1. Introduction

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant claims that there is *only one* unconditionally demanding moral law or categorical imperative (CI) (G 4:421, 4:436). Nevertheless, he distinguishes several (kinds of) formula’s of CI: (i) the formula of a *universal law* (FUL): “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (G 4:421), (ii) the formula of *humanity as end in itself* (FH): “so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (G 4:429), (iii) the formula of *autonomy* (FA): “to act only so that the will would regard itself as at the same time giving universal law through its maxim” (G 4:434), and (iv) the formula of the *realm of ends* (FRE): “act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends” (G 4:439). In summarizing his account of CI, Kant repeats his claim that these different “ways of representing the principle of morality”
are to be seen as “only so many formulae of the very same law”, but at the same time he adds that “there is nevertheless a difference among them” (G 4:436). This difference concerns the fact that FRE implies a “complete determination” of CI referring to the harmonization of “all the maxims from one’s own lawgiving [to] (‘zu’) a possible kingdom of ends” (G 4:436).

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

2. Intentionality

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

The ‘realm of ends’ is not merely the union of all rational beings as ‘ends in themselves’, i.e., as ‘persons’ having an incomparable, absolute and ‘inner’ worth instead of a merely comparative ‘price’, but also of “the ends of his own that each may set himself”. This ‘double’ sense of the ‘realm of ends’ is crucial, but is sometimes understated or misconceived even by influential authors such as Rawls (2000) and Hare (1963). Thus, Rawls takes the ‘realm of ends’ as expressing the idea of a “moral commonwealth” in which we view ourselves as equal “legislators […] of the public moral law”, but as such leaves out
the ‘realm of ends’ has a twofold sense for it concerns not only the systematic connection of all rational beings, but also the systematic connection of all their ends. By the latter, Kant refers to those ends that can be called ‘morally legitimate’, i.e., ends that are directly entailed by the moral law (‘ends as duties’) or ends that are at least not contradictory to or inconsistent with the moral law. In this ‘broader’ sense, the ‘realm of ends’ does not by definition exclude the striving for non-moral ends as long as these do not interfere or conflict with the moral law. In the ‘stricter’ sense, the ends involved are those that necessarily belong to the ‘realm of ends’ because they can be approved and pursued by a community of rational self-legislators. Taking these approaches together, the ‘realm of ends’ requires both “the exclusion of ends that in principle cannot be shared between rational beings” and “the furthering of ends that unite people (such as those involving mutual respect and mutual aid)”7.

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

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8 Wood, o.c., 1999, p. 166.
In sum, the peculiarity of FRE lies in the fact that it reveals an explicitly intentional commitment to ends, and moreover a duty to strive for a harmonious unification of all morally legitimate ends. As such, FRE unites as it were both Kant’s deontological and teleological ethics, i.e., Kant’s ethics as a system of duties and ethics as a system of ends. As Kant states in his *Metaphysics of Morals (Doctrine of Virtue)*: “Ends and duties distinguish the two divisions of the doctrine of morals in general. That ethics contains duties that one cannot be constrained by others […] to fulfill follows merely from its being a doctrine of ends, since coercion to ends (to have them) is self-contradictory” (MM 6:381). It is precisely in FRE that deontology and teleology become intertwined. Therefore we now turn to FRE’s normative dimension and its connection to the teleological dimension of CI.

3. Normativity

Kant calls the ‘realm of ends’ an “ideal” (G 4:433; 4:462) rather than an “idea”. While the latter can be defined as a concept of pure reason, an “ideal” concerns the “representation of an individual being as adequate to an idea” (CPJ 5:232), or “the idea not merely in *concreto* but in *individuo*, i.e., as an individual thing which is determinable […] through the idea alone” (CPR A:568; B:596). Although being a determinable individual thing, an ideal stands like an ‘archetype’ (‘Urbild’) that completely determines its copies: “just as the idea gives the rule, so the ideal […] serves as the original image for the thoroughgoing determination of the copy” (CPR A:569; B:597). In this respect, Kant mentions the ideal of the stoic sage as an exemplar designing an image of complete conformity with the idea of wisdom. Thus, while virtue is an idea of reason generating rules for moral judgment, the stoic sage is an ideal serving as a unique standard or model to shape our moral conduct: “we have in us no other standard for our actions than the conduct of this divine human being, with which we compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves, even though we can never reach the standard” (CPR A:569; B:597). Likewise, the ‘realm of ends’ can be interpreted as the only ideal of reason with which to compare our human relations and interactions: it serves for designing a vivid image of what would be a perfect social moral practice, the concept of which is “complete in its kind, in order to assess and measure the degree and the defects of what is incomplete” (CPR A:570; B:598).
Moreover, Kant also assesses the ‘realm of ends’ in terms of a “prac-
tical idea” by opposing it to the ‘realm of nature’. Kant makes it clear that
the former concerns not “a theoretical idea for explaining what exists”, but
rather “a practical idea for the sake of bringing about, in conformity with
this very idea, that which does not exist but which can become real by
means of our conduct” (G 4:436, footnote). Hence, it is obvious that Kant
takes the ‘realm of ends’ as a normative or constructive idea of practical
reason to model the natural world as it ought to be. Further, Kant argues
that, while the ‘realm of nature’ is only possible on the basis of heterono-
mous laws of “externally necessitated efficient causes”, the ‘realm of
ends’ is merely possible through autonomous maxims, i.e., “rules imposed
upon oneself” (G 4:438). As Kant puts it in his lectures: “If I picture to
myself a kingdom of natural things, […] then that is the kingdom of nature
under heteronomy. But I can also picture a kingdom of purposes with
autonomy, which is the kingdom of rational beings, who have a general
system of ends in view. In this realm, we consider ourselves as those who
obey the law, but also as those who give laws.” (LE 29:629).

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

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

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

4. Intersubjectivity and Communality

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

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

2007. Or, as Kant says: “For it is only insofar all rational creatures act according to these
eternal laws of reason that they stand under a principle of community and together constitute a
system of all ends” [italics added] (LPR 28:1100).
“allness” or “totality” is defined as “nothing other than plurality considered as a unity” (CPR B 110-1), which amounts to saying that totality exists in a kind of harmony of plurality in unity. FRE requires that a plurality of both rational beings as ‘ends in themselves’ and of their particular —morally legitimate— ends is brought into harmony under formal unifying principles of pure practical reason. Hence, FRE once again reveals its essential ‘social’ or ‘communal’ dimension: it is only in and through a ‘realm of ends’ that a universal valid law can be found for a plurality of rational agents united in an ideal moral community.

Let us further consider the significance of membership in the ‘realm of ends’. The specificity of FRE lies in the fact that it extends the function of autonomy and dignity as principium executionis for executing one’s moral actions to all rational subjects as members of a moral community. Such membership ‘guarantees’ that the autonomous will can serve both as its own and as a universal law: the common laws uniting rational beings in a ‘realm of ends’ have to be laws that are equally valid for and equally recognized by all members, which is only possible if all members are lawgiver of as well as subject to these laws. Further, FRE unites rational beings through moral laws regulating their reciprocal relations as ends and means. This implies the claim that only if one presupposes of oneself and of all others —insofar as these are affected by the actions of one another— that they do not only have their own personal ends, but also possess the capacity to and the interest for universal (self)legislation, a systematic connection of all morally legitimate ends is possible. Hence, it is guaranteed that all involved agents are capable of abstracting from their particular ends and of constructing a universally valid and universally acceptable maxim so that a harmonious unity of all ends can be realized12.

Furthermore, the culmination of the formula’s in FRE implies that a ‘realm of ends’ is so regulated that, in striving for particular purposes, each member as a universal lawgiver never restricts other members to do the same: each member has to take into account his own perspective and at the same time the perspective of the other members as equal self-legislators13. For this reason, Guyer speaks of the ‘realm of ends’ as “a system

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

13 See also A. W. WOOD, Kant, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 141-142.
of freedom, in which all agents freely pursue their freely chosen ends to the extent compatible with a like freedom for all” [italics added]14. Hence, by establishing a totality of a non-conflicting unity of common substantive ends, i.e., the valuation of each other as end in itself, amidst a plurality of particular relative purposes, FRE once again resists any merely blindly universalistic or merely auto-reflexively individualistic approach of Kant’s CI15.

Finally, the communal applicability of CI gains greater plausibility because FRE entails that the whole of all the subjects’ maxims (plural!) has to fuse into a ‘realm of ends’, i.e., that all the subjects’ maxims taken together have to be universalizable. This demand to construct a universalizable system of maxims is again reinforced by the fact that in conceiving such a system the moral agent “must always take his maxims from the point of view of himself, and likewise every other rational being, as lawgiving beings” [italics added] (G 4:438). FRE demands from every rational subject to construct an encompassing corpus of universalizable maxims viewed from the pluralistic diversity of perspectives of all involved, equally lawgiving members of the community. Hence, FRE not only requires an auto-reflexive but also a communal and intersubjective stance in evaluating the legitimacy of one’s (inter)actions and intentions — although it has to be acknowledged that Kant silently passes over the question of how this intersubjectivity effectively ought to take place16.

5. Conclusion

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


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

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

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

18 The authors would like to thank the Special Research Fund of Ghent University and the Fund for Scientific Research-Flanders for their financial support.