Few philosophers have done as much to enhance our understanding of ancient moral value as has Arthur W. H. Adkins. His strategy of analyzing what form and role responsibility assumed in ancient Greek society especially presents modern scholars and students alike with many insights into ancient morality and its beliefs. What I would like to do in the present essay is to build upon this understanding of these ancient values. My purpose will be not so much to increase our understanding of the ancients but rather to increase our understanding of ourselves. In particular, I want to examine and to evaluate the modern Kantian view of our moral selves.

Without a doubt, Immanuel Kant has cast a very long shadow over modern philosophy. This shadow is particularly deep in the field of moral philosophy. We almost always couch our discussions of the most basic moral problems in Kant's very terms. And we do so with good reason. Kant clearly invented ethical concepts that have enabled us to improve our understanding of ourselves. Nevertheless, these very concepts as Kant employed them do have their limits, and these limits have prevented us from understanding ourselves even better.

The Kantian concepts most influential are those of imperatives, both categorical and hypothetical. These concepts are frequently used to determine the nature of moral injunctions. The question usually asked is, Are moral imperatives categorical or hypothetical? The answer, whatever it might be, relies with only rare exceptions not solely on Kant's definitions of these imperatives but on his particular applications of them as well. Though loyalty to his theory is commendable, I want to suggest that
Kant's specification of his imperatives in application obscures a moral position worthy of our consideration.

We may, I think, shed new light on the Kantian imperatives by returning to ancient Greek moral theory. For my evaluation of these imperatives, I propose to examine and to compare the concept of intrinsic value presented in Kant's moral theory with that presented in Plato's and Aristotle's theory. I thus intend to reverse the strategy of Adkins. My strategy will be not to bring a modern moral concept to ancient Greek philosophy in order to view it from a new perspective but rather to take a concept from the ancient Greeks in order to gain a new perspective on modern moral philosophy. The result, I hope, will be a moral outlook as admirable as Kant's in its essentials but as adroit as Aristotle's in its applications.

I, too, shall ask the usual question about moral imperatives, whether they are categorical or hypothetical. My answer will be that moral imperatives are categorical but that these imperatives need not be Kantian. We shall indeed discover that categorical imperatives can take a variety of forms. How many kinds there are depends on how we conceive of the subject of moral imperatives, that is, on how we conceive of ourselves.

But I want first to review our definitions of categorical and hypothetical imperatives and then to examine our usual applications of these definitions. We tend to follow Kant very closely in defining imperatives, and I think that we are right to do so. We distinguish categorical from hypothetical imperatives by their ends. Both categorical and hypothetical imperatives express commands. But a categorical imperative commands an action as good for its own sake; a hypothetical imperative commands an action as good for the sake of something else. In other words, the one imperative requires an action as an end; the other requires an action as a means (Gr. 2.414).

Examples are ready to hand. Let us assume that we have a moral obligation not to commit suicide. Suppose, then, that someone is in deep despair and no longer desires to live. He in fact wishes to die (compare Gr. 1.397–98). If he yet preserves it without caring for it, this poor person clearly preserves his life merely for the sake of fulfilling an obligation to do so (Gr. 1.399–400). He can hardly preserve it for the sake of satisfying a desire, for he has no desire to live. He thus acts for the sake of lawfulness itself (401). Or, more precisely, this individual acts in accordance with a categorical imperative, for he conforms his action to a universal law solely for the sake of conforming to it. That is, he acts in such a way that he can will his maxim to be a universal law (402).

But imagine someone with a strong desire to live—someone with a
joie de vivre. If he preserves his life, this happy fellow in all likelihood acts merely for the sake of satisfying his desire to live. This person seeks the pleasure that this satisfaction gives him. He thus follows a hypothetical imperative, for he engages in an action solely for the sake of its effects. And he does not act for the sake of conforming to moral obligation itself. His action does conform to a universal law, but it conforms for the sake of pleasure (compare Gr. 1. 397–98).

Behind the Kantian distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives lie two models of human action. Behind the categorical imperative is an assumption that we ourselves and our actions are essentially rational. As rational beings, we can act in accordance with our idea of a law. We can do so only because we have a will, for our will is nothing other than practical reason, which enables us to derive actions from laws (Gr. 2. 412–13). We consequently seek what is objectively good, for we use reason to recognize the good, and reason is the same for us all (413).

A different assumption about ourselves and our actions lies behind the hypothetical imperative. We and our actions can also be irrational, for we have a will which is fallible. Our will is not always in harmony with moral law because it is exposed to subjective conditions. These conditions are, in a word, our desires. And so we may act for the sake of the pleasure which fulfilling a desire can give us (Gr. 2. 412–13). But pleasure influences our will only through our senses. Pleasure is therefore subjective, for the senses are not the same for everyone (413).

Consider our example again. The person who does not care to live acts out of sheer will power for the sake of acting in accordance with moral law since he does not have any desire for life. His action essentially conforms to moral law and hence is objective. The person with a desire to live acts out of an inclination for the sake of its pleasure. His action might conform to moral law but only by accident. It is essentially subjective.

We may sum up by considering the Kantian concept of a good will. A categorical imperative commands an act of good will. An action of this sort arises from the will for the sake of its own activity (Gr. 1. 397–400). A hypothetical imperative does not even command an act of will. Its action arises out of desire for the sake of its satisfaction (see Gr. 2. 413–14 n., where Kant distinguishes between a practical and a pathological interest).

We thus follow Kant in defining categorical and hypothetical imperatives. We also tend to follow Kant in applying his definitions of imperatives, but I think that we are mistaken in doing so. Before I can show why we are mistaken, I must first be clear about the Kantian application of these imperatives, especially the categorical. A good place for us to begin is in the middle of things with the second formula of the categorical imperative. The second formula is probably the most popular with contemporary
philosophers, though Kant himself commends the first (Gr. 2. 435–37). This formula will also be the eventual focus for my evaluation of the imperative.

The second formula of the categorical imperative states that we must act in such a way that we treat humanity in any person ever as an end and never as a mere means (Gr. 2. 429). Insufficient attention is paid, I think, to the fact that this formulation rests on a supposition that something exists which is an end with absolute value in itself. This something, Kant proclaims, is humanity itself: “Now I say: humanity and in general any rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means for the arbitrary use of this or that will, but must in all its actions, both those directed toward itself and those directed toward other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end” (Gr. 2. 428). As if to give it special emphasis, Kant reiterates this assumption even more succinctly: “The ground of this principle is: Rational nature exists as an end in itself (Gr. 2. 428–29).” The principle referred to in this statement is of course the categorical imperative. We would also note that rational nature is the proper moral subject; human nature is only the proximate subject (see Gr. 425, for example).

How does this assumption yield a ground for the categorical imperative? The assumption provides an objective ground for the will in two senses. An end valuable in itself first of all provides an object for the will; it is something that the will can make its end. But the will also finds in this end an objective principle. For an end of value in itself is the same for all humans and even all rational beings. Every rational being is by nature absolutely valuable in itself (Gr. 2. 427–28). A hypothetical imperative finds its ground in an end which is not absolutely valuable but only relatively valuable. It has an end which is objective in only one sense. Though not an object of the will, its end is an object of impulse. Only in relation to a desire can a hypothetical imperative command an action as a means to another end. But this end is accordingly a mere subjective principle, for its worth is relative to the desire of a subject (Gr. 2. 427–28).

Consider our example again. A person who does not commit suicide, though sorely tempted, regards humanity in himself as an end of absolute value. But someone who commits suicide uses his humanity as a means to another end of only relative value. Though he does not pursue pleasure, he does seek to avoid pain by ending his life. The one person acts on the second formulation of the categorical imperative; the other acts on a hypothetical imperative (Gr. 2. 429). So, humanity exists as an end in itself. We might now ask, What is this end in itself? Recall, now, that a categorical imperative commands an
action as itself an end. But the second formula of the categorical imperative declares that we must treat our humanity as an end. Humanity would therefore appear to be an activity which is itself an end. But what activity? Presumably, a rational one. But, then, what rational activity is an end with value in itself?

The first formula of the categorical imperative tells us what this rational activity is. This formula states that we must act only in such a way that we can will our maxim to be a universal law (Gr. 2. 421). Recall, again, that a categorical imperative commands an action as an end in itself. To act so as to will a maxim to be a universal law would therefore be an end in itself. Such an action is in fact an absolute end, for universal law is unconditioned (420–21). But the proximate absolute end is humanity, according to Kant. And so humanity is the activity of willing universal law.

A hypothetical imperative, by contrast, aims only at an end conditioned by desire (Gr. 2. 420–21). And of course its maxims are not moral commands but merely rules of skill or counsels of prudence (416–17).

Consider the poor soul contemplating suicide one final time. By declining to commit suicide, this person acts so as to treat his maxim as a universal law. He thus takes as his end the activity of conforming his maxim to lawfulness. And he regards this activity as absolute, for he is without desire. He thus acts on the categorical imperative in its first formula. But someone who commits suicide does not treat his maxim as universal law. By ending his life, he acts on a rule of skill. Nor is his end absolute; it is relative to his desire. His action thus rests on a hypothetical imperative (see Gr. 2. 421–22).

The third formula confirms our inference about the first two. Indeed, this formula of the categorical imperative, Kant explicitly argues, sums up the first and the second formulas (Gr. 2. 430–31). It states that we must act in such a way that we treat humanity as having a will which makes universal law (see 430–31). This formulation thus suggests that we as well as others exist as an end in ourselves when we are self-legislative. In a word, the only end of absolute worth is self-legislation.10

To conclude, I would like to point out how limited Kant’s application of his categorical imperative is. Kant recognizes only one end which is valuable in itself: a rational being or more proximately a human being. What makes such a creature an end in itself is its rationality. But rationality itself has only one practical function: the activity of making law for its own sake.

Kant himself believes that these two limitations are in the nature of things. He asserts that through its proper nature a rational being is determined as an end in itself and therefore as a legislator (Gr. 2. 435–36). He
also states that the natural end of the human will is universal legislation (432–33). That would appear to be why Kant prefers the first formula, which states this function most explicitly.11

III

I would now like to address the question, Are moral imperatives categorical or hypothetical? My answer is, Moral imperatives are categorical, but categorical imperatives need not be Kantian. I shall accept the Kantian conception of the categorical imperative but reject Kant’s narrow application of it. That is, we may act on categorical imperatives, but we need not act solely for the sake of making moral law. We can act instead for the sake of other activities that have value in themselves. We may thus widen our application of the categorical imperative.

To show that we may widen our application, I shall first make explicit a distinction implicit in our discussion of moral imperatives and in Kant’s own discussion as well. This distinction takes us back at once to the ancient Greeks: it is that between intrinsic and instrumental value (Rep. 2. 357b–37d; Eth. 1. 7. 1097a25–34).12 An action has intrinsic value if it is choiceworthy for the sake of itself; an action has instrumental value if choiceworthy for the sake of something else. For example, dancing is choiceworthy for its own sake. Country dances, ballroom dances, even the jitterbug, we can perform for their intrinsic value. But we put on our dance slippers for the sake of something else—for the sake of dancing. Putting slippers on has instrumental value.

A categorical imperative obviously commands an action that has intrinsic value, for it demands that we perform an action for its own sake. Kant argues, as we have seen, that this action is law-making. According to the first formula of his categorical imperative, we must act on a maxim that we could will to be a universal law. But a hypothetical imperative commands an action that has only instrumental value, for it requires an action for the sake of something else. An action of this sort a person usually pursues for the sake of pleasure, according to Kant.13

Now, I can only ask, Is making law the only activity with intrinsic value? And does law-making have the highest intrinsic value? I think that our answer to both questions must be negative. Law making is not the action with the highest intrinsic value, nor is it the only action with intrinsic value. We may perform many other actions which have value in themselves. These actions constitute our happiness in the Greek sense of the term. By definition, happiness for Plato and Aristotle is an activity which is itself an end (Eth. 1. 7. 1098a16–17; Rep. 4. 419a–421c, for example, though Plato simply assumes what Aristotle asserts). And this activity for humans can only be action (see esp. Eth. 2. 1–2).
We can glean an indication of what these intrinsically valuable activities are by glancing at some Aristotelian and Platonic virtues, for happiness on their account is an activity in accordance with virtue (Eth. 1. 7. 1098a16–17 and Eth. 2. 6. 1106b36–1107a2; see Rep. 4. 427a–434c and 441c–442d). Happiness in the Greek sense presents its clearest example in the activity of theoretical knowledge. To know theoretically is to know for the sake of knowing. Aristotle is probably the most ardent proponent of pure science and its intrinsic value (Eth. 10. 7. 1177b1–4). We must strain every nerve, he declares, in the pursuit of theoretical knowing (1177b31–1178a2). Activity of this kind is the best; it is the most continuous, the most pleasant, and the most self-sufficient (1177a18–1177b1). Plato, of course, recognizes the intrinsic value of pure knowledge, though he views it more as a dangerous distraction. The guardians of his ideal city, he argues, must study mathematics and dialectics especially in order to develop and to understand models of their city (Rep. 7. 521c–535a). But so delightful are these studies in themselves, he fears that his guardians will have to be coaxed and coerced, if necessary, to return to political life (519b–521b).

Though we do not always recognize the fact, we, too, pursue science for its own sake. An astrophysicist, for example, does not seek to determine the nature of black holes for the sake of any application. There is none, despite some fanciful claims to the contrary. He is determined to account for the amount of matter in the universe. Nor does a particle physicist search for the missing quark for the sake of any possible utility. His purpose is to isolate the ultimate elements of matter. On occasion, a scientist may argue that his investigations will ultimately issue in practical applications. But these applications are of no real concern to him; they are merely spinoffs, most often sought by others.

Practical knowledge can also be an end in itself. Plato takes pleasure in poking fun at those who pursue knowledge of this kind for its own sake. He dubs them philodoxers because they confuse theoretical knowledge with practical and pursue practical knowledge as if it had theoretical value. These characters are the lovers of sights and sounds who seek out every Dyonisiac festival (Rep. 5. 475d–480a). Aristotle recognizes a similar pursuit in a less disparaging manner. He distinguishes theoretical sharply from practical knowledge and identifies a virtue for this activity. Understanding, he argues, is an ability to judge practical matters without issuing commands (Eth. 6. 10.).

We also enjoy practical knowledge in itself, but, again, we often fail to realize that we do. Journalists, for example, bring us live telemedia reports about political and other matters from around the world, and yet the information thus proffered has little, if any, practical bearing on our lives. We have our own philodoxers too, though they are known by other
names. For example, fans of movie stars, rock stars, and sports stars ardently seek practical knowledge as if it were the only kind. So does the neighborhood gossip. Bird watchers and those who enjoy wild flowers take a similar, if more reserved, attitude toward other creatures.

The Greeks argue that even practical activity has its value for its own sake. Plato's very purpose in the Republic is to show that justice has intrinsic value in addition to any instrumental value that it may have (Rep. 2. 357a-358d). Justice, he argues, consists in all citizens performing their own functions, and each citizen finds his happiness in the performance of his function (Rep. 4. 419a-421c and 427c-434c). Aristotle argues in general that one must choose moral actions for their own sake as well as perform them with knowledge and from habit (Eth. 2. 4, especially 1105a30–33). More specifically, he explains that an action is not just if done only instrumentally—that is, for the sake of its effects. If we act out of fear, say of punishment, we do only what a just person would do (Eth. 5. 8. 1135b2–1135b8).

Despite some contemporary pessimism, we still do find intrinsic value in just actions. We surely approve of people who do what they ought even though their actions may not yield any advantages for themselves. We admire not only the citizen who refuses a reward for coming forward but also the criminal who decides to come clean. And we take a dim view of people who exhibit a legalistic attitude toward the law, such as those who search out tax loopholes for themselves or hire lobbyists to carve them out.

Other practical activities, such as courageous and temperate actions, also have intrinsic value. Persons who act courageously do what must be done for its own sake with little thought of risk to themselves. Consider the proverbial reply of the police officer or fire fighter who, upon receiving an award for heroism, protests that he was only doing his job. That we may perform temperate actions for their own sake is most obvious on social occasions—for example, a banquet we do not normally attend for the sake of satisfying appetite. Attending a banquet is a ceremony undertaken for its own sake. And so is a cocktail party and a backyard barbecue.

Nor do the Greeks overlook the intrinsic value of these activities. A courageous person, Aristotle observes, is one who stands his ground against pains and may even delight in doing so; a temperate person delights in abstaining from pleasures. What they can both enjoy is their virtuous activity itself and a pleasure which supervenes upon it (Eth. 2. 3. 1104b2–8; see also Eth. 10. 4. 1174b31–33). Courageous and temperate activities for Plato also have value primarily in themselves rather than in avoiding pain or in seeking pleasure. The guardians and other citizens, he argues, all find their happiness in fulfilling their functions and not in living as if they were revellers at a festival (Rep. 4. 419a–421c again).

Finally, there remain what I think are perhaps the most obvious in-
stances for us—the arts as well as sports and games. Dances, concerts, plays, movies, and games of all sorts we all enjoy for their own sakes, not merely as spectators but also as performers or players. Rare is the person who does not enjoy a gala ball or a square dance. Amateur musicians and actors perform in our cities and towns purely out of their love for the arts. Until recently the modern Olympics were quite rightly limited to amateurs, who participated without a thought of compensation.

The Greeks, of course, advocate the intrinsic value of these activities as well. Aristotle argues at length that music is an important leisure activity, pursued for its own sake (Politics, 8. 3. 1337b27-1338a30). He disagrees about sports, unfortunately. Games, he argues, are mere relaxation—medicine for the soul (1337b35-1338a1). Plato suggests that when properly blended, music and gymnastics both are important leisure activities, though he points out their instrumental value (Rep. 3. 410b-421c). And he clearly encourages the guardians to engage in imitation—but only of objects consistent with their function (394d-397b).

The Greek conception of happiness, then, shows that we may perform many activities of various sorts for their own sakes. But I must acknowledge that philosophers today do engage in controversies about what kind of value our intellectual and moral activities have. Any question about the value of science as such Plato and Aristotle would find philosophically moot. Science itself can only be pure because it concerns eternal truths valuable for contemplation alone (Rep. 5. 475d-480, for example; Eth. 6. 3. and 6. 6.). But contemporary philosophers argue that science essentially has not intrinsic value but rather instrumental value. John Dewey does, for example. He argues that we must define ideas “in terms of operations to be performed” and that we must test their validity “by the consequence of these operations.”

We also concede that practical knowledge is, of course, practical. The Greeks themselves esteemed it for its applications. Aristotle is more explicit than Plato about practical wisdom and its functions. Both theoretical and practical wisdom grasp truth, he argues, but practical wisdom can also control desire (Eth. 6. 2. 1139a21-31; Eth. 1. 13. 1102b13-28). But even Plato recognizes the practical value of opinion. The guardians, after their philosophical education, must return to politics and accustom themselves to its idols (Rep. 7. 519b-521b).

Clearly, we would like to know more about our contemporaries and their cultures in order to be better able to live together with them. This aspiration I take to be the motive behind current cries for political correctness and cultural diversity. The environmental crisis, in fact, requires other applications of us. We need to know better the natures and functions of plants and animals in order not to harm them but to preserve their species and ecosystems.
That practical activities have instrumental value is most obvious, especially in our acquisitive era. But Plato himself classifies justice as a good of the best sort precisely because it is valuable not only for itself but also for its effects (Rep. 2. 357c–358a). Aristotle argues that only theoretical activity has value for itself alone and that practical activity we value for itself and its effects (Eth. 10. 7–8).

Nevertheless, I would aver that, in addition to their instrumental value, all human activities, theoretical as well as practical and productive, still have intrinsic value. And we may surely engage in these activities for the sake of such value. Even Dewey acknowledges what he calls the play of ideas. He thus acknowledges that theoretical activity has some intrinsic value, though he emphasizes its instrumental effects. Can we not equally recognize the playful nature of our other activities as well and perform them for their own sake?

In these examples, then, we find activities which are choiceworthy for the sake of themselves. Activities of knowing, doing, and making, to put the matter in more general terms, all have intrinsic value. And even law-making too still retains its intrinsic value. Kant himself points out that to determine the will in accordance with universal law has value for itself even if it issues in unsuccessful action or in no action at all (Gr. 1. 394). We all recognize this intrinsic value when we are able to uphold our principles under trying circumstances.

But we also see how multifarious our identity as rational beings actually is. Scientist, citizen, artist, sports fan, bird watcher, hero, host, prima donna, or center linebacker, we are each and every one of us one or more of these intrinsically valuable beings. And of course I have hardly exhausted the list of intrinsically valuable activities and their corresponding identities.

We need not, then, view moral selves merely as law-makers who make law for the sake of making law. Admirable though acting from the Kantian imperative is, to engage in these other activities for the sake of engaging in them is equally noble. Their worth shines out, as does that of Kantian duty, when we overcome a temptation to pursue these activities merely for the sake of something else, such as personal gain or pleasure (see, of course, Gr. 1. 394).

Making universal law is thus not the sole activity valuable as an end in itself. But neither is making law the activity with the highest intrinsic value. The Greeks themselves argue that theoretical knowledge is the activity which has the highest value in itself. They cite in support of their contention the properties of this activity, as already noted, as well as the properties of its object (again, Eth. 10. 7. 1177a18–1177b1; also Eth. 6. 7. 1141a17–1141b8; Rep. 7. 519b–519c). Plato uses the lowly cicada as an image of our devotion to this activity. As the cicada sings from birth
until death without need of sustenance, so too those devoted to philosophy argue with one another and quite forget food and drink (Phaedrus 259b-259d).

Most, if not all, contemporary philosophers would argue that even activity of a practical sort has greater value than an activity of law-making. Making laws and following them, they argue, are of value not for themselves primarily but for their effects in action. Unfortunately, philosophers today often overlook the intrinsic value of practical activity in favor if its instrumental value. The pragmatists especially do. Dewey, for example, argues that practical activity, like practical knowledge, has value primarily for its consequences. But we clearly do admire individuals who act justly or courageously without regard for what the consequences might be for themselves.

Many people would find the highest intrinsic value in the arts and their products. Theater goers and concert goers as well as musicians and actors find greater intrinsic value in the performances of high culture than in either of the investigations of science or the machinations of politics. The same may be said of the plastic arts and more recent genres, such as jazz. And I need not mention again the devoted fans of popular culture and the spectacles of mass media. Aristotle himself argues that tragedy is its own end; its plot is its soul, as it were (Poetics 6. 1450a22-23 and 38-39).

By importing the concept of an intrinsically valuable activity from ancient Greek philosophy, we can thus cast a new light on modern moral philosophy. We can now see how restricted Kantian moral theory appears to be. Kant considered only one activity to have intrinsic value, and he focused on an activity that does not have the highest value of this kind. We see, too, that we in fact perform many intrinsically valuable activities, though we may fail to recognize in theory that we do.

So, I would now ask, Does an activity which is an end in itself but which is not making universal laws entail a categorical imperative? I think that it does. An eudaemonic activity in the ancient Greek sense makes a categorical demand on us, for it is an activity with an intrinsic value, and such an activity can be rational ground of choice. We can thus be obliged to engage in many activities of this kind, for they alone constitute our value as an ends.

This argument is essentially Kantian in one respect. It agrees with what Kant states in the second formula of the categorical imperative, that an intrinsic value is a ground for a moral demand. But the argument is decidedly not Kantian in other respects. It disagrees with what Kant states in the first formula, which requires universal legislation. I am arguing rather that we can be required to engage in thought, action, or art. In other words, I suggest that we are essentially activities of knowing, doing, and
making, for in these activities we realize ourselves most fully. We are not merely self-legislating creatures, as the third formula asserts.

The non-Kantian categorical imperatives that result from this analysis are objective in two senses. Though they are a posteriori, these imperatives do rest on objective knowledge of ourselves. I thus assume that empirical knowledge is the same or very similar for us all. But this knowledge, since it is empirical, is subject to the usual caveats. That is, we may be mistaken about what our function in given circumstances is or about what our circumstances are. But as categorical, these imperatives command an action as an end in itself. They thus provide an object for the will. We act on them because we recognize that an activity has intrinsic value, not because we wish to satisfy a desire.22

The analysis also assumes the Kantian model of a will which is rational and rejects any concept of an irrational will. As beings with a rational will, we act in accordance with a concept of an intrinsically valuable activity. Do philosophers, for example, engage in inquiry for the sake of the pleasure that it might give? Even if impelled by a desire to know, we most often find the pleasure of satisfying our curiosity outweighed by the pains of doing so. Rather, we engage in theoretical activity for its own sake; we wish to know for the sake of knowing. Any pleasure is adventitious.

But of course people can shirk non-Kantian obligations. We can act irrationally, for our will remains fallible. We most often do so when we treat an intrinsically valuable action as an action with instrumental value. That is, someone may perform an action with intrinsic value for the sake of an ulterior end. He usually seeks profit or pleasure and thus pursues a subjective good dependent on greed or another desire. He thus subjects himself not to a categorical imperative but to a hypothetical one. And this imperative is hypothetical in the Kantian sense.

I would assert, therefore, that humanity is by nature a knowing, doing, and making creature. Specific activities of these sorts entail categorical obligations because they are ends in themselves.

IV

My argument does require some sacrifices of us, however, if we are to maintain it. We must sacrifice some cherished prejudices inherited from Kant. The first sacrifice required is our notion of a moral agent; we must modify it. Kant argues that all rational beings as such are ends in themselves with absolute value because they are self-legislative (see Gr. 2. 425–26, for example). I agree with Kant that rational beings are ends in themselves, but I do not agree that rational beings as such have intrinsic value. I am arguing that other activities besides self-legislation—activities which are empirical—have intrinsic value. The subjects of morality are
thus not all rational beings but merely human beings as we know them. That is, only rational animals of one species are moral agents.

What is more, the rational animals in question do not have absolute value as ends in themselves. Homo sapiens has an intrinsic value which is merely relative. What has absolute value is the whole of which we are but a puny part. We can of course experience only intermediate wholes with relatively greater value than ourselves. These wholes make up our social and natural environments. But the ultimate whole with absolute value in itself can only be the universe itself.

The second sacrifice required by this analysis is the universality of moral imperatives. Kant argues that categorical imperatives are both universal and necessary (for example, Gr. 2. 420–21). The necessity of moral imperatives of course remains. Categorical imperatives are necessary because they are required of us as beings who engage in intrinsically valuable activities. Though without absolute value, these activities constitute what we are. We are, again, creatures engaged in knowing, doing, and making in all their variety and particularity.

But moral imperatives can be only generalities because they rest on empirical knowledge. How do we know what is incumbent upon us? We ourselves experience activities which have value in themselves, and we observe others engaging in them. Our knowledge of our moral obligations is thus limited by our experience and its scope, though these limits can be probed with imagination. Our knowledge of moral obligations is also limited by its objects. Empirical objects are subject to change and depend on their environment. What we find intrinsically valuable today may indeed have disvalue tomorrow.

Finally, we can have a kingdom of ends on this account. But I would prefer to call such a society a community of ends. With this change in nomenclature I mean to draw attention to the members of society. We again are not rational beings legislating universal laws for ourselves; we are rather human beings participating in human activities within human situations. Any moral laws that we make are not primarily ends in themselves; they are rather means to actions valued as ends in themselves. And what these actions are we determine only by experience within a given environment.

V

Today philosophers are not as sanguine about rationality and its activity as was Kant in his day. Kant advocated one absolute rational standard for all moral conduct. Many contemporary philosophers are so disillusioned with his project that they eschew any rational standard for conduct. They often advocate what amounts to little more than an intellectual fad. But
without taking the “high priori” road of Kant, I think that we can keep our rationality and take a “low posteriori” road. We need not seek one rational activity with absolute intrinsic value; we may pursue many activities which have relative intrinsic value. Indeed, we must.

NOTES

2. Two exceptions known to me are Williams and Foot. Though they both quarrel with Kant’s conception of emotion, Williams discovers a new application for the categorical imperative, Foot finds one for the hypothetical imperative. See Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), chapter 10, 189; Philippa Foot, Virtues and Vices (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), chapter 11, 158–59.
4. That we can never be completely sure of the motives for any action, I do of course realize. See Gr. 2. 406–407.
5. Williams challenges this assumption. He argues that a categorical imperative is not unconditional in the sense that it depends only on reason and not on desire. This imperative is unconditional rather in that it depends on a desire essential to our very character. It thus does not depend on any desire we may merely happen to have. Williams, chapter 10, 189.
6. This assumption Foot challenges. She argues that a hypothetical imperative can be conditioned by a desire for a long-term project as well as by a passing inclination. And we may be said to want a long-term project even though it might at a given moment leave us cold. Foot, chapter 11, 158–59.
7. The translation is mine.
8. Patton’s translation.
9. I thus differ significantly with Korsgaard on the interpretation of this formula. Borrowing terminology from Moore, she argues that our humanity as a choice has intrinsic, or unconditioned, value and that humanity as an end has only extrinsic, or conditioned, value. She explains that when we choose rationally, we confer value on our humanity as an end. Kant thus avoids, according to her, the “ontological task” of identifying rational ends. See, for example, Christine M. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” The Philosophical Review 92 (1983), 169–95, especially 177–84. But Kant not only declares emphatically, as we have seen, that our humanity exists as an end in itself, he also clearly argues that humanity alone exists as an unconditioned end (see again Gr. 2. 428). Far from avoiding it, Kant tackles the ontological issue head on.
10. Kant also argues that the three formulas are the same in that they express the form, the matter, and the complete determination of our maxims. See Gr. 2. 436–37. For an elaboration of this argument, the reader may consult Warner A. Wick, “Introduction: Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” Immanuel Kant, Ethical Phi

11. Williams is thus quite right to lament this impoverished conception of our moral selves. See Williams, chapter 4, 64–69, for example.

12. Plato, Republic; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics.

13. Korsgaard's attempt to map Moore's terminology onto Kant's moral theory appears to be what leads her astray. I have used the terms "instrumental" and "intrinsic" merely to indicate values that are means and ends. Without using "intrinsic," Korsgaard also opposes the instrumental values to those which are ends. But she goes on to oppose the term "extrinsic" to "intrinsic" in order to distinguish objects which have value from something else or in themselves. See Korsgaard, 169–70. For this distinction Kant prefers the terms "relative" and "absolute" or "conditioned" and "unconditioned." Kant accordingly indicates that our humanity has value as an unconditioned end (see n. 9 above). But Korsgaard denies that Kant takes a position of this sort, though she recognizes it as a possible one. Kant's position, according to her, is that our rationality is an extrinsic end. This is, a conditioned end. See 170–71 and 172–73. Korsgaard's utilization of Moore's terminology thus obscures in Kant's theory the very distinction that she meant to illuminate.

14. This definition of happiness differs from that of Kant. Though he at times ascribes it to Aristotle, Kant appears to define happiness as an activity that is at bottom strong-willed or even weak-willed, for he identifies it with the pursuit of pleasure. Compare, for example, Eth. 1. 13, 1102b13–28 with Gr. 2. 442–43; and Eth. 7. 1–10. Also see Roger J. Sullivan, "The Kantian Critique of Aristotle's Moral Philosophy," The Review of Metaphysics 28 (1974), 24–53. Foot and Williams too both remark how narrow Kant's discussion of nonmoral action is. Williams, chapter 4, 64–65; Foot, chapter 11, 158–59 and 164–65.


17. This conception of action and its intrinsic value agrees with what MacIntyre says about a practice and its internal goods. Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), chapter 14, especially 187–90. But MacIntyre parts company with us when he argues that a value intrinsic to action is socially teleological. See 196–97. I would argue that intrinsic value is naturally teleological because it is something that we discover by means of empirical knowledge.

18. Williams argues of course that a desire essential to an agent is the source of the highest practical value. Again see chapter 10, 198.

19. See Foot, chapter 11, 164–66. If one cares about others, she argues, then one will seek not the role of helping them but their good.

20. For example, John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), especially chapter 7.

21. McDowell is thus on the right track to argue that an action may be presented as practically necessary by our view of a situation. John McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, sup. vol. 52 (1978), 13–29; for example, 14. But he explains that we view
an action as morally required merely because our upbringing teaches us to see its situation in a special light. See 20–22. McDowell thus overlooks the intrinsic value of an action and its moral significance.


23. Plato and Aristotle of course place great emphasis on our social and political nature; today we must also take into account our ecological nature. For example, see Aldo Leopold, *The Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949).

24. On this topic one might consult Marcus Aurelius or Spinoza.