

THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL ADHERENCE TO SYMBOLIC GREEN NARRATIVES: A KANTIAN THEORETICAL APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, theories have tried to account for public adherence to deceptive phenomena such as greenwashing. A number of these theories have sought to answer why people choose to take actions that endorse narratives they acknowledge to be merely symbolic and, to a large extent, intentionally manufactured to deceive them.

In the context of narratives targeting green or environmental issues, this phenomenon has been addressed by theories of economics and social psychology. By offering descriptions in terms of the motivational aspects that govern consumers' choices, such theories tend to overfocus on the individual's perception concerning these narratives' falsity, consequently neglecting the *moral* aspect of people's decisions. In addition, even theories engaged in addressing moral aspects tend to overlook further components that are key to a deeper understanding about why agents endorse green narratives despite recognizing that they are deceptive. As a result, the mechanisms at work in cases where green narratives succeed in misleading their audience remain opaque, leading to a partially obscured picture of the phenomenon.

My main goal in this paper is to explore the adherence to green narratives which the agent recognizes as deceptive or merely symbolic from a moral standpoint. I will show that once under a moral framework, we allow for an approach whereby the overlooked components become salient.

Two of these components will be explored. The first refers to the idea that human moral experience is essentially *normative*, which is particularly evident in situations that place the agent in a position to make decisions in light of certain principles. The second, in turn, concerns a feature that is fundamentally at play when such decisions are made, namely the *first-person perspective*. As a result, I will make the case for a way of approaching the phenomenon

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of green narratives from an ethical and normative standpoint which additionally focuses on self-regarding considerations.

In Section One, I elucidate what I mean by symbolic green narratives (SGN) and contextualize the problem from two theories that I believe represent the context I have just laid out. The first theory descriptively delineates the phenomenon, while the second one presents an attempt (albeit limited) to approach it from an ethical standpoint. I then discuss the limitations of these theories and argue that they should be complemented by a moral perspective approach.

Presenting this complementary theory will be my goal in the next two sections. To do so, I will draw from the theory of a Kantian philosopher credited with elaborating on the first-person perspective, Christine Korsgaard. A number of elements from Kant's moral psychology will be underlined to elucidate Korsgaard's theory, but also to provide decisive insights towards an explanation of individual-level adherence to SGN.

In Section two I summarize the concepts that make Kant's moral psychology relevant to the cases discussed here. I begin by approaching the concepts of necessity and necessitation to present Kant's view concerning the characteristic features of human moral experience. I discuss the concepts of laws or norms to endorse the Korsgaardian thesis that agents' practical identities are sources of moral obligations. Section 03 explores SGN's normative aspect. I contend in this section that it is precisely this aspect that places such narratives on an essentially moral register, and ultimately that looking at the decision-making on green narratives from a moral perspective brings to the surface the problems in endorsing such narratives. I then approach virtue-signaling and self-affirmation to argue that such psychological phenomena find equivalence in Kant's thought, being regarded by Kant as blameworthy insofar as they hinder the proper functioning of practical reason.

The debate around SGNs can undoubtedly be enriched by a Kantian-inspired contribution. Kant's concept of *maxim* advances the notion of motivation and importantly connects with the idea that our moral life is essentially normative, as it involves the idea of principle; these principles are in play when we make decisions on moral matters. They are enacted by what, in her theory of self-constitution, Korsgaard calls *moral* and *practical identities*.

Contra amoralist arguments², I argue that decisions to endorse SGN are typically based on moral grounds, and most importantly that understanding the normative and self-regarding aspects behind such decisions is critical if we are to act in accordance with our best judgment. In this sense Korsgaard's theory is especially appealing, as it provides us with understanding about how practical identities play a role in an agent's reasoning with regard to green narratives, as well as concerning the tensions stemming from our practical identities once we perform actions that endorse narratives we acknowledge as deceptive.

SECTION 1. ACCOUNTING FOR MORAL BEHAVIOR VIA DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES

The increasing interest in awareness of different sectors of society for issues related to sustainability (Zhang et al, 2008; Follows & Jobber, 2000; Shepherd et al, 2005) combined with the growth of so-called ethical consumption (De Pelsmacker et al, 2005) has made “corporate greening” a profitable marketing strategy. This new trend, which has encouraged numerous companies to go green, has at the same time intensified companies’ needs in making public their attitudes on environmental issues. In this context and aiming to convince the public about the commitment and environmental impact of a company, goods, or services, green narratives emerge. Many of these narratives came out as merely symbolic or performative, meaning that they fail to comply with what is publicized³.

In this paper, I refer to the concept of *symbolic green narratives*⁴ (SGN, for short) as comprising discourses or communication mechanisms that seek to create or reinforce misleading beliefs in their audiences regarding the environmental commitment of those who produce them. The production of SGN includes not only the manufacture of certain goods, services, or corporate guidelines, but also the discursive manner in which these products are made public. Thus, the scope of what I refer in this paper to as green narratives includes texts, images, packaging, advertising pieces, audiovisual media, and other discursive ways of conveying meaning through language.

In the last decades one may witness the emergence of critical stances towards such narratives⁵ as well as a growing body of studies addressing this phenomenon more directly. Among the aims of the debates on SGN, the need to list the factors that explain the individual-level adherence to such narratives is typically stressed and commonly carried out by applying certain theories to the scope of the phenomenon under analysis. Two theoretical strategies are worth highlighting.

In seeking clarity about the processes involved in the effectiveness of SGN, Nyilasy et al (2012) draw on a conjunction between attribution theory and attitude change theory. The former theory, borrowed from general psychology, holds that agents tend to attribute causes for observed phenomena. However, agent engagement with a company’s green advertisement is not immediate; this allows that stimuli caused by green advertising result in a change in the consumer’s attitude towards that company. Effectively, this means that when it comes to SGN, the public suspects at the outset that the corporation’s pledge is not authentic. This points to the fact that while companies manufacturing SGNs expect positive brand attitudes from their audience, that audience’s perception of the merely symbolic nature of these narratives often results in rather negative attributions.

In this sense, one may claim that the explanatory potential of SGN’ power lies in the individual’s perception of green marketing, which in turn is mediated by attribution mechanisms and attitude change or formation. As such, once their misleading nature is perceived, these narratives tend to produce a negative brand perception, which brings damage to the firm that adopts them, indicating that “some firms would be better off staying silent” (Nyilasy et al, 2012, p. 121).

A further theory used when it comes to determining the factors responsible for the effectiveness of green narratives at the individual level is the theory of competitive altruism. This theory focuses on a typically pervasive behavior, that of virtue signaling, which has more recently been explored in the philosophical literature under the name moral grandstanding⁶.

The theory of competitive altruism is used by Mitchell & Ramey (2011) to outline a hypothesis about consumer adherence to green products, which in turn would arise due to the social sensitivity that individuals generally hold towards their peers. Mitchell & Ramey stress that social and anthropological factors underlie individuals' adherence to green narratives in general, many of which are merely symbolic. Therefore, when certain companies produce green narratives but lack a genuine alignment between their environmental commitment and their policies, regulations, or practices, they rely on the support of such mechanisms to meet their market goals.

Thus, according to Mitchell & Ramey's application of theory of competitive altruism, the elements accounting for SGN's effectiveness in being endorsed by their audiences are essentially anthropological and social.

While I grant Nyilasi et al that one of the elements explaining adherence to SGN is the individual's perception concerning the falsity of these narratives, I argue that SGN's success may falsely suggest that the role played by the individuals is restricted to the perception that they are potential victims of deception, leading them, as a result, to change their attitude accordingly. Put another way, overemphasizing the perception of falsity might lead one to believe that when perceived, the merely symbolic nature of a narrative *necessarily* produces in the individual a negative brand attitude, prompting the agent to boycott the green deceiver.

A more robust explanation of public adherence to SGN still seems to be needed, in particular, an explanation that accounts for cases that paradoxically result in *positive actions* of engagement *despite* the perception of their symbolic nature⁷. Although not explicitly stated, I believe that explaining how such narratives succeed is one of the goals of Mitchell & Ramey's approach resulting in the application of the theory of competitive altruism to greenwashing cases. This theory would explain why agents tend to undertake actions that display their positive engagement with narratives they perceive as deceptive. In particular, the performance of these actions is directly parasitic on the fact that "individuals selfishly tend to be perceived as altruistic because it elevates one's status, which in turn affords one benefits associated with the higher status" (Mittchel & Ramey, 2011, p. 42). However, while competitive altruism theory contains a thesis that seems to account for why agents endorse SGN *beyond the perception of intended deception*, the way it is framed leaves aside a critical aspect of agents' decision making when it comes to such issues. Namely, it overlooks the fact that such deeds may be pursued not just out of a need for external recognition, but also out of psychological coping mechanisms of self-affirmation.

In what follows, I take a similar path to the aforementioned scholars and offer a hypothesis about individual-level adherence to SGN. My hypothesis complements the theoretical lines I have just discussed in that it advances the following premises:

- (1) when it comes to green consumption, individuals' decision about engaging with SGN occurs within an ethical framework;
- (2) once in the ethical realm, actions stemming from such engagement (e.g. the consumption of symbolically green products or services, or the reproduction or validation of SGN) may be deemed as moral, immoral, or prudential, as they concern the agent's autonomous deliberation; and
- (3) in light of the perceived symbolic or deceptive aspect of these narratives, individuals' adherence is significantly influenced by first-person psychological, in addition to (third-person) anthropological and social aspects.

My goal is to draw close attention to psychological and morally informed aspects of an agent's decisions, in particular, how the practical identities of these agents shape their reasoning with regard to green narratives. A first step towards this will consist in understanding the main traces of human moral deliberation, notably how moral judgments are guided by practical principles.

SECTION 2. KANT'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Imagine a consumer who, out of environmental concerns, decides to stop buying single-use plastic products. Despite her urge to get those products, she suppresses her desire so that her action is consistent with her best judgment. For Kant, such an agent is subject to the power of elements that *necessitate*, i.e., constrain her will, in such a way that she feels compelled to carry out certain actions.

One might, however, wonder why someone *feels bound* to comply with it. Addressing this concern amounts to exploring the nature of what has been discussed under the name of *moral obligation*, which in turn permeates agents' reasoning when they deliberate about moral issues.

Drawing on the idea that as human beings, we have the capacity to act from the representation of laws, in what follows I elaborate on how Kant's concept of obligation captures this distinguishing feature of human nature.

2.1. NECESSITY, NECESSITATION AND MORAL OBLIGATION

In *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant states that whereas "everything in nature works according to laws" we, as rational natural beings, have "the capacity to act according to the representation of laws, i.e., according to principles, or a *will*." (GMS 4: 412).

With this, Kant wants to draw attention to the difference between, on the one hand, the way nature works and, on the other, the way beings that are not only natural, but also rational, act. A lion who kills a gazelle out of hunger is directly determined by sensible impulses, that is,

natural ones. Their “choice is not free, but necessitated by incentives and stimuli” (VE: 344). Human moral agency, on the other hand, is not *purely* a matter of a natural law because we are not only sensible, but also rational beings. Thus, our moral actions do not follow immediately from sensible stimuli, meaning that between our desire to eat the remains of animal corpses and the performance of such an action, there is room for deliberation.

Yet, assuming that when it comes to human moral agency there is a space for deliberation involves acknowledging that such deliberation is typically determined by factors that stem from our nature as *sensible* and *rational* human beings. Reflecting the duality of human nature, Kant calls these factors *laws of freedom*, i.e. laws that concern free human action, constraining it. Those are, as the concept itself emphasizes, free actions that are also marked by laws; laws that nevertheless do not imply natural necessity (such as in the case of natural laws) but rather necessitation [*Nötigung*].

Kant makes the relationship between *free action* and *necessitation* explicit in the opening sentence of the Introduction to his *Doctrine of Virtue*, where he maintains that “the very concept of duty is already the concept of necessitation (constraint) of a free choice through the law” (MS, 6: 380). To see what this means, we turn to the elucidated passage in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* where Kant defines *willing* as our ability to act in accordance with the representation of laws. This equivalency⁸ means that, for Kant, human will is oriented to change – and, in some sense, *to cause* – states of affairs in the world. In turn, being able to act from laws means that one’s actions are not mere movements arising from stimuli and sensible impulses, but rather byproducts of intentional forces, which point to precisely what must be taken into account if reason is to acquire a practical interest. As Kant points out,

[t]he human power of choice is indeed an *arbitrium sensitivum*, e yet not *brutum* but *liberum* because sensibility does not render its action necessary, but in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses. (KrV A534 / B562)

A lion (which has *arbitrium brutum*) does not choose to hunt its prey; it is instead immediately responsive to what is necessarily determined by its sensibility. Unlike a lion, human action is not *directly* determined by sensibility. Conversely, when morally worthy, human action can be carried out on purely rational principles.

To see why this is so, take Kant’s concept of incentive [*Triebfeder*]. For Kant, human action always involves incentives, because as human beings, we need incentives in order to be motivated to act. An incentive is, as Korsgaard (1996, p. 242) clearly puts it, a kind of “first-order impulse (...) to the performance of an action”. But to count as a motive for a certain action, incentives still need *principles*. According to Kant’s moral psychology, the principle behind our choices may ultimately be either rational, i.e., *duty* or material, i.e., *self-love*. Put another way, we say in the former case that an action is performed for the sake of duty, and in the latter, out of inclination [*Neigung*].

Such a view with regard to the principles of choice has two notable aspects. First, as said, that at bottom, all moral action is ultimately grounded on what is required by *either morality* (rational principle) *or self-interest* (material principle).

Only in the former case such an action bears moral worth. For example, one may resist the urge to buy single-use plastic products out of duty *or* out of inclination. If the agent's concern for the environment is what determines the action, her action was done from the motive of duty, thus bearing moral worth. In other words, her action has moral worth because the rational principle, i.e., her observance of what morality requires, is what caused her to decide to act in a way that curbs her inclination towards single-use plastic products. On the other hand, if one's action was merely performative, with an eye to, for example, making the agent appear to be more virtuous than she really is, then her action (although in accordance with duty) has no moral worth.

But what is wrong with an action being done out of inclinations? What if the effects of my actions are good, even though their determining motive is, for instance, my sympathy towards green issues? For Kant, for an action to have moral worth, it cannot have been performed out of material principles, because those are merely conditioned. It is conditioned, i.e., contingent, that I am an environmentally sympathetic person, as I could of course be a person who does not care about green issues⁹. Therefore, this cannot be the determining reason why I perform my action, if it is to have moral worth. Analogously, the moral worth of an action is unrelated to “the *effect* that is expected from [that action], nor therefore in any principle of action that needs to borrow its motivating ground from this expected effect” (GMS 4: 401) since such effects are similarly conditioned, meaning that they “could also have been brought about by other causes”. The moral worth of an action is closely tied, for Kant, to what is distinctive of a rational will, namely the ability to act according to the representation of laws and therefore from the sake of duty.

A second notable aspect with regard to the principles of choice is that principles are able to determine the will (and therefore one's deeds) only insofar as they are incorporated into actions as a result of one's free choice (REL 6: 24).

Thus, while we may often find our actions strongly driven by sensible impulses such as passions and other pathological emotions¹⁰, we can still act as morality requires. Yet, whatever incentives present to us, they only become the determining motive for the action after being incorporated in that action as a result of our self-determination. This means that an agent must render such an inclination as a part of the *principle* one gives to oneself. Thus, no matter how much one's action is naturally bound to sensible impulses, one must have incorporated those incentives into what one regards as the principle for which one acts. Such a self-imposed principle Kant calls a *maxim*. Agents that conform their actions to, say, environmental preservation, hold this practical rule as their maxim. This points to the fact that *human moral actions are principled*, meaning, they bear maxims¹¹.

Yet, maxims allow us to assess our actions. As was discussed earlier, as agents we act for reasons, that is, for inclinations we represent as sufficient motives for our actions, meaning that we *incorporate* certain inclinations into the maxims of our actions. In effect, as agents, we experience and act under the idea of freedom to the extent that freedom is imbued within the idea of agency. Not to consider oneself an agent amounts to not interacting with the world at all. Given that good actions, that is, actions with moral worth, are those performed from

duty, ensuring that interest in morality, i.e., duty, is the determining motive for that action is tantamount to confirming that we are on the right path to performing a good deed. Hence, the maxims of our actions allow us to evaluate whether or not our actions have moral worth. Stated another way, the maxims of our actions make it possible for agents to assess how they act in the world.

Of course, it is not the case that we should only act from maxims that allow moral assessment. It is true that a number of actions we perform do not have a moral dimension, and Kant himself calls attention to over-moralizing issues that do not merit moral consideration¹². However, once we genuinely acknowledge a topic as morally charged, we must seek to act out of duty, despite the strong tendency to act according to our inclinations.

Now, back to the concepts of law and necessitation. As such, our experience of free agency is essentially connected with the idea of laws. Laws give shape to this relationship. As Korsgaard (2009) emphasizes, they shape our daily actions. Norms defining one's "*do's and don't's*" within a social democracy, the parental demands regarding their children's education, and other sets of norms that we follow on a daily basis, define our social life by means of setting boundaries on our total freedom as individuals¹³.

However, sometimes,

we find ourselves doing what we think we ought to do, in the teeth of our reluctance, and even though nothing obvious forces us to do it. We toil out to vote in unpleasant weather, telephone relatives to whom we would prefer not to speak, attend suffocatingly boring meetings at work, and do all sorts of irksome things at the behest of our families and friends. (Korsgaard, 2009, pp. 2 - 3)

The examples outlined by Korsgaard suggest that many of our actions are carried out as the outcome of laws or commitments we set for ourselves. They are, in this sense, *internal*, and represent what an agent sets as *a norm or law for oneself*⁴.

Thus, saying that, for instance "one *ought* to x" illustrates a principle. This principle involves that our action can go one certain way, but not another, meaning that our action is constrained, i.e., necessitated. We identify the outcome of these constraints with what we refer to as *duties*. In this sense, the very concept of duty entails a constraint to our will. That is what obligation is based on: the concept of duty implies from the outset the idea that a will that suffers necessitation in its freedom is under obligation imposed by reason.

By extension, laws of freedom express duties that necessitate our will to perform actions that we would not have pursued if those norms were not posed. For example, when I refrain from getting a product I would like to have because it comes packaged in single-use plastic, there must be something compelling me to act in this way, since if it depended solely on my desire, I certainly would not do so.

Kant's account of obligation captures these features of our moral psychology. According to him, ethical norms are likely to be represented by us as commands or *imperatives*, which, in turn, necessitate our will. And here is where the distinguishing factor of the typically human moral experience lies: these norms count for sensible and rational beings like us. Only

human beings are capable of acting from the representation of laws, i.e., of understanding and acting on imperatives. Such imperatives place human beings under obligation, binding them by virtue of their (rational but at the same time sensible) nature. If we were merely rational beings, moral norms would not apply since our will would already conform to what is morally required. Conversely, when it comes to laws of nature, the idea of obligation does not seem to apply. One is not likely to claim that a lion *feels obligated* to hunt its prey, for what determines the occurrence of such a natural phenomenon is a cause-effect necessary relation. It is thus reasonable to claim that the idea of obligation amounts to a distinctive aspect of our moral experience. There is a sense in which we say that we are obligated to treat our fellow human beings respectfully, to look after people we love, to provide help when we are asked to do so, and so forth.

These distinctions shed light on the idea of moral obligation or, put differently, on what determines the sense of obligation we experience when dealing with particular circumstances. Once in the moral realm, we make decisions that not only involve laws, but depend on our distinctive way of apprehending and representing such norms.

In the next section I will argue that when it comes to SGN, the way we experience these obligations, namely a typically moral way, is a prominent and necessary factor in understanding what lies behind our endorsement of such narratives.

SECTION 3. EXPERIENCE AND MORAL OBLIGATION ON SYMBOLIC GREEN NARRATIVES

In broad terms, the aim of marketing strategies amounts to generating and maintaining competitive advantages through tactics geared towards satisfying the needs and wants of a target audience (Obermiller et al, 2008). Concurrently, manufacturing green narratives can be seen as one of such tactics, for they are designed to appeal to consumers' sense of obligation as a path to generating engagement.

The fact that consumers' sense of obligation is central to such narratives' success points to the ethical nature of the decisions and actions arising from them. However, from the fact that these narratives are *designed* to prompt a moral appeal, it does not follow that the decisions and actions concerning them have moral value from a Kantian perspective. This is because the correct motivation is crucial for moral value; the factors involved in the production of green strategies are not inherently associated with the decisions and actions that may eventually result from these narratives. In this sense, the presence of an element intrinsic to the decision-making process would be necessary to ensure that such actions and decisions are within the moral realm.

My aim in the next section is to introduce this element. I elaborate on the idea that decision-making about green narratives must be faced as a decision that encompasses a moral aspect in virtue of its normative character. I will show that once we focus on how market strategies are designed and performed by means of targeting a certain type of consumer, the essentially normative character of these decisions and actions emerges, a fact that emphasizes the sense by which *the way* these narratives are produced plays a heuristic role. I contend

that we may conclude that once perceived, these narratives connect with consumers' practical identities, producing moral obligations. In the last part of the section, I rewind to the idea of moral worth, and provide reasons why a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon must take into account a first-person perspective that embodies explanations about psychological aspects that may act as impediments in assessing our maxims. Finally, I discuss why failing to carry out such appraisals may raise problems.

3.1. THE ETHICS OF SYMBOLIC GREEN NARRATIVES

The emergence of ethical consumption and its prominence, particularly in recent decades, has led companies to pursue green marketing strategies. In general, market strategies are devised based on data concerning the attitude and consumption patterns of a certain group of consumers; in the case of green strategies, the targets are green or ethical consumers.

While not coextensive,¹⁵ ethical and green consumption are often addressed simultaneously. Both refer to the behavior of “people who are influenced by environmental or ethical considerations when choosing products and services” (Crowe & Simon, 2000, p. 04)¹⁶. It is thus possible to make the general claim that ethical or green agents are those whose decision-making incorporates environmental and social considerations. This means that the actions resulting from these agents' decision-making processes are determined by certain considerations, and that in most cases they would be different if their agents had not taken such considerations into account. For example, ethical consumers do pay more for products or services that are explicitly consistent (as an instance, via labeling¹⁷) with their moral commitments (Hainmueller, et al, 2015; Hertel et al. 2009); in the absence of moral commitments, the same consumers would arguably have responded differently towards ethical branding. In other words, green agents' environmental and social concerns are a defining component of their actions and decisions concerning green narratives.

Now, in the environmental and social marketing literature the fact that these concerns may in turn be defined in normative terms remains underexplored, as the literature on those fields seeks to be descriptive. Thus, the claim that green consumers make their decisions out of social and environmental concerns is, now in moral terms, equivalent to the idea that the considerations green agents incorporate when it comes to social and environmental issues *necessitates* their will, meaning that their decisions are constrained by norms or laws they set for themselves. Thus, the stance of deciding whether to engage with such narratives, added to the necessitation generated by the attitude towards green or ethical issues, pushes the phenomenon to the ethical sphere.

To achieve a better understanding of this normative element, it may be helpful to, once again, turn to some ideas concerning our typical moral experience, now through Korsgaard's theory of practical identity.

As said, Korsgaard argues that the necessitation we experience in cases such as decision-making on green issues results from duties we set for ourselves. Her agential identity theory draws on Kant's moral psychology to claim that setting duties for oneself is closely connected

with one's practical identity¹⁸. According to Korsgaard (1996, p. 101), the conception of one's practical identity refers to "a description under which you value yourself and find your life worth living and your actions worth undertaking". It involves an agent endorsing the set of obligations attached to a certain way of identifying oneself (Korsgaard, 2009, pp. 22 - 25).

While Korsgaard concentrates on demonstrating how agency and self-constitution are co-extensive, we do not need to endorse her argument to see that as a matter of fact, our identities are often the sources of obligation, by means of making claims on our actions¹⁹. One whose practical identity comprises the conception of a benevolent person, for example, does not perform actions that involve taking advantage of other people. Similarly, a person who portrays herself as an environmentalist, that is, someone whose environmental protection is incorporated into her practical identity, must refrain from contributing to environmental degradation.²⁰

Our practical identities are, for Korsgaard, merely contingent²¹. We acquire certain practical identities because we are situated in certain places, because we play certain social roles, or because we experience certain situations. They amount to the way *we regard ourselves* and, in many cases, result in obligations we deem as unconditional, that is, obligations whose violation makes us feel as if we are losing our integrity (1996, p. 102).

There is a form of identity upholding our practical and contingent identities viz., the moral identity. It is nevertheless necessary and therefore, once assumed, a normative source of moral obligations that are likewise necessary. To have a moral identity is for Korsgaard (1996, p. 121, my emphasis "to value yourself *just as a human being*").²²

Now, our relationship to our practical identities is, according to Korsgaard, a construct. For her, "every time you decide to act in a way that conforms to your practical identity, you count as re-endorsing that form of identity and making it your own" (2011, p. 09). As such, we can always give up our practical identities and we do so when, for example, we decide to overlook the obligations they generate. However,

so long as you remain committed to a role, and yet fail to meet the obligations it generates, you fail yourself as a human being, as well as failing in that role. And if you fail in all of your roles - if you live at random, without integrity or principle, then you will lose your grip on yourself as one who has any reason to live and to act at all. (KORSGAARD, 1996, p. 121)

This joint failure occurs because of the relationship between practical and moral identities. Our practical identities acquire normative force because of the requirements of our humanity, that is, to the extent that assuming certain practical identities is part of our constitution as beings who value themselves as human beings.

From this, it is rendered explicit that normativity makes up our moral experience. As rational yet sensitive human beings, our will is free to the extent that our actions do not necessarily result from our inclinations. A person who desires to eat meat but regards herself as an environmentalist may wish to engage with SGN, purchasing and consuming, say, "fair meat"; as her will is necessitated by the obligation arising from her practical identity, the

possibility that her deed results from something other than a necessary cause of her desire to eat meat (which happens in the epitomized case of the lion that kills the gazelle) opens up.

The contrast between necessity and necessitation (or more accurately, this fact about our moral nature) is precisely what is at stake with regard to decision-making overall, and especially, with decisions within the moral realm. Chief among these actions are those that result from agents' decisions whether to engage with green narratives that are perceived as symbolic. Once these agents perceive the symbolic character of such narratives, they often ask themselves "What should I do now?" or "What is the best deed in such a scenario?", which in addition to emphasizing that their will is undergoing necessitation, points to the fact that their decision lies in the moral realm.

From what has been discussed, it is possible to evince that, in the context of green narratives, the individual decision process on whether to engage with such narratives is ethical *par excellence*, as the individuals' sense of obligation is triggered by virtue of the normative nature of the issues that emerge from their practical identities.

Additionally, it is worth noting that understanding how marketing strategies that focus on these individuals assists us towards *clarifying* that the decision-making process regarding SGN has an ethical character. As mentioned, green strategies are designed from investigation into the behavioral and attitudinal profile of the consumers to be reached. That granted, take as illustration the increasingly adopted strategy of labeling products as "fair", which reflects the market demand known today as "fair trade", a form of ethical consumption associated with economic and environmental justice²³, as well as animal welfare (Annunziata, 2011). Over the last few decades this terminology has also been used to stress that a product is fair by virtue of one or more (but seldom all) aspects of its supply chain. As an individual who regards the concept of "fair" among the descriptions under which one values oneself in the sense outlined, an agent may feel compelled to engage in a particular way when confronted with SGN. One might for instance decide to consume "fair meat" or, once aware of its merely symbolic character, to boycott this product or brand. The use of an ethical concept such as "fairness" as a green marketing strategy allows us to see that what drives such strategies is precisely the fact that their effectiveness is inscribed in the ethical field. This is the reason why *the way* SGN are produced is relevant, namely, to point towards helping us to better grasp such narratives' normative aspect.

However, SGN manufactured as targeting green/ethical consumers do not always succeed in reaching that audience. That leaves room for cases of collateral consumers, i.e. individuals who end up engaging with such narratives arbitrarily or for essentially contingent reasons, e.g. ignorance or lack of interest. One could argue that the Kantian moral theorizing I bring up here does not succeed in explaining cases of collateral consumers, because for cases like these, it is hard to see how moral motivation could be involved. However, Kantian theory does also allow us to assess collateral consumers' endorsement deeds. Especially, it allows us to see that, *grosso modo*, collateral consumers will not act on these considerations *because* the essential component of green narratives, i.e., the environmental one, does not create obligation in them.²⁴ They may endorse SGN *despite* the fact that those narratives are green.

The fact that moral motivation results from obligation also helps us to understand the apathy of such agents toward green issues, as for when green narratives do generate obligation, consumers tend to feel motivated to perform actions incorporating ethical/green considerations.

For example, I may buy a recycled packaged product and decide not to share this product on social media, once I have learned that it is greenwashed. In the first moment, I endorse, i.e., positively engage with a narrative that portrays a certain product as green. In the second, upon learning that the product is greenwashed, I decide not to platform it, therefore engaging negatively. In both cases, my sense of obligation - in particular, moral obligation with regard to an ethical issue - motivates me to pursue certain courses of action.

Agents' personal identities certainly generate moral obligations, duties as well as inclinations. However, endorsing green narratives must ultimately result from one's own choice to take these obligations as a source of reason to act upon. Thus, following the example, as a person who regards oneself as an environmentalist, one may acknowledge one's duty not to platform a product whose greenwashing is perceived. However, the relationship between representing something as my duty and my actual deed is not a relation of necessity. This means that despite the motivation this duty generates on me, I can still deliberate and act differently, for example by sharing the greenwashed product on social media.

This denotes the importance of the agent's intentionality in *choosing to engage* with certain narratives, which in turn further reinforces the line that divides such behavior (disinterested or apathetic) from the ethical one.

To sum up, while the fact that narratives designed to work in an ethical framework produce decisions and actions of (positive or negative) engagement inscribed precisely in this framework is not surprising, it can still be misleading. Accepting that *x* is ethical because it is designed to prompt ethical responses does not sufficiently account for the fact that these responses are necessarily ethical. Inscribing actions of endorsement or engagement in the ethical field further depends on elements *internal* to those actions. When we make decisions based on the specific practical identity's conception targeted by green narratives, we bring out this internal element: the normative character our experience acquires when faced with such narratives. Engagement with green issues depends on the moral obligation generated by such narratives; only then are they able to motivate us to pursue actions that incorporate green considerations. Therefore, although the external element does not guarantee that these narratives take place within an ethical framework, it is (through the idea of target audience and thus of practical identity) a key heuristic piece to elucidate the ethical nature of decision-making regarding SGN.

3.2. MORAL DENIAL AND SELF-DECEPTION

Actions stemming from their agents' sense of obligation are actions within the moral field. But that is not to say that they are actions with moral worth in the (Kantian) sense sought above²⁵.

When an agent engages with green narratives, her deed bears moral worth only insofar as it premises the compliance with and respect for the obligation posed. As discussed, an action has moral worth when performed *out of duty*. In contrast, actions that merely conform to duty or go against it bear no moral worth; for an action to have moral worth, the agent's will must be necessitated, restricting sensible impulses, and rendering duty the determining motive of the action.

To elucidate the idea of moral worth, take as illustration the behavior of an agent faced with a SGN, for example, a product labeled as "fair meat". As an ethical consumer, this agent tends to ask herself "what should I do in this situation?", and despite the perception of the merely symbolic aspect, she may decide to endorse it. In light of her awareness that its production inevitably violates ethical and environmental principles, she may decide to purchase the product despite uncertainty as to the validity of attributing "fair" to "meat". As an individual whose conception of practical identity incorporates environmental considerations, she violates the duties and obligations engendered by her practical identity. In Kantian terms, this amounts to saying that she violates moral requirements. Thus, despite awareness of these requirements, that agent allows her will to be determined by *something other than duty*. Her motivation seems to be rooted in the fact that she desires the benefits associated with that product²⁶ in such a way that the pursuit of those perceived benefits drives her behavior. Consequently, by violating moral requirements, her action lacks moral worth. Therefore, when her desire to consume "fair meat" overrides what she acknowledges as her duty, or put another way, the moral demands set upon her practical identity, then she acts out of self-love²⁷.

As such, overall, actions performed out of self-love and despite the agent's acknowledgement that these actions violate their moral requirements, at the same time infringe upon these agents' practical identities.

Now, violating one's conception of practical identity in turn yields a threat to one's moral integrity. Take again the case of green or ethical consumers by imagining that a green consumer regularly breaches the requirements and duties engendered by her identity. As a result of a reflexive process (Powers, 1973), and because such violations are associated with negative self-attributions (Giner-Sorolla, 2001; Kivetz & Zheng, 2006), that individual tends to challenge the validity of her subsumption to such a practical identity's conception. Since that identity is an aspect of one's self (insofar as it represents a description whose value is initially attributed by the individual oneself), its violation simultaneously amounts to a threat to one's own integrity²⁸.

This idea is consistent with contemporary theories of personal identity, which define and typify the conflicts arising from the discrepancy between actions and thoughts, in particular between agents' behavior and what they think about their own identity (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Stets & Burke, 2000). Following the framework, I am outlining here, this is to say that these conflicts emerge from the lack of agreement between actions and decision-making on the one hand and moral requirements on the other.

Now, we can grant that in the context of green symbolic narratives, one may resolve this conflict by means of simply *abandoning* what generates the moral obligation, i.e. a certain conception of one's practical identity. Examples include cases in which individuals forego a plant-based diet on the grounds that the costs associated with that value are too high.

Yet a different path to address this conflict, or rather to cope with the resulting dissonance, depends on the agent's choice to *preserve* the conception of practical identity that leads to the dissonance. Should the agent preserve such a conception while respecting the moral demands it entails, the dissonance dissolves. Conversely, it becomes problematic once that agent chooses to preserve a certain conception of her practical identity *despite* the competing demands it engenders²⁹. Upholding a conception of a practical identity amounts to meeting the obligations that such an identity prompts; doing so while engaging in actions that *violate* that very conception is akin to having the cake and eating it too.

It is within this context of discomfort produced by the lack of consistency between one's actions and obligations that psychological mechanisms of self-preservation emerge. Strategies such as rationalization, wishful thinking and self-deception, are coping mechanisms that aim to preserve the agent's moral unity by reducing the cognitive dissonance entailed by the inconsistency between the awareness of nature and the performance of immoral deeds.

However, despite the typified advantages,³⁰ such strategies hold potential harm. They can play a critical role in distorting one's moral reality, as they can make immoral deeds look like permissible deeds that would otherwise be disallowed.

These phenomena are discussed by Kant under the label of rationalization or self-deception. Moral rationalization or self-deception³¹ is, according to Kant, a form of lie (inner lie) that we tell ourselves for exculpatory intent.

For deeds endorsing SGN, we frequently deceive ourselves in order to preserve our moral integrity. There are different ways of engaging in self-deception, and some of them are discussed by Kant throughout his moral writings. For instance, we deceive ourselves once (after having acknowledged a moral imperative) we create exceptions for ourselves with a view to rendering permissible a deed initially disallowed by that imperative (GMS 4:242)³².

Another instance of self-deception that Kant addresses in his moral theory concerns its epistemic aspect. This form of self-deception emerges once one distracts oneself, i.e., deflects attention from aspects that otherwise would count as morally relevant to the decision whether to engage in a certain action.

Take for instance a green agent who positively engages with a "fair meat" narrative while perceiving its purely symbolic character. Suppose that she motivates her decision on the idea of *preference*, meaning that, for her, this issue is allegedly purely aesthetic such that the decision regarding whether to engage with such a narrative does not require moral scrutiny. Yet, as a green agent, she is aware of the conflict emerging from the deed she is about to perform. It may be that she is provided with information on the impact of meat production upon the rainforest, on the sheer amount of water required to produce 1kg of meat, or data on greenhouse gas emissions related to the livestock industry, and so on. To successfully alleviate discomfort, such

information needs to be suppressed. Focusing on the aesthetic aspect in order to take the issue out of the moral arena, ignoring or selectively interpreting information that points to the moral framework are some strategies agents usually employ to ensure this success. What these moral-epistemic strategies have in common is that self-deception seems pervasive in all of them.

For Kant, this behavior is blameworthy because self-deception renders the agent who performs it incapable of truthfulness regarding one's assessment of that discrete maxim, as well as of one's moral character. By intentionally manipulating the truth, the agent harms her idea of herself as a truthful person. Ultimately, what is at stake here is the agent's interdiction with regard to the proper use of her practical reason³³. This is why Kant, in describing self-deception, does so in contrast to external lying, for both violate the principle of truthfulness.^{34,35}

Now take the behavior of virtue signaling, a typically others-oriented behavior that has been extensively addressed in the literature.³⁶ Agents signal virtue once they provide positive moral information on their alleged virtue to people whom they would like to believe that information. Virtue signaling behavior can be genuine, but it can also be merely symbolic. In the latter case, the information an agent provides to one's peers is *misleading*.³⁷ In this case, it can be construed as an external lie one tells others concerning one's own moral characteristics.

As discussed, competitive altruism theory avails virtue signaling to account for instances of behavior from which actions of engagement with symbolic green narratives are instantiated. Nonetheless, the way competitive altruism theory is typically rendered when it comes to explaining endorsement of narratives such as greenwashing, overlooks an aspect that has recently been shown to be pervasive when it comes to actions within the moral field, which is *self-signaling*.

Parallel to external lying (virtue-signaling), self-signaling can be understood as a lie an agent tells *oneself*, a form of self-deception, or in Kant's terminology, an inner lie. Self-signaling, i.e., the behavior of signaling virtue *to oneself* is, in this sense, analogous to self-deception broadly construed, and, interestingly, to the moral entendre under which Kant's account of the phenomenon is inscribed. Only agents who have some interest (even merely performative) in morality wish to be virtuous.³⁸ Moreover, it seems that virtue-signaling may at the same time embody self-signaling: by signaling virtue to others, an agent *reinforces* her assessment regarding her own moral traits.

In his account of deception in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant gives priority to self-deception over external lying. For him, external lying necessarily runs through a deception of the agent against oneself. In deceiving the other and thus, in making impossible the proper use of other's moral capacities, the agent violates one's own practical reason. These are reasons why immoral actions in general, and actions embodying deception in particular are regarded by Kant as irrational. Such actions imply that the agent is not making proper use of her practical reason insofar as she fails to enact the reasons produced by the rational process. Her rational process is flawed insofar as she fails to take into account the norms of evidence formation, for instance, by shifting focus away from the moral aspect of the information that constructs her beliefs (Papish, 2018)³⁹.

Those familiar with Kant's account of lying in a superficial sense characteristically assume that for Kant, lying is inherently wrong because it (1) amounts to a misuse of one's status as an end in itself while at the same time (2) threatens the possibility of making promises. In the latter sense, an agent who promises falsely precludes the existence of that speech act in a world where falsely promising is a universal maxim. However, this is not the moral problem posed by lying. Lying is morally troublesome because it amounts to the causal manipulation of another's will.⁴⁰ By lying, an agent prevents the deceived person from accessing the reasons that ultimately justify her own action, which in turn incorporates into her action (and thus into her practical reasoning) the result of the deceiving agent's maxim. This shared structure between deceiver and deceived is clearly vicious, for it leads the one who receives the lie to generate a maxim lacking a complete justification.

That said, drawing the parallel between virtue-signaling and lying becomes inescapable. In the same way that virtue-signaling can be regarded as a form of external lying, moral self-signaling is a form of self-deception, that is, an internal lie that we tell ourselves, preventing us from truly accessing and being able to evaluate our practical reasoning.

Insofar as it obscures the exercise of practical reason, self-deception is bound to have negative consequences for the agent who rationalizes away all discomfort caused by the perception of the potential immorality of her actions.

Self-deception can also lead to cognitive losses, such as emotional desensitization (Garrett et al, 2016), and may furthermore decrease the ability of self-deceived agents to successfully pursue informed rational judgements, which can in turn lead to less accurate predictions (Chance et al, 2011). In terms of moral capacities, self-deception is especially pernicious, as it subjects the agent to a distorted view of moral reality. This is problematic because, given the relevance of ethical considerations in consumer decision-making overall (Chowdhury, 2017; Martinez & Jaeger, 2016), self-deception precludes the most critical tool to combat deception promoted by companies making use of green strategies: moral education.

Moral education, for Kant, is an essential tool not only for the pursuit of virtue⁴¹, but also for the formation of a moral community of responsible agents. Without the ability to define and pursue ends, to form informed rational judgements, and to assess one's actions and character, no moral practice is possible. In addition, the absence of moral knowledge precludes moral education and, as a result, the formation of such a moral community is jeopardized.

Most importantly, self-deception represents a critical risk for the very exercise of morality. This is one of Kant's most central contentions in the *Doctrine of Virtue* (MS 6:429 - 431). Along with external deception, self-deception corrupts the ability agents have to use the capacity from which their personality is derived, namely, the ability to properly use practical reason. Both lying and self-deception manipulate the will of the deceived subject, obscuring and preventing the agent from acting from duty. Analogously, actions whose maxim is signaling to oneself one's own supposed virtue pose a similar risk.

In the context of ethical agents' decision-making in regard to SGN, self-signaling renders unnecessary any scrutiny that might eventually lead agents to care more than symbolically

about morality. Moreover, by signaling their virtue to others these agents flag to themselves an alleged conformity to their practical identities in a process of self-deception that may in turn lead them to fail to enact the reasons why they embraced such identities in the first place.

CONCLUSION

From what has been said above, the reasons why it is important for an agent to be able to evaluate one's maxims emerge. By assessing maxims, agents are able to ascertain the conformity between their actions and the practical identities they have embraced. Moreover, they are able to ascertain whether discrete actions conform to what morality requires, that is, whether they have moral worth or, put another way, whether such actions conform to one's moral identity. In this regard, evaluating maxims is especially important because we cannot guarantee that the practical identities we adopt will necessarily generate morally worthy or nonconflicting obligations. That is to say that given the contingent character of whatever practical identities we adopt, one might conceivably adopt identities such as that of an egoist or a mafioso, which in turn would generate obligations accordingly⁴². In this scenario, the process of evaluating maxims is critical to ultimately bringing agents that hold immoral forms of self-identification back into morality⁴³.

Of course, self-deception itself threatens our ability to assess our maxims, another reason why it is dangerous and must be opposed. However, being aware of the existence and the workings of this and other psychological strategies is, paradoxically, the best we have when it comes to produce quality reflexive processes that result in truthful evaluations, to pursue morally worthy actions, as well as to embrace practical identities that are genuinely committed to morality.

In sum, akin to virtue signaling, the self-deception involved in self-signaling is a reinforcing attitude, closely related to the perception and moral assessment an agent makes about oneself. One's view about oneself, about one's own moral identity, and ultimately about one's very interest in morality, make SGN so powerful. Part of their success depends on whether psychological mechanisms aimed at preserving the agent's moral integrity such as self-deception are operational.

This comes to the fore when we approach the problem of adherence to green narratives from a moral standpoint. Lacking moral literacy that ensures quality in forming and assessing the moral judgments underpinning one's decisions and actions, one's practical identities (despite being shaped as a means of providing us guidance in the moral terrain) tend to paradoxically fulfill the very opposite role. They may function as shields of self-deception, hindering the agent's access to one's own maxims, character and will.

Kant's moral psychology allows us to ascertain the underlying reasons as to why this is worrisome, but most importantly, it provides us with elements to delve beyond the virtue signaling broadly construed. These elements not only disclose the normative aspect of decisions surrounding green issues, but also reveal the ethical nuances and the psychological aspects that

lie at the heart of our behavior towards narratives we adhere to in spite of acknowledging them as deceptive.

Abstract. Why do agents, who consider themselves ethical or green consumers, endorse green narratives they acknowledge to be deceptive? In this paper I draw on Kant's moral psychology to propose a conceptual framework that provides us with elements to explain individual-level adherence to symbolic green narratives (SGN). From a theoretical perspective, I show how Kant's moral psychology provides insights consistent with the state of the art in contemporary social psychology regarding why green consumers fail to enact their best judgment when it comes to endorsing such narratives. My approach is complementary to other theories in arguing that many of our actions in the moral field, and particularly actions and decisions concerning green narratives, are typically pursued aiming not merely at virtue signaling but also at *self-affirmation* concerning one's own virtue.

Keywords: symbolic green narratives; moral psychology; practical identity; virtue-signaling; self-deception.

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NOTAS / NOTES

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² Claims that moral reasons offer no rationale for acting. A notable example of claiming that phenomena such as those discussed here should not be analyzed from an ethics framework, see Moeller, H. G., 2009. Although Moeller does not claim to be an amoralist himself, he does attack the main idea behind my argument, i.e., that ethics is a possible or desirable way to address contemporary quandaries.

³ Contemporary literature has generally approached these narratives under the label of *greenwashing*. See also note 04 below.

⁴ In line with the terminology coined by Bowen, F. (2014), I will accordingly employ the concept of symbolic green narratives to delineate all kinds of intentionally produced discourse seeking to mislead the public about practical commitment or involvement toward environmentally related issues, making it appear that this company, good, or service appears more sustainable than it actually is.

- ⁵ The increasing pervasiveness of misleading environmental communication is reviewed by Lyon, T. P & Montgomery, A. W. (2015). For a critical approach to the phenomenon, see Maxwell, R. & Miller, T. (2017).
- ⁶ The concept of moral grandstanding is defined by Tosi & Warmke (2016, p. 200) as involving the desire “that other people recognize her as morally respectable.” In this regard, see also Blackford, R., 2021.
- ⁷ Put in terms of greenwashing: when perceived, greenwashing results in negative attitudes towards those who produce it (Zhang et al, 2018). Thus, for cases where even if perceived, greenwashing maintains its success in deception, it is still necessary that the factors responsible for this success be determined.
- ⁸ Which ultimately refers to the equivalence between will and practical reason. See *GMS* 4: 412.
- ⁹ Kant’s illustrious example of the philanthropist (*GMS* 4: 398) is widely used in the literature when it comes to these distinctions. It deals with a person with a sympathetic temperament - whose compassionate action finds intimate pleasure in performing benevolent actions.
- ¹⁰ Cases of *practical akrasia* (weakness of the will i.e., the performance of deeds against our best judgment), highlight the interference our sensible impulses have on our decisions about what we have most reason to do.
- ¹¹ The concept of a maxim is not widely discussed by Kant, for there was at Kant’s time a certain consensus about its meaning. For a broader understanding regarding the concept of maxims, in particular *practical maxims*, see Kitcheer, P, 2003. She addresses, among other relevant aspects, the apparent contradiction that arises in Kant’s writings as he considers maxims as bearers of moral worth, other accounts on this concept, as well as the understanding of traditions preceding his ethics.
- ¹² Cf *MS*: 409. Kant calls “fantastically virtuous” one who is overly concerned with non-moral details, such as “whether I eat meat or fish”, an example that is however, easily moral, since it involves taking the lives of sentient beings who have an interest in their existence.
- ¹³ In this sense, such norms refer to more abstract ideas and goals, that is, values that guide human behavior and the way individuals assess it.
- ¹⁴ Human freedom can also be hindered by *external*, i.e., juridical or legal laws. Both sorts of duties (internal or external) are capable of imposing norms that necessitate, i.e., create restrictions or constraints on human will.
- ¹⁵ See Sho & Krasser, 2001.
- ¹⁶ Crowe & Simon (2000, p. 04) emphasize that the term ‘ethical’ covers “matters of conscience such as animal welfare and fair trade, social aspects such as labor standards, as well as more self-interested health concerns behind the growth of organic food sales.”
- ¹⁷ Empirical evidence suggests a positive correlation of ecolabelling on consumer purchasing behavior. Teisl et al (2002) highlight this correlation based upon evidence of the impact of the introduction of the ‘dolphin-safe label’ in tuna retail sales. More recently, Dhir et al (2021) found that labeling satisfaction is one of the main drivers of green consumption in the context of apparel.
- ¹⁸ More specifically, she expands Kant’s theory by arguing that practical identities determine moral agents’ choices just as, in Kant’s view, moral principles do.
- ¹⁹ Korsgaard’s notion of practical identity holds a prominently social dimension, since, as she summarizes (2009, p. 20) it includes “roles and relationships, citizenship, membership in ethnic groups, causes, vocations, professions and offices.” It is, in this sense, consistent with empirical evidence about the salience of these social roles and interactions in our moral judgements. In this respect, see Hamilton & Sanders, 1981; Kaspar et al, 2016; and Willemsen et al, 2018.
- ²⁰ Studies on environmental self-identity (Van der Werff et al, 2013) support this idea by showing that there is a positive correlation between environmental self-identity and pro-environmental actions.
- ²¹ There is a form of practical identity that is nevertheless necessary and therefore, once assumed, a normative source of moral obligations that are likewise necessary, viz., the moral identity. To have a moral identity is for Korsgaard (1996, p. 121) “to value yourself just as a human being”, or “valuing humanity in your own person rationally”, which in turn also implies valuing humanity in the other person’s rationality.
- ²² To bear a moral identity amounts to “valuing humanity in your own person rationally” (*ibidem*) which in turn also implies valuing humanity in the other person’s rationality.
- ²³ Overall, fair trade initiatives are committed to challenging “the ecologically and socially exploitative relations” (Schreck, 2002, p. 13) characteristic of industrial production systems, in order to “provide consumers with a guarantee that products are grown by disadvantaged producers *under healthy social and environmental conditions*” (*ibidem*).

²⁴ In terms of marketing strategies, that would be analogous to targeting a shampoo campaign at bald consumers. The theory I outline here maps the behavior of these people to the same extent that the theory of competitive altruism maps the behavior of people who truly don't care about being perceived as non-virtuous, non-altruistic or non-empathic.

²⁵ See section 2.2.

²⁶ Benefits typically perceived by meat eaters are, for example, aesthetic - related to the taste of the meat (Piazza et al, 2015), social - related to the social impact within gendered food consumption ideologies (Adams, 2018; 2007), socio-environmental - aiming at achieving acknowledgement of ecological virtues by her peers, etc.

²⁷ It is to be noted that one does not have to fully endorse a course of action in order to pursue it. Examples are cases of akratic actions, i. e. those one pursues despite the awareness that they violate one's moral requirements.

²⁸ Cf. Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 100 -102.

²⁹ There are multiple reasons why an individual may want to preserve practical identities whose demands are not wholly in agreement with his or her desires. Because they are understood and assessed within cultural contexts, those reasons are typically associated with the social sphere, but they are correspondingly often related to those individuals' self-perceptions. Kant acknowledges the importance of the social sphere in the context of demonstrating virtue. For example, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (6: 27), he describes what he calls a predisposition to humanity as a predisposition to "gain worth in the opinion of others," which can become a vice to the extent that the agent comes to desire "superiority for oneself over others."

³⁰ Such as avoiding pain, stress and anxiety generated by the threat to integrity (Goleman, 1985; Smith, 2004).

³¹ I take both terms as coextensive. For a background on the term rationalizing [*Vernünfteln*] in Kant's theory, see Sticker, M. 2021, pp. 08 – 17. For a discussion on the placement of *self-deception* in Kant's work, see Papish, L., 2018, pp. 68 – 69.

³² Instances of such behavior are individuals who classify themselves as vegetarians but violate the dietary requirements for self-attribution of that identity. For an empirical investigation of the factors leading to such dietary violations, see *Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2019*. Through a qualitative study, they address the ways in which meat-eating vegetarians cognitively cope with dietary violations, emphasizing the *post-hoc* justifications following from that behavior.

³³ I will get back to this issue later when I discuss the priority of self-deception over external lying.

³⁴ I discuss the relationship between external lying and self-deception elsewhere (AUTHOR, year). In AUTHOR (forthcoming), I argue for the centrality of the duty of truthfulness within Kant's ethical writings.

³⁵ This principle is central to Kant's account of duties that an agent has towards oneself because (among other reasons), the agent's moral improvement depends on it.

³⁶ The practice of virtue signaling is not a practice restricted to individuals. Companies may also engage in virtue signaling (Berthon et al, 2021). As a matter of fact, business models conveying positive signaling stand out due to their potential to improve companies' green credentials (Attah-Boakye et al, 2022).

³⁷ It is worth noting that here the idea of lie does not concern the negative sense of truth by equivalence, that is, it does not necessarily involve verisimilitude. Instead, a lying proposition is one that fails to carry truthfulness. Accordingly, what is relevant here, is that the agent *acknowledges* certain content as misleading.

³⁸ Such a fact is crucial for the emergence of moral self-signaling and it is even more evident when it comes to cases of *virtue* signaling. This is additionally consistent with Kant's views on rational interests. As Sticker, (2021, p. 30) emphasizes, a rational interest that would function as an incentive for moral actions would be the rational interest an agent has to feel rationally justified. This interest, he claims, "is rooted in an agent's acknowledgement of the authority of duty", that is, in morality.

³⁹ In the third chapter of her book, Papish highlights the aspect of rationalizations that concerns the violation of belief formation norms. Once an agent is unable to contradict what she is already aware of, she may resort to psychological strategies to shift her attention to cognitions that are more attractive to her.

⁴⁰ I follow, in this regard, the interpretation outlined by Herman, B., 2022.

⁴¹ MS 6: 477

⁴² This is assumed by Korsgaard as being part of her first-person normative perspective, according to which moral obligations are generated from what *the agent herself* takes to be normative. For the critique about immoral practical identities, see Cohen, 1996, pp. 183 - 187. For Korsgaard's response in this regard, see Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 254 - 258.

⁴³ The precise process of how this is carried out is described by Korsgaard under the name *reflective endorsement*. Drawing on Kant, she maintains that the test of reflective endorsement is precisely the method "used by actual moral agents to establish the normativity of all their particular motives and inclinations (...) [It] is not merely a way of justifying morality. *It is morality itself*". For her argument in this regard, see Korsgaard, 1996, chapter 03: *The Authority of Reflection*.

