

## Groundwork II

PHIL 4/871

### 1 *The Structure of Groundwork II*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Timmermann (2007), xxxi.

1. Preliminaries (4:406–12)
  - a. The origin of the concept of duty is not empirical but a priori (4:406–8)
  - b. On the limited value of exemplars in ethics (4:408–9)
  - c. True and false popularity in moral philosophy (4:409–10)
  - d. The primacy of metaphysics in moral philosophy (4:410–12)
2. The doctrine of imperatives (4:412–20)
  - a. The will as the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws (4:412–13)
  - b. Imperatives necessitate an imperfect will to act in accordance with laws (4:413–14)
  - c. Imperatives, hypothetical and categorical: skill, prudence, morals (4:414–17)
  - d. How are all of these imperatives possible? (4:417–20)
3. The categorical imperative (4:420–1) [FUL]
  - a. Derivation of the general formula of the categorical imperative from its concept (4:420–1)
  - b. The general formulation (4:421)
4. Variant: universal laws of nature (4:421–4) [FLN]
  - a. The universal-law-of-nature formulation (4:421)
  - b. Application of this formula to the four examples of duty (4:421–4)
5. Interlude (4:425–7)
6. Variant: rational creatures as ends-in-themselves (4:427–31) [FH]
  - a. Derivation of the “formula of humanity as the end-in-itself” from the concept of a will (4:427–9)
  - b. Application of this formula to the four examples of duty (4:429–31)
7. Variants: autonomy in a kingdom of ends (4:431–6) [FA & FKE]
  - a. Derivation of the formula of autonomy from the other two (4:431)
  - b. A universally legislative will is independent of all interest (4:431–3)
  - c. Self-legislation, morality and the kingdom of ends (4:433–4)
  - d. A moral being possesses dignity, not a price (4:434–6)
8. Reflections on the variant formulations of the categorical imperative (4:436–40)

- a. The connection between the three variants of the categorical imperative (4:436–7)
  - b. Review of the Groundwork so far: the good will and the formulations of the categorical imperative (4:437–40)
9. The autonomy of the moral will (4:440–4)
- a. Autonomy and heteronomy (4:440–1)
  - b. Division of ethical theories according to the principle of heteronomy (4:441–4)
10. Transition to Section III: how is a synthetic practical proposition possible? (4:444–5)

## 2 *Kant's Theory of Agency*

### 2.1 *Inclination & Desire*

- Living things act in accordance with inner states – representations<sup>2</sup>
- All *intentional action* (as contrasted with bodily movement/behavior) is based on both a cognitive and a conative component<sup>3</sup>
  - Conative states are themselves either representational or non-representational
    - \* Feelings of pleasure/displeasure (non-representational)
    - \* Desire (representational)
- An intentional action requires the following causal chain: cognition → conation (feeling + desire) → action
- At the empirical “level” we are (as are all living beings) psychologically determined by this causal chains<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2 *Action & Laws*

- Rational beings are distinctive in having the capacity to act from a representation of laws<sup>5</sup>
  - Difference between representing in accordance with a law vs. representing a law and *thereby* acting in accordance with it
- Perfectly rational beings only act in accordance with laws represented by reason<sup>6</sup>
- Q: Why does Kant move from talking about *representing laws* to talking about deriving an action *from a law* (and not a *representation* of a law)?

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

<sup>3</sup> Pleasure precedes the faculty of desire, and the cognitive faculty precedes pleasure . . . . [W]e can desire or abhor nothing which is not based on pleasure or displeasure. For that which give me no pleasure, I also do not want. Thus pleasure or displeasure precedes desire or abhorrence. But still I must first cognize what I desire, likewise what gives me pleasure or displeasure; accordingly, both are based on the cognitive faculty. (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:877-8 (1782/83))

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

<sup>5</sup> Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*. Since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. (4:412)

<sup>6</sup> If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary, that is, the will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good. (4:412)

### 2.3 *Maxims*

- What is a “maxim”?<sup>7</sup>
  - A “subjective principle of willing” or principle on which a person acts
    - \* Contrasts with objective *law*<sup>8</sup>
- Designates an action to be performed in a context and for some purpose on the basis of some evaluation of the Good: In C, I (ought, may, etc.) to do A for purpose P, because that would be G
  - A maxim functions as the major premise in a rational inference to some action (or volition to act) as a conclusion
- Kant’s examples of maxims
  - let no insult pass unavenged (5:19)
  - when I believe myself to be in need of money I should borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen (4:422).
- Action from a maxim contrasts with merely acting from inclination
- Non-rational beings lack the capacity to act on maxims, so their actions (or behaviour) is completely determined by their sensible impulses

<sup>7</sup> A *maxim* is the subjective principle of willing; the objective principle (i.e., the one that would also subjectively serve all rational beings as the practical principle if reason had complete control over the desiderative faculty) is the practical *law*. (4:400, note)

<sup>8</sup> The former [a maxim] contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations), and is therefore the principle in accordance with which the subject acts; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which *he ought to act*, i.e., an imperative. (4:421, note)

### 2.4 *Agreement About Maxims*

1. Everyone always acts on maxims.
2. Maxims determine how we act in specific situations through the use of practical rules.
3. Everyone has a highest maxim that affects the other maxims she adopts.
4. Maxims can be linguistically/propositionally formulated and then evaluated for their moral worth (and the deontic status of their accompanying actions) by the FUL.
5. Because maxims determine how we act, the deontic status and moral worth of our actions, and whether we are good or evil people, maxims express our character.
6. Maxims adopted for action *describe* what we intend to do or what we see as good rather than *prescribe* courses of action that we may or may not live up to.

### 2.5 *Practical Reason & The Will*

(*Pure*) *Practical Reason* (i.e. *the Will* [der Wille]): (i) the capacity/power to bring about an (intention to) action (ii) without being determined by any sensible inclination and (iii) solely due to one’s derivation of the action from (pure) principles

- Kant is addressing the issue of a will *in general*, so the laws in question are *objective* laws, not *subjective* maxims
- The will is a *capacity*, and as such exists even when not exercised, or exercised appropriately (i.e. in conformity with a law)
- Two kinds of will
  1. *Holy will*: a will which *always* acts in conformity with reason/rational law
  2. *Finite (human) will*: a will exposed to subjective and non-rational (sensible) incentives
    - Only finite wills have imperatives that apply to them<sup>9</sup>

## 2.6 Imperatives

- Imperatives are principles (representations of laws) that have normative force for an agent
  - In what sense “normative force”?
    - \* phenomenological (feeling of compulsion)
    - \* favoring/representing as good (4:413)

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

- In virtue of willing some end, Kant thinks it is *analytic* that one wills the means to that end<sup>10</sup>

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

- A categorical imperative is synthetic a priori since it commands something new, something not entailed by the ends the agent wishes to pursue<sup>11</sup>

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

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

<sup>9</sup> The representation of an objective principle in so far as it is necessitating for a will is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called IMPERATIVE. All imperatives are expressed by an *ought*, and by this indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that according to its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation). (4:413)

<sup>10</sup> Whoever wills the end also wills (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that is in his control. As far as willing is concerned, this proposition is analytic; for in the willing of an object, as my effect, my causality is already thought, as an acting cause, i.e. the use of means, and the imperative already extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of a willing of this end (4:417)

<sup>11</sup> Without a presupposed condition from any inclination, I connect the deed with the will a priori, and hence necessarily (though only objectively, i.e. under the idea of a reason that has complete control over all subjective motives). This is therefore a practical proposition that does not derive the willing of an action analytically from willing another that is already presupposed (for we have no such perfect will), but connects it immediately with the concept of the will of a rational being, as something that is not contained in it. (4:420, note)

### 3 The Moral Law, Categorical Imperative, & Its Formulations

*The Moral Law:* Rational agents act only on universal laws of action<sup>12</sup>

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

#### 1. The Formula of Universal Law (FUL)<sup>13</sup>

- Variant: The Formula of the Law of Nature (FLN)<sup>14</sup>

#### 2. The Formula of Humanity as End in Itself (FH)<sup>15</sup>

#### 3. The Formula of Autonomy (FA)<sup>16</sup>

- Variant: The Formula of the Kingdom of Ends (FKE)<sup>17</sup>
- The moral law, categorical imperative, and the universalization procedure are three distinct things
  - The moral law is (or specifies) a principle that applies to all rational beings *qua* rational, including perfect wills like that of God
  - The categorical imperative is a command to act in accordance to the moral law, and applies only to finite beings (e.g. humans). - The moral law is experienced as a *constraint*, one to which a subject may or may not conform
  - Universalization is the procedure by which we examine our maxims with regard to their conformity with the moral law
- The first version of the CI and its variant concern the *form* of willing
- The second version of the CI concerns the *matter* of what is willed, i.e. the end)
- The third version of the CI concerns the coordination of the products of universal willing in a community of rational beings

#### 3.1 Kinds of Duty

- *Division* (not *derivation*) of duties follows from the universalization procedure<sup>18</sup>

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

*Imperfect duty:* One ought to do *x* sometimes, and to some extent<sup>19</sup>

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

<sup>12</sup> Whatever the circumstance, whatever the action, and for whatever purpose, the action is done because it conforms with universal law

<sup>13</sup> Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law (4:421; cf. 4:402)

<sup>14</sup> Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature (4:421; cf. 4:436).

<sup>15</sup> So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or that of another; always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means (4:429; cf. 4:436).

<sup>16</sup> act according to maxims that can at the same time have as their object themselves as universal laws of nature (4:437)

<sup>17</sup> Act in accordance with the maxims of a universally legislative member of a merely possible realm of ends (4:439; cf. 4:432, 437, 438)

<sup>18</sup> It is easy to see that the first [contradiction in conception] conflicts with strict or narrower (unrelenting) duty, the second [contradiction in will] only with wider (meritorious) duty, and thus that all duties, as far as the kind of obligation (not the object of their action) is concerned, have by these examples been set out completely in their dependence on the one principle. (4:424)

<sup>19</sup> if the law can prescribe only the maxim of actions, not actions themselves, this is a sign that it leaves a playroom (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law, that is, that the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty. ... The wider the duty, therefore, the more imperfect is a man's obligation to action; as he, nevertheless, brings closer to *narrow* duty (duties of right) the maxim of complying with wide duty (in his disposition), so much the more perfect is his virtuous action. (DV 6:390)

#### 4 *The Formula of Humanity*

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

#### 5 *Autonomy & Heteronomy*

- Two notions of “autonomy”
  - Autonomy as a *property* of the will<sup>20</sup>
  - Autonomy as a *principle* of the will<sup>21</sup>
- All rival ethical theories place the principle of morality in some source other than (the structure of) the will – they are “heteronomous” for that reason<sup>22</sup>

#### 6 *References*

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<sup>20</sup> Autonomy of the will is the characteristic of the will by which it is a law to itself (independent of any characteristic of the objects of willing). (4:440)

<sup>21</sup> The principle of autonomy is thus: not to choose in any other way than that the maxims of one’s choice are also comprised as universal law in the same willing. That this practical rule is an imperative...cannot be proved by mere analysis of the concepts that occur in it, because it is a synthetic proposition; one would have to go beyond the cognition of objects to a critique of the subject, i.e. of pure practical reason, since this synthetic proposition, which commands apodictically, must be capable of being cognized completely a priori (4:440)

<sup>22</sup> If it is *in anything other* than the fitness of its maxims for its own universal legislation, hence if - as it goes beyond itself - it is in a characteristic of any of its objects that the will seeks the law that is to determine it, the outcome is always *heteronomy*. (4:441)

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