

Kant's Ethics and Kantian Ethics

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Lecture 5. *Groundwork* Section III

Transition from metaphysics of morals to the critique of pure practical reason.

4: 446-7. What is a free will? Will is, first, a kind of *causality*. In the case of a free will, the causality is not *natural necessity*, by which non-rational beings are made to act by alien causes. This contrast with natural necessity gives rise to a *negative* idea of free will: a will that can work independently of alien causes. This in turn yields a *positive* idea, when we consider that causality implies *laws*. Free will, if it is to be a will, must be law-governed, and if it is to be a free will, must be governed, not by natural law but law of a special kind: 'what, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will's property of *being a law to itself*?' This said law is the principle, to act on no other maxim than that which can also have as object itself as a universal law, i.e. the categorical imperative. 'A free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same'.

'*One and the same.*' There is an analytic connection between free will and morality: a reciprocal entailment, according to which freedom entails the moral law, and the moral law entails freedom. In Section II Kant has (perhaps) argued for one side of the entailment, namely that the moral law entails freedom, conceived as autonomy (432-33). Here at the beginning of Section III, he argues for the other side, namely that freedom entails the moral law. This 'reciprocity thesis' can be viewed as a biconditional holding between 'The rational will is free', and 'The moral law is unconditionally valid for the rational will' (see Wood, 171; Allison, 'Kant's Theory of Freedom', 214-8.)

'*Under moral laws.*' If the notion of being 'under' moral laws is taken to mean actually *obeying* moral laws, we approach the Platonic idea that it is impossible freely to do wrong, for we are only free insofar as we obey the moral law. This in turn would imply that wrong-doers fail to act freely, and to the extent they are wrong-doers, are not responsible for what they do. Moreover, it seems to conflict with the argument of Section II, which makes room precisely for the notion of a will that is *not* holy, but *is* free (4:413). Alternatively, being 'under' moral laws could be taken to mean being *bound* by the moral law—having the moral law be *valid* for it—whether or not the law is obeyed. That would leave scope for consistency with Section II, and responsibility for wrongdoing; yet the text seems to suggest the former reading.

4: 448 'Freedom must be presupposed as a property of the will of all rational beings'. Having just established (something like) the conditional, 'if the rational will is free, then the moral law is binding on it', Kant proceeds to establish (something like) the antecedent of that conditional, and thereby the consequent. The rational will *is* free—or at any rate we have to *presuppose* that it is, for it must act 'under the idea of freedom'.

Acting 'under the idea of freedom'. Some possibilities:

(i) freedom as phenomenology of the practical stance; (ii) freedom as presupposition of practical deliberation. *Caveats*: freedom is not a concept of experience, indeed experience apparently contradicts the supposition of freedom (4: 455). Moreover it is not so much *practicality* that presupposes freedom, as *rationality*, if theoretical reason itself presupposes freedom (4: 448). So try (iii) freedom as presupposition of *rationality*. Any exercise of reason presupposes freedom as autonomy, even theoretical reason: the alternative would be for an agent to attribute the determination of judgement not to *his reason*, but to impulse. It wouldn't then be *reason*; and it wouldn't then be *his*. So freedom is presupposed even in the exercise of ordinary theoretical judgement.

Compare here the ideas of freedom as *self-rule* (4: 448), and freedom as *capacity to do otherwise* (implicit at 4: 455). 'All human beings think of themselves as having free will. From this come all judgments upon actions as being such that *they ought to have been done even though they were not done*.'

1. A rational will must act under the idea of freedom, for otherwise the rational being's will is not its own [cannot be regarded as its own].
 2. Any will that must act under the idea of freedom is really free 'in a practical respect' [must regard itself as really free].
 3. So a rational will is really free [must regard itself as really free] 'in a practical respect' (from 1-2).
- [Q. At what point do we get to infer that *we* are rational beings, who have rational wills?]
4. If we are [must regard ourselves] as free from a practical point of view then we are [justified in believing we are] free—unless some speculative argument proves the contrary.
 5. No speculative argument could prove the contrary (argued in *Critique of Pure Reason*).
 6. So we are [justified in believing we are] free (from 4-5).