Do I have obligations to plants thanks to my practical identity? K thinks not, although I do to animals.

The interest of this question is: do claims on me come from inside or outside—from the other humans and the pain-sufferers, or just from my identity?

One way is to think that the division of the universe into things to which I have obligations (fellow-whites, fellow-animals, fellow-humans, fellow-living-things, etc.) is a function of my identity.

K’s way, however, is to say that it would be irrational to neglect obligations laid on me from outside, obligations which I must recognize by the nature of reason (the person shouting ‘stop’, the pig squealing in pain, etc.) but not irrational to trample on flowers—just bad.
Williams at the bottom of p. 212 lists the requirements that an argument for the Moral Law would have to fulfill to satisfy K: “ultimate justification, rationally inescapable, practically relevant, and explanatory of the source of itself. (The last, of course, is a peculiarly Kantian/Korsgaardian requirement which says that the explanation of our moral consciousness must also locate the source of obligation).

The trouble is that we reflect on what practical identity to have (like Huck) but we cannot reflect on what is an unconditional rational necessity—for we either see it or we don’t.

This comes up when Geuss says at p. 198 that the argument from the publicity of reasons to the need for all reason-givers to be treated as moral equals doesn’t go through.

And also at
Two distinct questions:

(1) Need my identity take the form of a law or principle I give myself, as K says at 3.3.3. This is the bit Cohen criticizes at 176 when he says “What the reflective structure requires is not that I be a law to myself, but that I be in command of myself”.

(2) Need my practical identity be that of a member of the Kingdom of Ends?
p. 91: “each impulse must pass a test for normativity before we can adopt it as a reason for action...but this is not a test for knowledge or truth”

Why not say “each belief or desire must be recognized as coherent with the others before I am willing to act on it”, and thus that there is no distinction between searching for truth and for moral rightness?

p. 91 first thesis to be proved: “autonomy is our source of obligation”

rather than identity? No, because an identity obligates and thinks of itself as autonomous.

K admits at p. 255 that non-moral and immoral identities obligate, but here she contradicts herself—an ambiguity that runs through the book.

Again, at p. 103 she says that “obligation is always unconditional, but it is only when it concerns really important matters that it is deep”

Again, at p. 127 she repudiates, thank God, the horrible Kantian idea that personal relationships and moral relationships are utterly distinct.

She says at p. 127 that the “contrast between being motivated by reason and being motivated by affection is incoherent”

But at pp. 227-8 she seems to return to the Kantian contrast she repudiates here.

p. 91: second thesis to be proved: “we have obligations to humanity as such”

p. 92, bottom: “the structure of our minds that makes thoughtfulness possible”

But what does this account of structure on p. 93 as “Distancing ourselves from our own mental activities” add to the automatic, built-in, quest for coherence?

p. 94: identification of reflection with a search for the unconditioned—for a final premise, a Letzbegrundung

But K confuses skepticism about such a final premise with scepticism about whether “the problems which reflection sets for us are insoluble”.

So she confuses skepticism about “whether there is such a thing as morality?” with the question ‘must the reflective Mafioso change his practical identity?’

p. 97-8: attempt to rehabilitate Kant’s argument that the very idea of a free will demands the idea of “a will that makes the law for itself”

But why think of freedom as the possession of a faculty, as opposed to the kind of Humean freedom which consists in not being under the gun?

Why use p. 97’s definition of “a free will as a rational causality which ineffectively being determined by any alien cause”

At pp. 100-101 K tries to answer these rhetorical questions by saying: “it is as if there were something over and above…” (100) and “I couldn’t live with myself” implies “that there are two selves here, me and the one I must live with and so must not fail”.

Again, why not just talk about inability to tell a coherent story about oneself?

At p. 103 we hit the crucial claim that “the reflective structure of human consciousness requires that you identify yourself with some law or principle”

This is the point to which Hume and Baier and Dewey are inclined to say: no that’s just one way of having coherence. Another way is to have a model, a paradigm, such as Don Corleone or Jesus or Zarathustra or Daddy or Socrates.

The big question K’s book raises is: can you get practical identity together with the notion of the rational necessity of taking every member of the species (or every pain-feeler) seriously, or is Nagel right in saying (at p. 203, bottom) that existentialism and universalism are like oil and water?

Or, as Cohen says at p. 174, “it is very difficult to put together the motif of practical identity with the emphasis on law”

The problem is that practical identities are rationally changeable and historically contingent whereas the Moral Law isn’t.

But K thinks that “our tendency to treat our contingent identities as sources of reasons implies that we set a value on our own humanity and so on humanity in general” (p. 250)
See her explanation of the reflective idealized Mafioso at the bottom of p. 256, and her claim at the bottom of p. 257 that “the activity of reflection has rules of its own” which guide the Mafioso toward deserting the Mafia rather than to an ever more coherent Mafia world-view.

But at p. 105 K reaffirms her devotion to the clusture of ideas which comprise “authority”, “law”, “command” and so on when she says “It is the fact that we command ourselves to do what we find it would be a good idea to do”.

Anti-Kantians say that we automatically do what we think it would be a good idea to do, and that commanding is just bringing in a whiff of blood and the last and old Nobodaddy unnecessarily.

At p. 107, K says that “autonomy is commanding yourself to do what you think it would be a good idea to do”—but this means that we are always all already autonomous whenever we get out of bed.

At p. 108: “A good maxim is good in virtue of its internal structure...the one that makes it fit to be willed as a law” A good maxim is therefore an intrinsically normative entity.

How about “I refuse your weapon, because having conquered you in battle you are now my slave” Is that universaliable?

p. 103 gives a good summary of the upshot of the first half of the third lecture. Discuss in detail “the idea that “Reflective distance...forces us to have a conception of our own identity, a concept which identifies us with the source of the reasons on which we shall act”

p. 103 then goes on to say that we need the second half of the chapter to avoid RELATIVISM, and that “there are particular ways in which we MUST think of our identities”

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p. 117: historicism—we were not always people “where one’s identity is one’s relation to humanity as such”

Note that humanity as such is ambiguous between “members of the species” and “reason givers”.
The big question about the Enlightenment is N’s: were we right to think that reasons can’t be ignored even when they come from blacks, or pigs, or women?

p. 121 states the thesis that this second half of the chapter is supposed to prove: “that our identity as people who value ourselves as human beings stands behind our more particular identities”

Alternatively, at the bottom of 121: “part of the normative force of the reasons springs from the value we place on ourselves as human beings who need such identities”

123 gives a “transcendental argument that Enlightenment morality is true”

I think that either you accept this argument or succumb to what K would call “relativism” or “historicism” or “contingency”. Since I cannot accept it...

Can you?

Can you believe the claim that slave-owners are inconsistent? That they have not thought things through? That they are really unable to will that they too should be enslaved if they are defeated in battle?