

Updated August 2019



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This paper was presented in its abridged form at the 12. International Kant Congress. The abridged version is published in *Natur und Freiheit, Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, hrsg. v. Violetta L. Waibel, Margit Ruffing und David Wagner (Berlin/Boston, 2018: 1959-1966 – Proceedings of the 12th International Kant Society Meeting at the University of Vienna, Austria (September 21-25, 2015).

For the abridged version published in the conference proceedings, see the second entry under "Category: Freedom on This and the Other Side of Kant" at <https://criticalidealism.org>

**PUBLISHING GUIDELINES FOLLOWED FOR THIS PAPER: See End of Paper**

### **Freedom on This and the Other Side of Kant<sup>1</sup>**

Axel Honneth<sup>2</sup> and Charles Taylor<sup>3</sup> represent a tendency to trace the “archaeology” of the notion of freedom either to G.W.F. Hegel’s *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*<sup>4</sup> or to Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty.”<sup>5</sup> Without claiming to be an exhaustive investigation of the discussion of freedom since or prior to Immanuel Kant, this paper proposes, however, that the meaning of freedom since Kant has for all intents and purposes overlooked the tradition of autonomous freedom prior to Kant that stems from Pico della Mirandola and influenced Leibniz, Sulzer, and Tetens – all of whom shaped Kant’s understanding of freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to James Cochrane for the careful reading and helpful suggestions for improving an earlier draft of this paper! All errors, of course, are my mistakes.

<sup>2</sup> Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* [*The Right of Freedom: Outline of a Democratic Ethics*] (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor, ‘What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty’, in A. Ryan (ed.), *The Idea of Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), reprinted in *Philosophical Papers II*.

<sup>4</sup> *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* at

<http://www.zeno.org/Philosophie/M/Hegel,+Georg+Wilhelm+Friedrich/Grundlinien+der+Philosophie+des+Rechts>

<sup>5</sup> “Two Concepts of Liberty.” In *Four Essays on Liberty*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

## Terminology

In his *Vorschule der Ästhetik*<sup>6</sup> of 1804, Jean Paul observes that the dictionary is full of dead metaphors. However, metaphors never die. Rather, they leave open the possibility of anachronistic distortions of them by subsequent generations. We are well advised, therefore, to first provide “concept clarifications” before we begin our discussion of freedom on this and the other side of Kant.<sup>7</sup>

First, the metaphor “metaphysics” needs to be clarified for the sake of what follows. Traditionally, metaphysics has meant Platonic Realism or Rationalism, where it is taken to refer to an *absolute* and entirely abstract reality independent of the physical world that is the source of all order that one can find in the physical world because the physical world is a copy and/or shadow of the perfect realm of ideas.<sup>8</sup> However, when it comes to metaphysics in this sense, Kant’s metaphysics is “post-metaphysical” in that it refers to the immanent, supersensible dimension of transcendental consciousness that constitute the *necessary* conditions of possibility for rational beings to be able to experience phenomena in the world the way that we do. There is no metaphysics in the Kantian sense without a world of phenomena.<sup>9</sup> Kantian metaphysics does *not consist* of absolute, transcendental concepts and is possible only because we experience a world of phenomena. Furthermore, Kantian metaphysics is no *dualism* in the Cartesian sense because metaphysics and phenomena are two sides of the same coin. Finally, there are no absolute proofs/disproofs for these Kantian, metaphysical, supersensible elements a) because by definition they don’t appear in the senses and b) because their validity is established by their ability to make sense of the phenomena that rational beings experience.

Second, “freedom” is commonly discussed in terms of “negative” and “positive” freedom. However, one encounters profound differences with respect to the meaning of these terms. Negative freedom (*freedom from*) – can have a metaphysical (in the Kantian sense) and a sociological meaning:

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<sup>6</sup> *Vorschule der Aesthetik* in *Sämmtliche Werke* (1804), vols. 41-42. (Berlin: S. Reimer, 1827): 25.

<sup>7</sup> Otfried Höffe underscores this call to clarify concepts as a fundamental task of philosophical reflection in the “Introduction” to *Lebenskunst und Moral oder macht Tugend Glücklich?* (München: C.H. Beck, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Kant rejects this form of metaphysics. See „Widerlegung des Idealismus“ in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, KrV, AA 05: B 274f.

<sup>9</sup> See „4. Die Postulate des empirischen Denkens überhaupt“ in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, KrV, AA 05: B 265f.

Metaphysically: negative freedom is concerned with the degree of independence that human beings have from nature

Sociologically: negative freedom is concerned with the degree of freedom from external, social coercion by institutions

Positive freedom (*freedom for*) has several meanings, which can be classified as metaphysical or sociological, as well:

Metaphysically:

- 1) Autonomous creative freedom consists of an unusual causal capacity to initiate a sequence of events that physical causality on its own cannot accomplish

Sociologically:

- 1) Positive freedom can mean self-determination within the limits of social institutions.
- 2) It can also mean self-imposed limitation in the short run to accomplish something of greater importance to the individual in the long run.
- 3) It can be taken to mean “purposive freedom” (defined as fulfilment of personal desires and interests within a sociological context), even as it places freedom under the sovereignty of a heteronomous, theonomous moral order (a metaphysical claim) to which it is accountable.
- 4) It can also mean “communicative freedom” as the product of rational discourse in the social world.

Third, “autonomy,” as well, requires explicit clarification, and its meanings also can be classified as metaphysical or sociological:

Metaphysically, “autonomy” takes its meaning literally from the Greek *αὐτόνομος*, which means giving oneself the law (NOTE: not creating the law for oneself). It is a label for the metaphysical form of positive, *freedom for*.

Sociologically, “autonomy” takes its meaning from the degree of liberty or self-determination one has within socially shaping institutions (religious traditions,

social/economic institutions, the state, and international norms) . It is a label for the sociologically negative, *freedom from*.

### I. Freedom This Side of Kant

What follows by no means proposes to be an exhaustive study of the notion of freedom since Kant. My goal is simply to point out that after Kant there is a dramatic shift in the meaning of a key pre-Kantian notion of freedom, which Kant himself represented. The consequence is that the heart of Kant's project can be overlooked because of an anachronistic notion of freedom. I am intentionally skipping even contemporary, significant discussions of "freedom" such as Günter Figal's investigation of "freedom" in *Heidegger. Phänomenologie der Freiheit* (2000), Theo Kobusch's „Die Kultur des Humanen. Zur Idee der Freiheit" (2011), and Otfried Höffe's thorough and strongly recommended, judicative (but not transcendental) critique of freedom in *Kritik der Freiheit. Das Grundproblem der Modern* (2015). For Höffe's transcendental critique of freedom, one should turn to his *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Eine Philosophie der Freiheit* (2012).

After Kant, the *metaphysical notion* of his positive, autonomous freedom is eclipsed (yet presupposed!) by a *sociological notion* of positive freedom as the self-determining subject shaped by a social context. One form of positive freedom does not exclude the other, but acknowledgment or non-acknowledgment of the difference between these notions of positive freedom dramatically shapes one's understanding of human experience, action, and responsibility.

The shift of primary focus from the metaphysical to the sociological nature of freedom commences already in Kant's lifetime. Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*<sup>10</sup> (1794) placed emphasis upon negative freedom to the detriment of positive, autonomous freedom by framing the issue in terms of nature as threat to human freedom. This encourages ignoring the significance of nature as crucial to the very understanding of autonomous freedom. Kant's positive freedom, in which humanity acts complementary to nature as it does things that nature cannot accomplish on its own, is eclipsed by emphasizing nature as the threatening limit to

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<sup>10</sup> *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. In *Fichte-Gesamtausgabe Der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Vol. 2 Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1965.

humanity's freedom rather than the necessary condition of possibility for the exercising of autonomous freedom.

### Hegel and Honneth

Hegel formulates a notion of freedom (more appropriately called liberty and based upon recognized rights) in terms of the individual's dependence upon social institutions for the exercising of freedom. This is a *freedom with* others that can be achieved only through shared values and institutional structures that, in turn, recognize (or fail to recognize) the rights of individuals. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel treats freedom as "self-determination"<sup>11</sup> not with respect to transforming nature but with respect to the individual's social framework. Freedom for him is exercised in the context of three institutions: the "natural spirit" of the family, the "divisiveness" of civil society, and the "objective freedom" of the state. Freedom, here, is primarily viewed from the perspective of *negative freedom* (freedom from) and addressed in terms of self-determination within the constraints of these social institutions. In short, one is free to the extent that one shapes one's life over against society's limits and expectations.

Drawing on Hegel's discussion of freedom and Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth defines freedom as *communicative freedom*, which he distinguishes from *negative freedom* and *reflexive freedom*.<sup>12</sup> In common with Berlin and Taylor below, *negative freedom* means *freedom from* in the sense of rejection of any external, social determination of the individual. However, Honneth places Taylor's discussion of positive freedom under the label of *reflexive freedom*, which according to Honneth means *freedom for* acting according to one's own intentions (desires).

Honneth distinguishes *reflexive freedom* from negative freedom in that the individual in *reflexive freedom* assumes moral responsibility for her/his self-selected goals. According to Honneth, reflexive freedom depends upon one's morally grounding one's decisions in something

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<sup>11</sup> See the „Introduction“ to the *Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>12</sup> On Honneth's notion of negative freedom, see „Die negative Freiheit und ihre Vertragskonstruktion“ in *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011): 44-57; on reflexive freedom, see „Die reflexive Freiheit und ihre Gerechtigkeitskonzeption“ in *ibid.*: 58-80; on communicative or social freedom, see „Die soziale Freiheit und ihre Sittlichkeitslehre“ in *ibid.*: 81-118. On „autonomy“ as freedom from external limitations, see *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit. Eine Reaktualisierung der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 2001) and *Pathologien der Vernunft: Geschichte und Gegenwart der kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2007).

like the Golden Rule<sup>13</sup> by which one expects oneself to act as one would want all others to treat oneself.<sup>14</sup> In short, Honneth's *reflexive freedom* only acknowledges a sociological ethics, not a metaphysical morality. Honneth finds that such reflexive freedom, exemplified for him in both Immanuel Kant's "rational self-legislation" of moral principles (autonomy) and Johann Gottfried Herder's "discovery of one's authentic wishes" (authenticity), are in fact not truly free but governed by a socialization process. One's principles are relative to one's social world, in Honneth's judgment, and individual authenticity is an illusion because one is negotiating a social world to fulfil one's interests.<sup>15</sup> According to Honneth, Charles Taylor's positive freedom anchored in religious, moral principles, then, is equally self-contradictory as with Kant and Herder for what is taken to be an autonomous, self-legislated principle is in fact the product of social construction (the social construction of a religious tradition's morality).

Honneth follows Habermas<sup>16</sup> in defending a Hegelian notion of *communicative freedom*, which means *freedom with others* that can be achieved only through shared values and, most importantly, institutional structures that recognize the rights of individuals. Communicative freedom is a civic process that can be achieved only through a shared social commitment to unhindered and unhampered "rational<sup>17</sup>" discourse as guaranteed by mutually constructed social institutions that encourage and support such rational discourse.

Honneth and the Frankfurt School call this *communicative freedom* because it is a social construction generated by commitment by all individuals and groups in society and accomplished by all concerned engaging in an open discourse to secure shared and optimal values. In order to be accepted at the table as a participant in the ideal speech situation that generates social values, communicative freedom requires the commitment to "rational<sup>18</sup>"

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<sup>13</sup> See *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011): 65 and 85.

<sup>14</sup> Kant actually rejects the „Golden Rule” as a valid principle for morality. See GMS, AA 04: 430\*. Kant defends a metaphysical morality, not a sociological ethics.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Honneth is thinking of Martin Heidegger's insight that "authenticity" is always a modification of "inauthenticity." See *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979): H317.

<sup>16</sup> See Habermas, *Kommunikatives Handeln und detranszendentalisierte Vernunft* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Here "reason" refers to discursive and instrumental reason, not Kant's theoretical and practical reason.

<sup>18</sup> "Rational" appears to mean discursive reason, which some argue is itself culturally relative (i.e., Western). In any event, when there is only one domain (the physical laws of nature) (on domains/*Gebieten* and territories/*Böden*, see *Critique of Judgment: KU, AA V, 174*), then all other systems are speculative or enthusiastic constructions, not rational. To insist, then, that everyone at the table for the establishment of social rules must be "rational" can only mean that everyone has to buy into a specific territorial construction in order to be

discourse and to conform to the decision of the majority, which is not absolute but subject to revision, within an institutional framework that protects the “rights” of the minority.

Communicative freedom is concerned primarily with the pursuit of distributive justice based upon the construction of appropriate social institutions devoted to facilitating the equal opportunity and distribution of resources for all.

Communicative freedom acknowledges, Honneth points out, that different institutional systems will recognize such freedom to varying degrees and in different respects. One can evaluate social systems in terms of the degree to which they, in fact, further the “right to freedom” among their participants/citizenry. Because no institutional system can be perfect, however, there is no one system of communicative freedom that is universal, and any given institutional system requires the continued vigilance and effort of its membership in order to continually renew the commitment to freedom.

Communicative freedom overlooks the important distinction made by Kant between the civic order/law (the Doctrine of Right in the *Metaphysics of Morals*) and morality (the Doctrine of Virtue in the *Metaphysics of Morals*). The civic law is, to be sure, a product of communicative discourse because it is concerned with the external rules necessary for conducting affairs in the public sphere. Each society has both the power and the obligation to create such rules, and they can, obviously, be different from one society to another. However, civic laws cannot on their own establish either distributive or retributive justice. Civic laws (the Doctrine of Right) require a citizenry that adheres to moral principles *above the civic law* (the Doctrine of Virtue) in order for the civic law to be just. One can do everything “legally” according to the civic law and be extremely unjust (i.e., violate not just the autonomous freedom, discussed below, but also the dignity of individuals).

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acknowledged as rational. A rational social order is not grounded in a territory but in the *second* domain distinguished from, but neither separable nor reduced to, the domain of physical causality. The key to this second domain is (autonomous) freedom, which establishes dignity (see Section II of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: GMS, 04) but requires the self-legislation of universal moral principles according to the three forms of the categorical imperative (see Section II of *ibid.*:GMS 04) and the three maxims of the understanding (see *Anthropology*: *Anth*, AA VII, 200, 228; *Logic*: *Log*, AA IX, 057; *Critique of Judgment*, AA V, 294).

## Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor

Isaiah Berlin distinguishes among negative, positive, and social freedoms. *Negative freedom is freedom from* external coercion, that is, it defines freedom as a sociological issue. Rather than freedom consisting in an agency that “rises above” nature to accomplish things that nature cannot accomplish on its own, negative freedom for Berlin, then, means the same as with Hegel and Honneth. In this version of negative freedom, one takes freedom to consist of resisting conformity to any external law either from tradition, society, or institution so as to maintain the radical liberty of self-determination.

In contrast, Berlin’s *positive freedom is coercive freedom* by which one subordinates oneself to a higher authority than immediate self-interest in order to increase one’s opportunities by limiting one’s pursuit of short-term satisfaction to achieve a greater range of freedom at some point in the future (for example, going to school). Positive freedom requires us to surrender some of our negative freedom (our personal liberty) for the sake of a higher, larger/greater, “rational” freedom. *Social freedom*, Berlin’s third option, is concerned with minorities and is the freedom to obtain *status and recognition on the part of a minority social unit* within a dominant society.

Charles Taylor employs an alternative notion of *positive freedom*. Positive freedom for Taylor is not “coercive” (that is, restrictive of the individual in the moment for a greater goal in the future) but *purposive freedom*. Taylor wants to acknowledge that freedom involves not merely an alternative between radical independence and external coercion, but positive freedom is concerned with “internal” elements (the individual’s desires) that lead to our pursuing purposive ends. For Taylor, then, Berlin’s notions of negative and positive freedom are inadequate to grasp the true character of positive freedom.

Because not all desires are moral, though, the desires that govern Taylor’s notion of positive freedom as purposive require a second-order reflection that invokes moral principles to govern our desires. According to Taylor, the source of these moral principles is what Kant calls “historical” religion or a heteronomous, relative morality achieved by revelation and acquired through (sacred) texts.



## II. Freedom on the Other Side of Kant:

### Autonomous Freedom

The notion of *autonomous freedom* is by no means a Kantian invention. Johann Georg Hamann reports in a letter to Johann Gottfried Herder from 17 May 1779 (*Briefwechsel*, vol. 4 [Wiesbaden: 1959], Brief Nr. 555, page 81) reports that, as Kant was writing the Critique of Pure Reason, Johannes Tetens' two volume *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* was on his desk.<sup>19</sup> Tetens' second volume is devoted to the discussion of the significance of humanity's possession of what appears to be a unique causality over against the blind determinism of nature: our ability intentionally to initiate a sequence of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own. Johannes Sulzer treated this notion three years prior to the publication of Tetens' reflections in his *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*. Kant, Tetens, and Sulzer probably have the theme from Leibniz and Hume, and Ernst Cassirer attributes the notion to Pico della Mirandola.<sup>20</sup>

Here is Mirandola's account of the creation of humanity and the final end of creation in the "Oration:"

"... when this work was done, the Divine ... bethought Himself of bringing forth man. Truth was, however, that there remained no archetype according to which He might fashion a new offspring ... Still, it was not in the nature of the power of the Father to fail in this last creative élan ...

At last, the Supreme Maker decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him:

'We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither

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<sup>19</sup> For an assessment of Tetens' influence on Kant, see Christian Hauser, *Selbstbewußtsein und personale Identität* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1994): 129, n. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Cassirer suggests that Pico Mirandola's "De hominis dignitate" is the source of this "revolutionary" idea of creative freedom, and Cassirer points out that Mirandola is the source of this idea for Leibniz. See "'Über die Würde des Menschen' von Pico della Mirandola" in *Studia humanitatis*, 12 (1959): 48-61.

mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.<sup>21</sup>”

Autonomous freedom is grounded in humanity’s causal capacity of intentionally initiating (not merely by natural instinct) a sequence of events that nature’s physical causality on its own cannot accomplish. Kant calls *negative freedom* precisely this independence from the physical law and desires/self-interest.<sup>22</sup> Physical events occur “blindly” (that is, without internal intentionality) and according to the deterministic laws of physics. Given that human creativity only occurs in a physical world, however, it necessarily is not independent of the blind and deterministic processes of nature, but this positive freedom is not reducible to them, either.

Because we only experience causes as effects and never directly, there is no way for us to prove (or disprove) empirically whether or not we possess this causal capacity.<sup>23</sup> However, of those ideas that we must assume if we are to understand ourselves as rational beings (possessors of supersensible capacities of the intelligible world within the sensuous world), which are incapable of confirmation in the senses, Kant proposes in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that creative freedom is the one *pure idea* of reason (in contrast to God and the soul) that comes closest to being a *fact* of reason.<sup>24</sup> By definition, though, an idea of reason cannot be a “fact,” according to Kant, because an idea of reason is not something accessible by empirical perception. Nonetheless, he speaks of autonomous freedom as a “*fact* of reason” because we experience ourselves, unequivocally, as capable of purposive behavior that requires our selection not only of the goals of our actions but also requires that we determine the (morally) appropriate means for the accomplishment of those goals. The *origin* of this sequence of *hypothetical*, technical and pragmatic necessities with respect to the means (materials, tools, and skills) necessary to achieve the intended *end* is a causality that is *categorical*,<sup>25</sup> to the degree that its source is autonomous freedom above nature.

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<sup>21</sup> Translated by A. Robert Caponigri (Chicago: Regnery Publishing, 1956): 5-8 and on the web at: [http://www.andallthat.co.uk/uploads/2/3/8/9/2389220/pico - oration on the dignity of man.pdf](http://www.andallthat.co.uk/uploads/2/3/8/9/2389220/pico_-_oration_on_the_dignity_of_man.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> See *Critique of Practical Reason: KpV*, AA 05: §8.

<sup>23</sup> See „Erläuterung der kosmologischen Idee einer Freiheit in Verbindung mit der allgemeinen Naturnotwendigkeit“ in *Critique of Pure Reason: KrV*, AA 05: B 586.

<sup>24</sup> See *Critique of Practical Reason: KpV*, AA 05: §§ 4-6.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion of *hypothetical* (i.e., technical and pragmatic) and *categorical* necessity in Section II of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: GMS*, AA 04.

### **Autonomy is Not Merely Spontaneity**

Creative freedom is no mere random spontaneity because causal systems require laws.<sup>26</sup> If dreams have no other value,<sup>27</sup> Kant proposes<sup>28</sup> that their value consists in reminding us that “clarity and distinctness” of perception in and of itself is insufficient for any sense of “causal order” and, hence, rational understanding.

What dreams and the physical world teach us is that, where we have causality, there we have a causal order upon which we must *necessarily* depend for the expansion of our understanding and future actions. The same applies to the causality of autonomous freedom. Autonomous freedom is a causal system complementary to the physical causal system but ultimately governed by the one system of laws that are compatible with freedom: a self-legislated moral order. Autonomous freedom involves an acknowledgement of our creativity that can self-legislate categorical principles<sup>29</sup> to govern the application of that creativity – even contrary to our personal self-interest.<sup>30</sup>

### **Freedom and the Moral Order are no Merely Vicious Circle**

At the risk of what appears to be a vicious circle, we can view the order (moral principles) that governs autonomous freedom to be an indication of autonomous freedom. The very encounter with moral principles presupposes the causality that makes them necessary because the experience of moral principles necessarily contains their condition of possibility, autonomous freedom. For example, when confronted with the possibility of one’s own execution should one refuse to testify falsely against a stranger, everyone knows *what is right* although no one can

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<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*: GMS, AA 04: 446.13f.

<sup>27</sup> The claim here has to do with the content of the dream, not with the physical conditions that might contribute to the generation the content.

<sup>28</sup> See *Critique of Pure Reason: KrV*: AA 05: B 520f; *Metaphysics Mronovius*: V-Met/Mron, AA 29: 885, 927; and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: Prol*, AA 04: Anmerkung III.

<sup>29</sup> See *Groundwork: GMS*, AA 04: 454, 6f.

<sup>30</sup> The capacity to act independently of self-interest is a corollary of Kant’s metaphysical (not sociological) notion of „autonomy.“ The unconditional „good will“ is that will that legislates its moral maxim for itself independent of interest. This is possible to the degree that humanity can exercise autonomous freedom. See *Groundwork: GMS*, AA 04: 444: „An absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative, will therefore, indeterminate with regard to all objects, contain merely the form of willing as such, and indeed as autonomy; i.e. the fitness of the maxim of every good will to make itself into a universal law is itself the sole law that the will of every rational being imposes upon itself, without underpinning it with any incentive or interest as its foundation.“ (Trans.CUP) Nonetheless Kant recognizes that we can never be certain that we are not acting out of “interest.” See the opening pages of Section II of *ibid.*: GMS, AA 04.

determine for someone else what s/he must do. The principle that forbids false testimony presupposes that one has the capacity not only to do something that nature on its own cannot do but also the capacity to act contrary to one's self-interest.<sup>31</sup> In short, it presupposes autonomous freedom.

In Section III of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,<sup>32</sup> Kant discusses this apparently vicious circle with respect to moral principles and the autonomous, efficient causality that is freedom. A creative causality presupposes a lawful order and a lawful order presupposes a creative causality especially because neither this causality nor a moral principle is capable of proof or disproof. However, the circle is avoided, Kant proposes, when we recognize that autonomy is not an isolated capacity for itself but presupposes that we simultaneously and inseparably live in two "kingdoms:" 1) a sensible realm and 2) an intelligible realm.

Autonomous freedom is the top of a hierarchy of intelligible capacities that allows Kant to speak of humanity as the *goal of nature*.<sup>33</sup> To be sure, this is not a pronouncement of humanity's right to treat nature as a mere means to capriciously and merely satisfy its unrestrained interests. Rather, humanity is the goal of nature to the extent that it exercises its autonomous freedom by self-legislating moral principles to govern itself (that is, by assuming personal responsibility for its positive freedom).

This hierarchy of intelligible capacities stretches from a capacity clearly shared in degree with other species (determining judgment) to a capacity shared only in very limited degree with other species (reflecting judgment). Determining judgment is the capacity to apply a concept that one already possesses to classify a set of phenomena. The concept can be given (in the case of other animals, by instinct) or it can be acquired by means of reflecting judgment. The latter consists in the capacity to search out a concept that one does not possess already for classification of phenomena that, without the acquisition of the unknown concept, would not be

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<sup>31</sup> See *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, KpV, AA 05: 30. See as well, Otfried Höffe's discussion of this example in "8. Freedom of the Will and the Fact of Reason" of *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Eine Philosophie der Freiheit* (München: C.H. Beck, 2012) where Höffe writes: „Morals or morality is the condition for the knowledge (*ratio cognoscendi*) of freedom, which, in turn, serves as the condition of being (*ratio essendi*) of morality: Only the moral law justifies the "presupposition" of freedom because without freedom "we would never encounter the moral law in ourselves" (Trans. McG) (See KpV, AA 05: 4; AA 05: 30).

<sup>32</sup> See *Groundwork: GMS*, AA 04: 450.17f.

<sup>33</sup> See *Critique of Judgment, KU*, AA 05: §83.

understood. Reflecting judgment is a powerful tool for a species such as humanity that is so poorly endowed with instinct.

The intelligible realm is not limited to such theoretical reason (i.e., the making sense of phenomena), however, but it includes aesthetic judgment where one can formulate a judgment without a concept (as in the case of “free” beauty in nature<sup>34</sup>) or where one can discover the illimitable nature of consciousness (as in the case of the mathematical sublime<sup>35</sup>) and, even more profoundly, one can discover a causal capacity that in principle can destroy nature precisely because it is not reducible to natural causality (as in the case of the dynamical sublime<sup>36</sup>). This capacity, of course, is the autonomous, creative freedom at the pinnacle of our intelligible capacities.

In short, the circle of autonomous freedom and moral principles can be defended (even if it cannot be proved/disproved<sup>37</sup>) as not vicious because autonomous freedom and moral principles are only the pinnacle of a much more comprehensive illimitable, intelligible, supersensible realm that is irreducible to the sensible realm. Consequently, it can be *defended* as incapable of being accounted for by the blind, mechanical causality of physical nature alone. Our assumption of this intelligible realm and its hierarchy is what allows our escaping both from a vicious circle and from a status of being mere animals, marionettes, or automatons.<sup>38</sup>

Autonomous freedom is an extraordinary *categorical* capacity by means of which we can initiate a sequence of events that nature on its own could never accomplish and, have control with respect to the selection of the principle upon which we will act. It is not reducible to any other form of freedom (Hegel’s *institutional freedom*; Honneth’s *negative, reflexive, or communicative freedom*; Berlin’s *negative, coercive, or social freedom*; or Taylor’s *negative or purposive freedom*). Autonomous freedom involves an acknowledgement of our creativity that can self-legislate categorical principles<sup>39</sup> to govern the application of that creativity – even

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<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, KU, AA 05: §16.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*, KU, AA 05: §§ 23-29.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> See *Groundwork*: GMS, AA 04: 459.

<sup>38</sup> See Kant’s references to „Marionetten“ in *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, KpV, AA 05: „Kritische Beleuchtung der Analytik der reinen praktischen Vernunft“ and Section IX: „Von der der praktischen Bestimmung des Menschen weislich angemessenen Proportion seiner Erkenntnisvermögen.“

<sup>39</sup> See *Groundwork*: GMS, AA 04: 454, 6f.

contrary to our personal self-interest.<sup>40</sup> As a consequence, Kant, too, speaks of negative freedom, but he means it metaphysically as a freedom that is not governed by physical causality alone, not simply as the label for humanity's sociological status.

### Conclusion

There appears to be a remarkable shift in the meaning of freedom prior to and after Kant that allows if not encourages the significance of Kant's project to be too easily overlooked. Rather than seek to escape the conditions of possibility for our exercising of freedom (that is, nature or social institutions), autonomous, creative freedom calls us to exercise our obligation as the *goal of nature* with moral responsibility because we are the only species (as far as we can determine) that can do so to the degree that we can. It would be a denial of our creative freedom and our status as human beings for us in the name of freedom to reject the material world, our interests/appetites, our desire for status and prestige in the eyes of others, or our creative activity in the physical world.<sup>41</sup> Assuming our place in the physical world, then, creative freedom commits us to technical and pragmatic imperatives (i.e., necessities), but these are possible only because we are beings who can exercise a categorical causality *higher than nature* in conformity with nature. When we exercise our categorical causality on the basis of self-legislated moral principles, we experience no higher satisfaction – even when we fail in our aim and/or when we act contrary to our personal interests. However, it is not because moral principles interest us (that is, it is not because they bring us personal satisfaction) that they have moral validity. Rather, it is because they have moral validity that they interest us.<sup>42</sup>

*Autonomous freedom* is more than Hegel's and Honneth's *communicative freedom* capable of being accomplished only through social institutions. Furthermore, unlike Berlin's and Taylor's *negative freedom*, then, autonomous freedom is no arbitrary rejection of tradition, social

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<sup>40</sup> The capacity to act independently of self-interest is a corollary of Kant's metaphysical (not sociological) notion of „autonomy“. The unconditional „good will“ is that will that legislates its moral maxim for itself independent of interest. This is possible to the degree that humanity can exercise autonomous freedom. See *ibid.*: GMS, AA 04: 444).

<sup>41</sup> See Kant's discussion of „Tierheit“ (animality), „Menschheit“ (humanity), and „Personalität (personality) in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*: RGK, AA 06: „I. Von der ursprünglichen Anlage zum Guten in der menschlichen Natur.“

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the role “interest” in Kant's project, see *Groundwork*: GMS, AA 04: especially the section titled “Von der Äussersten Grenze aller Praktischen Philosophie“ in Section III.

orders, or institutions. Yet, autonomous freedom is also more than Taylor's *purposive freedom*. To be sure, autonomous freedom can only occur in a material world and under social conditions (e.g., the civic law and public institutions), but our autonomy raises us above them and even above nature to be able to assume personal responsibility for our decisions and actions. This, in turn, not only enables us to generate and modify the civic law, which is a product of *communicative freedom* as described by Habermas and Honneth but also, most remarkably but also dangerously, enables us to transform both nature and social institutions. Autonomous, creative freedom places humanity in what Kant calls a "precarious position:"

Here ... we see philosophy put in fact in a precarious position, which is to be firm even though there is nothing in heaven or on earth from which it depends, or on which it is based. Here philosophy is to manifest its purity as sustainer of its own laws, not as herald of laws that an implanted sense or who knows what tutelary nature whispers to it, all of which -- though they may always be better than nothing at all -- can still never yield basic principles that reason dictates and that must have their source entirely and completely a priori and, at the same time, must have their commanding authority from this: that they expect nothing from the inclination of human beings but everything from the supremacy of the law and the respect owed to it or, failing this, condemn the human being to contempt for himself and inner abhorrence.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Groundwork: GMS, AA 04: 425-426.*

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(11 August 2019)