

# The Ethical Actuality of Kant's Categorical Imperative



- THE LIMITS OF HISTORICAL RELATIVIZATION

- „Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or ‘recognized.’ The conception of this its unity in its duplication, of infinitude realizing itself in self-consciousness, has many sides to it and encloses within its elements of varied significance. Thus, its moments must on the one hand be strictly kept apart in detailed distinctiveness, and, on the other, in this distinction must, at the same time, also be taken as not distinguished, or must always be accepted and understood in their opposite sense. This double meaning of what is a distinguished lie in the nature of self-consciousness: of its being infinite, or directly the opposite of the determinateness in which is fixed. The detailed exposition of the notion of this spiritual unity in its duplication will bring before us the process of Recognition. “ (Hegel, G. F. W, Phenomenology of Spirit, Hyper Text 2010)
- “What is aporetic in this fiction, which perhaps precisely because of its weakness lends so much subjective stress to the ‘I say now’, is illuminated by a footnote, in which Kant apologizes, ‘freedom is sufficiently presumed by our intent only in that the actions of rational beings are founded merely in the idea’, so that I may not be obliged, to prove freedom also in this theoretical intent. He has however the being in view, which cannot act otherwise than under the idea, therefore real human beings; and these, following the Critique of Pure Reason, are meant by that ‘theoretical intent’ which records causality in its table of categories. To ascribe freedom to empirical human beings, as if their will could also be demonstrated as free in theoretical philosophy, in that of nature, requires an immense effort on Kant’s part; for if the moral law were simply incommensurable with them, then moral philosophy would be meaningless. It would be only too happy to shake off the fact that the Third Antinomy punished both possible answers in equal measure as border-violations, ending in a deadlock. While in the practical philosophy Kant rigorously proclaims the chorismos of the existent and that which ought to be, he is nevertheless driven to mediations. His idea of freedom becomes paradoxical: incorporated into the causality of the world of appearance, which is incompatible with its Kantian concept.” (Adorno, T. W. 1981, pp. 230f)
- “On the other hand, the morally good as an object is something supersensible, so that nothing corresponding to it can be found in any sensible intuition; and judgment under the laws of pure practical reason seems, therefore, to be subject to special difficulties having their source in this: that a law of freedom is applied to actions as events that take place in the sensible world and so, to this extent, belong to nature...But no intuition can be put under the law of freedom (as that of a causality not sensibly conditioned) - and hence under the concept of the unconditioned good as well - and hence no schema on behalf of its application in concreto.” (Kant, I. 1996, pp. 195f)

- THE LIMITS OF ONTOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY

- “As an example of the first kind, I will take the passage towards the close of chap. iii. of the ‘Analytic of Practical Reason,’ [386] where he treats, in its bearing on Moral Responsibility, his peculiar metaphysical doctrine of a double kind of causation in human actions. According to Kant, every such action, regarded as a phenomenon determined in time, must be thought as a necessary result of determining causes in antecedent time – otherwise its existence would be inconceivable – but it may be also regarded in relation to the agent considered as a thing-in-himself, as the ‘noümenon’ of which the action is a phenomenon: and the conception of Freedom may be applied to the agent so considered in relation to his phenomena. For since his existence as a noümenon is not subject to time-conditions, nothing in this noümenal existence comes under the principle of determination by antecedent causes: hence, as Kant says, **‘in this his existence nothing is antecedent to the determination of his will, but every action, even the whole series of his existence as a sensible being, is in the consciousness of his supersensible existence nothing but the result of his causality as a noümenon.’** This is the well-known metaphysical solution of the difficulty of reconciling Free Will with the Universality of physical causation.” (Sidgwick, H. 2014)
- “Now, in order to remove in the supposed case the apparent contradiction between freedom and the mechanism of nature in one and the same action, we must remember what was said in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or what follows there from; viz., that the necessity of nature, which cannot co-exist with the freedom of the subject, appertains only to the attributes of the thing that is subject to time-conditions, consequently only to those of the acting subject as a phenomenon; that therefore in this respect the determining principles of every action of the same reside in what belongs to past time and is no longer in his power (in which must be included his own past actions and the character that these may determine for him in his own eyes as a phenomenon). *But the very same subject, being on the other side conscious of himself as a thing in himself, considers his existence also in so far as it is not subject to time-conditions, and regards himself as only determinable by laws which he gives himself through reason; and in this his existence nothing is antecedent to the determination of his will, but every action, and in general every modification of his existence, varying according to his internal sense, even the whole series of his existence as a sensible being is in the consciousness of his supersensible existence nothing but the result, and never to be regarded as the determining principle, of his causality as a noumenon.* In this view now the rational being can justly say of every unlawful action that he performs, that he could very well have left it undone; although as appearance it is sufficiently determined in the past, and in this respect is absolutely necessary; for it, with all the past which determines it, belongs to the one single phenomenon of his character which he makes for himself, in consequence of which he imputes the causality of those appearances to himself as a cause independent on sensibility.” (Kant, I. 2004)

- THE LIMITS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

- “At this point a certain inconsistency in Kant’s doctrine might become visible. In many places he develops namely something what is without doubt moral psychology. This is for example true for the remarks in the Metaphysic of Morals when he talks about the preconditions of the receptivity of the human mind to concepts of duty. He singles out moral feeling, conscience, love for humanity and respect for the law as such conditions. He explicitly treats them as subjective conditions of morality and thus as psychological facts”. (Mahlmann, M. 2005, p. 90)