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IMMANUEL KANT
Critique of Practical Reason

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IMMANUEL KANT

Critique of Practical Reason

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
MARY GREGOR

WITH A REVISED INTRODUCTION BY
ANDREWS REATH
Revised Edition



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Introduction

I

The *Critique of Practical Reason*, published in 1788, is the second of Kant's three *Critiques*, falling between the *Critique of Pure Reason* (first edition: 1781, second edition: 1787) and the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). It is also the second of his three major works devoted to moral theory, along with the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). These works develop an account of morality that reacts to those found in both the empiricist and the rationalist traditions, and together they constitute Kant's lasting contribution to moral theory.

Certain remarks in the *Groundwork* suggest that Kant did not originally plan a separate critique of practical reason. He notes that although a critique of practical reason is the only foundation for a metaphysics of morals (i.e. a systematic classification of human duties on a priori grounds), the need for critique is less pressing in the case of practical reason than it is for speculative reason, and that an outline of such a critique would suffice for his purposes.¹ In moral thought, ordinary reason is more easily brought "to a high degree of correctness and precision" in that authoritative practical principles are revealed through the workings of ordinary moral consciousness, while in its "pure but theoretical use, reason is wholly dialectical," tending to make illusory and illegitimate metaphysical claims. Furthermore, executing a critique of practical reason would introduce complexities not absolutely necessary to a presentation of the basic principle of duty [*G* 4: 391]. The idea of writing a separate critique of practical reason appears to have occurred to Kant while he was revising the *Critique of Pure Reason* for its second edition.

¹ See Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in the *Practical Philosophy* volume of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996), hereafter *G*, 4: 391, 445. The "outline" is the Third Section of the *Groundwork*, entitled "Transition from a Metaphysics of Morals to a Critique of Pure Practical Reason." References to Kant's works are included in the text and (with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) give the volume and page in the German Academy of Sciences edition of Kant's collected works, which are given in the margins of most English translations. Other abbreviations and translations used are as follows:

CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

MM *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996); also in Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

References to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, also to the Academy paging, use no abbreviation.

Introduction

The topics treated in the *Critique of Practical Reason* fall under three main areas: moral theory, freedom of the will, and the doctrine of the “postulates of pure practical reason,” in which practical reason provides grounds for assuming the reality of certain metaphysical ideas which could not be established theoretically. The second *Critique* is a work of moral theory. But as this list of topics may indicate, it establishes important connections between themes that had been treated independently in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Pure Reason* – in other words, between Kant’s moral theory and his epistemology and metaphysics. Or since Kant is never unconcerned with such connections, it is more accurate to say that in the second *Critique* Kant lays these connections out explicitly. In this respect, the second *Critique* makes an essential contribution to the edifice of Kant’s critical system. The fact that it is a work of moral theory that puts some of the key elements of Kant’s system into place is one aspect of what Kant terms the “primacy of pure practical reason.”

Because of the systematic nature of Kant’s concerns, it is difficult to appreciate the significance of certain themes in the second *Critique* without some familiarity with the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Pure Reason*. To provide some orientation to the *Critique*, this section surveys a few of its main themes and provides some, albeit cursory, background from these other works.

Moral theory

The first major division of the *Critique*, its Analytic, presents some of the fundamental ideas of Kant’s moral theory. For example, the opening chapter provides an analysis of the moral law as a principle that gives rise to objective requirements on action which are reason-giving simply in virtue of their suitability to serve as laws that any agent can regard as authoritative, without appeal to an agent’s desires or interest in happiness, and which accordingly regulates agents’ pursuit of their personal ends. The two chapters of the Analytic that follow take up the idea of the good as the “object of practical reason” and respect for the moral law as the motivation to moral conduct. In Chapter 2, Kant explains the “paradox of method” to which his analysis of morality has led him [63]. Traditionally moral theories had accounted for the content of morality by first assuming a conception of the good taken to be self-evident, or which human beings are generally disposed to desire, and then deriving principles of conduct from this antecedent conception of the good. But Kant argues that in order to support the idea that moral requirements apply with rational necessity, a moral theory must first identify a law or principle to which any rational agent is committed simply in virtue of possessing reason and will, and subsequently define the good as that which one wills under the direction of this principle. What is morally good – the actions, ends, and states of affairs which are the objects of good willing – is to be specified

by the application of this law. Chapter 3 expands upon a long footnote in the *Groundwork* [G 4: 401n] on respect for the moral law as the proper moral motive.

While these discussions develop ideas presented in the *Groundwork*, the *Critique of Practical Reason* takes a somewhat different approach to the justification of the moral law. The *Groundwork* separates this task into two stages, and in the second attempts to establish the validity of the moral law by deriving it from a conception of freedom that is independent of moral consciousness. The first two chapters of the *Groundwork* use an analysis of the concept of duty to arrive at a statement of the basic principle of duty, but stop short of showing that we ought to endorse this principle. The formal justification of the validity of the moral law, which Kant refers to as its “deduction” [G 4: 454], is left to the third chapter. Here Kant tries to show that it is fully rational to accept the moral law as our basic principle of conduct by deriving it from a conception of freedom that we are warranted in attributing to ourselves on grounds that are independent of morality. The argument is notoriously obscure, but roughly, it employs a set of analytical claims that connect freedom with morality, and rational agency with freedom, and then holds that our possessing theoretical reason, which is a capacity for spontaneous activity, warrants us in regarding ourselves as rational agents in the sense required by his argument. Since we identify with our capacity for free and spontaneous agency and regard it as our “proper self,” we are committed to accepting the authority of its fundamental principle, the moral law.² However, in the *Critique* Kant argues that the moral law neither allows of nor needs a deduction in his technical sense, but that its authority is firmly established in ordinary moral consciousness as a “fact of reason.” [See, e.g. 31, 46–50.] On reflection we do accept the moral law as an authoritative standard of conduct that provides sufficient and overriding reasons for action and we are motivated to act by our judgments of what it requires. We realize that we can do something because we judge that it is our duty, even when it involves setting aside or foregoing substantial desire-based interests, and we are disposed to self-criticism and self-contempt when we fail to. Whether it is reasonable to accept the

² That theoretical reason is a capacity for spontaneous activity is shown by the fact that it formulates ideas that outrun anything given by sensibility, through which it prescribes ends to the understanding that the understanding cannot form for itself. Kant appears to argue here that a rational being who regards himself as possessing this kind of intelligence must regard himself as having the same capacity for spontaneity in his agency. For discussion of different aspects of the argument of *Groundwork*, 111, see: Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 12; Thomas E. Hill, Jr., *Dignity and Practical Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), ch. 6; Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 6. For discussion of the change in Kant's approach to the justification of morality between the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*, see Dieter Henrich, “The Deduction of the Moral Law: The Reasons for the Obscurity of the Final Section of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,” in Paul Guyer, ed., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Critical Essays* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); and Karl Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ch. 6.

Introduction

requirements of morality is not in question in ordinary practical contexts. In claiming that the validity of the moral law is given as a “fact of reason,” Kant holds that it cannot and need not be grounded in anything outside of our ordinary moral consciousness, in which we are directly aware of the law-giving activity of reason.

Freedom of the will

The *Critique’s* second general area of concern is, in a sense, just another aspect of the first. Kant claims to provide a proof of a strong notion of human freedom – that is, to establish the reality of transcendental freedom, according to which the human will is a capacity for spontaneous activity, or a kind of causal power, which is independent of determination by empirical conditions.

The possibility of transcendental freedom as a causality which is undetermined by antecedent causal conditions had been of concern to Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and important components of his account of free will are developed there. Since Kant’s theory of free will draws on the epistemology of the first *Critique*, it will be useful to mention some of its principal doctrines here. First, Kant’s transcendental idealism holds that space and time are not mind-independent features of reality, but structural features of experience specific to human cognition; they are the “forms of intuition,” or the forms of human perception. The fact that our experience has structural features that are due to our cognitive faculties introduces a distinction between objects as they appear to us (“appearances” or “phenomena”) and objects as they are in themselves, considered apart from the conditions under which they appear (“things-in-themselves” or “noumena”). Second, we should recall Kant’s view that two different elements of cognition, intuitions and concepts, are required for synthetic knowledge. Intuitions are singular representations through which material is presented to the mind, while concepts are general representations originating in the spontaneous activity of the understanding. The act of bringing intuitions under a concept in a judgment, through which the manifold of intuition is unified and brought to consciousness, is what gives rise to knowledge.

These elements of Kant’s epistemology have several important consequences. First, the spatio-temporal properties of objects and the laws governing spatio-temporal events do not characterize things in themselves, but objects as they appear. Since synthetic knowledge presupposes some intuition, which in us is always spatio-temporal, our knowledge is limited to objects as they appear in space and time; there is no knowledge of things in themselves, which cannot be given in intuition. This analysis of the conditions and limits of knowledge entails the impossibility of a certain kind of metaphysics. Traditionally metaphysics had sought a priori demonstrative knowledge of transcendent facts such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the principles of cosmology. But if these lie beyond the limits of experience (as the tradition

agreed), they are beyond human knowledge. Moreover, claims about such transcendent facts are synthetic. Kant argues that metaphysics had been attempting to establish its conclusions through inferences from purely conceptual premises. Since no such deductive argument can establish any synthetic claim, metaphysics could not produce the kind of knowledge which it sought. Finally, while Kant's epistemology undermines traditional metaphysics, it unexpectedly creates the possibility in principle of making assertions about what lies beyond experience, should we find sufficient grounds for doing so. The distinction between appearances and things in themselves, along with the claim that spatio-temporal properties and laws do not represent objects as they are in themselves, creates room for the thought of noumenal objects subject to laws that are different in kind from those governing spatio-temporal events. Merely thinking about noumenal objects is not knowledge, of course, and the fact that we may coherently entertain such thoughts does not license any assertions about noumenal objects. But since nothing can be known about what is not part of the spatio-temporal framework, there can be no disproof of any (purported) noumenal object. Thus, propositions about noumenal objects cannot be contradicted by any valid theoretical knowledge claim. Therefore while transcendental idealism insists that there can be no knowledge of any noumenal entities, it does so in a way that creates room for the thought of such entities and guarantees that propositions about them are not inconsistent with theoretical knowledge.

Returning now to freedom, in the "Antinomy of Pure Reason" Kant had argued that in its theoretical use reason is led to the concept of transcendental freedom by the demand for completeness in explanation. We explain events in nature by tracing them back to their causes – to antecedent conditions that are jointly necessary and sufficient for their occurrence. But since the causes of any given event themselves admit of explanation in terms of antecedent conditions, the demand for explanation sets up the task of reconstructing the chain of antecedent causes. It is natural to think that the search for explanations is only completed when it identifies an event at the beginning of the causal series whose occurrence is not determined by any antecedent conditions and therefore needs no explanation. In this way, the demand for completeness in explanation, which issues from the activity that is constitutive of the theoretical use of reason, leads to the abstract idea of a transcendently free cause. But Kant had also shown that everything in nature has a cause by arguing that any event that is a possible object of experience for us must stand in causal relations to prior events, which fix its location in a unified spatio-temporal order. The concept of a transcendently free cause violates one of the conditions of the unity of experience. Thus, the law of natural causality rules out the possibility of encountering instances of transcendental freedom in our experience of the natural world.³

³ This paragraph draws on Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 11–28.

In the resolution of the Third Antinomy, Kant argues that transcendental freedom is at least possible in the sense that it is not inconsistent with universal natural causation. The distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves opens up the possibility that events that are subject to causal determination when viewed as phenomena, may, when viewed as noumena, manifest free causality. For example, human actions, viewed as phenomenal events in the natural world, are explained by tracing their occurrence to antecedent conditions from which they follow with necessity. But when considered as noumena, it may be possible to regard them as resulting from transcendently free causality. By this route Kant's transcendental idealism creates room for the idea of transcendental freedom. However, the claim that there is no inconsistency in viewing, say, human actions as the results of free causality falls far short of giving us positive warrant for doing so. The obvious question at this point is whether we have any grounds for regarding human actions as transcendently free, and no such grounds can be supplied by theoretical reason. In its tasks of explaining the natural world and extending empirical knowledge, it is bound to apply the principle of causality to all events. Indeed, since Kant's resolution of the Third Antinomy does not modify the argument for the law of natural causality, the impossibility of encountering any instances of transcendental freedom in our experience of the natural world remains. Thus the *Critique of Pure Reason* leaves theoretical reason in the situation of having demonstrated the consistency of the idea of transcendental freedom, but of being precluded from asserting its reality.

The second *Critique* claims that grounds for ascribing transcendental freedom to ourselves are supplied by the practical use of reason. Since the moral law provides reasons for action that are independent of the content and strength of our desires, and which can require one to set aside or override desire-based reasons, the ability to act from the moral law – the ability to do something simply because we judge that it is a duty – reveals in us an ability to act independently of determination by empirical conditions. But that is to say that the ability to act from the moral law reveals in us a kind of causality that satisfies the definition of transcendental freedom. Thus the fact of reason, in which we recognize the authority of and are aware of our ability to act from the moral law, discloses our freedom. The moral law, as Kant says, “proves not only the possibility but the reality [of freedom] in beings who cognize this law as binding upon them” [47].

There are several points to note here, to which Kant draws our attention in various places. First and most obvious, Kant holds that the practical use of reason is able to give objective reality to an idea which reason in its theoretical use had to assume as possible, but could not establish. Moreover, practical reason does more than provide grounds for the abstract claim that there is transcendently free causality; it supplies a determinate statement of the law that governs such causality, namely the moral law [47–50, 105]. Second, the reality that Kant asserts for transcendental freedom is “objective . . . though

only practical” [49], and is not an illicit extension of theoretical knowledge beyond the limits of possible experience. Since the reality of transcendental freedom is not established through any sensible intuition, it is not an item of empirical or theoretical knowledge that, for example, can enter into the explanation of events. The grounds for ascribing freedom to ourselves come from our recognition of the authority of moral norms, and this ascription is made for practical purposes, as part of our self-conception as rational agents. Third, whereas in the *Groundwork* Kant appears to believe that we must have grounds for ascribing transcendental freedom to ourselves before we can establish the authority of the moral law, the second *Critique* reverses this order: here Kant argues that it is the authority of the moral law that reveals our freedom. Kant notes that “whereas freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom” [4n]. Finally, the fact that the authority of the moral law establishes the reality of transcendental freedom serves as a further “credential” [*Kreditiv*] for the moral law [48]. That the moral law provides grounds for assuming the reality of an idea that had remained problematic for reason in its theoretical use, and in this way contributes to the construction of Kant’s philosophical system, is a further confirmation of its authority that takes the place of a formal deduction.

The postulates of pure practical reason

The Dialectic of the second *Critique* argues that certain necessary moral interests authorize us to assume the existence of God and the immortality of the soul as “postulates of pure practical reason.” These postulates are the elements of a “rational faith” or “reasonable faith” [*Vernunftglaube*],⁴ to which Kant refers in his remark that he has “found it necessary to destroy knowledge in order to make room for faith” [*CPR* Bxxx]. Kant argues that the moral law generates a duty to do all we can to bring about the highest good in the world, which for now we may understand as the state of affairs in which the ends of morality are realized in their totality. But the only way in which we can regard the highest good as a practical possibility is by assuming the immortality of the soul and the existence of God as a moral author of the universe who has ordered the world so as to support the ends of morality. Since the duty to make the highest good our end is unconditional, it licenses us to postulate the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, as conditions of the practical

⁴ Kant refers to both a “pure rational faith” [*reiner Vernunftglaube*] [126] and a “pure practical rational faith” [144, 146]. *Glaube* maybe translated both as “faith” and as “belief.” Mary Gregor renders *Vernunftglaube* as “rational belief” in this translation, while Lewis White Beck uses “rational faith,” “faith of pure practical reason,” or even “practical faith.” John Rawls suggests the term “reasonable faith” to capture the idea of faith supported by reason. See “Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” in Eckart Förster, ed., *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 94, and *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 309, 319.

possibility of the highest good. We consider this argument in more detail in the last section.

As with the idea of freedom, practical reason, in grounding the postulates, resolves questions that reason in its theoretical use raises, but cannot answer. In the first *Critique*, Kant had argued that in its search for the ultimate ground of all items given in experience – a problem given to reason “by the very nature of reason itself” [*CPR* Avii] – reason is led to the idea of God as the ultimate ground of all that exists and to the idea of the soul as a simple substance that is the real subject of experience, and attempts to infer their reality. The Dialectic of the first *Critique* exposes the purely “dialectical” or illusory nature of these inferences, arguing that they draw synthetic conclusions from purely conceptual premises and that the reality of such objects cannot be established on theoretical grounds since they cannot be given in intuition. By the same token, neither can their reality be disproved. Thus in its theoretical use, reason may inquire into the objective reality of these ideas, but must remain agnostic. As we have seen, Kant’s transcendental idealism creates room for the thought of noumenal objects, and the limits on cognition that place such objects beyond knowledge guarantee that assertions of their reality will not contradict any theoretical claim. This permits the argument that practical reason’s need to support the rationality of adopting the highest good as our end is a positive ground for assuming the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Since the warrant for these assertions comes from a need of practical reason rather than from any sensible intuition, they do not extend theoretical knowledge.

II

One might ask how these diverse topics all find their way into a “critique” of practical reason. An answer to this question requires that we lay out the main lines of argument of the *Critique*. To begin, it may help to say something about the idea of “critique” as Kant understands it, and about the distinction between the theoretical and practical uses of reason.

A “critique” is a critical examination of reason by itself, whose purpose is to establish the powers and limits of a use of reason, and in particular to establish the validity and legitimate employment of those a priori concepts and principles which structure a domain of rational activity. The Prefaces of the *Critique of Pure Reason* make clear that its driving concern is with reason’s claims to a priori knowledge of the world, and Kant remarks that a critique “will institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims, while dismissing all its groundless pretensions” [*CPR* Axi]. In the process, the first *Critique* examines all the cognitive faculties which claim to be sources of synthetic a priori knowledge – sensibility, understanding, and reason in its theoretical use.

The division of the Transcendental Logic into an Analytic and a Dialectic indicates that critique has both a positive, justificatory task and a negative,

critical task. The main task of the Analytic is to establish the validity of the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories) in their application to experience and to derive the a priori principles of the understanding, which are rules for the employment of the categories. The Dialectic demonstrates that reason's claims to knowledge of transcendent entities are groundless by exposing the illusory inferences on which they are based, which in the case of the Antinomies lead to apparent contradictions that threaten the coherence of reason. However, assigning the task of justification to the Analytic and criticism to the Dialectic oversimplifies. Since the limitations imposed on reason follow directly from the positive epistemological accomplishments of the Analytic, it serves an obvious critical function. And while the Dialectic demonstrates that the ideas of reason provide no speculative knowledge, it also shows that they have a legitimate regulative role in guiding the employment of the understanding. Reason prescribes aims of completeness and systematic unity to the understanding which it cannot form for itself. The ideas of reason set out these ideals, and are the source of maxims and regulative principles that serve as norms for empirical inquiry and the extension of empirical knowledge. Thus, the Dialectic validates the ideas of reason through their role in extending and systematizing empirical knowledge, and shows that the proper theoretical use of reason is its normative function of guiding empirical inquiry.

While the theoretical use of reason is concerned with knowledge of objects, practical reason is concerned with the "determining grounds of the will" [15]. Kant characterizes the will in different ways in his corpus, but throughout he understands it as a causal power particular to rational agents. In the *Groundwork*, he refers to the will both as "the capacity to act according to the representation of laws, i.e., according to principles" and as "a kind of causality of living beings in so far as they are rational" [G 4: 412, 446]. Similar characterizations of the will appear in the *Critique*, for example as the power to produce objects in accordance with representations of those objects or as the power to act according to the representation of rules or principles.⁵ In some important

⁵ At 15 Kant characterizes the will as:

a faculty either of producing objects corresponding to representations or of determining itself to effect such objects (whether the physical power is sufficient or not), that is, of determining its causality . . . [cf. also 45, 60, and CPR Bix-x].

And at 32 he refers to the will as:

the ability to determine [one's] causality by the representation of rules, hence insofar as they are capable of actions in accordance with principles and consequently in accordance with a priori practical principles.

Kant's conception of the will is complicated by a distinction that he draws in the *Metaphysics of Morals* between "will" [*Wille*] and "the capacity for choice" [*Willkür*]. *Willkür* is "the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts" (the rational faculty of desire) "insofar as it is joined with one's consciousness of the ability to bring about its object by one's actions." *Wille* is "the capacity for desire considered not so much in relation to the action (as *Willkür* is) but rather in relation to the ground determining choice to action" [MM 6: 213]. One way to interpret this distinction is that *Wille* refers to the capacity to deliberate about grounds of choice, or to determine whether an action or end is good or supported by reason, while *Willkür* is the capacity to act on the basis of

passages, Kant identifies the will with practical reason: “since *reason* is required for deriving actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason” [G 4: 412; see also *MM* 6: 213]. While Kant’s conception of the will defies simple definition, this much seems clear. He understands the will to be a complex capacity found in rational agents to act on the basis of principles or judgments about what is good, and it has different aspects. It is a rational capacity – a capacity to reason about action and to determine whether an action or end is supported by reason, thus worth choosing. And it is a causal power – the capacity to guide one’s choices by such judgments, or as Kant often says, the power to realize actions and ends represented as good by means of those representations.⁶ Thus the will is the capacity to guide one’s choice of ends and actions by the application to one’s circumstances of various rational principles (ranging, for example, from formal principles of rationality to substantive practical principles). In saying that practical reason is concerned with the determining grounds of the will, Kant is saying that it is concerned with the basic principles governing deliberation and choice, through which agents determine what they have most reason to do. Thus, as we will see, one aim of a critique of practical reason is to establish the basic principles of practical reasoning. As the second *Critique* also has an Analytic and a Dialectic, we should expect it to have both justificatory and critical aims, though these aims map onto the division into Analytic and Dialectic even less neatly than they do in the first *Critique*.

The next section outlines the central line of argument in Chapter I of the Analytic, Section IV comments briefly on the main ideas of Chapters II and III of the Analytic, and the last section sketches the main themes of the Dialectic.

III

In both the Preface and Introduction, Kant notes that this work is not a critique of *pure* practical reason, but rather a critique of “reason’s entire practical faculty” [3] or “only of *practical* reason as such” [15]. Since the practical use of reason is concerned with the principles governing grounds of choice, the first question which the *Critique* must answer is “whether pure reason of itself alone suffices to determine the will or whether it can be a

such determinations. Henry Allison observes that “Kant uses the terms *Willkür* and *Wille* to characterize respectively the legislative and executive functions of a unified faculty of volition, which he likewise refers to as *Wille*” [*Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 129]. Kant appears to use *Wille* in this inclusive sense in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*. (For discussion see Allison, pp. 129–36.) Recently Stephen Engstrom has suggested that the distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür* tracks the distinction between the cognitive or rational and the causal aspects of volition (that the will is both a rational capacity and a causal power). See Stephen Engstrom, “Reason, Desire, and the Will,” in Lara Denis, ed., *Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶ See 9n and *MM* 6: 211, where Kant defines the “faculty of desire” as “the faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of those representations.” The will is a “rational faculty of desire.”

determining ground of the will only as empirically conditioned” [15]. What is at stake in this question and why does Kant insist that pure practical reason needs no critique?

At issue is a fundamental question about the nature of practical rationality over which moral theorists have long divided. Hume famously claimed that “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can pretend to no other office than to serve and obey them.”⁷ Hume and other empiricists argue for an instrumental conception of practical reason, which comprises a cluster of theses about motivation and the role of reason in deliberation. Empiricists hold that motives and reasons for action must ultimately be based on desires or basic preferences that are not themselves produced by reasoning, which an agent has as a matter of psychological fact. Reason has the limited function of prescribing the means to one’s ends, seeking consistency among one’s desires, forming a conception of one’s overall happiness in light of one’s desires, and so forth. Desires and actions are subject to rational assessment only in terms of their consistency with other desires and ends, or with one’s overall happiness. There are no principles of reason which prescribe the adoption of any final ends or values, nor any rational grounds on which to assess the intrinsic goodness of actions or ends. Practical reason, so conceived, is “empirically conditioned” in Kant’s terms, because the reasons that an agent has for acting are based on empirically given desires, which agents may, without irrationality, lack.

To hold that pure reason is practical is to deny that the empirically conditioned use of practical reason is the only form of practical reason, and to hold that reason by itself provides grounds sufficient to determine choice. Otherwise put, it is to hold that reason prescribes practical principles whose normative force is not based on desire, but which apply to any agent simply in virtue of possessing reason and will. These principles provide a basis for evaluating desires, ends, and actions for their inherent conformity to reason rather than on instrumental grounds (e.g. in terms of their contribution to an agent’s happiness); and they yield grounds of choice that may take priority over an agent’s given desires and ends. Since they have necessary normative force for all rational agents, Kant terms them “practical laws.”

The question, “Does reason by itself provide grounds sufficient to determine the will?” may appear ambiguous between two different questions: (a) Can reason by itself motivate action? and (b) Does reason by itself generate (non-instrumental) practical principles or requirements on conduct? Kant, however, would not allow a sharp separation between these latter questions, and his question includes both. His conception of rational agents is that they are motivated by what they take to be good reasons for action, and that

⁷ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 415.

justifying reasons have motivational force for rational agents.⁸ If reason generates non-instrumental practical principles, then reason alone can motivate action, and vice versa. Thus to resolve whether reason alone can determine the will it is enough to show that reason by itself generates practical principles, or practical laws. Kant assumes this task at the outset of the *Analytic*, and proceeds in Chapter I to establish the “Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason,” which he takes to be the basic principle of morality – the Categorical Imperative.

If pure reason is practical, then it is empirical practical reason which needs critique in the negative sense – a critique that is carried out by pure practical reason. Kant notes that it is “incumbent” upon the *Critique* “to prevent empirically conditioned reason from presuming that it, alone and exclusively, furnishes the determining ground of the will” [16]. The “presumption” of empirical practical reason which Kant has in mind may be the natural tendency to give priority to reasons based in one’s personal interests – as, for example, is seen in someone who honors his obligations to others, or takes their needs into account, only on the condition that it does not interfere too much with his getting what he wants. This tendency might be reinforced by a view which may initially seem theoretically plausible, that all grounds of choice are ultimately desire-based. Implicit in both this tendency and this theoretical position is the claim that desire-based interests are sources of sufficient reasons – that, for example, the fact that empirical practical reason identifies an action as conducive to one’s overall happiness is always a decisive reason in its favor that settles what to do. It is precisely this sort of claim that the moral law deems illegitimate.⁹ The moral law sets out a condition of universalizability (specified by the Categorical Imperative) that ends and actions

⁸ This is not to say that rational agents are always motivated by objectively good reasons for action, but only that they are motivated by considerations that they take to provide good reasons (but which may not actually justify). Nor is it to say that sufficient reasons are always effective motives which lead to action, but only that they have some motivational force. For discussion of this aspect of Kant’s conception of agency, see Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, ch. 4, esp. section 111; Andrews Reath, “Kant’s Theory of Moral Sensibility,” reprinted in *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), (especially Section IV and Appendix); and Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, pp. 85–94, 125–26. For a more recent discussion, see Reath, “Did Kant Hold that Rational Volition is *Sub Ratione Boni*?” in Robert Johnson and Mark Timmons, eds., *Kantian Themes from the Philosophy of Thomas E. Hill, Jr.* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁹ This “presumption” of empirical practical reason is also mentioned in various forms in the *Groundwork*. See, for example, the reference to a “natural dialectic, i.e., a propensity to quibble with these strict laws of duty” and to bend them to one’s wishes [G 4: 405], as well as the tendency to make exceptions to moral principles which one otherwise wills as universal laws “to the advantage of our inclination” [G 4: 424]. Also relevant are Kant’s characterizations of “self-love” and “self-conceit,” in Ch. 111 of the *Analytic* [73–76]. Self-love is a natural tendency to take one’s inclinations as good reasons for action. Self-conceit is the tendency to claim a special worth for one’s person that does not recognize the limits on what is worthy of choice set by morality, in virtue of which one takes reasons stemming from self-love to be overriding reasons for action. These are tendencies of “our pathologically determinable self, even though it is unfit to give universal law through its maxims, nevertheless striving antecedently to make its claims primary and originally valid, just as if it constituted our entire self” [74]. Worth noting here is Kant’s view

must satisfy to be permissibly adopted. Actions that advance one's desire-based interests are fully choiceworthy only when they conform to the requirements of morality, and respect for the moral law checks the tendency to treat our desire-based interests as sufficient reasons.¹⁰ By establishing the fundamental principle of pure practical reason, the Analytic thus performs the critical task of setting limits to the employment of empirical practical reason. Pure practical reason needs no critique in this sense since it "proves its reality . . . by what it does" [3], and since it serves as the final standard for assessing the choiceworthiness of desire-based interests [15].

Let us now turn to the main argument in Chapter I, which Kant organizes as a series of theorems and corollaries that follow from the definition of a practical law, leading to the claim that pure reason is practical and concluding that the moral law is a principle of autonomy. Kant defines practical laws as principles of conduct that give reasons for action to all agents just insofar as they have reason and will, without depending on any contingent interests that distinguish one rational agent from another. In the ensuing sections, Kant derives from this definition further conditions that a principle must satisfy to qualify as a law.

"Theorem I" introduces the concept of a "material practical principle" and claims that no such principles provide practical laws. A material practical principle is a principle that "presupposes an *object* (matter) of the faculty of desire as the determining ground of the will" [21]. This remark deserves some comment. A material practical principle is not simply a principle that directs an agent to some object or end. Since Kant thinks that every action-guiding principle contains an end, the concept would be of no interest if that were all it amounted to.¹¹ The determining ground of the will is the principle or reason on which one acts. As Kant's explanation indicates, a material practical principle is thus one in which the ground of choice is given by an object for which one has an independently given desire. Simply put, it is a principle which there is reason to accept on the condition that one has an independent desire for (or is antecedently disposed to take satisfaction in) an object. A desire is independent in this context if it is not produced by one's accepting the principle, and if the object of the desire can be described without reference

that we have a tendency to make value claims on behalf of empirical interests, and that when we do so we act as though these interests are all that there are to the self. It is such claims that pure practical reason must limit.

¹⁰ Lest the case be overstated, it is important to bear in mind that Kant regards the satisfaction of desire-based interests as good when certain conditions are fulfilled. For example, note that self-love is called "rational self-love" when limited to conditions of moral permissibility [73]. For discussion of Kant's notion of conditional goodness, see Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, chs. 4, 8–9.

¹¹ See 34: "Now it is indeed undeniable that every volition must have an object and hence a matter; but the matter is not, just because of this, the determining ground and condition of the maxim . . ." See also *MM* 6: 381–85, where Kant claims that every action has an end, that there are objective ends that it is a duty to have, and that objective ends can be the "material ground of choice" [*MM* 6: 381].

to the principle.¹² Since the “object” or “matter of the faculty of desire” to which Kant refers is presumably an end contained in the principle (either an end prescribed by the principle, or the end to which an action is prescribed as a means), the idea is that there is a reason to act on this principle only if one has an independent desire for this end.

To illustrate, let’s take Kant’s example of the principle that one should work and save in one’s youth so as not to want in one’s old age [20]. Individuals normally desire comfort and security, and will have these desires in their old age. Given the fact that one will have these desires when older and that working and saving when younger are necessary means to their satisfaction, there is reason to work and save for this purpose now. The desires for comfort and security are independently given desires: they are not (or will not be) produced by your accepting this principle, and their objects of comfort and security can be specified without referring to the principle. If you know that you will not have these desires – for example, because you know that you will not live that long, are willing to forgo comfort later in life in order to consume more now, and so on – then it would seem that you have no reason to work and save now for that purpose. Since it is a condition of your having reason to work and save now that you will have these independent desires, the principle is a material practical principle. In contrast, consider the principle that one ought to treat others fairly (where fair treatment is prescribed as an end). Someone who accepts this principle will be motivated to treat others fairly, but this desire is not independent of the principle. The desire to treat others fairly is produced by accepting the principle, and the object of the desire (fair treatment of others) can only be specified by a principle; we can’t say what it is a desire for until we have a principle defining fair treatment. Because the desire to treat others fairly is a consequence of one’s accepting the principle, the presence of this desire is not – in fact, cannot be – a condition of having a reason to accept the principle. Since the reason to accept the principle does not depend on an independently given desire, it is not a material practical principle.

To continue with the argument, one has reason to act on a material practical principle only if one has an independent desire for, or will take satisfaction in, its object. Thus one cannot determine whether an agent has reason to act on such a principle without empirical information about that agent’s desires and circumstances. But the validity of a law must be rooted in the basic features of agency, and cannot depend on contingent conditions of this sort that distinguish one agent from another. Such principles therefore cannot provide laws.

¹² Here and in the next paragraph I draw on Rawls’s distinction between “object-dependent desires” and “principle-dependent desires.” See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 82–86. Also relevant here is Thomas Nagel’s distinction between motivated and unmotivated desires; see Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 29–30.

Theorem II offers a further generalization about material principles, claiming that they are “of one and the same kind and come under the general principle of self-love or one’s own happiness” [22]. This assertion is somewhat puzzling, because other-regarding natural desires such as compassion, or affection for loved ones, could be the basis of principles that are desire-based in Kant’s sense, but nonetheless directed at the well-being of others. In what sense do all material principles fall under the principle of happiness? What Kant does here is to make explicit a structural feature shared by material principles. In acting on such a principle, one takes the fact that the object offers prospective satisfaction as a reason for acting, and one decides how to act by asking how much satisfaction it offers – which, of course, is a function of one’s current desires and dispositions. Kant defines the principle of happiness or self-love as the principle of making one’s overall happiness “the supreme determining ground of choice” [22]. In other words, it is the principle of acting so as to maximize satisfaction over the course of one’s life. If this is your fundamental principle of action, you take the contribution of an action to your overall satisfaction as a measure of the reasons in its favor, and decide how to act by asking what will bring you most overall satisfaction. The principle of happiness thus expresses a formal feature which all material principles share, which highlights the way in which such principles provide reasons and the method of choice employed in acting on them.¹³ In the Corollary and first Remark to Theorem II, Kant argues that if all practical principles were material, one could draw no interesting distinction between a “higher faculty of desire” and a “lower faculty of desire.” This is a distinction between different ways in which the will is determined, or between different models of motivation and choice. Kant’s point is that if all practical principles were material principles, there would be no reason to introduce any model of choice other than that captured by the principle of happiness. In fact, it would not be anyone’s principle, but just a description of human volition – as most empiricists believe.

Kant now argues in Theorem III that it is the form of a principle that determines whether it can serve as a practical law, and then considers what that form is. Theorems I and II have shown that principles that are reasoning through their matter (i.e., which there is reason to adopt only if one has an independent desire for the object) fall under the principle of happiness and provide no laws. If we abstract away the matter of a principle as a potential source of reasons, all that remains is its form. Thus if we are to regard a principle or maxim as a practical law, it must determine the will through its form alone – that is, it must be one that there is sufficient reason to accept

¹³ For more on this point, see Andrews Reath, “Hedonism, Heteronomy and Kant’s Principle of Happiness,” reprinted in *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory*. Remarks in these pages of the *Critique* have led many people to read Kant as a psychological hedonist about non-moral motives. I argue against that interpretation in this paper. For further discussion of this issue, see Barbara Herman, *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), ch. 8.

simply in virtue of its form. Such principles have the “form of law” – the form that enables a principle to serve as a practical law.

The simplicity of Kant’s argument masks a number of perplexities and we shall not attempt a complete treatment here. A few things seem relatively clear. First, some practical principles have the form of law while others do not.¹⁴ Whether a principle has the form of law is ascertained by the Categorical Imperative, which yields a formal procedure that assesses a maxim of action by asking whether it can be willed as universal law without inconsistency.¹⁵ Kant gives an example in which one accepts a monetary deposit from someone who subsequently dies. Since no record was made, no one can prove that one has the deposit, and one has only to deny its existence to keep the money. But a maxim of violating the trust of others in order to increase one’s wealth does not have the form of law, as we see from the impossibility of willing it as universal law: it would be self-defeating if made a principle from which anyone may act. Second, whether a principle has the form of law can determine whether there is sufficient reason to act on it. Again, there are a number of issues that need sorting out, but we can say this much. The fact that a maxim does *not* have the form of law (as determined by the Categorical Imperative) is a sufficient reason to refrain from certain actions and a sufficient reason to perform certain others. In Kant’s example, since the maxim of violating trust to increase one’s wealth cannot be universalized, it is impermissible to deny that the deposit was made (regardless of how much one would benefit from the money), and it is one’s duty to reveal its existence. Alternatively, *having* the form of law is a condition that must be satisfied for there to be sufficient reason to act on a principle. For example, an action that contributes to one’s overall happiness is reasonably adopted and fully worthy of choice if – but only if – its maxim is universalizable.

Third, Theorem III has stated the condition that a principle must satisfy if it is to serve as a practical law – that there must be sufficient reason to accept it simply in virtue of its form. Clearly this condition is intended to lead (as it does later in §7) to a general principle that is an alternative to the principle of happiness, namely the higher order principle of acting only from maxims that are reason-giving through their form, thus having the form of law. This principle itself must be reason-giving through its form – because, we might say, it is a formal expression of the way in which practical laws provide reasons. And it is a law – the moral law, in fact. Kant takes it to be an abstract statement

¹⁴ Here note the first sentence of the Remark to Theorem III.

¹⁵ For some discussions of the form of reasoning based on the universal law formula of the Categorical Imperative, see Onora O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), chs. 5–8; Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, chs. 3, 5; Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chs. 3, 6–7, and 10; Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Kant: Lecture II; and Allen Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 3.

of the basic principle used by “the most common understanding” [27] to determine whether an action is morally permissible.

Kant argues next that “freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other” [29]. His aim is to establish two claims that together establish a deep connection between morality and freedom. They are: (1) If an agent’s basic principle is to act only from maxims with the form of law (the moral law), the agent is transcendently free; and (2) If an agent has a free will, then the moral law is the basic principle of his will. The argument for the first is given as the solution to “Problem I”: Assume an agent who finds sufficient reason to act on a maxim only if the maxim has the form of law. Such an agent has the ability to abstract from and, if necessary, set aside reasons taken from his desire-based interests. For example, the weight of the agent’s desire-based interests in practical reasoning is not determined by the strength of various desires, but by a judgment issuing from a rational procedure that assesses whether a maxim of acting on some interest has the form of law. One’s desire-based interests are ultimately traceable to the empirical conditions which produce these desires. Thus an agent who can act from reasons for action based on the legislative form of a maxim, in abstraction from desire-based interests, can act independently of empirical conditions. An agent with the ability to act on this kind of reason satisfies the definition of transcendental freedom. The other argument solves “Problem II”: An agent with a free will can determine himself to act independently of empirical conditions. Since an agent with a will is guided by his conception of what he has reason to do, that is to say: he can act from reasons that are independent of his desire-based interests, or (in Kant’s terms) independent of the “matter” of a principle. But a will must act on some principle; otherwise it would display random activity that would not count as volition. What, then, can serve as its basic principle, by which it determines how to act? Since its basic reasons for action do not depend on the matter of a principle, they must be taken from the form. That is to say that a free will must have the basic principle of taking the legislative form of a maxim as a sufficient reason for action.¹⁶

By this point Kant has, beginning from a definition of a practical law (§1), established the basic condition that a practical law must satisfy (Theorem III) and an analytical connection between freedom and practical law (§§5–6). In §7, Kant states the “Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason,” which he identifies as the Categorical Imperative. In stating it as an imperative, Kant presents it as a valid law, and he claims here that the moral law is established as a “fact of reason” [*ein Faktum der Vernunft*].¹⁷ In ordinary practical

¹⁶ Kant develops a more satisfactory version of this argument in the opening sections of *Groundwork*, III [446–47]. For discussion, see the references to Hill and Korsgaard in note 2, and Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, ch. 11.

¹⁷ On the fact of reason, see Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Kant: Lecture VII, especially p. 260:

reasoning we do take the moral law as a source of authoritative requirements that limit the weight that we may give to our desire-based interests, and we are able to act on these requirements simply because we ought to. The authority of the moral law is reflected in the standards to which we hold ourselves, the phenomenon of respect for the moral law, the workings of conscience and the moral emotions, and so on. Because of the necessity with which moral requirements present themselves, we presume that they are requirements of reason. Kant's analysis confirms their basis in reason by identifying the features that would be true of a law prescribed by reason and showing that they are present in the basic principle of ordinary moral thought. But the authority of the moral law rests ultimately on the fact that it is firmly rooted in ordinary thought and experience [cf. 91–92].

The fact of reason shows that there are practical laws. It follows that reason by itself provides sufficient determining grounds of the will. Given that laws determine the will through their form (Theorem III), that a will for whom the form of law provides a sufficient reason for action is transcendently free (Problem I), and that the fundamental principle of morality is a law for us and a determining ground of our will as shown by the fact of reason, it follows that we are transcendently free.

While Kant sometimes identifies the fact of reason, or consciousness of the authority of the moral law, with consciousness of freedom,¹⁸ he is clear that it is our recognition of the authority of the moral law that reveals our freedom, and that in the absence of such moral consciousness we would have no reason to ascribe freedom to ourselves [30–1, 47–8]. The sort of causality which a will exercises is a function of the character of the principles by which it is governed. The moral law provides its own sufficient grounds of choice based on the legislative form of one's maxims, which require us to abstract from subjective interests in determining what we have reason to do. A will governed by such a principle thus has the ability to act independently of determination by empirical conditions. The validity of the moral law and the reality of transcendental freedom are, in effect, different aspects of pure

The fact of reason is the fact that, as reasonable beings, we are conscious of the moral law as the supremely authoritative and regulative law for us and in our ordinary moral thought and judgment we recognize it as such.

See also Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 166–75, and “The Fact of Reason: An Essay on Justification in Ethics,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of Kant* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 200–14; and Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, ch. 13. More secondary literature is cited below in Further reading.

The “fact of reason” is an unusual notion, as may be acknowledged in Kant's remark that our consciousness of the moral law is the “sole fact of pure reason” [31]. As Kant stresses, it is certainly not an empirical fact supported by sensible intuition. His choice of this expression signals that the authority of the moral law is given with a kind of immediacy: we are directly aware in an undervived way of the authority of the moral law and the law-giving activity of pure practical reason.

¹⁸ As at 42: “this fact is inseparably connected with, and indeed identical with, consciousness of freedom of the will.” Cf. also 29–30, 46.

practical reason: the moral law is the basic principle, and transcendental freedom is the kind of causality exercised by agents whom it can motivate. But the grounds for attributing such causality to ourselves come from the characteristics of this principle.¹⁹

One of the most intriguing aspects of Kant's demonstration of freedom is that, as he insists, it does not extend theoretical knowledge, but gives the concept "objective, and though only practical, undoubted *reality*" and that it is introduced "for none other than a practical purpose" [49]. What Kant must substantiate is that the assertion of freedom is rationally based, but not in the way that knowledge claims are. If so, it is not a claim to theoretical knowledge, and therefore complies with the strictures of the first *Critique*. His account includes these elements: That we are transcendently free is, it would appear, a metaphysical claim about the self of just the sort that reason in its theoretical use attempted, but could not establish. And it is an assertion for which he claims rational and objective grounds: the reality of freedom "is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason . . ."; the moral law reveals "that freedom is real" [3–4]. But it is the practical use of reason that, in the ways we have seen, both supplies the grounds for this assertion and gives substance to, or specifies, the abstract idea of freedom.²⁰ Practical reason supplies a determinate statement of the law that governs the activity of a free will, and our recognition of the validity of the law is the ground for ascribing freedom to ourselves. Freedom is manifested in activities in which we acknowledge the authority of this law, such as patterns of reasoning and choice, responses such as respect, and so on. Somewhat oversimplifying, our self-awareness of such activities and capacities is an awareness of freedom. The way in which various elements of moral consciousness give content to the notion of freedom is analogous to the role of intuition in empirical knowledge. But since moral consciousness is not spatio-temporal intuition, the assertion of freedom does not have a theoretical basis. Moreover, this basis is unavailable. Transcendental

¹⁹ The freedom revealed by our ability to act from the moral law is a perfectly general capacity to act independently of determination by empirical conditions. It is important for Kant's theory that this capacity underlies *all* choice and action, including those in which one acts from desire-based interests or non-moral motives. In other words, we are free in *all* exercises of agency, not just those in which we act from moral reasons; otherwise (assuming that freedom is a condition of responsibility) we would be responsible for our actions only when we act morally, and could not be held accountable when we act contrary to morality. (Immoral and evil actions are freely chosen – that is why they are evil.) Transcendental freedom is a feature of our will that we would have no reason to ascribe to ourselves in the absence of our moral capacities, and which may be most directly manifested when we act from moral motives. But what our moral consciousness reveals is a feature of volition that it is present in all choice.

²⁰ See 56:

the concept [of unconditioned causality] is given significance in the moral law . . . thus I have, indeed, no intuition that would determine its objective theoretical reality for it, but it has nonetheless a real application which is exhibited *in concreto* in dispositions or maxims, that is, it has practical reality which can be specified; and this is sufficient to justify it even with regard to noumena.

freedom is not a possible object of intuition, nor is it needed to explain events. The fact that the concept of freedom cannot be determined in the way necessary to enter into empirical knowledge guarantees that it can only be used for practical purposes, as part of our self-conception as agents.

The last “theorem” in Chapter I is Theorem IV. It introduces the central notion of autonomy, claiming among other things (i) that the moral law is a principle of autonomy, in that a will subject to the moral law is bound only to its own fundamental principle, or the principle through which reason is law-giving, and not to any external source of authority; and (2) that only such a principle can ground necessary moral requirements. We cannot do justice to this complex notion here, but briefly: the moral law demands that one base one’s reasons on the legislative form of one’s maxims, in abstraction from their matter. Kant believes that he has shown that in acting from this principle, one is guided by the will’s own principle and is subject only to the authority inherent in one’s reason and to nothing external to reason. When one takes one’s reasons from the legislative form of one’s maxims, one is motivated by that feature of a principle that makes it a law. One thus acts from the principle that is constitutive of practical reason, through which reason is law-giving. But when one bases one’s reasons on the matter of a principle, one takes one’s reasons from a source external to reason.²¹ Perhaps this allows us to see how the requirement expressed by the moral law is simply that of acting from the principle that expresses the nature of pure practical reason, without submitting to any external authority. This is autonomy.

We close this section with two comments about the significance of Kant’s doctrine of the fact of reason. First, by claiming that the moral law is given as a fact of reason, Kant adopts a coherentist or non-foundationalist approach to the justification of morality, holding that the authority of morality cannot be derived from theoretical reason, or from a conception of rationality or agency devoid of moral content – indeed, that it cannot be based on anything outside of itself.²² The shape that Kant’s theory eventually takes explains in retrospect some of the barriers to producing this kind of “deduction” of the moral law.

²¹ For example, when one acts on a desire-based interest, one allows one’s reasons for action to be determined by one’s desires, and ultimately by whatever external factors are responsible for one’s desires. However, action that is desire-based in the ordinary sense is not the only form of heteronomy. A principle of submitting to an uncritically accepted social, political, or religious authority – for example, of performing an action simply because it is demanded by someone in a position of authority – is a principle of heteronomy, and in precisely the same way: one allows one’s actions to be directed by a source of authority external to reason. Kant argues that moral theories that base the principle of right conduct on an antecedent conception of the good are principles of heteronomy because they direct agents to take their reasons for action from a source external to reason, in which one can fail to take an interest without irrationality [cf. 63–65]. Indeed, Kant uses the term “heteronomy” mainly to refer to this kind of moral theory, which he thinks incapable of grounding obligation.

²² For discussion of this point, see Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 266–68. For a discussion of Kant’s non-foundationalism in a broader context, see Onora O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, chs. 1–3.

Introduction

The moral law is a principle of reason, but of a form of reason that in the practical sphere is revealed primarily through moral consciousness. If so, it is unclear how to give a characterization of this form of practical reason that is independent of morality, which could then be cited as its basis. For the most natural characterization is simply to specify the basic principles of morality. What alternative approaches to justification are there? One can articulate the basic principles that underlie ordinary moral judgments, and show how they express values, attitudes towards persons, and conceptions of agency that are firmly rooted in ordinary thought and experience. One can show that the basic principles of morality have the marks of a principle of reason. And one can look for ways in which the different uses of reason form a single coherent system. Kant pursues all these avenues in the *Critique*.

Second, the way in which the fact of reason warrants regarding ourselves as free illustrates a way in which important aspects of our self-conception are rooted in moral consciousness. Kant thinks the moral law provides insight into important deliberative and motivational capacities, including a form of practical reason, that, apart from moral consciousness, we would not understand, much less have any reason to attribute to ourselves. To give an account of these capacities we need to engage in moral theory, because a full description of the relevant capacities presupposes an account of the content and structure of the principles which guide practical reasoning and choice. If so, it is a mistake to allow conceptions of practical reason and motivation that are developed independently of morality to set prior constraints on the content of moral theory – for instance, by insisting that acceptable moral principles must fit into a conception of motivation or rationality derived solely from empirical inquiry. Moral theory must be free to articulate the principles that we actually recognize, and to secure those insights into our nature which they provide.

IV

Chapters II and III of the *Analytic* take up, respectively, the concept of the good as the “object of practical reason” – as that which one wills under the direction of rational principles and is thus “an object of the faculty of desire in the judgment of every reasonable human being” [61] – and respect for morality as the moral incentive and the feeling that is the motivational consequence of recognizing the authority of morality. What explains this sequence of chapters? Kant tells us that since theoretical knowledge is concerned with cognition of objects that are given in sensible intuition, the *Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason* must begin with an account of the a priori forms of sensibility and proceed from there to the a priori concepts of objects of possible experience (the pure categories) and subsequently to the a priori principles of the understanding. But since practical reason is concerned with determining grounds of the will – with the capacity to realize the objects represented as good – its critique proceeds in the reverse order, from

the basic principle or law of pure practical reason, to the good as object of practical reason, and finally to the motivational effect of the moral law, i.e., its effect on feeling or sensibility [89–90]. This explanation of the order of topics is not merely “architectonic.” The necessity and deliberative priority that common sense assigns to morality is genuine only if morality is based on a law that makes necessary demands on the will. This law is conceptually prior to and determines (or sets limits on) any conception of the good. Likewise the feeling of respect that Kant identifies as the proper moral motive must be a response to the authority of moral principle and not an independent feature of our psychology that is the basis of its authority.

A central aim of Chapter II is to argue for a thesis about “the method of ultimate moral investigation” [64] and to explain what Kant calls the “paradox of method” encountered in the *Critique* – “that the concept of good and evil must not be determined before the moral law. . . but only. . . after and by means of it” [63]. Kant contrasts the traditional method of moral philosophy, which begins with a conception of what is good, with his own method of first establishing the fundamental law, and argues that his method alone can establish the unconditional authority of moral principle. Theories with the first structure begin by presenting some end as intrinsically or self-evidently good. Examples of the good that Kant has in mind from the tradition include happiness, perfection, conformity with moral feeling, or conformity with divine law [40–41]. From some such object the theory derives a set of practical principles (say, to act in ways that promote or are in conformity with this object), and the normative force of the resulting principles stems from our presumed interest in this end. Kant terms such theories “material principles of morality” [39] because they assign a foundational role to an object, end, or value that is given to the will in which we are presumed to have an interest, or whose authority is taken for granted. Kant has several reasons for thinking that such theories fail to show that moral principles are genuine “practical laws” or categorical imperatives.²³ But his basic point is that theories that follow the traditional method of beginning from a conception of the good in which interest is assumed do not show that it is rationally necessary to take an interest in that end or value. Moreover, since such theories do not undertake any critical examination of the nature of practical reason or the necessary commitments of rational agents, they lack the resources to establish any such

²³ In Chapter II, Kant argues that if a moral theory assigns a foundational role to the good – if it simply assumes a conception of what is good – the only criterion for assessing that proposed conception is whether or not it elicits interest on our part. Since no a priori standard of good has been argued for or established, the criterion for assessing the proposed conception is “nothing other than the agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or displeasure” [63]. Kant thinks that it follows from such theories that nothing is “immediately good,” since what is good strictly speaking is determined through rational judgments and universally communicable criteria [58, 63]. All goodness is then instrumental, “only good for something” – it is what is good as a means to the object or value initially presented to the will [59].

necessary claim. Hence they cannot establish genuine laws. This is the force of Kant's objection to "material principles of morality" that they are principles of heteronomy. Since they base the authority of morality in an end or value given to the will from the outside, which are not rationally necessary, they can at best show only that moral requirements are hypothetical imperatives.²⁴

In Kant's alternative method, which we see employed in Chapter I, the fundamental task of moral theory is to establish a law or principle that makes a necessary claim on the will. But a principle carries this kind of authority only if it is a "formal law" that expresses the necessary commitments of rational agents, or as we might say, if it is in some sense the will's own law. The only truly necessary objects of volition are those that are internal to the will, or that follow from the application of its own law. But a formal law that expresses the necessary commitments of rational agency is a law that the will or practical reason gives to itself and in that sense is a principle of autonomy. Thus, genuine categorical imperatives are possible only if morality is based on autonomy. As Kant says, "only a formal law, that is, one that prescribes to reason nothing more than the form of its universal lawgiving as the supreme condition of maxims, can be a priori a determining ground of the will" [64; cf. 41].²⁵

Chapter III, "On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason," is a detailed discussion of respect for morality as both the proper moral motive and as moral feeling. Agents who act out of respect for the moral law are motivated to act by their recognizing moral considerations as sufficient reasons for action that take priority over and limit the force of the reasons provided by one's interest in happiness. That is, respect is the immediate recognition of the

²⁴ Of course, not every interest in an end is heteronomy. Heteronomy is a feature of practical principles based on ends that are given to the will from the outside, that are not internal to rational volition. Autonomy is not compromised when an end is given by the moral law or is a necessary feature of rational agency, and rationally necessary ends figure prominently in Kant's moral conception. Rational nature or humanity as an end in itself, which Kant in the *Groundwork* calls the "matter" of morality [G 4: 436], is an end or value to which rational agents are necessarily committed, and the moral law generates obligatory ends, e.g., the happiness of others and one's own perfection. Defining the good as the object of practical reason, among other things, allows Kant in the *Dialectic* to introduce the highest good as the final end of moral conduct. Since the highest good is an end defined by the moral law, its introduction is consistent with Kant's views about autonomy and the priority of the moral law over the concept of the good.

²⁵ Also worth noting in this survey is the section appended to the Chapter II, "Of the Typic of Pure Practical Judgment." Though brief and obscure, it is important to Kant's account of the Categorical Imperative. Kant explains that we judge whether an action is an instance of a universally valid rule of pure practical reason, or what is the same thing, an instance of the moral good, by attempting to conceive of its maxim as a universal law of nature. Our concern in moral evaluation, of course, is whether an action instantiates a valid "law of freedom." Here Kant claims that a law of nature serves as the "type" for a law of freedom, by which he means that a hypothetical law of nature supplies a concrete exemplification of the property of lawfulness, through which we can judge whether an action is a case of a universally valid rule, or has the form of law. This discussion bears on the related formulations of the Categorical Imperative given in G 4: 421, the second of which reads: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature."

authority of morality. But it may also be viewed as the feeling produced by our recognition of the authority of morality; or as we might put it, it is how rational agents who are moved by certain kinds of sensible dispositions experience the motivational efficacy of the moral law. Much of this chapter thus explores how moral consciousness affects the human faculty of desire and feeling when it regulates our tendency to regard the claims of self-love as sufficient reasons for action.²⁶

V

The Dialectic completes the project of conferring practical reality on the problematic concepts of speculative reason by arguing for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul as “practical postulates” which provide the elements of a “pure practical rational faith” [146]. Kant occasionally refers to freedom as a postulate in the Dialectic, but his considered view stresses an important difference: the (practical) reality of freedom is established directly by the authority of the moral law, while the postulates of God and immortality are introduced as necessary conditions of the practical possibility of the highest good.

The argument for the postulates runs as follows. Kant argues that the moral law generates a duty to do all we can to bring about the highest good in the world, which he specifies as a state of affairs in which all agents have achieved virtue and happiness is distributed in accordance with virtue.²⁷ As far as we can see, the possibility of the highest good is consistent with the laws of nature, in that it would result if everyone acted from the moral law. Possibility in the minimal sense of consistency with natural laws is a condition of there being a duty to promote the highest good. However, since our experience of human events offers no evidence that such a state of affairs is actually achievable, and if anything, indicates the contrary, it seems at best an empty possibility. But we cannot rationally and in good faith adopt a state of affairs as our end if we do not believe it to be a real possibility, nor, more to the point, without a conception of the world that shows us how it might occur. Thus is generated a contradiction within practical reason, which Kant refers to as its “antinomy” [113]. For morality creates a duty to promote a state of affairs which our experience suggests is mere fantasy – an “empty imaginary end”

²⁶ For discussions of Chapter III, see Andrews Reath, “Kant’s Theory of Moral Sensibility,” reprinted in *Agency and Autonomy*, and Stephen Engstrom, “The *Triebfeder* of Pure Practical Reason,” in Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann, *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁷ The joint satisfaction of these two conditions would imply that all individuals are virtuous and are able to achieve their permissible ends. How the highest good is introduced or constructed by the moral law, what its content is, and what the basis is (if any) of the duty to pursue the highest good are controversial questions. For discussion, see the secondary literature on the Dialectic recommended below in Further Reading.