

UBC Department of Philosophy Colloquium



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Refusing to Will the Means

Abstract:

Many Kantians believe that hypothetical imperatives depend on categorical imperatives for their normativity. I argue that this view stems from a prevalent, but mistaken, understanding of hypothetical imperatives as primarily anti-akratic principles that prescribe the volition of the necessary known means to one who wills the end. On this view, all practical necessity is really categorical, depending on the categorical imperative's endorsement of our ends as good. It thus collapses any normative difference between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. I argue instead that, for Kant, the volition of the necessary known means and the volition of the end are the very same volition, and so it does not turn out to be possible, on his account of practical reason, to will an end and fail to will the necessary known means to it. Based on Kant's conception of willing an end then, I offer an alternative understanding of hypothetical imperatives, one which preserves the normative difference between categorical and hypothetical imperatives, and the correlative distinction between practical failures that are evil, and those that are merely stupid.

FRIDAY, October 20 BUCH A103 4.00 – 5.30

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