

~~general) depends, as the original ground of its necessary lawfulness (as nature regarded formally)” (ibid.). Or more strongly: “we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity that we call nature, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there. [...] The understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances: it is itself the legislation for nature, i.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all” (A125–126).~~

5. Morality and freedom

Having examined two central parts of Kant’s positive project in theoretical philosophy from the Critique of Pure Reason, transcendental idealism and the transcendental deduction, let us now turn to his practical philosophy in the Critique of Practical Reason. Since Kant’s philosophy is deeply systematic, this section begins with a preliminary look at how his theoretical and practical philosophy fit together (see also section 7).

5.1 Theoretical and practical autonomy

The fundamental idea of Kant’s philosophy is human autonomy. So far we have seen this in Kant’s constructivist view of experience, according to which our understanding is the source of the general laws of nature. “Autonomy” literally means giving the law to oneself, and on Kant’s view our understanding provides laws that constitute the a priori framework of our experience. Our understanding does not provide the matter or content of our experience, but it does provide the basic formal structure within which we experience any matter received through our senses. Kant’s central argument for this view is the transcendental deduction, according to which it is a condition of self-consciousness that our understanding constructs experience in this way. So we may call self-consciousness the highest principle of Kant’s theoretical philosophy, since it is (at least) the basis for all of our a priori knowledge about the structure of nature.

understanding >> the laws of nature
reason >> the moral law

Kant’s moral philosophy is also based on the idea of autonomy. He holds that there is a single fundamental principle of morality, on which all specific moral duties are based. He calls this moral law (as it is manifested to us) the categorical imperative (see 5.4). The moral law is a product of reason, for Kant, while the basic laws of nature are products of our understanding. There are important differences between the senses in which we are autonomous in constructing our experience and in morality. For example, Kant regards understanding and reason as different cognitive faculties, although he sometimes uses “reason” in a wide sense to cover both.^[19] The categories and therefore the laws of nature are dependent on our specifically human forms of intuition, while reason is not. The moral law does not depend on any qualities that are peculiar to human nature but only on the nature of reason as such, although its manifestation to us as a categorical imperative (as a law of duty) reflects the fact that the human will is not necessarily determined by pure reason but is also influenced by other incentives rooted in our needs and inclinations; and our specific duties deriving from the categorical imperative do reflect human nature and the contingencies of human life. Despite these differences, however, Kant holds that we give the moral law to ourselves, just as we also give the general laws of nature to ourselves, though in a different sense. Moreover, we each necessarily give the same moral law to ourselves, just as we each construct our experience in accordance with the same categories. To summarize:

- Theoretical philosophy is about how the world is (A633/B661). Its highest principle is self-consciousness, on which our knowledge of the basic laws of nature is based. Given sensory data, our understanding constructs experience according to these a priori laws.

- Practical philosophy is about how the world ought to be (ibid., A800–801/B828–829). Its highest principle is the moral law, from which we derive duties that command how we ought to act in specific situations. Kant also claims that reflection on our moral duties and our need for happiness leads to the thought of an ideal world, which he calls the highest good (see section 6). Given how the world is (theoretical philosophy) and how it ought to be (practical philosophy), we aim to make the world better by constructing or realizing the highest good.

So both parts of Kant's philosophy are about autonomously constructing a world, but in different senses. In theoretical philosophy, we use our categories and forms of intuition to construct a world of experience or nature. In practical philosophy, we use the moral law to construct the idea of a moral world or a realm of ends that guides our conduct (4:433), and ultimately to transform the natural world into the highest good. Finally, transcendental idealism is the framework within which these two parts of Kant's philosophy fit together (20:311). Theoretical philosophy deals with appearances, to which our knowledge is strictly limited; and practical philosophy deals with things in themselves, although it does not give us knowledge about things in themselves but only provides rational justification for certain beliefs about them for practical purposes.

To understand Kant's arguments that practical philosophy justifies certain beliefs about things in themselves, it is necessary to see them in the context of his criticism of German rationalist metaphysics. The three traditional topics of Leibniz-Wolffian special metaphysics were rational psychology, rational cosmology, and rational theology, which dealt, respectively, with the human soul, the world-whole, and God. In the part of the Critique of Pure Reason called the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant argues against the Leibniz-Wolffian view that human beings are capable of a priori knowledge in each of these domains, and he claims that the errors of Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics are due to an illusion that has its seat in the nature of human reason itself. According to Kant, human reason necessarily

He makes this argument against Leibniz and Wolff produces ideas of the soul, the world-whole, and God; and these ideas unavoidably produce the illusion that we have a priori knowledge about transcendent objects corresponding to them. This is an illusion, however, because in fact we are not capable of a priori knowledge about any such transcendent objects. Nevertheless, Kant attempts to show that these agnosticism illusory ideas have a positive, practical use. He thus reframes Leibniz-Wolffian special metaphysics as a practical science that he calls the metaphysics of morals. On Kant's view, our ideas of the soul, the world-whole, and God provide the content of morally justified beliefs about human immortality, human freedom, and the existence of God, respectively; but they are not proper objects of speculative knowledge. ^[20] but these ideas are useful for morality

5.2 Freedom

Kant's first argument for freedom seems to come from Aristotle's intended/responsible actions to be a subject of ethics and justice.

The most important belief about things in themselves that Kant thinks only practical philosophy can justify concerns human freedom. Freedom is important because, on Kant's view, moral appraisal presupposes that we are free in the sense that we have the ability to do otherwise. To see why, consider Kant's example of a man who commits a theft (5:95ff.). Kant holds that in order for this man's action to be morally wrong, it must have been within his control in the sense that it was within his power at the time not to have committed the theft. If this was not within his control at the time, then, while it may be useful to punish him in order to shape his behavior or to influence others, it nevertheless would not be correct to say that his action was morally wrong. Moral rightness and wrongness apply only to free agents who control their actions and have it in their power, at the time of their actions, either to act rightly or not. According to Kant, this is just common sense.

On these grounds, Kant rejects a type of compatibilism that he calls the "comparative concept of freedom" and associates with Leibniz (5:96–97). (Note that Kant has a specific type of compatibilism in mind, which I will refer to simply as "compatibilism," although

Kant's conception of "compatibilism" is not the same with Leibniz's.

freedom there may be other types of compatibilism that do not fit Kant's characterization of that view). On the compatibilist view, as Kant understands it, I am free whenever the cause of my action is within me. So I am unfree only when something external to me pushes or moves me, but I am free whenever the proximate cause of my body's movement is internal to me as an "acting being" (5:96). If we distinguish between involuntary convulsions and voluntary bodily movements, then on this view free actions are just voluntary bodily movements. Kant ridicules this view as a "wretched subterfuge" that tries to solve an ancient philosophical problem "with a little quibbling about words" (ibid.). This view, he says, assimilates human freedom to "the freedom of a turnspit," or a projectile in flight, or the motion of a clock's hands (5:96–97). The proximate causes of these movements are internal to the turnspit, the projectile, and the clock at the time of the movement. **This cannot be sufficient for moral responsibility.** However,

It seems he'll challenge the Aristotelean idea of responsibility.

Why not? The reason, Kant says, is ultimately that the causes of these movements occur in time. Return to the theft example. A compatibilist would say that the thief's action is free because its proximate cause is inside him, and because the theft was not an involuntary convulsion but a voluntary action. The thief decided to commit the theft, and his action flowed from this decision. According to Kant, however, if the thief's decision is a natural phenomenon that occurs in time, then it must be the effect of some cause that occurred in a previous time. This is an essential part of Kant's Newtonian worldview and is grounded in the a priori laws (specifically, the category of cause and effect) in accordance with which our understanding constructs experience: every event has a cause that begins in an earlier time. If that cause too was an event occurring in time, then it must also have a cause beginning in a still earlier time, etc. **All natural events occur in time and are thoroughly determined by causal chains that stretch backwards into the distant past. So there is no room for freedom in nature, which is deterministic in a strong sense.** We can't simply say a thief's action of theft is free.

The root of the problem, for Kant, is time. Again, if the thief's choice to commit the theft is a natural event in time, then it is the effect of a causal chain extending into the distant past. But the past is out of his control now, in the present. Once the past is past, he can't change it. On Kant's view, that is why his actions would not be in his control in the present if they are determined by events in the past. Even if he could control those past events in the past, he cannot control them now. But in fact past events were not in his control in the past either if they too were determined by events in the more distant past, because eventually the causal antecedents of his action stretch back before his birth, and obviously events that occurred before his birth were not in his control. **So if the thief's choice to commit the theft is a natural event in time, then it is not now and never was in his control, and he could not have done otherwise than to commit the theft. In that case, it would be a mistake to hold him morally responsible for it.** And there is no freedom too.

this is what Aristotle misses

I think Spinoza makes a similar mistake.

Compatibilism, as Kant understands it, therefore locates the issue in the wrong place. Even if the cause of my action is internal to me, if it is in the past – for example, if my action today is determined by a decision I made yesterday, or from the character I developed in childhood – then it is not within my control now. The real issue is not whether the cause of my action is internal or external to me, but whether it is in my control now. For Kant, however, the cause of my action can be within my control now only if it is not in time. This is why Kant thinks that transcendental idealism is the only way to make sense of the kind of freedom that morality requires. For transcendental idealism allows that the cause of my action may be a thing in itself outside of time: namely, my noumenal self, which is free because it is not part of nature. No matter what kind of character I have developed or what external influences act on me, on Kant's view all of my intentional, voluntary actions are immediate effects of my noumenal self, which is causally undetermined (5:97–98). My noumenal self is an uncaused cause outside of time, which therefore is not subject to the deterministic laws of nature in accordance with which our understanding constructs experience.

!!!!

But the situation before he intervenes was also puzzling and made no room for freedom.

the puzzles of the idea of noumenal self

Many puzzles arise on this picture that Kant does not resolve. For example, if my understanding constructs all appearances in my experience of nature, not only appearances of my own actions, then why am I responsible only for my own actions but not for everything that happens in the natural world? Moreover, if I am not alone in the world but there are many noumenal selves acting freely and incorporating their free actions into the experience they construct, then how do multiple transcendently free agents interact? How do you integrate my free actions into the experience that your understanding constructs?

[21] In spite of these unsolved puzzles, Kant holds that we can make sense of moral appraisal and responsibility only by thinking about human freedom in this way, because it is the only way to prevent natural necessity from undermining both.

Finally, since Kant invokes transcendental idealism to make sense of freedom, interpreting his thinking about freedom leads us back to disputes between the two-objects and two-aspects interpretations of transcendental idealism. On the face of it, the two-objects interpretation seems to make better sense of Kant's view of transcendental freedom than the two-aspects interpretation. If morality requires that I am transcendently free, then it seems that my true self, and not just an aspect of my self, must be outside of time, according to Kant's argument. But applying the two-objects interpretation to freedom raises problems of its own, since it involves making a distinction between noumenal and phenomenal selves that does not arise on the two-aspects view. If only my noumenal self is free, and freedom is required for moral responsibility, then my phenomenal self is not morally responsible. But how are my noumenal and phenomenal selves related, and why is punishment inflicted on phenomenal selves? It is unclear whether and to what extent appealing to Kant's theory of freedom can help to settle disputes about the proper interpretation of transcendental idealism, since there are serious questions about the coherence of Kant's theory on either interpretation.

It seems he is leading to a kind of dualism like Descartes'...

5.3 The fact of reason

Can we know that we are free in this transcendental sense? Kant's response is tricky. On the one hand, he distinguishes between theoretical knowledge and morally justified belief (A820–831/B848–859). We do not have theoretical knowledge that we are free or about anything beyond the limits of possible experience, but we are morally justified in believing that we are free in this sense. On the other hand, Kant also uses stronger language than this when discussing freedom. For example, he says that “among all the ideas of speculative reason freedom is the only one the possibility of which we know a priori, though without having any insight into it, because it is the condition of the moral law, which we do know.” In a footnote to this passage, Kant explains that we know freedom a priori because “were there no freedom, the moral law would not be encountered at all in ourselves,” and on Kant's view everyone does encounter the moral law a priori (5:4). For this reason, Kant freedom is the condition for the moral law. claims that the moral law “proves” the objective, “though only practical, undoubted reality” of freedom (5:48–49). So Kant wants to say that we do have knowledge of the reality of freedom, but that this is practical knowledge of a practical reality, or cognition “only for practical purposes,” by which he means to distinguish it from theoretical knowledge based on experience or reflection on the conditions of experience (5:133). Our practical knowledge of freedom is based instead on the moral law. The difference between Kant's stronger and weaker language seems mainly to be that his stronger language emphasizes that our belief or practical knowledge about freedom is unshakeable and that it in turn provides support for other morally grounded beliefs in God and the immortality of the soul.

Kant calls our consciousness of the moral law, our awareness that the moral law binds us or has authority over us, the “fact of reason” (5:31–32, 42–43, 47, 55). So, on his view, the fact of reason is the practical basis for our belief or practical knowledge that we are free. Kant insists that this moral consciousness is “undeniable,” “a priori,” and “unavoidable” (5:32, 47, 55). Every human being has a conscience, a common sense grasp of morality, and a firm

conviction that he or she is morally accountable. We may have different beliefs about the source of morality's authority – God, social convention, human reason. We may arrive at different conclusions about what morality requires in specific situations. And we may violate our own sense of duty. But we all have a conscience, and an unshakeable belief that morality applies to us. According to Kant, this belief cannot and does not need to be justified or “proved by any deduction” (5:47). It is just a ground-level fact about human beings that we hold ourselves morally accountable. But **Kant is making a normative claim here as well:** it is also a fact, which cannot and does not need to be justified, that **we are morally accountable, that morality does have authority over us.** Kant holds that philosophy should be in the business of defending this common sense moral belief, and that in any case it could never prove or disprove it (4:459).

Kant may hold that the fact of reason, or our consciousness of moral obligation, implies that we are free on the grounds that **ought implies can.** In other words, Kant may believe that it follows from the fact that we ought (morally) to do something that we can or are able to do it. This is suggested, for example, by a passage in which Kant asks us to imagine someone threatened by his prince with immediate execution unless he “give[s] false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext.” Kant says that “[h]e would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him” (5:30). This is a hypothetical example of an action not yet carried out. It seems that pangs of guilt about the immorality of an action that you carried out in the past, on this reasoning, would imply more directly that **you have (or at least had) the ability to act otherwise than you did, and therefore that you are free in Kant's sense.** you have options to do or not to do

5.4 The categorical imperative

In both the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals and the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant also gives a more detailed argument for the conclusion that morality and freedom reciprocally imply one another, which is sometimes called the reciprocity thesis (Allison 1990). **On this view, to act morally is to exercise freedom, and the only way to fully exercise freedom is to act morally.** Kant's arguments for this view differ in these texts, but the general structure of his argument in the Critique of Practical Reason may be summarized as follows.

First, it follows from the basic idea of having a will that to act at all is to act on some principle, or what Kant calls a maxim. **A maxim is a subjective rule or policy of action: it says what you are doing and why.** Kant gives as examples the maxims “to let no insult pass unavenged” and “to increase my wealth by every safe means” (5:19, 27). We may be unaware of our maxims, we may not act consistently on the same maxims, and our maxims may not be consistent with one another. But Kant holds that since we are rational beings our actions always aim at some sort of end or goal, which our maxim expresses. The goal of an action may be something as basic as gratifying a desire, or it may be something more complex such as becoming a doctor or a lawyer. In any case, the causes of our actions are never our desires or impulses, on Kant's view. **If I act to gratify some desire, then I choose to act on a maxim that specifies the gratification of that desire as the goal of my action.** For example, if I desire some coffee, then I may act on the maxim to go to a cafe and buy some coffee in order to gratify that desire.

Second, Kant distinguishes between two basic kinds of principles or rules that we can act on: what he calls material and formal principles. **To act in order to satisfy some desire, as when I act on the maxim to go for coffee at a cafe, is to act on a material principle** (5:21ff.). Here the desire (for coffee) fixes the goal, which Kant calls the object or matter of the action,

and the principle says how to achieve that goal (go to a cafe). Corresponding to material principles, on Kant's view, are what he calls hypothetical imperatives. A hypothetical imperative is a principle of rationality that says that I should act in a certain way if I choose to satisfy some desire. If maxims in general are rules that describe how one does act, then imperatives in general prescribe how one should act. An imperative is hypothetical if it says how I should act only if I choose to pursue some goal in order to gratify a desire (5:20). This, for example, is a hypothetical imperative: if you want coffee, then go to the cafe. This hypothetical imperative applies to you only if you desire coffee and choose to gratify that desire.

material principles / hypothetical imperatives >> goal or desire oriented
formal principles / categorical imperatives >> goal or desire disinterested

In contrast to material principles, formal principles describe how one acts without making reference to any desires. This is easiest to understand through the corresponding kind of imperative, which Kant calls a categorical imperative. A categorical imperative commands unconditionally that I should act in some way. So while hypothetical imperatives apply to me only on the condition that I have and set the goal of satisfying the desires that they tell me how to satisfy, categorical imperatives apply to me no matter what my goals and desires may be. Kant regards moral laws as categorical imperatives, which apply to everyone unconditionally. For example, the moral requirement to help others in need does not apply to me only if I desire to help others in need, and the duty not to steal is not suspended if I have some desire that I could satisfy by stealing. Moral laws do not have such conditions but rather apply unconditionally. That is why they apply to everyone in the same way.

Third, insofar as I act only on material principles or hypothetical imperatives, I do not act freely, but rather I act only to satisfy some desire(s) that I have, and what I desire is not ultimately within my control. To some limited extent we are capable of rationally shaping our desires, but insofar as we choose to act in order to satisfy desires we are choosing to let nature govern us rather than governing ourselves (5:118). We are always free in the sense that we always have the capacity to govern ourselves rationally instead of letting our desires set our ends for us. But we may (freely) fail to exercise that capacity. Moreover, since Kant holds that desires never cause us to act, but rather we always choose to act on a maxim even when that maxim specifies the satisfaction of a desire as the goal of our action, it also follows that we are always free in the sense that we freely choose our maxims. Nevertheless, our actions are not free in the sense of being autonomous if we choose to act only on material principles, because in that case we do not give the law to ourselves, but instead we choose to allow nature in us (our desires) to determine the law for our actions.

Finally, the only way to act freely in the full sense of exercising autonomy is therefore to act on formal principles or categorical imperatives, which is also to act morally. Kant does not mean that acting autonomously requires that we take no account of our desires, because that would be impossible (5:25, 61). Rather, he holds that we typically formulate maxims with a view to satisfying our desires, but that "as soon as we draw up maxims of the will for ourselves" we become immediately conscious of the moral law (5:29). This immediate consciousness of the moral law takes the following form:

I have, for example, made it my maxim to increase my wealth by every safe means. Now I have a deposit in my hands, the owner of which has died and left no record of it. This is, naturally, a case for my maxim. Now I want only to know whether that maxim could also hold as a universal practical law. I therefore apply the maxim to the present case and ask whether it could indeed take the form of a law, and consequently whether I could through my maxim at the same time give such a law as this: that everyone may deny a deposit which no one can prove has been made. I at once become aware that such a principle, as a law, would annihilate itself since it would bring it about that there would be no deposits at all. (5:27)

In other words, to assess the moral permissibility of my maxim, I ask whether everyone could act on it, or whether it could be willed as a universal law. The issue is not whether it would be good if everyone acted on my maxim, or whether I would like it, but only whether it would be possible for my maxim to be willed as a universal law. This gets at the form, not the matter or content, of the maxim. A maxim has morally permissible form, for Kant, only if it could be willed as a universal law. If my maxim fails this test, as this one does, then it is morally impermissible for me to act on it.

If my maxim passes the universal law test, then it is morally permissible for me to act on it, but I fully exercise my autonomy only if my fundamental reason for acting on this maxim is that it is morally permissible or required that I do so. Imagine that I am moved by a feeling of sympathy to formulate the maxim to help someone in need. In this case, my original reason for formulating this maxim is that a certain feeling moved me. Such feelings are not entirely within my control and may not be present when someone actually needs my help. But this maxim passes Kant's test: it could be willed as a universal law that everyone help others in need from motives of sympathy. So it would not be wrong to act on this maxim when the feeling of sympathy so moves me. But helping others in need would not fully exercise my autonomy unless my fundamental reason for doing so is not that I have some feeling or desire, but rather that it would be right or at least permissible to do so. Only when such a purely formal principle supplies the fundamental motive for my action do I act autonomously. An action's passing the universal law test and being a universal law don't require its being performed freely/autonomously.

So the moral law is a law of autonomy in the sense that "freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other" (5:29). Even when my maxims are originally suggested by my feelings and desires, if I act only on morally permissible (or required) maxims because they are morally permissible (or required), then my actions will be autonomous. And the reverse is true as well: for Kant this is the only way to act autonomously.^[22]

6. The highest good and practical postulates

Kant holds that reason unavoidably produces not only consciousness of the moral law but also the idea of a world in which there is both complete virtue and complete happiness, which he calls the highest good. Our duty to promote the highest good, on Kant's view, is the sum of all moral duties, and we can fulfill this duty only if we believe that the highest good is a possible state of affairs. Furthermore, we can believe that the highest good is possible only if we also believe in the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, according to Kant. On this basis, he claims that it is morally necessary to believe in the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, which he calls postulates of pure practical reason. This section briefly outlines Kant's view of the highest good and his argument for these practical postulates in the Critique of Practical Reason and other works.

6.1 The highest good

In the previous section we saw that, on Kant's view, the moral law is a purely formal principle that commands us to act only on maxims that have what he calls lawgiving form, which maxims have only if they can be willed as universal laws. Moreover, our fundamental reason for choosing to act on such maxims should be that they have this lawgiving form, rather than that acting on them would achieve some end or goal that would satisfy a desire (5:27). For example, I should help others in need not, at bottom, because doing so would make me feel good, even if it would, but rather because it is right; and it is right (or permissible) to help others in need because this maxim can be willed as a universal law.

But although Kant holds that the morality of an action depends on the form of its maxim rather than its end or goal, he nevertheless claims both that every human action has an end and that we are unavoidably concerned with the consequences of our actions (4:437; 5:34; 6:5–7, 385). This is not a moral requirement but simply part of what it means to be a rational being. Moreover, Kant also holds the stronger view that it is an unavoidable feature of human reason that we form ideas not only about the immediate and near-term consequences of our actions, but also about ultimate consequences. This is the practical manifestation of reason's general demand for what Kant calls "the unconditioned" (5:107–108).^[23] In particular, since we naturally have desires and inclinations, and our reason has "a commission" to attend to the satisfaction of our desires and inclinations, on Kant's view we unavoidably form an idea of the maximal satisfaction of all our inclinations and desires, which he calls happiness (5:61, 22, 124). This idea is indeterminate, however, since nobody can know "what he really wishes and wills" and thus what would make him completely happy (4:418). We also form the idea of a moral world or realm of ends, in which everyone acts only in accordance with maxims that can be universal laws (A808/B836, 4:433ff.).

But neither of these ideas by itself expresses our unconditionally complete end, as human reason demands in its practical use. A perfectly moral world by itself would not constitute our "whole and complete good [...] even in the judgment of an impartial reason," because it is human nature also to need happiness (5:110, 25). And happiness by itself would not be unconditionally good, because moral virtue is a condition of worthiness to be happy (5:111). So our unconditionally complete end must combine both virtue and happiness. In Kant's words, "virtue and happiness together constitute possession of the highest good in a person, and happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy) constitutes the highest good of a possible world" (5:110–111). It is this ideal world combining complete virtue with complete happiness that Kant normally has in mind when he discusses the highest good.

Kant says that we have a duty to promote the highest good, taken in this sense (5:125). He does not mean, however, to be identifying some new duty that is not derived from the moral law, in addition to all the particular duties we have that are derived from the moral law.^[24] For example, he is not claiming that in addition to my duties to help others in need, not to commit theft, etc., I also have the additional duty to represent the highest good as the final end of all moral conduct, combined with happiness, and to promote that end. Rather, as we have seen, Kant holds that it is an unavoidable feature of human reasoning, instead of a moral requirement, that we represent all particular duties as leading toward the promotion of the highest good. So the duty to promote the highest good is not a particular duty at all, but the sum of all our duties derived from the moral law – it "does not increase the number of morality's duties but rather provides these with a special point of reference for the unification of all ends" (6:5). Nor does Kant mean that anyone has a duty to realize or actually bring about the highest good through their own power, although his language sometimes suggests this (5:113, 122). Rather, at least in his later works Kant claims that only the common striving of an entire "ethical community" can actually produce the highest good, and that the duty of individuals is to promote (but not single-handedly produce) this end with all of their strength by doing what the moral law commands (6:97–98, 390–394).^[25]

Finally, according to Kant we must conceive of the highest good as a possible state of affairs in order to fulfill our duty to promote it. Here Kant does not mean that we unavoidably represent the highest good as possible, since his view is that we must represent it as possible only if we are to do our duty of promoting it, and yet we may fail at doing our duty. Rather, we have a choice about whether to conceive of the highest good as possible, to regard it as impossible, or to remain noncommittal (5:144–145). But we can fulfill our duty of promoting the highest good only by choosing to conceive of the highest good as possible, because we cannot promote any end without believing that it is possible to achieve that end (5:122). So fulfilling the sum of all moral duties to promote the highest good requires

believing that a world of complete virtue and happiness is not simply “a phantom of the mind” but could actually be realized (5:472).

6.2 The postulates of pure practical reason

Kant argues that we can comply with our duty to promote the highest good only if we believe in the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. This is because to comply with that duty we must believe that the highest good is possible, and yet to believe that the highest good is possible we must believe that the soul is immortal and that God exists, according to Kant.^[26]

Consider first Kant’s moral argument for belief in immortality. The highest good, as we have seen, would be a world of complete morality and happiness. But Kant holds that it is impossible for “a rational being of the sensible world” to exhibit “complete conformity of dispositions with the moral law,” which he calls “holiness,” because we can never extirpate the propensity of our reason to give priority to the incentives of inclination over the incentive of duty, which propensity Kant calls radical evil (5:122, 6:37). But Kant claims that the moral law nevertheless requires holiness, and that it therefore “can only be found in an endless progress toward that complete conformity,” or progress that goes to infinity (5:122). This does not mean that we can substitute endless progress toward complete conformity with the moral law for holiness in the concept of the highest good, but rather that we must represent that complete conformity as an infinite progress toward the limit of holiness. Kant continues: “This endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul). Hence the highest good is practically possible only on the presupposition of the immortality of the soul, so that this, as inseparable with the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason” (ibid.). Kant’s idea is not that we should imagine ourselves attaining holiness later although we are not capable of it in this life. Rather, his view is that we must represent holiness as continual progress toward complete conformity of our dispositions with the moral law that begins in this life and extends into infinity.

Kant’s moral argument for belief in God in the Critique of Practical Reason may be summarized as follows. Kant holds that virtue and happiness are not just combined but necessarily combined in the idea of the highest good, because only possessing virtue makes one worthy of happiness – a claim that Kant seems to regard as part of the content of the moral law (4:393; 5:110, 124). But we can represent virtue and happiness as necessarily combined only by representing virtue as the efficient cause of happiness. This means that we must represent the highest good not simply as a state of affairs in which everyone is both happy and virtuous, but rather as one in which everyone is happy because they are virtuous (5:113–114, 124). However, it is beyond the power of human beings, both individually and collectively, to guarantee that happiness results from virtue, and we do not know any law of nature that guarantees this either. Therefore, we must conclude that the highest good is impossible, unless we postulate “the existence of a cause of nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely the exact correspondence of happiness with morality” (5:125). This cause of nature would have to be God since it must have both understanding and will. Kant probably does not conceive of God as the efficient cause of a happiness that is rewarded in a future life to those who are virtuous in this one. Rather, his view is probably that we represent our endless progress toward holiness, beginning with this life and extending into infinity, as the efficient cause of our happiness, which likewise begins in this life and extends to a future one, in accordance with teleological laws that God authors and causes to harmonize with efficient causes in nature (A809–812/B837–840; 5:127–131, 447–450).

Both of these arguments are subjective in the sense that, rather than attempting to show how the world must be constituted objectively in order for the highest good to be possible,

they purport to show only how we must conceive of the highest good in order to be subjectively capable both of representing it as possible and of fulfilling our duty to promote it. But Kant also claims that both arguments have an objective basis: first, in the sense that it cannot be proven objectively either that immortality or God's existence are impossible; and, second, in the sense that both arguments proceed from a duty to promote the highest good that is based not on the subjective character of human reason but on the moral law, which is objectively valid for all rational beings. So while it is not, strictly speaking, a duty to believe in God or immortality, we must believe both in order to fulfill our duty to promote the highest good, given the subjective character of human reason.

To see why, consider what would happen if we did not believe in God or immortality, according to Kant. In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant seems to say that this would leave us without any incentive to be moral, and even that the moral law would be invalid without God and immortality (A813/B841, A468/B496). But Kant later rejects this view (8:139). His mature view is that our reason would be in conflict with itself if we did not believe in God and immortality, because pure practical reason would represent the moral law as authoritative for us and so present us with an incentive that is sufficient to determine our will; but pure theoretical (i.e., speculative) reason would undermine this incentive by declaring morality an empty ideal, since it would not be able to conceive of the highest good as possible (5:121, 143, 471–472, 450–453). In other words, the moral law would remain valid and provide any rational being with sufficient incentive to act from duty, but we would be incapable of acting as rational beings, since “it is a condition of having reason at all [...] that its principles and affirmations must not contradict one another” (5:120). The only way to bring speculative and practical reason “into that relation of equality in which reason in general can be used purposively” is to affirm the postulates on the grounds that pure practical reason has primacy over speculative reason. This means, Kant explains, that if the capacity of speculative reason “does not extend to establishing certain propositions affirmatively, although they do not contradict it, as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest of pure reason it must accept them [...] being mindful, however, that these are not its insights but are yet extensions of its use from another, namely a practical perspective” (5:121). The primacy of practical reason is a key element of Kant's response to the crisis of the Enlightenment, since he holds that reason deserves the sovereign authority entrusted to it by the Enlightenment only on this basis.

7. The unity of nature and freedom

This final section briefly discusses how Kant attempts to unify the theoretical and practical parts of his philosophical system in the Critique of the Power of Judgment.

7.1 The great chasm

In the Preface and Introduction to the Critique of the Power of Judgment, Kant announces that his goal in the work is to “bring [his] entire critical enterprise to an end” by bridging the “gulf” or “chasm” that separates the domain of his theoretical philosophy (discussed mainly in the Critique of Pure Reason) from the domain of his practical philosophy (discussed mainly in the Critique of Practical Reason) (5:170, 176, 195). In his words: “The understanding legislates a priori for nature, as object of the senses, for a theoretical cognition of it in a possible experience. Reason legislates a priori for freedom and its own causality, as the supersensible in the subject, for an unconditioned practical cognition. The domain of the concept of nature under the one legislation and that of the concept of freedom under the other are entirely barred from any mutual influence that they could have on each other by themselves (each in accordance with its fundamental laws) by the great chasm that separates the supersensible from the appearances” (5:195).

One way to understand the problem Kant is articulating here is to consider it once again in terms of the crisis of the Enlightenment.^[27] The crisis was that modern science threatened to undermine traditional moral and religious beliefs, and Kant's response is to argue that in fact these essential interests of humanity are consistent with one another when reason is granted sovereignty and practical reason is given primacy over speculative reason. But the transcendental idealist framework within which Kant develops this response seems to purchase the consistency of these interests at the price of sacrificing a unified view of the world and our place in it. If science applies only to appearances, while moral and religious beliefs refer to things in themselves or "the supersensible," then how can we integrate these into a single conception of the world that enables us to transition from the one domain to the other? Kant's solution is to introduce a third a priori cognitive faculty, which he calls the reflecting power of judgment, that gives us a teleological perspective on the world. Reflecting judgment provides the concept of teleology or purposiveness that bridges the chasm between nature and freedom, and thus unifies the theoretical and practical parts of Kant's philosophy into a single system (5:196–197).

It is important to Kant that a third faculty independent of both understanding and reason provides this mediating perspective, because he holds that we do not have adequate theoretical grounds for attributing objective teleology to nature itself, and yet regarding nature as teleological solely on moral grounds would only heighten the disconnect between our scientific and moral ways of viewing the world. Theoretical grounds do not justify us in attributing objective teleology to nature, because it is not a condition of self-consciousness that our understanding construct experience in accordance with the concept of teleology, which is not among Kant's categories or the principles of pure understanding that ground the fundamental laws of nature. That is why his theoretical philosophy licenses us only in attributing mechanical causation to nature itself. In this respect, Kant is sympathetic to the dominant strain in modern philosophy that banishes final causes from nature and instead treats nature as nothing but matter in motion, which can be fully described mathematically. But Kant wants somehow to reconcile this mechanistic view of nature with a conception of human agency that is essentially teleological. For as we saw in the previous section, Kant holds that every human action has an end and that the sum of all moral duties is to promote the highest good. It is essential to Kant's approach, however, to maintain the autonomy of both understanding (in nature) and reason (in morality), without allowing either to encroach on the other's domain, and yet to harmonize them in a single system. This harmony can be orchestrated only from an independent standpoint, from which we do not judge how nature is constituted objectively (that is the job of understanding) or how the world ought to be (the job of reason), but from which we merely regulate or reflect on our cognition in a way that enables us to regard it as systematically unified. According to Kant, this is the task of reflecting judgment, whose a priori principle is to regard nature as purposive or teleological, "but only as a regulative principle of the faculty of cognition" (5:197).

7.2 The purposiveness of nature

In the Critique of the Power of Judgment, Kant discusses four main ways in which reflecting judgment leads us to regard nature as purposive: first, it leads us to regard nature as governed by a system of empirical laws; second, it enables us to make aesthetic judgments; third, it leads us to think of organisms as objectively purposive; and, fourth, it ultimately leads us to think about the final end of nature as a whole.^[28]

First, reflecting judgment enables us to discover empirical laws of nature by leading us to regard nature as if it were the product of intelligent design (5:179–186). We do not need reflecting judgment to grasp the a priori laws of nature based on our categories, such as that every event has a cause. But in addition to these a priori laws nature is also governed

by particular, empirical laws, such as that fire causes smoke, which we cannot know without consulting experience. To discover these laws, we must form hypotheses and devise experiments on the assumption that nature is governed by empirical laws that we can grasp (Bxiii–xiv). Reflecting judgment makes this assumption through its principle to regard nature as purposive for our understanding, which leads us to treat nature as if its empirical laws were designed to be understood by us (5:180–181). Since this principle only regulates our cognition but is not constitutive of nature itself, this does not amount to assuming that nature really is the product of intelligent design, which according to Kant we are not justified in believing on theoretical grounds. Rather, it amounts only to approaching nature in the practice of science as if it were designed to be understood by us. We are justified in doing this because it enables us to discover empirical laws of nature. But it is only a regulative principle of reflecting judgment, not genuine theoretical knowledge, that nature is purposive in this way.

Second, Kant thinks that aesthetic judgments about both beauty and sublimity involve a kind of purposiveness, and that the beauty of nature in particular suggests to us that nature is hospitable to our ends. According to his aesthetic theory, we judge objects to be beautiful not because they gratify our desires, since aesthetic judgments are disinterested, but rather because apprehending their form stimulates what he calls the harmonious “free play” of our understanding and imagination, in which we take a distinctively aesthetic pleasure (5:204–207, 217–218, 287). So beauty is not a property of objects, but a relation between their form and the way our cognitive faculties work. Yet we make aesthetic judgments that claim intersubjective validity because we assume that there is a common sense that enables all human beings to communicate aesthetic feeling (5:237–240, 293–296). Beautiful art is intentionally created to stimulate this universally communicable aesthetic pleasure, although it is effective only when it seems unintentional (5:305–307). Natural beauty, however, is unintentional: landscapes do not know how to stimulate the free play of our cognitive faculties, and they do not have the goal of giving us aesthetic pleasure. In both cases, then, beautiful objects appear purposive to us because they give us aesthetic pleasure in the free play of our faculties, but they also do not appear purposive because they either do not or do not seem to do this intentionally. Kant calls this relation between our cognitive faculties and the formal qualities of objects that we judge to be beautiful “subjective purposiveness” (5:221). Although it is only subjective, the purposiveness exhibited by natural beauty in particular may be interpreted as a sign that nature is hospitable to our moral interests (5:300). Moreover, Kant also interprets the experience of sublimity in nature as involving purposiveness. But in this case it is not so much the purposiveness of nature as our own purpose or “vocation” as moral beings that we become aware of in the experience of the sublime, in which the size and power of nature stand in vivid contrast to the superior power of our reason (5:257–260, 267–269).

Third, Kant argues that reflecting judgment enables us to regard living organisms as objectively purposive, but only as a regulative principle that compensates for our inability to understand them mechanistically, which reflects the limitations of our cognitive faculties rather than any intrinsic teleology in nature. We cannot understand organisms mechanistically because they are “self-organizing” beings, whose parts are “combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form” (5:373–374). The parts of a watch are also possible only through their relation to the whole, but that is because the watch is designed and produced by some rational being. An organism, by contrast, produces and sustains itself, which is inexplicable to us unless we attribute to organisms purposes by analogy with human art (5:374–376). But Kant claims that it is only a regulative principle of reflecting judgment to regard organisms in this way, and that we are not justified in attributing objective purposiveness to organisms themselves, since it is only “because of the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties [that] I cannot judge about the possibility of those things and their generation except by thinking of a cause for these acts in accordance with intentions” (5:397–398). Specifically, we cannot understand how a whole can be the

cause of its own parts because we depend on sensible intuition for the content of our thoughts and therefore must think the particular (intuition) first by subsuming it under the general (a concept). To see that this is just a limitation of the human, discursive intellect, imagine a being with an intuitive understanding whose thought does not depend, as ours does, on receiving sensory information passively, but rather creates the content of its thought in the act of thinking it. Such a (divine) being could understand how a whole can be the cause of its parts, since it could grasp a whole immediately without first thinking particulars and then combining them into a whole (5:401–410). Therefore, since we have a discursive intellect and cannot know how things would appear to a being with an intuitive intellect, and yet we can only think of organisms teleologically, which excludes mechanism, Kant now says that we must think of both mechanism and teleology only as regulative principles that we need to explain nature, rather than as constitutive principles that describe how nature is intrinsically constituted (5:410ff.).

Fourth, Kant concludes the Critique of the Power of Judgment with a long appendix arguing that reflecting judgment supports morality by leading us to think about the final end of nature, which we can only understand in moral terms, and that conversely morality reinforces a teleological conception of nature. Once it is granted on theoretical grounds that we must understand certain parts of nature (organisms) teleologically, although only as a regulative principle of reflecting judgment, Kant says we may go further and regard the whole of nature as a teleological system (5:380–381). But we can regard the whole of nature as a teleological system only by employing the idea of God, again only regulatively, as its intelligent designer. This would be to attribute what Kant calls external purposiveness to nature – that is, to attribute purposes to God in creating nature (5:425). What, then, is God's final end in creating nature? According to Kant, the final end of nature must be human beings, but only as moral beings (5:435, 444–445). This is because only human beings use reason to set and pursue ends, using the rest of nature as means to their ends (5:426–427). Moreover, Kant claims that human happiness cannot be the final end of nature, because as we have seen he holds that happiness is not unconditionally valuable (5:430–431). Rather, human life has value not because of what we passively enjoy, but only because of what we actively do (5:434). We can be fully active and autonomous, however, only by acting morally, which implies that God created the world so that human beings could exercise moral autonomy. Since we also need happiness, this too may be admitted as a conditioned and consequent end, so that reflecting judgment eventually leads us to the highest good (5:436). But reflection on conditions of the possibility of the highest good leads again to Kant's moral argument for belief in God's existence (he now omits immortality), which in turn reinforces the teleological perspective on nature with which reflecting judgment began.

Thus Kant argues that although theoretical and practical philosophy proceed from separate and irreducible starting points – self-consciousness as the highest principle for our cognition of nature, and the moral law as the basis for our knowledge of freedom – reflecting judgment unifies them into a single, teleological worldview that assigns preeminent value to human autonomy.

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