Kant’s Trinity of Freedom
An exposition of Practical Freedom, Causal Spontaneity, Autonomy

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Introduction

Kant declares the enlightenment’s motto: “Sapere Aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding.”¹ This motto stands in stark contrast to the words of Proverbs 3: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” Unlike the Christian tradition, Kant makes freedom into an end of itself, eventually arguing that “autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of duties in keeping with them.”² Without moral autonomy, Kant believes that the Christian falls into mindless tradition and spiritual bondage. Yet surprisingly, Kant does not reject many of the Christian doctrines which have long been considered antagonistic towards freedom (e.g. predestination, original sin, salvation by faith, etc.); rather, Kant’s radical stance on freedom forces him to affirm many of Christianity’s most binding doctrines in order to save freedom. This essay will explore the interaction between Kant’s rich articulation of the dialectical nature of freedom and the paradox of Christian faith.

We must begin our essay with an exposition of Kant’s view of freedom. Throughout this essay, I will argue that Kant’s systematic philosophy uncovers the true nature of freedom as a trio of related concepts; or, more accurately, Kant uncovers three dialectical relations which are essential to the notion of freedom. Kant speaks of freedom under three different moments: practical freedom, autonomy, and causal spontaneity. Kant defines practical freedom as “the independence of our will from coercion through impulses of sensibility,”³ essentially the ability for humans to resist sensibility. Autonomy, as defined by Kant, “consists in independence from all matter of the law (namely from a desired object) and at the same time in determination of choice through the mere form of giving universal law that a maxim must be capable of”, i.e. self-

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¹ An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1)
² PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg 166
³ Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 464, B562/A534
Finally, **causal spontaneity** is defined as “the faculty of beginning a state spontaneously,” which is to say that a causally spontaneous moral agent “does not depend, according to the law of nature, on another cause, by which it is determined in time.”

According to Kant, these three moments of freedom are entirely identical; throughout *The Critique of Pure Reason, The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morality*, and *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that “a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same thing.” Kant works to show that practical freedom is the same as causal spontaneity in the first *Critique*, and that causal spontaneity is identical with autonomy in the *Groundwork*. At times, Kant speaks of “freedom” in the general sense, as if all three of the modes of freedom were part of a single reality. In an attempt to illustrate the equivalence of the three moments of freedom, Kant states that the three moments are equivalent “as different fractions of equal value are reduced to their lowest expression.” This simile is used to good effect by Kant, as it shows that no human can realize true freedom without all three of the moments; and yet, one must ask whether the fraction $\frac{1}{2}$ isn’t slightly different than the fraction $\frac{2}{4}$. While both fractions have exactly the same value, they are represented in different manners. In attempting to interpret Kant’s original position, it seems safest to view the different modes of freedom simply as constituting a singular reality which is viewed from multiple perspectives.

My interpretation of Kant chooses to depart from the easiest interpretation; Kant is certainly on to something when he attempts to show that they different moments of freedom are

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4 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 166
5 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 463, B561/A533
6 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 463, B561/A533
7 PP, The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg 95
8 By the transitive property of equivalence, it seems fair to conclude that practical freedom is also thereby equivalent to autonomy.
9 PP, The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg 98
similar, but I do not think that the three modes are completely identical. My hope is that a novel interpretation of Kant’s view of the tripartite freedom will bring new light to an old concept.

This paper will explore the three types of freedom as Kant defined them, but rather than insist that the three types of freedom are exactly the same, we shall attempt to show the differences between the three types. We conclude that the hasty equivocation on Kant’s part is poorly devised, and that when the three modes of freedom are rashly combined, the nuance of each mode loses its luster. Instead, the modern interpreter ought to isolate each moment of freedom, examine that moment on its own terms, and then attempt to assimilate the three once again. Kant’s general account of freedom is like a quodlibet,10 which combines three different melodies into one production. To the brash listener, the three tunes blur together into an unremarkable drone; yet the attentive listener picks the song apart and finds that the beauty of each individual tune reveals the true genius of the musician.

When properly explicated, each mode of freedom corresponds to a different dialectical relation which somehow relates to the generalized concept of freedom. Autonomy consists in the dialectical relation of self-legislation; causal spontaneity consists in the dialectical relation of self-causation; and practical freedom consists in the dialectical relation of self-determination. To explain what I mean by a dialectical relation, I now quote the late Paul Tillich:

Dialectic is not reflective, in so far as it does not reflect like a mirror the realities with which it deals. It does not look at them merely from the outside. It enters them, so to speak, and participates in their inner tensions. The tensions may appear first in contrasting concepts, but they must be followed down to their roots in the deeper levels of reality. In a dialectical description one element of a concept drives to another.11

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10 I here use the word “quodlibet” in its musical sense: “a piece of music combining several different melodies, usually popular tunes, in counterpoint and often a light-hearted, humorous manner”
11 Systematic Theology: Volume II, Paul Tillich, pg. 90
These three modes of freedom are dialectical because they are defined in a self-referential manner. For instance, one normally thinks of causation as a relation between two distinct entities (i.e. A causes B); and yet the idea of self-causation breaks this normal pattern (A causes A). One cannot understand self-causation without appreciation for its dialectical nature. When A causes A, we see that “one element of a concept drives to another.” Similarly, self-legislation breaks the normal divide between ruler and ruled: when the governor becomes the governed, one cannot understand that relation except in a dialectical manner. Finally self-determination is the existential reality of agency and willfulness; under this mode of freedom, the human agent wills his own freedom, a decidedly dialectical relation.

Unfortunately, the dialectical nature of freedom implies that each mode of freedom becomes self-constrained. When a governor becomes the governed, he no longer possesses the same freedom; he is now constrained by his own law. For this reason, the dialectical relation of self-legislation becomes constrained by the moral law. Similarly, causal spontaneity is constrained by phenomenal determinism; and practical freedom must acquiesce to the inevitable weight of man’s natural propensity to evil (i.e. original sin). I say that the three modes of freedom consist in a dialectical relation because each mode of freedom governs the individual in relation to something: autonomy governs the self-ethical relation; causal spontaneity governs the self-nature relation; and practical freedom governs the self-self relation.

Only after we understand the complexity and richness that each account of freedom entails can we recombine the three into their quodlibet. In doing so, we find that Kant’s view of freedom as a whole cannot be sung in complete harmony. Kant’s description of causal spontaneity does not meld properly with his description of autonomy; the brash concept of autonomy, derived from practical reason, clashes with the unassuming concept of causal

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12 Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 56
spontaneity, derived from pure reason. Yet perhaps this conflict is resolvable; the three modes of freedom are derived from three different perspectives, so it is not entirely unexpected that they might need to relate to each other in a tenuous relation. We discuss the possibility that one could realize a single mode of freedom in absence of the other two; yet our conclusion will be very similar to that of Kant: one might be able to do so, and yet it would profit nothing. Ultimately, we see that the three modes of freedom truly belong to a single entity, though they can only be understood separately.

However, even when the tensions within Kant’s view of freedom are resolved, one still gets the feeling that something is not right. In listening to Kant’s *quodlibet*, the trained ear can tell that the tune is off-balance. Kant claims that freedom comes from extricating oneself from the causal nexus, or by removing oneself from the draw of all sensible impulses. The moral action, according to Kant, is one with no basis in emotion. While emotions may occur in the moral life, these emotions cannot be the determinant of action. In listening to Kant’s tune, one might get the impression that Kant looks down upon the human condition; the *quodlibet* produces a tinny noise which lacks the fullness of common human emotions, i.e. lacks the fullness of reality. Where the trained ear notices only that Kant’s *quodlibet* is disharmonious, the expert ear can tell that the *quodlibet* was written for four parts instead of three. It is as if some fourth mode of freedom were missing from Kant’s otherwise detailed account of freedom. Hidden in the shadow of practical freedom, autonomy, and causal spontaneity, a fourth mode of freedom resides: the freedom to be see oneself as a child of God.

While Kant is able to reproduce many Christian doctrines through the use of reason alone, he is unable to reproduce the central paradox of Christianity in its entirety; Kant misses
the paradoxical nature of the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation. While Kant argues for a doctrine of quasi-incarnation (mankind needs a “prototype” for moral exemplification), he never understands the true ramification that the God-man entails. Christ becoming man gives permission for man to be just man; the incarnation gives humans the freedom of theonomy. Kant fails to realize that God’s law might not contradict autonomy. In the words of Bonhoeffer:

The commandment of God is the permission to live as man before God. The commandment of God is permission. It differs from all human laws in that it commands freedom. It is by overcoming this contradiction that it shows itself to be God’s commandment; the impossible becomes possible, and that which lies beyond the range of what can be commanded, liberty, is the true object of this commandment.

Certainly, if one views God’s law as an external entity, Kant is right to critique those who blindly and slavishly follow the will of God. And yet if one takes Bonhoeffer’s view of divine law, and God’s commandment is viewed as a commandment of freedom, then God’s law could hardly undermine the autonomy of the individual. Bonhoeffer fears that the Kantian view of freedom misses the true liberty of existence. He writes:

That convulsive clinging to the ethical theme, which takes the form of a moralization of life, arises from fear of the fullness of everyday life and from an awareness of incapacity for life; it is a flight into a position which lies outside real life, a position from which one can only view life at a distance with an eye which is at the same time arrogant and envious.

Bonhoeffer sharply critiques those who cling to the ethical, and yet I do not think that Bonhoeffer is critiquing the Kantian position, so much as completing it. Theonomy, which I argue is the long lost fourth mode of freedom, completes Kant’s tripartite quodlibet. Theonomy describes the self-God relation, and is constrained by guilt. However, the dialectical nature of

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13 Again, I am using Paul Tillich’s conventions in defining paradox. A paradox is that which perpetually defies expectation, not necessarily something absurd. Tillich argues that the only paradox in Christianity is the Christ, i.e. that God would enter actuality as a man.
14 Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 80
15 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pg. 277
16 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pg. 264
theonomy is found through *co-operant grace*. When the tune of self-affirmation is combined with the trio of ethical themes propounded by Kant, the composition is a masterpiece.

The connection between Bonhoeffer’s life-affirming theonomy and Kant’s tripartite vision of freedom is not entirely clear. Kant derives his view of freedom from morality itself; Bonhoeffer’s view of theonomy comes from the Christian tradition. The last section of this essay will be devoted to finding the connection between Kant’s view of freedom and theonomy. I propose that Paul Tillich’s “method of correlation” might be the best hope for resolution. Kant’s work in deriving ethical principles from pure and practical reason form a philosophical question; this question can only be answer by correlation with religious doctrines. At the end of the day, we may be able to simultaneously affirm the motto of the enlightenment “have courage to make use of your own understanding” and the instruction of Proverbs 3 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”
The table below summarizes nicely the information presented in the introduction. The three headings under each mode of freedom correspond in order to the Constraint, Dialectic, and Relation of each mode.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical Freedom</th>
<th>Causal Spontaneity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original Sin(^{17})</td>
<td>Phenomenal Determinism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Determination</td>
<td>Self-Causation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Self</td>
<td>Self-Nature(^{19})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{Autonomy} & \text{Ethical} & \text{Causal Spontaneity} \\
\hline
\text{Moral law} & \text{Practical} & \text{Phenomenal Determinism} \\
\text{Self-Legislation} & \text{Pure} & \text{Self-Causation} \\
\text{Self-Ethical} & & \text{Self-Nature}\(^{19}\) \\
\end{array}\]

- Theonomy
  - Guilt
  - Co-operant Grace
  - Self-God

\(^{17}\) Here, original sin is meant only as another term for humanity’s natural propensity towards evil.

\(^{18}\) This could also be referred to as the Self-Law relation.

\(^{19}\) This could also be referred to as the Self-Other relation.
Practical Freedom

*I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*\(^{20}\)

The above passage comes from Romans 7, where Paul speaks in the persona of a “slave to sin.” Romans 7 is one of the most excruciating passages to read for two reasons: first, as a reader you wish to shake the speaker and say “knock it off! If you know that you’re sinning, why don’t you stop! What’s *wrong* with you?!” The “slave to sin” portrayed by Paul is meant to bring out disgust amongst readers targeted at those who fail to control themselves when they clearly ought to be able to do so and subsequently refuse to accept responsibility for their actions. And yet the second thing which makes Romans 7 difficult to read is that the passage forces the reader to examine himself, and his own experiences of moral duplicity. In reading the words of the “slave to sin,” the reader recognizes that he has had similar experiences, and as such the reader is forced to confront his own lack of moral resolve. Romans 7 creates a derisive emotion in its audience, and then forces that derision back upon its hypocritical originator.

Aside from being an emotionally difficult passage, Romans 7 serves as a highlight of the three types of freedom; the passage presents an existential exposé of human nature struggling towards freedom in all of its forms.\(^{21}\) For now, notice the way that Paul’s character describes his moral conundrum. Paul’s character knows exactly what he ought to do; the problem is that Paul’s character has trouble *actuating* the moral decisions which he recognizes to be good. This

\(^{20}\) Romans 7:19-20

\(^{21}\) In *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, pg. 53, Kant uses Paul as an example to illustrate one of three grades of man’s natural propensity to sin. Paul’s character is supposed to represent the fragility of the human condition. However, Paul’s “a slave to sin” character is also an example of the other three grades: Kant just doesn’t use the apostle as an example of impurity or depravity like he does for fragility.
inability to actuate moral actions causes Paul’s character to dissociate, and to posit two different entities in his own psyche. Paul’s character becomes split between the “slave to God’s law” and the “slave to the law of sin.” While most moral agents don’t explicitly think of themselves as a composition of two psychological entities, the experience of conflicting emotions within the psyche is a common experience among all moral agents. Psychologists are quite familiar with the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, where a subject experiences conflicting desires and thoughts. Freud was amongst the first to label this psychological experience, and he thought that the term ambivalence accurately described the moral conundrum; when a moral agent desires to act in one way, and yet feels morally obliged to act in another, the moral agent might be described as ambivalent because he holds multiple and opposing values. Paul’s persona epitomizes the concept of ambivalence: the character holds two opposing values so strongly that he conceives of himself as two different entities; each of these values becomes personified and then projected onto the individual.

I would like to sketch Kant’s concept of practical freedom as the idealized solution to the experience of schizophrenic crisis portrayed by the “slave to sin.” Paul’s depiction of the “slave to sin” shows an individual who conceives of himself as two entities in one; Paul’s persona longs to be unified into a single entity, capable of acting without conflicting desires. Practical freedom is the realization of this desire for unity. An agent can be called practically free when his “proper self” is uncoerced by external forces. The issue of practical freedom is raised by psychological experiences of division and helplessness: the issue begins with these psychological experiences, and then seeks to make sense of them.

22 Romans 7:25
23 We shall see later that Kant poses an anecdotal character very similar to the “slave to sin.” I have affectionately named Kant’s anecdotal character “Bob,” and we will see that Bob struggles with exactly the same issue that Paul’s character does.
24 PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral, pg. 104
The first psychological experience is that of *self-control*, which is quickly followed by the experience of *limitation*, and finally the experience of coercion. As the experiences of control and limitation wrestle with each other, a sphere of influence is chiseled out for the self. This sphere of influence is described by *agency*: within the sphere of influence, the self always retains the possibility for resisting desires, i.e. the self is treated as an agent who makes voluntary actions; yet outside of the sphere of influence, the self recognizes itself as incapable of self-determination. But once this sphere of influence has been determined, the experience of coercion begins. The self is divided over how to use its agency; it knows one set of actions to be right, and yet pursues another. At once, a moral agent recognizes that he makes *voluntary actions* (actions which fell within the sphere of influence and were left “up to him”), and yet also recognizes that these voluntary actions followed from *coercion* by external forces.

At root, practical freedom is the question of what it means to be a moral agent; the issue starts with what it means for an action to be voluntary, and then ends with what it means for an action to be freely chosen, i.e. uncoerced. Kant posits a faculty for self-determination in each moral agent, which corresponds to voluntarity; yet Kant also posits that this faculty only becomes fully actualized when the moral agent acts in a manner which defies coercion by external factors. Thus humans receive their status as moral agents through the voluntarity of their actions, which makes them practically free insofar as they have the potential for actualizing moral deeds; and yet, not all moral agents have attained practical freedom, insofar as they act in a coerced manner.

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25 Debatably, a freely chosen action in Kant’s view is *not* one which is uncoerced, but rather an action which defies all coercion. For instance, a moral agent who is coerced by a governing authority but who ultimately defies that coercion is freer in Kant’s view than a man who chooses not to defy a smaller amount of coercion. Thus coercion never limits the freedom of a moral agent in Kant’s view, only *giving in* to that coercion.
As per the above description, practical freedom is a self-self relation: when practical freedom is actualized, the self becomes a unified whole under the direction of moral conscience; when practical freedom is not actualized but merely potential, the self wages a war within itself which results in the experience of division. Practical freedom is about actuating one’s agency. The obstacle which stands in the way of practical freedom is the tendency towards internal strife in the individual, which Kant calls a “natural propensity towards evil” though I prefer to refer to it as original sin.26 Factually, we know that moral agents fail in the attempt to fully actualize their own practical freedom; we also know from past experience that this tendency exists within our selves. Yet Kant reminds us, through various anecdotes and arguments, that nothing actually prevents us from overcoming original sin. Original sin is only known through experience, which comes to us a posteriori, whereas the possibility of practical freedom comes to us a priori. Kant shows that the self can actualize practical freedom through self-determination.27 Kant’s argument is this: there is nothing which logically prevents us from actuating our potential.

26 I attempt to introduce the term “original sin” outside of its usual theological context, such that it is here used synonymously with Kant’s phrase “natural propensity for evil.” Kant says that a human being is evil when “he is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it,” and that man is evil by nature because “according to the cognition we have of the human being through experience, he cannot be judged otherwise, in other words, we may presuppose evil as subjectively necessary in every human being, even the best” (Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 55-56, italics added). Thus there are subjective grounds for the “possibility of an inclination” for evil in the will of each human being (pg. 52). Existence under this natural propensity to evil is an existential state of being, and must be differentiated from the nominal acts of sin, which Kant defines as a “transgression of the moral law as divine command” (pg. 63).

For now, let us define sin as the non-actualization of potential action in line with the moral law, and remove the word “sin” from its theological context. Thus sin is the nominal state in which potential moral action lies unactualized, and original sin is the existential state in which man has a natural propensity towards non-actualization. Use of the phrase “original sin” in this manner allows us to easily move back and forth between Kant’s philosophy and the work of Paul Tillich. In volume II of his Systematic Theology, Tillich recognizes the evil has a broad definition and a narrow definition. The broad definition “covers everything negative and includes both destruction and estrangement,” whereas under the narrow definition evil is defined as the “consequences of the state of sin and estrangement” (pg. 60-61). If we use the phrase “original sin” as I have outlined, it allows for easy transition between the Kantian system and the Tillichian system.

27 Kant uses the phrase self-determination to describe the state of practical freedom. I would like to point out the similarity between Kant’s phrase, and Tillich’s phrase “self-affirmation” as used in his work The Courage to Be. Self-affirmation is meant to describe the recognition of the self in Tillich’s work; in Kant’s context, the realization of practical freedom is the realization of the self as a moral agent, which later implies the recognition of the self as an intelligible being.
Differentiation between the Faculty for and State of Practical Freedom

For any serious Kant scholars, it should be surprising that I would describe practical freedom in terms of “potential,” “actualization,” and “original sin.” At this point, I admit that these terms are rather fuzzy, but an examination of Kant’s work will clear up the matter. Kant defines practical freedom as the independence of our will from coercion through impulses of sensibility: essentially, practical freedom is when the will says “No!” to its desires. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes:

> Freedom, in its practical sense, is the independence of our will from coercion through impulses of sensibility. Our will is sensible insofar as it is affected pathologically (by impulses of sensibility); it is animal will (*arbitrium brutum*) if it can be necessitated pathologically. The human will is certainly an *arbitrium sensitivum*, not, however, *brutum*, but *liberum*; for sensible impulses do not necessitate its action, but there is in human beings a faculty of self-determination, independent of the necessitation through sensible impulses.  

Already, we see that Kant identifies two important aspects of practical freedom: the faculty for practical freedom, and the state of practical freedom. With regards to the faculty of self-determination in humans, Kant implies that all humans must be regarded as potential actuators of practical freedom. With regards to the state of practical freedom, one can only interpret the phrase “self-determination” as a reference to the state wherein the human will is independent of coercion through impulses of sensibility. Thus Kant identifies a faculty for practical freedom, and a state of practical freedom.

Let us attempt to unravel the reasoning behind Kant’s definition of practical freedom. Immediately after defining practical freedom (in the above quotation), Kant admits that our wills are sensible insofar as they can be affected pathologically. Yet he makes a very important distinction between the human and animal wills: Kant argues that the animal will is necessitated

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28 Critique of Pure Reason, pg 464, B562/A534

29 I will later argue that a faculty of self-determination ought to be interpreted as a logical possibility for self-determination.
by its sensible impulses, while the human will is merely *affected* by its sensible impulses. Thus the human will *could* entirely reject sensible impulses, just as it *could* blindly follow those sensible impulses.

Two important clarifications must be made about this interpretation of the phrase “faculty of self-determination” First, Kant does *not* mean to imply that the will is indeterminable *a posteriori*, but only that the will cannot be predicted *a priori* and by necessity. In fact, Kant directly addresses whether the rational will is predictable *a posteriori*, and he concludes that the human will is entirely predictable. Kant states:

… if we could investigate all the appearances of [a rational agent’s] will down to the very bottom, there would be not a single human action which we could not predict with certainty and recognize from its proceeding conditions as necessary.\(^{30}\)

Kant insists that all phenomena are entirely predictable, which is to say that the human will can be predicted with 100% certainty, supposing that enough intelligence, diligence, and time is spent in the investigation.\(^ {31}\)

The second clarification I would like to make about Kant’s position is this: Kant does not mean to impute a metaphysical property to the rational will in using the word “faculty.” By using the word “faculty,” Kant does not intend to claim that the human psyche has some innate property which allows it to defy sensible impulses, for this would contradict his critique of

\(^{30}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg 473, B578/A550

\(^{31}\) It is an interesting question whether Kant’s view would be changed at all by the insights of quantum theory which have been developed in the last century. From the above quotation, it is clear that Kant believed that all physical phenomena were predictable if the observer was smart enough and careful enough in his observations. Contemporary quantum theory certainly rules out the possibility of actually predicting events with 100% certainty. However, Kant’s underlying point was simply that insofar as scientists observe a situation, they will always find causes behind every event. Insofar as the scientists investigate the event, they will find that the event was determined before hand, and that scientists can only proceed by using the principle of succession in accordance with the schematization of the category of causality. Kant can still claim that phenomenal events could be predicted *if* enough time, intelligence and diligence were spent in the investigation of phenomenal events; he need only add that humans lack the means to so. Kant’s underlying point remains unchanged, and Kant’s assertion that humans can be predicted through empirical observation is untouched by the results of modern science.
rational psychology. In his somewhat lengthy style, Kant disseminates the idea that the way in
which we perceive our self phenomenally does not reflect upon our self noumenally:

The dialectical illusion in rational psychology arises from our confounding
an idea of reason (that of pure intelligence) with the altogether indeterminate
concept of a thinking being in general. What we are doing is that we think
ourselves for the sake of a possible experience, while still abstracting from all
actual experience, and thence infer that we are able to become conscious of our
existence even apart from experience and its empirical conditions. We are,
therefore, confounding the possible abstraction from our own empirically
determined existence with the supposed consciousness of a possible separate
existence of our thinking self, and we bring ourselves to believe that we know the
substantial within us as the transcendental subject. But all that we have in our
thoughts is the unity of consciousness, on which as the mere form of knowledge,
all determination is based.32

From the above argument, Kant concludes that we cannot make any determinations with regards
to the human self in itself. Kant proposes that any argument for or against the immateriality,
incorruptibility, personality, or immortality of the soul is “falsely supposed to be a science of
pure reason.”33 While practical reason may allow us to assume axiomatically that the noumenal
will does possess some kind of freedom, even practical reason ought not to impute metaphysical
properties to the soul. Thus I do not believe that we can interpret Kant’s proposed “faculty of
self-determination” as a metaphysical claim.

Having shown that the “faculty of self-determination” neither imputes a metaphysical
property to the human will, nor implies that the human will possesses which resists prediction
from posteriory reasoning, we are ready to examine what the phrase actually implies. The word
“faculty” might be slightly misleading to English speakers of Kant’s work, because the word
faculty in English usually connotes an actual something which is possessed. For instance, if I say
that Jimmy has a faculty for understanding audible speech, it seems to imply that Jimmy has
something which enables him to understand audible speech. In German, Kant uses the word

32 Critique of Pure Reason, pg 355-356, B422
33 Critique of Pure Reason, pg 319, B403-4/A345-6
vermögen, which has an incredibly vague meaning. In English, vermögen could be translated as faculty, capacity, power, or property. Of the established translations, I think that the word “power” might be the best English translation, as the word “power” does not give the impression of possessing something.

The differentiation between animal wills and human wills is the key to understanding what Kant means by a “faculty of self-determination;” this is why Kant interjects his discussion of the human and animal will between his definition of practical freedom and his claim that humans have a faculty for self-determination.34 Kant says that an arbitrium liberum is differentiated from the arbitrium brutum because “sensible impulses do not necessitate its action.” Thus when Kant says that humans have a “faculty of self-determination,” this ought to be interpreted as him saying that the human will is not determined by necessity, but by affectation (presumably affectation exists in the phenomenal realm, and does not impinge upon the human’s noumenal freedom). Essentially, Kant rigidly insists that human wills retain the logical possibility of acting in accordance with reason, even when they lose possibility from the empirical side of things. From the concept of the human will itself, we cannot conclude before experience that the rational will is going to blindly follow its inclinations: this is how we ought to interpret Kant’s claim that the human will has a “faculty of self-determination.” Thus, even though the best literal translation of vermögen in this phrase might be as a “power of self-determination,” the best way to understand Kant’s intended meaning would be to translate the phrase as “logical possibility of self-determination.” Kant is using the incredibly vague word vermögen in order to show that, if humans do possess some power related to freedom, it is intangible and essentially inscrutable. All that humans can comprehend of this “power for self-determination” is that the logical possibility exists.

34 This interjection can be observed in the above quotation with footnote 28.
A Practical Application of Practical Freedom

The interpretation which I have proposed of the phrase “faculty of self-determination” might seem underwhelming: what good is it that the *arbitrium liberum* cannot be determined *a priori*, when it can be determined *a posteriori*? The point is that the human will always has the logical potential to reject sensibility, even though it may or may not actuate this potential in any given set of circumstances. For the animal will, decisions are based off of whatever inclinations happen to beset the poor beast: Kant writes “everything happens in necessary conformity with external solicitations and impulses without any spontaneous inclination of the will.” Even when an animal experiences conflicting inclinations, Kant argues that the strongest inclination will always beat out the rest. Rather, the human will is subject to rationality in addition to sensibility. Unlike the will of beasts, which are necessarily determined by the whims of fate, the human will ultimately has the potential to say “No!” and to reject sensible inclinations. Humans have the *logical possibility* (though perhaps not the *empirical possibility*) to control themselves.

Having settled upon an interpretation for Kant’s claim that humans have a “faculty of self-determination,” two very important points arise from this interpretation: First, even though a human will can be predetermined in any particular case, thanks to *a posteriori* reason, we can easily think *a priori* of another possible scenario in which the human will rejects that same impulse. Thus we conclude, Second, that no inclination can be considered entirely irresistible to the human will, as there is always a hypothetical limiting case in which that inclination is not

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35 A later section will attempt to wrestle with this issue.
36 Nova dilucidatio, pg. 80, Ak Ed. 2:400. Citation courtesy of Kant’s Compatibilism by Hud Hudson, pg. 16
37 The phrases “logical possibility” and “empirical possibility” might be unclear. By logical possibility, I mean that the one cannot establish impossibility from the a priori standpoint. I prefer to use the phrase logical possibility over the double negative of the phrase “a priori non-impossibility.” Later on, we will see that there is a vital difference between the possibility and non-impossibility of freedom in the context of causal spontaneity; Kant wants to differentiate between the realm of possible experiences and the realm of non-impossibility which is established by non-contradiction. However, I don’t think that the terminological difference is important in the case of practical freedom because, as already established, we are clearly speaking of logical possibility (non-contradiction) to begin with.
irresistible. Because nothing is entirely irresistible to the human will, the human will always retains the logical possibility of self-determination in any given situation.

Kant illustrates both of these points with an excellent example of practical freedom in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant introduces an anecdotal character who is very similar to Paul’s “a slave to sin” character. Kant writes:

Suppose [Bob] asserts of his lustful inclination that, when the desired object and the opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him; ask him whether, if a gallows were erected in front of the house where he finds this opportunity and he would be hanged on it immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then control his inclination. One need not conjecture very long what he would reply.

Even though Bob asserts that a certain object is completely irresistible to him, this is clearly false. If Bob were asked whether the object would still be irresistible under pain of death (he would probably gulp and ask if the questioner was serious), he would need to admit that the object was not entirely irresistible for him after all. Bob didn’t realize his own freedom in this scenario because he was relying upon his past experiences (i.e. *a posteriori* reasoning). Bob had generalized from previous experiences and concluded that he would be doomed to repeat his mistakes endlessly; he had fallen into the perceptual trap set by original sin. And yet, all it took for Bob to realize that he actually possessed the faculty of freedom was for him to imagine the limiting condition of death. This hypothetical scenario shows Bob that his inclination can be trumped by a fear of death. But has not Bob merely replaced one irresistible inclination (his lust) with another (fear of death)?

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38 It is almost as if Kant were belligerently carrying on a conversation with Paul’s character
39 I admittedly defile Kant’s wonderful prose with the generic name Bob for ease of use.
40 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 163
41 In the event that Bob does not admit as Kant suggests, and Bob maintains that he would find a certain object irresistible even under pain of death, Kant would probably be cynical. But let us suppose that Bob actually did find the object irresistible even under pain of death; Kant would probably claims that Bob was more animal than human at that point. This certainly presents a reasonable objection to Kant, though nothing which cannot be smoothed out ultimately.
Kant uses the above scenario to show that most any inclination can be trumped by a fear of death. He postulates a hypothetical situation in which Bob’s supposedly irresistible inclination is proved to not be irresistible. Yet it would seem that Kant has only shown the human concern for death to be supreme. For this reason, Kant postulates another scenario, showing that even the fear of death can be overcome. Continuing the conversation with Bob, Kant writes:

But ask [Bob] whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext, he would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.

Why is it that Bob admits being able to resist his fear of death in this latter example, but not in the former? Bob first thinks that a certain object is irresistible for him; this is shown to be false, for Bob’s lust can be trumped by his fear of death. And yet, with the latter scenario, Bob admits that even his fear of death could be overcome! It’s easy to see why Bob thought his lust completely irresistible in the first scenario: Bob simply didn’t have a great enough imagination. Bob was relying upon *a posteriori* reason when a simple use of limiting cases would have revealed his freedom from his original lust. It is slightly harder to understand why Bob admits his freedom in the second case though; *perhaps* Bob is just afraid of looking like a coward, and therein attempts to make himself look braver? Yet it is clear that Bob is not merely showing bravado in this scenario: we already know that Bob is a coward, and he doesn’t even admit that he *would* give his life for the truth, merely that he could. Somehow, Bob recognizes that he *could* resist the fear of death, even though he doesn’t want to. Bob judges that there is no reason why

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42 Yet again I defile Kant’s beautiful prose for my own purposes.
43 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 164
he couldn’t give his life up. Kant says that Bob “judges … that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within” himself. Somehow, Bob has an inner sense of the moral law in this scenario, and recognizes his own freedom.

Assuredly, an imagined conversation with an imagined character named Bob is no more than anecdotal evidence; Kant’s response that Bob “cognizes freedom within himself” gives a mystical quality to the story (quite unusual for Kant) which seems to stand on dubious logical ground. And yet, I hope that Bob’s somewhat confused response is not entirely unknown to my audience; Bob’s testimony is not meant to stand on its own logically, but rather to conform to a human’s inner sense of freedom. Naturally, like Bob, many humans lose their inner sense of freedom throughout the every day slog of life, after knowledge of original sin has done its work. Yet when past experiences extinguish our sense of practical freedom, Kant’s anecdotal conversations with Bob are meant to reignite that sense of freedom. The first scenario shows that even when we think an inclination is completely irresistible, it can always be topped by the fear of death. Then the second scenario shows that even the fear of death is resistible. If even the fear of death is resistible, can any inclination be considered irresistible? It is almost as if Kant were challenging his audience: give me one good reason why you don’t have control over your actions, right now! You know what practical freedom feels like because you’ve felt it a million times before; why don’t you feel it right now?

It might appear that the issue of practical freedom is largely a matter of feeling; one is practically free when one feels free. This, however, is not correct. Feelings, in Kant’s philosophy, can only establish subjective reality. Yet in order to have true moral pertinence in Kant’s thought, a faculty for self-determination needs to be an objectively founded logical possibility. Whether a moral agent feels like he has control over his life or not, Kant must argue
that the agent objectively has a faculty of self-determination, else the ethicist risks delusion. However, the issue of practical freedom cannot be wholly separated from the subjective ground of freedom. Without the feelings of freedom and coercion (which are initially regarded as subjective), humans would have no reason to think about practical freedom and to come to an objective understanding of moral agency. While Kant must argue that the objective faculty of self-determination remains even when a moral agent does not believe himself to be free, the subjective experiences of freedom and coercion are the occasion for reflection upon practical freedom.

We must now reflect upon the distinction between the faculty for self-determination and the state of self-determination. If Kant is correct, the logical possibility of practical freedom is what defines a rational will. The faculty for practical freedom is ubiquitous, and accompanies moral agents throughout all of their decisions. This faculty for self-determination is the condition of moral culpability; if humans have not even the possibility of self-determination, they were absolutely helpless by necessity from the start and cannot be held responsible for their actions. The conclusion is that some sort of faculty for practical freedom must exist even when practical freedom is not actualized.

The existence of this faculty of self-determination is absolutely crucial because the rational will is distinguished from the animal will by the existence of this faculty, according to

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44 In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant describes how all knowledge must start as possible knowledge (known subjectively), and then subsequently work its way up to apodictic certainty (becoming objective knowledge). Kant writes “The problematic proposition is that which therefore expresses only logical (not objective) possibility, that is, it expresses a free choice of admitting such a proposition, and a purely optional admission of it into the understanding. The assertoric proposition deals with logical actuality or truth. Thus, for instance, in a hypothetical syllogism the antecedent is problematic in the major premise, but assertoric in the minor. And the assertoric proposition indicates that it already conforms to the understanding according to its laws. The apodictic proposition thinks the assertoric as determined through these laws of the understanding themselves, and therefore as asserting a priori; and in this manner it expresses logical necessity. Since everything is thus incorporated in the understanding step by step – inasmuch as we begin by judging something problematically, then perhaps accepting it assertorically as true, and finally maintain it as inseparably united with the understanding, that is, as necessary and apodictic – we may be allowed to call these three functions of modality so many moments of thought in general” (CPR, pg. 102, B101/A76).
Kant. This faculty draws a direct connection between Kant and Aristotle’s theory of voluntary action. Aristotle argues that an action is involuntary when it is determined by an “external principle”: he gives the example of a man who is carried off by the wind. This windswept man does not choose of his own volition to be swept away, and consequently he can’t be held morally accountable for such an action. In his pre-critical writings, Kant actually invokes Aristotle’s criterion of the “internal principle.” Hudson remarks that, in light of this evidence, one should interpret Kant’s view of freedom in terms of Aristotle’s philosophy. I think that Hudson is correct insofar as Kant’s theory of morality is indebted to Aristotle’s *Nicomachaen Ethics*, but Hudson fails to point out how Kant’s vision of freedom goes far beyond that of Aristotle.

A comparison of Aristotle’s work with Kant’s is exceedingly demonstrative on the issue of forced action and internal/external principles. Aristotle and Kant both believe that moral action is always “up to us,” and both agree that a moral agent cannot be held accountable for an action which was truly forced. Aristotle writes that a forced action is one which “has its principle outside the person forced, who contributes nothing.” Kant argues that “the action to which the ought applies must be possible under natural conditions.” It seems fair to link Kant’s theory of the faculty of self-determination (which is the key to understanding Kant’s theory of culpability) with Aristotle’s distinction between voluntary/involuntary action. Aristotle indicates that an

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45 Aristotle, *Nicomachaen Ethics*, Book III 1:3
46 Nova Dilucidatio, pg. 82, Ak. Ed. 2:402; citation courtesy of Hud Hudson, Kant’s Compatibilism, pg. 16
47 Hudson writes: “Significantly, Kant does not wholly retract [his Aristotelian characterization of freedom] in his discussion of spontaneity in the Critique of Pure Reason, and this is one reason to be initially suspicious of interpretations of his later use of the term ‘spontaneity’ which would make it equivalent to the power to disrupt the uniformity of nature or to violate the necessity of nature … Consequently, when an agent spontaneously inclines his will, then the will is determined internally, that is, through reasons the agent has represented to himself” (Hudson, Kant’s Compatibilism, pg. 16-17).
48 Aristotle, *Nicomachaen Ethics*, Book III 5:2
49 Aristotle, *Nicomachaen Ethics*, Book III 1:12
50 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 472, B576/A548
51 As a quick test of whether Aristotle’s differentiation between internal and external principles is a useful hermeneutic for understanding Kant’s position on voluntary/involuntary action, consider Kant’s position on the inclinations. Kant always speaks about sensible inclinations which coerce individuals into acting against the moral
action is voluntary only if the principle of action is in the actor, i.e. if the actor *determines* the outcome of the action.\textsuperscript{52} It follows that Kant and Aristotle agree on this point: a faculty of self-determination is the requirement for status as a rational agent acting voluntarily.

One must not get carried away, however, as Kant and Aristotle disagree fundamentally about the value of freedom. This disagreement can be seen most clearly in their discussions about coercion. For Kant, freedom from coercion must be the highest principle of all morality. As Kant states in his definition, practical freedom is the “independence of our will from coercion.” If one is being coerced, then one is not free, and one is not moral. The idea of coercion brings us back to the example of Paul’s “slave to sin” and Kant’s anecdotal character Bob. Both of those characters feel coerced by their desires; they feel as though they have no choice. Kant has no pity for such foolishness; of course there is a voluntary choice in these examples, and it is being made poorly! Kant’s non-sympathy towards coerced agents can be found in other areas as well; Kant suggests that it is impermissible to tell a lie even if the lie would save a life. Even under extreme duress, Kant maintains that the pursuit of a freedom which shirks all coercion is the ultimate end of all ethical considerations.

Aristotle, on the other hand, thinks that coercion can mitigate the voluntary nature of a given action. Aristotle brings up a number of scenarios which “raise dispute about whether they are voluntary or involuntary.”\textsuperscript{53} These scenarios are described by Aristotle as “mixed” between

\textsuperscript{52} Nicomachaen Ethics, pg. 353
\textsuperscript{53} Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book III 1:4
voluntary and involuntary, even though Kant would clearly disagree. The first example is a scenario in which a tyrant tells an agent to do something shameful and if the agent does not comply, the tyrant will kill the agent’s children and parents. This form of coercion, for Aristotle, mitigates the voluntary nature of the shameful actions when it clearly does not for Kant. Similarly, Aristotle argues that if a ship’s captain is forced to throw cargo overboard in order to save his ship during a storm, one might conceive of the action as somewhat involuntary; Kant utterly rejects such a conclusion. While Aristotle states that coerced actions are “more like voluntary actions” than involuntary actions, he still maintains that coercion can mitigate culpability in some scenarios: Aristotle states “In some cases there is no praise [for a coerced action], but there is pardon, whenever someone does a wrong action because of conditions of a sort that overstrain human nature, and that no one would endure.” While Kant and Aristotle agree that moral agents cannot be held culpable for involuntary actions, they clearly disagree over the culpability of coerced actions and the value of practical freedom. So though Kant owes Aristotle for some of his ideas, Hudson is incorrect insofar as Aristotle should not be used to interpret Kant’s view of freedom.

The radical difference between Kant and Aristotle on the matter of coercion truly highlights the importance which Kant gives towards the pursuit of practical freedom. As I have argued, the faculty for self-determination posited by Kant implies the logical possibility of practical freedom. This freedom is actuated when a moral agent is not coerced, that is, when the moral agent solidifies into a single and unified will. So long as a moral agent is affected by inclinations of sensibility he will always be ambivalent, like Paul’s “slave to sin” persona. However, Kant uses his anecdotal character Bob to illustrate wherein the possibility for practical

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54 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book III 1:6
55 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book III 1:7
freedom exists. Even when humans are limited by the reality of original sin and a posteriori reasoning, Kant’s conversation with Bob shows us that no inclination is truly irresistible, and that even the fear of death can be resisted.

Though I hope that the matter of practical freedom is now clear, at least insofar as to how it is defined, one might notice that no proof of the possibility of practical freedom has been given, nor has any account been given of how one might defy all sensible coercion as a moral agent. Practical freedom cannot exist independent of this issue: if freedom is going to move beyond the realm of anecdotal evidence and mystical talk about the inner sense of freedom, it must find a basis in scientific and psychological analysis. To this extent, practical freedom is concerned primarily with the ontic expression of the common experience of freedom; the subjective reality of the experience of practical freedom opens up the possibility of and serves as the occasion for further exploration of freedom in the scientific and psychological realms. In this manner, one cannot truly understand the common experiences of practical freedom until one has explored the scientific and psychological basis for practical freedom. The scientific basis for practical freedom is causal spontaneity, whereas the psychological basis for the theory of practical freedom is called autonomy. Without the experience of practical freedom, one would have no reason to inquire as to the freedom of moral agents in the causal realm, just as one would have no reason to seek the self-determined moral law. And yet, investigation of causal spontaneity and autonomy only serves the purpose of building up to an objective basis for establishing the reality of the subjective experiences of practical freedom. Practical freedom not only undergirds the possibility of scientific and psychological understandings of freedom by serving as the occasion for further study; practical freedom also serves as long awaited conclusion of further study. The philosopher leaves only for the purposes of returning.
Causal Spontaneity

_ I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do … As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out._56

So far, we have introduced the idea of practical freedom, which raises the problematic proposition that humans have a faculty of self-determination. Yet the possibility of the objective reality of this faculty forced us to investigate the possibility of freedom in the scientific realm.57 We now turn our investigations to the realm of pure reason to ask whether the logical possibility of self-determination can find a basis in pure reason.

The issue might be rephrased in this way: if I am caused, how can I have control over myself? That is, if my causality is attributable to another, how can I be my own master? If one studies this question, one will find that the answer must address a very specific relationship: the relationship between self and other, or what I will refer to as the self-Nature relation.58 The question also directly addresses the issue of scientific _causality_, and will require an in-depth understanding of what it means to be caused. Kant tackles the issue of causality in greatest detail within the _Critique of Pure Reason_, and consequently our analysis of the issue will draw almost entirely from that source.

56 Romans 7:14-18
57 I say that causal spontaneity is freedom considered from the scientific perspective, but I don’t want this use of the word “scientific” to be confused with empirical investigation. Rather, causal spontaneity is the objective ground of freedom from the metaphysical perspective, as formulated through pure reason.
58 The word nature can refer to any number of things in philosophy, but here I’m just using nature to refer to reality as that which is external to the self. One might ask what I mean by external, and I would direct the questioner to Kant’s theories of space and time. Something is external if one can attribute a location in space and time to it.
The concept of cause and effect is a fairly simple one; Kant believes that the category can be derived from formal logic, specifically from hypothetical statements. A hypothetical statement takes on the form “if A, then B” or more appropriately “if cause, then effect.” Unlike the mathematical judgments, using the category of causality invokes a dynamical judgment, which means that cause/effect judgments are always “directed towards the existence of [objects of intuition] (in their relation either to one another or to the understanding).” By calling the category “dynamical,” Kant is simply pointing out that the category of cause and effect implies a relation between two entities, as should be obvious from the binary form of the if/then statement.

Returning to the question at hand, we wish to inquire as to how a person can have control over themselves if they are caused. Unsurprisingly, Kant answers that one does not have control over oneself if caused by another. If determined externally, the individual is caused by something outside of his control, and therefore forfeits control to that external entity. In the if/then statement, the cause is always taken as a sufficient condition for the effect. The effect has no control over the cause and cannot ignore the sufficiency of its cause; consequently the effect is entirely dependent on the cause. It would seem that causation threatens to destroy all freedom; and thus the quest to establish the objective reality of freedom directs us to investigate how one can avoid causation altogether.

Kant’s search to answer the question “how can I avoid being caused externally?” gives rise to the idea of causal spontaneity, essentially the concept of self-causation. Kant says that something is causally spontaneous whenever “its causality… does not depend, according to a

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59 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 108, B110
60 Please not that saying “one does not have control” is different from saying “one cannot have control.” The issue of causal spontaneity deals with whether one does/does not have control, whereas the issue of practical freedom deals with whether one can/cannot have control.
law of nature, on another cause, by which it is determined in time." Notice the dialectical nature of causal spontaneity; the category of cause and effect was always meant to relate two entities, and yet here the category relates an entity to itself. With causal spontaneity, the causal relation of an entity cannot be understood except in a self-referential manner. We begin to think that Kant might be speaking gibberish; it seems implausible that a moral agent could actually become causally spontaneous and cause himself!

The question of how one can avoid external causality altogether appears to be even more implausible after considering our everyday experience of the category. While the category of cause and effect is not reducible to phenomenal judgments, our most basic conception of cause and effect comes from schematization. Imagine one billiards ball smacking into another. From past experience, we know that whenever this billiard ball collision occurs, one billiard ball transfers kinetic energy to the other. We say that the collision event causes the kinetic-energy-transfer event. If two billiard balls collide, then there will be a transfer of kinetic energy. As humans, we are intimately familiar with this sort of phenomenal cause and effect relationship. Without invoking judgments of causality, we have no opportunity to make sense of everyday experience.

As one might imagine, we are forced to establish cause/effect relations on ourselves in order to make sense of our experiences; as Kant argues, every event (insofar as we can investigate its causality) has an empirical cause. This idea promotes the doctrine of phenomenal determinism, which would seem to diminish the possibility of freedom. As I stated in the

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61 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 463, B561/A533
62 I am here using dialectical in the manner proposed by Paul Tillich, not in the manner proposed by Kant: “In a dialectical description one element of a concept drives to another.”
63 It might be tempting to think that the solution to our current problem might depend on the time traveling paradox where a man becomes his own father. However, that wouldn’t help us, because a past self is not a present self. When a man becomes his own father, he still forfeits control of his present self to a past self. Kant requires an atemporal (or immediate?) self-causation.
64 The pure concept of cause and effect is actually unrelated to our intuitions, except via schematization
introduction, causal spontaneity is always limited by this empirical barrier: the predictive power of phenomenal determinism. And yet, Kant does not think that phenomenal determinism entirely destroys the possibility of causal spontaneity. In order to understand why phenomenal determinism does not obliterate any chance for self-causation, we must understand precisely how the doctrine of phenomenal determinism comes about. Only then can we understand Kant’s wily escape from the clutches of phenomenal determinism, and his conception of causal spontaneity.

To expand upon my position, I will break my argument down into several sections. First, I will explain the problem: Kant’s view of phenomenal determinism. Then I will explicate Kant’s solution to the problem of determinism as postulated in the Critique of Pure Reason; this will include the third antinomy of pure reason, and the introduction of causal spontaneity via the intelligible cause.

Kant’s doctrine of Causal Determinism amongst Appearances

I start by explicating Kant’s doctrine of the thorough-going determinism of appearances, in order that we might understand how Kant salvages causal spontaneity from the clutches of determinism (Kant will argue that the category of causation only applies to the appearance of things). Until we have fully explicated the doctrine of phenomenal determinism, though, the rescue attempt seems daunting.

To easily understand Kant’s doctrine of phenomenal determinism, one need only start with a basic scientific attitude. When we look at the world around us, we want to know why things occur the way that they do. But this quest to find the cause of everything goes too far. As scientists, we can never escape the determination of appearances in time, and thus the question of “why?” always haunted our empirical enquiries. Kant writes:

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65 I’m using the word “scientific” loosely here.
If you suppose that everything that happens in the world is nothing but a result according to the laws of nature, then the causality of the cause will always in turn be something that happens; and this causality thus necessitates a regress to a still higher cause, and therefore necessitates a continuation of the series of conditions a parte priori without end. Mere causally active nature, therefore, is too large for any concept in the synthesis of events in the world.

If you admit, in certain cases, spontaneously caused events, therefore generation from freedom, then by an unavoidable law of nature the question, Why?, still pursues you, and you are forced by the empirical law of causality to go beyond this point; and thus you find that any such totality of connection is too small for your necessary empirical concept.\textsuperscript{66}

From a scientific point of view, the incessant desire to know why things happen might not be so bad. And yet, when we examine ourselves as moral agents, Kant’s deterministic view forces us to ask “why” events unfold in the way which they do. We find, through this analysis, that our actions have efficient causes, which necessarily determine our actions even before they occur.

The doctrine of phenomenal determinism might prove troubling for ethicists, but Kant attempts to prove it nonetheless. Kant supports his view of phenomenal determinism through an elegant argument with three steps.

1. Proof of Synthetic Unity of the Manifold of Appearances
2. Analogies of Experiences must be used as Regulative Ideals
3. The Analogy of Succession and Causal Determinism

In the first step of his argument for causal determinism among appearances, Kant argues that there must be a synthetic unity of the manifold of apperception.\textsuperscript{67} It is this principle upon which Kant’s argument rests entirely: Kant calls it the “supreme principle of all use of the understanding.”\textsuperscript{68}

To the human understanding [the synthetic unity of the manifold of apperception] is, indeed, the first principle, and is so indispensable that our understanding cannot even form the least of any other possible understanding,

\textsuperscript{66} Critique of Pure Reason, pg 435, B516/A488
\textsuperscript{67} In common English, the synthetic unity of the manifold of perceptions is the idea that each human experience is part of one cohesive and phenomenal whole, which might be called the “self,” the “I think,” or the ego.
\textsuperscript{68} Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 129, B136
whether it would intuit by itself or be in possession of an underlying sensible intuition, though one that would be different in kind from that is space and time.69

To show evidence for the “supreme principle of the understanding,” Kant utilizes a *sine qua non* argument; if there were no synthetic unity of the manifold of apperception, there could be no analytic unity of the manifold of apperception. But without the analytic unity of the manifold of apperception, the self would be unable to think of general concepts, and we could not formulate a coherent view of the world at all. Thus if one wishes to deny the synthetic unity of the manifold of apperception, one also must deny the coherency of rational experience. Kant first argues that the principle of the synthetic unity of the manifold of experience is possible:

> It must be possible for the **I think** to accompany all my representations: for otherwise something would be represented within me that could not be thought at all, in other words, the representation would either be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. That representation which can be given prior to all thought is **intuition**, and all the manifold of intuition has, therefore, a necessary relation to the **I think** in the same subject in which this manifold of intuition is found… What I mean is that, as my representations (even though I am not conscious of them as that), they must conform to the condition under which alone they can stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not one and all belong to me.70

Having shown that we must at least allow the possibility of a synthetic unity of the manifold of apperception, he goes on to show that we cannot accept an analytic unity of the manifold of apperception without also accepting the synthetic unity of the manifold of apperception:

> Only because I am able to combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness is it possible for me to represent to myself the identity of the consciousness in these representations, that is, only under the presupposition of some synthetic unity of the apperception is the analytic unity of apperception possible.71

Because there can be no coherent experience without the analytic unity of the manifold of apperception, Kant concludes that there must be a synthetic unity of the manifold of

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69 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 133, B139  
70 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 124-125, B132-B133  
71 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 126, B134
apperception. The ramifications of this are astounding, but the alternative is untenable. Either we admit that experience is incoherent, or we admit that experience (and therefore our perceptions) can be represented in a coherent and objective manner. Kant writes:

In experience perceptions come together only contingently, so that no necessity of their connection could be discovered in the perceptions themselves. For apprehension is only a composition of the manifold of empirical intuition, but contains no representation of the necessity of the connected existence, in space and time, of the appearances which it combines. Experience, on the contrary, is a knowledge of objects through perceptions. And so in experience the relation in the existence of the manifold is to be represented, not as the manifold composed in time, but as it is objectively in time. Now, as time itself cannot be perceived, the determination of the existence of objects in time can take place only through combining them in time in general, that is, through concepts connecting them a priori. As these concepts always carry necessity with them, we are justified in saying that experience is possible only through a representation of the necessary connection of perceptions.72

From the principle of the synthetic unity of the manifold of perception, the position which implies that perceptions can be strung together in time with an objective ordering, Kant proceeds to show that the analogies of experience are necessary regulative ideals.

In the second step of his argument, Kant is ready to show that there are certain regulative ideals which govern the use of the understanding. These regulative ideals are the principles of permanence, succession, and community. For our purposes, we will be most interested in the principle of succession, which relates to causality.

So far, Kant has used a sine qua non argument to show that our perceptions must be founded in a synthetic unity. Yet in order to accept that unity, considering the variety of experiences held within the manifold, we must determine those experiences in time. And if we are to determine our experiences in time, we must have three tools at our disposal: the concepts of permanence, succession, and simultaneity. Without the analogy of permanence, we would be

72 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 203, B219/A177
unable to see any continuity between different temporal experiences.\textsuperscript{73} Without the analogy of succession, we would be unable to reconcile different time experiences of a single thing.\textsuperscript{74} And without the analogy of simultaneity, we would be unable to reconcile experience of multiple entities at any given time.\textsuperscript{75} These principles, however, are not infallible. Kant argues that the analogies of experience are merely regulative ideals. Kant writes:

An analogy of experience can therefore be no more than a rule whereby unity of experience may arise from perceptions (but not telling us how perception itself, as empirical intuition in general, may arise). This analogy may be valid for objects (that is, appearances), not in a constitutive way, but only in a regulative way.\textsuperscript{76}

Taken as regulative ideals, the analogies of experience do not extend to the noumenal realm; that is, the analogies of experience do not tell us anything about things in themselves. Instead, the regulative ideals are only useful for empirical investigations, or \textit{a posteriori} reasoning. While the analogies of experience do not allow a deeper understanding of things in themselves, the analogies of experience do allow humans to understand their experience coherently. The analogies of experience regulate the human ability to merge logical concepts with the empirical realm via schemata. Kant writes:

These analogies have their meaning and validity not as principles of the transcendental, but as only as principles of the empirical use of the understanding. They can be established only in this character, and appearances must therefore be subsumed not directly under the categories, but only under their schemata. For if the objects to which these principles are to be referred were things in themselves, it would be perfectly impossible to know anything of them synthetically a priori. But they are nothing but appearances, and a complete knowledge of them, which,

\textsuperscript{73} For instance, without the principle of permanence, we would be unable to recognize the idea of a substance: no connection needs to be drawn between a block of iron in one moment and a block of iron experienced in the next moment. With the principle of substance, we can recognize the block of iron as a single entity.

\textsuperscript{74} For instance, without the principle of succession, we would be unable to reconcile the fact that a permanent thing, such as Bob, grew older with time. For without the principle of succession, we would merely experience an old Bob and a young Bob, clearly two different things.

\textsuperscript{75} For instance, without the principle of simultaneity, we would be unable to recognize the concurrence of two individuals. Though Bob and Jane are two individuals existing at the same time, we could not recognize them as separate without the analogy of simultaneity.

\textsuperscript{76} Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 205-206, B222-B224/A180-A181
after all, all a priori principles must lead to, is simply our possible experience. Those principles, therefore, can aim at nothing but the conditions of the unity of empirical knowledge in the synthesis of appearances… These principles will therefore authorize us to combine appearances only by analogy with the logical and universal unity of concepts. 77

Having now established the role of the analogies of experience, Kant is finally ready to explicate the analogy of succession and argue for causal determinism amongst appearances.

The third step in Kant’s argument for causal determinism among appearances is to show that there can be no objective and coherent concept of reality without a thoroughgoing doctrine of causal determinism among appearances. If we were unable to use the analogy of succession, there would be no determinate ordering to our experiences. Events could occur just as easily forwards as backwards. 78 In order to give our experiences an objective and coherent quality, we use the analogy of succession to give our experiences a time determination. Kant writes:

I perceive that appearances succeed one another, that is, that there is a state of things at one time the opposite of which existed in a previous state. I am therefore really connecting two perceptions in time. Connection is not the work of the mere sense and of intuition, but is here the product of a synthetic power of the faculty of imagination, which determines inner sense with respect to relations of time. Imagination, however, can connect these two states in two ways, so that either the one or the other precedes in time: for time cannot be perceived in itself, nor can what precedes or what follows in the object be determined empirically, as it were, with reference to time… In other words, the objective relation of appearances following upon one another remains undetermined through mere perception. 79

Because there is no inherent ordering to the events of experience, the human understanding must supplement those experiences with the concept of causality. Certainly humans do experience events only in one ordering, and so there must be some way in which this ordering is achieved. According to Kant, the ordering of experiences is subject to the analogy of succession:

77 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 206, B224/A181
78 Or perhaps events could occur completely out of order if there were no principle of causality.
79 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 212-213, B233-234
In order that this objective relation may be known as determined, the relation between the two states must be thought in such a way that it determines as necessary which of the two [experiences] should be placed before and which after, and not conversely. Such a concept, involving a necessity of synthetic unity, can only be a pure concept of the understanding, which is not contained in perception. In this case, it is the concept of the relation of cause and effect, the former determining the latter in time, as the consequence, not as something that might precede only in imagination (or might not be perceived at all).⁸⁰

Having established that every experience is subject to a time determination via the analogy of succession, Kant strives to bring his point home. He concludes:

Experience itself, therefore, that is, an empirical knowledge of appearances, is possible only by our subjecting the succession of appearances, and with it all alteration, to the law of causality; and appearances themselves, as objects of experience, are consequently possible only in accordance with this law.⁸¹

Because all appearances are subject to the law of time determination, it follows that no experience can escape the law of causality. Insofar as we are attentive to our experiences, insofar as we go searching for a cause, this cause must always exist. The existence of this cause, as a rule, is not merely an empirical fact, but embedded in pure reason itself; not because the cause exists in itself, but because all appearances must conform to the laws of causality. While we cannot determine a priori the content of any given cause and effect, the formal conditions of causality are given a priori by the synthetic unity of the manifold; and once these formal conditions have been recognized, the law of causality cannot be denied:

If, then, it is a necessary law of our sensibility, and therefore a formal condition of all perceptions, that a preceding time necessarily determines the succeeding time (because I cannot arrive at the succeeding time except through the preceding one), then it is also an indispensible law of the empirical representation of the series of time that the appearances of past time determine every existence in succeeding time; and that these existences, as events, cannot take place except insofar as the appearances of past time determine their existence in time, that is, fix it by a rule.⁸²

⁸⁰ Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 213, B234/A189
⁸¹ Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 213, B234/A189
⁸² Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 219, B244/A199
Yet again, Kant is careful to distinguish his doctrine of phenomenal determinism from noumenal determinism. Kant adamantly argues that the analogy of succession is valid for all appearances:

The principle of the causal relation in the succession of appearances is valid, therefore, also for all objects of experience (under the conditions of succession), because that principle is itself the ground of the possibility of such experience.  

Yet while the analogy of succession is valid for all appearances, its validity can be taken no further. As a regulative ideal, the analogy of succession does not actually tell us anything about things in themselves, but only about how those things will appear. The principle of causality is valid only in relation to appearances. Kant’s final position on the matter of causality is clear: each effect can only appear to come about due to a homogenous cause. If an effect can about due to a foreign cause, then it would destroy the unity of experience. Any appearance must be a mere alteration of what came before it; never can true creation be witnessed, lest that creation destroy the rules which govern our senses. Kant writes:

If such an origin is looked upon as the effect of a foreign cause, it is called creation. This can never be admitted as an event among appearances, because its very possibility would destroy the unity of experience. If, however, we consider all things not as phenomena but as things in themselves and as objects merely of the understanding, then despite their being substances they can be considered as dependent, with regard to their existence, on a foreign cause. Our words would then assume a quite different meaning, and no longer be applicable to appearances, as possible objects of experience.

As far as Kant is concerned, phenomenal determinism as a concept is completely supported. At the very least, Kant’s argument puts the ball in his opponent’s court; Kant has made the argument that every appearance appears to have an efficient cause (when we go looking for it). To prove him wrong, his opponents would either have to deny that the phenomenal realm has a

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83 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 221, B247/A202
84 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 224, B251-B252/A206
synthetic unity to it (without which there would be no experience) or find an appearance which
does not appear to be caused (which is absurd).

Thus in three simple steps, Kant is able to show that the phenomenal realm is subject to a
thoroughgoing causal determinism. There must be a synthetic unity of the manifold of
apperception; otherwise there cannot be any coherent experience. If there is a synthetic manifold
of apperception, we need to use the analogies of experience as regulative ideals to make our
perceptions coherent. The principle of succession is the second of three analogies, which enables
a human to properly order his perceptions. Yet in accepting the use of the principle of
succession, the human is forced to look for cause in every perception; if the principle of
succession is accepted as necessary for experience, the law of phenomenal causality necessarily
follows just the same.

Through this argument for phenomenal determinism, we see that Kant has set up a trap
for himself. In hoping to ensnare other philosophers in his argument, Kant has presented a very
juicy piece of meat: the *a priori* possibility of a coherent experience. No rational being could
resist the allure of such a treat! Kant does not pretend to resist the pull of his own argument; he is
drawn inevitably into the iron-jawed maw of his doctrine of phenomenal determinism. Upon his
conclusion, Kant rejoices! Each can enjoy the coherency of his own experience without pause!
And yet, once he has glutted himself on the treat, only then does Kant realize that he has become
trapped by his own argument. As it turns out, Kant is worried that the argument for causal
determinism might endanger freedom. Kant believes that humans can overcome their
inclinations, that is, attain some measure of control over their actions. And yet, it would seem
that Kant has just proved that humans *cannot* overcome their inclinations. It would seem that
Kant has just proved that humans are always externally conditioned, and therefore lacking in
self-control. What previously moral agents had cognized as sensible coercion is actually sensible force! Only after getting ensnared in his own trap does Kant realize how constraining his position is; I imagine Kant giving out a long low cry upon this realization, much like a wounded animal caught in a snare who has just realized his bondage.

Never fear, though. The Kant is a wily animal, and it may be that he has left himself one loophole with which to escape from his own trap. As we saw by tracing Kant’s argument from start to finish, phenomenal determinism is based on regulative ideals, and accordingly does not imply anything about things in themselves. Kant has not given up hope that he might yet answer the question “how can I avoid external causation?” The next section will investigate Kant’s attempt to reconcile his doctrine of phenomenal determinism with the concept of causal spontaneity.

**The Third Antinomy of Pure Reason – Spontaneity vs. Causality**

Throughout his proof of causal determinism, Kant consistently affirms that phenomenal determinism does not affect the noumenal realm in any way. The perceptions which we form of ourselves need not constitute how we actually are in ourselves. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Kant insists that humans might be free, despite any protests of pathological necessitation. In attempting to avoid the necessitation of phenomenal determinism, Kant introduces an idea which has long been an aspect of traditional metaphysics: the idea of spontaneity. Spontaneity is freedom “in its cosmological meaning,” which is reminiscent of Aristotle’s unmoved mover and Aquinas’ first cause. Normally these descriptions have been applied to a supreme being, and yet Kant thinks the description might have ramifications for moral agents.

Generally, spontaneity is the opposite of causality: something is spontaneous when nothing precedes it. Kant thinks that absolute spontaneity (i.e. to be completely without a cause)
is absurd. However, while absolute spontaneity might be absurd, the moral agent still might aspire to “self-causation.” One is self caused when nothing exterior to the individual causes the individual. To differentiate Kant’s position from absolute spontaneity, I adopt the phrase “causal spontaneity.” The phrase “causal spontaneity” might seem nonsensical; after all, the phrase is a union of two opposing predicates. However the phrase is well suited to its descriptive task: causal spontaneity is causal, insofar as it is self-caused, and spontaneous insofar as it is not caused by anything exterior to itself. In this manner, the phrase “causal spontaneity” captures the essence of the dialectical\(^85\) relation of freedom. Causality is one of the dynamic categories, which means that cause/effect statements relate two different entities. As per the objective of this section, we are attempting to show how a moral agent might escape all external causation, and Kant’s response to this question is causal spontaneity.

Kant defines something as causally spontaneous when “its causality… does not depend, according to a law of nature, on another cause, by which it is determined in time.”\(^86\) This definition brings forth two questions; first, Kant has already shown that appearances are deterministic and subject to causality. Does it not follow that causal spontaneity could never be found within human experience? And second, supposing that causal spontaneity is beyond the realm of possible experience, does that imply that causal spontaneity is impossible?

With regards to the first question, Kant argues that no, humans cannot experience causal spontaneity. Insofar as we are observers, the world will always appear to be deterministic. Kant’s argument for this position is well laid out by his arguments regarding causal determinism amongst appearances. If humans claim to have a coherent experience of the world, then they must accept that causal determinism among appearances obtains.

\(^{85}\) Again, dialectical here implies self-referential, as per the Tillichian definition.

\(^{86}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 463, B561/A533
However, as Kant turns to the second question, he concludes that causal spontaneity is not impossible, even if causal spontaneity could never be found in experience. Notice that Kant does not intend to prove that causal spontaneity is possible; rather he intends to show the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity. When it comes to ludicrous ideas such as causal spontaneity, Kant humbly sets his sights low. Kant writes:

It should be clearly understood, that in what we have said, we had no intention of establishing the reality of [causal spontaneity], as one of the faculties which contain the cause of the appearances of our world of sense… It was not even our intention to prove the possibility of [causal spontaneity]; for in this, too, we should not have succeeded, because from mere a priori concepts we cannot know the possibility of any real ground or any causality. We have treated [causal spontaneity] only as a transcendental idea, which makes reason imagine that it can absolutely begin the series of conditions in appearances through the sensibly unconditioned; but here reason becomes involved in an antinomy with its own laws, the laws which it prescribes to the empirical use of the understanding. That this antinomy rests on a mere illusion, and that nature does not conflict with the causality of freedom, this was the only thing which we were able to show, and cared to show.\(^7\)

To hope to prove that causal spontaneity is possible would be fool-hardy: proving that causal spontaneity is possible would seem to imply that it could be met with in some possible experience. Rather, Kant merely attempts to prove the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity; that is, causal spontaneity cannot be ruled out a priori through the principle of non-contradiction. To show that causal spontaneity is non-impossible, Kant must examine the third antinomy of pure reason. In Kant’s thought, an antinomy is an unavoidable conflict of reason which occurs when the understanding attempts to extend itself beyond possible experience. In investigating the third antinomy, Kant finds that causal spontaneity is decidedly not-impossible.

The third antinomy of pure reason can be summarized in the following way: oftentimes philosophers have attempted to argue that the fundamental reality underlying all experience is

\(^7\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 478, B585-B586/A557-558. Kant uses the word freedom ambiguous in this quotation, though he is obviously intending the causal spontaneity mode of freedom in this instance.
either deterministic or spontaneous in nature; Kant thinks that these philosophers have fallen into a logical trap (which he calls an “antinomy”) which occurs when individuals attempt to understand things outside of appearance. Pure reason seemingly finds a contradiction between causal determinism and freedom: both seem to be proved by contradiction. Suppose that causal spontaneity is necessary in order to explain the world as it is; yet almost by definition, this is a contradiction because causal spontaneity in itself cannot be properly explained. By its very definition, causal spontaneity is that which is not subject to natural law, and consequently causal spontaneity is incomprehensible to human rationality. From this argument, Kant concludes that the concept of causal spontaneity cannot be used to explain the world as it is. On the other hand, denying causal spontaneity is just as bad: reason can make no better sense out of an infinite chain of efficient causes. If an infinite chain of efficient causes is posited, the chain of efficient causes is never actually complete. Thus the infinite chain explains the world no better than causal spontaneity. It would seem that neither causal spontaneity, nor an infinite chain of causes, can help the human rationalize experience. As Kant describes it, this conundrum is the third antinomy of pure reason.

In his examination of the antinomies of pure reason, Kant argues that the whole problem comes from reason’s attempt to extend human understanding beyond experience. Reason takes one of the categories (e.g. causality), which apply to all possible experience, and then attempts to apply that category to those things which transcend our experience. Yet once this attempt is adopted, reason finds itself in a contradiction. In the case of causality, either a series of efficient causes extends upward towards infinity (in which case the series of causes finds no totality), or the series of efficient causes terminates with a spontaneous cause (in which case the series

88 Adherence to laws is a criterion for rational explanation, in Kant’s view. See my section on autonomy.
cannot be explained, except via the spontaneity of its first cause, which is really no explanation at all).

Reason [attempts to extend the understanding beyond the limits of experience] by demanding, for a given conditioned, absolute totality on the side of the conditions (under which the understanding subjects all appearances to synthetic unity). It thus changes the category into transcendental idea, in order to give absolute completeness to the empirical synthesis, and does so by continuing it up to the unconditioned (which can never be met in the experience, but only in the idea). Reason makes this demand in accordance with the principle that if the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and therefore the absolutely unconditioned (through which alone the conditioned was possible) is also given. Hence the transcendental ideas [e.g. a first cause] are, firstly, simply categories extended up to the unconditioned.89

The extension of a category beyond the limits of possible experience is quite practical, as Kant will later say. Yet Kant firmly argues that this extension cannot be maintained dogmatically. In extending itself beyond experience, reason asserts as conclusion that which ought to have been a presupposition. For instance, if we are given the middle term in a series of conditions, it might be tempting (and perhaps quite practical) to presuppose the conditions prior to that middle term, but those terms do not follow conclusively from the middle term of the series. Kant writes:

… since consequences do not render their conditions possible, but rather presuppose them, we can, in proceeding to the consequences (or in descending from the given condition to the conditioned), be unconcerned about whether or not the series comes to an end, and the question as to the totality of this series is, indeed, no presupposition of reason at all.90

While this critique of cosmological ideas can be applied to numerous problems, our particular interest lies in the problem of causality and freedom. As Kant argues, reason inevitably attempts to extend causal chains regressively beyond the realm of possible experience, and when this occurs, reason falls into the third antinomy of pure reason.

89 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 380, B436/A409
90 Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 380-381, B437/A410
Kant’s solution to the antinomies of pure reason is to reject the transcendental use of the categories. Rather than attempt to agree with one side or the other, Kant compares the contest to a bout between two knights: in our case, the knight of freedom and the knight of determinism. These knights are fierce in their attacks, but because they engage one another in unsure terrain, each attack is devastating. Kant writes:

Hence vigorous knights, whether fighting for the good or the bad cause, are sure to win their laurels, even if they ensure that they have the right to make the last attack, and are not obliged to withstand a new onslaught of the enemy. We can easily imagine that this arena has often been entered, and that many victories have been won on both sides, but that the last decisive victory is always guarded by the defined of the good cause maintaining his place, by forbidding his opponent ever to carry arms again.\(^9\)

With this statement, Kant is unabashedly critiquing all those who would forbid their opponents to carry arms, the so called dogmatists. In a contest where the knight to strike the last blow is crowned the victor, Kant believes that neither knight ought to be crowned victorious. For this reason, Kant urges the skeptical method.\(^9\)\(^2\) Certainly, from the standpoint of pure reason, we must maintain our impartiality between these two knights, as it appears that pure reason favors neither one nor the other. Rather than interfere, Kant suggests that we fulfill our role as arbitrators and allow the valiant knights to duke it out. There is always the hope that the knights will grow tired of their ceaseless battles. Kant writes:

As impartial judges, we must take no account of whether it be the good or the bad cause which the contestants defend. It is best to let them fight it out between themselves in the hope that, after they have tired out rather than injured each other, they may themselves perceive the uselessness of their quarrel, and part as good friends.\(^9\)\(^3\)

Eventually, in Kant’s resolution of the antinomies, the bout is declared a tie. In the case of the mathematical antinomies, which do not concern us here, the bout is settled in favor of neither

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\(^{9\text{i}}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 389, B450-B451/A423
\(^{9\text{ii}}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 389, B451/A424
\(^{9\text{iii}}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 389, B451/A423
knight. But in the dynamical antinomies (e.g. the bout between the knight of freedom and the knight of determinism), the bout can be settled in favor of both knights.\textsuperscript{94} Where the mathematical antinomies must reject both sides of the argument, the dynamical antinomies can hold both sides of the argument with skepticism. Kant concludes that the idea of causal spontaneity is not impossible, though unable to be proved either way.

At this point, Kant congratulates himself; he believes that he has proved the doctrine of phenomenal determinism \textit{and} has also proved the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity. But what has Kant bought for all of his troubles? At the moment, the conclusions seem meager. As Kant points out himself, he has not even proven the mere \textit{possibility} of causal spontaneity.

Let us not despair however; we shall see that even the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity is essential to Kant’s view of morality in the next section. For now, however, we need to examine what else Kant is willing to conclude about causal spontaneity. There are two points to be made: First, causal spontaneity is the concept of self-causation, and utilizes the concept of intelligible causes. Second, Kant’s introduction of the intelligible cause requires that the intelligible cause be entirely seamless to empirical observer.

The intelligible cause can be understood as follows: Each phenomenon has a noumenal entity associated with it, and this noumenal entity should properly be considered the cause of the phenomenal. Yet this causal relation (termed intelligible) is completely unlike the causal relation posited by efficient causality. The efficient cause establishes a relation between two homogenous entities (e.g. two phenomena); the intelligible cause posits a relationship between heteronomous entities (e.g. phenomena and noumenal). Kant writes:

\begin{quote}
If… appearances are taken for nothing except what they are in reality, namely, not for things in themselves but for mere representations connected with one another according to empirical laws, they must themselves have grounds
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{94} Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 461, B557-B558/A529-A530
which are not appearances. Such an intelligible cause, however, is not determined with reference to its causality by appearances, although its effects appear and can thus be determined by other appearances. This intelligible cause, therefore, together with its causality, is outside the series although its effects are to be found in the series of empirical conditions.\textsuperscript{95}

Once Kant has established the concept of an intelligible cause, it becomes clear where he is going. Kant wishes to show that the existence of intelligible causes does not undermine the predictive power of efficient causes. In no way does the existence of intelligible causes contradict what is known about efficient causes and phenomenal determinism. The two forms of causality run side by side. Kant writes:

\begin{quote}
In every subject of the world of sense we should have, firstly, an empirical character, through which its actions, as appearances, stand in thoroughgoing connection with other appearances, according to permanent laws of nature, and could be derived from these appearances as their conditions; and so in connection with those appearances these actions would form the members of one and the same series in the order of nature. Secondly, we should also have to allow it also an intelligible character, through which, it is true, the subject becomes the cause of the same actions as appearances, but which itself is not subject to any conditions of sensibility and is not itself appearance. We might call the former the character of such a thing in appearance, and the latter the character of the thing in itself.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

I like to think of Kant’s description of intelligible causes and efficient causes as a theory of “dual causation.” Kant merely advocates the position that having a second form of causality (intelligible), running directly alongside the first (efficient), does not undermine the first at all. It is good to note, however, that the introduction of intelligible causes requires that intelligible causes be entirely seamless to empirical observation.

To this end, Kant reiterates over and over the idea that efficient causes and intelligent causes must act in harmony to determine appearances as we see them. To assert otherwise would undermine Kant’s proof of phenomenal determinism. Imagine if an intelligible cause actually

\textsuperscript{95} Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 465-466, B564-B565/A536-A537
\textsuperscript{96} Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 467, B567/A539
broke through the deterministic chains of efficient causes! Surely we would recognize this, a clear violation of Kant’s position on phenomenal determinism. Kant writes:

… freedom and nature, each in complete significance of its term, would exist together and without conflict in the same actions, according to whether we refer these actions to their intelligible or to their sensible cause.  

For the proof of the intelligible cause, Kant is playing yet again on the non-impossibility factor. All Kant can show is that the idea of the intelligible cause is not contrary to a priori principles of the understanding. To this end, Kant attempts to pass off the idea of an intelligible cause as requiring very few assumptions (notice below how he qualifies the proposition with phrases like “though it be mere fiction”). But simultaneous to Kant’s apologetic stance, Kant is very clear on one point: the effects of any intelligible cause must be seamlessly integrated into the nexus of efficient causes:

An original action, by which something takes place that did not exist before, cannot be expected from the causal connection of appearances.
But is it really necessary that, if effects are appearances, the causality of their cause, which cause itself is also appearance, could be nothing but empirical? Or is it not possible, although for every effect in appearance a connection with its cause, according to the laws of empirical causality, is certainly required, that the empirical causality itself could nevertheless, without breaking in the least its connection with the natural causes, be an effect of a non-empirical but intelligible causality; that is, of the action, original with respect to appearances, of a cause which is so far not appearance but, with respect to this faculty, intelligible, although it must also, as a link in the chain of nature, be regarded as entirely belonging to the world of sense? … The understanding would not be wronged in the least if we assumed, though it be mere fiction, that among the natural causes come have a faculty which is only intelligible, inasmuch as its determination to action never rests on empirical conditions, but on mere grounds of the understanding, and rests on these grounds in such a way that the action of this cause in appearance is in accordance with all the laws of empirical causality. \(^98\)

And yet again, Kant reinforces the way in which determinism and freedom can coexist in harmony:

\(^{97}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 468, B569/A541. Italics added for emphasis
\(^{98}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 470-471, B572-B573/A544-A545. Italics added for emphasis.
Our problem was, whether freedom is in conflict with natural necessity in one and the same action; and this we have sufficiently answered by showing that freedom may have relation to a very different kind of conditions from those of natural necessity, so that the law of the latter does not affect the former, and the two may exist independently of, and undisturbed by, each other.\textsuperscript{99}

I hope that the above quotations thoroughly show Kant’s commitment to the harmony between efficient and intelligible causality. Playing with the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity, it would seem that Kant is clutching at straw. And yet, though Kant might appear to be betting on a losing horse, he has found a way to rigidly maintain his doctrine of phenomenal determinism, and also posit the existence of causal freedom.

At this point, I would like to take a moment to summarize what we have found with regards to causal spontaneity. The concept of causal spontaneity came up in response to the question “if I am caused, how can I have control over myself?” As humans, we see ourselves as the effect of a long chain of efficient causes extending into the past. We don’t want to be necessitated by this form of causality, for that would render us helpless. We would like to be spontaneous, or failing that, at least self-caused. The idea of being self-caused is a dialectical concept; it is self-referential and foreign to our normal schematization of causality. Yet if self-caused, we would not forfeit control over ourselves to an external condition. Kant plays upon our fears of pathological necessitation by proving a doctrine of phenomenal determinism; he shows that we could never experience causal spontaneity, for all experiences are subject to the category of causality. And yet, Kant also attempts to alleviate our fear of phenomenal determinism by showing the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity. In investigating the third antinomy of pure reason, Kant argues that causal spontaneity might exist beyond the realm of possible experience, or more accurately, is non-impossible beyond the realm of possible experience. To bring the non-impossibility of causal spontaneity to its full conclusion, Kant posits the existence of intelligible

\textsuperscript{99} Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 478, B585/A557. Italics added for emphasis.
causes, which connect the noumenal realm to the phenomenal realm. Intelligible causes must act in harmony with efficient causes, but supposing this condition is met, intelligible causes are entirely non-impossible. While intelligible causes are entirely unobservable (what I call empirically seamless), their non-impossibility might hold the key to the idea of self-causation.

In the next section we examine another mode of freedom, the mode of autonomy. We will see whether Kant can make the mere non-impossibility of causal spontaneity into a meaningful concept; we will see whether Kant was actually able to resuscitate freedom after the blow of phenomenal determinism.
Autonomy

I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.  

Paul’s words illustrate one dimension of the moral law: that of restrictiveness. The restrictive dimension of the law is what causes the sensation of alienation between an individual’s conscience and inclinations. When Paul’s persona first encounters the moral law, he senses a noose closing about his neck, which causes him to fight against the constrictive power of the law. Upon realizing that the law would restrain passion, Paul’s persona experiences “every kind of coveting” and “sin sprang to life.” Yet the restrictive dimension of the law does more than merely foster desire: it convinces moral agents to deny their own practical freedom. Paul’s persona feels trapped by restrictive nature of the moral law.

In his more charitable moments, Kant is willing to admit that the experience of restrictedness is always present in an individual’s relation to the moral law. Kant describes the law as a “yoke” which moral agents must bear in opposition to their own desires. The yoke of the law is heavy, and bears down on those who are willing to shoulder the burden. Kant believes that the burdensome nature of the law is mitigated, at least in part, by the fact that it is imposed by reason itself, yet he does not deny its burdensome nature: he states “though [the yoke of the law] is a mild one, because reason itself imposes it on us,” it is still a yoke which we must “bear,

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100 Romans 7: 7-11
101 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 208
In this respect, Kant admits that the moral agent will always maintain an uneasy relationship with the law at best. The moral law does not provide comfort or happiness by necessity. Kant writes: “no necessary connection of happiness with virtue in the world, adequate to the highest good, can be expected from the most meticulous observances of moral laws.”

Yet while Kant admits that the moral law has restrictive dimensions, Kant likes to emphasize the radically liberating dimensions of the law. The persona presented by Paul in Romans 7 is unable to cognize practical freedom, as it has been handed to him, and Kant believes this to be a major mistake. Just as humans are subject to moral law, they can also find a strange sort of liberty within morality, if they just have courage to become legislators of the moral law. The reason that Paul’s persona finds the moral law so incredibly restrictive is because it is an externally imposed obligation. Certainly, if one views Kant’s position on the categorical imperative as a way to restrict human action by use of principle and an external commandment, it becomes oppressive. Yet Kant himself opposes any morality which relies purely on formulas and precepts. In his famous essay What is Enlightenment?, Kant dares his audience “Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding!” As he sees it, humans cannot be free unless they are willing to emerge from their own “self-incurred minority.” To this end, the autonomous moral agent should not accept any formula or principle unless he could find the truth of that statement within himself. Kant states:

Precepts and formulas, those mechanical instruments of rational use, or rather misuse, of [man’s] natural endowments, are the ball and chain of an everlasting minority.

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102 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 208
103 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 231
104 PP, An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?” pg. 17. Sapere Aude! means “dare to be wise!”
105 PP, An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?” pg. 17.
106 PP, An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?” pg. 17.
Kant clearly places a premium on the legislative role of moral agency. Moral agents must be free to come up with the moral law by themselves. If moral agents were incapable of accessing the moral law as an objective truth, they would be confined to heteronomy. Yet, with just a little courage, moral agents can utilize the practical freedom which they have been endowed with in order to cognize the moral law in harmony with the need for autonomy. This premium which Kant places on autonomy is what leads him to state that autonomy is the “sole principle of all moral laws and of duties in keeping with them.”\textsuperscript{107} His system of morality is entirely bent on the liberation of the moral agent from his inclinations. Thus while there is a restrictive dimension to the moral law in Kant’s thought, there is also be a dimension of liberation within the moral law.

We now turn to an investigation of the concept of autonomy, which is essentially a formulation of the potential liberation created through the moral law. In order to comprehend the concept of autonomy, we must first understand how the idea of autonomy evolves out of causal spontaneity and practical freedom. Already in this paper we have introduced the idea of practical freedom, which raises the question “can humans be considered moral agents?” We were unable to answer the question without first examining causal spontaneity. In examining causal spontaneity, we found that the concept of self-causation via an intelligible cause is non-impossible. We said that an intelligible cause is one which relates a noumenal reality to a phenomenal reality; the idea of an intelligible cause was non-impossible because nothing could correspond to an intelligible cause in any possible experience, but that the idea of an intelligible cause was not incoherent beyond the realm of possible experience. Yet it remained to be seen whether anything fruitful could come from a mere non-impossibility.

Thus in considering the issue of causal spontaneity from the perspective of pure reason, Kant was forced to cast himself as a neutral judge. Insofar as Kant was acting from a neutral

\textsuperscript{107} PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg 166
perspective, he was unable to decide between the knight of freedom and the knight of determinism. Pure reason, which derived from the synthetic unity of the manifold, was unable to judge for or against human freedom. But now that the bout between the two knights has been declared a draw, Kant has fulfilled his role as neutral arbitrator, and is able to disengage himself from the perspective of pure reason. While pure reason was unable to find a champion amongst the two knights, *practical* reason easily awards the victory to the noble knight of freedom.

This ability to decide between the knight of freedom and the knight of determinism, which Kant calls orientation, is explored by Kant’s article *What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* Kant is opposed to anything which does not find a basis in reason because without reason humans are led into base enthusiasm. However, if pure reason ever finds itself unable to decide between two positions, reason allows itself to be oriented by convention. For instance, humans have an innate sense of left and right and this sense cannot be supported by pure reason. The direction humans think of as right could just as easily feel like the direction left. Yet because reason itself shows that the choice between left and right is outside of the sphere of pure reason, it is entirely reasonable for humans to trust their intuitions of left and right. Without being able to trust this intuition, humans would be disoriented and very confused. While humans can never assert dogmatically that their intuitions of left and right are correct, Kant finds it entirely reasonable for them to establish conventions off of their intuitions once they know that they are not contradicting any logical principle in doing so.

As we saw earlier, pure reason found that it could not decide between freedom and determinism. Given pure reason’s inability to decide between the two, Kant suggests that we orient ourselves towards freedom. To explain why practical reason wishes to declare the knight of freedom the winner, Kant accentuates the dangers which would have been involved *if the*
If the knight of determinism had won the bout and defeated the knight of freedom, Kant argues that morality would have become meaningless. The idea of practical freedom is that humans can be considered moral agents; and yet, without the possibility of causal spontaneity, practical freedom is incomprehensible. If the knight of determinism had won, and therefore humans were completely determined by their impulses, it would seem to follow that moral agents lacked determinative power, and therefore were not actually agents to begin with. Without agency, morality and moral imperatives wouldn’t make any sense! Kant writes:

> It can easily be seen that, if all causality in the world of sense were merely nature, every event would be determined in time through another, according to necessary laws. Since appearances, therefore, in determining the will, would render every action necessary as their natural effect, the removal of transcendental freedom would at the same time destroy all practical freedom. Practical freedom presupposes that, although something has not happened, it ought to have happened, and that the cause of this something in appearance, therefore, did not have the determining force which could prevent the causality of our will from producing, independently of those natural causes, and even contrary to their force and influence, something that in the order of time is determined according to empirical laws, and from originating a series of events entirely of itself.\(^{108}\)

Kant concludes that it is quite fortunate indeed that the knight of determinism did not win, as this would have voided morality. Of course, one must note that pure reason did not declare the knight of freedom as winner; rather, from the pure perspective, the knight of freedom lost just like the knight of determinism. And yet, Kant’s critical method allows us to utilize the draw between the knight of freedom and the knight of determinism to decide as we please.

Yet our description of how the concept of autonomy arises from the concepts of practical freedom and causal spontaneity provides no insight into what autonomy is, exactly. Autonomy might generally be defined as self-governance, but for Kant it goes far beyond such a simple

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\(^{108}\) Critique of Pure Reason, pg. 464, B562/A534
definition. The etymological roots of the word “autonomy” help us to understand exactly why the concept was so important for Kant, and indeed the rest of the enlightenment. Tillich writes:

“Autonomy” is not used in the sense of arbitrariness, of man making himself or deciding about himself in terms of his individual desires and arbitrary willfulness. Autonomy is derived from *autos* and *nomos* (self-law) in Greek. It does not say that “I am a law unto myself”, but that the universal law of reason, which is the structure of reality, is within me.\(^{109}\)

To understand why Kant advances this view of autonomy, we must begin with an examination of Kant’s view of rational thought. While Kant believes that everything in nature is subject to laws, he thinks that humans have a special status as rational creatures and can therefore represent laws to themselves in the form of principles. Kant writes:

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.\(^{110}\)

In their capacity to represent laws to themselves, humans engage in what Kant calls *practical reason*, or the derivation of actions from laws. Unlike animals, which are unaware of the laws which govern their actions, humans can recognize and change the principles which direct their action; humans can argue and debate with themselves about which formulas to use in order to decide upon the proper course of action.\(^{111}\) These formulas are called *imperatives*, which negotiate between objective laws and the subjective will:

Therefore *imperatives* are only formulae expressing the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, of the human will.\(^{112}\)

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\(^{109}\) A History of Christian Thought, Paul Tillich, pg. 289

\(^{110}\) PP, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 67

\(^{111}\) Of course observation shows that humans sometimes act without self-reflection (in which case they are acting like animals), but Kant’s argument again rests upon the idea of a “capacity:” humans are only humans insofar as they possess the capacity to act in accordance with self-governing principles.

\(^{112}\) PP, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 67
The imperative is a very special kind of statement, which only applies to humans with practical freedom; because humans are not necessitated by their impulses, they can follow objective laws of reason instead. Kant describes the two types of imperatives, which are derived from the structure of reason itself. Imperatives are either hypothetical or categorical:

Now all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of possible actions as a means to achieving something else that one wills (or that it is at least possible for one to will). The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end.

Hypothetical imperatives are those which express a means to an end, whereas the categorical imperative is one which is necessary in itself.

The difference between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is crucial; the distinction between the two governs all of Kant’s moral theory. At its basis, every will chooses to obey either categorical imperatives, hypothetical imperatives, or no imperatives at all. If the will is blissfully unaware of imperatives in general, the will is unprincipled, and therefore irrational and animalistic. Kant holds those who choose to base their maxims on hypothetical imperatives only slightly higher than the unprincipled, because the logical form of the hypothetical imperative reveals its own hedonistic motivations; hypothetical imperatives always take on the form “if A is most desirable, then take action B.” By its very form, the hypothetical imperative is always directed by what is most desirable, i.e. happiness. Thus, even if a moral agent escapes the bestiality of not adopting any moral principle, adopting a hypothetical imperative will not save him from the whims of fate, outward circumstance, and sensible inclinations. In sum, Kant

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113 Kant writes “All imperatives are expressed by an ought and indicate by this the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that by its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation).” (PP, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 66)

114 PP, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 67

115 I believe that there must be a distinction between those who adopt no principle (the unprincipled), and those who adopt a hypothetical principle as the basis of morality (presumably an adherent to consequentialism). While there is technically a distinction between the unprincipled and the consequentialists, Kant’s point is that the two groups are not directed by substantially different goals; one group merely pursues their ends more intelligently.
argues that one is still a slave to sense even when adopting a hypothetical imperative. Kant writes:

Now a rational being’s consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence is happiness, and the principle of making this the supreme determining ground of choice is the principle of self-love. Thus all material principles, which place the determining ground of choice in the pleasure or displeasure to be felt in the reality of some object, are wholly of the same kind insofar as they belong without exception to the principle of self-love or one’s own happiness.

Kant’s critique applies not only to base hedonists, but also those who enjoy the “higher pleasures” of life. As far as Kant is concerned, any philosopher who speaks of higher pleasures and lower pleasures is just deluding himself, because the higher pleasures and lower pleasures all address one thing ultimately: happiness. Even utilitarian arguments devolve into a sophisticated form of hedonism, according to Kant, because utilitarian principles are formulated only with regards to contingent circumstances, which seem desirable at one time or another, but never have a basis in reason:

Suppose that finite rational beings were thoroughly agreed with respect to what they had to take as objects of their feelings of pleasure and pain and even with respect to the means they must use to obtain the first and avoid the other; even then they could by no means pass off the principle of self-love as a practical law; for, this unanimity itself would still be only contingent. The determining ground would still be only subjectively valid and merely empirical and would not have that necessity which is thought in every law, namely objective necessity from a priori grounds, unless one had to say that this necessity is not practical at all but only physical, namely that the action is as unavoidably forced from us by our inclination as is yawning when we see others yawn.

As far as Kant is concerned, if humans are forced to develop moral laws on the basis of their own desires, or even the desires of their fellow man, then they retain not a scrap of autonomy within

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116 Kant uses the phrases “material principle” and “formal principle” to denote the ends of a moral law and the means of a moral law respectively.
117 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 156
118 Kant writes: “All material practical rules put the determining ground of the will in the lower faculty of desire, and were there no merely formal laws of the will sufficient to determine it, then neither could any higher faculty of desire be admitted.” (PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 156).
119 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 159-150
themselves because they are entirely conditioned by *a posteriori* reasoning. Kant concludes his tirade against hypothetical imperatives in the following way:

One cannot therefore act on determinate principles for the sake of being happy, but only on empirical counsels, for example, of a regimen, frugality, courtesy, reserve and so forth, which experience teaches are the most conducive to well-being on the average. From this it follows that imperatives of prudence cannot, to speak precisely, command at all, that is, present actions objectively as practically necessary; that they are to be taken as counsels rather than as commands of reason.\(^\text{120}\)

Given that hypothetical imperatives cannot “command at all,” Kant directs us to turn our attention towards categorical imperatives. The categorical imperative liberates the human from the conditions of sensibility by focusing on the command itself. If a command can be considered correct *a priori*, then the action which it commands is valuable in and of itself, thereby negating the pull of the results:

An action from duty has its moral worth not in the *purpose* to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon, and therefore does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action but merely upon the *principle of volition* in accordance with which the action is done without regard for any object of the faculty of desire.\(^\text{121}\)

By making a sharp contrast between the formal element of an imperative and the material element, Kant has dichotomized the human will into two classes: one which is conditioned by the whims of contingency, either by adopting hypothetical imperatives or being unprincipled, and the other which adopts categorical imperatives as the basis of morality. Kant describes this dichotomy between consequentialism and deontology in the following manner:

The will stands between its a priori principle, which is formal, and its a posteriori incentive, which is material, as at a crossroads; and since it must be determined by something, it must be determined by the formal principle of volition as such when an action is done from duty, where every material principle has been withdrawn from it.\(^\text{122}\)

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\(^{120}\) PP, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality*, pg. 71

\(^{121}\) PP, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality*, pg. 55

\(^{122}\) PP, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality*, pg. 55
The state of being wherein the formal principle of action is determined by duty is defined as the state of autonomy. When every material principle is removed from the consideration of the will, then and only then can a person be considered free from sensibility. Only by giving up all matters of choice to practical reason and the moral law can a person ever hope to escape the heteronomy of sensible impulses.

Our analysis of Kant’s view of human psychology has prepared us to examine his definition for moral autonomy. The definition is given in two parts, the negative and positive definition. The negative definition is this:

[Autonomy] consists in independence from all matter of the law (namely from a desired object) and at the same time in determination of choice through the mere form of giving universal law that a maxim must be capable of. That independence, however, is freedom in the negative sense…

The negative definition merely presents the moral agent as undetermined by the matter of hypothetical laws, and thereby resorting to categorical imperatives in conformity with the form of universal law. The positive definition of autonomy goes beyond the negative definition, and speaks of the moral agent in his role as law-giver:

… That independence, however, is freedom in the negative sense, whereas this lawgiving of its own on the part of pure and, as such, practical reason is freedom in the positive sense.

By this differentiation between the positive and negative sense of autonomy, Kant wishes to show autonomy in two manners. In one way, Kant wishes to show the moral agent as

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123 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 166
124 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 166, words bolded for emphasis
125 This differentiation between positive and negative views of autonomy will parallel the two perspectives position which Kant takes up later, which we reach through the idea of causal spontaneity. However, I argue that the positive and negative views of autonomy can be held dialectically (in the Hegelian sense) whereas the two perspectives position is inconsistent due to its scientific complications.
independent of sensibility. From the other perspective, Kant wishes to highlight the moral agent’s role as self-governor: the autonomous will is “lawgiving of its own.”

This differentiation between the positive and negative definition needs to be explicated further, and I will do this in a later section. However, for the time being, I will conclude this section by explaining why I have chosen to explicate practical freedom and autonomy as two separate entities in Kant’s writing, especially when Kant saw the two as being one and the same. Kant does state “a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same thing.”

However, I note that the two types of freedom have different definitions, and for the purposes of this paper, I will emphasize the definitions as being slightly different. As Kant defined it, practical freedom was simply the idea that humans have the ability to resist their inclinations (a “faculty of self-determination”). On the other hand, moral autonomy is more like a psychological explanation of how practical freedom can manifest in the rational will. While Kant would argue that any individual has practical freedom, and is thereby morally responsible, not all moral agents can be considered autonomous. The concept of autonomy explains how moral agents can use their practical freedom to adopt maxims in conformity with universal law. Thus the concept of practical freedom as such need not presuppose Kant’s psychological view of the rational will. In contrast, the concept of autonomy is built upon Kant’s view that beings are rational insofar as they think in laws and logical relations. If Kant’s view of the rational will can be accepted, Kant’s view of autonomy provides an explanation for how a moral agent can psychologically escape his inclinations. The only escape from sensible impulses, says Kant, is for the individual to self-legislate maxims in conformity with universal reason.

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126 PP, The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg 95
127 For instance even poor Bob, who thinks himself incapable of resisting his lust, has the practical freedom to resist, and is therefore morally culpable. Yet Bob is not autonomous, because he allows his inclinations to control him and does not legislate the moral law to himself.
Autonomy and the Legislator-Subject Duality

In explicating Kant’s concept of autonomy, we encountered both a positive and negative definition. The negative definition emphasized the adoption of a maxim in conformity with universal law by a moral agent. Kant describes the autonomous moral agent, under the negative definition, as the subject of moral law. On the other hand, the positive definition of moral law given by Kant emphasized the legislation of moral law by an autonomous moral agent; that is, under the positive definition of autonomy, an autonomous moral agent is considered a legislator of moral law. Kant uses these two perspectives together to illustrate an important point about the human psyche: somehow humans all have access to the moral law, not as an external entity, but as a faculty of reason internal to the human psyche; yet somehow, though the moral law must be internal to the human psyche, there is a schizophrenic sensation in which the human recognizes his own rational faculty as other. From perspective of legislator, the moral agent sees himself as entirely self-motivated; from the perspective of subject, the moral agent sees himself as governed by reason.

Problematically, if a moral agent cognizes himself as a subject, then he experiences morality as being imposed upon him, and he is heteronomous; yet if a moral agent sees himself purely as legislator, he need not actuate his legislation. It is only by combining these two dynamically opposed roles, subject and legislator, that a moral agent can achieve true autonomy, or self-legislation.

The question which remains is whether Kant’s dynamical duality between subject and legislator successfully allows the moral agent to conceive of their self as simultaneously bound by conscience and liberated by conscience. In the *Groundwork*, Kant cockily argues that his view
of the individual as a self-legislator clears up all of the controversy surrounding the underlying principles of morality:

If we look back at all previous efforts that have ever been made to discover the principle of morality, we need not wonder now why all of them had to fail. It was seen that the human being is bound to laws by his duty, but it never occurred to them that he is subject only to laws given by himself but still universal and that his bound only to act in conformity with his own will, which however, in accordance with nature’s end is a will giving universal law. For, if one thought of him only as subject to a law (whatever it may be), this law had to carry with it some interest by way of attraction or constraint, since it did not as a law arise from his will; in order to conform with the law, his will had instead to be constrained by something else to act in a certain way. By this quite necessary consequence, however, all the labor to find a supreme ground of duty was irretrievably lost.¹²⁸

Despite Kant’s humble self-congratulation, there is still a danger involved in the use of subject-legislator language: the danger of obscurity. In the attempt to emphasize both sides of the relation equally, Kant lapses into intricate and repetitive descriptions of the self. Consider the following passage, in which Kant attempts to grapple with a moral agent’s relation to the law:

In accordance with [the principle of autonomy] all maxims are repudiated that are inconsistent with the will’s own giving of universal law. Hence the will is not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it must be viewed as also giving the law to itself and just because of this as first subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author).¹²⁹

Herein, Kant attempts to explain the relation of the autonomous will to itself: he argues that the will must be considered subject to the law, but not in such a way that the law is viewed as an independent entity, for if the law was an independent entity, the will could only be heteronomous. Thus the will must be viewed as legislating to itself, in a relation of what Kant calls the “first subject to the law.” But just to reemphasize the will’s role as legislator, Kant tacks on the additional modifier that the will can regard itself as the author of the moral law.

¹²⁸ PP, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 82
¹²⁹ PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 81
While Kant’s description of the moral agent as a self-legislator makes the self into an obscure concept, and though Kant’s language becomes overly repetitive as such, this dualism adds depth to Kant’s psychological account of the human. Formulating his view of the human in dialectical terms, Kant is able to describe the autonomous human as being liberated and constrained by the moral law simultaneously. As promised, we now see that the idealized view of autonomy as “self-legislation” is a self-relation. The autonomous moral agent relates himself to the ethical in a positive and negative fashion. In the positive sense, the moral agent cognizes the moral law and derives it from pure practical reason. In the negative sense, the moral agent receives the moral law as though it were imposed from without. In this way, the moral agent becomes a self-legislator: bound by the moral law, and liberated by legislative functions.

**Respect – The Self-wrought Positive Feeling without Empirical Origins**

We have made much progress, so far, in the attempt to explain autonomy in the context of Kant’s view of rational psychology. However, our conception of Kant’s account of autonomy has not yet dealt with his attempted rebuttal against the likes of psychological egoism. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant posits a harmony between intelligible causes and efficient causes. If anything corresponds to causal spontaneity, it is necessarily outside the realm of all possible experience. Yet under the guise of autonomy and practical reason, it would appear that humans have intuition of their freedom, despite the supposedly seamless interaction between intelligible and efficient causes. Kant does not provide answers as to how this interaction between the noumenal and phenomenal self can be seamless, and yet intuitable.

Now enter the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality*, where Kant is forced to confront the motivational connection between human agents and the moral law. In order to avoid

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130 By psychological egoism, I imply the position that human beings are always motivated by their own self-interest.
moral egoism, Kant is forced to conclude that for an autonomous moral agent *there can be no phenomenal cause* which informs us of our autonomy. Experience can provide no certainty as to whether we are autonomous or not.

By refusing to admit the existence of a phenomenal cause for moral behavior, it might appear that Kant is heading for moral skepticism. After all, no experience can confirm the morality of any of my actions with certainty. Kant does not allow us to drift towards moral skepticism however: instead, Kant argues that we can attain some measure of moral intuition, through self-examination. The awareness that there exists no phenomenal cause for moral behavior is termed *respect* for the moral law.

As Kant admits himself, the feeling of respect is an obscure concept, and yet the issue of respect is crucial to his position. The concept of respect, and its differentiation from an inclination, is Kant’s response to psychological egoism. The question which consistently troubles Kant is this: *why do humans follow the moral law?* For Kant, who wishes to exonerate the possibility that moral agents are not swayed by ulterior motives, this question becomes a trap. If Kant answers that humans follow the moral law out of fear, then the psychological egoists have won, and humans are ultimately conditioned by an external locus of fear. If Kant answers that humans follow the moral law out of love, the egoists have also won, for then humans are merely following their desires by attending to the moral law. It would seem that the psychological egoists have won if Kant invokes any phenomenal motivation at all to explain the contingent-transcendent tether, for if any phenomenal motivation is given, then the egoist simply responds that agents are subject to that very motivation. In fact, Kant can only avoid the egoist’s deadly question by positing the non-existence of a phenomenal motivation: Kant must assert that there

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131 Here, moral skepticism is the position that an understanding of human motivations, and therefore the moral worth of human actions, is beyond human knowledge.
was no motivation, i.e. no cause, for following the moral law (except, possibly, the moral law itself). Is this not a radical idea: that a person could be without external motivation?

At certain times, Kant appreciates the radical nature of the claim that a human might be without contingent motivation; if there is no contingent motivation for morality, then our motivation for morality is unknowable. Kant admits the impossibility of knowing whether a moral agent acts from pure motivations:

In fact, it is absolutely impossible by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action otherwise in conformity with duty rested simply on moral grounds and on the representation of one’s duty.\textsuperscript{132}

No amount of rational self-reflection can overcome the moral cynicism with which we ought to hold ourselves. However hard we scrutinize our motivations, the possibility always exists that some ulterior motivation remains hidden from sight. To that extent, moral self-knowledge is not a matter of empirical observation and rational reflection. Kant writes:

It is indeed sometimes the case that with the keenest self-examination we find nothing besides the moral ground of duty that could have been powerful enough to move us to this or that good action and to so great a sacrifice; but from this it cannot be inferred with certainty that no covert impulse of self-love, under the mere pretense of that idea, was not actually the real determining cause of the will; for we like to flatter ourselves by falsely attributing to ourselves a nobler motive, whereas in fact we can never, even by the most strenuous self-examination, get entirely behind our covert incentives, since, when moral worth is as issue, what counts is not actions, which one sees, but those inner principles of actions that one does not see.\textsuperscript{133}

It would seem to me that this argument ought to lead toward complete moral skepticism. After all, if one cannot know about anything moral with certainty, how can one even begin to evaluate whether an action was moral or not? Imagine if we had no knowledge at all of whether our actions where moral: moral instruction would become meaningless, as would our moral judgments and all imperatives. Thinking about morality in general would be hopeless and

\textsuperscript{132} PP, The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 61
\textsuperscript{133} PP, The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 61-62
absurd! Kant does not even entertain the possibility of moral skepticism, but rather posits the existence of an uncertain moral feeling, *respect*, which probes an individual’s motivational landscape. Respect, though an uncertain indicator of moral action, is the only way for moral agents to judge whether they acted heteronomously or autonomously.

Much of Kant’s work in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* is devoted to appropriately distinguishing respect from other feelings. Several things are important to note: First, respect is described phenomenologically as a *feeling*. Respect for the moral law is not the conclusion of a lengthy process of self-examination, but rather an innate intuition common to the human psyche. Second, though rational self-reflection can only fail to find ulterior motives, respect for the moral law is somehow an intuition that these motivations do not exist. Thus respect is a direct awareness of non-existence, as opposed to the non-consciousness of existence. Third and finally, respect is self-wrought. Kant writes:

> It could be objected that I only seek refuge, behind the word respect, in an obscure feeling instead of distinctly resolving the question by means of a concept of reason. *But though respect is a feeling*, it is not one received by means of influence; it is, instead, a feeling *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept and therefore specifically different from all feelings of the first kind, which can be reduced to inclination or fear. What I cognize immediately as a law for me I cognize with respect, which signifies merely *consciousness of the subordination of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences on my sense*.

Let us examine each of these dimensions of respect in detail, and the process whereby respect arises. Respect is first and foremost known as a *feeling* (moreover a positive feeling!), which implies that respect belongs in the phenomenal realm. Kant attempts to legitimize the existence of this feeling through a priori concepts, and his explanation of the feeling of respect moves in stages. Kant attempts to work his way up from the existence of the moral law to the positive

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134 PP, *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morality*, pg. 56, italics added for emphasis, numbers added for clarity
view of respect as a feeling. Kant begins with the moral law: the moral law produces a negative
effect on a moral agent’s inclinations. Then this negative effect results in a positive feeling.

The first movement is from the moral law to the negative feeling (a negative feeling is
defined via “infringement” upon other inclinations). Kant provides a rich account of how the
moral law affects our inclinations. Kant writes:

The effect of the moral law as incentive is only negative, and as such this
incentive can be cognized a priori. For all inclination and every sensible impulse
is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (by the infringement upon
the inclinations that take place) is itself feeling. Hence we can see a priori that the
moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain; and here we have the first
and perhaps the only case in which we can determine a priori from concepts the
relation of a cognition (here the cognition of a pure practical reason) to the feeling
of pleasure or displeasure.135

The crucial distinction here is between self-love and self-conceit. Self-love is an entirely rational
entity, which comes from treating the self as an end, whereas self-conceit deludes a moral
individual into giving himself preference over other moral agents. Kant writes:

All the inclinations together (which can be brought into a tolerable system
and the satisfaction of which is then called one’s own happiness) constitute regard
for oneself (solipsismus). This is either the self-regard of love for oneself, a
predominant benevolence toward oneself (Philautia), or that of satisfaction with
oneself (Arrogantia). The former is called, in particular, self-love, the latter, self-
conceit. Pure practical reason merely infringes upon self-love, inasmuch as it only
restricts it, as natural and active in us even prior to the moral law, to the condition
of agreement with this law, and then it is called rational self-love. But it strikes
down self-conceit altogether, since all claims to esteem for oneself that precede
accord with the moral law are null and quite unwarranted because certainty of a
disposition in accord with this law is the first condition of any worth of a person
(we shall soon make this more distinct), and any presumption prior to this is false
and opposed to the law. Now, the propensity to self-esteem, so long as it rests
only on sensibility, belongs with inclination which the moral law infringes upon.
So the moral law strikes down self-conceit.136

135 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 199-200
136 PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 199-200
Having established the manner in which the moral law has a negative effect on the human’s inclinations. Respect, then, as the negative action of self-effacement is not created by means of influence. Nothing can force respect for the moral law out of a moral agent; respect must be given willingly, or else it is not respect. Instead, respect arises out of “pure self-activity,” or equivalently, by reason. Kant argues that the faculty of reason can be completely divorced of all affective activity and sensibility. Kant writes:

Reason … shows in what we call “ideas” a spontaneity so pure that it thereby goes far beyond anything that sensibility can ever afford it, and proves its highest occupation in distinguishing the world sense and the world of understanding from each other and thereby marking out limits for the understanding of itself.\(^\text{138}\)

This pure self-activity, which results in the moral law, destroys self-conceit. In so doing, the moral law has a negative effect on the inclinations of the moral agent, and is not caused by anything exterior to the moral agent. Nevertheless, this negative effect results in a positive feeling:

But since this law is still something in itself positive – namely, the form of an intellectual causality, that is, of freedom – it is at the same time an object of respect inasmuch as, in opposition to its subjective antagonism, namely the inclinations in us, it weakens self-conceit; and inasmuch as it strikes down self-conceit, that is, humiliated it, it is an object of the greatest respect and so too the ground of a positive feeling that is not of empirical origin and cognized a priori. Consequently, respect for the moral law is a feeling that is produced by an intellectual ground, and this feeling is the only one that we can cognize completely a priori and the necessity of which we can have insight into.\(^\text{139}\)

Here, we have shown those three features of respect which Kant adamantly maintains. First, respect is an actual feeling which is produced by the moral law. And yet, while respect is a feeling, it is the result of a negative process. The moral law bears down upon other inclinations which the moral agent might have. This negative effect then creates a positive feeling, which can

\(^{137}\) PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 99.  
\(^{138}\) PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, pg. 99  
\(^{139}\) PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 199-200
properly be described as self-wrought. Perhaps the self-wrought dimension of the feeling of respect is the most important, for being self-wrought is what allows Kant to declare that “respect is not of empirical origins and cognized a priori.”

Kant uses this argument to show that respect is fundamentally different from fear, love, and other inclinations. Respect arises from the moral law, and not the other way around. Kant writes:

Immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called respect, so that this is regarded as the effect of the law on the subject, and not as the cause of the law. Respect is properly the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love. Hence there is something that is regarded as an object neither of inclination nor of fear, though it has something analogous to both. The object of respect is therefore simply the law, and indeed the law that we impose upon ourselves and yet as necessary in itself. As a law we are subject to it without consulting self-love; as imposed upon us by ourselves it is nevertheless a result of our will; and in the first respect it has an analogy with fear, in the second with inclination.¹⁴⁰

From this, we see the precipitous line that Kant is walking. While respect for the moral law is similar to fear and inclination, it is entirely different in one crucial respect: respect for the moral law arises solely because of the moral law (never mind that the moral law arises from the individual’s will!). We are “subject to [the law] without consulting self-love,” yet the law is “imposed upon us by ourselves” as “a result of our own willing.” Notice that Kant must yet again undergo a linguistic dance in order to properly describe the causal relationship between an individual and the moral law: respect for the moral law is “self-wrought,” and yet “respect is the effect of the law on the subject, and not the cause of the law.”

One part of this linguistic dance is the dialectical relation of self-legislation, which occurs entirely in the noumenal realm and which we have already discussed in great detail: the moral agent has to simultaneously be subject to the moral law and legislator of that moral law. The

¹⁴⁰PP, Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 56, italics added for emphasis
dialectical relation of self-legislation is as follows: respect for the moral law *can only arise because of the moral law*; but as already established, the moral law is caused by the individual willing it. In this way, the individual’s will is the cause of the moral law, which is the cause of an individual’s respect for the moral law. The result is that respect is truly a self-legislated psychological entity; there can be no explanation for an individual’s respect for the moral law, except for the moral law, which he himself conceived in an act of the will. In this manner, self-legislation is an unsightly dialectical relation, much like the chicken-egg paradox: what comes first? Respect for the moral law, or the moral law itself? Kant answers that neither can be without the other, and ultimately the only explanation which can be given is that of “pure self-activity” or reason. It is good to note that an individual’s will become supremely prominent under this description. Ultimately, the real issue at stake is not in determining which came first (the moral law or respect for the moral law), but rather to answer the objections of psychological egoists. Kant responds to the psychological egoists, but at the expense of invoking a troublesome dialectical relation.

At this point in our exploration of Kant, we have achieved the pinnacle of freedom. We started with the concept of practical freedom, which we intuited as a feeling of agentive power and the ability to resist our inclinations. However, we acknowledged that this subjective feeling of practical freedom was nothing until it could be confirmed by reason. Accordingly, we sought to investigate whether pure reason ruled out the possibility of agency under deterministic considerations. Though we proved a doctrine of phenomenal determinism, our analysis of the third antinomy of pure reason revealed the non-impossibility of freedom outside the bounds of experience. Finding that causal spontaneity was thoroughly non-impossible, we allowed ourselves to be oriented towards the possibility of freedom and accordingly towards morality.
We posited the possibility of autonomy amongst humans, as a part of their rational nature.

Having come to appreciate the significance of autonomy, we are finally capable of providing an objective basis for our previously subjective feeling of practical freedom. Though the proof is not made from the grounds of pure reason, practical reason affords an objective basis upon which to plant our doctrines of moral agency. Only within the context of autonomy that moral agency (and practical freedom) achieves any meaning.
The Unactualized Potential

Now one must ask what the mere logical possibility\(^1\) of freedom is worth. If rational wills are defined by having a “faculty of self-determination,” but this faculty does not correspond to any real possession, what does it amount to when unactualized? Naturally, we say that Jimmy has the ability to catch a ball even when he is not in the act of catching a ball, but this is because Jimmy retains all of the necessary parts to catch that ball even when he isn’t in the act: his hand and arm are still attached to his body, and his muscles work just fine. On the other hand, we can attribute no physical feature to the faculty of practical freedom; it isn’t clear that anything is retained when freedom is not in use.

Martin Luther poses a similar question to Erasmus in their dialogues about free-will: as Erasmus saw it, free will was ineffective for salvation apart from God’s grace, and yet free will retained some meager power even when it had no salvific effect. Luther’s rebuttal seems to make a mockery of Erasmus’s position: at the time, free will was usually defined by the possession of a power.\(^2\) If a Christian is stripped of the power to actuate his free will, then what power is left to free will? Luther writes:

You describe the power of “free-will” as small, and wholly ineffective apart from the grace of God. Agreed? Now then, I ask you: if God’s grace is wanting, if it is taken away from that small power, what can it do? It is ineffective, you say, and can do nothing good. So it will not do what God or His grace wills. Why? Because we have now taken God’s grace away from it, and what the grace of God does not do it not good. Hence it follows that “free-will” without God’s grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondslave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Again, I claim that the logical possibility of something is equivalent to non-impossibility, at least in this context.

\(^2\) See Summa Theologica, First Part, Question 82, Article 2

\(^3\) Martin Luther, Bondage of the Will, pg. 187
The issue is exactly the same with Kant: if calling a moral agent “practically free” is meant to imply that he has some sort of “power of self-determination,” wherein does that power lie when it is not used? When it can be predicted with certainty that I will not actuate my freedom, how can we say that I still retain freedom?

The issue of the unactuated potential is essentially equivalent to the tension which arises between autonomy and causal spontaneity. We have already seen that Kant can only formulate causal spontaneity under the supposition that intelligible causes be in complete “harmony” with phenomenal determinism. And yet, if agents are to be autonomous, we would expect for this autonomy to rupture the causal nexus. If humans are truly autonomous, they ought to be able to actually defy causal determinism. Does it not seem that the freedom of causal spontaneity is worthless without this ability to defy the uniformity of nature?! We would hope that the freedom of causal spontaneity actually allows us to freely choose our actions, right?

Two commentators on Kant’s position have an interesting dialogue over this very question. Beck finds that Kant’s vision of freedom seems to lack any sense of freedom whatsoever. Hudson, on the other hand, defends the position that Kant’s vision of freedom is consistent, and entails “the ability to do otherwise.”144 Beck presents his critique in this way: “If the possession of noumenal freedom makes a difference to the uniformity of nature, then there is no uniformity; if it does not, to call it ‘freedom’ is a vain pretension.”145 Hudson responds to Beck’s objection with the following argument:

Beck’s idea seems to be that genuine freedom requires that the ability to choose from among alternative courses of action, but that the uniformity of nature (i.e., the strict ordering of nature in accordance with natural laws) would unacceptably restrict the range of alternatives in every case, leaving only whatever action the agent is causally determined to perform. Possession of genuine freedom, Beck implies, would (sooner or later) lead to the actual

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144 Kant’s Compatibilism, Hud Hudson, pg. 4
145 Beck, Commentary, pg. 191-192; citation courtesy of Hud Hudson, Kant’s Compatibilism, pg. 31
performance of some action that was not in accordance with the history of the phenomenal world and the natural laws governing it. In other words, if we possess genuine freedom, the thesis of the uniformity of nature is false.

In this spirit, the proposition corresponding to the second horn of the dilemma states that, “if the possession of noumenal freedom does not make a difference to the uniformity of nature, to call it ‘freedom’ is a vain pretension.” Let us make Beck’s objection as strong as possible: suppose for a moment (contrary to fact) that, if one is able to make a difference to the uniformity of nature, one is able to perform an action that directly violates some law of nature. Even on this exceedingly strong reading of an agent’s ability to make a difference to the uniformity of nature, the proposition corresponding to the second horn of the dilemma is false. It is false quite simply because it conflates possessing an ability with exercising the ability. Even this very strong reading – in which one’s exercising the peculiar ability would make a difference to the uniformity of nature by acting in such a way as to violate nature law – does not imply that the uniformity of nature will be disrupted by a being possessing such a fantastic ability – unless possessing an ability commits one to exercising it.  

Hudson’s argument, in this case, is completely correct. Further, Hudson understands something quite profound about the Kantian vision of freedom. Kant does not see a conflict between foreknowledge of action and freedom. Hudson acknowledges that actions could be foreknown, i.e. that “at any moment in time, the entire world at that time and the laws of nature together determine a unique future,” and yet he doesn’t think foreknowledge poses any problem to our “ability to do otherwise.” Foreknowledge, the uniformity of nature, and freedom must all coexist in Kant’s system. The potential for freedom is in no way limited by the fact that freedom will not be actualized.

The crucial distinction which must be made in order to understand Kant on this issue is the distinction between determinism and pre-determinism. Kant defines these positions in his

Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason:

We have only to ask whether we are certainly and immediately conscious of a faculty enabling us to overcome, by firm resolve, every incentive to transgression, however great … Everyone must admit that he does not know

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146 Kant’s Compatibilism, Hud Hudson, pg. 31-32
147 Kant’s Compatibilism, Hud Hudson, pg. 9
whether, were such a situation to arise, he would not waver in his resolve. Yet
duty equally commands him unconditionally: he ought to remain true to his
resolve; and from this he rightly concludes that he must be able to do it, and that
his power of choice is therefore free. Those who pretend that this inscrutable
property is entirely within our grasp concoct an illusion through the word
determinism (the thesis that the power of choice is determined through inner
sufficient grounds) as though the difficulty consisted in reconciling these grounds
with freedom – [an issue] that does not enter into anyone’s mind. Rather, what we
want to discern, but never shall, is this: how can pre-determinism co-exist with
freedom, when according to pre-determinism freely chosen actions, as
occurrences, have their determining grounds in antecedent time (which, together
with what is contained therein, no longer lies in our control), whereas according
to freedom the action, as well as its contrary, must be in the control of the subject
at the moment of its happening.

Determinism in this context¹⁴⁸, according to Kant, is “the thesis that the power of choice is
determined through inner sufficient grounds.” By this definition, Kant means essentially this:
when a moral agent makes a choice, they make the choice for a particular reason which is
internal to their intelligible processes (e.g. greed, lust, or respect for the moral law). In this way,
one might argue that the actions of moral agents are determined, because they do not have the
ability to do otherwise than what they will do. Kant argues that determinism is completely
compatible with freedom. The only problem is pre-determinism, which is the idea that “freely
chosen actions … have their determining grounds in antecedent time.” If the determining
grounds of our actions no longer lie in our control, then we don’t have control over the action.
Kant argues that this contradiction between pre-determinism and freedom is irreconcilable, and
thus we should understand that Kant’s attack on determinism is really an attack on the idea that
our actions are determined by forces which bypass agentive control altogether.

Kant’s distinction also helps to illustrate why the issue of an unactuated potential is so
troublesome to comprehension. We concoct the illusion of determinism as a scare tactic against

¹⁴⁸ Normally pre-determinism is considered the same as determinism, so be careful to note the difference as Kant
defines it here.
our own freedom. We see ourselves as being determined immediately, as being necessitated in
the moment and this terrifies us as moral agents.

Yet in order to secure the idea of freedom, we need to give up the idea of contingent
action. Spontaneity is not opposed to necessitation: Kant argues that God is a purely necessary
and simultaneously an absolutely spontaneous being. He writes:

There is no difficulty in reconciling the concept of freedom with the idea
of God as a necessary being, for freedom does not consist in the contingency of an
action (in its not being determined through any ground at all), i.e. indeterminism
([the thesis] that God must be equally capable of doing good or evil, if his action
is to be called free) but in absolute spontaneity. The latter is at risk only with
predeterminism, where the determining ground of an action lies in antecedent
time, so that the action is no longer in my power but in the hands of nature, which
determines me irresistibly; since in God no temporal sequence is thinkable, this
difficulty has no place.\textsuperscript{149}

Our noumenal selves are exactly like God in this instance; the problem of determinism is but an
illusion, and phenomenal determinism, in the form of temporal necessitation, can have no effect
on our eternal selves.

As we have seen, the position that an unactuated potential might exist is easy proposition
to defend, and a hard proposition to swallow. We are terrified by the illusory sense of
determinism in the moment. While the issue of pre-determinism might prove problematic, our
results in investigating the third antinomy of pure reason show that pre-determinism is not an
issue. Phenomenal determinism cannot defeat the spontaneity accessible to our non-temporal
selves.

\textsuperscript{149} Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 71.
Synthesis and Dialectic – Tripartite Freedom

At several points, Kant insists that all three of the forms of freedom are one and the same. In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant sheepishly admits that the concept of practical freedom and transcendental freedom are identical.\(^{150}\) He writes: “It is extremely remarkable that the practical concept of freedom is founded on the transcendental idea of freedom, which constitutes the very difficulty which at all times has surrounded the question of the possibility of freedom.” In the Groundwork, Kant writes that causal spontaneity and autonomy are exactly the same, just represented in a different manner. He writes:

> We take ourselves as free in the order of efficient causes in order to think ourselves under moral laws in the order of ends; and we afterwards think ourselves as subject to these laws because we have ascribed to ourselves freedom of will: for, freedom and the will’s own lawgiving are both autonomy and hence reciprocal concepts, and for this very reason one cannot be used to explain the other or to furnish a ground for it but at most be used only for the logical purpose of reducing apparently different representations of the same object to one single concept (as different fractions of equal value are reduced to their lowest expression).\(^{151}\)

Given that Kant associates practical freedom with causal spontaneity and causal spontaneity with autonomy, it seems fairly safe to assume that all three concepts are meant to be equivalent in his thought.

Even though Kant intends for the three concepts to be equivalent, that does not mean that all three are exactly the same. We have seen, through our previous analysis, that the three concepts emerge in a logical progression. Practical freedom, or the ability to resist sensible coercion, comes about first through direct intuition, albeit only in a subjective manner. When we

\(^{150}\) I say that Kant sheepishly admits that practical freedom and causal spontaneity are the same because he offers no explanation and when he states that they are the same he begins with “It is extremely remarkable that…”

\(^{151}\) PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, pg. 98
inquired as to whether this intuition might find an objective basis in pure reason, we switched into a consideration of the concept of causal spontaneity. We decided that causal spontaneity was distinctly non-impossible outside the bounds of all possible experience. Thereafter, having decided that pure reason prohibited dogmatic assertions for or against freedom, we were able to orient ourselves towards freedom under the direction of practical reason. Only after finding and examining the concept of autonomy were we able to find an objective basis for practical freedom. Thus there is a logical order in which the three concepts must be approached, and they can be differentiated under that respect. Without this differentiation, I think that the concept of freedom becomes muddied: only by making this differentiation were we able to see the tension between causal spontaneity and autonomy.

Within the context of Kant’s work, it makes little sense to speak of true autonomy without the concept of practical freedom. Without the ability to resist sensible impulses, autonomy loses its luster. While I am willing to admit that there is logical distinction amongst the three modes of autonomy, it makes little sense to pull them apart. For Kant, it would be absurd to encounter a causally free individual who acts in a heteronomous manner. Similarly, without the ability to self-determine, it makes no sense to call a moral agent autonomous. Ultimately, the value in studying the three modes of freedom separately is found in their unique vision of freedom, and a proper understanding of their logical order. Having separated the three elements of freedom, we are now capable of seeing the genius behind their composition.
Theonomy – The Freedom to See Oneself as a Child of God

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.\textsuperscript{152}

Throughout this essay, I have used parts of Romans 7:7-25 to provide a backdrop for Kant’s investigations into freedom. In the persona of the “slave to sin,” Paul writes about the sensation of ambiguity and duplicity. Paul feels like he has both a “sinful nature” and an “inner being” which delights in God’s law. As discussed previously, these two warring factions within the human psyche contribute to our understanding of agency and our ability to resist coercion through our sensible impulses. Paul’s persona feels as though he has been sold as a slave to sin, and feels as though his actions are outside of his control. Yet we saw, in our analysis of the third antinomy of pure reason, that there is nothing in pure reason which says that our actions are outside of self-determination. Finally, Paul’s struggle for freedom occurs before the backdrop of the Jewish law, which he understands as an externally imposed constraint. If Paul’s persona had conceived of himself as an autonomous legislator, the pain of this external constraint might have been mitigated by the sense of liberation which accompanies self-legislation.

Clearly, Paul’s persona is unknowingly struggling with the issues of practical freedom, causal spontaneity, and autonomy. The “slave to sin” recognizes the ideality of the moral law, and sees his own faults. Yet Paul’s persona concludes by exalting in something foreign to Kant’s exegesis of freedom. The “slave to sin” rejoices at his salvation through “Jesus Christ.” It would

\textsuperscript{152} Romans 7:24-25
seem that the “slave to sin” has given up the attempt to fix his sinful nature, and resigned himself to sin forever. Yet this interpretation would lead to antinomian consequences. Rather, it is best to interpret this passage, not as an excuse to continue sinning, but as an acknowledgement that sin will continue and a rejoicing at the fact that sin does not have the final word. The “slave to sin” rejoices because Christ has ushered in a new form of freedom: the freedom of theonomy.

Paul Tillich attempts to explain what he means by theonomy, and for the purposes of this essay, I will use his description. Tillich writes:

[Theonomy] means acknowledging the mystery of being, but not believing that this mystery is an authoritarian transcendent element which is imposed upon us and against us, which breaks our reason to pieces.\(^{153}\)

Reason, in Tillich’s view, is limited. Reason is ultimately incapable of proving the innate value of a person, or properly diagnosing the existential dilemmas of human existence. And yet, reason is not entirely destroyed by its limitations either. Theonomy is the existential freedom of being able to incorporate reason and faith together; it is the freedom to partake in the divine mysteries of life. For the Christian, theonomy is the freedom to see oneself as a child of God. According to Tillich, an appreciation for the mystery and sanctity of life must precede and undergird all pursuits in reason. He writes that “reason and mystery belong together, like substance and form.”\(^{154}\) If reason were to reduce the value of human life to nothing, then all reason would be for naught. Tillich worries that Kantianism exalts human reason so far as to forget the innate value of human life.

Bonhoeffer expresses similar concerns about the Kantian system. It can be easy to read Kant and see the categorical imperative as an externally imposed law. It can be easy to read Kant’s descriptions of autonomy and practical freedom as impossible ideals, which can never be

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\(^{153}\) Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, pg. 160

\(^{154}\) Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, pg. 160
fulfilled, and which cruelly lord themselves over the moral agent. Paul’s “slave to sin” obviously sees morality in this light. Bonhoeffer sharply critiques Paul’s character, who has allowed morality to become a form of outward expression and a command of servitude. An overemphasis on obedience to the moral law, according to Bonhoeffer, destroys the very value which morality set out to preserve. Bonhoeffer writes:

That convulsive clinging to the ethical theme, which takes the form of a moralization of life, arises from fear of the fullness of everyday life and from an awareness of incapacity for life; it is a flight into a position which lies outside real life, a position from which one can only view life at a distance with an eye which is at the same time arrogant and envious.155

Bonhoeffer echoes a feeling which has been advanced by Kierkegaard, Tillich, and many others. Pursuit of the ethical, when not cast in the perspective of the ultimate sanctity of the human person, becomes a vain pursuit. Bonhoeffer writes:

The absolute criterion of a good which is good in itself, assuming that a notion of this kind can be conceived in the first place without inherent contradiction, makes good into a dead law, a Moloch to which all life and all liberty are sacrificed, and which fails even to impose a genuine obligation, simply because it is a metaphysical and self-contained construction which bears no essential relation to life itself.156

For this reason, Bonhoeffer argues that the true form of morality is a type of theonomy, where freedom is found through one’s relation to God.157 Under this theonomous relationship, Bonhoeffer argues that God’s command can best be understood as the command of freedom.

The commandment of God is the permission to live as man before God. The commandment of God is permission. It differs from all human laws in that it commands freedom. It is by overcoming this contradiction that it shows itself to be God’s commandment; the impossible becomes possible, and that which lies

155 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pg. 264
156 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pg. 212
157 I do not mean God as a necessary being here, which is how Kant normally understand the term God. Rather, I harken to Tillich’s definition “that which is of ultimate concern.” The Christian’s relationship to God might be connected to Kant’s dedication to the moral law as an end in itself.
beyond the range of what can be commanded, liberty, is the true object of this commandment.\textsuperscript{158}

Here, Bonhoeffer has attempted to acknowledge the ultimate \textit{telos} of morality, which is to respect the sanctity of human life. When morality becomes too concerned with principles and obedience, it can oftentimes overlook its ultimate goal. This view leads Bonhoeffer to incorrectly critique Kant’s view of morality. He writes that “To make obedience independent of freedom leads only to the Kantian ethic of duty.”\textsuperscript{159} As we have seen throughout this paper, Bonheoffer critically misunderstands the Kantian position: Kant argues that morality is the ultimate expression of freedom. And yet, even though Bonhoeffer offers a mistaken critique of Kant’s ethical system, Bonhoeffer’s critique may provide an opportunity to rectify a shortcoming of Kant’s system. We shall see that Kant \textit{did} value the goods that Bonhoeffer was concerned with, and yet Kant does not make that connection as explicit as he might have. The roots of a theonomous attitude are buried within Kant’s system, and yet we must uncover those roots in order to rectify his presentation of freedom. As we shall see, without the freedom of theonomy, Kant’s view of freedom does indeed become a “Moloch.”

Before we delve into Kant’s work, we need to understand exactly what a theonomous attitude entails, and why it provides a different flavor of freedom from that of practical freedom, causal spontaneity, and autonomy. As Tillich has described it, a theonomous attitude encapsulates the belief that reason and mystery belong together: this is Tillich’s essential understanding of the human. Tillich speaks in the tradition of Kierkegaard, who writes that the human is a self-relating relationship between temporal and eternal aspects. A theonomous attitude is one which recognizes and appreciates this relationship between temporal and eternal within the human. The freedom of theonomy is an understanding and appreciation for the “divine

\textsuperscript{158} Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pg. 277
\textsuperscript{159} Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pg. 249
spark” within every human; the recognition that every human is formed in the image of God. Theonomy acknowledges that the mystery of human life does not destroy human wisdom, but actually precedes and undergirds our use of reason. It is only through the reflection of divine light (manifested through reason) that humans receive their worth. Tillich writes:

[Theonomy] means that every act of cognition is made in the power of the divine light … All knowledge is in some way rooted in the knowledge of the divine within us. There is a point of identity with our soul, and this point precedes every special act of knowledge. Or, we could say that every act of knowledge … is implicitly religious. A mathematical proposition as well as a medical discovery is implicitly religious because it is only possible in the power of these ultimate principles which are the uncreated divine light in the human soul. This is the famous doctrine of the inner light, which was also used by the sectarian movements and by all the mystics during the Middle Ages and the Reformation period, and which in the last analysis underlies even the Rationalism of the Enlightenment. The rationalists were all philosophers of the inner light, even though this light later on became cut off from its divine ground.

Unlike Bonhoeffer’s undue critique of Kant, Tillich’s critique might get to the heart of Kant’s shortcomings. Kant never explicitly acknowledges his faith in the faculty of reason, even though he treats it with semi-divine reverence. Kant’s system does not make explicit its own religious attitude, and therein attempts to cut itself off from its “divine ground.”

Given that Kant makes no explicit reference to an attitude of theonomy, we must ask whether there is room within Kant’s system for a theonomous attitude; and further, we must ask whether Kant’s tripartite vision of freedom can be formulated without theonomy. I will first show that Kant’s philosophy already exhibits theonomous elements, even if these elements are downplayed, and then show that Kant’s vision of freedom truly relies upon theonomy. As we shall see, there can be no autonomy without theonomy.

We first find evidence of a theonomous attitude in the Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morality. Therein, Kant uses reason to show that there are two attitudes that one can make

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160 Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, pg. 185
towards morality: a heteronomous attitude which receives legislation from an external authority, or an autonomous attitude which self-legislates. The choice between these two attitudes, as Kant argues, must be made on the basis of practical reason: one cannot prove the existence of freedom from pure reason alone. Yet it is unclear what “pure reason” entails. If practical reason is simply pure reason with an eye to autonomy, Kant has begged the question. Even Kant is willing to admit that this methodological problem exists. He writes:

It must be freely admitted that a kind of circle come to light here from which, as it seems, there is no way to escape. We take ourselves as free in the order of efficient causes in order to think ourselves under moral laws in the order of ends; and we afterwards think ourselves as subject to these laws because we have ascribed to ourselves freedom of will…

Even after admitting that this circular logic appears, Kant attempts to show that the circle is consistent, yet Kant never attempts to explain what occasion led him to ascribe freedom to rational creatures in the first place. Though Kant does not admit it, there must be something which directs him to presuppose freedom in rational beings. There must be something, separate from reason, which lends purpose and value to our pursuit of freedom. This thing is theonomy, the freedom to see oneself as a participant in the *logos*. Thus, beneath Kant’s outwardly rational character, I believe there is evidence that Kant’s philosophy implicitly presupposes a theonomous outlook.

I think we can also find evidence that Kant’s tripartite vision of freedom could not exist without theonomy. As Kant argues, the categorical imperative can be formulated in the context of a “kingdom of ends” just as easily as it can be formulated through the concept of autonomy. Kant says that “Morality consists, then, in reference of all action to the lawmaking by which alone a kingdom of ends is possible.”

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161 PP, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality*, pg. 97
162 PP, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality*, pg. 84
By *kingdom* I understand a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws. Now since laws determine ends in terms of their universal validity, if we abstract from the personal differences of rational beings as well as from all the content of their private ends we shall be able to thing of a whole of all ends in systematic connection (a whole both of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of his own that each may set himself), that is, a kingdom of ends, which is possible in accordance with the above principles.  

In the kingdom of ends, every person acts as though every other moral agent were of infinite worth. Kant argues that “in the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity.” Those things which are afforded prices are given worth based upon pure fancy, and can easily be substituted for another item of equal worth. In comparison, those things with dignity are of infinite worth. According to Kant, in the kingdom of ends, all moral agents would be treated with dignity out of respect for their rational character. Kant writes:

Reason accordingly refers every maxim of the will as giving universal law to every other will and also to every action toward oneself, and does so not for the sake of any other practical motive or any future advantage but from the idea of the *dignity* of a rational being, who obeys no law other than that which he himself at the same time gives.

It is interesting to compare the infinite worth of every rational being, under Kant’s system, to the intrinsic value of the moral law. Each rational being, in the kingdom of ends, is meant to hold a dignity which is respected as an end in itself. If I understand Kant correctly, the infinite moral worth of rational beings is meant to be equivalent to the intrinsic worth which is given to the moral law: these are not two distinct objects of intrinsic worth. It would be foolish to ask whether the moral law derives its intrinsic worth from its benefit and relationship to rational beings, or whether rational beings derive their intrinsic worth from their access to the moral law. The intrinsic worth of an individual is equivalent to the intrinsic worth of the moral law.

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163 PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 83
164 PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 83
165 PP, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morality, pg. 83
Thus it would be a mistake to interpret Kant as valuing obedience to the moral law over the sanctity of human life. It would be a mistake to read Kant as offering and describing a lifeless freedom. In this way, Bonhoeffer errs in his interpretation of Kant’s philosophy. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer’s critique is not fruitless. Bonhoeffer is right to critique Kant because Kant does not acknowledge the religious character of his reliance on reason and the moral law; Kant does not explicitly declare the freedom of theonomy.

If there is one place where Kant acknowledges that reason must be supplemented by theonomy, this acknowledgment can be found in Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason. In the first Critique Kant shows that reason is limited, yet nowhere else but in Religion does Kant admit so readily that reason is an insufficient foundation for morality. Certainly Kant still maintains that reason is necessary for morality, and yet he admits that the use of reason does not mandate the adoption of rational principles. One can imagine an evil genius who recognizes the rationality behind the moral law, and yet chooses to disobey the moral law regardless. Kant writes:

From the fact that a being has reason does not at all follow that, simply by virtue of representing its maxims as suited to universal legislation, this reason contains a faculty of determining the power of choice unconditionally, and hence to be practical on its own; at least, not so far as we can see. The most rational being of this world might still need certain incentives, coming to him from the objects of inclinations, to determine his power of choice. He might apply the most rational reflection to those objects – about what concerns their greatest sums as the means for attaining the goal determined through them – without thereby even suspecting the possibility of such a thing as the absolutely imperative moral law which announces to be itself an incentive, and, indeed, the highest incentive. Were this law not to be given to us from within, no amount of subtle reasoning on our part would produce it or win our power of choice over to it. Yet this law is the only law that makes us conscious of the independence of our power of choice from determination by all other incentives (of our freedom) and thereby also of the accountability of all our actions.166

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166 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 50-51, footnote
Kant admits that our dedication to the moral law is dependent upon something higher than mere reason (or more accurately, something prior to reason). Humans are only capable of responding to their rationally founded beliefs after they have developed personality. Kant writes:

The predisposition to personality is the susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice. This susceptibility to simple respect for the moral law within us would thus be the moral feeling, which by itself does not yet constitute an end of the natural predisposition but only insofar as it is an incentive of the power of choice. But now this is possible only because the free power of choice incorporates moral feeling into its maxim: so a power of choice so constituted is a good character, and this character, as in general every character of the free power of choice, is something that can only be acquired; yet, for its possibility there must be present in our nature a predisposition onto which nothing evil can be grafted. The idea of moral law alone, together with the respect that is inseparable from it, cannot be properly call a predisposition to personality; it is personality itself (the idea of humanity considered wholly intellectually). The subjective ground, however, of our incorporating this incentive into our maxims seems to be an addition to personality, and hence seems to deserve the name of predisposition on behalf of it.\footnote{Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 52}

The predisposition towards personality in humans is Kant’s explanation for why humans choose to orient themselves towards freedom. We are susceptible to simple respect for the moral law through our predisposition to personality, which Kant associates with the “moral feeling.” When this moral feeling is interpreted properly, it can be called “good character.” Humans are not born with good character, but rather good character must be “acquired” in life. Kant informs us that the issue of personality is completely “inseparable” from the issue of respect. Only upon the basis of personality can respect for the moral law emerge. As Kant describes it, personality seems to be very similar to the other three modes of freedom: autonomy, causal spontaneity, and practical freedom. In the absence of personality, it seems impossible that the moral agent would be autonomous or causally spontaneous or practically free. And yet, this disposition towards personality is strikingly different from the abstract definitions of autonomy, causal spontaneity,
and practical freedom which we have already encountered. Practical freedom, conceived of as the logical possibility to resist the coercion of sensible inclinations, does not address the initial motivation for resisting coercion. Causal spontaneity, though an explanation of how freedom can exist in harmony with the causal nexus, is logically distinct from the personality which seeks to utilize causal spontaneity. Even the concept of autonomy cannot be accepted on objective grounds until one has oriented oneself towards freedom. Proceeding each of Kant’s three moments of freedom is the underlying freedom of theonomy: the freedom to see oneself as a participant in the divine.

Because the concept of personality, as Kant defines it, is logically distinct from autonomy, causal spontaneity, and practical freedom, I think it can be best understood as a fourth mode of freedom which precedes and underlies the other three. From Kant’s meager admittance that morality needs more than just reason to function, we can expand upon this view. I argue that Tillich’s concept of theonomy can be connected to Kant’s theory of personality.

At the beginning of this essay, I argued that theonomy could be understood in the same way as the other three moments of freedom: as a dialectical relation relating the self to God. Here, I must be careful to qualify my use of the word God. God, here used, is not meant in the sense of a “necessary being;” rather, theonomy is a relation between the self and “that which is of ultimate concern,” to invoke Tillich’s definition. When Kant attempts to show the objective reality of the concept of God, he does not prove the existence of a necessary being; rather, Kant proves the objective reality of a highest good, which closely parallels Tillich’s definition for God. For Kant, personality is a predisposition towards respect for the moral law; personality represents the possibility of an acknowledged relation to that which is of ultimate concern. Without the predisposition to personality, one cannot appreciate the dignity of other humans;
without the predisposition to personality, one cannot recognize the divine within humanity. Theonomy, or personality, is a relation between the temporal human self and the divine.

**Theistic Language in Kant’s Philosophy and Tillich’s Method of Correlation**

Let’s take a look at Kant’s argument for the objective reality of “God.” By attempting to follow the moral law, and thereby pursuing the highest good, humans presuppose that this “highest good” is possible and has objective reality. Kant writes:

> In the practical task of pure reason, that is, in the necessary pursuit of the highest good, such a connection is postulated as necessary: we ought to strive to promote the highest good (which must therefore be possible). Accordingly, the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely of the exact correspondence of happiness with morality, is also postulated … Now, a being capable of actions in accordance with the representation of laws is an intelligence (a rational being), and the causality of such a being in accordance with this representation of laws is his will. Therefore the supreme cause of nature, insofar as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being that is the cause of nature by understanding and will (hence its author), that is, God. Consequently, the postulate of the possibility of the highest derived good (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a highest original good, namely the existence of God.\(^\text{168}\)

Strangely, Kant has here allowed a certain amount of theistic language to appear in his philosophy in order to describe the personhood of God. Kant argues that God must have “understanding” and “will” if he is to legislate the moral law to humanity. Stranger still, Kant invokes the phrase ‘Son of God’ in other places to show the necessary personification of this “highest good.” Kant’s derives the idea of the highest possible good from the moral law, and yet it is unclear why the “highest good” needs to be personified with theistic language.

Let’s review Kant’s argument for clarity: the very existence of an infinite gulf between limited humans and the divine causes us to wonder whether we can actually live up to the ideals of the moral law. Yet purely by acknowledging the moral law, humans already acknowledge the

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\(^{168}\) PP, Critique of Practical Reason, pg. 240-241
objective reality of the possibility for obeying the moral law. Kant writes: “We ought to conform to [the moral law] and therefore we must also be able to.” Thus we cannot think the moral law without also thinking that conformity to the moral law is possible. This intuitive application of the moral law forces us to cognize a prototype for humanity. Kant writes: “There is no need, therefore, of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason.” Thus Kant argues for the objective reality of this prototype, which he calls the son of God, even before experience.

Kant writes:

This human being [(the moral prototype)], alone pleasing to God, “is in him from all eternity”; the idea of him proceeds from God’s being; he is not, therefore, a created thing but God’s only-begotten Son, “the Word” (the Fiat!) through which all other things are, and without whom nothing that is made would exist (since for him, that is, for a rational being in the world, as can be thought according to its moral determination, everything was made). – “He is the reflection of his glory.” – “in him God loved the world,” and only in him and through the adoption of his dispositions can we hope “to become children of God”; etc.

As Kant argues, the idea of a prototype for humanity is actually embedded directly within our cognition of the moral law (or at least implied therein). And further, this prototype must have adopted humanity as its nature; else the prototype would be incomprehensible to depraved humanity. While this may be true, Kant’s argument is fraught with religious quotes and language. One might attempt to find a rational basis for the use of religious language here, and yet the pursuit might be fruitless. When Kant attempts to show the incarnation of the “prototype,” it seems that all hope of rationality is lost. Kant writes:

Precisely because we are not its authors but the idea has rather established itself in the human being without our comprehending how human nature could have even been receptive of it, it is better to say that that prototype has come

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169 Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, pg. 81
170 Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, pg. 81
171 Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, pg. 80
down to us from heaven, that it has taken up humanity (for it is not just as possible to conceive how the human being, evil by nature, would renounce evil on his own and raise himself up to the ideal of holiness, as it is that the latter take up humanity – which is not evil in itself – by descending to it).\textsuperscript{172}

Clearly Kant is mixing his philosophy with religious language. It is entirely unclear why he needs to speak of this prototype as coming down from heaven; it is also unclear that one ought to speak of this prototype as the “Son of God.”

Rather than provide a rational explanation for Kant’s invocation of religious languages here, I think a better reading of Kant would place these passages as primitive examples of Tillich’s method of correlation. Tillich’s method of correlation is a way to relate existential problems derived from philosophy with solutions from the revealed traditions of religion. Even in the most charitable reading of Kant, it would be most difficult to show that Kant derives the phrase “Son of God” from his philosophy. Rather, Kant is correlating the needs of his system with the most readily available religious tradition and the religious symbols available therein. Kant has shown that the moral law requires the objective existence of a moral exemplar for humanity; and yet, rather than create his own language for describing this moral exemplar, Kant correlates his existential problem with the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. In this interpretation, we need not offer any rational explanation for Kant’s choice to speak of the prototype of humanity within Christian terminology. If we accept this interpretation of Kant, the result is fantastic; we see that Kant makes room for a minimal amount of religious language within his philosophy, so long as that language supports the overall aims of the system.

\textbf{The Limitation of Theonomy - Guilt}

As we have seen so far, each dialectical relation exists within a limitation. Whereas practical freedom was limited by the human’s natural predisposition towards evil (original sin),

\textsuperscript{172} Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, pg. 80
the freedom of theonomy is limited when one forgets the divine element within oneself. Thus the limitation of theonomy, at least in Kant’s context, is guilt. While Kant’s perusal into the tripartite vision of freedom allows the individual to find agentive freedom in the moment, this freedom disappears in hindsight. The moral agent who has attained practical freedom is capable of resisting any coercion directed against him, at least in the moment. And yet, practical freedom does not comprise absolute freedom: after sins have been committed, one cannot go back in time and un-commit them. Thus, though there is value in practical freedom, it does not solve the existential problem of guilt. Generally, guilt refers to a negative self-evaluation with regards to immoral acts that one has committed in the past. Through the experience of guilt, it can be easy to forget one’s own innate worth as a human being; through guilt, it can be easy to forget that every human has an element of the divine within them. Thus the theonomous attitude described above is limited by guilt. Fortunately, guilt can be combated by a truly theonomous attitude and a firmly theonomous attitude. Kant, though unable to appreciate the paradoxical nature of the Christian gospel in its entirety, is able to offer atonement through co-operant grace in the spirit of theonomy.

The issue of guilt begins with the experience of sin. As Kant is well aware, there is an infinite gulf between the goodness of man and the ideal of perfect holiness. Kant writes:

> The law says: “be ye holy (in the conduct of your lives) as your Father in Heaven is holy,” for this is the ideal of the Son of God which is being placed before us as a model. The distance between the goodness which we ought to effect in ourselves and the evil from which we start is, however, infinite, and, so far as the deed is concerned – i.e. the conformity of the conduct of one’s life to the holiness of the law – it is not exhaustible in any time.  

Noting that this infinite gap between man and perfection exists, Kant thinks the only way to make up for it is through a continuous moral striving. Kant writes:

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173 Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, pg. 84
If by a single and unalterable decision a human being reverse the supreme ground of his maxims by which he was an evil human being (and thereby puts on a “new man”), he is to this extent, by principle and attitude of mind, a subject receptive to the good; but he is a good human being only in incessant laboring and becoming; i.e. he can hope – in view of the purity of the principle which he has adopted as the supreme maxim of his power of choice, and in view of the stability of this principle – to find himself upon the good (though narrow) path of constant progress from bad to better.\footnote{Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 68}

If Kant’s rational religion incorporates a theory of justification, this must be it! Kant is arguing that humans can become well-pleasing to God through a constant moral striving and the attainment of moral progress in their lives. Kant continues to elaborate this point:

Because of the disposition from which it derives and which transcends the sense, we can think of the infinite progression of the good toward conformity to the law as being judged by him who scrutinizes the heart (through his pure intellectual intuition) to be a perfected whole even with respect to the deed (the life conduct). And so notwithstanding his permanent deficiency, a human being can still expect to be generally well-pleasing to God, at whatever point in time his existence be cut short.\footnote{Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 85}

Within this rationally formulated doctrine of justification, we even find that Kant has made room for grace. While humans must ultimately be responsible for their own moral decisions (so that these decisions might be imputed to the human), there is nothing to stop a human from accepting divine assistance after the initial movement of the will has begun. It is perfectly reasonable, according to Kant, to hope for divine assistance in moral living. Kant writes:

The human being must make or have made himself into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil. These two [characters] must be an effect of his free power of choice, for otherwise they could not be imputed to him, and, consequently, he could be neither morally good nor evil…Granted that some supernatural cooperation is also needed to his becoming good or better, whether this cooperation only consist in the diminution of obstacles or be also a positive assistance, the human being must nonetheless make himself antecedently worthy of receiving it; and he must accept this help…\footnote{Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason, pg. 66}
At this point, we should like to conclude with two things: first, it is clear that Kant makes room for a theonomous attitude in his philosophy. Kant extends dignity to the rational human being, and though the extension of this dignity is in conformity with reason, the occasion for this extension can only be out of respect for human beings as ends in themselves. Thus Kant invokes a fourth mode of freedom, theonomy, which is the freedom to see oneself as a participant in the divine. Though Kant’s view of theonomy is disrupted by guilt in the face of sin, constant moral striving can rectify the relationship which would otherwise be in disrepair. The resultant solution to the problem of guilt involves a co-operant relationship with God, even to the point of accepting divine assistance and grace. In this way, Kant’s philosophy makes room for and necessitates the self-God relation of theonomy. While humans must make the first move towards God, Kant returns to religious convictions in his later work to show that a rational faith in God is possible and necessary.

Yet, second, we must point out that Kant’s system is fundamentally different from the good news of the Christian gospel. Though Kant’s system makes room for justification, grace, and atonement, one cannot receive these divine gifts without being “antecedently worthy.” Kant’s insistence that the justification of every individual must begin from within that individual prevents Kant from appreciating the true spirit of the Christian gospel, and perhaps the true spirit of theonomy. Paul’s “slave to sin” persona rejoices in his salvation through Christ Jesus, not because the he was allowed to save himself, but rather because Christ loved him even before conversion. To Kant, it is unthinkable that God would extend grace to those who do not deserve it; and yet the gospel proclaims that “we love because he [God] first loved us.”177 While Kant clearly values human beings for their rational relationship to the moral law, it is unclear whether God’s love could possible extend further into the human’s identity as a child of God.

177 1 John 4:19