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# Freedom as Morality

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FREEDOM AS MORALITY

by

Hao Liang

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ABSTRACT

FREEDOM AS MORALITY

by

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Under the Supervision of Professor William F. Bristow

In this paper, I offer a reading concerning Kant's concept of freedom and its relation to morality. In *Groundwork III*, Kant deduces morality from freedom, such strategy in which requires a metaphysical understanding of freedom. However, according to Kant's argument in the first *Critique*, we do not have knowledge of freedom as an idea of reason. That is: we cannot know that we are free. In the second *Critique*, Kant claims that morality is a "fact of reason", which is not dependent on any antecedent data. We could cognize that we are free when we are conscious of the moral law. In this paper, I do some preliminary work regarding this argumentative shift in Kant's moral philosophy. I reconstruct Kant's arguments in the *Groundwork III* and the second *Critique* to show that freedom as an idea of reason gains its reality from a practical standpoint view.

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## 1. Introduction

Freedom is a central concept in Kant's moral philosophy. According to Kant, morality requires absolute freedom that is not in the phenomenal realm. There is an argumentative shift in Kant's philosophy regarding such absolute freedom and its relation to morality. In *Groundwork III*, Kant deduces morality from freedom, such strategy in which requires a metaphysical understanding of freedom. However, according to Kant's argument in the first *Critique*, we do not have knowledge of freedom as an idea of reason. That is: we cannot know that we are free. In the second *Critique*, Kant claims that morality is a "fact of reason", which is not dependent on any antecedent data. We could cognize that we are free when we are conscious of the moral law. In this paper, I do some preliminary work regarding this shift in Kant's moral philosophy. I connect Kant's arguments in the *Groundwork III* and the second *Critique* to argue that freedom as an idea of reason gains its reality from practical perspective.

My argument is structured as follows. In the first part, I reconstruct Kant's argument in the *Groundwork III*. I show that Kant's conception of freedom is closely connected with the will that is a special kind of causality belonging to rational beings. I further analyze the complexity of Kant's argumentative strategy in the *Groundwork*. On the one hand, Kant deduces morality from freedom to prove that morality is real. On the other hand, Kant maintains the upshot of his arguments in the first *Critique*: it is beyond our capacity to know freedom as an idea of pure reason. I suggest that Kant's argument is essentially a theoretical one although he realizes that morality is a practical conception. In *Groundwork*, Kant does not have a full-fledged practical conception of morality. In the second part, I focus on Kant's conception of "the fact of reason" in his *Critique of*

*Practical Reason* to show that Kant shifts his theoretical perspective to a practical perspective concerning morality and freedom. Morality, as a practical consciousness, does not need to be deduced from any antecedent data. Freedom, I argue, is changed from transcendent use into immanent use in the moral consciousness. In this way, freedom is no more an idea, but has reality. In the third part, I connect my argument with the unity of reason. I show that although from speculative perspective we cannot know freedom as an idea of pure reason, from practical perspective our cognition of freedom is extended. Freedom, as the keystone combines two interests of reason into a whole.

## **2. Freedom and Morality in the *Groundwork***

### **2.1 Reciprocity Thesis**

Freedom, in Kant's theory, is not concerned with our capacity of a free choice; rather it is the property of the will. As Kant says,

*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes determining it, just as natural necessity is the property of the causality of all non rational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes. (4:446)

Will, for Kant, is not simply given by human beings' biological structure. It is a kind of causality that belongs to rational living beings. Freedom is the property of such special kind of causality. The relation between will and freedom could be put in this way: will is a free will, and freedom is the freedom of will, not of a choice. The reason that will is free lies in the fact that it is about a special kind of causality. The specialty of this kind of causality is shown in the contrast with natural causality.

For all the non-rational beings, the causality in them has the property of natural necessity. That's because non-rational beings' activities are determined by the influences of causes external to them. They don't have self-determinacy. For all the rational beings, in contrast, they have a special kind of causality in them. Freedom is the property of such causality. Because of this special kind of causality, rational beings are able to determine their activities independent of causes external to them. They have self-determinacy. Put in another way, they can be the cause of their activities without being influenced by external causes.

This special kind of causality in rational beings makes them free, i.e., rational beings are able to be the cause of their activities. Since it is causality, the activities have to be caused by something, rather than nothing. Thus, such special kind of causality introduces an idea of making laws to itself, i.e., categorical imperative.

Since the concept of causality brings with it that of laws in accordance with which, by something that we call a cause, something else, namely an effect, must be posited, so freedom, although it is not a property of the will in accordance with natural laws, is not for that reason lawless but must instead be a causality in accordance with immutable laws but of a special kind; for otherwise a free will would be an absurdity. Natural necessity was a heteronomy of efficient causes, since every effect was possible only in accordance with the law that something else determines the efficient cause of causality; what, then, can freedom of the will be other than *autonomy*, that is the will's property of being a law to itself? But the proposition, the will is in all its actions to a law to itself, indicates only the principle, to act on no other maxim than that which can also have as object itself as a universal law. This, however, is precisely the formula of the categorical imperative and is the principle of morality; hence **a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same. [4:447]**

The concept of freedom or free will has a negative meaning and a positive meaning. Negative freedom tells us what freedom is not, i.e., not being determined by alien / external causes. It does not give us information about what freedom is. With respect to the positive meaning of freedom, as the quote above shows, "what, then, can

freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will's property of being a law to itself?" (G 4:447) Positive conception of freedom is equated with autonomy, i.e., self-determination, or self-legislation. There are two reasons for this equation. First, positive freedom as a special causality is law-like, rather than something that is totally random or uncertain. Secondly, positive freedom is not governed by a natural law. That is: positive freedom is not constrained by natural necessity. These two constraints make the positive conception of freedom nothing but making laws for itself. A will that can make laws to itself is a will under morality.

At this point, what we know is that a free will and a will under morality are the same. In the second critique, Kant puts the same point as "freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other"(5:29). This claim is called the Reciprocity Thesis. Given freedom of the will and a will under morality are the same, we still don't know what is the strategy of the deduction of morality. In the *Groundwork*, Kant asserts that freedom must be presupposed as a property of the will of all rational beings. He says,

reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such a will must in a practical respect thus be attributed to every rational beings. (4:448)

As the quotation shows above, Kant maintains the distinction between non-rational beings and rational beings. The former are determined by alien /external causes, while the later can be the author of their principles. If practical reason has to be the author of itself, the will of a rational being has to be free. Otherwise, such a being is still influenced by alien causes. In this sense, a free will is the necessary condition for a practical reason to have self-determinacy. The reciprocal circle between freedom and

morality is broken by this formulation concerning the relation between a free will and a will that is the author of itself. It seems like the strategy of Kant's argument in the *Groundwork* is to deduce morality from freedom. To put it explicitly, if rational beings have free will, they can be the cause of their principles independently of alien / external causes. Consequently, they are able to give laws to themselves, i.e., they are moral.

In order to show that morality is real rather than a chimerical idea in our mind, Kant has to show that freedom of the will is real. However, concerning the freedom of the will, there is a tension in Kant's remark. Kant claims that "the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such a will must in a *practical respect* thus be attributed to every rational beings". The first half of the remark is shown as a theoretical proposal: if a will is put under the idea of freedom, such a will is a free will. The key is to prove that freedom is real. However, according to Kant's theory in the first *Critique*, we cannot judge whether freedom is real or not because it is an idea of pure reason. There's an intrinsic difficulty in this proposal. While the second half of the remark is shown as a practical proposal: from a practical respect, a free will has to be attributed to every rational being. The key to this proposal is to make sense of a practical respect. With respect to this tension, I suggest that although Kant maintains the upshot of his arguments in the first *Critique*, he still considers freedom as the antecedent data of the deduction of morality. His argumentative strategy in the *Groundwork* is a theoretical one. In order to make sense of practical moral activity, Kant has to make a move to ask rational beings to consider themselves as free. Although Kant realizes that morality is a practical conception, he has not completely shifted his perspective into a practical point

of view in the *Groundwork*. The transition from a theoretical perspective to practical perspective is completed in the second *Critique*.

## 2.2 Deduction of morality

Kant's deduction of morality is a complicated project. In this section, I will describe this project in big strokes by reconstructing it in three steps. Kant's strategy of the deduction of morality is a theoretical project in essence. He tries to prove that positive freedom as the necessary condition of morality is possible. Consequently, the categorical imperative is possible. If this deduction failed, it would be because of this theoretical attitude.

### Step 1:

Freedom of the will is concerned with a rational being. In order to prove that freedom is possible, Kant firstly introduces the distinction between three different faculties that a person has in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As he says in the *Groundwork III*,

Now, a human being really finds in himself a capacity by which he distinguishes himself from all other things, even from himself insofar as he is affected by objects, and that is *reason*. This, as pure self-activity, is raised even above the *understanding* by this: that though the latter is also self-activity and does not, like sense, contain merely representations that arise when we are affected by things (and are thus passive), yet it can produce from its activity no other concepts than those which serve merely to bring sensible representations under rules and thereby to unite them in one consciousness, without which use of sensibility it would think nothing at all; but reason, on the contrary, 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 of sense and the world of understanding from each other and thereby marking our limits for the understanding itself. (4:452)

In this passage, Kant does not just repeat his doctrine in the first *Critique*: our faculty of sensibility is passive because it is affected by things to form representations, while our

faculty of understanding is active because it can bring different representations under one consciousness by certain rules. Kant also introduces a new point: *self-activity* of the understanding is different from the *spontaneity* of ideas of reason in degree. Although the former is self-active, the activity of understanding still needs sensibility to bring representations to it. In this sense, the rules of the understanding can only be applied to objects that are conditioned. The activity of reason, in contrast, is pure spontaneity that it does not need sensibility to offer any material. For Kant, reason is the source for rational beings to think of the unconditioned. Although some scholars criticize Kant that the spontaneity of ideas is just an epistemic capacity, I think that this capacity of thinking the unconditioned offers the ground of morality as categorical imperative because morality demands people to act according to the moral laws necessarily and universally.

### **Step 2:**

Since a rational being has sensibility, understanding and reason, he is at the same time bound by experience and not bound by experience. In the latter sense, she is free. But she is free only when she considers herself as to belonging to another world.

A rational being counts himself, as intelligence, as belonging to the world of understanding, and only as an efficient cause belonging to this does he call his causality a *will*. On the other side he is also conscious of himself as a part of the world of sense, in which his actions are found as mere appearances of that causality; but their possibility from that causality of which we are not cognizant cannot be seen; instead, those actions as belonging to the world of sense must be regarded as determined by other appearances, namely desires and inclinations. All my actions as only a member of the world of understanding would therefore conform perfectly with the principle of autonomy of the pure will; as only of the world of sense they would have to be taken to conform wholly to the natural law of desires and inclinations, hence to the heteronomy of nature. (The former would rest on the supreme principle of morality, the latter on that of happiness.) But because the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense and so too of its laws, and is therefore immediately lawgiving with respect to my will

(which belongs wholly to the world of understanding) and must accordingly also be thought as such, it follows that I shall cognize myself as intelligence, though on the other side as a being belonging to the world of sense, as nevertheless subject to the law of the world of understanding, that is, of reason, which contains in the idea of freedom the law of the world of understanding, and thus cognize myself as subject to the autonomy of the will; consequently the laws of the world of understanding must be regarded as imperatives for me, and actions in conformity with these as duties. (4:454)

The distinction between the world of understanding and the world of sense is no more an epistemic point. Rather, Kant is making a distinction of two worlds from a practical point of view. When a rational being belongs to the world of sense, his action is caused by other appearances, such as desires and inclinations. But when he counts himself as belonging to the world of understanding, he is the efficient cause of his activities. He is free in the sense that he is not bound by any previous appearance. In this sense, in the world of understanding, a rational being has autonomy of the will. In other words, he is free.

The problem is that a rational being is in the empirical world in which he is bound by law of nature. How could he at the same time be free in the empirical world? In order to solve that problem, Kant introduces the relation between the world of understanding and the world of sense. The former one is the ground of the latter. By “ground” Kant means at least four different aspects.

- (1) “the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense and so too of its laws”. The world of understanding is the ground of the laws in the world of sense. Laws in the world of sense are natural laws. Hence, the ground of natural laws lies in the world of understanding not the world of sense.

- (2) “and is therefore immediately lawgiving with respect to my will (which belongs wholly to the world of understanding)”. In the world of understanding, a rational being gives law to his will without any mediation.
- (3) “it follows that I shall cognize myself as intelligence, though on the other side as a being belonging to the world of sense, as nevertheless subject to the law of the world of understanding, that is, of reason, which contains in the idea of freedom the law of the world of understanding, and thus cognize myself as subject to the autonomy of the will”. Although a rational being is in the world of sense where he is bound by the natural law, when he cognizes himself as intelligence he is subject to the autonomy of the will at the same time. These two subjections could happen in the same person at the same time.
- (4) “consequently the laws of the world of understanding must be regarded as imperatives for me, and actions in conformity with these as duties.” Since the world of understanding is the ground of the world of sense, the laws of the world of understanding is imperative for a rational agent. It’s controversial whether there is a gap between “ground” and “imperative” in Kant’s argument. I don’t have enough space to defend Kant here. The key to keep in mind is that the laws in the world of understanding are the ground of natural laws in the world of sense. For a rational being, he has duties to obey the laws in the world of understanding prior to the natural laws in the world of sense, although subjecting to the latter is much easier.

**Step 3:**

And so categorical imperatives are possible by this: the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world and consequently, if I were only this, all my

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

Since Kant proves that the intelligible world is the ground of the world of sense in the last step, categorical imperative is possible only if the will affected by sensible desires is added by an autonomous will in the intelligible world. It is similar to the relation between sensibility and concepts of the understanding in the formation of epistemic cognition. Sensibility offers intuitions and the concepts offer the lawful form. Our knowledge is a synthetic proposition that combines intuitions and concepts together. Similarly, if apperception is the key in the formation of knowledge, then freedom is the key in the deduction of morality. To further understand freedom, we have to understand the relation between the idea of freedom, intelligible world and the sensible world.

### **2.3 Two worlds**

In order to make the deduction of morality work, Kant has to prove that freedom as the premise of the deduction is real. Since Kant separates the intelligible world from the sensible world, it is natural for us to understand them as two ontological worlds. If this is correct, then the argument, putting it explicitly, should be like this: if there is an ontologically intelligible world, in which rational beings are able to act according to the categorical imperative based on an autonomous will, then morality is real, not an illusion

in our mind. It is important to notice that a metaphysical understanding of freedom in an intelligible world is a key to proving the objectivity of morality in *Groundwork III*.<sup>1</sup>

However, this metaphysical understanding of freedom is problematic. First of all, it raises various puzzles concerning the connection between the intelligible world and the sensible world. As members of the sensible world, we seem to be determined by natural inclination and therefore cannot choose merely according to the categorical imperative. Given that we are entirely autonomous in the intelligible world, the question of how that autonomy influences our actions in the sensible world is still unanswered. As Wood and other philosophers have emphasized, intelligible causality and timeless agency are mysterious<sup>2</sup>. And thus this ontological view carries too much of a metaphysical burden.

Secondly, from the perspective of epistemology, it is problematic to base the positive conception of freedom on an ontological intelligible world. Transcendental freedom, if we take it to occur in an intelligible world that is totally beyond our empirical world, is impossible for human beings to *intuit*. According to Kant's theory of cognition, sensible intuitions and concepts are the two conditions for human experience. We do not have a third faculty called intellectual intuition. Without intuition of transcendental freedom, we do not have any knowledge of it at all. Furthermore, transcendental freedom is not the necessary condition of the possibility of our knowledge, such as categories. So, we cannot assume its existence based on the possibility of human knowledge. Thus the deduction of morality does not work and the metaphysical understanding of freedom fails.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on what Kant says in *G III*, an ontological reading of such an intelligible world is a plausible reading; especially in the whole *Groundwork* Kant tries to prove morality as part of knowledge. Kant uses the word "proposition" to refer to the synthetic cognition, which shows that he has theoretical attitude to prove morality when he wrote the *Groundwork*.

<sup>2</sup> Allen W. Wood, '*Kant's Compatibilism*' in *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp.73-101

Further, putting these epistemological difficulties of intuiting transcendental freedom in an intelligible world aside, there is a more important reason for us to reject the ontological understanding of freedom. Kant not only introduces the intelligible world and the sensible world; he also introduces a relation between them. On his view, “the world of understanding contains *the ground* of the world of sense and so too of its laws, and is therefore immediately lawgiving with respect to my will”. (G454, emphasis added). If we read the intelligible world and the sensible world to be two separate worlds, then the grounding relation between them is metaphysical, not normative. By a metaphysical grounding relation, I mean that we could appeal to the transcendental freedom in the intelligible world to give an explanation of our freedom to act according to the moral law in the empirical world. For example, I can choose freely because I am a member of the intelligible world, where I have transcendental freedom and a member of the world of sense at the same time. Given that human beings have transcendental freedom in a separate intelligible world, what we can infer from it is merely that transcendental freedom makes our empirical free choice possible metaphysically. But we are still left with the question of why human beings *ought to* choose freely, namely to act according to the moral law. Freedom for Kant is not a concept concerning free choice, but is intimately connected with the conception of autonomy, i.e., giving laws to itself. In order to make Kant’s argument work, I will argue later, it is better to understand the relation between the intelligible world and the world of sense as practical, not metaphysical. Our membership in the intelligible world does not determine our free actions according to the moral law metaphysically; rather, that membership gives us a normative / moral calling, and thus opens the possibility for us to act not according to the sensible inclinations.

Due to the three reasons above, Kant's deduction of morality fails based on a metaphysical understanding of freedom. In *Groundwork III*, Kant tries to save his deduction by shifting to a standpoint view of freedom. I don't have space to go deeper to evaluate his standpoint view here. But it's enough to point out that Kant gave up his deduction of morality after all because he realizes that morality and its connection to freedom of the will is fundamentally a practical question, not a theoretical one. In the *Ground work III*, Kant has not worked out full-fledged accounts of morality and freedom from practical point of view. This work is finished in the second *Critique*.

### 3. Morality and Freedom in the *CPrR*

#### 3.1 The Fact of Reason

After giving up the deduction of morality from theoretical perspective in *Groundwork III*, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant introduces the "fact of reason" as a new starting point of his argument. As we will see, this new approach is from the practical perspective.

He says,

Consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason because one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason, for example, from consciousness of freedom (since this is not antecedently given to us) and because it instead forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic a priori proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical, although it would be analytic if the freedom of the will were presupposed; but for this, as a positive concept, *an intellectual intuition would* be required, which certainly cannot be assumed here. However, in order to avoid misinterpretation in regarding this law as *given*, it must be noted carefully that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of *pure reason* [emphasis added], which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving. (5:31)

The passage just cited shows that Kant has given up the argumentative strategy in the *Groundwork* to prove the reality of morality, i.e., to deduce morality from freedom. First,

Kant sees morality as a fact of pure reason that cannot be deduced from anything antecedent to it. This is a new strategy because Kant deduces freedom from morality in the second *Critique*. Second, morality would be analytically deduced if the freedom of the will were presupposed. But, since human beings do not have intellectual intuition, it is impossible to prove the freedom of will from speculative reason's point of view.

Is Kant committed to a kind of Intuitionism or Dogmatism with his claim of “the fact of reason”? No. But for the purpose of this paper, I cannot show Kant's argument of “the fact of reason” in detail. What is significant for my argument is that Kant gives us a hint to understand this special fact, i.e., it is *the consciousness* of the fundamental law. Paralleling the big shift in argumentative strategy mentioned above, Kant gives up looking for a third cognition to combine free will and morality together; rather, he returns to the consciousness of the moral law. Consciousness of the moral law is *in* everyone's practical thinking and deliberation.

What is the structure of the consciousness of the fundamental moral principle? Let's consider a famous example in the second critique about false testimony. A person was demanded by his prince to give false testimony against an innocent person. The prince threatened him with death were he to fail to obey. Kant claims that,

This man 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.” (5:30) [emphasis added]

As I read the passage, Kant is saying that in order to say that this man has the possibility to act against his own natural inclination, i.e., the fear of death, there are two constraining components: first, he must be aware of what he ought to do. That is to say

that he must be conscious of the moral law. Secondly, he has to be able to cognize freedom *within* himself. Recall the upshot of Kant's arguments in the first *Critique*: we do not have knowledge of freedom as an idea of pure reason. Consequently, this cognition of freedom is of course not a speculative cognition, which requires our intellectual intuition of the transcendental freedom. On the contrary, this cognition is purely practical in the sense that through being aware of the moral law the agent is able to cognize freedom in herself. That is to say that she has agency to act not according to the sensible inclinations, but the law given by herself, i.e., categorical imperative. It is important to notice that with this second constraint, freedom is no longer a mere *idea*; rather, when we are conscious of the moral law, practical cognition of freedom is *real* in each agent's consciousness.

Based on the analysis above, in the next section, I draw attention to Kant's argument about freedom as immanent in contrast with transcendent freedom. I argue that this immanence of freedom in Kant's argument fulfills the second constraint above, i.e., the ability of the agent to cognize freedom within herself. I hope thereby to shed some light from the second critique on the puzzle of the positive conception of freedom in *Groundwork III*.

### **3.2 Transcendent Freedom and Immanent Freedom**

As Kant famously says in the preface of the second critique, "the concept of freedom constitutes the *keystone* of a system of pure reason." (5:4). It seems like understanding the concept of freedom is pivotal for us to understand Kant's system. I attempt to argue that Kant uses the conception of immanent freedom versus transcendent

freedom to characterize the positive conception of freedom. This strategy, as we will see, maintains, on the one hand, the distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason, while on the other, it makes freedom real in the agent's practical consciousness. From this perspective, immanent freedom is the key for us to understand the possibility of pure practical reason, which is the essence of "the fact of reason" as the consciousness of moral law.

In the introduction of the *CPrR*, Kant first mentions the contrast between immanent and transcendent use of pure reason. He says,

If it is proved that there is pure reason, its use is alone *immanent*; the empirically conditioned use, which lays claims to absolute rule, is on the contrary *transcendent* and expresses itself in demands and commands that go quite beyond its sphere—precisely the opposite relation from what could be said of pure reason in its speculative use. (5:16)

It's a little bit abrupt to introduce this passage without considering the context. The context of this passage is to show why there is no need of Critique of *Pure* Practical Reason; rather, Critique of Practical Reason is enough. Kant famously argues that there is a sharp distinction between the theoretical and practical use of reason. The theoretical use of reason is concerned with the objects of cognitive faculty while the practical use of reason is concerned with the determining grounds of the will. There is a need of critique of pure (theoretical) reason because pure cognitive faculty has the tendency to go beyond its boundary to cognize unattainable objects and form contradictory concepts. But, there is no need of critique of pure practical reason because pure practical reason can of itself determine the will. The task of the second critique is to ask "whether pure reason itself alone suffices to determine the will or whether it can be a determining ground of the will only as empirically conditioned." (5:16) Kant points out immediately that in order to

answer that question, we have to consider the conception of causality. In the first Critique, although it is justified by itself, natural causality is never empirically presented. Now, in the second Critique, if Kant can find the grounds for showing that a special kind of causality belongs to the human will, then pure reason alone can be practical.

Bearing this distinction between theoretical and practical reason in mind, when we read back to the quotation above, Kant draws a distinction between immanent and transcendent use of reason. For him, from a practical standpoint, the use of pure reason alone is immanent. If we question its empirically conditioned use, such as human being's desires and inclinations, then pure practical reason transgresses its boundary. From a theoretical standpoint, in contrast, we can only know objects in the empirical domain. If we want to know the object that goes beyond the phenomenal sphere, the use of pure reason is transcendent.

Now, with respect to freedom, I suggest that it is immanent from a practical standpoint since pure practical reason determines the will that is free. I will specify in what sense freedom is immanent later. However, if we question the empirical condition of freedom from a theoretical standpoint, the answer will lead us to go beyond reason's own boundary. It is transcendent. The reason lies in the fact that we do not have an intuition of the ideas of reason [God, Immortality and Freedom] at all. Pure practical reason is not empirical since it is both immanent in our free actions, and is never presented empirically. Although we don't have experience of pure practical reason, it is in our actions.

Regarding the positive conception of freedom, it contains a paradoxical requirement. On the one hand, positive freedom cannot be deduced from the empirical

world since everything in the empirical, i.e., phenomenal world is determined by natural necessity. If it is to be independent of natural necessity, freedom has to be beyond the empirical world. In this sense, freedom is transcendent. On the other hand, positive conception of freedom is just a mere idea of reason. It is beyond our theoretical cognition. Human beings don't have intellectual intuition to cognize it. If positive freedom is real rather than some phantom in our mind, it has to be immanent in human beings' actions although it differs from an empirical fact. It must be manifested in a particular person's actions. Then, how could this paradoxical requirement be? This is Kant's suggestion.

In this they [freedom, immortality and God] become *immanent* and *constitutive* inasmuch as they are grounds of the possibility of making real the necessary object of pure practical reason, whereas apart from this they are *transcendent* and merely *regulative* principles of speculative reason which do not require it to assume a new object beyond experience but only to bring its use in experience nearer to completeness. (5:135)

As the passage just says, transcendent freedom, for Kant, is merely a regulative principle. What is the regulative use of reason? Kant does not give us a clear definition in the second Critique. But at least we know that, first, a regulative principle concerns theoretical / speculative reason; secondly, as Kant says in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, “the concept of freedom cannot hold as constitutive but solely as a *regulative* and, indeed, merely *negative* principle of speculative reason.” (6:221) A regulative principle as negative principle of reason cannot determine an object beyond experience. With respect to freedom, such principle can only offer a negative conception of freedom, i.e., freedom is not determined by the alien causes. But, it cannot offer a positive conception of freedom because transcendent use of freedom lacks the immediate determination of the will. Thus the positive conception of freedom cannot be found by way of a regulative principle of speculative reason. Immanent use of freedom, in contrast, plays a constitutive

role in our practical consciousness. Because of its constitutive function, it is the ground of the possibility of making the object of practical reason real<sup>3</sup>. This possibility is in the essence of “the fact of reason” as the consciousness of moral law.

There is another place in the second *Critique* where Kant uses the same strategy to show the positive conception of freedom that converts a transcendent use of reason into an immanent use. As he puts it,

By adding a *positive* determination to a causality thought only negatively, the possibility of which was incomprehensible to speculative reason, which was nevertheless forced to assume it; it adds, namely, the concept of a reason determining the will immediately and thus is able for the first time to give objective though only practical reality to reason, which always became extravagant when it wanted to proceed speculatively with its ideas, and changes its *transcendent* use into an *immanent* use (in which reason is by means of ideas itself an efficient cause in the field of experience). (5:48)

In this passage, Kant connects practical reason with a positive determination of causality. He highlights that in order for the pure practical reason to determine will immediately, i.e., to give objective but only practical reality to reason, transcendent use of reason has to be changed into immanent use. In the immanent use of reason, Kant explains reason is “by means of ideas itself an efficient cause in the field of experience”. Although, it is beyond this paper’s goal to explain how ideas of reason could be an efficient cause in the field of experience, it is enough to point out that for Kant, transcendent ideas as purely regulative principles of reason in the theoretical domain cannot help to solve a practical problem. The objectivity of morality is based on the immanent use of reason, not just ideas. In this sense, all the ideas of reason including God, Immortality and Freedom are changed from negative position into positive position. In the next part, we will explore this positive freedom.

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Allison claims that, “this consciousness, then, is of a mere possibility rather than an actual capacity.” in his book *Kant’s theory of freedom*, p.246.

To summarize, in all the passages cited above as we see, Kant introduces this conception of immanent use of freedom versus transcendent use of freedom to clarify the special conception of freedom in his system. Freedom as an object of our practical consciousness is always transcendent, at least in the sense that it is beyond our consciousness of empirical objects. However, its transcendence cannot be understood as a relation to another ontological world. The idea of transcendent freedom is merely regulative. There is no room for speculative reason to question how transcendent freedom is possible. The positive conception of freedom brings the transcendent use of reason into immanent use, and this positive freedom constitutes the possibility of a special kind of causality in rational beings, i.e., the fact of reason as consciousness of the moral law. As the result of the conception of immanent use of freedom versus transcendent use of freedom, the distinction between speculative /theoretical reason and practical reason is maintained. At the same time, we do not need to appeal to an ontological distinction between the intelligible world and the empirical world to characterize the relation between transcendent freedom and immanent freedom. Freedom has always a dimension beyond empirical consciousness and it is toward the transcendental freedom. But it is just toward an idea rather than a real ontological world. Transcendent freedom can only play a role in the practical domain through immanent freedom. By itself, as an idea, it cannot ground the fact of reason at all.

### **3.3 Regulative vs. Constitutive Principles**

We are now in a position to rethink the relation between freedom and morality. For Kant, morality commands us to obey the moral law. But we are not forced to obey;

rather, we freely to answer the calling from categorical imperative. Freedom is intimately connected with morality. As we have shown earlier, there are two different ways for freedom to be connected with morality. If my argument is correct, we should not accept the ontological understanding of freedom. That we, as imperfect rational beings, can obey the moral law is not grounded on an ontological fact that we are purely practical without being influenced by natural inclinations in the intelligible world. Rather, our freedom is grounded by a practical fact: we are conscious of the moral law in our consciousness. In this part, I will connect this conception of freedom as morality with the idea of the immanent use of freedom discussed above.

As we have seen, the transcendent use of freedom is a regulative principle of pure reason. Although Kant does not explicitly explain what a regulative use is in the second *Critique*, fortunately, he does have some remarks in the first *Critique*.

The ideal of the highest being is, according to these considerations, nothing other than a **regulative principle** of reason, to regard all combination in the world **as if it** arose from an all-sufficient necessary cause, so as to ground on that cause the rule of a unity that is systematic and necessary according to universal laws; but it is not an assertion of an existence that is necessary in itself. (A619/B647)

The “highest being” is an example of a regulative principle of reason. Although we don’t have knowledge of the experience of God, the idea of the highest being functions as an assumption in a systematic unity of human knowledge. A regulative principle of reason is used in the theoretical domain, which concerns the unity of our knowledge. It is not concerned with our practical activities. With respect to freedom, such regulative principle functions as an assumption in the system of knowledge. We know that we have to assume freedom in order to make sense of morality as part of knowledge. But freedom as an

assumption in the system of knowledge does not have connections with morality in the practical domain. If we accept the metaphysical understanding of freedom, then the idea of freedom is merely transcendent to us. Only when the transcendent use freedom is brought into immanent use, can we be free in practice.

The immanent use of reason, as we have seen in the third part, is a constitutive principle of reason. What is a constitutive principle? Kant does not give us an explicit answer. However, in the first *Critique*, we could find a clue.

Thus it [cosmological principle of totality] is not a principle of the possibility of experience and of empirical cognition of objects of sense, hence not a principle of the understanding, for every experience is enclosed within its boundaries; nor is it a **constitutive principle** of reason for extending the concept of the world of sense beyond all possible experience. (A509 / B537)

This passage shows that for Kant an idea of reason is merely a regulative principle, not a constitutive principle. If a regulative principle and a constitutive principle are contrary to each other, then we could infer from the passage just cited that a constitutive principle of reason could in some sense constitute an object beyond experience. From theoretical perspective, a regulative principle of reason cannot constitute freedom as an object, since such cognition has already gone beyond the limit of human beings. But, it does not rule out the possibility that when a transcendent idea is transformed into immanent use, practical reason does constitute an object: the highest good. This is not an empirical object, but a practical or moral object. When we are conscious of the moral law, we have the practical cognition of freedom. In this way, pure practical reason determines our will.

Before ending this section, I would like to address two misunderstandings of Kant's account of freedom and morality. The first misunderstanding is: since morality demands us to act according to the categorical imperative, such necessity determines our

will to do so. Consequently, there is no room to explain that there are people who do not obey the moral law. In my account of Kant's conception of freedom, I emphasize that it is the consciousness of the moral law (the fact of reason) that brings the transcendent use of freedom into its immanent use. To put it in another way, morality is the condition to connect such freedom with our moral agency. But, morality does not force us. Kant's theory on freedom and morality leaves room for explanation of not obeying the moral law. Since freedom as the property of a special kind of causality is belonging to the rational beings, morality is just a calling rather than a natural force on us. If we were totally rational, our actions would be completely in conformity with categorical imperatives. Since human beings are not totally rational, it is natural to see people who do not act according to the moral law in everyday situation.

The second misunderstanding is about freedom. In Kant's theory, morality and freedom are hand in hand. But some people might raise an objection that for those people who do not obey the moral law, they still have the capacity to choose between having spaghetti or Chinese food for dinner. It seems like they still have freedom. I would like to draw a distinction between freedom as a capacity of free choice and freedom as a rational capacity to give laws to oneself. Kant is not concerned with an account of our natural capacity to choose between two means to fulfill a given end. Freedom, in Kant's theory, is a rational agency to act according to the law given by oneself. In this sense, it is intimately connected with morality. Not obeying the categorical imperative entails this person's lacking of autonomy, but not the capacity of a free choice.

## 4. The Unity of Reason

### 4.1 Two interests

Kant claims that the concept of freedom is “the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason”. In what sense freedom is the keystone? In this section, I connect my reconstructions of Kant’s arguments concerning freedom and morality in the *Groundwork III* and the second Critique with the idea of the unity of reason. I attempt to show that how my special characterization of the positive concept of freedom help us understand Kant’s big project.

The idea of unity of reason contains two points. The first is the claim that there is only one reason. Theoretical (Kant uses theoretical and speculative reason interchangeably) reason and practical reason are not two reasons but one reason with two different interests. “The interest of its speculative use consists in the *cognition* of the object up to the highest a priori principles; that of its practical use consists in the determination of the *will* with respect to the final and complete end.” (5:120) The second point of the unity of reason is the claim that reason’s practical interest has primacy over its theoretical interest. Since speculative reason and practical reason are in one unit of cognition, in order to avoid a conflict between them either the former subordinates to the latter, or the latter subordinates to the former. For Kant, practical reason cannot subordinate to the theoretical reason because reason’s speculative interest is limited. Based on Kant’s arguments in the first Critique, our knowledge concerning objective cognition is restricted to the empirical domain. The unconditioned condition is not in the system of human knowledge. Practical use of reason, in contrast, is not conditioned. It

could extend its boundaries over anything empirical because practical reason is concerned with final end, which is not in the empirical domain.

In Kant's system, freedom, God, and immortality are the three postulates, which show the unity of reason. Although theoretical use cannot prove their existence but practical reason can guarantee their reality. Among them, freedom is the most important because without it morality is impossible.

#### **4.2 Two cognitions**

In my account, freedom as the keystone combines both theoretical reason and practical reason into a whole structure. Freedom, considered under the speculative use of reason, is transcendent. If we see everything in the natural world is under the natural law, then freedom is not in the empirical domain. We do not have empirical cognition of it. Accordingly, freedom is not an object of the understanding, but an idea of reason. Freedom is an idea of reason implies that it is merely a regulative principle of reason because it is not required "to assume a new object beyond experience but only to bring its use in experience nearer to completeness". (5:153)

Freedom, considered under the practical use of reason, is immanent. Consciousness of the moral law brings its transcendent use into immanent use. When we are conscious of the moral law, freedom is not an idea of reason any more, but is transformed as immanent in that consciousness. Positive freedom is that moral law. That's why Kant characterizes freedom as the *ratio essendi* of the moral law. Accordingly, positive freedom is not a mere regulative principle of reason, but a constitutive principle. It constitutes an object that goes beyond empirical. That is the highest good.

By this way, positive freedom brings speculative use of reason and practical use of reason into a unity. Although we don't have cognition of freedom under the speculative use of reason, we could extend our cognition of freedom under the practical use of reason, although this cognition is not empirical. As Kant says,

Is our cognition really extended in this way by pure practical reason, and is what was *transcendent* for speculative reason *immanent* in practical reason? Certainly, but only for practical purposes. (5:133)

### **5. Conclusion:**

Let's now bring this new thinking of immanent use of freedom back to the *Groundwork III*. Kant tries to deduce morality from freedom. He distinguishes between the intelligible world and the empirical world and claims that morality is possible only if we transfer ourselves from the sensible world to the intelligible world. Is he asking us to go to another ontological world? If we choose to see the conception of freedom from the theoretical perspective, the answer is yes. But, we don't have to understand it in this way. After all, Kant concludes that such transcendent freedom is incomprehensible (G 4:463). From the practical perspective, Kant suggests that we consider the intelligible world as a *standpoint* to see the possibility of choosing against one's own sensibility, which is determined by nature. This practical understanding of freedom is fully explicated in the second critique.

In the *Groundwork III*, Kant discusses a case of the change of character in a scoundrel. Kant thinks that there is a possibility for that scoundrel to change his personality to be a better person only after he considers himself as a member of the intelligible world where he can determine his action by his will freely. "By this standpoint he is conscious of a good will that, by his own acknowledgements, *constitutes*

the law for his evil will as a member of the world of sense—a law of whose authority he is cognizant even while he transgresses it. The moral “*ought*” is then his own necessary “*will*” as a member of an intelligible world, and is thought by him as “ought” only insofar as he regards himself *at the same time* as a member of the world of sense.” (4:455) The intelligible world is an ontological entity when Kant attempts to prove morality theoretically in the Groundwork. However, after reconsidering his arguments in the second critique, we don’t have to see the intelligible world as an ontological entity. The possibility for the scoundrel to change his character is not to ask the scoundrel to give up his own body and evil will in the empirical world to go to another perfect world. What the scoundrel could do is to consider himself as a member of an intelligible world, and to make the moral “ought” *constitute* his practical consciousness in the empirical world. Once he uses his reason correctly and is conscious of the moral law, it is possible for him to behave according to the moral law, although he is not forced to do so. Freedom, although it is transcendent metaphysically, is always immanent in this world for practical use.

In this paper, I argue that freedom should not be understood metaphysically, but practically in Kant’s moral theory. Metaphysical freedom, even if it were possible, would not solve the practical question. The conception of freedom, at least for Kant, should be understood as intimately connected with morality, which is a practical, not a theoretical enterprise. We cannot prove how freedom is possible; but insofar as it is practically possible in human beings’ agency, it is real. Through the consciousness of the moral law, transcendent use of freedom is brought into immanent use of freedom. Freedom is transformed from an idea of reason into practical reality.

Of course, this is not the whole story. We haven't gone deep enough to explore the structure and the mechanism of the consciousness of the moral law. By doing that, we hope to understand how transcendent freedom is brought into immanent freedom within our consciousness and its connection with our will. However, this is beyond the goal of this paper.

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