

Groundwork II

PHIL 871

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1 The Structure of Groundwork II¹

¹ See Timmermann (2007), xxxi.

1. Preliminaries (4:406–12)
2. The doctrine of imperatives (4:412–20)
3. The categorical imperative (4:420–1) [FUL]
4. The first variant: universal laws of nature (4:421–4) [FLN]
5. Interlude (4:425–7)
6. The second variant: rational creatures as ends-in-themselves (4:427–31) [FH]
7. The third variant: autonomy in a kingdom of ends (4:431–6) [FA & FRE]
8. Reflections on the variant formulations of the categorical imperative (IV 436–40)
9. The autonomy of the moral will (4:440–4)
10. Transition to Section III: how is a synthetic practical proposition possible? (4:444–5)

2 Kant's Theory of Agency

2.1 Inclination & Desire

- Living things act in accordance with inner states – representations²
- All *intentional action* (as contrasted with bodily movement/behavior) is based on both a cognitive and a conative component^{3,4}
 - Conative states are themselves either representational or non-representational
 - * Feelings of pleasure/displeasure (non-representational)
 - * Desire (representational)
- An intentional action requires the following causal chain: cognition → conation (feeling + desire) → action
- At the empirical 'level' we are (as are all living beings) psychologically determined⁵

² The faculty of a being to act in accordance with its representations is called *life* (MM 6:211).

³ Insofar as a mental state ("representation") is the cause of an action that brings about some state of affairs, it is a desire: "the faculty of the soul for becoming cause of the actuality of the object through the representation of the object itself = ... the faculty of desire" (29:1012; see also 6:211, 399; 7:251). As this definition suggests, "action" occurs whenever a representation is the cause of the actuality of an "object," where "object" includes physical objects but also states of affairs. (Frierson (2014), 54-5)

⁴ Pleasure precedes the faculty of desire, and the cognitive faculty precedes pleasure [W]e can desire or abhor nothing which is not based on pleasure or displeasure. For that which give me no pleasure, I also do not want. Thus pleasure or displeasure precedes desire or abhorrence. But still I must first cognize what I desire, likewise what gives me pleasure or displeasure; accordingly, both are based on the cognitive faculty. (29:877-8)

⁵ if we could investigate all the appearances of his power of choice down to their basis, then there would be no human action that we could not predict with certainty, and recognize as necessary given its preceding conditions. Thus in regard to this empirical character there is no freedom... (A549-50/B577-8; cf. CPrR 5:99; Pr 4:295)

2.2 Maxims

- What is a 'maxim'?⁶
 - A 'subjective principle of willing' or principle on which a person acts
 - * Contrasts with objective *law*⁷
 - Designates an action to be performed in a type of situation and for some purpose
- Distinguish between:⁸
 - A) I will knock Alex down, in order to remove him from the path of an oncoming bullet.
 - B) I will knock Alex down, in order to relieve my temper.
 - C) I will punch a punching bag, in order to relieve my temper.
 - (A) is (at least) permissible while (B) is wrong, but not simply because of the action
 - (C) is permissible, but not simply because of the intention
 - What matters is the relation between action and intention – viz. the 'form' of the maxim
- Kant's examples of maxims
 - let no insult pass unavenged (5:19)
 - when I believe myself to be in need of money I shall borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen (4:422).
- Action from a maxim contrasts with merely acting from inclination
- Non-rational beings lack the capacity to act on maxims, so their actions (or behaviour) is completely determined by their sensible impulses

2.3 Maxims & Incorporation

- Intentional action depends on the ability of the agent to act rationally
- Rational action requires the adoption of a maxim in which a desire to bring about some end has been 'incorporated'⁹
 - 'incorporation' talk leaves open whether desires determine choice or action by themselves
- The 'Incorporation Thesis'
 - Desires do *not* determine rational choice/intentional action by themselves
 - * There is a question here whether intentional action is a status an agent *confers* on her (possibility psychologically determined) actions via rational reflection/endorsement, or something she can *recognize* her actions as having, given her capacity for freedom (what Kant calls 'practical freedom')¹⁰

⁶ A *maxim* is the subjective principle of willing; the objective principle (i.e., the one that would also subjectively serve all rational beings as the practical principle if reason had complete control over the desiderative faculty) is the practical *law*. (4:400, note)

⁷ The former [a maxim] contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations), and is therefore the principle in accordance with which the subject *acts*; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which *he ought to act*, i.e., an imperative. (4:421, note)

⁸ Korsgaard (1989), 339-40

⁹ [F]reedom of the power of choice [*Willkür*] has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into the universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself): only in this way can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice of freedom). (RGV 6: 24; 73)

¹⁰ **Freedom in the practical sense** is the independence of the power of choice from **necessitation** by impulses of sensibility...in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses. (A534/B562)

- A desire, once incorporated, stands as a reason for the subject's action
- The adoption of the maxim is not itself either causally connected to or otherwise a causal consequence of the (state of) desire, but is rather a 'spontaneous' and free act of the agent¹¹
- Status of the incorporation thesis is controversial
 - The original context of the claim concerns moral 'rigorism' – that a subject is either good or evil, there is no intermediate position
 - * Suggests that, contra the Incorporation thesis, desire acts as a sufficient incentive to action and that Kant's point concerns the possibility of freely choosing *which incentives* will determine a subject's choices throughout her experience

¹¹ Kant uses the term 'incentive' (*Triebfeder*) to describe the relation of the free person to the candidate reasons among which she chooses. An incentive is something that makes an action interesting to you, that makes it a live option. Desires and inclinations are incentives; so is respect for the moral law. An inclination by itself is merely an incentive, and does not become a reason for action until the person has adopted it freely into her maxim (Korsgaard (1996a), 165)

2.4 The Will & Imperatives

- Distinguish between:¹²
 - Action in accordance with a law (as is the case with all activity in nature)
 - Action in virtue of the *representation of a law* (as is a case with a will governed by rational 'principles')

¹² Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*. Since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. (4:412)

Practical Reason (the Will [der Wille]): the capacity to act in accordance with, or as a result of, one's representation of a law; i.e. act according to principles

- Kant is addressing the issue of a will *in general*, so the laws in question are *objective* laws, not *subjective* maxims
- The will is a *capacity*, and as such exists even when not exercised, or exercised appropriately (i.e. in conformity with a law)
- Two kinds of will
 - Holy will: a will which *always* acts in conformity with reason/rational law
 - Finite (human) will: a will exposed to subjective and non-rational (sensible) incentives
 - * Only finite wills have imperatives which apply to them¹³
- Imperatives are principles (representations of laws) which have normative force for an agent
 - In what sense 'normative force'?
 - * phenomenological (feeling of compulsion)
 - * favoring/representing as good (4:413)

¹³ The representation of an objective principle in so far as it is necessitating for a will is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called IMPERATIVE. All imperatives are expressed by an *ought*, and by this indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that according to its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation). (4:413)

Hypothetical Imperative: command to do something whose value is conditioned by its status as a means to some further end, which is also willed

- In virtue of willing some end, it is *analytic* that one wills the means to that end¹⁴

¹⁴ Whoever wills the end also wills (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that is in his control. As far as willing is concerned, this proposition is analytic; for in the willing of an object, as my effect, my causality is already thought, as an acting cause, i.e. the use of means, and the imperative already extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of a willing of this end (4:417)

Categorical Imperative: command to do something whose value is unconditional – i.e. whose value is an end in itself

- A categorical imperative is synthetic a priori since it commands something new, something not entailed by the ends the agent wishes to pursue¹⁵

OBJECTION: There are non-moral oughts which are not straightforwardly hypothetical

- e.g. 'Answer an invitation in the third person in the third person'
 - An imperative of etiquette is unconditional – it does not apply only to those who have the end of (or an end that is served by) being polite
- But imperatives of etiquette do not apply with the requisite *universality* which Kant has in mind – they do not apply merely in virtue of the subject's status as a rational being

3 The Categorical Imperative & Its Formulations

The Categorical Imperative (CI): Adopt only maxims that conform to universal law as such (cf. 4:421).

1. The Formula of Universal Law (FUL)¹⁶

- Variant: The Formula of the Law of Nature (FLN)¹⁷

2. The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself (FH)¹⁸

3. The Formula of Autonomy (FA)¹⁹

- Variant: The Formula of the Realm of Ends (FRE)²⁰
- The moral law, categorical imperative, and the universalization procedure are three distinct things
 - The moral law is (or specifies) a principle that applies to all rational beings *qua* rational, including perfect wills like that of God
 - The categorical imperative is a command to act in accordance to the moral law, and applies only to finite beings (e.g. humans). – The moral law is experienced as a *constraint*, one to which a subject may or may not conform
 - Universalization is the procedure by which we examine our maxims with regard to their conformity with the moral law
- The first version of the CI and its variant concern the *form* of willing
- The second version of the CI concerns the *matter* of what is willed, i.e. the end)
- The third version of the CI concerns the coordination of the products of universal willing in a community of rational beings

¹⁵ Without a presupposed condition from any inclination, I connect the deed with the will a priori, and hence necessarily (though only objectively, i.e. under the idea of a reason that has complete control over all subjective motives). This is therefore a practical proposition that does not derive the willing of an action analytically from willing another that is already presupposed (for we have no such perfect will), but connects it immediately with the concept of the will of a rational being, as something that is not contained in it. (4:420, note)

¹⁶ Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law (4:421; cf. 4:402)

¹⁷ Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature (4:421; cf. 4:436).

¹⁸ So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means (4:429; cf. 4:436).

¹⁹ act according to maxims that can at the same time have as their object themselves as universal laws of nature (4:437)

²⁰ Act in accordance with the maxims of a universally legislative member of a merely possible realm of ends (4:439; cf. 4:432, 437, 438)

3.1 Kinds of Duty

- *Division* (not *derivation*) of duties follows from the universalization procedure²¹

Perfect duty: One ought always (or never) do x

Imperfect duty: One ought to do x sometimes, and to some extent²²

- Violation of a perfect duty would generate a contradiction in *conception*
- Violation of an imperfect duty would generate a contradiction in *will* but not in *conception*

4 The Formula of Humanity

- The only objectively valuable end is rational nature itself (whether in oneself or another)
 - Kant's argument proceeds by excluding all(?) other possible contenders
 - * The objects of inclination
 - * Inclination
 - * Non-rational beings (e.g. other animals)
- Only *persons* (rational beings) are ends in themselves
 - Does rational nature admit of maximization/optimization?
 - Could Kant's moral theory as expressed by FH justify a form of consequentialism?
 - * Evaluate actions as good/right that promote or optimize the existence of rational nature

5 Autonomy & Heteronomy

- Two notions of 'autonomy'
 - Autonomy as a *property* of the will²³
 - Autonomy as a *principle* of the will²⁴
- All rival ethical theories place the principle of morality in some source other than (the structure of) the will – they are 'heteronomous' for that reason²⁵

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²¹ It is easy to see that the first [contradiction in conception] conflicts with strict or narrower (unrelenting) duty, the second [contradiction in will] only with wider (meritorious) duty, and thus that all duties, as far as the kind of obligation (not the object of their action) is concerned, have by these examples been set out completely in their dependence on the one principle. (4:424)

²² if the law can prescribe only the maxim of actions, not actions themselves, this is a sign that it leaves a playroom (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law, that is, that the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty. ... The wider the duty, therefore, the more imperfect is a man's obligation to action; as he, nevertheless, brings closer to *narrow* duty (duties of right) the maxim of complying with wide duty (in his disposition), so much the more perfect is his virtuous action. (DV 6:390)

²³ Autonomy of the will is the characteristic of the will by which it is a law to itself (independent of any characteristic of the objects of willing). (4:440)

²⁴ The principle of autonomy is thus: not to choose in any other way than that the maxims of one's choice are also comprised as universal law in the same willing. That this practical rule is an imperative... cannot be proved by mere analysis of the concepts that occur in it, because it is a synthetic proposition; one would have to go beyond the cognition of objects to a critique of the subject, i.e. of pure practical reason, since this synthetic proposition, which commands apodictically, must be capable of being cognized completely a priori (4:440)

²⁵ If it is in *anything other* than the fitness of its maxims for its own universal legislation, hence if - as it goes beyond itself - it is in a characteristic of any of its objects that the will seeks the law that is to determine it, the outcome is always *heteronomy*. (4:441)

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