

## KANT: MORALITY AND FREEDOM (KpV)

**BREAKING THE CIRCLE.** We have seen in the *Groundwork* how Kant struggled with the circle. The problem there was to provide the ground of the applicability of morality, and thus a response to the moral sceptic. The stance Kant adopted, at least initially, was that the moral law is grounded in our awareness of freedom. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (KpV) the answer is the opposite one: the awareness of the categorical imperative (FUL) is a ‘fact of reason’ that cannot be derived from any other claims of reason (nor of course from the senses). Kant now asserts explicitly that it cannot be derived from our consciousness of freedom. It is an ‘undeniable’ fact (*Faktum*, meant not as a metaphysical fact, but better as a datum of reason) that somehow follows from the analysis of practical judgement. People can see that reason resists inclination, and in so doing, sets the categorical imperative FUL as its sole principle. 31, 43

**THE HOLY WILL.** Kant returns again to the distinction between rational will and holy will. The FUL is ‘declared’ by reason to be valid for all rational beings, since it is independent of their particularities. It is a command, an imperative, since rational wills of finite beings may be in conflict with inclinations (needs and sensible motives, *Bedürfnissen und sinnliche Bewegursachen*). The holy will is incapable of forming any maxim that would be incompatible with FUL. So for this kind of will the principle FUL would not have the status of a command. 32

In these (extremely convoluted) passages Kant comes closest to endorsing the Platonistic picture of the soul in which reason competes with desires and emotions for effectively inclining the person to action. In Kantian terms, this would mean the conflict for the determination of the will. The holy will cannot be the object of such conflict, because (in Platonistic terms) the holy soul would have no non-rational elements. Kant hastens to remark that holy will is merely an idea of our reason which we should nevertheless attempt to approximate as a model (*Urbild*).

**BACK TO PSYCHOLOGY?** At this point the following question may be asked: how can Kant speculate about finite wills any differently from the holy will? The holy will is not an object of experience. It is just an idealised model. We have no inkling (and we *should* have no inkling) how it operates beyond saying that it cannot in principle be affected by inclinations. Finite wills are supposedly real, not merely models, and we should have a very good account how they operate. That was indeed one of the *basic premisses* of the *Groundwork*, that the will can make itself independent of inclinations etc. Are they? Are, in other words, reason and inclinations given to us in experience? If they are given to us at all, they have to be investigated with the tools of psychology. But then the a priori method of reasoning about their nature and influence, and also the a priori nature of reason itself, are very much in doubt.

**ANALOGY WITH EXPERIENCE.** Kant deals with the issue just raised in 46–47. First, moral law does not describe objects given to us in experience. It is rather concerned with reason itself, and hence, with the possibility of experience. A potentially important remark is made, when Kant says that reason ‘has causality in rational being, that is, pure reason, which can be regarded as a faculty immediately (i.e. without a medium in between, *unmittelbar*) determining the will.’ This is all very well, but the question stays: how does anyone, Kant included, can make such pronouncements? Is there a basis *at all* for this metaphysical quasi-causal picture of reason’s influences? 46

Kant pursues the same line in the next interesting paragraph. All explanations must come to an end when we get to reason about the basic capacities of the mind. For these capacities must be assumed whenever we have (and interpret) experience. So this is one ground (already mentioned) why psychology is irrelevant in this enquiry. Moreover, once again, we are certain of the moral law as a *Faktum* of reason which requires no ‘justifying grounds’. Needless to say, our question has not been answered. 47

But Kant thinks that something else can be learned here. The moral law which cannot be justified in, and by, experience, is ubiquitous. We are familiar with it, have always been familiar with it, as a *Faktum* of reason. What is its role? 47, 105

I paraphrase as follows. We grasp the moral law as a *Faktum*, but then ask how we can be affected by it—i.e. how our wills can be determined by that law. The answer we are supposed to give is that we can only be affected by it so far as we have the capacity for freedom. This capacity thus has to be assumed, once we are certain of the *Faktum*, which itself requires no further ground. Here we have freedom both in the negative and in the positive sense. In the negative, because we can think of ourselves as free of inclination (though the question asked above stays!). In the positive, because we can think of ourselves as actually determined by freedom which in this way is analogous to the law of causality.

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