

# Freedom & the Unity of Reason

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## 1 Groundwork III & The Freedom of Reason

### 1.1 The Deliberation Argument<sup>1</sup>

1. If one cannot act except under the assumption of freedom, then that person is really free, if only from a practical standpoint
2. Those laws connected with freedom apply to such a deliberative agent just as if she *really were*, from the standpoint of theoretical philosophy, *free*
3. Rational agents cannot act except under the assumption of their freedom
4. ∴ Rational agents are, from a practical standpoint, free [1, 3]
5. ∴ The laws of freedom (i.e. the moral law) necessarily apply to rational agents [2, 4]
6. ∴ Rational agents are, for all practical purposes, really free

### 1.2 Autonomy & Kant's Circle

*The Circle:* (A) The belief that we are subject to the moral law is based on our knowledge that we are free; (B) our belief that we are free is based on our knowledge that we are subject to the moral law<sup>2</sup>

#### Breaking the Circle:

- We break out of the circle by looking for *non-moral* reasons for thinking that we are free
- Kant finds such a non-moral basis by appealing to the spontaneity of *theoretical reason*<sup>3</sup>
  - Theoretical reason (or theoretical judgment) is an activity of reason in accordance with rational principles (e.g. principles of logic; an “ethics” of belief)
  - Reasoning in accordance with rational principles cannot be ultimately determined by preceding events<sup>4</sup>
    - i. Control argument
      - Assumes reasoning is something that is under one's control
    - ii. Constitutive laws argument
      - Assumes the intellect operates according to non-natural causal laws

<sup>1</sup> I say now: every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy. Now I assert that to every rational being having a will we must necessarily lend the idea of freedom also, under which alone he acts. Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently...the will of a rational being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such a will must in a practical respect thus be attributed to every rational being. (4:448)

<sup>2</sup> a kind of circle comes to light here from which, as it seems, there is no way to escape. We take ourselves as free in the order of efficient causes in order to think ourselves under moral laws in the order of ends; and we afterwards think ourselves as subject to these laws because we have ascribed to ourselves freedom of will: for, freedom and the will's own lawgiving are both autonomy and hence reciprocal concepts, and for this very reason one cannot be used to explain the other or to furnish a ground for it but can at most be used only for the logical purpose of reducing apparently different representations of the same object to one single concept (as different fractions of equal value are reduced to their lowest expression). (4:450)

<sup>3</sup> All of our actions and those of other beings are necessitated, the intellect (and the will, insofar as it can be determined by the intellect) alone is free and a pure self-activity, which is not determined by anything other than itself. Without this original and inalterable spontaneity we would not cognize anything a priori, and our thoughts themselves would stand under empirical laws. The capacity to think a priori and to act is the unique condition of the possibility of the origin of all other appearances. The ought would also have no significance at all. (R 544I (1776-8), 18:182-3)

<sup>4</sup> [O]ne cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from any other quarter with respect to its judgments, since the subject would then attribute the determination of his judgment not to his reason but to an impulse. (4:448)

### The Two Standpoints Argument:

- Explanation of the spontaneity of theoretical reason requires positing ourselves as “intelligible objects” – i.e. subjects of a realm free of natural (temporally structured) causation<sup>5</sup>
1. We have non-moral reasons, based on the spontaneity of theoretical/speculative reason, to conceive of ourselves as not merely empirical but also intelligible objects
  2. An intelligible reasoner cannot think of the causality of its own will except under the idea of freedom—i.e. as autonomous (defined both negatively as “independence from the determining causes of the world of sense” and positively as “being a law to itself”).
  3. An autonomous will is one that acts according to the moral law
  4. ∴ Understanding ourselves as intelligible reasoners, and thus as free, requires understanding ourselves as subject to the moral law<sup>6</sup>

#### OBJECTIONS:

- Premise (1) is problematic
  - A. If we cannot know anything about the self grounding the ‘I think’, how could we know any other metaphysical conclusion about the self, such as that it is transcendently free, based on appeals concerning the nature of (empirical) reasoning?
  - B. Why think that the capacity for rational thought requires *transcendental* freedom?
- There is a gap between premises (1) and (2)
  - C. Even if we grant both that we are reasoners and that reasoning entails being transcendently free (i.e. being a member of an intelligible realm operating according to laws of reason rather than natural causality), still it does not follow that we are *practical* reasoners with rational *wills*—i.e. why think that a rational *thinker* must also be a rational *actor*?

### 1.3 The Fact of Reason

- Kant seems also to pursue an alternative strategy: We are aware of the moral law as we are aware of the laws of theoretical reasoning; there is no longer a relation of epistemic dependence between these two (instead they are parallel)<sup>7</sup>
  - The “fact of reason” is the non-derivative or immediate awareness of being subject to the moral law (in the same way that we are immediately aware of being subject to logical laws)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Now, a human being really finds in himself a capacity by which he distinguishes himself from all other things, even from himself insofar as he is affected by objects, and that is reason. ... [R]eason...shows in what we call “ideas” a spontaneity so pure that it thereby goes far beyond anything that sensibility can ever afford it. ... Because of this a rational being must regard himself as intelligence (hence not from the side of his lower powers) as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of the intellect. ... As a rational being, and thus as a being belonging to the intelligible world, the human being can never think of the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom (4:452).

<sup>6</sup> As a rational being, and thus as a being belonging to the intelligible world, the human being can never think of the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom; for, independence from the determining causes of the world of sense (which reason must always ascribe to itself) is freedom. With the idea of freedom the concept of *autonomy* is now inseparably combined, and with the concept of autonomy the universal principle of morality, which in idea is the ground of all actions of *rational beings*, just as the law of nature is the ground of all appearances. (4:452-3)

<sup>7</sup> We can become aware of pure practical laws just as we are aware of pure theoretical principles, by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them to us and to the setting aside of all empirical conditions to which reason directs us. The concept of a pure will arises from the first, as consciousness of a pure understanding arises from the latter. (CPrR 5:30)

<sup>8</sup> Consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason because one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason, for example from consciousness of freedom (since this is not antecedently given to us) and because it instead forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic a priori proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical. ... However in order to avoid misinterpretation in regarding this law as *given*, it must be noted carefully that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving. (CPrR 5:31)

### The Fact of Reason Argument:

1. Lawfulness and causality are mutually entailing
2. The concept is objectively valid; its derivation from the understanding gives it objective necessity even in application to intelligible objects<sup>9</sup>
3. The fact of reason gives us a basis (albeit practical) for applying the concept to the intelligible world
4. ∴ We have (non-circular) practical grounds for believing in the existence of an intelligible cause governed by the moral law—viz. the intelligible (free) self

## 2 The Unity of Reason

### 2.1 Is There a Common Principle?

- Kant speaks of “reason” (*Vernunft*) as a unitary faculty with a “common principle”<sup>10</sup>
- Q<sub>1</sub>: In what sense is the faculty of theoretical reason, which pursues the systematicity of its cognitions, identical with the faculty of practical reason, which binds the causally unconditioned aspect of the rational (human) will by (categorical) laws?<sup>11,12</sup>
  - Is the categorical imperative the supreme or “common” principle of reason?<sup>13</sup>
- Q<sub>2</sub>: In what sense does practical reason have “primacy”?<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2 O’Neil’s Proposal

- The categorical imperative (or the moral law) is the principle unifying all of reason’s activity
1. The practical use of reason is more fundamental than its theoretical/speculative use
  2. The Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle of practical reason
  3. ∴ The Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle of reason

## References & Further Reading

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<sup>9</sup> Now the concept of a being that has a free will is the concept of a *\*causa noumenon\**; and one is already assured that this concept does not contradict itself since the concept of a cause, as having arisen wholly from the pure understanding, also has its objective reality with respect to objects in general assured by the deduction in as much as, being in its origin independent of all sensible conditions and so of itself not restricted to phenomena (unless one should want to make a determinate theoretical use of it), the concept could certainly be applied to things as beings of the pure understanding (CPrR 5:55)

<sup>10</sup> Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason’s common principle (*gemeinschaftliches Prinzip*) has been discovered (Axx)

<sup>11</sup> [A critique of pure practical reason] is not of such utmost necessity as [a critique of pure theoretical reason], because in moral matters human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, even in the most common understanding, whereas in its theoretical but pure use it is wholly dialectical [i.e., a source of illusion]...I require that the critique of pure practical reason, if it is to be carried through completely, be able at the same time to present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application. (G 4:391)

<sup>12</sup> if pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law proves it to be, it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles (CPrR 5:121)

<sup>13</sup> To make use of one’s own reason means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason. (OT 8:146n)

<sup>14</sup> in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*. ... [O]ne cannot require pure practical reason to be subordinate to speculative reason and so reverse the order, since all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone. (CPrR 5:121)

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