

## Childhood, Agency, and Paternalism: A Montessori Solution to a Kantian Problem

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Kant has a problem when it comes to ethics and children.<sup>1</sup> Kant's ethic is rooted in respect for the humanity of others, and Kant seems to make a sharp distinction between two radically different kinds of beings: those that have "dignity" by virtue of having "humanity," and everything else, which has mere "price." To have humanity is, at a minimum, to have a will of one's own, to be an independent chooser.<sup>2</sup> And to respect the humanity of others is, at a minimum, to avoid interfering with that will through coercion or deception. But while children seem worthy of something more than mere price, various forms of paternalism – discipline, coerced behavior, ignoring their expressed choices, and so on – seem justified towards them. While paternalism generally implies disrespect for the dignity of adult human beings, it seems justified in the context of children.<sup>3</sup>

There are, in broad terms, two ways of dealing with this apparent conflict between everyday attitudes towards children and the apparent implications of Kant's ethical theory. The first is to enrich Kant's ethical theory with concepts and principles that explain why paternalistic attitudes towards children are justified. This approach is hinted at in Kant himself (see e.g. MS 6:281, P 9:441,483<sup>4</sup>) and is

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Herman has noted that "Kantian moral theory does not seem to provide a comfortable environment for thinking about children" (Herman 2007:130), but the problem – as I suggest here (and see too Schapiro 1999) – is deeper than that.

<sup>2</sup> There is considerable debate about how much more than this is required for "humanity" in the Kantian sense, ranging from Christine Korsgaard's suggestion that it be equated with having a will of one's own (Korsgaard 1996) to Richard Dean's recent claim (Dean 2006) that it requires that one have a *good* will. For my view about this issue, see (Author 2007).

Note too that in focusing on the role of having a will "of one's own" for being worthy of Kantian respect, I am *not* interested in the descriptive or predictive functions of this notion of ownership. Thus, I don't share Sayre-McCord and Smith's interest in a conception of desires (and beliefs) "of one's own" that can explain how "central aspects of who we are, aspects that shape what and why we do what we do, may nonetheless be features of ourselves of which we disapprove" (Sayre-McCord and Smith, forthcoming: 2). While there is value to a conception of self that allows for such a notion of desires "of one's own," the sense of ownership relevant to respect for one's humanity is that practical conception of ownership according to which a desire (or will, or probably even belief) of my own is one that I, at the very least, do not reflectively *reject* (though, as I will argue, I need not reflectively *endorse* it).

<sup>3</sup> This issue is closely related to the issues such as whether children can have rights and, if so, what kind and on what basis. For discussion, see Cohen 1980, O'Neill 1989, Purdy 1992, Sumner 1987 (e.g. p. 203), and several of the essays in Archard and MacLeod 2002.

<sup>4</sup> For references to Kant, I use the standard method of referring to the volume and page numbers in the *Akademie Ausgabe* (1902–), which numbers are also listed as marginal in the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge University Press, 1992–). I abbreviate his major works as follows:

A – *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. R. Louden in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. R. Louden and G. Zöller, Cambridge University Press: 2007.

G – *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

KpV – *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. M. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

KU – *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge University Press: 2001.

MS – *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

R – *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* trans. G. diGiovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press: 2001.

taken in a variety of different ways by many contemporary Kantians (most notably Barbara Herman and Tamar Schapiro).<sup>5</sup> Schapiro lays out the project particularly clearly:

The philosophical task is to . . . explain more clearly the sense in which children are undeveloped and the reason why their lack of development is significant from a moral point of view [and in particular,] . . . why children are proper objects of paternalistic treatment. (Schapiro 1999:717, 724, see too Schapiro 2003:584)

Shapiro's proposal, in this context, is that "A child . . . [is] incapable of making her own choices, whether good or bad" (Schapiro 2003:579), that she is "is a being who . . . does not really 'have' a will yet, [who] is still internally dependent upon alien forces to determine what she does and says" (Schapiro 1999:730), and thus for whom there is no "will" there to disrespect.

In this paper, I follow a different path. Rather than figuring out how to modify our understanding of respect for humanity in order to justify paternalism, I consider the real possibility that paternalism is *not* justified, that the formula of humanity does apply to children, and that it applies precisely because children *do* have wills of their own that can (and should) be respected. In taking this route, I follow the thought of the important but underappreciated philosopher Maria Montessori.<sup>6</sup> Montessori's lifetime focus was the cultivation of and respect for children's agency. Unlike many approaches to education and agency (arguably including those of Kant<sup>7</sup>), Montessori did not think that agency was *simply* an end to be promoted in children. Instead, she recognized that children already express something like a will of their own, something that rightly deserves respect in its own right.

In this paper, I examine two key Kantian criteria for having agency in the sense of a will of one's own: (1) one's actions must be grounded in reasons rather than merely caused by desires, and (2) one's willing reflects a consistent character over time. I argue that these claims can be understood in a narrow Kantian sense that does challenge the possibility for young children to have agency, but I show how Montessori develops notions of acting for reasons and persistence of character that are both plausible in their own right and realistically applicable to children. In that sense, Montessori provides an alternative way of developing key Kantian<sup>8</sup> ideas about agency, one that primarily facilitates critique rather than justification of paternalism towards children. I close with a brief account of some implications of Montessori's conception of agency for respectful attitudes towards both children and adults.

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<sup>5</sup> But see also Kain 2009 for a more historically rooted discussion of Kant on children, as well as the various essays collected in Roth and Suprenant 2011. Throughout this paper, when I refer to contemporary neokantians, I primarily have in mind Tamar Schapiro and Christine Korsgaard, though most other neokantian accounts are similar to these in many of the features I attend to here. Schapiro is a particularly helpful interlocutor here because she specifically applies this model to children. For very similar accounts (Kantian and non-Kantian), see e.g. Bratman 2007, Frankfurt 1998 and 2006, Herman 2007, and Korsgaard 1996 and 2009.

<sup>6</sup> After being the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree (in 1896) and after several years work on psychiatric illnesses, Maria Montessori spent several years (starting in 1902) at the University of Rome pursuing a degree in philosophy. To the best of my knowledge, despite her important influence in educational theory, she has never been recognized as a serious contributor to academic philosophy (with the possible exception of her influence on the pedagogical views of Bertrand Russell and Rabindranath Tagore). I hope that this paper will show that neglect to be misguided.

<sup>7</sup> For an argument that Kant's philosophy of education, particularly as applied to young children, takes a consequentialist approach to children's agency, see (Author under review).

<sup>8</sup> These ideas are Kantian, but not exclusively Kantian.

Two caveats are important before going into the details of this paper. First, many key aspects of the issue of whether children have wills that can be respected are empirical, and Montessori was deeply committed to the empirical study of children.<sup>9</sup> This paper, however, focuses on conceptual issues about the nature of agency. Second, much Kantian theorizing about the nature of willing is, for good reason, interested in both the bare prerequisites for “willing at all” (Korsgaard 2009:76) and with normative *ideals of good willing*. The notions of “willing” and “agency” that I use in this paper are the thinner notions, the bare prerequisites for having a will worthy of respect, rather than the more robust ideals of good willing.<sup>10</sup> This paper uses Montessori to develop a minimal concept of will as that level of self-governance that is worthy of respect and shows that children as described by Montessori have this level of will.

## 1. Two Key Kantian Claims about the Will, Stated Broadly

For Kantians (and many others), two key features are necessary (even if not sufficient) for having a will of one’s own, and the need for these features is taken (at least by many) to preclude children from genuine agency.

First, to have a will of one’s own, one’s actions need to be grounded in *values* or *reasons* rather than mere desires. Even very young children *seem* to have wills and to make choices. (In the case of many two-year olds, we might even think that they have too much will!) But these expressions of preference on the part of children can be distinguished from genuine choices in the way Kant distinguishes animals governed merely by impulse and free human beings that are capable of self-governance by reason.<sup>11</sup> Even the most wanton-like amongst us, those who act on every impulse of the

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<sup>9</sup> In the course of her study of children, she develops her own empirical methodology in the context of severe critiques, many still apt, of the empirical psychology of her day. For discussion of Montessori’s conception of empirical psychology, see (Author in progress-a).

<sup>10</sup> It is the former and not the latter (as I argue in Author 2007) that are worthy of respect, even if the latter are what we ought to aspire towards.

<sup>11</sup> That humans are distinct from animals in this way is widely discussed by Kantians and others. In its application to children as an analogy, see e.g. Kant P 9:441, Schapiro 1999:722-3, Frankfurt 2006:6, and Herman 2007: 9-10, 138-43). As Tamar Schapiro explains,

Man is different [from instinct-governed animals] in that he possesses a capacity to reflect on his instinctive desires and to act in opposition to them, both by developing desires for objects which are not objects for him by instinct and by restraining the instinct to gratify his desires in general. By divorcing man from his instincts, this capacity for reflection gives rise to a distinctively human problem. The problem is to “work out a plan of conduct” which will substitute for nature’s plan. In order to do this, man needs to decide how to use his capacity for reflection. He must decide both how to choose among the new potentially infinite set of desirable objects and how to regulate his will with respect to them . . . Stated more precisely, the problem is that man, now aware of his capacity for freedom, has to find a way of governing himself *as* a free will. He has to regulate his motivational impulses on the basis of a principle which does not undermine his free status, a principle which he can regard as his own. (Schapiro 1999:722-3)

Elsewhere, Schapiro connects this difference between humans and animals with the notion of that, like animal actions, children’s actions are not really attributable to *them*.

The animal is . . . most free, most fully active, when it acts on its instincts, thereby expressing the form of behavior which is most characteristic of it. But this means that even at its most active, the animal still acts on nature’s authority. Its freedom is realized in conformity to its nature, but its nature is to be subject to a law it cannot and does not question. (Schapiro 2003: 587)

The genuinely autonomous *human* will is free in the sense that it stands *above* its instincts; the human can “take a reflective step back from . . . instinct” and “demand justification” for impulses and attitudes (Schapiro 2003:587).

moment, cannot really *be* wantons because (as Christine Korsgaard has put it) “a person must act on a reason, and so the person who acts like a wanton must be treating the desire of the moment as a reason” (Korsgaard 1996:99n). Closely related to the distinction between reasons and mere desires is some level of control over the extent to which one acts on a desire. To have a will, one must not act *immediately* from impulse or desire but *deliberately* from reasons, first-person ascriptions of *value* to a thing.

Second, to have a will of one’s own, one’s value-ascriptions must be persistent.<sup>12</sup> This insistence upon persistence is an intuitive part of agency (see e.g. Dworkin 1993:230) and persistence of value-ascription is arguably constitutive of being able to stand apart from one’s impulses (see e.g. Bratman 2007: 28ff.; Schapiro 1999:729f.). Without a diachronic unity of self, there is no way to distinguish one’s *self* at a particular moment from one’s impulses at that moment (see e.g. Korsgaard 2009:75-6).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, consistency over time is needed to generate the *normativity* implicit in self-governance. Without, as Schapiro puts it, some “unified, regulative perspective which counts as the expression of her will . . . [that] makes it possible for her to live up to the demands of the judicial role which the practical point of view imposes on her” (Schapiro 1999:729), the self cannot exert its *authority* over its impulses, since it is not clear what it uses as the principle of that authority. To genuinely have a will of one’s own is to be an *authority over oneself*, and for this one must have a consistent, unified deliberative perspective.<sup>14</sup>

Given these two requirements for the genuine agency that merits respect, one can argue that children lack agency. Children seem to lack the “reflective[ness] about . . . motivation” (Bratman 2007:21, cf. Frankfurt 1971) and/or “rational understanding” (Herman 2007: 15) requisite for seeing their “actions” as governed by *reasons* as opposed to mere desires. And even when children have something

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At its most developed, “this task finds completion in . . . our capacity to act on a law which in no way derives its authority from instinct” (Schapiro 2003:587-8). In particular, it is crucial that while “impulses” can “address” the agent “as claims,” “since the agent is reflective, that authority [of these claims] can come only from her own reason; autonomy is the source of obligation” (Schapiro 1999:729). But “our capacity to reflect . . . develops gradually . . . childhood has to be conceived as a condition of as-yet-incomplete liberation from nature’s rule” (Schapiro 2003: 589). Infants are “almost wholly reactive” (589) and even older children are “only partially free from the governance of instinct” (590). Given this conception of the child, according to which children are – like animals – slaves to instinct rather than self-governing wills, paternalism is justified: “liberating children from adult authority would not be a way of respecting their humanity” but only a way of relinquishing them to enslavement to instinct (590).

If paternalism is to be justified . . . , it has to be the case that by interfering with a child’s action, we do not thereby violate *her* . . . [C]hildren are lacking in reason, and . . . therefore are unfit to govern themselves . . . [But] Kant conceives of reasoning as autonomy, the exercise of the capacity to be a law to oneself . . . To treat someone like an adult is [thus] to treat her as the ultimate source of her words and deeds, as the final authority to whom those words and deeds are attributable. (Schapiro 2003: 587-9)

And with that, the task of reconciling paternalism with Kantian ethics is (more or less) complete.

<sup>12</sup> The reason for this has been laid out most forcefully by Christine Korsgaard in Korsgaard 2009:72-76. Schapiro makes use of a very similar point (again with specific reference to children) in Schapiro 1999:729-31.

<sup>13</sup> “[P]articularist willing makes it impossible for you to distinguish yourself, your principle of choice, from the various incentives on which you act . . . But this means that particularist willing eradicates the distinction between a person and the incentives on which he acts . . . Particularist willing lacks a subject, a person who is the cause of his actions. So particularist willing isn’t willing at all.” (Korsgaard 2009:75-6, see too Korsgaard in Frankfurt 2006:60-63)

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent neo-Romantic critique of *this* basis for seeing the sovereign self as subject to self-imposed law, see Geuss in Korsgaard 1996: 192, though my prior argument for persistence as a condition of possibility of distinguishing the self from its impulses arguably provides the Kantian response to Geuss’s proposal.

like reflective distance, they do “not really ‘have’ a will yet” (Shapiro 1999:730) because their reflection lacks “an established constitution” to serve as the “principled perspective which would count as the law of her will” (1999:729).

Strikingly in this context, Montessori does not disagree with either central Kantian claim about the will. For Montessori, as for Kant, a will of one’s own requires that one’s actions not be governed by mere impulse but by reason-responsive value ascriptions that persist over time. For Montessori, “the disorderly movements of a child giving way to uncoordinated impulses” are “very different” from that genuine willing wherein one “inhibits all movements which do not conduce to the accomplishment of this work . . . , makes a selection . . . , [and] persists” (Montessori 1918/1991: 134-5). Montessori reconciles her endorsement of these Kantian claims with her insistence that children *do* have wills in two ways. First, she notes that children, in the right contexts, are capable of self-governance in ways that Kant and others fail to see.<sup>15</sup> Children have more reflection, more regulation of impulse, and more persistence than Kant and Kantians (and most of the rest of us) often to credit. This claim is fundamentally an empirical one, and it will not be the focus of the present paper. Second, however, and more fundamentally, Montessori argues that both control of impulse and volitional persistence can be understood in ways that are more general, and more applicable to children, than the standard Kantian ways of understanding those claims. The rest of this paper unpacks that conceptual claim.

## 2. Two Key Kantian Claims about the Will, Stated Narrowly

To see how Montessori provokes a conceptual clarification of the key Kantian claims stated in the previous section, it’s important to realize that Kant and contemporary neoKantians understand “reasons” and “persistence” with specific emphases on self-conscious reflection, the faculty of “Reason,” and an emphasis on practical *principles* with purportedly strict *universality*.

Thus *Kantian* acting on reasons involves more than merely acting reasons of one’s own rather than instincts towards which one is passive. It also requires that the process whereby an impulse becomes a reason be self-consciously reflective.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, reasons – the first person, evaluative judgments on the basis of which these reflective agents act – ultimately get authority from Reason<sup>17</sup> – a particular faculty of mind. As Schapiro puts it, “‘Since the agent is reflective, authority can only come from her own *reason*’” (Schapiro 1999:729; see too, e.g., Korsgaard 1996, 2009). Given Kant’s notion of reason, it

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<sup>15</sup> The importance of the right environment is central to Montessori’s conception of children and their agency. I discuss this importance in more detail in [“Children’s Incapacity for Autonomy as an External Failing,” in process]. In brief, I argue there that where many see children’s incapacity for self-governance as an internal failing (what Nussbaum would call a lack of an “internal capability”), Montessori sees it as a failure of context (a failure in the external conditions needed for that internal capability to become a “combined capability” (Nussbaum 2000:84). While relevant to the current paper, a full discussion of this issue would take us too far afield.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Korsgaard has made this point particularly explicitly: It is because “the human mind is . . . essentially reflective” that is “cannot settle for . . . desire” but “needs a *reason*” (Korsgaard 1996:92-3, see too e.g. Korsgaard 2006: 1, 19-26). Similar points are involved in Frankfurt’s appeal to second-order desires as the basis for calling something a desire of one’s own (see e.g. Frankfurt 1971) and Bratman’s appeal to “reflection on what one takes to be of value” as (at least partly) grounding the right sorts of higher-order desires (Bratman 2007:139).

<sup>17</sup> Throughout, I capitalize “Reason” when referring to the distinct higher faculty that Kantians see as being the proper source of “reasons.”

follows that these evaluative judgments must be rooted in “principles” or “laws.”<sup>18</sup> Thus not only must one act on reasons rather than desires, but reasons can only be given by *principles of Reason* consulted through *self-conscious reflection*.

Similarly, Kantians’ accounts of the will’s persistence emphasize self-conscious reflection on established principles given by Reason as the basis for this persistence. Moreover, the requisite persistence generally is taken to be strictly universal in two important senses. First, and less important in the present context, the principles of one’s own will are taken to be, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to every other will. This move marks the distinctively Kantian point that something like the categorical imperative is a constitutive principle of action as such. Arguably, this move also goes from the merely minimal conception of the will that is worthy of respect to the richer conception of autonomy as moral ideal. Second, and more importantly in the present context, these principles are taken to be universal across one’s entire life. Whereas general arguments for persistence require only *some* enduring will that persists above particular impulses, Kantians take this to require a will that is consistent *across one’s entire life*. Kant’s own language in this regard is particularly strong, as he claims that “to have a character signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself *irrevocably* by his own reason” (*Anthropology*, 7:292, emphasis added). But Schapiro appeals equally forcefully to an “established constitution” that provides guidance for one’s whole “plan of life” and Korsgaard insists on treating principles of genuine action as at least “provisionally universal” (see Schapiro 1999:730; Korsgaard 2009:73). This does not rule out changing one’s mind,<sup>19</sup> but it does require that one think of one’s reasons at any given point *as* reasons to which one is committed for life.<sup>20</sup> Kantian agency requires not only consistency and persistence, but also that one at least *aim for universal and life-long* consistency (rooted in *principles of Reason* to which one commits oneself on *reflection*).

In the next two sections, I show how Montessori modifies what are two necessary conditions for having a will of one’s own in ways that open room for children to have genuine agency. These modifications are not *sufficient* to show that children have agency, not only because this is a partly empirical question but also because neither Kant(ians) nor Montessori think that persistent action on the basis of reasons rather than mere desires is *sufficient* for having a will of one’s own. Other features, such as adhering to hypothetical imperatives (in the case of Kantians) or having requisite levels of knowledge and bodily competence (in the case of Montessori) are also necessary. And Montessori specifically sees the “decision” or “choice” that is “the act of will *par excellence*” (Montessori 1918/1991: 139) as built *on* rather than reducible *to* the “foundation[s]” of choice, such as persistence and acting on the basis on reasons. But the broader accounts of persistence and acting on reasons undermine two common ways that philosophers have argued against the possibility of genuine agency on the part of children.

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<sup>18</sup> It also follows, given Kant’s sharp opposition between Reason and instinct, that “instinct” can never be the internal ground on the basis of which one judges something to be a reason. Instincts can provide candidate reasons, but only Reason can be the basis for affirming these *as* reasons. Instincts are always external forces with respect to which one is passive. Reason is an internal and active force by which one can take up the claims of instincts or impulses and make them one’s own. (Cf. e.g. Schapiro 1999:723.)

<sup>19</sup> See Korsgaard 2009:73-4 for an account of consistency while still changing one’s mind.

<sup>20</sup> Others – e.g. Bratman and Sayre-McCord – have more modest temporal horizons, insisting only – as Sayre-McCord and Smith have put it – on “robust[ness]” that can be “a matter of degree” (Sayre-McCord and Smith, forthcoming: 5). For a discussion of this notion of “robustness,” see below.

### 3. Recovering the Broad Reading of Reasons

Kantians rightly see self-conscious reflection on the basis of principles of reason (and/or modification in the light of such principles) as an important way mere desires become genuine reasons,<sup>21</sup> but such reflection is not the *only* way desires become reasons. In her account of the will, Montessori shares the Kantian insistence that mere action from desire is insufficient to constitute a will of one's own, but she moves away from the narrow Kantian reading of reasons and specifically endorses varieties of active, first-personal engagement with the world that are genuinely agential without being specifically governed by rational principles. These forms of engagement include love, care, indignation, sympathy, and interest, but the most primitive and important form of active agency, according to Montessori, is "attention."

Montessori shares the Kantian view that merely being passively moved by desire – what she generally calls impulse – is insufficient to constitute a basis for human agency.<sup>22</sup> Agency requires that we "correct, direct, and utilize our impulses" (Montessori 1918/1991: 133), so Montessori contrasts the "motion by decisions" which requires "activities of comparison and judgment" with that "primitive state of *chaos* in which . . . actions were the outcome of *impulses*" (Montessori 1918/1991: 143). And Montessori sees mere desire as a problem for two reasons central to Kantian concerns. One must *actively identify* with one's reasons and values, and one must exert *control over* one's impulses. But for Montessori, neither of these elements specifically requires self-consciously reflective governance by principles of Reason.

To start with the fact that one must exert control over impulses, Montessori insists that a basic prerequisite for the will is a "reciprocal equilibrium" between "the forces of impulse and inhibition" (Montessori 1918/1991: 133), where both impulse and inhibition are first-personal *reasons* rather than mere causal forces.<sup>23</sup> Thus, for instance, "Our impulse might be to pay a certain visit, but we know that we might disturb our friend, that it is not her day for receiving, and we refrain" (Montessori 1918/1991: 133). More generally, "Without impulses we could take no part in social life; on the other hand, without inhibitions we could not correct, direct, and utilize our impulses" (Montessori 1918/1991: 133). Like Kant, Montessori sees the human will as a will in tension. Impulses provide initial, *prima facie*, candidate reasons for action, but for these impulses to express genuine *willing*, one must "correct, direct, and utilize" them.

Montessori's conception of impulse and inhibition is crucially different from Kant's, however, in a set of related ways. Montessori's "inhibitions" are more general than Kant's "duty" or "(practical)

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<sup>21</sup> This might even be the *best* way that one comes to act on the basis of reasons. I have some doubts about this, but it is important for the purposes of this paper to note that I need not argue that these other ways of valuing/acting for reasons are fully consistent with the highest norms for willing (nor even with all of the constitutive norms for bare willing). My argument is only that other ways of valuing are sufficient to meet the criteria of being genuine reasons of one's own.

<sup>22</sup> Montessori does develop a notion of biological self-directedness that plays an important role in her metaphysically-loaded conception of agency in human beings (see section five, below), but her notion of human agency goes beyond mere biological autonomy.

<sup>23</sup> Some of Montessori's terminology (see, e.g., the reference to actions as "a resultant of the forces of impulse and inhibition" (AMM 133)) can make her seem to have a balance of forces model of motivation according to which all human actions are governed merely by mechanical forces. Elsewhere, as in the quotation following this note, she clearly sees such "forces" as "impulse" and "inhibition" in first-personal ways.



reason.”<sup>24</sup> One’s immediate impulse might be inhibited by principles of practical reason, but often inhibitions are not *principled* at all. One might not have a *principle* of refraining from annoying one’s friends; one might simply *care* about the friend, or have an attuned sympathy, or internalized sense of honor.<sup>25</sup> Inhibitions – and even the balance between impulse and inhibition – can even be habitual, but nonetheless self-directed in that one identifies with the inhibition and has implicit confidence in one’s balance between impulse and intuition even when that balance is immediate or a matter of habit. As Montessori explains, some “acts have almost become reflex. And yet the acts in question are by no means reflex actions . . . The will stores up its prolonged efforts outside the consciousness, or at its extreme margin, and leaves the consciousness itself unencumbered to make new acquisitions and further efforts” (133-4).

One of Montessori’s more poignant examples of self-discipline, taken from a teacher’s description of a child (*O*) in a Montessori school, exhibits just these features of inhibiting an impulse by means of reasons recognized pre-reflectively:

Before the daily hot meal was instituted, the children used to bring their own luncheons, which varied very much; two or three of the children were very generously provided, and had meat, fruit, etc. *O* was seated next to one of these. The table was set, and *O* had nothing to put upon his plate but the piece of bread he had so strenuously acquired<sup>26</sup>; he glanced at his neighbor as if to regulate himself by the time the latter would take over his meal, but with no trace of envy; on the contrary, with great dignity he tried to eat his piece of bread very slowly, in order that he might not finish before the other, and thus make it evident that he had nothing more to eat while the other was still busy. He nibbled his bread slowly and seriously.

What a sense of his own dignity—subduing the desires of an appetite exposed to temptation—existed in this child, together with his sense of the fundamental needs of his own life, by which he was impelled to struggle and to conquer what was “necessary.” And there was further that exquisite sensibility, which manifested itself in the affectionate expression of his . . . face, and in the effusion of a general tenderness which looked for no return. (Montessori 1918/1991: 92)

Here is a child exercising extreme self-restraint.<sup>27</sup> The child *might* have been operating with principles of practical reason, maxims dictating that he not finish his meal before others, or even more general maxims dictating that he seek to promote the happiness of those around him. But the appeal to such “principles”

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<sup>24</sup> Her “impulse” is also importantly different from Kant’s “inclination” in several ways. Some of these are correlates of the “inhibition”-“reason” distinction, but others are not. For instance, “impulse” suggests – and is – something instantaneous, while inclinations can be enduring volitional habits (not merely the instantaneous activation of those habits). For the purposes of this paper, however, I pass over most of these points.

<sup>25</sup> Moreover, unlike Barbara Herman’s recent Kantian incorporation of these sorts of cares into rational agency, Montessori can see them as *reason*-responsive even prior to “hav[ing] been brought within the scope of [R]eason” (Herman 2007:17). Cares *as such* can be intrinsically responsive to reasons, so children’s lack of a “co-development of rational understanding” alongside their desires need not imply that those desires are “unmediated” or “cannot be rational” (Herman 2007:15). Understanding is simply not needed for a “conception of an object” to include a “conception of the object’s value” (Herman 2007: 15).

<sup>26</sup> *O* was extremely poor and neglected by his family.

<sup>27</sup> Formerly he had been “violent” and “spiteful to his companions” (AMM 91), and one might have thought these circumstances would generate those impulses of hunger and shame that would provoke just those reactions here. Instead, however, the child exercised intense and socially-sensitive self-restraint.



of “Reason” is an unnecessary epicycle in explaining the story. The child’s impulse to eat ravenously is inhibited by his immediate sense of his own dignity and affection for his companions. The value of his companions, in particular, emerges not from a principle of reason but from affection and “exquisite sensibility.”<sup>28</sup>

Montessori’s departure from Kant goes further than broadening the possible sources of inhibition, however. She also insists that *both* impulse *and* inhibition contribute to having a will of one’s own.<sup>29</sup> It is not merely by *limiting* one’s impulses, but also by *identification with* them, that one comes to have a will of one’s own. And importantly, this identification need not be – and initially is not – a matter of reflective endorsement. Even insofar as reflection comes – later – to play a role in the will, it does so largely through eliciting endorsement of impulses that are *already* in some sense one’s own.<sup>30</sup> And Montessori explores several related phenomena whereby one comes to have a full and autonomous identification with impulse, an identification that can persist in and even become the basis for proper balancing between impulses and inhibitions. Of these impulses, the most basic is what Montessori calls “attention.” Montessori illustrates her particular concept of attention with countless examples, of which her most frequently mentioned<sup>31</sup> is from her first days as a new teacher:

I happened to notice a little girl of about three years old deeply absorbed in a set of solid insets, removing the wooden cylinders from their respective holes and replacing them. The expression on the child’s face was one of such concentrated attention that it seemed to me an extraordinary manifestation; up to this time none of the children had ever shown such fixity of interest in an object;

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<sup>28</sup> One might, of course, take this child to be a special – or even a fanciful – case. Even with this broader understanding of the relationship between impulse and inhibition, one might think that rather than opening room for children to have wills, Montessori has simply highlighted precisely in what way children – at least very young children – *lack* even the rudiments of will. After all, even the most willful two-year-old often seems precisely to be governed entirely by impulse, free from any correcting and guiding role of inhibition. Montessori herself admits, “The child . . . [i]n comparison with the adult, . . . is an unbalanced creature, almost invariably the prey of his own impulses” (AMM 134). Thus all of Montessori’s analysis would only to support the view that children lack the will that is present in adults. That is, it would support Schapiro’s paternalism rather than Montessori’s pedagogy of genuine respect for agency. But Montessori’s numerous examples – all presented as accurate descriptions of real classroom behaviors – are meant to illustrate that even very young children *do* manifest the balance between impulse and inhibition, at least when in an environment appropriate to the exercise of that balance (see Author in progress-b).

<sup>29</sup> Even in Kant, both impulse *and* inhibition are necessary to healthy human life. There is a parody of Kant that suggests that for Kant, the best willing would be purely rational with no role for inclination at all. But as many recent Kantians have pointed out, that reading of Kant is inconsistent with the overall structure of Kant’s theory. Even for Kant, something like impulse (inclination) gets human volition going. We have some *prima facie* desires before we consider whether or not those desires are morally acceptable or not.

<sup>30</sup> To see why, consider what happens when we come to see a desire as *not* authentically our own, say because we see it as the result of a repressed childhood fixation or deliberate manipulation by another, or even just because we recognize ourselves as having habitually engaged in certain sorts of “desires” that never really grew from our own sense of self. In these cases, the recognition that “*I don’t really want that*” can be a basis *for* reflective rejection rather than a result *of* reflective rejection. This implies that there is, at least in some cases, a sense of desires being “one’s own” that is more primitive than reflective endorsement. And it suggests, given the role of authentic desires in one’s life, that having such desires of one’s own is an important part of living an autonomous human life.

<sup>31</sup> This understates the importance of this particular story, which Montessori credits as being “the fundamental fact which led me to define my method” (see AMM 53).

and my belief in the characteristic instability of attention in young children, who flit incessantly from one thing to another, made me peculiarly alive to the phenomenon.

I watched the child intently without disturbing her at first, and began to count how many times she repeated the exercise; then, seeing that she was continuing for a long time, I picked up the little armchair in which she was seated, and placed chair and child upon the table; the little creature hastily caught up her case of insets, laid it across the arms of her chair, and gathering the cylinders into her lap, set to work again. Then I called upon all the children to sing; they sang, but the little girl continued undisturbed, repeating her exercise even after the short song had come to an end. I counted forty-four repetitions; when at last she ceased, it was quite independently of any surrounding stimuli which might have distracted her, and she looked round with a satisfied air, almost as if awaking from a refreshing nap. (Montessori 1918/1991: 53)

This sort of attention “became common” within Montessori’s schools, and it was at the core of her approach to “the free development of the child” (Montessori 1918/1991: 54, 55). In these moments of attention, the child receives an “inner nourishment . . . corresponding to a primitive impulse . . . It is in the satisfaction of this primitive impulse, this internal hunger, that the child’s personality begins to organize itself and reveal its characteristics” (Montessori 1918/1991: 55). Importantly, the “primitive” nature of this “impulse” does not, for Montessori, imply that it merely shows up as a force to which the child is passively related. Rather,

The internal activities act as cause; they do not react and exist as the *effect* of external factors. Our attention is not arrested by all things indifferently, but by those which are congenial to our tastes. The things which are useful to our inner life are those which arouse our interest. Our internal world is created upon a selection from the external world, acquired for and in harmony with our internal activities. (Montessori 1918/1991: 124)

While attention is directed towards genuinely interesting external objects, its origin and proper source lies within. And the “within” in which it lies is no mere contingent set of desires, nor even a set of merely biological instincts, but that set of internal *activities* which constitutes one’s self.<sup>32</sup>

The importance of attention can be seen by analogy with other recent accounts of “caring” or “love” or “non-deliberative processes that are . . . not self-aware or reflective yet . . . are intelligent and responsive to reasons *qua* reasons.”<sup>33</sup> Agnieszka Jaworszka and Harry Frankfurt, for instance, have convincingly argued that “carings are inherently internal” and “cannot be legitimately construed as an alien force, or as a mere occurrence within the agent’s psychological makeup that does not belong to him” (Jaworska 2007:532, 531, cf. Frankfurt 2006). Montessori’s focus on attention, particularly in the context of attentive *work*, resonates even more closely with (and gets significant support from) Mihaly

<sup>32</sup> These activities develop over time, as one’s self develops over time. But the internality of activity can be present even in the youngest children. I discuss the role of activity in more detail in section 5, below.

<sup>33</sup> See Jaworska 2005a&b and 2007a&b for treatments that emphasize the language of “caring”; Frankfurt 2006 for an account focused on love, and Railton 2009 for a more general account. The final quotation is from Railton 2009:103.

Csikszentmihalyi's recent accounts of the important of "flow experiences," wherein "action and awareness are merged" and "self-consciousness disappears" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 111-112).<sup>34</sup>

All of these accounts emphasize three related points that are essential to broadening Kant's account of the will. First, there are valuing attitudes – including caring, loving, attention, concentration, and others – that need not be self-conscious or rooted in Reason, but are nonetheless attuned to "reasons" or "values." Second, these attitudes are not passive forces that come over us but our own active engagements with the world. There is a kind of love or affection that can sweep over a person. But my care for my partner and children – and my partner and children's care for me – is an *active* valuing, even if not one rooted in rational principle.<sup>35</sup> Finally, these sorts of interests are among those that are most important to our own sense of who we are. When we do engage in Reason-guided, self-conscious reflection, we rightly endorse certain "desires" as having a different status than others. And amongst the desires that we particularly endorse are those carings, loves, and foci of attentive work that we have *already*, albeit not via Reason, identified with as reason-giving.

In particular, Montessori is correct to locate attentive work or flow, like caring in general, as a locus of reasons that are endorses, even if pre-reflectively. This is evident in our reactions to violations of such work, which are quite unlike general frustrations of mere desires. If I am watching a television show, even a somewhat enjoyable one, and you interrupt me, I may be bothered, but I do not feel violated; I do not feel as though a part of *myself* has been interrupted, because the television program, and even my enjoyment of it, are incidental to my identity. But if I am interrupted while hard at work on an important project – laying out a key argument, for example, or putting the finishing touches on a painting, or practicing a difficult piece of music, or building a bookshelf – I feel a sense of violation that is deep. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that you have wronged me. There are many occasions when even work that is central to who one is needs to be interrupted, or can be interrupted without lasting harm. The point is only that the nature of interruption is different when one's *attentive work* is interrupted than when one's mere experience is.

In sum, Montessori broadens Kant's insistence that one transform one's immediate desires into value-conferring reasons in two respects. First, she argues that the "inhibitions" by which one resists immediate impulses need not be limited to principles of practical reason. Appropriate inhibitions can be due to immediate sensitivity to the needs or feelings of others (Montessori 1918/1991: 133), a pre-rational sense of our own dignity (Montessori 1918/1991: 92), an attention to the demands of our present work (Montessori 1918/1991: 134-5), or a variety of other non-rational (or not-necessarily-rational) causes. These sorts of inhibitions can go too far, leading one to be "pathologically the victim of his own powers of inhibition" (Montessori 1918/1991: 137, see too pp. 143-4; Montessori 1936/1996: 167-8; Montessori 1949/1995: 197, 201-2). In these cases, one becomes incapable of engaging in activity of one's own. But

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<sup>34</sup> The similarities between Montessori's account of fulfilling work in children and Csikszentmihalyi's accounts of flow go far beyond the superficial points mentioned here, and one could not unreasonably read Montessori's pedagogy as a pedagogy of "flow," within which an environment is created that maximizes flow experiences for young children. For some preliminary research on the effectiveness of Montessori education in terms of the facilitation of flow, see Kahn 2003, Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi 2005a and 2005b, and Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi 2009).

<sup>35</sup> As Kantians rightly point out (see especially Herman 2007), these carings can become infused with rational principle in mature adults. But as others – most famously Bernard Williams – point out, carings carry a valuing of their own, and justification by self-reflective reason is often "one thought too many" (Williams 1981).

the danger of excess is not limited to inhibitions that emerge pre-reflectively or non-rationally. Reflection itself can become a dangerous inhibition to activity, and overemphasis on principles of Reason can, when taken too far, blind one to emotional impulses that, in particular contexts, are more attentive to relevant values. But Montessori's general point is that inhibition of some sort, whether Reason-guided or not, is, for all its potential dangers, required for genuine agency. Second, she argues that even our impulses can be value-conferring, if and when they are the right sorts of impulses. These impulses are present in contexts of attentive work, and Montessori goes on to emphasize various other sensitivities, "guiding instincts" (Montessori 1936/1996: 210-214), and especially forms of "love" (Montessori 1918/1991: 17; Montessori 1936/1996: 97-104, 169; *Abs. Mind* 220) that, at least as much as attention, are internal activities of value-conferral that need not be rational or self-consciously reflective. Moreover, Montessori *connects* these impulses with which we can fully identify with both the control of impulse by inhibition and with a host of particular volitional developments, including respect for others and social cohesion. "[T]he will," she explains, "is built up on the internal fundamental fact of a prolonged attention" (Montessori 1918/1991: 132). Thus Montessori agrees with Kant's first key claim – that genuine agency depends upon guiding oneself in accordance with reasons rather than being ruled by mere desires – but only in the broad version that does not limit "reasons" to those arrived at through appeal to principles of Reason.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. Recovering the Broad Reading of Persistence

Montessori also agrees with Kant's persistence claim, going so far as to claim that "persistence [is] the true foundation of the will" (Montessori 1918/1991: 139). And Montessori's reasoning for the importance of persistence is reminiscent of the Kantian justifications above:

This quality ["constancy, or persistence"] is really the exponent of the uninterrupted concord of the inner personality. Without it, a life would be a series of episodes, a chaos; it would be like a body disintegrated into its cells, rather than an organism which persists throughout the mutations of its own material. This fundamental quality, when it embraces the sentiment of the individual and the direction of his ideation, that is to say, his whole personality, is what we have called *character*. The man of character is the persistent man, the man who is faithful to his own word, his own convictions, his own affections. (Montessori 1918/1991: 138)

Like Kantians, Montessori emphasizes that persistence is necessary to be a coherent self, to avoid being merely a "series of episodes." But Montessori rejects several aspects of Kant's particular way of understanding persistence. For one thing, as one would expect from the preceding section and as the passage above makes clear, Montessori sees persistence as embracing "sentiment" and "affections" as

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, there must be some limits to what counts as a reason, some basis for distinguishing impulses and inhibitions "of the right sorts" from those impulses and inhibitions that are not reason-responsive in the way required for agency. Because an important part of this story – for Kant as for Montessori – relates to the kind of persistence that genuine reasons have for a person, I turn now to a discussion of Montessori's broadening of Kant's notion of "persistence" before turning to a more general account of agency-conducive impulses and inhibitions.

much as rational principles. Equally importantly, Montessori rejects Kant's insistence that persistence be *universal* (even provisionally so) and *life-long*.<sup>37</sup>

The primary basis for rejecting *lifelong* persistence as necessary for genuine agency comes from Montessori's paradigmatic case of persistence: "persistence in work" (Montessori 1918/1991: 138). The child working repeatedly with cylinder blocks, the boy patiently eating his piece of bread, the artist or scientist with a "will to work," or the "humblest artisan who 'works'" each "undoubtedly contains within himself all the elements which make for happiness and security in life" (Montessori 1918/1991: 139). Rather than emphasizing practical *principles* of action, it is practical actions themselves in which one must exercise constancy.<sup>38</sup> Eventually, one forms "the constant man, the man of character" (Montessori 1918/1991: 139) whose constancy of action shapes the context of an entire life. The artisan, for example, may exhibit a constancy of *techne* that is inarticulable in terms of principles or practical maxims. Montessori will emphasize even such things as handwriting and basic muscle memory as forms of constancy in activity, without requiring a "principle" governing the way that one writes the letter "s" or shoots a basketball. Montessori does not deny the importance of having a vision of one's life as a whole. But the constancy of the adult is already present in "the little child who persists in his exercises" (Montessori 1918/1991: 139), and the constancy of the child persisting in a particular chosen task remains a necessary part of adult character.

To see why this persistence would be important, consider the main reasons given earlier for the importance of a stable character, to distinguish oneself from one's (passing) impulses and to provide a basis for the normativity required for self-governance. The child who flits from toy to toy insisting on playing with each for a moment before moving on to the next, or who covets his friend's toy until he gets hold of it and then discards it, shows a sort of "wilfulness" that lacks the persistence requisite of any genuine expression of agency. But the child who "persists for a long time and with earnest attention in the same exercise, correcting the mistakes which the didactic material reveals to him" (Montessori 1918/1991: 132), avoiding distractions and being genuinely offended by interruptions, exhibits an agency capable of (and worthy of) respect.

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<sup>37</sup> Similar points have been elegantly developed by Jaworska (1999) in her broadly Kantian accounts of the agency of Alzheimer's patients. Like children, Alzheimer's patients do not have the "sense of a whole life" that many Kantians (and Ronald Dworkin, against whom Jaworska argues in the paper) think necessary for agency. There is a key difference, of course, between a child and an Alzheimer's patient. Children are in the process of coming to have such a sense of life as a whole, while Alzheimer's patients are in the process of coming to lose it. This difference has important implications regarding the sense of agency of each, but those are beyond the scope of the present paper.

<sup>38</sup> In this context, it may be worth noting that while Montessori, like Kant, emphasizes that the *motivations* for actions are of utmost importance, she also emphasizes, unlike Kant, that

There can be no manifestation of the will without completed action; he who thinks of performing a good action, but leaves it undone; he who desires to atone for an offense, but takes no step to do so; he who proposes to go out, to pay a call, or to write a letter, but goes no farther in the matter, does not accomplish an exercise of the will. To think and to wish is not enough. It is action which counts. "The way to Hell is paved with good intentions."

The life of volition is the life of action. (AMM 132-33)

In the present context, this is particularly important in that the persistence *Montessori* insists upon is an acted-out persistence. Sticking a principle that never plays out in one's life is not the sort of "character" upon which one can build a stable identity.

The persistence involved in focused projects provides a stable background against which one can be distinguished from passing impulses. Kantians often describe human volition such that one has *either* consistent commitments fitting into a coherent life-plan or mere passing desires. But human life is full of commitments with much more narrowly specified temporal horizons. When I am teaching a course or writing a paper or playing a game of soccer or practicing a musical instrument, I have a limitedly-constant character, that is, a character that is constant within the limits of my activity. This character provides a basis for distinguishing myself from my impulses. I might want to stop writing that paper, or get tired of playing soccer, or be frustrated in my practice. But I resist those desires for the sake of remaining “persistent in work.” And while the overall importance of these commitments may depend upon how they fit into a bigger picture, I need not appeal to any such role in my life as a whole in order to distinguish my commitment to the present activity from my passing whims and desires.

This limited persistence is also sufficient for a local form of normativity. When I fail to resist impulses that would conflict with paper-writing, or soccer, or violin, I recognize that failure *as* a failure. One can succumb to temptations and even have weakness of will with respect to commitments and values that are temporary as well as to “universal” commitments one sees as part of an overall life plan. And these failings, as much as the successes wherein one remains true to one’s task, show the extent to which the persistence of focused work is the persistence of a will even if it does not involve a commitment to that work as a *life-long* task.

Montessori’s focus on the kind of persistence involved in focused work also reveals an ambiguity in conceptions of persistence such as Sayre-McCord and Smith’s notion of “robust” as opposed to “fragile” beliefs and desires. A full discussion of this distinction in the context of Montessori would go far beyond the present paper, but one key distinction is needed. A desire, for Sayre-McCord and Smith, is “robust” if it is “stable across time” (Sayre-McCord and Smith, forthcoming: draft p. 10). But this conceals an ambiguity between what we might call intensive and extensive cross-temporal stability. A desire would be intensively stable if it strongly resists being changed; it would be extensively stable if it resists change over a long period of time. These two concepts of stability are not identical. The aforementioned three year old child working with cylinder blocks (Montessori 1918/1991: 53) had great *intensive* stability but very little extensive stability. While she was focused on her work, almost nothing could deflect her from it. But the period of time during which she focused on it was short. Similarly, we might consider Sayre-McCord and Smith’s example of “the student who goes off to college and then comes home every couple of months with a completely new set of enthusiasms and ideals” (Sayre-McCord and Smith, forthcoming: 10). Such a student might be only loosely committed to each ideal when she is committed to it, such that her ideals would lack both intensive and extensive robustness. Or she might be intensely committed to the ideals while she is committed to them, but then change her ideals over time. And importantly, in this second case, it seems right to say that the reason that her ideals changed is that *she* changed. And that’s to say that insofar as “what it might mean for a desire to be an agent’s own, and one with which she can be identified” is that “it is robust,” then the robustness that matters is *intensive* rather than extensive. This is particularly evident when one considers Sayre-McCord and Smith’s explanation of the “appeal of this suggestion”:

The robust desires that agents possess help constitute their distinctive personalities. The point is perhaps most obvious in the case of the desires that agents have about how they are to live their own lives from day to day. For example, if the desires of those with whom we choose to live our lives

were not robust—if they didn’t have relatively stable desires to watch certain sorts of movies, read certain kinds of books, eat certain kinds of food, decorate the house in certain sorts of ways, talk to certain sorts of people, talk with those people about certain sorts of things, and so on—then it seems to us that we would not have the reasons that we have for choosing to live our lives with them in the first place. The same goes, only *vice versa*, for the desires of those we avoid because we can’t stand being around them. The crucial point is that the robust desires that people have, precisely because they are robust, help to give them the personalities they have, personalities that attract us to them or repel us. And this is true whether or not those robust desires are ones that they themselves wish to be effective in action. The fragile desires that agents have about how to live their lives from day to day, by contrast, precisely because they are fragile, don’t help constitute a distinctive personality. Such desires are not distinctively the agents’ own, and agents cannot be identified with such desires. (Sayre-McCord and Smith, forthcoming: 11)

In my view, what determines a person’s personality, what attracts or repels me from them, is not the set of desires that happen not to change. The vegan who doesn’t eat meat just because the meat nearby happens not be particularly good is not attracting for his veganess. The (political) libertarian who just doesn’t think much about politics and remains a libertarian because that’s how she happened to raised doesn’t attract me for being libertarian. But the communist who is a die-hard communist, fired up and committed to the cause, is attractive or repulsive for his communism. And that’s true even if he ends up changing later. When he becomes a young Republican, he’s likely to be attractive and repulsive to different people, but it will be the new values that have *intensive* robustness, and not the values that just happen to be sticking around, that will define his personality.<sup>39</sup>

Admittedly, there would be something lacking were one *merely* to pass from particular project to particular project without any consistent background into which these projects fit as a coherent whole. In that sense, Kantians are correct to insist upon a consistency that is at least provisionally universal. A person who was always only persistent within the confines of a particular project would perhaps live a life that is, as Montessori would put it, a “series of episodes.” But even such a life would not be a mere “chaos”; such a person would not be a wanton. And within each episode, there *would* be a self to respect, with a will to respect. The sort of consistency that conceives of individual values as universally applicable and part of an overall conception of life as a whole may be an ideal, but that sort of consistency is *not* required for *agency as such*.<sup>40</sup> Montessori thus articulates and illustrates a sort of persistence that

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<sup>39</sup> Another interesting issue related to robustness – and relevant to our assessment of the robustness of children’s values – is the relationship between internal characteristics and external conditions in determining whether a belief, desire, or valuing is robust. Many features of ourselves that we think of as quite robust, and that *are* robust in present conditions and “ordinary” change, would be susceptible to change if conditions changes sufficiently radically. If children – as Montessori thinks – are constantly subjected to environments that undermine their persistent activity (see (Author in progress-b)), they may seem to have less robust desires than they really have, or could have, in the right environments.

<sup>40</sup> This is a good thing, since, as Kant noted, “the formal element of the will in general, to act according to firm principles (not to fly off hither and yon, like a swarm of gnats) is something rare” (*Anthropology* 7:292, see Frierson 2006, 2010, 2013 for discussion). Even most adults lack the developed constancy that Kantians sometimes think is required for genuine agency. Schapiro 1999, even after recognizing the danger that “there is a sense in which no one, regardless of age or maturity, is able to achieve autonomy on Kant’s view” (1999:723), falls into this error in a particularly significant way, insisting precisely that adults have established constitutions that provide the “basic structure” of our choices. It would be nice if we all had such an established constitution, but even Kant recognized that most of us do not.



satisfies the necessary conditions of agency but, because not dependent upon a sense of life as a whole, applies to the kinds of persistence of which children are capable.

## 5. Too broad? Whim, Television, and Agency

Montessori provides broad accounts of reasons and persistence on the basis of which children, at least sometimes, fulfill these requirements for agency. But Montessori might seem to develop an account of reasons (and persistence) that is *too* broad, such that so *any* desire counts as an expression of agency, including mere whims or the all-too-common desire to “persist” in sitting before the television. In this respect, Kantians have an advantage; by insisting that the only impulses that genuinely express one’s own will are those endorsed in Reason-guided reflection in the light of universal principles taken to govern one’s life as a whole, they have a clear basis for refusing to respect the child’s refusal to go to sleep, insistence upon continuing to watch TV, and demands for candy or more toys.<sup>41</sup> The broader one makes one’s categories, the less basis there might seem to be for these distinctions. Fortunately, Montessori lays out several general characteristics of genuinely agential impulses that can at least rule out the most important cases of children’s willful “self”-assertion.

Several important characteristics of genuine agency are rooted in the broad notions of reasons and persistence discussed in the previous sections. In particular, the kinds of impulses that provide a basis for agency in children and are worthy of respect are impulses to persistent, norm-governed activity (or “work”). Montessori lays out further characteristics of the right sort of impulses elsewhere in her work. Among these, the most important are that the right sorts of impulses involve a striving for “perfection” and an expression of a force of “life” within us (which she later connects to Bergson’s notion of an “*elan vital*”). Both of these are sometimes articulated using Montessori’s distinctive metaphysics, but properly understood, they are compatible with a suitable broadened Kantian account of the will.

Two characteristics of the right sort of reasons have already been noted explicitly. Reasons of one’s own are reasons *for activity that persists*. The first point helps distinguish agency-conducive impulses from the child’s desire to be entertained or to watch television. (Television in particular is generally<sup>42</sup> a highly seductive relinquishing of oneself into passivity.) The call to activity also helps distinguish the agency that must be respected from mere contrariness or willfulness in cases like the child who refuses to go to bed. A child who simply “doesn’t want to go to bed” is not expressing an impulse constitutive of her agency. By contrast, the child who is intensely interested in some task and wants to continue his activity rather than go to bed *is* expressing something worthy of genuine respect. It might be that he actually needs to stop that activity to avoid being overly tired the next day, and caregivers may need to interfere, but in this case – unlike the previously mentioned – the interference comes at a real cost

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<sup>41</sup> This insistence on endorsement by Reason-guided reflection raises problems of its own, however. It is not always clear whether particular desires, whether of children or adults, have been endorsed by reflection. It is often even less clear whether the reflection has been appropriately Reason-guided. And as Kantians move further from the simplistic picture of constant self-monitoring (as in Herman), the judgments about which desires are genuinely agential “reasons” and which are not becomes even murkier.

<sup>42</sup> There are exceptions. One might watch television in an actively engaged way, in which case one’s desire to watch television would become a reason for an activity – watching television – rather than a passive slipping into non-activity. Even in that case, of course, it is not uncommon to deliberately decide to watch television and find oneself, hours later, having passively given in to continued TV-watching.

to the child's agency.<sup>43</sup> The second point – persistence – is a necessary condition for agency because only a valuing that persists can be (partly) constitutive of a self that stands apart from – and can thereby govern – one's passing states. This persistence requirement distinguishes genuinely autonomous reasons from mere whims. Because it incorporates requirements for activity and persistence, Montessori's broadened accounts of reasons is not *so* broad that it must include children's willful insistence upon television, staying up at night, and every new fancy that enters their minds.

Montessori's broadened account of reasons is further narrowed by an insistence that the right kinds of reasons are normative. For a value (or impulse, or reason) to be an expression of agency, it must have standards by which one's activity can be *normatively-governed*. The requirement of normativity is part of why expressions of agency must be active rather than passive and why they must be persistent (since both activity and persistence are necessary for normativity). For Kantians, normativity also requires principled universality, but Montessori fleshes out the normativity requirement in ways that show how even very young children can engage in norm-governed activity. Her central concept here is the notion of excellence or perfection; children "feel in themselves a natural attraction ... toward perfection ... Perfection attracts them because it is in their nature ... [It] is pursued as if it satisfied their deepest longings" (Montessori 1949/1995: 210, 212).<sup>44</sup> These children persist in and repeat activities for the sake of doing them *better*, and they "rejoice in *the perfection of their achievements*" (Montessori 1936/1996:130-31).

Because of the importance of self-directed striving towards increasing excellence, Montessori emphasizes that her classrooms and their materials include a "control of error" that allows students to recognize manageable goals and correct errors even without articulated *principles* of excellence.<sup>45</sup> Thus the furniture in her classrooms is light enough to be moved, but also to be knocked over accidentally, and children learn to "tak[e] care not to knock into things" (Montessori 1936/1996:130<sup>46</sup>). Cylinder blocks vary in size from large to small, each fitting in its own cylindrical hole, so that children can try to replace them in their proper places, getting increasingly good at recognizing the size of each block, and correcting their mistakes themselves: the child will "persist for a long time and with earnest attention in the same exercise, *correcting ... mistakes*" in the use of the material (Montessori 1918/1991: 132). Most generally,

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<sup>43</sup> Note that the purpose of the present paper is not to argue that we may never infringe on children's agency, but rather that there is an agency to be infringed on. My point is not that paternalism is never justified, but rather, in contrast to accounts such as Tamar Schapiro's (1999, 2003), that such paternalism is a genuine limitation of the will of another.

<sup>44</sup> Here and elsewhere, Montessori does not claim that *all* children do this, but that children in the right (agency-conducive) environments do so. For more on the role of environment, see (Author, in progress-b).

<sup>45</sup> As in the case of Montessori's account of impulse and persistence, her conception of normative standards as striving for excellence (rather than consistency with principle) is strongly supported by recent work on the nature and importance of "flow" (see Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 1996). This sort of norm-governed, focused interest also bears striking similarity to Alasdair MacIntyre's concept of a "practice" with its own internal standards of excellence (see MacIntyre 1989: 187), though MacIntyre's concept of a "practice" defines it in a way that requires that it be "cooperative," and his conception of the way in which "human powers to achieve excellence ... are systematically extended" is a social rather than an individual one, ruling out the sorts of practices – tracing sandpaper letters, putting cylinders in holes, scrubbing chairs – that allow individual children to extend their powers. Still, the more general notion that a "coherent and complex form of ... activity" can have "goods internal to that form of activity" that involve "standards of excellence which are ... partially definitive of that form of activity" (ibid.) fits well with Montessori's conception of the way in which children's autonomously chosen activities can be norm-governed through the pursuit of excellence in those very activities.

<sup>46</sup> Get better quotation from MM.

“Every exercise in movement that is susceptible of control by error ... helps the children to perfect their powers” (Montessori 1936/1996:130).

This emphasis on excellence rules out whim-driven play, watching television, and a variety of children’s other apparently “willful” activities as being genuinely constitutive of a will of their own. The child playing with one toy after another has no particular standard of excellence she aims to achieve, nor do those seated in front of cartoons or trying to avoid going to bed. An insofar as such children *are* trying to achieve standards of excellence – say, by trying to discover the workings of every toy in the room or by trying to anticipate what will occur next in a television show – they do act on the sorts of impulses that are candidates for genuine expressions of will.<sup>47</sup>

One further, and more metaphysically-loaded, aspect of Montessori’s thought also helps flesh out the way in which pre-conscious impulses in the child can be genuinely her own in a way worthy of respect. Montessori connects the sorts of impulses worthy of respect with what she calls “guiding instincts” that are conducive to the preservation and increasing perfection of “the individual and the species” (Montessori 1936/1996:212). She then explains,

These are the guiding instincts, with which is bound up the very existence of life in its great cosmic function. Such instincts are not so much reactions to the environment as delicate inner sensibilities, *intrinsic to life*, just as pure thought is an entirely intrinsic quality of the mind. We might continue the comparison and look on them as divine thoughts working in the inmost centers of living creatures, leading them subsequently to action on the outer world in realization of the divine plan. The guiding instincts therefore have not the impulsive character of episodic struggles, but those of an intelligence, a wisdom leading creatures through time (the individuals) and through eternity (the species). (Montessori 1936/1996:212)

A full explication of the metaphysics underlying Montessori’s claims here would take us too far afield, but the notion of “life in its great cosmic function” is a central metaphysical category for Montessori, one that she sought to articulate in various different ways over the course of her life. As a medical doctor, Montessori was extremely interested in “life” as an active and creative biological force, and in her first book – *Scientific Pedagogy* – she explains and defends “theories of evolution”<sup>48</sup> that “attribute the variability of species to *internal* rather than external causes – namely, to a spontaneous activity, implanted in life itself ... The internal factor, namely life, is the primary cause of *progress* and the *perfectionment* of living creatures” (PA 46-7). This “life” is an active force in the universe, teleologically oriented towards increasing complexity and perfection, and it is life that is manifested in the child’s striving for excellence. For Montessori, “The educator must be one inspired by the deep love of life” (MM 59), one willing to work *with* nature to promote the perfectionment of the child (and thereby the species). Thus in her early *Montessori Method* (1912), Montessori explains the close connection between biology and psychology:

<sup>47</sup> Of course, there are other factors that need to be taken into account before these are accorded respect. The child who seeks to prevent every other child from enjoying any of the toys in the room may well have a standard of excellence and may even exercise immense self-control, but he lacks appropriate socially-responsive inhibitions.

<sup>48</sup> The theorists to whom she appeals for these accounts of evolution are Carl Wilhelm von Nägeli and Hugo Marie de Vries, both important figures in the development of genetics and the eventual Darwinian synthesis, as well as Léon Laloy (a Belgian biologist), whose *Evolution de la vie* (Paris: Librairie C. Reinwald, 1902) is cited as particularly helpful for understanding the fundamental principles of biology to which she adheres (see PA 40).

The child is a body which grows, and a soul which develops – these two forms, physiological and psychic, have one eternal font, life itself. We must neither mar nor stifle the mysterious powers which lie within these two forms of growth, but we must *await from them* the manifestations which we know will succeed one another. (MM 59)

In later works, this connection is developed further. She argues that early childhood is the period of the “spiritual embryo” (Montessori 1949/1995: 60-82; Montessori 1936/1996:12-32) making a tight connection between “the formative work ... done by the embryo in the physical sphere” and that which “the newborn child has to do ... in the psychological sphere” (Montessori 1949/1995: 60, cf. Montessori 1936/1996:12-17). Drawing from Percy Nunn, she develops the concept of “the force called *horme*” that is “a vital force within ... [which] guides his efforts towards their goal.” *Horme* “might be likened to will-power” but “belongs to life in general, to what might be called the divine urge, the source of all evolution” (Montessori 1949/1995: 83).<sup>49</sup>

Montessori’s emphasis on life ascribes a normative importance to those impulses that proceed from one’s “guiding instincts” or “vital force,” the striving for self-perfection implicit in our natures as living beings. For Montessori, there are strong metaphysical and even theological underpinnings of the normative importance of these impulses. But her initial insight into their importance was more intuitive, an application of the implicit normativity involved in medical practice to pedagogy.<sup>50</sup> Whatever one thinks of her metaphysics, there is something to be said for this extension of health-oriented normativity to thinking about human agency. Philippa Foot puts the point in a particularly Montessorian way, with a clear sense of the medical analogy but none of the complex metaphysics:

I believe that evaluations of human will and action share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things, and can only be understood in these terms ... *Life* will be at the center of my discussion, and the fact that a human action or disposition is good of its kind will be taken to be simply a fact about a given feature of a certain kind of living thing.<sup>51</sup>

Montessori does not share Foot’s virtue ethical theory, and the present paper is focused on a minimal standard for agency, not a description of what makes particular exercises of it good. But the general point remains. There is a difference between behavior that flows from the “life” of a being and behavior that is artificial or contrary to that life. And likewise, there is a difference between the impulses of a child that

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<sup>49</sup> Montessori further connects this notion of “life” or “vital force” to Henri Bergson’s *elan vitale* (see Montessori 1949/1995: 83; Montessori 1948/2007: 14, and, for a discussion of Bergson’s interest in Montessori, Kramer *Montessori* 246, 268). More ambivalently, she relates her notion of life to Freud’s *libido* (Montessori 1949/1995:83), in part because most of the roots of these impulses are unconscious or sub-conscious. Still, Montessori sharply critiques Freud’s particular accounts of the unconscious (see especially Montessori 1936/1996: 4-12) and develops her own complex theory of the unconscious and subconscious mind and the way in which un- and sub-conscious processes can facilitate rather than hinder genuine agency. A full discussion of Montessori’s theory of mind is beyond the scope of the present essay.

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Montessori 1913/2012:443, where she compares “aid[ing] the physical development of the child under nature laws” as “favor[ing] his health and growth” and “aid[ing] his natural psychic tendencies” as “render[ing] him more intelligent” (and happy).

<sup>51</sup> Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford, 2001, p. 5. See too Michael Thompson, 2009, for a rich, normatively-loaded conception of “life” applied to thinking about human agency, one with strong affinities to Montessori’s approach but without her metaphysical baggage.

flow from its life, its “will to live,” and those that reflect mere passivity or chaos. Watching television and flitting from toy to toy are not, in Montessori’s (or Foot’s) sense, forms of “life.”

The notion of excellence or perfection provides a non-Kantian interpretation to the normativity required for genuine reasons, one that appropriately narrows the range of impulses that can count as genuine reasons for action without limiting it to those that are based on practical principles. Excellence *can* be defined in terms of principles (including moral ones) but also in other ways, such as hitting just the right tone in one’s playing of a musical instrument. When enriched with some teleological concept of life (or *horme* or *elan vital*) – in either metaphysically-loaded or merely intuitive versions – the notion of natural impulses towards self-perfection provides a further framework for distinguishing healthy interest in language or movement or cylinder blocks from unhealthy suppression of development in passively watching television or mindlessly flitting from one toy to another or maliciously disturbing others.

Montessori’s perfectionism and her ascription of normative importance to the guiding instincts implicit in life are not Kantian. Kant’s emphasis on the emergence *from* governance by instinct as the defining moment in the human being’s emergence into freedom is a sharp divergence from Montessori’s conception of freedom as continuous with and derived from the broader inner impulses of life. But Montessori’s emphases are still consistent with many general features of Kant’s philosophy. Kant’s endorsement of the need for teleology in biology (see KU 5:376) fits well with Montessori’s teleological biology, and his claim that *all* natural volitional predispositions in the human being are aspects of a predisposition *to the good* (see 6:26) fits well with the notion that one’s not-yet-moral impulses towards self-cultivation express an aspect of one’s (good) nature. Kant’s related notion that human beings have a duty to promote all of our natural predispositions (not merely the moral one) further supports this emphasis on respect for expressions of natural impulses of whatever form. Of course, Kant would not see anything short of the moral predisposition as sufficient for genuine agency, and he often writes as though in themselves all impulses have equal footing (e.g. KpV 5:23). But his philosophy leaves at least some room for the sorts of refinements suggested by Montessori’s perfectionist account of human impulse. And these refinements provide a basis for a less paternalistic relation with children.

For Montessori, then, not every whim or desire of a child is a genuine expression of agency worthy of respect. Autonomous willing arising only from those desires that are directed at persistent activity (work) governed by normative standards, oriented towards a standard of excellent or perfection, and deriving from one’s natural *horme* or vital impulse. Ultimately, even these qualifications leave an inevitable even if mitigated vagueness in determining which impulses are agential reasons of one’s own and which are not. But this vagueness is simply a fact of real life. There is a wide range of reason-responsive valuing attitudes that can ground autonomous willing, including rational and principled commitment but also love, caring, attentive work, and active sympathy (see e.g. Frankfurt 2004 and Darwall 2003). There might turn out to be a single underlying structure shared by all and only impulses that one can call one’s own, but there might not. And there is no *prima facie* reason to think that there must be. Even within each category of impulse, there may be no single characteristic that distinguishes each instance of genuine caring from other similar but not genuinely agential sorts of engagement with a thing. And Montessori often distinguishes true attentive work from undisciplined or passive stances towards objects as much from an “expression on the child’s face ... of such concentrated attention that it seem[s] ... extraordinary” (Montessori 1918/1991: 53) as from any specific and articulable criteria. The difference between a child (or adult) who is actively engaged in satisfying an interest with which they

genuinely identify and one who is mindlessly or self-alienatingly involved in playing computer solitaire is real, and generally recognizable, even if not fully identifiable by articulable criteria.

In any case, there are impulses that mature adults, on reflection, endorse, among which are impulses towards certain forms of love and caring, impulses towards work of certain kinds, and impulses towards certain activities, for their own sakes. In some cases, the activity of reflection *generates* identification with these impulses. I might recognize a desire to dance and, on reflection, see that I need a new hobby and that identification with this desire would allow me to meet that need while cultivating relationships and a sense of self that are independently valuable. Thus a desire that might otherwise have arisen and passed away might be transformed, through reflection, into one that I identify with. But often, reflection involves the recognition that one *already* identifies with particular impulses. And this identification is not merely a matter of finding oneself to have certain patterns of desire that partly constitute who one is (descriptively). Rather, one finds that one has already, albeit non-reflectively, *endorsed* certain impulses as *reasons* to pursue various courses of action. In reflecting on why I spend so much time painting or why I feel sexually attracted to people of a particular type, I might come to see that this activity or attraction is something *already* constitutive of who I am, that is, something to which I have already – albeit pre-reflectively – committed myself. In that case, reflective endorsement is an endorsement of impulses that *already* express my agency. It might turn out that all the impulses I identify with share a single feature in common that distinguishes them from all other impulses. If they do, this feature will not be the one beloved by Kantians, that they are endorsed upon rational reflection, since precisely what reflection reveals is a *prior* identification with the impulse. But it might also turn out that the impulses (and inhibitions) that constitute the self that I am, while generally sharing the characteristics Montessori identifies – active, persistent, norm-governed, expressive of an inner life, and oriented towards excellence – are in other respects a heterogeneous set of reason-responsive attitudes of quite different sorts. This heterogeneity, however, cannot be wiped away by reducing genuinely agential impulses to only that narrow sub-set that is endorsed by rational reflection; it is a complex fact of real human lives.

## 6. So What? Implications for the Treatment of Children and Adults

In this conclusion, I very briefly consider implications of the aspects of Montessori's account of the will on which I have focused in this paper. I start with three implications that Montessori draws from her account of children's wills: the evil of interruption, the need to respect children's "sensitive periods," and the importance of environment. But although Montessori develops her account of the will in the context of a discussion of pedagogy and the rights of children, that account has important implications for how adults think of their own agency and what it means to respect that agency. I turn to a few such implications at the end of this section.

With respect to children, one repeated application of Montessori's emphasis on attention and persistence is the recognition that *interruption* is amongst the severest forms of disrespect towards children. Montessori compares interruption of the child to "the manner of masters to slaves" (Montessori 1918/1991: 17) and insists that "He who interrupts the children in their occupations in order to make them learn some pre-determined thing . . . confuses the means with the end and destroys the man for a vanity" (Montessori 1918/1991: 139). The reason should be clear. In "those marvelous moments when their attention is fixed," the child who "is roughly interrupted" can rightly object that their *will* is being

thwarted (Montessori 1918/1991: 18).<sup>52</sup> When “they are interrupted . . . they lose all the characteristics connected with *an internal process regularly and completely carried out*” (Montessori 1918/1991: 77). One very practical implication of this abhorrence of interruption comes in Montessori’s approach to sharing, one rooted respect for the wills of others rather than mandatory generosity. While many in our culture see “sharing” as requiring that a child interrupt her own attentive work to give an item to another (who may or may not really care for it), Montessori “sharing” preeminently means waiting patiently until one’s fellows are finished with their work before taking what they were working with.

Two other implications of Montessori’s account arise from features of children’s will that are unlike those of adults. First, children are primarily focused on and capable of self-formation, while adults are focused on and capable of the shaping of their (external) worlds.<sup>53</sup> Thus respect for children is not limited to leaving them uninterrupted, but also requires the creation and maintenance of an environment suited to the exercise of their wills. This point is not wholly unique to children. Adults have obligations to ensure that the world in which we live is one in which all people’s internal capabilities for self-governance have the minimal material conditions for expression.<sup>54</sup> But in the case of children, one has a special obligation to “give the child an environment in which everything is constructed in proportion to himself, and let him live therein. Then there will develop within the child that ‘active life’ which has caused so many to marvel . . . [T]he environment . . . in the schools ought [to] . . . make such liberty possible” (Montessori 1918/1991: 17, 57). Much of Montessori’s philosophy of education is oriented towards detailed study of the environmental conditions that allow children’s “auto-education” through the free exercise of their wills in focused work. Finally, children, partly because they are in a process of self-formation, have a series of “guiding instincts” that, while always “internal” and distinct from “the impulsive character of episodic struggles” (Montessori 1936/1996: 212, see too pp. 33-41), change over time, giving rise to what Montessori calls “sensitive periods.”<sup>55</sup> Thus an important part of respect for the child is respect for the child’s particular sensitive periods, those changing but internal grounds of valuing the world. Whereas respecting the agency of an adult might involve prioritizing those commitments that are more enduring, respecting the agency of a child involves careful attunement to the way the child’s agential interests develop over time.

Beyond its implications for dealing with children, Montessori’s improved concept of agency also enriches notions of respect for adults’ humanity. For adults as for children, values implicit in caring, love, and attentive work should be respected, even when not defended in terms of principles of Reason. This could provoke important distinctions in ways in which preference-deference are ranked interpersonally and politically. So, for instance, liberal governments generally avoid laws that infringe

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<sup>52</sup> In this context, Montessori has rough words for the schools of her time (and, alas, of ours): “yet it is well known that, in spite of such results, constant interruption and change of work are commonly practiced in schools, as part of a scientific plan for combating fatigue” (Montessori 1918/1991: 48).

<sup>53</sup> This difference is discussed at length in (Author in progress-b).

<sup>54</sup> Montessori compares our need to provide children the means for their activity with the need to provide decent conditions of labor for workers: “Society has come to recognize [the laborer’s] moral and economic value, and to accord him the means and conditions needed for his work as a matter of right. Suppose we carry this idea over to the child” (Montessori 1949/2005: 16). For discussion of the importance of children’s environment in Montessori’s thought, see (Author in progress-b). For more general discussion of the obligation to provide the basic conditions for exercising fundamental capacities, see e.g. Nussbaum 2000.

<sup>55</sup> While the notion of a sensitive period in development has become standard, Montessori is the one who first developed the concept. See Kramer 1976:374.



upon principles fundamental to persons' visions of life. (In the U.S. this takes the form of various rights to privacy and religious liberty.) If carings, loves, and attentive work can be as central to one's identity as practical principles, then these forms of valuing should be accorded a comparable respect. More interpersonally, when we help or avoiding hindering others in daily interactions, we ought to focus more on goals that are part of focused work, flow, caring, or love than on those "goals" of mere desire. Given the importance of certain pre-reflective forms of valuing, one might even want to avoid excessive demands for reflection and reasoned justification of actions. If one must constantly reflect and appeal to Reason, one may end up overly inhibited in one's activity, unable to fully identify with those impulses that are truly one's own and from which one's identity – at least in part – should properly derive.<sup>56</sup> Montessori herself highlights an important implication of this conception of agency for the status of work in modern capitalist societies. As she notes, work, "which should represent the supreme satisfaction," ends up "rejected," "depends only on external circumstances," and "becomes forced labor, . . . hard and repellent." She goes on:

when through exceptional circumstances work is the result of inner, instinctive impulse, then *even in the adult* [emphasis added] it assumes a different character. Such work is fascinating, irresistible, and it raises man above deviations and inner conflicts. Such is the work of the inventor or discoverer, the heroic efforts of the explorer, or the compositions of the artist, that is to say, the work of men gifted with such an extraordinary power as to enable them to rediscover the instinct of their species in the patterns of their own individuality. This instinct is then a fountain that bursts through the hard out crust and rises, through a profound urge, to fall, as refreshing rain, or arid humanity. It is through this urge that the true progress of civilization takes place. (Montessori 1936/1996:196)

The point here is that like children, adults have inner impulses that are genuinely their own. Too often, our lives are governed by (prudentially) rational considerations of (economic) value. And when we really see individuals whose lives are exemplars of excellence and authenticity, we find these to be individuals whose agency arises not only from Reason-guided reflection but particularly from an attunement to their own "inner, instinctive impulse" towards excellence(s) of a particular kind. Finding room – both as individuals and as society – for these sorts of agential impulses to find expression is a central part of respect for humanity, in both children and adults. Overall, then, a Montessori broadening of Kantian conditions of agency opens room for children's agency to be respected, and it also helps us better respect adults (including ourselves).

In the end, Montessori articulates and illustrates notions of acting on reasons and persistence that are broad enough to be applicable to children but not so broad as to be implausible. These alternatives to related Kantian concepts are not exclusive of those narrower Kantian readings of these aspects of agency. The fact that attention and caring confer value in ways distinct from mere desire and with which one can fully and actively identify does not mean that there is not something special about the way that value-conferral happens in endorsement through self-conscious reflection in the light of practical principles of Reason. And the fact that there are localized forms of persistence in attentive work does not imply that

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<sup>56</sup> One example of the dangerous interruption of reflection might well relate to notions of "consent." Those involved in shared projects often work together and make use of each other without express consent. (This will be true of sexual activity, but also other shared 'flow' experiences.) The "consent" is implied by the common activity, but any model according to which reflection and rational principle are necessary in order for consent to be truly one's own will fail to capture the sort of shared values involved in activities in which all are fully immersed (flow experiences). There are a host of tricky issues here to ensure that none are implicitly forced into activities without their consent while still preserving the unreflective "flow" of activities in which one is wholly immersed.

there is not something special about the way in which commitment to universal rational principles for life as a whole allows for the construction of a coherent self. But even if Montessori does not show that a child-like will is the highest we should aspire to,<sup>57</sup> she helps establish a conception of the will – and of the humanity Kant calls us to respect – that is applicable to children and changes our understanding of ourselves as adults.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Montessori does think that adults have a lot to emulate in children's willing, particularly with respect to the ways in which children love, but a discussion of the range of ways that adults needs to learn from children is a topic for another paper.

<sup>58</sup> Acknowledgements footnote:

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