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MAKING MORAL DECISIONS: REASON, EMOTION AND LUCK

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Masters of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

December, 1999

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0-612-47776-2

ABSTRACT

Making Moral Decisions: Reason, Emotion and Luck

Ljiljana Petrovic

Christine Korsgaard is concerned with what justifies the claims morality makes on us; that is, the normative question. She puts forth a thesis in *Sources of Normativity* in which she tries to address and solve the normative problem. Her thesis relies on the reflective capacity of our minds which enables us to come up with a self-conception, or identity in which our principles and values are reflected. When we ask ourselves what justifies the claims morality makes, we are able to answer that it is our self conceptions that define and enforce the moral standards that we ourselves have set. I think too much emphasis is put on self-identity. Compelling as Korsgaard's thesis is, I suggest that she fails to examine some significant elements in moral life; namely, emotions (and how they threaten or uphold her thesis) and luck (and the ways in which moral life is vulnerable to it). After examining Korsgaard's thesis, I look at those elements I think are missing from her work. By including the alternative perspectives of Martha Nussbaum and Robert Solomon, I hope to develop and enrich the project Korsgaard starts.

Acknowledgements

Doctor Nielsen, it is rare to come across professors with the degree of enthusiasm and passion you have for the study of philosophy. It was a pleasure to have had the opportunity to study under your direction.

The writing of a thesis, however, involves more than just the student and the professor with whom it is written. Along the way, I have been encouraged and inspired by Sheila Mason, without whom I never would have considered doing this. For this, I thank you Doctor Mason. Your lectures and guidance have stayed with me long after I was your student. Your work in philosophy continues to shape how I think and how I understand the world.

Professor O'Connor, I thank you for making my thesis defence bearable. And Eudine, I thank you for pulling me together the last few years when you knew what I had to get done before I did.

Kerim, thank you for the little brown room where you made me write, for giving me no window to jump out of when I didn't want to write anymore, and for rolling the joints when I couldn't write anymore.

For their ongoing support, financial and otherwise, I thank my family, Milanka, Slobodan and Damjan Nikolic, Jelena, Dusan and Kristina Radosavljevic, and Milovan Petrovic.

And Michelle Rohner, you were there every step of the way. You are the gift of laughter, without which, nothing in this world can be done. Anything I can say here falls short of what and how much your role is and continues to play in my life, pre- and post- thesis phase.

Finally, I thank my husband Branimir Bozic, for seeing me through to completion when I could not foresee it, and for giving me a post-thesis phase to look forward to when the final words get printed.

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MAKING MORAL DECISIONS: REASON, EMOTION AND LUCK

Introduction

In *Sources of Normativity*¹, Christine Korsgaard maps out how normative ethical claims have authority over us. In so doing, she aims at providing a justificatory, not merely an explanatory, response to unearth the source of normative claims. Her approach is a practical one; that is, her principles should address moral action, not merely moral theory. By providing us with reasons for why we *act* morally, Korsgaard addresses both the practical moral skeptic and her theoretical counterpart. She begins with the premise that we have certain moral beliefs, and she traces how it is we come to have these beliefs. For Korsgaard, unearthing how we come to have moral beliefs is the justificatory ground from which moral claims derive their force.

Korsgaard's thesis relies on autonomy and self-identity to answer the problem of normativity; that is, what justifies the claims morality makes on us. Practical self-identity is that conception which we have of ourselves, and it is that conception which compels us into moral action. I will refer to this authority that we have over ourselves as the 'normative voice'; i.e., the answer we provide for ourselves when challenged to say who we think we are and how we should act and live.

Korsgaard's thesis is valid insofar as it provides a thorough and coherent articulation of why we act morally *when* we act morally, but I see some problems in Korsgaard's work. For example, her answer to the practical moral skeptic has authority only when she has answered issues about the moral justification skeptic. Moral action presupposes a system of beliefs, which are grounded.

¹Christine Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Indeed Korsgaard believes we are governed by these beliefs, and when we act on them we do so with the sense that we *should* act on them. In this way, Korsgaard claims that normativity pervades our lives. The problem she begins with asks what is it that makes normativity compelling. What do we appeal to when we must *justify* moral action, especially when moral action is *hard*?

There is one sense in which Korsgaard answers the problem of normativity in a justificatory context; that is, when a person's practical self-conception is *held firmly at that time* by that person and she is challenged to act on her beliefs. However, the way in which Korsgaard traces the foundations of those beliefs is explanatory. But this, or so I shall argue, cannot answer issues concerning moral justification pressed by the moral skeptic. Nonetheless, in her thesis she claims to provide justification as well as explanation to answer the normative problem.

My contention is that in times of moral crisis self-identity (that which Korsgaard relies heavily upon) may be called into question. When it is, what have we to command, oblige and compel us into moral action? The problem becomes not why to act, but what to act on. Korsgaard tells us that our own normative voice (which stems from practical identity) is the authority and source from which we act morally. It is what we rely upon to tell us how to proceed. But this picture, in my view, neglects some fundamental elements about moral life. I will consider those elements in human moral life which may threaten the stability of Korsgaard's thesis. Those elements include emotions and luck. I will consider the role emotion plays in moral life, and also, the way in which moral luck renders moral life vulnerable. Moral luck includes elements like dependency on external goods outside of our control, relationships with others, value-conflicts and human passions. Korsgaard fails to consider elements in moral life like contingency, luck and human passions which call into question and

threaten the rational approach she takes in explaining and justifying (or trying to justify) moral action.

I want to maintain that Korsgaard answers the problem of normativity (that is, what justifies the claims morality makes) in some cases, but that her conception is not applicable in other cases with which moral life confronts us. Rather than tell us why we act morally when acting morally is hard, she tells us why we act morally, at great sacrifice to ourselves if necessary, when our identities, beliefs, and value systems are not challenged. In a sense, this is not so hard, because when we are sure about who we are and what we value, doing the 'right' thing is easy.

After explaining where Korsgaard fails to provide justificatory adequacy in the problem of normativity, I will turn to what, in my understanding, works in her thesis. I will elaborate on her discussion about 'affections' to show how emotions can be used as a source for moral understanding with a view to maintaining the integrity of Korsgaard's work. In so doing, I hope to provide a richer understanding of what is involved in moral life.

First I will provide an exposition of Korsgaard's account of the problem and answer to the normative question. I will then move to showing how Korsgaard's account provides a theory with explanatory but not justificatory force. I will, after that, examine Korsgaard's use of the terms 'practical reason', 'autonomy' and 'self identity', with a view to expose the problems inherent in those terms and her usage of them.

I will then move on to develop Korsgaard's conception of how emotions play a role in moral life, and in so doing, introduce the elements I think are missing from Korsgaard's work. I bring in the perspectives of Nussbaum and Solomon to enrich Korsgaard's vision of moral life. Finally, I conclude with a conception of moral life, which includes Korsgaard's theory of normativity, but

limits its application. I argue that in times of moral crisis, what one appeals to may have little to do with autonomy and self-identity. I offer what I think is a richer perspective to the sources from which we derive moral understanding; this includes the use of reason in conjunction with the use of emotion.

I introduce the element of moral luck to show why sometimes, an appeal to reason alone will not help us out of difficult moral situations. In offering this alternative vision, I do not claim to answer the justification question. Rather, I hope to include an understanding of moral life which accounts for those life's exigencies: that is, that moral life is contingent and this contingency makes moral life vulnerable. In explication of Korsgaard's account, I will show where and to what extent her account has limitations that keep it from being a full account of morality and its claims on us.

Section I: Chapter I An Exposition of Sources of Normativity

The context in which Korsgaard frames her thesis in *Sources of Normativity*² is that ethical standards are normative. She begins with the premise that we have moral beliefs. When we make claims about what we believe, we act on what we think *ought* to be enacted. We find the claims we make compelling, and we believe that we *should* act in this or that way. In this way, normativity pervades our lives. We are obligated by our values and we act on those values. By starting out with this premise, she does not address the moral justification skeptic, since the moral beliefs we have are foundational. They are not what is being challenged. But in aiming to provide a justification for why we act morally when moral action is hard, she traces those beliefs to their foundations, hoping to provide a justificatory basis upon which a moral theory can rest, and this basis is what she will call the '*source*' of normativity. This sets the stage for Korsgaard to explore the normative question.

What concerns Korsgaard is the problem of normativity: i.e., that *which justifies the claims obligation makes* on us. She begins by explaining how we can trace the source from which normativity derives its force. In unearthing the source of normative claims, she hopes to provide a moral theory with justificatory force, as well as explanatory force. We have moral beliefs, but why should we maintain, uphold and act on those beliefs when that action is hard? Modern ethical theory seeks to establish how we can respond to the moral agent when that agent asks 'why be moral?' This is the premise from which Korsgaard begins her exploration of the normative question, from which she derives what she calls the *source* of normative claims. In this way, Korsgaard hopes to answer to the problem of normativity.

²Korsgaard, *Sources* 8.

Korsgaard charges modern ethical theorists with failing to answer why normative claims obligate us. At best, she claims, they have provided us with explanations as to *how* we act morally but not *why* we act morally. Korsgaard aims to clarify the question of normativity. By this, she means to ask what its source is. She begins by outlining the theories of modern concepts: voluntarism, realism, reflective endorsement, and appeal to autonomy. Voluntarist and realist theories seek to establish the normativity of ethics, but they fail to unearth the source of the normativity of ethics in an important way. They fail the test of justification or, as Korsgaard sees it, they do not answer the normative question.

Korsgaard begins by defining a theory of moral concepts as that which answers three questions: (i) what moral concepts mean or contain, (ii) what they apply to, and (iii) where they come from. Where moral concepts come from should uncover the force behind moral claims. For Korsgaard, where moral concepts come from is crucial because it should answer the justificatory question: that is, when we answer where moral concepts come from, we should know what makes obligation compelling and forceful. The moral concepts people have are informed by what Korsgaard terms 'practical and psychological effects', (i.e., that which refers to motivation, belief, reward, punishment). Practical and psychological effects inform moral concepts in two distinct ways: (i) they provide a criterion of explanatory adequacy and (ii) they provide a criterion of normative or justificatory adequacy.³

In the first case, explanatory adequacy refers to describing how certain ideas affect us in the way that they do. In the second case, normative or justificatory adequacy refers to *why* ethical claims obligate us. This distinction is very important for Korsgaard because later we will see her emphasize that the source of normative claims must address the moral agent's own first-person

³ Korsgaard, *Sources* 13.

perspective, to which a normative or justificatory answer will apply. In other words, a normative or justificatory answer will provide a person with personal reasons as to why she should act morally. Explanatory adequacy provides an account of why people in general should act morally, but does not address the first person--the person in moral conflict, or even the person who is not in conflict and who simply questions why she should act in this or that way. Explanation addresses the third person whereas justification addresses the first person, according to Korsgaard. At least, this is how she sets up the problem.

This distinction (between explanatory adequacy and justification) is especially significant for Korsgaard as one of her three conditions for what justifies moral claims is the ability to appeal to the first-person. But I do not think this is right: what appeals to the first-person may provide the force behind an obligation or a duty, however it need not answer questions about justification. The second condition for normative justification is to meet the requirements of transparency; that is, once one knows what justifies one's actions, one must believe that those actions are justified and that they make sense. The third condition must appeal to a person's sense of self, or self-identity.⁴ It is in Lectures III and IV of *Sources of Normativity* that Korsgaard begins to articulate her own view, having argued that to date, modern ethical philosophers have let the normative question slip through their fingers. Korsgaard frames the question, which I think, finally goes unanswered, as such: "It is as agents that we must do what we are obligated to do, and it is as agents that we demand to know why".⁵

Korsgaard sees the problem and the solution to the normative question like this: Human agents have beliefs, desires, and impulses. That we have beliefs

⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources* 178.

⁵ Korsgaard, *Sources* 91.

not only distinguishes us from other animals, but more importantly, what separates us from other animals is that we can *reflect* on those beliefs, desires and impulses. This capacity to reflect involves our ability to stand apart from ourselves, to distance ourselves from those impulses, and in so doing, to call them into question. We can ask ourselves whether we have *reason* to act on this or that impulse. Being able to stand apart and question our beliefs means we are confronted by choices. In confronting those choices our values reveal themselves to us. It is this reflective structure of our human consciousness which gives us the authority over ourselves to act on impulses, and to decide *how and why* to act on impulses. This reflective capacity gives us both the distance from impulses to act or not act on this or that impulse, and it makes those laws to which we adhere *normative* for us. To make a law for ourselves, according to Korsgaard, is to express a practical identity. These practical conceptions of ourselves will determine how we respond to the impulses with which we are confronted. What we come up with in acting or not acting on impulses will count as reasons to act or not act.⁶ To be reasons, for Korsgaard, they have to be reflectively endorsed. Those reasons we come up with will obligate us to act in particular ways. Those actions will express what we think makes life worth living, and this is the stuff that makes normativity so persuasive.

Korsgaard's theory of normativity, therefore, consists of two major premises: (i) that autonomy is the source of obligations, and; (ii) that these obligations include *moral* ones. Because the human mind is in essence reflective, we are able to stand apart from those desires and impulses we have and question them. Reflection requires reason in order to decide whether and upon which impulses to act. Reasons are required in order for us to know if our impulses can survive the reflective test. Because the reflective structure of our

⁶ Korsgaard, *Sources* 93.

minds gives us a choice as to how to act, we need reasons to determine what those choices will be. *Reasons*, then, mean reflective success.⁷ So it is the reflective structure of our minds which is the source from which our normativity stems, according to Korsgaard.

Freedom is the condition upon which we can exercise our reflective capacity. We must act under the idea of freedom because this reflective capacity confronts us with choice. Reflection means we have the freedom to act on one impulse over another. From this, Korsgaard derives the thesis that autonomy is the source of normativity. If we could not choose between one or another action, then we would not be confronted with the normative question. Obligation can only make sense within the context of reflective capacity and the freedom to act on this or that impulse. It seems to me that this shows that freedom is a condition for normativity, but Korsgaard has not shown this to be the *source* of normativity.

Now, the problem lies in our very capacity to question our beliefs and desires. If we can question the validity of our impulses, we can also question the practical identity which forbids or enforces one act over another. If normativity rests on practical identity we may ask ourselves whether we must conform to laws of those identities. Identities, after all, are contingent on circumstances and those circumstances are relative. Korsgaard questions how we can be bound by obligations which spring from conceptions not in themselves necessary.

The answer lies in that very reflective capacity from which the problem stems. The reflective capacity which lends itself to this kind of questioning also makes us recognize that the form of identity which demands this kind of questioning is an identity in and of itself, and it stands behind all other practical conceptions: that is, our identity as humans who have practical conceptions of

⁷ Korsgaard, *Sources* 97.

ourselves, who need those practical conceptions in order to live and act. Like the Cartesian foundation for existence '*Cogito ergo sum*', Korsgaard establishes a premise along the lines, 'I question therefore I am a questioning being who must answer to those questions'. She extends moral obligation from the relative and contingent individual to the universal by claiming that if we recognize ourselves individually as reflective beings, we must extend that recognition to all human beings who are essentially reflective beings. Korsgaard refers to the necessity to treat our human identity as normative, as 'moral identity'. This moral identity is the source from which reasons and obligations spring.

Moral identity and practical identity are similar in that both carry with them obligations. Where practical identity carries with it obligations which reflect the particularities of that identity, moral identity carries with it the obligation that has to do with being human. Moral identity requires that one act with a certain respect towards humanity. One's membership in humanity requires some recognition of the fact that one is a member of a greater group called humanity. That membership carries with it the most basic obligations toward humanity. For Korsgaard, this identity is foundational, upon which other identities can be built. However, Korsgaard does not specify what these obligations toward humanity are. Rather she maintains that there are *certain basic moral obligations* toward humanity, parallel (I imagine) to the basic moral obligation we have towards ourselves.

In this way, moral identity differs from practical identity. If moral identity is foundational, it is the necessary building block upon which other practical identities are built, and from which other identities derive their importance. Part of the normativity practical identity necessitates, then, is derived from one's moral identity. We cannot have practical identities, according to Korsgaard, without the foundational moral identity. Further, if we cannot treat our moral

identities as normative, we cannot treat our practical identities as normative. In this way, moral identity is unavoidable if we are to have any identity at all. For these reasons, moral identity plays a governing role over all practical identities. Moral identity is the governing one in that if one practical identity were to be in conflict with the normativity of moral identity, that practical identity would have to be given up.

In essence, the reflective structure of the human mind which questions why we should act morally is the very thing which provides us with the answer to the normative question. If we can ask ourselves why act on this or that impulse, we can also provide ourselves with a conception of what we are to ourselves. That conception reveals our values and principles and it gives us reason to act on what we believe, sometimes at great sacrifice to ourselves. In this way, normativity stems from the autonomy to pose and answer these questions; and identity gives us the substance or material from which to act.

Section I, Chapter II:
The Explanation-Justification Distinction

Now that I have outlined the main points to Korsgaard's thesis in *Sources of Normativity*, I want to examine critically those points, indicating where her thesis can be seen to be explanatory and where she fails to provide justificatory adequacy.

Korsgaard begins with the premise that ethical standards are normative. We have moral beliefs (i.e., ethical standards) and those beliefs are not merely descriptive: "They make claims on us; they command, oblige, recommend, or guide".⁸ She does not address the ethical skeptic who challenges her with the possibility that no moral belief or claim is justified. For Korsgaard we have moral beliefs, and those beliefs are normative. She is not interested in whether those beliefs are justified. Rather, what Korsgaard claims to do is to uncover the source of those beliefs insofar as those beliefs are compelling and obligatory. They require something from us which we fulfill when we adhere to moral obligations. In this way, these beliefs we hold are normative for us. Now, beginning with this premise, Korsgaard sets out to survey modern ethical theory from which point she develops and defends her own moral theory with a view to unearth what the source of those normative claims are. Her contention is that, to date, modern ethical philosophers have failed to provide us with a moral theory which is justificatory, and not merely explanatory.

Korsgaard, however, claims to give her reader a justificatory as well as an explanatory response to the source of ethical claims. When we seek philosophical grounds upon which to build a moral understanding, we require an answer which is more than something merely descriptive and explanatory; we require justification, she says. Korsgaard, in her attempt to unearth the

⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources* 8.

source of normativity, aims at providing a response to the moral agent who is being obligated as to the 'why?'. Why is it, Korsgaard asks, that we do the right thing when the right thing is so difficult? How do we respond to the moral agent when she needs a justification for the claims obligation makes? This is what Korsgaard calls the 'normative question'.

G. A. Cohen, in his response to *Sources of Normativity* explains that Korsgaard characterizes the problem of normativity in two ways; one "general and unexceptional, and the other more specific and of a sort which makes the problem so difficult that it seems impossible to solve".⁹ While she provides an answer to the first characterization of the problem of normativity, the hard version, Cohen contends, is set up in such a way that makes it difficult for anyone to solve. I believe, however, that Korsgaard provides an answer in circumstances which are more than general and unexceptional; that is, her thesis can be applied to that person who, armed with her identity and principles in tact, is ready and willing to sacrifice her life if necessary. Such a dramatic situation is indeed more than general and unexceptional. However, that situation is, or can be tenuous. Doubt and uncertainty make claims on the principles in which we believe, at which point we begin to question that in which we believe. The reflective endorsement exercise can be repeated indefinitely, for when do we arrive at something concrete, life's exigencies, or our own minds can shake the foundations of beliefs upon which our identities rest, and therefore, according to Korsgaard, the practical identity which commands, obliges, recommends or guides us into moral action.

Before explaining Cohen's contention, let me explain and exemplify the way in which Korsgaard's thesis works, which I just referred to as 'more than general and unexceptional'. I want to elaborate on this example in order to show

⁹ G.A. Cohen, "Reason, humanity and the moral law" in *Sources of Normativity*, 177.

the way in which Korsgaard's theory can be applied to some moral situations. After that, I will characterize the problem in such a way as to show how Korsgaard's fails in some ways to provide justificatory force.

We have already seen that identity is at the core of Korsgaard's solution to the problem of normativity. It begins with the reflective self who is able to stand apart from herself and question her obligations. Because that part of the human mind which lets us reflect on things we think we ought to do is capable of this sort of distance, it is also capable of demanding a justification for those obligations. In reflection, this part of the self, which Korsgaard calls the 'thinking self', has an idea of itself, or put another way, a self-conception. What makes autonomy the source of normativity is that the thinking self defines its conception of itself. That self-conception identifies with standards, values, beliefs, which govern its actions. The acting self must be, in as many cases possible, in accordance with the thinking self, for the sake of consistency. If a person is always acting contrary to her thinking self's self-conception, then a person inevitably loses her sense of self. It is in this way that a person obligates herself. She has identified with some value. She has made out of that value a law for herself. Because she knows who she is and what she values, she can answer the 'why' question; i.e., 'why be moral?'. The autonomous thinking self obligates herself to certain values which make sense to her, and define her life. Without those values, and a particular self-conception which defines her principles, she has no reason to act at all. In this way, she has created her own internal legislator (confirming a part of voluntarism--that one obeys, or tries to obey the legislator). And this internal legislator provides the justification for the part of us that asks, 'why?'.

Here is where I think Korsgaard's conception of moral theory is invaluable to us when thinking about why we perform moral acts, *when we act*

morally. It explains why we act morally in times of crisis when it is indeed hard to do the right thing. When a person is confronted with a difficult situation, it is precisely that clarity of mind (knowing one's mind, one's values and principles) which sees one through the storm. We can imagine gritting our teeth through a painful decision because we know precisely what the right thing to do is. That clarity of mind comes from knowing what one's principles are, and identifying with them so deeply that the internal legislator takes over and commands of us what is right. But in this case, the crisis is external. It is the kind of crisis which confirms a person's beliefs, values and identity, rather than challenges them. Perhaps a person feels strongly about a political position, and suddenly it becomes necessary to espouse those beliefs publicly. The person who already has a good sense of herself, what she believes in and why she believes in a particular position may find the courage to declare her position publicly, at *great sacrifice to herself, if necessary*.

But the reason this explanation fails the justificatory test is that moral action here relies on a foundation of beliefs which is firm. This person, who must act at great sacrifice to herself when challenged has no room to call those beliefs into question. Now Korsgaard will say that indeed the person has reflected, demanded of herself reasons for this action, and having come up with reasons which express a practical identity (and remember this practical identity does not conflict with her moral identity) she can now act on impulse A. But as Michael Bratman points out in his essay on *Sources of Normativity*, how do we avoid infinite regress?¹⁰ I am confronted with impulse A. I reflect on it, come up with reasons to endorse it. Now that I have found reasons which confirm a self-conception I have which I call my practical identity I begin to act on impulse A,

¹⁰ Michael Bratman, "The Sources of Normativity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 598 vol LVIII No 3: 705.

and indeed impulse A is hard. As I continue to act, at great sacrifice to myself, I ask once again, 'Is this right? Is this indeed who I profess to be?'. If the moral action is hard enough, or if moral life is already riddled with ambiguity about what could be right or wrong, how can I ever be so sure about those beliefs? The *source* of normativity lends itself to question the *source* of the identity which provides the obligatory voice. That identity is contingent upon beliefs which must be firm, and if questioned, could shake the grounds upon which that normativity is so compelling.

Here is where one could say that Korsgaard has come up with a foundation for an explanation of the normative problem. What justifies act A is answered by a compelling self-conception which has been arrived at through reflection. But this is not strong enough to be called justificatory because here the ethical skeptic will always challenge the moral agent to provide a justification for those beliefs. Put another way, if a person is *certain* about what she believes, she can act bravely. If the ethical skeptic challenges her to prove that what she believes is *true*, she may not be able to come up with a justification, but she would have no need of one because of that very certainty. Take for instance a religious person who acts out of great sacrifice to himself on the basis of his beliefs. If an atheist would challenge this person to justify his actions, the believer and the atheist would come to a standstill. The best the believer could do is to explain that his actions reflect his beliefs and then maintain that his beliefs are firmly held. The believer may not be able to *prove* his beliefs, but he would have no need to prove them. Now, if the believer came to an internal crisis wherein his belief system were challenged, he could not explain, (much less justify) even to himself what reason he has to act at great sacrifice to himself on the basis of his identity.

Take two moral agents performing act A for the same moral principles, both of whom are doing this act at great sacrifice to themselves. The situation is of a crisis sort and requires the clarity of mind which comes from knowing with certainty what principles define a person. Person X is plugging along and says, 'This crisis just confirms what I know to be right, and I know what to do, even at the expense of my life.' Person Y says, 'I thought I knew what was right, but this situation is beginning to make me question what I believe and I am no longer sure what is right'.

This brings us to Cohen's objection in his response to Korsgaard's moral theory. As I mentioned, Cohen finds Korsgaard's thesis to have explanatory force in that she explains why a person acts morally *when she acts morally*, but that Korsgaard loses justificatory force when a person challenges her identity and her beliefs, at least in certain respects. The part of us which has the ability to stand apart and ask 'why be moral?' is also quite capable of asking, 'who am I, *really?*'. If a person cannot answer the second question with some confidence, then Korsgaard has not provided a justification for acting morally.

Korsgaard anticipates this early on and answers that a person who has an identity crisis either changes some value or principle for another, and acts on a new revised conception of self, or, in extreme cases of loss of identity, does not act at all. It is whatever conception a person has of herself that makes her act at all, and therefore, when none exists, a person has no reason to do anything at all. Cohen has a problem with this, and I will explain why in a moment.

I, too, think that Korsgaard's method of unearthing the source of normativity is simple in a sense. It makes the idea of identity and the autonomy to develop an identity seem very straightforward. Self-identity is tenuous, or can be, and is often questioned. Often we ask ourselves who we are, or who we think we are, and yet we carry on doing the things we are supposed to do—or at

least many of us do. Developing a self-conception can be a life-long process, and can always be challenged by oneself or by others. If that is the case, then the source of obligation may not necessarily be integral to autonomy and our self-conception. Sometimes we do the right thing, not because we identify with that principle deeply, but because it may be a law, and we must do that, as the voluntarist would argue. Take the case of an ultra conservative right-wing person who believes everyone should fend for themselves and so there should be no social services. That person must still pay taxes to provide those services, not because she believes in those principles, but because it is the law. Korsgaard might think that the person values adhering to the law and that is the principle which is being upheld. But suppose the person would dodge the law if she knew how. The tax-payer's motivation may be something the voluntarist has answered, in the spirit of Hobbes. Korsgaard thinks that this has no justificatory weight, but is instead explanatory. Cohen charges Korsgaard with the same criticism, and so it seems to me, rightly so.

Or, it is conceivable that a person passing by a recycling bin and a garbage can throws his can in the recycling bin. He is not an 'environmentalist' *per se*, nor does he think about these things deeply. He just put the can in the recycling bin because he has been convinced that it is the right thing to do, and his identity is not really involved in that act. Here moral realism answers to why he acted in the way that he did. Korsgaard may be right in saying that this conception is explanatory and not justificatory, but by her very argument, she too has provided an answer to normativity with explanatory force and not justificatory force.

Cohen distinguishes two kinds of crisis situations. The first is an internal crisis, wherein a person loses her sense of self. The second is an external crisis where we are confronted with an awful situation in which "we sacrifice our lives,

or voluntarily relinquish what makes them sweet".¹¹ In the first case, Korsgaard cannot provide an answer as her whole theory rests on affirming one's self-conception, and on the autonomy to have a self-conception. The practical identity gives us reason to act morally when that identity is firmly grounded. If that identity is in question, then what has that person to act on? We can conceive of situations wherein people act morally, but not out of a sense of themselves. Korsgaard's theory of morality does not apply to that person. The problem of normativity remains: what justifies that person's actions?

In the second case, a person who is able to articulate her own self-conception has reason to act, even in the face of danger or pain. Cohen acknowledges this and maintains that if Korsgaard framed the question slightly differently, we would have our answer to the source of normative claims. I would say in this case that we have our answer to what the *grounds* of normativity are, rather than what its *source* is. If a moral agent is acting at great sacrifice to herself, and is confronted by the skeptic, she can answer that her conscience compels her to act in the way that she is acting--it is who she is. If the skeptic replies that this person's conscience may not be trustworthy, that it may lead her to do immoral things, then Korsgaard can only reply that her conscience cannot compel one to do inhumane things because her practical identity cannot conflict with her moral identity. The skeptic has reason to be wary of this response and to challenge it. Korsgaard, however, puts much faith in the reflective process, and in her transcendental argument that one must respect humanity as an extension of respecting one's own humanity. But if the moral agent is not sure who she is and asks, 'why should I perform this act at great sacrifice to myself?', the answer 'It is who you are' means little. Korsgaard's theory does not help at this point.

¹¹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 9.

Of the three conditions set out by Korsgaard which answer to the normative question (that is; first person appeal, transparency, and self-identity) Cohen argues that the first is not fulfilled. Cohen argues that Korsgaard's first person appeal addresses the person who is already acting morally and wishes to explain why. If the crisis is internal, and a person questions not only her moral obligation, but the very identity which informs her sense of obligation, then Korsgaard fails to provide a justification. Korsgaard's first-person appeal only works for a person who is able to articulate a definitive self-conception. If a person is not able to define herself, then Korsgaard has not answered the 'why?'. There is no use in telling someone that she is acting against herself, if her sense of self is in question.

I said earlier that Cohen is right in one way, but Korsgaard may have a response to this, which I will anticipate here. Korsgaard maintains that we cannot speak about the claims morality makes on us *unless* we have a sense of self. Self-identity is so integral to moral action for Korsgaard that we cannot speak about acting morally unless we have something to work with--that is, an identity. What commands, obliges and recommends us is that very sense of self we have. We have the autonomy to make choices and by acting on those choices, through the choices we make, we construct a picture of ourselves: 'I am the kind of person who does this...'. That self-conception is tied to moral action. It is an integral part of being a moral agent. In this sense Korsgaard is right. We must, when trying to be moral agents, look within ourselves, and if we find nothing there we are hard pressed to be active participants in the crowded dance of modern life. But in the same way that Korsgaard criticizes the voluntarists and realists for providing explanatory adequacy and not justification, I think Korsgaard too has shown us how (under certain conditions) we act morally, but if those certain conditions are already in place, no justification is required of us.

But I maintain that even when we have strong identities and principles upon which we normally act, situations in which we are not sure as to how to act may arise, and with them, justificatory questions. More of this will be discussed when I bring in Nussbaum's thought, in which I consider how value-conflicts play a role in moral life.

In section I, I outlined Korsgaard's criteria for moral concepts. I also delineated the two ways in which practical and psychological effects inform moral concepts. She defined 'explanatory adequacy' as describing how certain ideas affect us in the way that they do. This is precisely what I think Korsgaard has provided: a description as to how we go about acting morally when we do act morally. Self-identity is contingent. It is contingent upon clarity of mind, attention to the details, (what it is that constitutes a person, what motivates a person, etc.) and self-knowledge. Rather than provide a justificatory response, Korsgaard has traced back moral action to its foundation, but beneath that foundation she has not uncovered the source. Tracing back has not answered the justificatory 'why?'. If identity were more solid, stable and definitive, then we could use it as a source. Being, as it is, contingent, tenuous, fragile, and subject to external influences, it cannot be the premise upon which a justificatory moral theory rests. Now if one considers the *fact* that moral life may include elements of contingency, fragility and luck, one may accept that any theory of explanation or justification as to why we act morally *must* give some leeway for these elements. The contingencies involved in moral life, I maintain, are not considered seriously enough in Korsgaard's work.

The normative question, in the way Korsgaard defines it, is bound to be left unanswered. A justification of the sort Korsgaard wishes to articulate, in the context under which she wishes to articulate it, is impossible. If it were the case that one could justify to a person why she should be moral when she demands

to know 'why?', one cannot answer: 'because it is in your personhood to do so'. Korsgaard indeed implies that this is the case. The same criticism that Korsgaard has of the realists applies to her own theory. One cannot answer to a person that she should act morally when she wishes not to by saying it would be in her nature to do so. If Korsgaard says that answer is not good enough, then in the same way, her conception of autonomy and self-identity becomes too weak to handle the problem of justification.

In this way, I think Korsgaard's conception fulfills explanatory adequacy but lacks justificatory adequacy. She has provided a theory for those who understand themselves, armed with a definitive explanation as to why they act the way they do. But Korsgaard has not provided a justification for the person who does not know how to proceed. She has not answered the *hostile* 'why should I?'.

The problem lies here: moral crisis can be internal. It can reflect how a person is reacting to an external situation and it calls into question the very inner stability Korsgaard relies on when she appeals to identity. Now it is necessary to examine Korsgaard's use of practical reason in that practical reason is at the heart of how we use our reflective capacity. After that, I will dedicate some time to the thorough examination of the two notions Korsgaard relies heavily upon in her moral theory: that is, autonomy and identity. Through this examination, we should uncover some other problems with the notion of autonomy and identity as a source of normativity which indicate that sometimes the obligatory voice does not, and other times should not, come from a person's self-conception.

Section II: Chapter III Korsgaard's Use of Practical Reason

Foundational in Korsgaard's work is her inquiry into the character and source of practical reasons. By defining the character of practical reason, and by revealing its source, according to Korsgaard's understanding and use of it, we come to a deeper appreciation of her theory of normativity vis à vis autonomy and identity. This chapter, in which I explicate Korsgaard's theory and use of practical reason, will serve to introduce a discussion about Korsgaard's use of autonomy and identity in her theory of moral concepts.

Korsgaard claims that practical reasons are: (i) agent-neutral, not agent-relative; (ii) because they are agent-neutral, they are not based in individual desires; (iii) therefore, practical reasons are universally binding. Further, the source of practical reasoning is found in the nature of practical reasoning itself, not in the nature of things. In their *essence*, then, practical reasoning is agent-neutral. Given this, we cannot say that some practical reasons are agent-relative and others are agent-neutral.¹² Nor can we claim (as Nagel does *The Possibility of Altruism*)¹³ that agent-relative reasons must correspond to agent-neutral reasons. Korsgaard takes the strong claim, like Kant, that the nature of practical reason itself, is in its essence, agent-neutral.

To defend her claim that all practical reasons are agent-neutral in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, Korsgaard appeals to Kant on the one hand, and some of Nagel's arguments on the other. In *Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard appeals to Wittgenstein's argument against private language to defend her claim and in so doing, she refers to reasons as being 'public' or 'shared'. In my chapter on

¹² Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 276.

¹³ Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) 83-85.

'autonomy', I will link this argument to a claim I make, which states that in one way we can see autonomy as being 'shared'.

At the core of Korsgaard's defense for the claim that practical reason is agent-neutral is the appeal to freedom. Purely rational motivation is possible only if we are free. Kant's argument relies on transcendental idealism in which he reconciles theoretical causal determinism with free will; that is, causally undetermined action. By separating things-in-themselves, and things-as-they-appear to us, he bypasses the metaphysical question and focuses on claims of normativity vis à vis moral action, rather than focusing on epistemological claims. Therefore, instead of trying to prove causally, undetermined action, Kant accepts theoretical grounds for causal determinism and relies on the world of appearances, (or how things are represented to us) in order to make claims about how to act. He admits the limitations of what we can know, but finds a way to avoid getting trapped in the metaphysical question by delineating the two categories of what we can speak about (the world as it appears to us) and what we cannot speak about (the world in itself).

Now Vasilis Politis in "Reasons and Values"¹⁴ contends that while Korsgaard relies on Kant's account of freedom to defend her view, she does not consider Kant's transcendental idealism in her account, and this, he feels, weakens her position greatly. Korsgaard, instead, relies on an 'attitudinal' account to reconcile causal determinism and causally, undetermined action. For Korsgaard, when we hold people responsible for their actions, we assume their autonomous capacity for action. We assume they could have acted otherwise, and that in essence is a claim about their freedom. Korsgaard assumes a Kantian

¹⁴ Vasilis Politis, "Reason and Values," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* v5 no3 (O97) 428.

position when she distinguishes the theoretical from the practical, but she develops her own way of making this distinction apparent to us:

Responsibility is construed theoretically by those who think that it is a fact about a person that she is responsible for a particular action, or that there is some fact about her condition either at the time of action or during the events which led up to it which fully determines whether it is correct to hold her responsible. It is a fact, say, that she could have done otherwise, or that she could have avoided the condition which made it impossible for her to do otherwise...Deciding whether to hold someone responsible is a matter of arriving at a belief about her.¹⁵

A practical approach to responsibility shows us that we make judgments about people and those judgments assume free will. This, Politis contends, veers too far away from Kant's position. Kant will not make any epistemological claims about whether we are free, because for Kant we cannot know this, even in principle. Kant accepts the limits of knowledge and refers to this as the price we pay for transcendental idealism, but Korsgaard reconciles the Kantian theoretical/ practical contradiction regarding freedom by placing the question in the realm of attitude. We cannot make true or false claims about attitudes and at best, we can only argue as to their necessity insofar as they are rationally required. In this way, Korsgaard bypasses the metaphysical question, again, with a view to grounding ethics in a practical sphere in order to make claims about moral action.

Politis, in his assessment of Korsgaard's account points to two problems with Korsgaard's reconciliation of freedom and determinism: (i) that if we believe that things are causally determined, we cannot suspend this belief (which is rationally required of us if we are to hold people responsible for their actions) and (ii) unless a standpoint can suspend a belief, it will contradict that belief. If that standpoint can contradict the belief that we are free, then the standpoint of freedom is not attitudinal. In the first objection, we can say that we can suspend

¹⁵ Korsgaard, *Creating* 197.

beliefs if they are qualified, and in this way transcendental idealism would succeed; i.e., as Kant claims, we qualify the belief that we are free by arguing that causally determined things are not a feature of things-in-themselves, but rather a feature of how we perceive things, or how they are represented to us. In this way, Politis says, Kant's transcendental account makes more sense than Korsgaard's attitudinal account.¹⁶

I have said that according to both Korsgaard and Kant, purely rational motivation is only possible if we are free. This is fundamental in Korsgaard's theory of moral concepts because integral to Korsgaard's work is the notion that we can rely on reason to work out moral questions and that reason will provide us with answers which are universally applicable. For Korsgaard, this means that the use of practical reason helps us bypass relativism. It will bypass relativism because her approach is one she deems is necessary because the law of practical reason is essentially agent-neutral: "the necessity is in the law, and not in us".¹⁷ If understood in this way, then practical reason is safeguarded from the sometimes irrational way people may act: the law is in reason itself, and not *our* reasons. As Korsgaard puts it:

To the extent that skepticism about pure practical reason is based on the requirement that reasons be capable of motivating us, the correct response is that if someone discovers what are recognizably reasons bearing on conduct and those reasons fail to motivate us, that only shows the limits of *our* rationality.¹⁸

Korsgaard takes value out of the hands of the individual, who may be subject to whims, desires which contradict her reason, and appetites, and places it in the arena of the universal, unchanging, stable world of practical reason, neutral by its own definition. She protects value from the possibility of contingency, luck,

¹⁶ Politis 429-430.

¹⁷ Korsgaard, *Creating* 331 quoted from Politis 432.

¹⁸ Korsgaard, *Creating* 331 (my emphasis)

or even human passions. But here Korsgaard begins to lose her reader, or at least some of her readers, to whom she suggests a practical, not just theoretical approach to ethics.

To define 'practical reason' as agent-neutral in its essence, is not to answer to how it may be possible that one will come up with reasons which are relative and contingent. Of course, Korsgaard does not accept that reasons can be relative and contingent. However, she admits the fact that people are not always moved by reason: "Rage, passion, depression, distraction, grief, physical or mental illness: all these things could cause us to act irrationally, that is, to fail to be motivationally responsive to the rational considerations available to us".¹⁹ But she responds, I think, inadequately to these facts of human life. In her view, because rational considerations lie in the considerations themselves, and not in the moral agent herself, she has withdrawn the living moral agent from the living moral life. She admits this when she says that *in this way* "practical reason is no different from theoretical reason".²⁰ And her conclusion to this claim is as follows: "The extent to which people are *actually moved by rational considerations*, either in their conduct or in their credence, is beyond the purview of philosophy".²¹ In my view, Korsgaard has failed to address the moral agent who is not moved by, or does not understand, the considerations practical reason makes.

Now having briefly considered Korsgaard's understanding and use of practical reason, we should examine that which she relies on to defend, in part the agent neutrality of practical reason, and to a great extent, her thesis on the source of normativity; that is, autonomy. In so doing, I will set up some challenges to her theory of moral concepts.

¹⁹ Korsgaard, *Creating* 320

²⁰ Korsgaard, *Creating* 320

²¹ Korsgaard, *Creating* 332 (my emphasis)

Section II: Chapter IV Korsgaard on the Use of Autonomy

Korsgaard's central claim is "that autonomy is the source of obligation, and in particular of our ability to obligate ourselves..."²². I have started out by examining why Korsgaard's conception holds explanatory but not justificatory force. After that I explicated what underlies Korsgaard's thinking; that is, her use of practical reason. Now I would like to examine more carefully what lies at the heart of Korsgaard's argument vis à vis the source of normativity; that is, autonomy. If the source of normativity, or, that which commands us to act, is situated in autonomy, then this concept needs to be thoroughly examined from a Korsgaardian perspective.

It interests neither Korsgaard, nor Kant, whether autonomy (or, freedom of the will) is an ontological fact. For Kant, it is sufficient to assert, as the basis of an argument that: "[f]reedom as an Idea is posited by all rational beings as the basis for their actions".²³ This allows Kant to bypass having to prove freedom in a theoretical way. Korsgaard speaks about autonomy as a condition, inescapable, in the sense that when we reflect, when we are presented with choices (or perceive ourselves to have choices) we are acting, if nothing else, under the idea of freedom. "Determinism" Korsgaard maintains, "is no threat to freedom".²⁴ For Kant, and by extension for Korsgaard, there is necessity involved in the idea of freedom: "Now I affirm that we must necessarily grant that every rational beings who has a will also has the Idea of freedom and that it acts only under this Idea".²⁵ So for Kant, we must act under this idea of freedom,

²² Korsgaard, *Sources* 91.

²³ Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck, ed. The Library of Liberal Arts (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995) 65, footnote.

²⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources* 95.

²⁵ Kant, *Foundations* 65.

and for Korsgaard the same idea is explained in terms of freedom being the 'condition' in which we reflect and make choices about how to act.

The condition of freedom is explained in terms of the structure of reflective consciousness. That human beings have a built-in capacity for self-consciousness makes it such that human beings are presented with a particular problem: if we have the capacity to distance ourselves from our desires and impulses, we also have the capacity to call into question the beliefs and values which motivate us to act in accordance with certain moral rules. In other words, the normative problem is particular to humans who have this inherent reflective structure. The answer to the problem lies where the problem arose in the first place: it is that reflective structure of the human mind which allows us to distance ourselves from ourselves and question what principles and values we most identify with. This identification serves as a base from which we are compelled to act one way or another. And this course of reflection can only act within the context of freedom.

So one of the answers modern moral philosophy has offered to the source of normativity is 'the appeal to autonomy'. An agent must be able to act out of her own free will, make claims on herself, and act on them. The appeal to autonomy assumes a capacity for self-reflection, an ability to stand apart from oneself and question one's values, principles and actions. What one determines about one's principles, values, actions is the authority or has the authority to make normative claims on us.²⁶

The reflective capacity we have helps us to stand apart (here Korsgaard makes a thinking/acting self-distinction) and to examine whether the impulse of the moment stands the test of reflection. Reflection is the act of authority we have over ourselves, for it is our own judgment about our principles that obliges

²⁶ Korsgaard, *Sources* 20.

us to act one way or another. The ability to be reflective is presupposed, or dependent upon human autonomy. An agent must start with free will in order to function as a reflective being.

Reflection, then, and freedom are linked: "It is because of the reflective character of the mind that we must act, as Kant put it, under the idea of freedom".²⁷ It is that reflective nature, which gives us the capacity to think things through, and to come up with reasons for actions. Reasons, Korsgaard says, mean reflective success.²⁸ This exemplifies how Kant and Korsgaard give priority to reason as a source for moral action. Korsgaard's modification to Kant, as we will see, is that she adds identity as a basis from which to derive reflective questions, whereas Kant does not see personal identity as a way to arrive at moral decisions. (She maintains a feature of universalizability, to escape relativism, by claiming that obligations include moral obligations toward humanity.) But it is with reason, they both claim, that we possess the capacity to make moral decisions. It is reason which guides us in moral action. Reasons are what we come up with to endorse desires.²⁹ They are that which survive the reflective test. Later I will elaborate on this view. I will add that reason is not solely the source from which to derive moral understanding, and that reason alone (unlike how Kant sees it) cannot illuminate the problems one is confronted with when trying to determine how to act. I will explain how reason is limited in its capacity to direct moral life. It cannot account for contingency and dependency. It assumes a controlled environment and a presumption that moral life is not subject to vulnerabilities such as 'luck'.

The notion of autonomy and the capacity for reflection relies on, or presupposes the notion of free will. In Kantian terms, which Korsgaard uses,

²⁷ Korsgaard, *Sources* 25.

²⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources* 26.

²⁹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 27.

free will is defined as 'rational causality'. 'Causality' refers to a thing acting in accordance with laws. Because the will is understood as 'causality', the will must act in accordance with laws, but because also the will is free, it cannot act upon externally imposed laws. This is where it becomes important to apply what Kant says about practical reason to free will: his argument vis à vis free will as rational causality depends on his argument for practical reason. For Kant, if one sees oneself as an agent, one must see oneself as a cause. It is an the essential characteristic of rational thought (practical reason) to perceive oneself as a cause, and because that cause is 'free' one must (rationally) adhere to some law, not externally imposed, and therefore constructed within reason itself. Hence, Kant resolves the will as rational causality and the will as free with the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is the only possibility for the law of free will. It tells us that we must act by a law, but nothing determines what that law should be. Because the categorical imperative does not constrict the activities of free will, but rather arises from the nature of the will, it must choose a maxim which it can regard as a law. This is the law of practical reason. And for Kant, practical reason is bound up with free will:

Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles, independently of alien influences; consequently as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must regard itself as free. That is to say, the will of a rational being can be a will of its own only under the Idea of freedom, and therefore from a practical point of view such a will must be ascribed to all rational beings.³⁰

The appeal to autonomy is Kant's starting point. The authority of moral claims must be found in the agent's own will. While the will is free, it must still conform to some law, and this is how Kant comes up with the categorical imperative as the only law for free will.

³⁰ Kant, *Foundations* 65.

Korsgaard upholds this principle, but hoping to spare Kant from the criticism of 'empty formalism' she introduces the idea of a moral law. Moral law refers to the Kantian 'republic of all rational beings', the 'Kingdom of Ends'.³¹ Korsgaard makes this distinction because as she sees it, the categorical imperative is the law of free will, but it does not specify that the *moral* law is the law of free will. Moral law specifies that we act upon those maxims which all rational beings living in a society together would agree to act upon. The moral law derives its content from the fact that the citizens of the Kingdom of Ends would determine what would be rational and agreeable. For a person to be bound by the moral law, she would have to identify herself as a member of the Kingdom of Ends.³² Here Korsgaard begins to diverge from Kant's path by introducing the role identity plays in moral life. In this way she hopes to rescue Kant from the accusation that the categorical imperative is empty formalism.

Korsgaard ties the authority of reflection to self-identity. She says: "The reflective structure of the mind is a source of 'self-consciousness' because it forces us to have a *conception* of ourselves".³³ In this way Korsgaard links reflection with identity, making them inseparable in terms of how she views the normative question. A person who has conflicting desires acts on the one which most resonates with a principle with which the person identifies. The principle with which one identifies represents the person's identity. In this way, principles and values are expressive of the sorts of persons we purport to be. They are expressive of who we think we are.

One's conception of oneself, or the "description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" is what Korsgaard calls 'practical

³¹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 99.

³² Korsgaard, *Sources* 100.

³³ Korsgaard, *Sources* 100.

identity'.³⁴ And of course, practical identity is complex. We identify ourselves in many ways at once: someone's spouse, child, parent, colleague, etc. The way we understand ourselves (that is, have a self-conception) in these varying roles will be the conception out of which comes a command of unconditional obligation.³⁵ They are 'unconditional', according to Korsgaard, because it is by our own authority that we construct and obey our own laws. In as many cases as possible, one needs to act in accordance with one's thinking self. To act against oneself is to lose one's sense of self. This is what it means, Korsgaard says, when we say 'I couldn't live with myself if I did that'.

It is not a third-person, or metaphysical self because it addresses the person who is asking herself what she values and what choices she will make in her practical life on the basis of her values. The law she adheres to is the one which expresses herself in particular. The way that she thinks of herself is ultimately expressed in the laws she chooses for herself. In that way, she becomes a law unto herself.

The complexities of a person's practical identity--gender, religious or cultural background, professional role, private role, etc.--demand various obligations of a person with respective reasons for carrying those obligations. Korsgaard says, "Your reasons express your identity, your nature; your obligations spring from what that identity forbids".³⁶

While Korsgaard deviates from Kant greatly on this account, she maintains a feature of universalizability by relying on the autonomy which uses reflection as a guide to formalize obligation as something necessary and unconditional. Korsgaard, with Kant, upholds the feature of universalizability by placing the activity of lawmaking within reason itself, and not in something

³⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources* 101.

³⁵ Korsgaard, *Sources* 102.

³⁶ Korsgaard, *Sources* 101.

contingent like identity. While Kant does not use identity as a source from which to arrive at normativity, Korsgaard sees both their versions of autonomous lawmaking as imposed by none other than reason itself: "The requirement of universalization is not imposed on the activity of autonomous lawmaking by reason from outside, but is constitutive of the activity itself".³⁷ And in this way, there is nothing relative or contingent about Korsgaard's version of autonomy.

Further, while Kant does not speak about self identity *per se*, Korsgaard shows that Kant does in fact use the principle of identity in that one 'identifies' as "a member of the intelligible world" and identification obliges us to uphold the moral law.³⁸ The parallel Korsgaard makes between herself and Kant is that where Kant uses the idea of a normative identity as having a self-conception which entails being rational, Korsgaard uses the idea of a normative identity as having a self conception of oneself as *human*. From the human identity (which she calls moral identity) springs a self-conception (a practical identity) which make particular moral demands on a person.

To summarize: Free will is situated in autonomy and is defined as rational causality. We need regularity for the idea of causality because there is an element of necessitation involved in causality. For causality to be more than temporal sequence, there must be a law or a regularity about it. Now because the *will is a cause*, it too must operate according to a law; i.e., it must have some regularity about it. The way in which free will is linked to the normativity of reason is that "will is *self-conscious* causality, causality that operates in the light of reflection".³⁹ So it is the structure of that reflective capacity that carries with it

³⁷ Korsgaard, *Sources* 235.

³⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources* 237.

³⁹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 227.

inherently a normative force. We need the normative principle to be part of the will because it brings integrity and unity to the acting self.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Korsgaard, *Sources* 228.

Section II: Chapter V Korsgaard on the Use of Identity

Now let us examine what is involved in Korsgaard's conception of self-identity. One of the conditions Korsgaard sets out to meet in answering the normative question is that the source of normativity must in some deep way appeal to one's sense of self.⁴¹ Korsgaard's claim is that: "It is the conceptions of ourselves that are most important to us that give rise to unconditional obligations".⁴² She calls these obligations 'unconditional' because in her view, they are constructed and enforced by our own conception of ourselves. Because that conception is constructed from within, if we are to have any respect for ourselves, we would have to adhere *unconditionally* to the obligations that conception makes on us.

The voice of obligation stems from the fact that every reflective agent identifies with some law or principle, which determines what actions that agent takes. This deep connection to some law or principle is what becomes one's own personal law. For Korsgaard, this is the source of normativity; i.e., the voice, which obligates one. I would argue that rather than call this the *source* of normativity, it should be called the *foundations* of normativity. The source, however remains beneath those foundations: what is still left unanswered is (i) what constitutes identity, (ii) how identity is arrived at, and (iii) how identity can be challenged.

Korsgaard's theory begins with autonomy and with the autonomous capacity for reflection. Reflection is the tool to articulate or ascertain what one's principles are, what one values and holds dear. Those principles or values form a conception of the self. A person then acts out of the principles from which a

⁴¹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 19.

⁴² Korsgaard, *Sources* 102.

person has developed a sense of self. In as many cases as possible a person will try to act in accordance with her thinking self, and if she does not, she goes against herself, negates herself, and will begin to lose the sense she has of herself.

Practical identity is used in Korsgaard's theory to address the first-person. It addresses the first person because it *is* personal, because one arrives at practical identity out of reflection, and one's own conception of oneself. If I find myself confronted with an impulse to go out on this beautiful day, instead of practicing the piano, and I challenge myself to give myself a good reason why I should stay in and practice the piano, my normative voice can very well say, 'Well, who's making you learn the piano?' Since I have arrived at the decision to learn this instrument by myself, it is my *self* who is obligating me. If I found no value in learning this instrument then indeed I would have no reason to stay in. If on reflection I found the learning of piano invaluable, then I have found my obligatory voice, authoritative and unconditional.

Now, perhaps one can say that this voice is not 'unconditional'. I can very well understand what constitutes my identity, and what motivates my impulses to do or not do something, and then I can simply ignore it. However, the context Korsgaard sets up is one in which (as I have criticized earlier) she explains why a person acts morally *when they act morally*. Again, she claims to provide justification for why a person acts, but really her answer applies to a particular circumstance; that is, a context wherein a person chooses to do the 'right' thing. She explains what motivates that choosing, and what is involved in that motivation. In this way, a person can argue that these obligations are not really *unconditional*, but rather they are, psychologically speaking, *compelling*. We can say that these obligations are unconditional if we believe that principles act as laws on ourselves, but because laws can be broken or ignored, it would be more

precise to say that we have (if we have moral dispositions) *compelling reasons*, rather than *unconditional obligations* to adhere to these laws.

This is particularly powerful because it makes the individual responsible for her moral actions. Her obligations indicate what kind of practical identity she has, and her practical identity is arrived at through the principles in which she believes. When someone confronts her with a challenge to explain why she is doing X at great sacrifice to herself, she can answer that she chose X because it appeals to her in some deep way. It would be harder to endorse some action X if it appealed to the third person. The extent to which a person adheres to the principles of her practical identity will determine how successful she is at being 'herself' in a sense. When we call a person 'genuine' or 'authentic', we refer to this very kind of Korsgaardian conception of a self. When Korsgaard speaks about uniting the acting and thinking self, the former adheres to the latter, and this is the kind of moral foundation which guides, compels and inspires moral action from an individual, at great sacrifice (if necessary) to herself.

Korsgaard introduces 'moral identity' which answers to the concern, 'What if a person's practical identity were that of murderer?'. By adding moral identity to her conception of the source from which normativity is derived, Korsgaard adds a dimension of universalizability, staving off criticism that extreme relativism threatens her conception of moral life; that is, she offers an answer to the critic who suggests that using practical identity as a basis for the obligatory voice allows justification for *immoral* action: 'That is who I am', said the thief.

Now, more than just universalize her theory, Korsgaard attempts to add moral content to that universalizability so that a person cannot simply universalize her immoral actions. Where practical identity is concerned with making laws for oneself which express who a person is, moral identity refers to

our identity as humans. Being a part of the human species requires certain kinds of obligations. It means that our reflective capacity requires that we have practical conceptions of ourselves, and having arrived at practical conceptions of ourselves, we recognize that conception as normative. If our practical conceptions are normative, our conception of humanity must be normative because we must recognize it as foundational. We must recognize that the reflective capacity we have to form practical identities is normative and therefore what makes one person human is what makes all persons human. To treat your human identity as normative is what Korsgaard refers to as having a moral identity. While we are bound to the particular identities which constitute us and are reflective of our particular communities, we are also bound to treat our human identity as normative, and accept the claims that human obligation makes on us. Identifying as human means recognizing the obligations and reasons that come with human identity; it means human identity has normative claims on us.⁴³ Now Korsgaard says this, but just as it is difficult to show why practical identity makes *unconditional* obligations on us, it is respectively difficult to show why we must have this foundational moral identity (which makes obligations on us) and upon which we will build practical identities. One may agree with Korsgaard that we must have obligations towards humanity, but I do not see that Korsgaard has shown this to be true.

The point of Korsgaard's conception of moral identity is not only to add universalizability to her theory, but also to provide the content for moral obligations. Because moral identity carries with it foundational moral obligation toward humanity, Korsgaard's theory cannot apply to (for instance) a self-respecting murderer. Again, to remind the reader, Korsgaard claims that practical identity must not contradict moral identity, and if it does, that practical

⁴³ Korsgaard, *Sources* 41.

identity must be given up. Now, Korsgaard says this, but that is all. She would be hard pressed to come up with a justification for her moral vs. practical identity problem.

Having a moral identity is tied to having a practical identity. The moral identity is at the core of the practical identity because it makes possible the normativity of practical identity. If one cannot recognize what it means to value human life, to derive a source of obligation from the normativity of human life, then one cannot value one's identity only as part of a particular community. This valuing one's identity only as part of a particular community is possible. We can look at a self-respecting Nazi who values his principles of the superiority of the Aryan Nation, and yet he is not obligated by the normativity of human identity. But this, Korsgaard claims, is incoherent. On Korsgaard's account, this is incoherent because practical identity cannot contradict moral identity. Unfortunately, it is difficult to account for these examples in articulating a theory of moral concepts because people are quite capable of being incoherent. Korsgaard maintains that any practical identity, which is fundamentally inconsistent with the value of humanity, must be given up.⁴⁴ It remains open whether this can be *shown* to be true or justified such that anyone who rejects it is irrational. Here, I think, Korsgaard fails. She has not shown that any practical identity which contradicts moral identity is incoherent.

Having articulated the basis of Korsgaard's use of identity let me point to a problem I see with the practical/moral distinction. I am skeptical that it is possible to have a moral identity before a practical identity. The problem I see with Korsgaard's conception is that, according to her, moral identity is prior to practical identity. At one point Korsgaard seems to say that having a practical identity includes having a moral identity, but at another point she says, "There is

⁴⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources* 42.

no reason why your relationship to humanity at large should always matter more to you than your relationship to some particular person".⁴⁵ But I think that I understand my value as a human being and my valuing other human beings on grounds of being human *because of my practical identity*. My immediate response is that if I am to have a relationship to humanity, it does not exist until I have a relationship to a particular person. Or put more boldly, my relationship to humanity (if I am to have one at all) *is my relationship to the particular person*. However, it is possible that I have personal relationships with particular people and that I am unable or unwilling to extend that feeling to something called 'humanity'. My point here is that *if we are to have a respect and feeling for something as abstract as 'humanity' we could only do so through the respect and feeling for individuals*.

Let me try to exemplify it like this: moral identity, in the way Korsgaard defines it, seems to be highly theoretical. Practical identity is the stuff we experience everyday--when a friend calls and needs a hand, but you have a hundred things to do, and yet you find time to help. That sacrifice you make comes from caring about a real, living, breathing person. Now, I am not suggesting that we do not have obligations to "humanity", but that we can only understand those obligations when we care for, have affectionate ties with, individual people. Feeling obligation for something so abstract as "humanity" is only realized and only possible through the caring of individuals. Now as I mentioned, this need not *necessarily* be the case. I am not making a claim that this is a conceptual truth--that anyone who is cared for and cares for an individual will necessarily extend that feeling toward humanity. Rather, I am making an empirical, sociological observation--that if we are to develop a respect

⁴⁵ Korsgaard, *Sources* 128.

an feeling for humanity, we could only do so if certain conditions are in place which include having affectionate ties with individuals first.

Korsgaard might say, if you value yourself as a human being, and you understand the necessity of having a roof over your head and food to eat, then you must understand your obligation toward human beings who are denied this basic human condition. And perhaps what Korsgaard means when she makes the moral/practical distinction, is that part of what it means to be a human being is to care (for example) about whether people are homeless and hungry. But I think what happens is that we come to value our own humanity from caring and being cared for by others. Then we can project that care (which obliges us, like a friend in need obliges us) to people whose names we do not know.

To exemplify this conversely, imagine a person who has never been cared for, never had affectionate ties to a parent or friend. Given this, that person has never learned how to care for another, develop an identity as someone's friend or child, and never belonged to a community. It seems unlikely that this person would have a moral identity, but more plausible to believe that this person would develop a moral identity only after learning to care and be cared for by particular people who attribute a particular identity to her.

I understand when Korsgaard says that it is incoherent to have a practical identity and not a moral one. According to Korsgaard's thesis, it would be inconsistent for a person to feed her child, and then walk by a hungry child without any reaction. For Korsgaard, the two identities must co-exist. But I would suggest that practical identity is prior, if not parallel to moral identity, that practical identity gives us the ability to have a moral identity, and not vice versa. Otherwise, Korsgaard's ordering reminds me of a quote I once read. Paraphrased, it sounds something like this: 'I love humanity, I just hate people'. Korsgaard's reflective method would make that statement incoherent, and she

says that several times, but that quote exemplifies for me why practical and moral identity are two parts of the same whole. One cannot have one without the other. More importantly, one cannot develop a moral identity first, and then a practical identity. At best, perhaps Korsgaard can answer that if one respects one's practical identity, one must respect one's moral identity and the obligations that come with it because one is *first* a person, and *then* a particular person. But then, this kind of theorizing becomes third-person reasoning and it does not address (as Korsgaard claims) the first-person perspective, the person in a difficult moral situation who asks, 'Why should I?'

Another problem with the practical/moral distinction is that some people have practical identities but not moral identities. I think Korsgaard is right in saying that this is inconsistent, but the very fact that people are capable of being caring mothers and fathers, and yet uphold the SS regime of the Nazi party indicates that some people may be capable of this kind of inconsistency. Having said that, I would not know how to account for this fact in any moral theory and moral theorists would be hard-pressed to account for these examples.

So far, I have explicated the terms Korsgaard uses to develop a theory of moral concepts. I have in particular looked at her use of autonomy, how it relates to normativity, the categorical imperative modified by what she calls 'moral law', and self-identity in their two distinct forms: practical and moral. I have illustrated how Korsgaard modifies Kantian ethics by introducing the idea of identity in her moral theory. I have illustrated how in Korsgaardian ethics, autonomy, reflection, reason and identity together make up the necessary ingredients for a moral life.

Now I will examine the terms 'autonomy', 'self-identity' and the conceptions that go with them critically. This examination will express some concerns I have with Korsgaard's theory. My aim is not to negate Korsgaard's

theory, but to show how, with some modification, its integrity can be maintained. I hope, in what follows, to add to Korsgaard's conception of moral life, and bring to it a deeper understanding.

Section II: Chapter VI
Problems With Autonomy and Self-Identity

(i) Autonomy:

If I call out your name, I make you stop in your tracks. (If you love me, I make you come running.) Now you cannot proceed as you did before. Oh, you can proceed, all right, but not just as you did before me. For now if you walk on, you will have to muster a certain active resistance, a sense of rebellion. But why should you have to rebel against me? It is because I am a law to you.⁴⁶

Throughout this conception of self-obligation and autonomy, there lingers a reality, a fact about human life, which Korsgaard addresses, but in explication of this fact, does see a conflict; that is, in the relationship obligation has to autonomy. Here I will reiterate Korsgaard's conception of what it is to 'obligate one another' and present it as a problem in autonomy. Eventually this will be linked with a problem in identity.

First, we have already seen how valuing our own humanity means we must think, according to Korsgaard, of our human identity as a form of practical, normative identity.⁴⁷ The ability to have what Korsgaard calls a 'moral identity' amounts to valuing implicitly the humanity of others by extension of valuing one's own humanity. Now the approach Korsgaard takes in defending this view is a compelling one--so much so, that if one accepts it, one can begin to see some problems in her conception of autonomy and self-identity vis à vis the source of normativity.

Korsgaard defends moral identity by claiming that 'reasons' (that which survives the reflective test) are essentially public, rather than private. Rather than try to show how private reasons become public through an exchange of private reasons, Korsgaard suggests that the solution may lie in moral realism,

⁴⁶ Korsgaard, *Sources* 140.

⁴⁷ Korsgaard, *Sources* 132.

wherein reasons refer to objective features in the public sphere. We come up with reasons which we can present publicly because everyone understands, or could come to understand them; they have been in some way previously agreed upon. We share reasons, and in this way, cannot call them *essentially* private, but rather *incidentally* private. If we accept that reasons can be objective in that we all as a group refer to the same ones; i.e., that in a practical sense they are objective, and if we accept that reasons, in virtue of what they are, have a quality which makes them 'shareable', we are more or less pointing to the social nature of our humanity. Quite simply, we live in this world *together*: we share space, language, understanding, and implicitly, *reasons*. Moral life is bound up in social life: "To act on a reason is already, essentially, to act on a consideration whose normative force may be shared with others".⁴⁸

So to obligate oneself, one must be reflective and conscious of that reflection. For a person to obligate another, she must be conscious of that person and conscious of that person as a person. Here Korsgaard appeals to Wittgenstein's argument against private-language-games to support her claim. The meanings or uses of words are normative in that we all at least implicitly agree on their use; without that we could not carry on a conversation. They are relational in that we use them amongst ourselves, and we share their definitions. An intrinsically private language does not make sense. It is not that 'cat' *could* mean a furry four legged animal that purrs, but that it *should* mean that. If definitions are subjective and not objective, we could not have conversations with each other and expect to understand one another. Korsgaard's argument is that the meanings of words are normative because they are shared. They are normative because words *ought* to mean (rather than *could* mean) a particular shared thing.

⁴⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources* 46.

In the same way, argues Korsgaard, *reasons* are normative because they are shared. When we discuss our reasons for doing one thing rather than another, what we are talking about is a relationship between people, not a private encounter with one self. If reasons for moral action did not make sense to other people, they probably would not make sense to an individual. If I were the only person who understood my reasons for acting on an impulse, I would either have to reconsider my reasons, or close myself off from the world.

Reflection, then, is what we do when we need to come up with reasons. 'Reasons' have been defined by Korsgaard as that which survive the reflective test.⁴⁹ Once we come up with reasons for actions, we obligate ourselves. We do all of this under the idea of freedom. To go back to what we have already noted, Korsgaard has said that an agent must be able to act out of her own free will, make claims on herself, and act on them.⁵⁰ To reiterate what has been said about autonomy, the appeal to autonomy assumes the capacity for self-reflection, an ability to stand apart from oneself and question one's values, principles and actions. What we determine about our principles, values, actions *is* the authority or has the authority to make normative claims on us. Reflection is the act of authority we have over ourselves and the ability to be reflective is dependent upon human autonomy. We must act, as Kant put it, under the idea of freedom. Now, I am not contesting that we, as free-willed agents, act under some autonomy, but I am suggesting that given what has been said about the publicity and shareability of reasons, we act in accordance with one another. This is to say that if reasons are public, and reasons are that which we come up with to decide which impulses to act on, then we are not (even in thinking) acting autonomously, but rather, we are acting in accordance with one another. Here I

⁴⁹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 97.

⁵⁰ Korsgaard, *Sources* 19.

suggest not that we have no free-will, but I want to clarify what precisely we mean by 'autonomy'. What I will conclude with is an understanding of autonomy that includes and considers other people; that is, if I could put it oxymoronically, I am going to suggest a sort of 'shared-autonomy'.

Autonomy means personal freedom, or freedom of the will. But when we say things like 'personal freedom' what do we think we are free from? Being a person in a social structure, acting as a moral agent, participating as a member of a community all make demands on us. Moral life means that we are obligated to one another, and we accept that in fulfilling those obligations, we fulfill who we think we are (or, our self-identity). We have the autonomy to think, and when we think in terms of reasons, if reasons are public, as Korsgaard argues, then even the act of reflection is public. What I am suggesting is that every act of reasoning is a public act, if we do indeed accept that reasons are public, and that their meanings are shared. I accept Korsgaard's argument that reasons are public because the reasons we toss around in our heads are publicly defined, understood and communicated. They are not private because (for example) my mother does not need to be in the room for me to hear what she would say in this or that situation, and my friend does not need to be in the country for me to anticipate how she would react to this or that decision. Now, I can decide to go against all the people in my life in order to enact a decision, and it may very well be the right decision to make, but in so doing, I have reacted, rebelled, ignored, or defied those people whose thoughts and reactions are part of what I think. That is what makes me autonomous, but autonomy is tricky here because I have still participated in reacting, rebelling, ignoring or defying the 'other'. We are free to do what we want, but what we want is always contingent, always connected insofar as we are connected to a world, a piece of something greater than the individual.

So in one sense it is true that we are autonomous: we can reflect on what to do, and we can act on the decisions we make. But always in these acts of reflection we are in a world where the reasons we sift through have been publicly defined, and given that reasons are necessarily public, any act of reflection is in a sense public. We are inescapably products of communities, experiences, cultures, particular ways of thinking. Now I am not suggesting that we are *only* such products, but here I am acknowledging the weight of such communities, experiences and cultures. Further, I am suggesting that when a person stands apart from her community and challenges its beliefs, norms and practices, she is still participating in that culture by rebelling or defying it. How we digest our social surroundings, how we make sense of our communities, experiences, and cultures and how we act in relation to these factors is that ounce of autonomy that we refer to here. But I want to emphasize here that this autonomy we refer to is heavily weighed down with the connections we have in the world; that in one sense autonomy involves other people, and this is what I mean when I say 'shared-autonomy'.

(ii) Self-Identity

What I have said about autonomy anticipates my problem with self-identity, and here the complexities become deeper, calling into question Korsgaard's appeal to identity as a justificatory response to the source of normative claims. In the same way that we are only autonomous insofar as we are with others, participating, reacting, rebelling, or upholding beliefs, principles, and acting on some and not other impulses, our identity is composed of, entails necessarily a whole spectrum of influences. This is what makes us part of a social structure. Korsgaard considers this when she discusses practical identity, and refers to communitarianism as one of the ways philosophers have addressed the question of identity. Because identity is such an integral part of Korsgaard's

thesis, I will elaborate on a communitarian perspective with regard to what is entailed in identity. Specifically, I will use Charles Taylor's explication of communitarianism.

(ii-a) Taylor on Self-Identity

Taylor introduces the idea of 'inescapable frameworks' in his thesis regarding self-understanding. 'Inescapable' refers to the fact that everyone is situated within a particular construct, with a history, with a set of values attached to that context. No one is immune from a greater picture within which she stands. 'Framework' refers to the horizon which identifies what that context is, what are its values, meanings, interpretations, habits, customs.

When Taylor speaks of 'inescapable frameworks' he means to say that there is an historical source from which one understands oneself. Everyone is situated, and that situation, shared with others, provides the basis, the framework for understanding oneself. The framework from which one comes to know oneself provides one with a sense of moral coherency. "To know who you are" says Taylor, "is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary".⁵¹ Taylor uses this spatial analogy with reference to the psychological state of "narcissistic personality disorders" wherein a person who loses her sense of connectedness in the most extreme case begins to develop signs of uncertainty regarding where she is physically located.

After one locates oneself in terms of history, Taylor speaks of locating oneself by being able to name oneself, and one's social relationship to an interlocutor. It is fundamental to be capable of answering this question for

⁵¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Mass: Harvard UP, 1989) 28.

oneself, "to know where one stands".⁵² It is always in relation to 'other' that one understands oneself better. This is role of the interlocutor, to ask 'Who are you?'. With that, one begins to answer, name, social position, nationality, gender, age, etc. All of the answers to these questions situate one. The interlocutor is the lover, the friend, the group of friends, the boss, the professor, the family. There is a constant answering to questions that places one in terms of how one lives and the answers to these questions informs one as to how one lives morally.

Let us accept that one is always situated within a framework (what Taylor rightly calls 'inescapable'). Indeed, try as I may, I cannot imagine a person not being born within a particular historicity, within a greater story. In answering questions about oneself, one becomes aware of one's particular framework. The task is two-fold: firstly one admits to being located within a framework, and secondly one learns to identify one's particular framework. The failure to identify one's framework is for Taylor being 'at sea'; that is, lost. Not being able to identify who one is leads to not being able to identify what is important. This is what has come to be known as an 'identity crisis'. The word 'crisis' indicates the severity of the circumstance and it is defined as a time of danger or great difficulty, or a turning point.

Taylor accounts for the rebellion of people within a particular framework by asserting that a person who rejects her particular social horizon is a person who admits to a particular historicity, and finds it lacking meaning, or objects to its meaning in some way. This person works within her framework to change, redefine, and set new boundaries for herself, within a particular time and place, and adds to the meaning of what it is to be a part of that community.⁵³

⁵² Taylor, *Sources* 29.

⁵³ Taylor, *Sources* 31.

Taylor's understanding of a person's ability to recognize and define herself within her community lends an understanding to a person's social responsibility within that framework. To exemplify this, let us consider a young person dissatisfied with the social conditions of her time and location. This person sees injustice and corruption all around her and feels rather ashamed of being a part of that community. One option is to move away and never have anything to do with that particular place again. Another option, the communitarian one, would be to admit to one's belonging to that community, and contribute to social change that would make the community a better one. The communitarian option is an active one, and one that would contribute positively toward the building and shaping of a more egalitarian, more just society.

In recognizing one's particular situatedness, locating oneself historically and socially, one comes to understand one's own values more acutely, and only then is that person able to articulate what values are best pursued, and which are secondary. The understanding of self-ascribed values is the starting point from which one can be a contributing, moral agent in society.

In keeping with communitarianism, I will proceed on the premise that identities are arrived at through the participation of various roles as members of particular communities. Indeed we do not construct ourselves, by ourselves, in a vacuum, from which principles, beliefs and ideas spontaneously emerge. We discover our communities and within that discovery, construct our identities in a world with others, and in this way are bound participants of a social construct.

(ii-b) Unearthing Some Problems With Korsgaard's Use of Identity

(i) If we see our identities as something composed of particular roles, then identity is contingent and dependent on others. If your friend teaches you or shows you her conception of what it is to be a good person, and that conception

appeals to you, and if you therefore adopt certain ways of doing things because that person showed you how, then that part of your identity is borrowed from that person. She then, in that way, becomes part of what you are now. If that friend turns around and does something immoral, it is bound to affect you, not only in the sense that you are disappointed in your friend, but it must affect you in the sense that she was the one who, in some important respects, taught you about morality. This is not to say that you must necessarily dismiss all of what you had learned, but it acknowledges that part of your identity was composed of something that is no longer what you thought. A more dramatic example would be that of one's parents. If your parents taught you to be a certain kind of person, and then you discovered of them that they are not that, but something grossly contrary to what they claimed, that new knowledge must affect you to such an extreme that you may call into question your own identity. If Korsgaard appeals to a person's self-conception to provide the normative or obligatory voice, and if she refers to communitarianism as one of the possible ways to discover that identity, then she must admit to the fragility inherent in the conception of oneself. The obligatory voice only works when your identity is not called into question, when the people you have relied on to help compose that identity remains what they are and nothing happens out of the ordinary. Martha Nussbaum refers to this as 'luck'. And luck here refers to what Nussbaum aptly names 'the fragility of goodness'.

If identity means having certain principles, values, beliefs, and if having integrity means acting on impulses which uphold one's identity, then we need to look at, not only the source of identity, but how one maintains an identity on a practical level. To go back to what Korsgaard said about identity with regard to normativity, she said: "It is the conceptions of ourselves that are most important

to us that give rise to unconditional obligations".⁵⁴ We have already said that the voice of obligation stems from the fact that every reflective agent identifies with some law or principle which determines what actions one takes, and that this connection to a law or principle is what becomes one's own personal law. What I suggest as an addition or clarification of what this means is that our principles and laws, which become our own personal laws, are informed by others; that identities are malleable, not grounded in that we are influenced, affected, changed by each other, and that this is what is involved in being a developing human being. In this way, self-conception may not always be reliable.

This is like the Hobbesian argument wherein the sovereign who makes the laws can change the laws. In keeping with this idea the individual can change her conception of herself if new impulses require that she do so. Sometimes this works in a positive sense (when, for instance a person grows into a more mature person) but it need not necessarily be so. What if a student perceives herself as a diligent, hard-working, dedicated thesis-writer, and then, upon reflection she has a self-conception of a toilet-cleaner who should immediately abandon the pursuit of academia? In fact, this second conception may have arisen from some unforeseen stress, many sleepless nights, and some mornings when she awoke crying. Because she is her own law, constructs principles for herself which reflect her own identity, she may very well change her identity for all the wrong reasons. Perhaps in these times she would be ill-advised to appeal to her practical identity, for if her identity is fragile, it may very well break. If the appeal to moral realism does not answer the 'Why should I?', and the Voluntarist does not answer the question either, how can the 'Because that is who you are' answer it, when the student protests, 'Not anymore'? We cannot end the question there, because I think we all agree that the student should carry

⁵⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources* 102.

on, and most would answer to her that she is simply suffering a crisis in confidence.

(ii) Korsgaard's use of identity vis à vis the normative question gives rise to another unavoidable problem. If one accepts that identity is composed of values and principles which derive from the roles we play, what happens when we have conflicting roles which carry with them conflicting demands? With those demands come conflicting values, which carry emotional weight. Here's how Nussbaum exemplifies the problem: You are a parent, and value that role deeply. You are also a professor and that too carries great weight for you. On a given night you have to make a choice between going to your child's play, or giving a lecture. Your child demands of you something that carries with it great emotional weight, but your profession is meaningful to you and you feel you have an obligation to your students. If you turn to Korsgaard's moral theory to help solve your problem you come to a deadlock: when you ask yourself who you are and what you value, you come to realize that you value being a caring parent, and you value being a good professor. Korsgaard might answer that you have to make a choice here about what you value more, and you do this through reflective endorsement. In fact, that is unfair. You can easily reflectively endorse both possibilities. Your students will not die if you do not attend the class, nor will your child suffer irreparable damage if you do not attend the play. But both choices are compelling, and both carry with them obligations, responsibilities with which you identify as being part of who you are. And in both choices, you can come up with good reasons to act or not act.

Having said that, let me turn to some of Thomas Nagel's criticism of identity as a source from which to derive the obligatory voice. I said already that in the case of the parent/philosopher, the moral agent would be at a loss to unearth her normative voice by appealing to her identity. She would rightly

argue that she is both a parent and a professor and both identities carry deep meaning for her. Nagel frames the problem nicely when he says, "To decide from the reflective standpoint what to do you have eventually to stop thinking about yourself and think instead about the question at issue...The answers to such questions may partly determine your identity, but they don't derive from it".⁵⁵ While Nagel does not address the same problem I do, his objection works well with the example I pose as a problem. The parent/professor may very well be less concerned with her identity in this case, than with trying to look at the bigger picture to determine how to act.

To follow through with Nagel's next objection, I will use my same example. Let us imagine that the parent/philosopher chooses to go to her child's play. She is then asked why she chose her child's play over the lecture she was due to give. Her answer is that it meant so much to her child that she simply had to attend. If Korsgaard in turn replied that the parent acted in this way because she valued her motherhood over her profession, as Nagel puts it, Korsgaard will have 'cheaped' the parent's action. Furthermore, some moral decisions made are contextual: they need not make general statements about higher and lower values, but rather in this particular case the parent choose option X because option X was more compelling at that time.

In this case, the moral agent chose one option over the other because she valued her child, not because she valued her identity as a parent. While it is always possible for a person to act morally out of her strong sense of self, and while she should not dismiss those actions as less moral, I think Nagel rightly objects that it is not always the case that a person would act morally *only* out of a sense of her identity.

⁵⁵ Thomas Nagel, "Universality and the reflective self" in *Sources of Normativity* 206.

Korsgaard responds to this criticism in her "Reply". Firstly she points out that one's self-conception need not be *only* about oneself: "To conceive of oneself as a Citizen of the Kingdom of Ends is to conceive of oneself as *related to others in a certain way*--it is not a private ideal".⁵⁶ Korsgaard, however, maintains that "self-conceptions are essential to the normativity of reasons".⁵⁷ Now, Korsgaard has no stronger defense for this other than to insist that "an agent could not bring herself to make extreme sacrifices unless not making them seemed to her to be worse than death, and I do mean worse for the agent herself".⁵⁸

The grounds of moral obligation, says Korsgaard, are integral to how one's values are manifested in living one's *own* life, and this *is* personal. I can accept this argument only insofar as living one's life is a communal activity: indeed, perhaps the value of a parent's life would increase dramatically if that parent had the choice to do something which would save, or benefit greatly the life of her/his child. But this example, I think, lends itself more to the motivation of love for others, than to the principle of self-conception. Korsgaard equates this kind of action with animal instinct wherein a mother animal saves her offspring from danger. This view, she thinks is 'sentimental' and 'romantic'. In her view, actions of this kind are "impelled" and not chosen. What distinguishes humans from other kinds of animals is that we make choices about how to act, and this is why we subject our actions to moral evaluations. Fair enough. But the point remains (and she does address this) that what 'cheapens' a person's motives is the possibility that she acts out of a sense of who she is, rather than for someone else. To this Korsgaard replies that the content of the incentive need not necessarily apply to every moral decision one makes. Rather, it is only when a person needs to "stiffen her resolve" in moral action; that is, when a

⁵⁶ Korsgaard, *Sources* 246, my emphasis.

⁵⁷ Korsgaard, *Sources* 247.

⁵⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources* 247.

person might be tempted to do something other than what she thinks is required of her.⁵⁹ At that point, Korsgaard says, it must be a person's conception of herself that pulls her through that difficult decision. In my view, the problem remains: when one's own conception of oneself involves relationships with other people, the line between doing something because of oneself and because of another becomes blurred.

To summarize the problems I see in identity as a source from which to derive the normative voice, I have said that (i) because practical identity is informed (partly, if not mostly) by others, there is an element of contingency to it, in that those who help one identify oneself can also shake that identity; (ii) when identity is shaken for whatever reason, it is not a reliable source of normativity; (iii) to further the preceding point, identities could be whimsical, in that we may create or recreate conceptions of ourselves which may be wrongly informed; (iv) identities are multifaceted, and inevitably they conflict, and (v) sometimes a person acts, not on the basis of her identity but because she believes it is the right thing to do, above and beyond what conception she has of herself.

One may reply that (i) contingency is a fact of life, and no moral theory would be equipped to account for it; (ii) that while identity is malleable, it is still the foundation from which we act when we make decisions; (iii) that in fact identity is not whimsical, but rather it is what we rely upon when we do make decisions everyday; (iv) that conflict in values is part of moral life; and (v) that, as Korsgaard says, we only rely on identity to enforce a trying decision when those decisions are difficult, but we may not need to act from that self-conception when moral life is not calling on us to make sacrifices.

In what follows, I will address these possible objections. Partly, I will anticipate how Korsgaard would respond to the problems I set up and the

⁵⁹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 248.

objections to my problems. Further, I will consider what Martha Nussbaum says in my response, insofar as she puts more emphasis on those very contingencies in moral life which I think are not given the weight they deserve in Korsgaard's moral theory.

When I consider examples of how sometimes in moral life, whatever choice is made, someone or something will suffer, I consider the role moral luck plays. For this, I rely heavily on Nussbaum's account of moral life. When suffering results, not because of a situation we created, but because of a situation we reacted to, we are reminded that moral life involves exigencies which are sometimes outside our control. We are often reminded that moral life is full of unanticipated exigencies, and that there may not be a 'right answer' in some cases. Of course, Korsgaard would not deny this. But what I hope to do, is to put some emphasis on those elements in order to get a fuller picture of what is involved in moral life.

Korsgaard's moral theory sheds some light on why we act morally when we do, but in espousing her theory of normativity, I think she misses some important subtleties involved in moral life. Her heavy reliance on a rational approach, on reason, sometimes fails to recognize, or dismisses altogether some essential elements of what moral decision making entails; i.e., the role of emotions and the effect of luck on moral life. Before bringing in Nussbaum, I will consider how Korsgaard deals with the question of personal relationships and the emotions that go with them with regard to moral life.

Section III: Chapter VII
Korsgaard, Nussbaum and Solomon: Emotions, Luck and Fragility in Moral Life

What do emotions and luck have to do with a moral theory? How can these concepts be applied to what Korsgaard tries to do in *Sources of Normativity*? Throughout Section II, I have examined the terms and concepts that describe Korsgaard's theory of normativity. I have repeatedly expressed my conviction that Korsgaard misses some important subtleties involved in moral life. I think by considering some elements of human life, which include emotions and luck, we can come to a better understanding of what works in Korsgaard's theory, and why; and what elements of her theory are threatened by these concepts, and why. I shall begin with what Korsgaard says about emotions and how I interpret her thoughts on emotions in her moral theory.

(i) Korsgaard on Personal Relationships and the Role of Emotions in Moral Life

Having pointed to some problems in Korsgaard's theory of normativity, I would like to turn now to some alternate conceptions about what is involved in moral life. However, first, I will examine Korsgaard's use of emotions in her moral theory. Here we will see that Korsgaard does not dismiss the use of emotions as one possible source for moral understanding. Indeed, she includes what she calls 'affections' in her conception of how to derive self-knowledge. My contention remains that Korsgaard's approach, in some important respects, is too rigid to include adequately both the notions of emotion and luck in her moral theory. The reason her approach cannot accommodate such notions is that they threaten the stability of her theory. Both emotion and luck put moral life in the arena of the fragile and the vulnerable. They are far from the world of practical reason, wherein reason itself is agent-neutral and we as agents merely appeal to that neutrality when we use reason properly.

Nonetheless, Korsgaard equips her theory of normativity with some considerations of how emotions play a role in moral life. Emotions need not *necessarily* stand in opposition to reason. While Korsgaard does not expressly talk about 'emotions' *per se*, I will anticipate where emotions can be seen to be intertwined in her conception of moral theory. To quickly trace Korsgaard's steps once again, autonomy is the source of the obligatory voice. The obligatory voice is that which tells us that we should act morally and is informed by the conception we have of ourselves. That conception comes from identifying with certain principles, and those principles reflect the various roles we fulfill in life. This is of course, where Korsgaard relies on self-identity as a source from which to derive the obligatory voice.

Part of what constitutes our roles in life is naturally the personal relationships in which we are engaged. Korsgaard expresses this when she says, "Personal relationships are therefore constitutive of one's practical identity".⁶⁰ Personal relationships involve emotion. Therefore, I understand Korsgaard's inclusion of personal relationships as that element which entails emotion. Being someone's spouse, child, parent, friend or sibling carry great emotional weight, as we know from participating in these various relationships. This is how I see that Korsgaard acknowledges the role of emotions in moral life.

Korsgaard rejects the view that reason needs to stand in opposition with what she calls "affections". For Korsgaard, the reflective process includes weighing and considering affectionate ties with people, the source of which are emotions: "To be motivated by 'reason' is normally to be motivated by one's reflective endorsement of incentives and impulses, including affections, which arise in a natural way".⁶¹ Rather than put personal relationships at odds with

⁶⁰ Korsgaard, *Sources* 127.

⁶¹ Korsgaard, *Sources* 127.

moral life, Korsgaard draws on the reciprocal commitment people have with one another, in which they take into consideration each other's interests and wishes. She borrows from Kant the term 'a unity of will' in which two people constitute membership of a Kingdom of Two, and in which they are "committed to being in a special degree ends for one another".⁶²

So Korsgaard may concede that emotions are used as a source for moral understanding in one sense, but only insofar as the reflective process includes considering the affectionate ties we have with one another. However, Korsgaard makes a distinction between personal relationships and moral ones. Korsgaard maintains that 'structurally' they are the same, except that personal relationships require "more fully realized forms of reciprocity".⁶³ However, this view focuses on the special obligations personal relationships make on one another. In this way, Korsgaard contends that personal relationships are independent sources of obligations; that they are *like* moral obligations, but not completely subsumed under them. Why this distinction is made is not clear to me. If personal relationships inform practical identities, how is it that they acquire a special status, structurally like, but not subsumed under moral relationships? Further, what are moral relationships as distinguished from other ones?

I think Korsgaard would agree that emotions, to a certain degree, inform our values insofar as emotions inform reasons. Or, put another way, when an emotion strikes us, we can use it as something which is considered and weighed within the reflective process. Emotions need not be something blind and unreflective. Rather, they can be the source of some new way of considering an issue, a situation, a problem. They could shed light on a problem, or help to

⁶² Korsgaard, *Sources* 127.

⁶³ Korsgaard, *Sources* 128.

reveal what we truly value. Emotions may sometimes provide the food for thought we need when confronted with a difficult moral problem, which is then reflected on, and becomes part of what we use when we come up with reasons for acting morally.

Compassion is an example of how to act morally which is informed primarily by emotion. In the case of compassion, an emotion informs the reasons one acts on an impulse. Think of an instance where a young man with not very much money sees a homeless person and gives him some money. This is a moral act (according to the young man) because he thinks he *should*, in this circumstance, give his little available funds away: that is, he believes this is the right thing to do. It is not based in pure reason because someone might think the young man foolish for giving money when he has not that much to spare. But the young man feels *compelled* to do so because he was moved emotionally by the suffering he witnessed. Korsgaard would say that he is willing to sacrifice some material needs for the sake of a value higher than the value of material needs. Indeed, compassion in this sense fits in nicely with Korsgaardian ethics. In this way, a person's feeling gives him reasons to act as he did. Of course, one problem that immediately emerges is that emotions can be negative and can be used blindly, without reflection. If one acts on negative emotion, without reflection, bad choices may be made. But this is true for reasoning as well. We are all capable of bad reasoning from time to time, and indeed, we may use our reflective capacities badly. The problem with using emotions blindly or badly will be discussed later in this chapter.

Now the act of charity can be an act based in pure reason, not having anything at all to do with emotion. For example, one could provide material needs for those who suffer from poverty and this act could be done solely on the principle that if one could help alleviate suffering, one should do so. Perhaps a

person's identity includes being charitable, but that person does not act out of an emotion brought about by the witnessing of suffering. I am not suggesting that this is not possible. My point here is that some acts can be inspired by, and carried out with the influence of emotion, and that emotion can be the source of some moral understanding. This does not threaten Korsgaard's conception because for Korsgaard, feelings, affectionate ties, and the emotions that come with them need not stand in opposition to reason. I imagine Korsgaard, if pressed on this question, would include emotions as part of what we can use in the reflective process of reasoning. Emotions, as Robert Solomon argues, (and this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter) have a logic to them, and can be used as part of the deliberative process. I think that Korsgaard agrees that emotions can also be a source for shedding some light on problems in moral life, if used as part of the reflective process.

But on the other hand, for Korsgaard, problems can emerge *because* of the kind of emotional weight personal relationships carry with them. They "can be the source of some particularly intractable conflicts *with morality*".⁶⁴ I think Korsgaard contradicts herself here. While I agree that relationships, and the emotions which are at the root of those relationships can be the source of some problems in moral life (indeed, *are* the source of some problems that emerge in moral life), Korsgaard cannot claim that relationships are a source of conflict *with morality per se* by her own argument: I will use her line of reasoning to show why.

If we accept that any practical identity which is inconsistent with moral identity needs to be given up, as Korsgaard says, then we can apply the same rules to personal relationships. If a personal relationship requires something of you which is inconsistent with moral identity, it must be given up. If my

⁶⁴ Korsgaard, *Sources* 127, (my emphasis).

membership in my Kingdom of Two conflicts with my membership in humanity and my membership in the Kingdom of Ends, then I cannot, if I remain morally committed, continue with it. Now this is in keeping with Korsgaard's own argument with regard to personal identity and moral identity. I have already articulated the problems I have with moral identity being prior to practical identity, and I have touched on how values can conflict, but I want to maintain that if Korsgaard is willing to acknowledge the way in which personal relationships can contribute to practical identity, then I do not see why she should contend that personal relationships can be the source of some intractable problems *with morality*.

Rather, emotions can be the source of some intractable problems in moral life, generally speaking. If one is pulled in two directions, has conflicting values, is confronted with an impulse to do X and impulse Y, and both impulses are also moral choices, (that is, they are morally 'right') then the emotions pulling a person in one direction over another may indeed be a source of problems. And this is where I think Korsgaard's answer to the source of normativity falls short. It falls short, not because it does not answer the problem. (Indeed I think any moral theory would fail at such an attempt.) Rather, I think Korsgaard touches on a central problem in moral life, and then sweeps it under the carpet far too quickly. Moral life, (that is, *human* moral life) is not only vulnerable to the problems emotions bring us, but these problems are central in any active moral agent's life. A person who has more than one value, more than one commitment, more than one personal relationship, will, most probably, be confronted with conflict; that is, when acting morally becomes *hard*. But for Korsgaard there is little consideration of this fact. Given that this fact is central in any moral agent's life, it needs to be considered. A moral theory which fails to do so is, in my view, inadequate.

Now, to return to the problem I brought up earlier, I argued that Korsgaard cannot claim that personal relationships may stand in opposition to morality according to her own reasoning. However, I have already opposed that argument, claiming that practical identity informs moral identity. I argued that moral identity cannot be prior to practical identity because that which informs a person as to how to have a relationship with the world on a theoretical level (that is, to have a respect for 'humanity') is a person's practical identity (that is, to have a respect for oneself and loved ones). Now if practical identity is informed, at least in part, by one's personal relationships, then what is to stop one from becoming a murderer if one's only personal relationship is to a murderer? If that person's practical identity is being informed by personal relationships, and that person's moral identity is being informed by her practical one (as I have argued) and if in this example, the person's only relationship is to a murderer, what are the implications? What would stop her from committing murderous acts? To this I reply: nothing. In this way, we are beings dependent upon, and informed by other people. I will not argue that the person whose only connection to the world is with a murderer must *necessarily* become that, (that is one of the great things about humanity; that is, its unpredictability), but that if she were about to commit criminal acts, according to my argument, nothing would stop her.

So, we have seen how Korsgaard's conception of moral life can include emotions, via personal relationships, and we have seen where, for Korsgaard, they can be sources of conflict with morality. In order to proceed, we need to examine Nussbaum's vision of moral life. Nussbaum includes those elements of a human life which I think Korsgaard does not adequately address. But first, let us paint Nussbaum's picture of what is involved in (and missing from Korsgaard's assessment of) moral life.

(ii) Nussbaum on Luck, Fragility and Dependency

They did not want to look on the naked face of luck (*tuche*), so they turned themselves over to science (*techne*). As a result, they are released from their dependence on luck; but not from their dependence on science.⁶⁵

Nussbaum relies heavily on ancient Greek philosophy to develop her views on ethical theory. She outlines the Greek preoccupation with elements in moral philosophy that are neglected in modern ethical theory: namely, the element of vulnerability contained necessarily in human life; that people are susceptible to circumstances outside of their control; that values conflict; that the character of human beings entails non-rational elements, and sometimes even "appetites, feelings, emotions"⁶⁶ and that given this reality, a careful weighing of the role reason plays in the 'good life' needs to be examined. The first preoccupation of Greek thought involved asking how human reason could help control our human responses to these very vulnerabilities of human life so that we are not always subject to this kind of contingency.

One prominent feature of how Nussbaum's work is distinguished from Korsgaard's is Nussbaum's markedly un-Kantian position. For Nussbaum, Kantian discussion of moral theory is organized in such a way as to make it "immune to the assaults of luck".⁶⁷ Not only is Nussbaum deeply critical of Kantian ethics, but she maintains that the Kantian way of thinking has created an obstacle to the critical examination of Greek tragedy. Given that Korsgaard's position is a relentless effort to reconstruct and modify Kant's moral theory, with a view to maintaining its integrity, the juxtaposition of the two philosophers offers what I believe to be an invaluable contrast, highlighting the contributions

⁶⁵ Hippocratic treatise *On Science*, quoted from *The Fragility of Goodness* by Martha Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 89.

⁶⁶ Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 7.

⁶⁷ Nussbaum, *The Fragility* 4.

both ways of thinking present, and illuminating where they require reassessment.

Another important distinction to be made about the two philosophers is that Korsgaard provides (or tries to provide) an answer to the normative question, tracing back the steps in moral decision making, using a rational approach, which should provide an answer for us as to why we act morally, and why we are obliged to act morally. For Nussbaum, that question, and its approach is, from its very conception, to go about reflecting on morality in the wrong way. Nussbaum looks at moral life from a completely different angle. Her goal is not to answer the normative question, and her solution, if she could claim to have one, does not address the kinds of concerns Korsgaard addresses. Nonetheless, I bring in Nussbaum's perspective insofar as it illuminates along the way those problems I have with Korsgaard's work, and in so doing, it reveals some important subtleties I think Korsgaard misses, by the very nature of the way she looks at moral life.

Herein I will articulate some key elements of moral life according to Nussbaum, with a view to examining them critically. This sets the stage for assessing how these elements of moral life impact on Korsgaard's theory of ethics. My conclusion will be that Korsgaard answers the question, 'Why be moral?', but that answer only applies to situations and circumstances that are general and unexceptional in character: that is, while Korsgaard provides an explanation as to why people act, and are obliged to act morally under general and unexceptional circumstances, Nussbaum's illumination of the complexities of moral life call into question the rational approach we usually take in trying to determine how to live ethically. Questions about why we act morally become crucial, as Korsgaard points out in her opening remarks, when acting morally becomes hard. But as I see it, Korsgaard has not really addressed those elements

which make moral life hard. Nussbaum considers these elements, in my view, more adequately, with attention to the details that I think are missing from Korsgaard's work.

Human life is not only vulnerable to circumstances outside of its control, but *moral* human life is especially vulnerable to life's exigencies. What I mean by *moral* human life is that a person who has values, is committed to those values, and tries in as many cases as possible to uphold those values, is vulnerable to (i) luck, (ii) other people; (iii) value conflicts and (iv) the non-rational characteristics of human beings. Now Korsgaard has already said that ethical standards "make claims on us", that "the reflective structure of the mind is a source of 'self-consciousness' because it forces us to have a conception of ourselves", and that "your reasons express your identity, your nature; your obligations spring from what that identity forbids".⁶⁸ That starting point, taken to its conclusion, is not so much contested in Nussbaum's work, but rather, Nussbaum already begins with the idea that we have values, with which we identify so much that our obligations spring necessarily from them. For Nussbaum, however, this is the very foundation from which problems in moral life emerge. It is the very fact that we have identities, beliefs in principles and values that makes moral life vulnerable. Those identities, principles and values upon which we rely to direct moral life are contingent, fragile and vulnerable to the assaults of luck. Emotions can be passionate, and shake the foundations of those beliefs we hold dearly. Relationships in which we are involved mean putting our faith in other people, and when we put our faith in something external to us, we are in vulnerable positions, relying on things external to our control. All this is a part of moral life which makes moral life vulnerable to luck, fragile and dependent.

⁶⁸ Korsgaard, *Sources* 8, 100, 101.

Nussbaum goes back to the foundation of ethical life and says, "Even the poet's joy is incomplete without the tenuous luck of seeing it confirmed by eyes on whose understanding, good will and truthfulness he can rely".⁶⁹ Further, not only are these external things upon which we rely important for our feelings of contentment, but that "what the external nourishes, and even helps to constitute, is excellence or human worth itself".⁷⁰ Inasmuch as those external circumstances could threaten moral life, they are in part what constitute moral life. In this way, Nussbaum cannot consider moral life without involving those very qualities which threaten it. This is, as I said earlier, one of the ways in which her consideration of ethics is distinguished heavily from Kant's, where any consideration of moral life has, by nature of its task, to dismiss those qualities which would make moral life contingent and vulnerable to life's exigencies; that is, to luck.

If we go back to Korsgaard for a moment, being a moral agent means having a practical identity which obligates us. Having a practical identity means identifying with certain values, and those values obligate us. Now, being a moral agent means, of course, having more than one identity, and therefore having more than one value. Certain values may dominate others, but when real and meaningful values conflict, it may not be so clear which values, if any, dominate. Luck means we are not put into predicaments where we have to choose between two values, both of which carry such weight that the quality of our lives would be greatly compromised if we had to suspend one of them because of a particular circumstance. When Korsgaard speaks of practical identity and values, she speaks of it as if it were the sum of those identities and values we refer to when making decisions as moral agents. Another

⁶⁹ Nussbaum, *The Fragility* 1.

⁷⁰ Nussbaum, *The Fragility* 1.

interpretation would be that for Korsgaard one value would dominate all others. But, as we have already seen, identities and values can conflict. We feel the weight of these conflicts in tragedy. Nussbaum refers to tragedy in order to help illuminate these conflicts, and it is in tragedy, she believes, that we can access those emotions with which we can understand or appreciate the weight of conflict. For Nussbaum there is a great emphasis on simply appreciating what a conflict in values feels like, and through that feeling, we are able to come to a richer understanding of what moral life entails. Here, Nussbaum relies on using human feeling, or emotion, as a source for moral understanding. It is by accessing that feeling that one comes to a deeper appreciation of what is involved in moral struggle, which makes up part of moral life.

Reason, in the case of tragedy, does not play a central role simply because it will not help us come to a deeper appreciation of what conflict entails. In some cases, reason helps us decide on how to act, but in other cases, which occur particularly in moral life, when moral crisis occurs, reason may not be as helpful or central as Korsgaard makes it out to be. Now, this is not to imply that through emotion one can reach answers to difficult questions. But in fact, this is Nussbaum's point: in moral life, there are not necessarily answers to questions which make moral life hard. And these cases are not rare. Rather, they characterize moral life. For Nussbaum, understanding moral life requires a deep appreciation of conflict. In these cases, an appeal to reason may in fact take away from what makes acting as a moral agent in moral life not only hard, but what makes it compelling, what makes it *valuable*. What makes moral life compelling and valuable may very well be the weight felt in these conflicts. Korsgaard's intention is not to highlight these struggles, but to answer how one acts morally with regard to normativity. In order to come up with such a theory, Korsgaard cannot dwell on emotional weight inherent in value conflicts. But this is exactly

where I think Korsgaard's approach fails to consider what is involved in moral life. In this way, Korsgaard's theory neglects what makes moral life hard, and this neglect, in my view, hurts her theory. For Nussbaum, the examination of conflict, and the feeling involved in that examination is at the heart of what it is to understand moral life.

Now if human reason is supposed to rescue us from living at the whims of luck and human contingency, we must examine, says Nussbaum, what relationship human reason has to feeling, emotion and perception. Reason is a structure of human life as are these other elements, and they may conflict. Further, our rational capacities, upon which Korsgaard relies heavily, can play tricks on us. While we have the ability to be reflective, we may well use that ability against ourselves. Reason is a thinking tool, and it can be used badly to suit our needs. Lawyers, for example, make a living out of making well-reasoned cases, and they may make these cases, even if they are aware that they are arguing something which is not true.

Also consider that reason may not always help us in difficult moral situations. Nussbaum uses Sophocles' *Antigone* to illustrate how practical reasoning may fail us at times--at crucial times in fact, wherein we may need the answers reason claims to offer the most. I will use Nussbaum's example of a character in *Antigone* to illustrate how reason may fail us. This scene may be common to many of us during times of crisis:

Sir, I won't pretend that I come here breathless from eager haste, with light, agile footsteps. For many times my thinking made me pause and wheel around in my path to go the other way. My soul kept talking to me, saying, 'Fool, why do you go where you will be punished?' 'Wretch, why are you delaying? And if Creon learns this from someone else, how will you escape punishment?' Turning this all over in my mind, I gradually made my way, slowly and reluctantly. And so a short road became long. Finally, though, the idea of coming here to you won the

victory...I come with a grip on one hope--that nothing can happen to me that is not my lot.⁷¹

It may not-- often will not-- be clear to us how to act in a moral crisis, and reason may provide solid arguments for more than one side of moral choices. Again, we see lawyers do this. They are trained to take a side, any side, and argue it forcefully. This is not unfamiliar to philosophers. Our practical identities which reflect the persons we purport to be may be complex, and each principle with which we identify may carry equal weight. In these cases, our identities may fail to provide us with the answer we need to proceed. Reasons, similarly may fail us, in that there can be many equally good (but different) reasons why we should act in one way or another. We may find ourselves, like the character in *Antigone*, finally resolving to leave what will be to what is simply 'our lot'. This is not, by any means, reassuring. And yet, this is much of what is involved in moral life, or can be.

Now, compare this feeling of loss and indecisiveness with the character 'Creon'. He finds himself confronted with a conflict of values: he has a loyalty to his family in which a family member has been declared a traitor of the city. 'Polynices', this family relative, is now dead and it is Creon's religious and familial obligation to bury him in Attica. But to do so would be to betray the laws of his city. Creon, however, suffers no crisis of values. He resolves the problem by appealing to reason (he claims) and this requires him to choose his loyalty to the city's law over his religious and familial obligation. Reason, or Creon's use of reason, robs the dilemma of the weight and seriousness of the conflict. While Creon may espouse a list of beliefs in which he appears noble and praiseworthy, and while he appeals to practical reason to come to these conclusions, his apparent lack of conflict, and his apparent restructuring of values

⁷¹ Sophocles, *The Antigone* quoted from *The Fragility of Goodness* 53.

makes him seem (to me) all the more brutish. Here, an appeal to reason *alone* may translate to (in some sense) immoral action in that it neglects the subtleties discerned within the weighing and feeling of conflict. I will refer to Dickens to illustrate this point:

"Blitzer," said Mr. Gradgrind, broken down, and miserably submissive to him, "have you a heart?"

"The circulation, sir," returned Blitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, "couldn't be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart."

"Is it accessible," cried Mr. Gradgrind, "to compassionate influence?"

"It is accessible to Reason, sir," returned the excellent young man. "And to nothing else."⁷²

Moral life must include, if it is to be complete, an examination of feeling, as well as an appeal to reason lest we rob moral life of what makes it rich and moral action compelling.

⁷² Dickens, *Hard Times* quoted from *Poetic Justice*, by Martha Nussbaum (Boston: Cambridge UP, 1995) 53.

(iii) Nussbaum and Literature as a Guide to Moral Awareness

Again, I speak of method as a key difference between Nussbaum and Korsgaard. Herein, I want to articulate how Nussbaum considers the examination of moral life through literature. In so doing, I can introduce what value emotion has in ethical life. While Korsgaard talks about the reflective structure of our minds, inherent in what it is to be human, I will introduce the fact of emotion, inherent also in what it is to be human. This too, is a reference point to ethical life, and I will elaborate on this point after having considered Nussbaum's position.

Nussbaum looks at the question of moral awareness using literature as a moral frame. From literature, says Nussbaum, one can grow to develop a moral sensitivity, an awareness and lucidity from which one derives a sense of what it is to be a morally responsible person. For Nussbaum, a novel is a "moral achievement".⁷³ It is an avenue through which one can discern the subtleties and intricacies of ethical dilemmas. Through the novel, one can cope with particular moral facts in a way that one cannot do in philosophy without literature.

Nussbaum uses Henry James' novel, *The Golden Bowl*, as an exemplification of how moral attention directed toward a person's innermost feelings is handled with care and responsibility. The key words used in Nussbaum's discussion are "attention" and "insight" and in doing so she captures the sense of what it is to be morally *present*. Nussbaum uses the novel to illustrate how a person can be morally present in discovering and unraveling the complexities involved within moral crises. The reader is in a privileged position of having to stand outside the story, yet the act of reading involves the individual to the extent that one is feeling what the character is feeling. The

⁷³ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990) 148.

character becomes a part of one's moral imagination. One can refer to the father or the daughter in *The Golden Bowl* as a point of reference in one's own life. One is able to derive a sense of one's own self through the understanding of a character in a novel.

Nussbaum's thesis in *Love's Knowledge* is that the unique position of being the reader allows a person to capture the full picture, struggle with the moral implications, and walk through with the characters to their final conclusions. The books we read teach us, become part of us, locate us. The novel allows us to eavesdrop on the moral dialogue of fictional characters who represent the living, breathing people we are and with whom we have relationships. A novel can capture those particular moral facts that are not present in universal moral facts of ethical abstraction. When we discuss what it is to be a moral agent we make general statements about general facts. In drawing our attention to a particular situation, our vision expands: "It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling."⁷⁴

Within particular moral situations, the path toward moral responsibility requires some improvisation. Nothing is concretely prior, hence one's attention to detail and ability to discern particular moral responses requires attention to present situations. Interestingly, Nussbaum refers to a history when taking into account moral improvisation. As in Charles Taylor's work, Nussbaum locates the moral question within a framework which is referred to and respected, even if one has to deviate from a traditionally historical response.

Nussbaum considers there being a framework (as in Taylor's 'inescapable framework') as the common point of reference to which the people who are involved in a moral struggle adhere. She further joins the necessary attention to

⁷⁴ Nussbaum, *Love's* 152.

particulars in order to paint a picture of a complete approach to ethics. As with Taylor, for Nussbaum, moral acts make sense within the context within which they exist. Literature and philosophy join perception and rule respectively. Either one on its own is incomplete.⁷⁵ General rules do not allow for the responsibility of moral acts within particular facts involved in moral life. Similarly, perception alone makes sense only within a shared context. Together, the possibilities for moral imagination produce the effect of moral insight and responsibility.

Being a moral agent, then, requires this kind of attention and insight. Nussbaum refers to it as a kind of moral 'presence'. This kind of moral presence *allows* for the contingencies involved in moral life. That values will conflict, that passions will overwhelm, that circumstances beyond one's control will put one in a situation where one may have to act in a way out of the ordinary, are the types of contingencies Nussbaum addresses. She brings these up with a view, not to ask from where the normative voice derives, but to acknowledge and give importance to what moral dilemma involves. For Nussbaum, we rob moral life if we try to appeal to some rationalistic approach in resolving these conflicts. Moral life necessarily entails these contingencies, and by minimizing them, we simplify our lives, taking away what makes them rich morally.

The parent/philosopher, for example, suffers a dilemma because her life is rich with values and responsibilities. When a person values her citizenship, for instance, and also her role as someone's partner, and her profession, and her membership to her family, and her volunteer work at some organization, her life is rich with the complexities involved in being an active, moral agent. If Korsgaard were to ask her why she spends her Saturday mornings at the Food Bank, she is able to answer, using Korsgaard's analysis of the normative voice,

⁷⁵ Nussbaum, *Love's* 158.

and if she confronts herself one early Saturday morning, with an overwhelming impulse to sleep late, her strength and motivation may very well come from the authority of normative conception she has of herself. But that authority stops having an impact when her roles conflict. And if her roles conflict to such a degree that she is no longer sure who she is, she has little reason to act one way or another. If human passions take over and demand that she call into question her practical identity, the reflective structure of her mind may not be able to pull her out. While Korsgaard emphasizes the reflective structure of our human minds, she gives little attention to the passionate element of human lives. Emotion is acceptable for Korsgaard only insofar as it informs reason, and is part of the reflective process. But that categorizes emotion too neatly. In order to examine where or how emotion can be seen to be intertwined with Korsgaard, I will delineate the role of emotion in ethical life.

Examining Nussbaum's approach has allowed us to discern the subtleties in moral life. It has allowed us to see where in Korsgaard's perception some key features of moral living have been neglected or dismissed. The point of this examination has been to illuminate where, if anywhere, a conception of moral life can include emotion as a source for moral understanding. While reflection is part of the structure of the human mind, to which we refer in order to come up with reasons for actions, what is its relationship to emotion, and can emotion be seen to be intertwined with what both Korsgaard and Nussbaum talk about? Here I will refer to Robert Solomon's articulation of the role of emotion in ethical life to better illuminate how emotions are an integral part of the moral agent.

(iv) Robert Solomon on the Role Emotions Play in Moral Life:

Solomon looks at the role emotion plays in shaping and understanding one's moral framework. In his introduction, Solomon says that it is our emotions, our passions, which constitute our world, our relationships and our Selves.⁷⁶ Emotions occupy us and inform us. Solomon's task is to illustrate how one can situate one's moral grasp of the world through the reflection on emotion. Solomon looks at emotion as a way to extract information and understanding of the world because he sees that emotions "have a distinctly moral edge to their judgments".⁷⁷ Emotions have a moral edge because they make moral judgments: some examples of judging emotions are anger, shame indignation, and guilt. Whereas the tendency in philosophy is to move away from that which is purely subjective, and extract universals from some sort of objective standpoint, Solomon looks inwards, recognizing that emotions are a shared experience, and that they often direct our actions. I want to make a connection here between Korsgaard's public reasons, and what I will take to mean Solomon's public emotions. Because they are, or can be, shared, they are public. When we refer to jealousy, we understand each other. If we go on about the reasons we are jealous, we again can understand each other. In this way, both reasons and emotions, shared as they are or can be, are public in essence, and only as Korsgaard put it, 'incidentally private'. That we can anticipate how a person will react emotionally in a certain situation, puts emotion in a public sphere.

No emotion is unique, says Solomon, and in that way we have a shared understanding of anger, pain, jealousy, joy. These experiences, common to everyone, inform us as to how to act. Thus Solomon proposes that there is a

⁷⁶ Robert Solomon, *The Passions* (Garden City New York: Anchor Books, 1977) 15.

⁷⁷ Solomon, *The Passions* 252.

logic to emotion. Solomon uses the term 'logic' the way Kant uses it; that is, to denote the employment of categories and concepts in order to study judgements and concepts through which we constitute the world of experience. In the same way, Solomon applies a logical study, through the identification and examination of those subjective (not *a priori*, not universally necessary) concepts and judgments that provide the structure of our living world.⁷⁸ Like other systems of thought, it is merely a question of putting it in some sort of logical or conceptual system.⁷⁹ The necessity for analysis of emotion is based on the fact that emotions should be reflected upon: "Reflection is a judgment about our emotional judgments".⁸⁰ Solomon does not take reason to be the highest form of knowledge, nor does he take wholly subjective emotion as the one thing to which one should appeal. Rather, Solomon frames the objective perspective within the subjective and proposes that one analyze the intricacies and nuances of how emotion plays a role in moral life through careful attention and reflection on emotion.

Given the frame of the scope and focus of emotions, Solomon addresses objects of love, criteria for love, personal status, evaluation of emotion, responsibility, and intersubjectivity. Directing emotion toward a person means a particular thing. There is an objective standard to which we appeal when we speak of treating people as 'human'. Korsgaard uses this in a normative way when she speaks of treating people as 'human'. She already presupposes that *humanity* means something, and the reason she can do this rests on the fact that we have a shared understanding of what it is to be *humane*. There are criteria we have in judging emotions. In this way, emotions are evaluative. While they are subjective in that we feel them on an individual level, they are objective (and

⁷⁸ Solomon, *The Passions* 254.

⁷⁹ Solomon, *The Passions* 253.

⁸⁰ Solomon, *The Passions* 377.

public) in the way we assess and discuss them. We can say jealousy and hate are negative emotions, and agree upon that. Some may argue that jealousy and hate may be necessary emotions but nonetheless we can analyze their roles and make evaluative, objective decisions about what kinds of emotions they are.

Integral to any discussion of emotion is also the extent to which emotions affect personal status. They have a quality of lowering and raising self-esteem; that is, loving someone and being loved has profound effects on a person's self image. This is important with regard to Korsgaard's theory of normativity because one of the critiques of Korsgaard's theory is that one needs to have a strong sense of self. One of the ways, as I have mentioned, that we have this sense is through our relationships with others.

In evaluating emotion Solomon distinguishes pre-reflective and reflective emotions. Pre-reflective emotions deal with evaluations that solely concern one with one's own welfare and security; reflective emotions go beyond one's own interests. In our more reflective moments, discerning the specificities of emotion challenge us to see things beyond black and white, good and evil. This ties in nicely with Nussbaum, as attention and moral presence involves seeing the richness and complexity inherent in moral life. Standards for evaluation may be a kind of 'objective', moral criterion, or an interpersonal criterion in which intuition plays a major role in the evaluation of emotion. The next step is ascribing responsibility for the evaluations we make.

Solomon uses the term 'intersubjectivity' to describe how people who come together, share a particular outlook, work with and off each other in a community-like spirit. When people come together and share their lives (as in an intimate intersubjective setting), or have a common association (respectively as in a professional setting) there is a sharing of judgments which involves trust, openness, and an active process of interpretation of the world with each other. It

is no longer purely *my* perspective and *your* perspective, and *we* happen to be looking at the world at the same time. Rather, we understand things through each other's perspective about ourselves, each other, and things external to us. The effect of this is a higher moral understanding which is attributed to the sharing process by nature of the fact that it is in unity, and *with respect* to one another, that we come to this higher moral understanding. While intimacy is not a requisite for intersubjectivity, an intimate association deepens such an effect. Personal relationships require attention to, and sharing of self-revelation and personal history.

Emotions require a sort of active attention. If I am moved by compassion by the homeless person on the streets, that emotion may take me to a place where I can aid in establishing more housing. The emotion may strike me so profoundly that although it goes beyond my power to do so, I find the strength and energy to perform such an action. This is the moral edge Solomon repeatedly talks about. Emotions can drive us to be better or worse human beings, depending on what that emotion is, and depending on our ability to reflect deeply about that emotion.

Now because emotion is an integral part of what constitutes being human, it needs to be considered and interwoven in anything theory of what drives us to act morally. Just as reason is something we practice (in order to reason well), we also need to learn how to reflect on emotions so that they can be used as a source from which to derive additional moral understanding. They will inform us, if we learn to analyze them in some coherent way, as to how to act. Using emotions or feelings as a source from which to derive some moral understanding is similar to moral realism or intuitionism. Both refer to something mysterious when pointing to the source of moral knowledge. G. E. Moore talks about *knowing* intuitively what *good* is, and that if it is not known,

one cannot explain it in the same way that one cannot explain yellow to a blind person.

Used badly, or unreflectively emotions can be the source of some moral misunderstanding. Errors in judgment can be made. This, too, is part of what constitutes moral life. But this is why it is necessary to examine emotions in a coherent way, as Solomon does. The emotions we experience, which constitute our worlds, inform us about our worlds:

At the heart of every emotion is a set of evaluative commitments, defining the mythologies within which we live and the ideologies we live with. Every emotion, even the pettiest fit of jealousy or embarrassment or the shortest fling of infatuation or indignation, is a micrometaphysical and ethical system, a bit of philosophy, which it is appropriate for us, as philosophers, to make clear.⁸¹

Now in this way, emotions contain information about who we are, where we live, why and how we react and act in the ways that we do. Therefore, reflection on, identification and categorization of emotion can help us tap into that source of information, which may in turn, motivate and help us make moral decisions. Emotions as one way to arrive at self-understanding ties in nicely with Korsgaard's thesis.

The way emotions play a role in moral life, as well as the ways in which we can use emotions to derive information and understanding for the enrichment of moral life needs to be included in any moral theory. Speaking about reason alone does not adequately cover the grounds moral theory needs to cover in order to be a complete moral theory. For this reason, I include Solomon's perspective as a way to exemplify one approach to the analysis of emotions as a possible source for moral understanding in ethical life.

⁸¹ Solomon, *The Passions* 254.

Conclusion: Modifying Korsgaard

We have seen that Korsgaard's theory of normativity can be upheld in general and unexceptional circumstances; that is, Korsgaard gives us an answer as to why we fulfill those duties and obligations when tempting 'impulses' may arise. We have also seen in Korsgaard's theory how a person can justify moral actions when they are steadfastly grounded in an identity which is not challenged (at least at the time that moral action is performed).

Now, to reiterate some problems that emerge: Korsgaard uses the term 'impulses' in that they may tempt us to act in ways that contradict our moral beliefs. However, 'impulses' are not moral crises. Conflicting impulses may challenge us to provide ourselves with reasons to act morally when we are tempted not to do so. Conflicting impulses may also call into question who we are, but on a level where we are challenged to act with integrity, to know who we are and what we are made of. These impulses challenge us to behave in a way we think is morally acceptable, and what we deem 'morally acceptable' is the standard which we set. In this way can we be a 'law unto ourselves'. And it is in this way that we refer to our practical identity if it is not immediately apparent what that law is.

However, I have suggested that this theory does not answer the normative question when crisis situations arise. I have used Nussbaum's thought to illustrate the complexities and contingencies of moral life. I have referred to Solomon to discuss how emotions can be a source for moral understanding. Now I would like to suggest that the integrity of Korsgaard's thesis can be maintained only insofar as life's moral exigencies are of an ordinary sort, or when the moral agent who knows why she is acting is challenged to explain her actions. When a moral crisis becomes so hard as to challenge in a deep way a person's identity, or when moral crisis puts a person in a situation

wherein she has to choose between one of two things she values profoundly, Korsgaard's theory falls short. She does not fail to answer the normative question because the normative question asks 'why should I do (x, y, or z)?' The normative question does not ask *what* one should do, but rather, it asks why. If we do not know how to act morally, the question 'why' act morally becomes irrelevant. But if Korsgaard's theory fails to recognize those life's exigencies which make moral life hard, it cannot then provide the fuller picture we need in order to know how to proceed.

Because moral life is riddled with complexities including value-conflicts, shattering or changing self-conceptions, a dependency on things external to us or out of our control (as in when we put our faith and love in other people, for example), and sometimes human passions, we need a moral theory to include, or at least consider, some of these elements. I think, by including some perspectives by Nussbaum and Solomon, we can add to Korsgaard's conception of moral life, and what makes moral action worth pursuing.

In this thesis, I have filled in what I think are some gaps in Korsgaard's theory. Korsgaard's *Sources of Normativity* remains an invaluable asset in understanding moral life, why we are compelled to act morally, and what lies at the foundation of that desire. My intention is simply to include some points of view which expand the picture Korsgaard presents, and in doing so, show what works in Korsgaard's theory and why, and what does not work, and why.

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