

Moving on to GMS III

1. Reconsidering Categorical Imperative and Ends¹

- (1) Ends give us reasons to act. If we have no end in view, then we would lack a reason to act. We would have no incentive to do anything (cf. 427.21–3: ‘what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the end’).
- (2) Any imperative presupposes that there are reasons to act. A categorical imperative presupposes that these reasons are valid for all rational beings, or rational agents. Hence, these ends must be independent of any interests that are not shared by any conceivable rational agent.
- (3) So, there must be an end that is in the same sense independent of any such interests. (Otherwise it would not be universally valid.)
- (4) By definition, such an end is an end in itself. (It is not relative to any other end; it is a final end.)
- (5) Therefore, if there is a categorical imperative, there must be something that exists and is an end in itself.
- (6) That end is humanity.
 - (a) In *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 1790: “*Humanity* means on the one hand the universal *feeling of participation* [*Teilnehmungsgefühl*, sympathy?] and on the other hand the capacity for being able to *communicate* [*mittheilen*] one’s inmost self universally, which properties taken together constitute the sociability [*Geselligkeit*] that is appropriate to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals.” (§60, 5:355)
 - (b) In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 1793, on three determining elements of the human being: “[1] predisposition to *animality* of the human being, as a *living being*’ [self-preservation, sexual and social drives]; [2] ‘to the *humanity* in him, as a living and at the same time *rational being*’ [comparative self-love, happiness, worth]; [3] to his *personality*, as a rational and at the same time *responsible being*’ (6:26; cf. GMS 428.22, 438.15).
 - (c) In *Metaphysics of Morals*, 1797: “*Freedom* (independence from being constrained by another’s choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law, is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity.” (6:237)

¹ See Allison, H. E. (2011). *Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (p. 206).

2. GMS III §1: Freedom and Autonomy

- ¶1 The will is causal, i.e. a power to produce effects. Only rational beings have a will. A *free* will is causally independent of ‘alien’ determinative influences, i.e. natural necessity (e.g., sensible impulses, cf. *Metaphysics of Morals* VI 213–4). This concept of freedom is negative (free ‘from’; freedom of indifference): it tells us what freedom is not, *viz.* not to be determined by the laws of nature.
- ¶2 The concept of causality is *nomological*, i.e. entails laws. So, insofar as the will is causal, it is in line with laws or causal regularities. But the natural necessity is a *heteronomy* (cf. GMS II 441). Given ¶1, it follows that if the laws of *nature* determined the will, it would cease to be free. So, natural laws cannot be the will’s laws. But a causal will unrestricted by *any* laws is ‘absurd’ (*ein Unding*): it would be random. So, there are laws of freedom. By exclusion, the free will gives itself these laws: a free will is *autonomous*, i.e. spontaneously free ‘to’ set its own laws (cf. GMS 444.1–34). The idea that a pure will, or practical reason (cf. GMS 412.28–30) is a law to itself is nothing but the generic formula of the categorical imperative. And since the categorical imperative is the principle of morality, it follows that a free will is identical with a will that is subject to moral laws, and this means that autonomy and morality are *equivalent*. Free (finite) rational agents recognise the validity of the categorical imperative—and, as free, acting from duty *or not* is up to them (cf. *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* VI 20–1, or GMS 449.20 or 414.1–11).
- ¶3 But now the limits of analysis are obvious. The above is an analytical argument: morality follows from the supposition of the will’s freedom by conceptual analysis. In contrast, the categorical imperative is *synthetic* (see GMS 420.14 note, 444.35). It is not possible immediately to derive the idea that an absolutely good will always acts according to universalisable maxims (or from duty) from the concept of a good will (cf. 426.22, 440.20). A third thing is needed to connect the two. The positive notion of freedom points to this third thing. But before the moral law can be proven (in §4), the concept of freedom must be deduced from pure practical reason; and this needs preparation (in §§2–3).

2. GMS III §2: The Presupposition of Freedom

Morality makes sense only for beings that are free. But this freedom must be demonstrated *a priori* for all practical rational beings, i.e. all beings that are subject to moral laws (see 429.3–9; and also KRV B404–5). Agents who cannot act but under the idea² of freedom are in a practical respect really free. For such (causal) agents have practical reason (i.e. a pure will), and are hence self-

2 An *idea* is of ‘something which not only can never be borrowed from the senses but far surpasses even the concepts of the understanding’ (KRV A 313/B 370). Ideas are *pure* concepts of reason, and thus transcendental (e.g., immortality, God, freedom).

determined (or autonomous). But a will can determine itself only if it regards itself as *positively* free, i.e. that the determination of its will is up to itself, not to ‘alien’ forces. As presupposition, the idea of freedom is *transcendental*; it is a necessary condition for the possibility of moral action, i.e. practical rationality.

3. GMS III §3: Morality and Interest

- ¶1 Morality is thus reduced to freedom; yet freedom must be presupposed. It has not (yet) been shown to be an actual part of human nature.
- ¶2 But why is it that I should submit, in virtue of being a rational agent, to the moral law? Why do I feel obliged, bound, or motivated, by the moral law? Why do I seem to take an interest in acting according to a law that is not associated with any interest at all? For categorical imperatives do not compel me to action through ends that interest me.
- ¶3 It seems, thus, that in the idea of freedom, we *also* presuppose the moral law (and thus the will’s autonomy). If so, we could not justify or prove the reality of the moral law either. If so, we cannot answer the question above.
- ¶4 Could it be that the moral law binds because of we are interested in our worthiness to be happy (cf. 393.23; 415.28–33)? No. This interest is but a consequence of the moral law.
- ¶5 An independent justification for morality thus seems hard to find: if we ask, why are we free, we answer that this because we conceive of ourselves as subject to moral laws; and if we ask, why do we think that, we might be tempted to answer that this is because we have free will. But this is a circle, which assumes freedom to account for the fact that human agents are bound by moral laws, and then also assumes moral laws to account for the fact that human agents are free. Morality cannot ground in freedom *if* freedom in turn grounds in morality. In the background of this potential problem lurks the equivalence thesis (see above §1 ¶2; 447.6–7).
- ¶6 But there is a way to avoid the circle. This escape depends on a different standpoint (*Standpunkt*).
- ¶7 Naïve understanding distinguishes between appearances, which are given to us passively, and things in themselves, which however we cannot cognise or know at all. Such is the distinction between a *world of sense* and a *world of understanding*. Rational human agents dwell in both worlds.
- ¶8 We should resist the temptation to sensualise things in themselves.
- ¶9 That is the difference between reason and understanding. While the understanding serves to bring sensuous representations (*sinnliche Vorstellungen*) under rules, and thus could not operate independently of sensibility (see KRV A50–1/B74–5), reason is spontaneous (and while being able to go beyond sensitivity—hence threatens to become ‘dialectical’ in its use—this marks the limits of the understanding).
- ¶10 Rational agents thus have two *standpoints*: the heteronomous standpoint of *nature*, and the autonomous standpoint of *freedom*.

- ¶11 As rational agents, we conceive of ourselves as part of the intelligible world, and thus as subjects to *its* laws. And this means we conceive of ourselves ‘under the idea of freedom’. Inseparably related to the idea of freedom are autonomy and the universal principle of morality, which underwrites rational agency just like laws of nature underwrite appearances.
- ¶12 There then goes the suspicion that a question is begged (the circle). Insofar as we conceive of ourselves as free, we ‘transfer’ (*versetzen*) ourselves to the world of understanding and cognise (*erkennen*) the will’s autonomy and morality as its consequence; but insofar as we conceive ourselves as *bound by duty*, we consider ourselves as part of the world of sense *and* the world of understanding.

6. GMS III §4: The Deduction—how a CI is possible

- ¶1 As intelligence, rational beings belong to the world of understanding. My will is causally effective. As conscious sensuous being, i.e. as belonging to the world of sense, I experience the actions as appearances, or effects. As *purely* intelligent all my actions would be autonomous and consistent with the moral law; as *purely* sensuous they would be heteronomously consistent with happiness and the laws of nature (desires and inclinations). There is an *asymmetry* between these worlds: the intelligible world ‘contains the ground’ of the sensible world, including its laws (of action): the world of sense is ontologically inferior to the world of understanding.³ So, the world of sense is also subordinated to my will (as belonging exclusively to the world of understanding). This means that the moral law binds me as belonging to the world of sense too. Since I straddle both worlds, the laws of practical reason oblige me *as* categorical imperatives, which I regard as duties. What I *should* to do as a sensuous-rational being, as a merely rational being I *would* do as something I myself will to do as an authentic (*eigentliches*) self (458.2)—or as a ‘transcendental subject’ (KRV A492).
- ¶2 This categorical *ought* is a synthetic *a priori* proposition (cf. 447.8–20), because it contains the ideas of a will that is affected by sensuous desires *and* the idea of the same will that is pure and practical by itself, yet belongs to the intelligible world. These laws are the necessary condition of all actions of the sensuous will. This is the *third* thing (447.16). This is roughly similar to the case where intuitions are combined with concepts of the understanding and thus yield cognition of nature (cf. KRV A51/B75).
- ¶3 The *practical use* of common human reason confirms the correctness of this deduction. As sensuous, we transgress the moral law, which however we know (*kennen*) from the standpoint of freedom. Insofar as we aspire for the perspective of the intelligible world, or transfer ourselves to it, our inner worth (*Werth*), our dignity (*Würde*)—or indeed our humanity—increases.

3 For details, see Schönecker, D. and Wood, A. W. (2015). *Immanuel Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press (pp. 205–13).

