality”.<sup>10</sup> It is this “emotional phenomenon of the sense of reverence for the Law”<sup>11</sup> that explains how the subject feels immediately bound by, constrained and compelled by moral obligations, rather than directly grasping the workings of pure reason on her mind. While Kant certainly thinks of respect as the subjective (affective) counterpart of the objectivity of the moral law, he hardly treats it as

a mere empirical psychological force, which vicariously undertakes the office of reason. Rather, respect is nothing less than the mark of moral agency.

#### **4. Objectivity, Validity, and Authority**

The role of respect is to lend subjective authority to the moral law, so that it becomes the motive of action. For Kant we can show that morality is objective, rather than a philosophical dream, only if we show that reason has an effect on our mind, that is, only if it is perceived as authoritative. To be genuinely authoritative, reason must be capable of directly affecting our mind. That is to say, the directives of reason must be felt as immediately compelling and binding. If reason affected our mind by triggering some empirical feelings or interests, the moral law would have no genuine authority, and its aspiration to objectivity would be misplaced. Thus, it is crucial for Kant to deny that reason needs any empirical surrogate, or that the authority of moral claims is supplied by “pathological feelings”. On the Kantian view, respect plays a very different role than it is typically attributed to empirical feelings such as sense of guilt, love or sympathy: it does not mediate between pure reason and the subjective motivation. Rather, it directly drives to action:

Respect for the law is not the incentive to morality; instead it is morality itself subjectively considered as an incentive inasmuch as pure practical reason, by rejecting all the claims of self-love in oppositions with its own, supplies authority to the moral law, which now alone has influence.<sup>12</sup>

Differently than pathological feelings, respect is activated by the mere contemplation of the moral law, by the very thought that something is right. This is why respect is considered a peculiar, moral (not pathological) feeling, generated by the subject's representation of herself as an agent, capable of being the author rather than a mere executor of her actions. This is what qualifies respect as "the only moral incentive". Respect is an incentive in a very specific sense, as it cannot be regarded as the source of motivation and judgment: it is the subjective state of the agent who is moved by the recognition that a reason is morally valid. It is important that the recognition of validity is the only determining motivating factor, or reason would not be practical. Contrary to pathological feelings, respect does not exercise a mere pressure on our mind. It has authority on it, even when we disregard its commands. This authority is the authority of reason on our mind, which is an integral part of the very idea of ethical objectivity.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of pure practical reason is objective if it is applicable; and it is applicable if reason becomes a subjective motive for us, animals endowed with reason. This is to say that the experience of respect proves practical reason to be objective, but only in the sense that it shows reason capable of authorizing action. The argument does not amount to a "proof" that pure practical reason is objective. Kant's appeal to the subjective experience is not directed to show that there actually is a moral law, accessible to all rational beings. Rather, the argument is that we are capable of moral motivation, that is, of being driven directly by reason's commands. The argument points at the phenomenon of moral authority, which is necessarily related to but does not exhaust the issue of moral objectivity.

Kant distinguishes two aspects of the claim about ethical objectivity: authority

and validity. Whether a consideration counts as a *valid* moral reason is fully determined by the standards of the Moral Law. Validity is thus completely independent of the subjectivity and self-representation of agents. Authority names the mode in which validity is experienced subjectively. Authority is felt, and it is felt in the guise of respect. Without authority, the moral law could be valid but inert, a mere idea without application. Hence, the objectivity of pure practical reason crucially depends on the subjective experience of it. Vindicating ethical objectivity amounts to showing that pure practical reason not only provides the standards of valid reasoning, but it is also capable of setting our mind to work.

While Kant's argument for the objectivity of morality deserves to be called phenomenological, it has little in common with realist arguments of the same sort. Respect is not an introspectible fact that proves that there really are moral facts or properties. It is part of the "fact of reason" (*Faktum der Vernunft*).<sup>14</sup> The agent perceives her freedom as a given, a fact that she cannot derive from higher principles or by further reflection on the nature of agency.<sup>15</sup> She is simply aware that she can act out of duty, and this awareness is felt in the guise of respect. Respect conveys this awareness; it is a felt certainty, a given in the sense that it is the way we are emotionally aware that a pure idea of reason, the moral law, while not completely attainable, has a foothold in our character.<sup>16</sup> Thus, respect supports the objectivity of pure practical reason, as it finds application in self-reflective minds.

The argument is complex and obscure. Partly, the confusion arises out of the expectation that the argument from the fact of reason works in the realist way. By this standard, respect "proves" the objectivity of practical reason only if it unveils some

hidden truths, allowing the subject to perceive or discover an independent moral reality. Because of this confusion, the fact of reason is often indicated as the locus where Kant is revealed for what he is: an objectivist of the old (or perhaps the only) sort, a realist.<sup>17</sup>

In the attempt to dispel this confusion, I propose that we distinguish between two conceptions of respect as reverence for the law. On the one conception, which I call *derivative*, respect is an emotional response to moral value or dignity. Moral value depends on a property, that is, autonomy, which Kant regards as a metaphysical property of the will.<sup>18</sup> The standards of appropriateness of respect depend on the presence of value property. On the other conception, which I call *constitutive*, respect is a normative relation of mutual recognition with others. It is this mutual and simultaneous recognition that institutes others as authoritative sources of valid claims.

The derivative conception faces embarrassing questions. If respect is a response due to the recognition of a value property (dignity), and dignity is ascribed on the basis of a metaphysical/natural property of the will, they should co-vary. But people display autonomy intermittently, and at various degrees: does respect vary correspondingly? Do we owe respect to those who lack autonomy? How much autonomy should we have to deserve respect? Such attempts at determining the exact measure of respect that is appropriate to feel in response to such measure of autonomy contradict a fundamental claim about humanity, which is said to have dignity, that is, intrinsic and incommensurable value.

The constitutive conception of respect does not simply avoid these difficulties; it also makes apparent why these questions are not legitimate. Respect is not a response that follows the perception of a value-property (whether grounded on a metaphysical or a

natural property). Rather, it names a specific form of normative relations where people reciprocally represent each other as sources of authoritative claims. A failure to respect is a normative and moral failure. By denying respect, we fail to represent and relate to others as sources of valid claims. At the same time, however, we also fail to appreciate the bounds of our agency, and thus fail to represent ourselves as rational agents. This is a failure in self-representation and self-respect, hence in autonomous agency.<sup>19</sup> The equivalence can be fully appreciated by advancing a relational account of agential autonomy.<sup>20</sup> On this view, autonomy is a capacity of individual rational minds that is exercised and developed in social contexts, through social relations that promote and protect mutual respect and recognition. Our autonomy constitutively implicates the recognition of others. In claiming authorship on one's self, one represents oneself as a member of an ideal community of agents having equal standing.<sup>21</sup>

## **5. Practical Necessity and Agential Autonomy**

Williams credits Kant with a view about practical necessity that he finds exemplified in radical morally charged choices. The view, in a nutshell, is the following:

The recognition of practical necessity must involve an understanding at once of one's own powers and incapacities, and of what the world permits, and the recognition of a limit which is neither simply external to the self, nor yet a product of the will, is what can lend a special authority or dignity to such decisions.<sup>22</sup>

>From the subjective perspective, morality is the experience of being bound and

necessitated, but also of being free and emancipated from inclinations and selfish thoughts. For Kant the subject's recognition of practical necessity arises out of the comprehension of the bounds of rational agency. As the mark of moral agency, respect displays a complex and nuanced phenomenology. It is partly a painful feeling, because it involves humiliation and frustration of one's inclinations. But it is partly a pleasurable and exhilarating feeling, because it also involves the understanding that one is capable of acting on the basis of reason, not determined by one's interests and inclinations. Respect is thus the emotional awareness of one's rational autonomy and sensitivity to practical reason.

The authority of practical reason is felt as a constraint, an obligation that curbs our self-concern, and leaves us with no alternatives but follow the dictate of morality. But this is at the same time a liberating experience, the experience of one's autonomy. That is to say, reason constrains the will in a way that is not perceived as fully external, or alien. On the contrary, this is how the agent draws significant boundaries between those desires, interests, and plans that simply occur to him in this particular situation, and those desires, interests, and plans that he wills to have, and that he recognizes as his own. Such boundaries mark the contours of the will, and are thus not a mere product of the will.

Williams is skeptical about Kant's claim that such practical necessity is distinctive of moral reasons, and argues against the alleged sovereignty of morality or the view that moral reasons should be overriding in deliberation. To dwell on this alleged discontinuity between moral and non-moral reasons is, however, misleading. All forms of rational agency show a concern for rational justification. Moral action exhibits a distinctive form of practical necessity only in the sense that it represents the most

complete realization of the ideal of practical rationality, which is present in all forms of choice.<sup>23</sup>

Kant would indeed concur with Williams that acts falling under the category of practical necessity are expressive of character, and thus qualify as one's own in "the most substantial way."<sup>24</sup> He would agree that such "conclusions of practical necessity [seriously arrived at in serious matters] are indeed the paradigm of what one takes responsibility for."<sup>25</sup> But Kant would not have any need to restrict this claim only to grave and serious morally charged decisions, or to the class of moral actions. Actions are expressive of character whenever the agent performs them on the basis of reasons. Practical necessity is present in any activity for which we can claim responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Moral actions exemplify practical necessity in the highest sense, because they rest on reasons that claim universal and unconditional validity. Not all rational actions rest on reasons that nobody can challenge, but they all express a concern with justification on the basis of reasons that address others.

Actions done on the basis of reasons bear the mark of one's specific agency. What makes them into actions of which we can legitimately claim authorship is that they are governed by public criteria. They are public for the very same reason why they are our own. Actions are a socially significant category, not simply in the sense that they enter the public arena as ready-made objects of exchange, addressed to others and susceptible to be assessed, acknowledged, favored or obstructed. More basically, actions are public constructions. They are public because they are negotiated and constructed with others, according to public standards. They are recognizable as actions and open to claims of authorship, only from within a public domain.

There is nothing extraordinary or mysterious in the way practical necessity is supposed to work in morality. There is no external order of things, no realm of intrinsic values that is prior to deliberation and bears on it. All the same, we are not left with the option that the validity of moral claims is of our making, that is, a mere function of our will.<sup>27</sup> For the will is constituted in such a way that when it produces reasons, they have a certain structure. Considerations that count in favor of action should meet certain standards in order to qualify as reasons. This is because reasons are normative items that we not only exchange with others, but that we also think of as addressing others as having equal standing.<sup>28</sup> Others have and claim the authority to ask for reasons because they stand in a relation of respect and mutual recognition with us. We are not at liberty of eluding their request, and in this sense the request is inescapable.

This is the rather mundane and ordinary sense in which moral reasons display an authority that is akin to necessity. It is not that moral reasons depict facts that are in themselves irresistible and necessarily command compliance. Inescapable is our dialogue with others, by which we conceive of our reasons. To refuse to address others does not show that we are free to escape the bonds of morality, but that we are sometimes tempted to retreat from our rational agency and renounce agential autonomy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mackie 1977: 48 ff., 105-106; compare Blackburn 1993: 149-165. Blackburn presents projectivism as an alternative to error theory; his key point is to vindicate the aspiration to objectivity of moral judgments *via* a thin conception of truth, Blackburn 1993: 7. While I recognize that Blackburn's projectivism adds complexity to Mackie's meta-ethics, I doubt that his account improves upon error theory; McDowell doubts that projectivism can be distinguished from error theory. His most substantial argument is that there is no need for projectivism or error theory, once one thinks that the moral properties are more akin to secondary qualities than to primary qualities, McDowell 1985: 208.

More specific objections concern the internal coherence of Blackburn meta-ethics; McDowell 1985: 208, 213 fn 46; McDowell 1987: 216; compare Blackburn 1993: 157 fn 9. I agree with most of McDowell's points and share his basic concern that the projectivist deprives us of the kind of intelligibility we aspire to, but I offer different grounds, see Bagnoli 2002.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, whether moral properties are explanatorily redundant, queer, primary or secondary qualities, inert or "motivationally hot", or whether to vindicate rationalist objectivity we have to suppose "a mysterious ability to spot the immutable fitness of things" (Blackburn 1985: 186). Compare Sturgeon 1985; McDowell 1985: 209.

<sup>3</sup> Horgan & Timmons 2008: 283; Sinnott-Armstrong 2008.

<sup>4</sup> To this extent, the second variety of phenomenological arguments is emancipated from earlier debates about anti-realism/realism, which cast moral experience in terms ordinary first order moral judgments. This shift in the notion of moral experience corresponds to a broader conception of the domain of meta-ethics, as including issues in meta-normativity, moral psychology and action theory.

<sup>5</sup> Horgan & Timmons 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Mackie also directs his argument against two kinds of conceptions of objectivity: against the realist conception of objectivity, as championed by G.E. Moore, and against the non-realist conception of objectivity, as defended by Kant. But Mackie explains the craving for objectivity with subjective and social patterns of objectification, within an error theory. By contrast, for Williams the falsifying factor is ethical theory, which misunderstands the nature of our need for objectivity and misconstrues it as a theoretical model.

<sup>7</sup> Williams 1995: 175.

<sup>8</sup> Williams 1995: 175-176.

<sup>9</sup> Williams 1995: 176.

<sup>10</sup> Williams 1995: 175-176.

<sup>11</sup> Williams 1995: 175-176.

<sup>12</sup> Kant 1795: V 76.

<sup>13</sup> See Guyer 1990; Reath 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Having renounced the deduction of transcendental freedom attempted in the *Groundwork*, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant claims that autonomy is inextricably bound up with the consciousness of freedom, which constitutes the fact of reason, Kant 1795: V 42-43, 46-48.

<sup>15</sup> Kant 1795: V 31.

<sup>16</sup> An important aspect of this claim is that while the moral ideal motivates us, it is not “motivationally hot” in the same sense as e.g. some emotions such as anger or jealousy. This is to say also that moral motivation is a complex phenomenon, not simply “triggered” by emotional aspect of respect. I examine this issue in “Moral emotions and the authority of morality”.

<sup>17</sup> Wood 2008: 106-141.

<sup>18</sup> Kant 1785: IV.

<sup>19</sup> Failures of respecting others are thus constitutively related to failures of self-respect, or so I argue in Bagnoli 2007.

<sup>20</sup> There are different and often intertwined ways of defining and defending relationality in debates about personal autonomy. In such debates, relationality is understood in

causal-ontological terms. It arises out of metaphysical concerns, as the alternative to the prevailing individualism of Kantian accounts. Some defend relationality to insist on the intersubjective aspects of autonomy as a corrective of liberal accounts of autonomy. They aim at identifying the material and institutional circumstances of autonomy and sensitize to the sources of its vulnerability. By contrast, I argue for a distinctively normative conception of relational (agential) autonomy.

<sup>21</sup> I credit Kant for the view that autonomy requires mutual respect and recognition (in thinking and acting), in contrast to the Hegelian tradition that evolved out of dissatisfaction for Kant's understanding of autonomy as a mere metaphysical property of the will. I thus take the relational account of agential autonomy as compatible with Kant's characterization of autonomy as "the property of the will by which it is a law to itself independently of any proposition of the objects of volitions", Kant 1785: IV 440. There is an important continuity between Kant's conception of recognition-respect and Hegel's conception of social recognition. It is a mistake to overlook such continuity in elucidating the problem of moral authority. In my view, there are good reasons to prefer Kant's original notion of recognition respect to its Hegelian counterpart. Reference to "ideal community" serves the only purpose of offering objective normative criteria for moral assessment. Strictly for normative purposes, the formulation of mutual recognition in terms of membership in the ideal community of peers is preferable to recognition by concrete communities..

<sup>22</sup> Williams 1981: 130-131.

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<sup>23</sup> For further support for the claim about the continuity between moral and non-moral agency in Kant's account, with special reference to his derivation of the moral law from reason, see O'Neill 1989, Chapter 1; Reath 2006, 70, 74; Korsgaard 2008, 63 fn 60.

<sup>24</sup> Williams 1981: 130.

<sup>25</sup> Williams 1981: 130.

<sup>26</sup> The emphasis here is on "activity", as one could claim responsibility for aspects of actions that are not active components, e.g. some direct and intended consequences.

<sup>27</sup> As Wood writes, "I cannot lose myself from the moral law because it is not up to me to make or unmake the idea of rational will. The content of the law is not a creation of my will, or the outcome of any constructive procedure on my part", Wood 2008: 108. Contrary to what Wood concludes, however, this is no proof of Kant's commitment to realism.

<sup>28</sup> Others have a crucial role in the *making* of reasons for action. This is the claim that mutual respect and recognition ground the relations of authority.