

Kant's Deduction of Morality: The Actualization of Freedom

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One of the running problems of Kant's moral philosophy concerns the possibility of the categorical imperative. This problem parallels the one upon which Kant's theoretical project is based, namely the problem concerning the possibility of synthetic *a priori* propositions. The theoretical project explains how it is possible to speak of propositions that are necessary but still synthetic. Kant's solution to the problem of synthetic *a priori* propositions concerns an important third term, that is, the faculty of sensibility.

Roughly speaking, Kant's argument runs as follows. The faculty of sensibility receives particular perceptions in space and time. The faculty of understanding subsumes these perceptions under general concepts. This twofold transcendental activity generates experience. For example, we can say that certain effects necessarily follow from certain causes, not because we can analyze the term effect from the term cause. Instead, we can say that, because the two terms together subsume particular perceptions, such as this pen falling to the ground when left unsupported in mid-air, in order to generate experience. Concepts are thus the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience. However, they are only validated by means of particular perceptions. In this sense, the validation of synthetic *a priori* propositions depends on the kind of knowledge that is not full-fledged experience, namely, on the empirical intuition of the manifold.¹

¹ The exact nature of this dependence remains somewhat unclear in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If Kant is arguing that the operation of the faculty of sensibility

It is in this context that we can understand Kant's concern with the possibility of the categorical imperative. When Kant asks how the categorical imperative is possible, he is asking how synthetic *a priori* proposition is possible in practice. In theory the synthetic *a priori* proposition involves two terms (e.g. cause and effect). Kant argues that synthetic *a priori* practical proposition also involves two terms. They are the good will and the universal law. Analogous to the question that Kant asks in theory, in practice he asks: how is it possible that the concept of the good will is necessarily connected to the concept of the universal law? In other words, how can we demonstrate the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition?

If human beings were fully rational this question would not arise. In this case, the concept of the good will would already contain the concept of the universal law. This would imply that this law would not be the categorical imperative, in other words, it would not be a moral demand. However, because human beings are not fully rational, for us the concept of the good will does not contain the concept of the universal law. Thus the proposition of morality must be the *a priori* synthesis of those two terms. Kant notes as much:

But the principle of morality – that an absolutely good will is that whose maxim can always contain itself regarded as a universal law – is nevertheless always a synthetic proposition; for, by analysis of the concept of an absolutely

temporally precedes the operation of the faculty of understanding, then it seems that he is dogmatically committed to the metaphysical existence of the thing in itself. This position produces the problem of affection. On the other hand, I play safe and argue only that Kant's theoretical project logically depends on the faculty of sensibility. In other words, Kant demonstrates synthetic *a priori* propositions only because there *are* particular perceptions for concepts to subsume. Where these perceptions originate, however, is not something with which I am concerned.

good will that property of its maxim cannot be discovered (G 4:447).²

In order to solve this problem Kant takes a road, which is structurally analogous to the one he traverses in theory. In theory, there has to be a third term, a third kind of knowledge that demonstrates the necessary connection between the two terms. It is only in this third knowledge, that is, in empirical intuition that the *a priori* synthesis is demonstrated. Similarly, in practice Kant again argues that a third term is necessary in order to demonstrate synthetic *a priori* practical proposition.

Such synthetic propositions are possible only in this way: that the two cognitions are bound together by their connection with a third in which they are both to be found (G 4:447).

There is, however, an important difference between theoretical and practical solutions to the problem of synthetic *a priori* propositions. Whereas in theory it is the empirical intuition that names that third kind of knowledge, in practice this third kind of knowledge is the knowledge of freedom.

The *positive* concept of freedom provides this third cognition, which cannot be, as in the case of physical causes, the nature of sensible world (in the concept of which the concepts of something as cause in relation to something else as effect come together) (G 4:447).

² For Kant's works I use short forms as follows: *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (G), and *Critique of Practical Reason* (CPrR). I use the pagination of the standard German edition of Kant's works, *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter deGruyter & Co., 1900.) The one exception is the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where, following standard practice, I use the pagination of the A and B editions.

Thus Kant arrives at the following position. He must prove that we can know freedom in order to demonstrate the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. Without the knowledge of freedom the categorical imperative is impossible.

In this paper, I explain in what sense Kant can claim that this knowledge of freedom is possible. My argument is that Kant does in fact succeed in demonstrating our knowledge of freedom. I mean this in the strong sense. Kant's demonstration includes a clear definition of knowledge and excludes both circular and dogmatic reasoning.

Groundwork

Kant attempts the validation of freedom in the third part of the *Groundwork*. His argument revolves around what has been called the Incorporation Thesis (Allison 5). Kant begins with the claim that inclinations do not causally determine human beings to act in the way in which it can be said that inclinations cause animals to act. On the contrary, even when human beings do act on the basis of inclinations, it is because their reason incorporates those inclinations into their maxim. Alternatively, their reason can also exclude inclinations from their maxim altogether and we can act on its universal form. For the Kant of the *Groundwork* this argument is enough to make positive claims about freedom.

From the perspective of theoretical reason, the argument fails. Theoretical reason seeks the unconditioned in the metaphysical sense. Therefore, the fact that human beings have the ability to exclude inclinations from the maxim altogether, and act on its universal form does not say anything about whether human beings are free or not. The most that the argument says is that human beings do act on reason. However, unless Kant can give independent arguments for the metaphysical nature of reason, in other words, unless Kant can argue that reason itself is not susceptible to the empirical laws of

nature, then even though we may act on reason, that does not mean that we act freely. In fact, unless Kant can prove the metaphysical nature of reason, then even when we do act on reason, it might be the case that we actually act on inclinations, of which we may not even be aware. In short, theoretical reason suggests that it might be nature all the way down.

Kant has an answer to this concern. His claim is that, unlike theoretical reason, practical reason is not concerned with what is actually the case, in either the phenomenal or the noumenal world. That is, when he argues that we act on reason, he is not making a metaphysical claim about reality. Instead, his claim is epistemic, that is, about how we *regard* ourselves when we act. When we act, Kant argues, we do not regard ourselves as automata, which are caused to perform certain actions, as soon as we experience relevant inclinations. Instead, we regard ourselves as agents who act on the basis of reasons. Kant argues that this epistemic claim is enough to establish the possibility of freedom.

Kant does not pretend that with this form of epistemic freedom, he establishes the reality of metaphysical freedom. He is simply not concerned with establishing metaphysical freedom in the *Groundwork* at all. However, he does claim that when he establishes epistemic freedom, it is ‘as if’ he established metaphysical freedom as well. In seeking after metaphysical freedom, theoretical reason seeks those laws that are unconditioned by the empirical laws of nature. Well, Kant claims, acting on reason, that is, excluding inclinations from the maxim altogether, and instead acting on its universal form is akin to acting on those unconditioned laws after which theoretical reason sought. He writes:

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 the 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 (*G* 4:448).

Nevertheless, this is not to say that Kant in the *Groundwork* thinks that epistemic freedom is logically dependent on metaphysical freedom. Even if we could definitively decide that we were not metaphysically free – and theoretical reason cannot decide this because it is dialectical on this issue – that would still not change the fact that when we do act, we act under the idea of freedom or that we do conceive of ourselves as free. In other words, that impossible theoretical knowledge would still not change the fact that we do act on the universal form of the maxim. Kant is clear on this point:

I follow this route – that of assuming freedom, sufficiently for our purpose, only as laid down by rational beings merely *in idea* as a ground for their actions – so that I need not be bound to prove freedom in its theoretical respect as well. For even if the latter is left unsettled, still the same laws hold for a being that cannot act otherwise than under the idea of its own freedom as would bind a being that was actually free (*G* 4:448n).

Kant's practical argument concerning epistemic freedom in the *Groundwork* is altogether separate from his theoretical argument concerning metaphysical freedom.

We are now in a position to see how Kant proposes to deal with the problem of synthetic *a priori* practical proposition in the *Groundwork*. I have argued that in theory Kant demonstrates the synthetic *a priori* proposition by means of particular perceptions received in space and time, in other words, by means of empirical intuition. Again, the terms cause and effect are connected by means of particular perceptions received in space and time, such as the pen falling down when left

unsupported in mid-air, in order to construct experience. Something similar goes on in practice.

Suppose we had to give in to theoretical reason, and claim that human beings were just sensible. In this case, we would not be able to explain how an *a priori* synthesis between the good will and the universal law is possible. Instead, we would have to admit that the proposition of morality is *a posteriori*. Kant's point, however, is that when we do act, we recognize that it is impossible for us to be exclusively sensible beings. After all, in acting, we do not conceive ourselves as having been caused to act by the empirical laws of nature. Instead, we conceive ourselves as acting on the basis of reasons, and, further, as capable of resisting natural inclinations. Therefore, whereas in theory we know our will to be sensible, in practice we also conceive of our will as intelligible. Moreover, this conception of our will as intelligible, in other words, this conception of freedom, is at the same time the recognition that our will is not subject to the laws that hold in the empirical world, but rather to the laws that hold in the intelligible world. These laws are moral laws. This intelligible will is the good will. Such a good will is subject to these moral laws, precisely because, even though it conceives of itself as free, it does not, in that conception, renounce the knowledge of itself as also sensible. If it did that, then when the good will conceived itself as free, the universal law would follow analytically from it.

This is how Kant demonstrates the possibility of synthetic *a priori* practical proposition by means of freedom: if in theory, the two terms, that is cause and effect, necessarily come together in the particular perception received in space and time in order to construct experience, in practice, the two terms, that is, the good will and the universal law necessarily come together in freedom in order to construct morality. Kant puts it as follows:

And so categorical imperatives are possible by this: that the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world and consequently, if I were only this, all my actions *would* always be in conformity with the autonomy of the will; but since at the same time I intuit myself as a member of the world of sense, they *ought* to be in conformity with it; and this *categorical* ought represents a synthetic proposition a priori, since to my will affected by sensible desires there is added the idea of the same will but belonging to the world of the understanding – a will pure and practical of itself, which contains the supreme condition, in accordance with reason, of the former will; this is roughly like the way in which concepts of the understanding, which by themselves signify nothing but lawful form in general, are added to intuitions of the world of sense and thereby make possible synthetic propositions a priori on which all cognitions of a nature rests (*G* 4:454).

Synthetic *a priori* theoretical proposition is validated in empirical intuition. However, synthetic *a priori* practical proposition is validated in the knowledge of freedom.

Epistemic freedom

One commentator who has been convinced by Kant's arguments in the *Groundwork* is Henry Allison. Allison argues that even though we might have originally thought that the only way to establish morality is by establishing metaphysical freedom, it is actually the case that epistemic freedom will do the job. If synthetic *a priori* practical proposition is established by simply acting under the idea of freedom or by conceiving of ourselves as free, then Kant has in fact shown that we can be sensible in nature from the perspective of theoretical reason, and still act as intelligible, moral

beings. There is simply something about practice that is irreducible to theoretical concerns and conclusions. Allison writes:

First, Kant is not suggesting that morality requires only a compatibilist conception of freedom (that would be puzzling); rather he is noting that morality does not require a conception of freedom distinct from the one presupposed in the conception of ourselves as finite, sensuously affected, rational agents. Second, the speculative proof, which grounds the agency in the transcendental freedom, is not needed for moral purposes because from the point of view of practice, the question of the ontological status of our rational agency simply does not arise. In other words, Kant's point is not that the speculative proof is merely practically sufficient; it is rather that it is practically irrelevant (Allison 62).

I disagree with Allison's claim that epistemic freedom will do for Kant. I do not deny that we act under the idea of freedom or that we conceive of ourselves as free. However, I think that those statements in the *Groundwork* do not do enough to justify the knowledge of freedom that Kant needs in order to demonstrate the validity of the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. Let us remind ourselves that in analogy with theory, in practice Kant claims that we need a third kind of *knowledge* in order to demonstrate the validity of the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. In theory, this knowledge is found in the empirical intuition; in practice, this knowledge is the knowledge of freedom.

The *positive* concept of freedom provides this third cognition, which cannot be, as in the case of physical causes, the nature of sensible world (in the concept of which the concepts of something as cause in relation to something else as effect come together) (*G* 4:447).

My claim is that, as far as the *Groundwork* is concerned, Kant does not actually provide an adequate account of that third kind of knowledge of freedom.

There is something odd in Kant's argument that we act under the idea of freedom or that we conceive ourselves as free irrespective of whether we are metaphysically free or not. While this argument does make sense and strikes me as true, philosophically speaking it is vacuous. In theory, Kant outlines the criteria that make certain representations count as knowledge. For example, he claims that the faculties of sensibility and understanding together construct experience. Without either of these, there is no experience. If Kant thinks that we need knowledge of freedom in order to demonstrate synthetic *a priori* practical proposition, and if he claims that we act under the idea of freedom or conceive ourselves as free, then if those claims are to be successful, Kant needs to explain why in practice 'to have an idea of freedom' or 'to conceive oneself as free' does in fact count as knowledge. In other words, just as Kant has criteria for theoretical knowledge he needs criteria for practical knowledge. Without these criteria, Kant cannot really claim that in practice we *know* freedom.

I do not mean here to fault practice from the perspective of theory. My argument does not take the following form: because in theory having an idea of freedom or conceiving oneself as free is illegitimate, those ways of representing freedom must also be illegitimate in practice. In other words, I do not claim that just because those ways of representing freedom in theory do not constitute knowledge, they must also not constitute knowledge in practice. It could very well be the case that just having an idea of freedom or just conceiving oneself as free in practice does count as knowledge. My point simply is that, with the conceptual vocabulary that we are given in the *Groundwork*, we cannot actually tell. This is why, unlike Allison, I am not ready to accept Kant's epistemic freedom as a demon-

stration of the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. Unless Kant can say more to explain how, in practice, we actually *know* freedom, he cannot demonstrate the validity of the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition.

This lack of criteria for what counts as practical knowledge often gets Kant into trouble in the *Groundwork*. I think that at this point in his career Kant was only aware of theoretical criteria of justification. However, because in the *Groundwork* he feels the onus of justifying freedom in order to demonstrate the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition, he borrows vocabulary from theory. The problem, however, is not merely that he borrows theoretical terms such as ‘having an idea of freedom’ or ‘conceiving oneself as free’ that theory itself discounts as knowledge. The problem is, rather, that he borrows from theory, period. The problem, in other words, is not that Kant is being dogmatic in the *Groundwork*. The problem is that he is being sloppy.

This is why Kant contradicts himself in the *Groundwork*. On the one hand, as I have argued above, Kant does think that in the *Groundwork* he provides knowledge of freedom and therefore solves the problem of synthetic *a priori* practical propositions. On the other hand, however, Kant is aware that this supposed knowledge of freedom is not good enough. Thus he also often claims in the *Groundwork* that we cannot actually know freedom.

Thus, the question, how a categorical imperative is possible, can indeed be answered to the extent that one can furnish the sole presupposition on which alone it is possible, namely the idea of freedom, and that one can also see the necessity of this presupposition, which is sufficient for the *practical use of reason*, that is, for the conviction of the *validity of this imperative* and also of the moral law; but how this presupposition itself is possible can never be seen by any human reason (*G* 4:461).

In the end Kant admits that acting under the idea of freedom or conceiving oneself as free is not actually knowledge of freedom, but is rather the presupposition of freedom. This demonstrates that, in the *Groundwork*, Kant is not only using theoretical criteria of justification, but also that he upholds the theoretical judgment of what counts as justification, even though he uses theoretical criteria in practice. While Kant borrows these theoretical criteria in order to claim knowledge of freedom in practice, he often seems to remember that those criteria are actually discounted as knowledge from the perspective of theory, and can therefore only achieve the presupposition but not the knowledge of freedom in practice.

Overall, Kant seems to waver between the positions that acting under the idea of freedom and conceiving oneself as free are both enough and not enough. These theoretical criteria are sometimes enough, in the sense that they do not make metaphysical claims in practice. However, most of the time, these theoretical criteria are not enough, because no matter what claims they make in practice, their ultimate source of justification is theory and theory judges them to be illegitimate. Kant is stuck. He is desperately in need of properly practical criteria of justification. If he can develop these practical criteria of justification, then he will be in a better position to argue that we can know freedom, and will thus be in a better position to demonstrate the validity of the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition.

My claim is that whereas Kant does not develop these practical criteria of justification in the *Groundwork*, he does do it in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In this sense, we are to take Kant's discussion of the knowledge of freedom in the *Groundwork* as merely preparatory. Kant himself says as much:

What this third cognition is, to which freedom points us and of which we have an idea *a priori*, cannot yet be shown here and now; nor can the deduction of the concept

of freedom from pure practical reason, and with it the possibility of a categorical imperative as well, as yet be made comprehensible; instead, some further preparation is required (*G* 4:447).

Unlike Allison, I argue that epistemic freedom is not enough to demonstrate synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. Instead, epistemic freedom must give way to a different kind of freedom, freedom that we can really know. This can happen only when Kant outlines properly practical criteria of justification.

Kant published the *Groundwork* in 1785. However, when he published the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1787, he had already had some time to think about practical criteria of justification. Take, for example, what he argues in the second edition of the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here Kant distinguishes between logical knowledge, on the one hand, and *a priori* knowledge, on the other. Logical knowledge thinks concepts but does not apply them to objects. It is only concerned with logical possibility, i.e., with our ability to think a concept at all. Thus logical knowledge does not fail to have objective validity; it is not in the business of having one at all (*CPR* Bxxxviii). “But” Kant claims “something more is required before I can ascribe to such a concept objective validity, that is, real possibility; the former possibility is merely logical” (*CPR* Bxxxviii). Kant then goes on to make the following decisive claim. “This something more need not, however, be sought in the theoretical sources of knowledge; it may lie in those that are practical” (*CPR* Bxxxviii). Thus by 1787, Kant has figured out that there are properly practical sources of knowledge. In order to say that we know freedom in practice, we no longer have to draw on theoretical criteria of justification. Therefore, the language of ‘acting under the idea of freedom’ or ‘conceiving oneself as free’ can fall away at least as far as the practical justification of freedom is concerned.

This is how Kant explains the difference between theoretical and practical sources of knowledge in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Now if reason is to be a factor in these sciences something in them must be known *a priori*, and this knowledge may be related to its object in one or other of two ways, either as merely *determining* it and its concept (which must be supplied from elsewhere) or as also *making it actual*. The former is *theoretical*, the latter *practical* knowledge of reason (*CPR* Bx).

This is an important moment in Kant's critical philosophy. For Kant there are two ways of knowing something *a priori*. In theory, we know objects by determining them and their concepts in empirical intuition. Most people are familiar with this definition of knowledge in Kant. It is central to Kant's critical theoretical philosophy that the concept of freedom cannot be determined in empirical intuition. Therefore, freedom cannot be known theoretically at all. However, in practice, Kant argues, we know objects by actualizing them and their concepts. This actualization names a legitimate process of *a priori* knowledge, specifically of practical knowledge. Perhaps, we can know freedom in the sense that we actualize it. Kant does not do much with the concept of actualization in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, I claim, he does use it as a foundation for the position he holds in the *Critique of Practical Reason* which he publishes in 1788.

Practical freedom

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that unlike theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge is not founded on sensibility but rather on principles.

For, in the present *Critique* we shall begin with *principles* and proceed to *concepts*, and only then, where possible, from them to the senses, whereas in the case of speculative reason we had to begin with the senses and end with principles (*CPrR* 5:16).

Moreover, Kant does not just reverse theoretical criteria of justification in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. He also redefines what the faculty of sensibility is in relation to the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The Aesthetic there had two parts, because of the twofold kind of sensible intuition; here sensibility is not regarded as a capacity for intuition at all but only as feeling (which can be subjective ground of desire), and with respect to it pure practical reason admits no further division (*CPrR* 5:90).

This redefinition of the faculty of sensibility determines the meaning of the reversal of the theoretical criteria of justification. When Kant claims that practical knowledge is founded on principles, he does not mean that it is founded on those laws that are not subject to the empirical laws of nature that are operative in theory. This would be the case if Kant continued to understand the faculty of sensibility in terms of intuition. Instead, when Kant claims that practical knowledge is founded on principles here, he means that it is founded on those laws

that are not subject to feelings. In this sense, practical knowledge is just founded on the universal laws.

However, once we state the position of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in these terms, it seems that there is no fundamental difference between this work and the *Groundwork*. We have seen that in the *Groundwork* Kant argues that we know freedom only in the sense that when we act on reason, we act under the idea of freedom or that we conceive ourselves as free. However, because he is only using theoretical criteria of justification in the *Groundwork*, he also admits that this acting under the idea of freedom or conceiving ourselves as free is not knowledge, but rather the presupposition of freedom. The one thing that seems to change in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is that Kant is now prepared to make a bolder statement. Because he has developed practical criteria of justification, he no longer needs to say that acting on reason allows us only to act under the idea of freedom, or to conceive ourselves as free, in other words, that this acting on reason allows us merely to presuppose freedom. Instead, he can also claim that this acting on reason is actually knowledge (practical knowledge) of freedom.

Despite this difference, however, the position does not seem to have changed much, if at all. Even though Kant does use practical criteria of justification in order to claim the knowledge of freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, this freedom does not look much different from the freedom he has already established in the *Groundwork* using purely theoretical criteria of justification. In the *Groundwork* Kant uses theoretical criteria of justification not to establish metaphysical freedom, but rather to establish epistemic freedom. Here Kant again argues that to know freedom is to act on the basis of reason. However, because he does not use theoretical criteria of justification, the freedom we know is no longer epistemic. Calling freedom ‘epistemic’ makes sense only in the context of the theoretical vocabulary of acting under the ‘idea’ of freedom or of ‘con-

ceiving' of oneself as free. In other words, it makes sense only in the context of the language of representation. Therefore, when this theoretical vocabulary falls away, Kant calls the freedom that we know 'practical freedom.' However, this terminological difference does not seem to be much more than that. Like epistemic freedom, practical freedom is not metaphysical. In fact, practical freedom seems to be epistemic freedom simply phrased in properly practical vocabulary. Either way, we seem to return to the position that Allison finds convincing.

I argue that this is actually not the case. I claim, instead, that when Kant argues in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that we know freedom when we act on reason, he does not simply rephrase what he has already said in the *Groundwork* in practical vocabulary. He does not just refer to epistemic freedom using practical vocabulary. Instead, when Kant argues in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that when we act on reason we know freedom, he means we know metaphysical freedom. This is the fundamental difference between the inadequate account we find in the *Groundwork* and the more thoroughly developed account we find in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In order to understand how we can know metaphysical freedom, we need to take seriously Kant's claim that practical knowledge is actualization.

Critique of Practical Reason

Whereas in both the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant talks about knowing freedom by acting on reason, in the latter work he also talks about freedom in the metaphysical sense. Here he claims that metaphysical freedom is the condition of acting on reason whereby we know freedom. This is Kant's famous distinction between freedom as the *ratio essendi* of the moral law and the moral law as the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.

Lest anyone suppose that he finds an *inconsistency* when I now call the freedom the condition of the moral law and afterwards, in the treatise, maintain that the moral law is the condition under which we can first *become aware* of freedom, I want only to remark that whereas freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For, had not the moral law *already* been distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in *assuming* such a thing as freedom (even though it is not self-contradictory). But were there no freedom, the moral law would not be encountered at all in ourselves (*CPrR* 5:5n).

From the perspective of the *Groundwork* it seems that Kant is saying exactly what he has already said. The only difference is that whereas in the *Groundwork* he has rid his discussion of metaphysical claims altogether, for some reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he grounds all of his discussion on the metaphysical claim concerning freedom. From the perspective of the *Groundwork* Kant has merely placed his discussion of knowing freedom by acting on reason on a dogmatic basis. This seems even more confusing given that, supposedly, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant provides practical criteria of justification and thus advances his discussion from epistemic to practical freedom. This kind of interpretation of the distinction between the *ratio essendi* and the *ratio cognoscendi* has led many commentators to suppose that the *Critique of Practical Reason* is not an improvement on the *Groundwork*, but rather a regression. Take the example of Karl Ameriks.

According to Ameriks, Kant begins by claiming that he can justify morality if he can justify freedom. However, in the *Groundwork* Kant only justifies freedom by means of morality. Because freedom is supposed to justify morality, when Kant justifies freedom by means of morality, he argues in circles.

Because Kant could not justify the very freedom, that was supposed to justify morality, without invoking morality itself, morality remains unjustified. In order to rectify this situation, Ameriks continues, Kant introduces metaphysical freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Metaphysical freedom acts as the condition of morality. However, Ameriks claims, because Kant offers no justification for metaphysical freedom, it is unclear how it, as a condition, justifies morality. Morality remains unjustified. In the end, Ameriks claims, Kant grasps at straws and claims that morality is a fact of pure reason. However, because Kant cannot explain how this fact is possible, the claim is dogmatic. Freedom was supposed to justify morality. But morality justifies freedom. However, morality itself cannot be justified. Therefore neither freedom nor morality can be justified. Kant has had hopes for his deduction of freedom and morality. However, in the end he gives in to dogmatism.

Before, the assertion of our freedom seemed to be based on the assertion of morality, which in turn rested on an appeal to freedom. Now instead, of the last step, which does involve a circular grounding, no step at all and so no theoretical grounding is offered. In the place of ambitious but understandable attempts at a strict deduction, Kant has fallen back into the invocation of an alleged a prior fact of practical reason (Ameriks 177).

I agree that Kant's practical philosophy is unsuccessful as long as one insists on the position in the *Groundwork* or interprets the *Critique of Practical Reason* in the way in which Ameriks does. However, I offer an alternative interpretation. When in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant argues that we know freedom when we act on reason, he does not mean to say what he has already said in the *Groundwork*. Instead, I argue that the claim that the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of

freedom is inseparable from the claim that freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law. In other words, the former claim is an integral, constitutive part of the latter claim. What binds these two claims together is the concept of actualization. This concept allows Kant to claim the knowledge of metaphysical freedom. When we interpret the *Critique of Practical Reason* in this light, we see that this work is a noteworthy improvement on the *Groundwork*, rather than a regression from it.

Actualization

Usually when Kant discusses metaphysical freedom he does so from the perspective of theoretical reason. For theoretical reason to know freedom would mean to determine it in empirical intuition. Because such determination is impossible, Kant concludes that we cannot theoretically know freedom. However, for practical reason, knowledge is not at all about empirical determination. It is about actualization. This fact has fundamental consequences for what Kant can mean if he is to claim that we can know metaphysical freedom in practice.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant is only privy to theoretical criteria of justification. For that reason, however, he can only understand acting on reason in terms of the idea of freedom or in terms of conceiving of ourselves as free. In other words, he cannot explain in metaphysical terms, how such an act is possible. Acting on reason thus has the appearance of a metaphysical miracle, and theoretical reason has every right to complain about it. However, when Kant comes up with practical criteria of justification, he is no longer subject to this difficulty. He can claim that there is reason, that we do actually act on reason, and that reason is metaphysically free. When theoretical reason asks why practical reason thinks it is justified in claiming this metaphysical freedom, practical reason can offer actualization as the answer.

Actualization is not a representation of metaphysical freedom after we have acted on reason. Instead, actualization *is* that act. To say that freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law is to say that the act on reason is made possible by metaphysical freedom. When theoretical reason asks for the justification of metaphysical freedom, practical reason does not offer anything other than actualization; in other words, the act based on reason itself. It seems that practical reason here argues in circles. In other words, it seems that practical reason argues that metaphysical freedom makes possible acting on reason and that acting on reason makes possible metaphysical freedom. However, that is not the case. It would be the case that Kant argues in circles if acting on reason did not itself constitute metaphysical freedom. With the concept of actualization, Kant suggests that acting on reason reveals a particular truth about itself, namely the metaphysical freedom, of which it is not aware unless it acts it out. In short, reason can know that it is metaphysically free only by realizing this freedom through its own action. This realization, this actualization, of metaphysical freedom through acting on reason *is* the knowledge of freedom.

Theoretical reason wants to have the corner on metaphysical freedom. It wants the knowledge of metaphysical freedom before we enact it. It wants to be assured that when we act, we really are free. In other words, it wants the proof of metaphysical freedom without anyone acting at all. Everything else is dogmatism. But this is precisely Kant's radical point in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Metaphysical freedom cannot be known in this way. It can only be known by acting. In order to know freedom, I must make an effort to act rationally. This is what Kant means when he claims that freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, and the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.

Freedom is not the *ratio essendi* of the moral law in the dogmatic sense. Nor is the moral law the *ratio cognoscendi* in the sense of the *Groundwork*. In other words, when Kant in the

Critique of Practical Reason argues that the moral law is the knowledge of freedom, he does not just mean that when we act on reason, we act under the idea of freedom or conceive ourselves as free, only this time around put in terms of practical criteria of justification. Instead, Kant's point is the following one. The fact that freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law is what we realize when we act on the basis of reason. However, this realization is not a process that is distinguishable from acting. It *is* acting. That freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law is what is known by means of the moral law, in the sense that the moral law that is acting on reason is the actualization of that freedom. This is why the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. The demand that we grasp metaphysical freedom prior to acting is precisely the dogmatism that Kant tries to avoid in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant has only theoretical criteria of justification at his disposal. For this reason, he argues only that we can justify epistemic freedom, but not metaphysical freedom. Allison thinks that this epistemic freedom will do the job of demonstrating synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. Alternatively, Ameriks thinks that Kant does not do much else in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. He justifies practical freedom, but in the process invokes a metaphysical freedom that he cannot justify. Therefore, Ameriks continues, Kant ends up dogmatically claiming that morality is a fact of pure reason. On the other hand, I argue that in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant moves well past the position in the *Groundwork*. In fact, he justifies precisely that metaphysical freedom that theory could not justify. Kant is able to do this, because he finally makes use of practical criteria of justification. Reason does not know metaphysical freedom, because it represents it. It does not determine it in empirical intuition. This is impossible. Instead, reason knows metaphysical freedom, because it acts it out. This acting, this morality is the knowledge of metaphysical freedom. We must learn to appreciate that, for Kant, doing can also be

knowing. If we do this, we will learn to appreciate the fact that we can know metaphysical freedom without lapsing into dogmatism.

For, if as pure reason it is really practical, it proves its reality and that of its concepts by what it does, and all subtle reasoning against the possibility of its being practical is futile. With this faculty transcendental *freedom* is also established, taken indeed in that absolute sense in which speculative reason needed it, in its use of the concept of causality, in order to rescue itself from the antinomy into which it unavoidably falls when it wants to think the unconditioned in the series of causal connection; this concept, however, it could put forward only problematically, as not impossible to think, without assuring it objective reality...(*CPrR* 5:4).

Deduction

My goal in this paper has been to explain how Kant can demonstrate synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. We have seen that Kant thinks that he can do this, only if he can explain how we can know freedom. I have argued that Kant does not succeed in justifying the knowledge of freedom in the *Groundwork*. The merely epistemic freedom we find there simply will not do the job. On the other hand, I have argued that the *Critique of Practical Reason* does succeed at this task. We know metaphysical freedom in the sense that we actualize it by means of the moral law, that is, by actually acting on the basis of reason. The advantage of this interpretation is that it makes sense of Kant's otherwise ambiguous claims concerning the deduction of freedom and morality.

We have seen that synthetic *a priori* proposition is demonstrated in the third kind of knowledge, in other words, in empirical intuition. Because the moral law does not deal with

empirical intuition, Kant admits that synthetic *a priori* practical proposition cannot be demonstrated in this way. Nevertheless, Kant famously insists that the moral law establishes itself.

Hence the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction, by any efforts of theoretical reason, speculative or empirically supported, so that, even if one were willing to renounce its apodictic certainty, it could not be confirmed by experience and thus proved a posteriori; and it is nevertheless firmly established by itself (*CPrR* 5:48).

If we do not understand practical knowledge in terms of actualization, then Kant's claim that the moral law establishes itself sounds dogmatic. This is Ameriks' position. However, if we recognize that according to Kant freedom actualizes itself as the moral law, then the contention that the moral law establishes itself makes perfect sense.

In the *Groundwork* Kant seems to have thought that he needs to establish the knowledge of freedom without using any moral premises, in order to demonstrate synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. By the time of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, this dream is over. However, this does not mean that Kant settles for a lesser, unsatisfactory position or that he lapses into an even worse form of dogmatism. Instead, when Kant recognizes that practical knowledge is actualization, he also recognizes that the synthetic *a priori* practical proposition must establish itself. In other words, acting on reason must be the very means whereby we establish the validity of acting on reason. The first moment of human practice is acting rationally. But Kant is committed to the metaphysical claim that this rational activity is not arbitrary. It actualizes freedom. Thus Kant claims that we act on reason and that this acting is possible because we are in fact metaphysically free. Moreover, he does not state this point dogmatically. He claims that we know this

metaphysical freedom by means of this activity, *in this activity*. But is this also not what Kant claims in that infamous passage on the deduction of morality and freedom? Here Kant argues that morality need not be established, because it establishes itself and also that morality establishes freedom.

But something different and quite paradoxical takes the place of this vainly sought deduction of the moral principle, namely that the moral principle, conversely itself serves as the principle of the deduction of an inscrutable faculty which no experience could prove but which speculative reason had to assume as at least possible... namely the faculty of freedom, of which the moral law, which itself has no need of justifying grounds, proves not only the possibility but the reality in beings who cognize this law as binding upon them (*CPrR* 5:48).

Thus Kant does not assert his deduction of morality dogmatically. It is a result of a well worked out method, a method that understands practical knowledge in terms of actualization.

It is this context that we ought to understand Kant's point about the fact of pure reason. Kant does not invoke morality as the fact of pure reason, because he runs out of ideas, as Ameriks suggests. Instead, those terms actually best describe Kant's position. Morality is the fact of pure reason, not because in practice pure reason has a mystical intuition of morality. Instead, morality is a fact of pure reason, because pure reason establishes morality as a fact by acting rationally. Kant's critical project is a transcendental project; in other words, it is concerned with the conditions of possibility of experience and morality.³ In the former case, Kant argues, theoretical reason imposes natural laws. In the latter case, practical reason imposes moral laws. The only difference is that whereas in the former case,

³ It is also concerned with the conditions of possibility of judgment, but this topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

theoretical reason justifies natural laws in representation, in the latter case practical reason justifies moral law in action. This is all that Kant means when he claims that morality is the fact of pure reason. It is a fact that pure reason imposes *and* justifies in practice. In this sense, I agree with Lewis White Beck's interpretation. He claims that we understand the fact of pure reason as the fact *for* pure reason.

Only a law which is given by reason itself to reason itself could be known a priori by pure reason and be a fact for pure reason. The moral law expresses nothing else than the autonomy of reason; it is a fact for pure reason only inasmuch as it is the expression of the fact of pure reason, i.e., of the fact that pure reason can be practical. That is why the moral law is the sole fact of pure reason and for pure reason. (169)

Kant begins his practical project in the *Groundwork* by claiming that he needs to demonstrate freedom, before he can demonstrate synthetic *a priori* practical proposition. He concludes this project in the *Critique of Practical Reason* by claiming that freedom can be demonstrated only in morality. However, because Kant understands practical knowledge in terms of actualization, his conclusion involves neither circular nor dogmatic reasoning.⁴

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