FREEDOM AS A KIND OF CAUSALITY[1]

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According to Kant, freedom is a "kind of causality" (A445/B473).[2] It is the capacity to initiate causal chains of itself without prior grounds, independently of nature's causal laws. Freedom is causality through concepts, determined by reason's moral law. (A547f/B575f.) According to Kant, freedom and nature can coexist, for in transcendental idealism freedom pertains to things in themselves and natural causality only to appearances. The *same action* can be "*intelligible* […] as a thing in itself" yet "*sensible* […] as an appearance" (A538/B566). Although theoretical reason can only prove the logical possibility of freedom, we can cognise its actuality practically: we are conscious of our capacity for self-legislation via the moral law, hence of a free power of choice that determines our actions independently of (but not in conflict with) the deterministic mechanism of nature. It is this latter claim that "constitutes the real moment of the difficulties" (A533/B561) in Kant's practical conception of freedom.

I will not here question Kant's reconciliation of freedom and nature: I grant him that we are denizens of two worlds, phenomena subject to deterministic nature and noumena capable of free self-legislation, and that if I am morally obligated, I must be free. But even granting this, since the categories of the understanding – including causality – can be objectively applied only to appearances, never to supersensible things in themselves, and freedom is supersensible, the question remains: *In what sense* can we call freedom *causality* without thereby applying the categories transcendentally to supersensible things – an application Kant explicitly, consistently, and empathetically rejects in all three *Critiques*. I submit that only Kant's theory of symbolic cognition can avoid this contradiction and that symbolism is thus an indispensable part of his philosophical system – indeed, it is a necessary condition of the possibility of our very agency itself.

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[2] Translations of Kant's works are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Deviations from these translations are marked with "tr. modified" or "tr. amended."

It might be tempting to try to solve this problem by relying on "unschematised" or pure categories – that since it is schemata that restrict categories to appearances, one could apply the category of cause without its schema to freedom.[3] Here freedom *is* causality, albeit without the schema we cannot theoretically *cognise* it. Although I will not specifically argue against it, I reject this view as contrary to the letter and spirit of Kant's philosophy, for reasons that will become clear during the paper: symbolic cognition is not and cannot be unschematised. The idea of an "unschematised" category prompts an important question, however: What are categories without schemata? Indeed, what are categories?

Kant defines categories as "concepts of an object in general, by means of which its intuition is regarded as *determined* with regard to one of the *logical functions* for judgments" (B128). These are the logical functions exhibited in the Table of Judgments, from which the Table of Categories is derived. Side-stepping here the numerous complications, the categories are thus these logical functions when they are applied to intuition, i.e. objectively to things, not just logically to thoughts. (A79/B104f, B143.)

Whereas the Table of Judgments expounds the functions of *all thinking in general*, the Table of Categories represents the functions of *thinking of objects*, which, in turn, requires synthesis of intuition. Schemata are exactly what connects categories to intuitions and so "makes possible the application of [categories] to [appearances]" (A138/B177), thereby "providing them with a relation to objects, thus with *significance*" (A146/B185). As Kant notes, it might seem that without the restrictive schemata the "pure" categories "hold for things [...] *as they are*, [not just] *how they appear*" (A147/B186). But since schemata facilitate the objective application of

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[3] E.g. Adams, Robert M.: *Things in Themselves.* In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57/4 (1997), 801–825, 820f. Allais, Lucy: *Transcendental Idealism and Metaphysics. Kant's Commitment to Things As They Are in Themselves.* In: *Kant-Yearbook* 2 (2010), 1–32, 16. Ameriks, Karl: *Kant's Theory of Mind.* Oxford 2000, xxiv, 67, 290. Hogan, Desmond: *Noumenal Affection.* In: *Philosophical Review* 118/4 (2009), 501–532, 504. Watkins, Eric: *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality.* Cambridge 2005, 190n8, 324. Westphal, Kenneth R.: *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism.* Cambridge 2004, 43, 51.

categories in the first place, abstracting from them abstracts from *all objective significance*. Indeed, "without schemata" the categories just revert back to the "functions of the understanding for concepts", to which the schemata were added, and thus "do not represent any object" (A147/B187). Hence Kant grants the pure categories only "logical significance of the mere unity of representations" (A147/B186).

A hypothetical judgment expresses a logical function of dependency between judgments: an "if… then…" structure. This dependency-function can also be applied to concepts, giving rise to the pure concepts of *ground* and *consequence* – the logical counterparts of *cause* and *effect*. I.e. when the latter are deprived of schemata, they mean "merely the logical functions of […] ground and consequence" (B431). Accordingly, "the word *cause*, when used of the supersensible, signifies only the *ground*" (KU, AA 05: 195; cf. A564/B593). To furnish this logical ground with a schema is (for humans) to determine it as a *real spatiotemporal ground of existence* – as a *cause*. Without schemata, a ground is just *something* taking the logical place of the "if" in "if… then…" E.g. a premise grounds (the truth of) a conclusion, but, as non-spatiotemporal, cannot be said to *cause* it. Thus the unschematised category of cause – a mere logical ground – does not suffice for freedom, for freedom needs more than logical significance: its *effects are actions that appear and exist in spatiotemporal nature*.

FREEDOM AND NATURE

It is this last point that sets nature and freedom on a collision course. Although free grounds themselves are not temporal, *actions* as their consequences are temporal events in nature and hence subject to its deterministic mechanism. (A536–8/B564–6, A543f/B571f; KU, AA 05: 196, 474f.) Thus the *effects* of freedom are at the same time effects of nature and "all the actions" – even free ones – "of the human being in appearance are determined in accordance with the order of nature" (A549f/B577f). The same action as a natural phenomenon is sufficiently grounded in preceding events, yet as a supernatural noumenon it can be grounded on an atemporal, free choice (A536–43/B564–71, A554–5/B582–3).

To alleviate this paradox, note that in a sense an event can have multiple causes. The proximate cause of someone's death may be heart failure, but one can identify others: a bullet striking the heart, a decision to pull the trigger, the psychological make-up of the shooter, etc. In a way the *whole chain of events* is the cause, and it is somewhat arbitrary what we single out as the 'true' cause. We could even say that the Big Bang is the cause of death – or speculate that it, too, is further grounded in God's act of creation. In one sense *none* of the events in the series caused the death, yet in another sense *all* of them did by contributing to its full explanation. Indeed, according to Kant, reason's causality is that "*through* which the sensible condition of an empirical series of effects first begins" (A552/B580) and this "empirical causality itself […] could […] be an effect of a causality that is not empirical, but rather intelligible" (A544/B572). Thus, although every action is determined by a series of natural causes, if freedom is "the ground […] of the possibility of [this] sensible series" (A564/B598) itself, there is no contradiction in *both* the sensible *and* the supersensible grounding actions.

Kant attributes choice to our *intelligible character* – contrasted with our *empirical character*. (A539–41/B567–69, A546–57/B574–85; KpV, AA 05: 97–100.) The former is noumenal and timeless and determines the latter's actions as appearances. Whereas the actions of the empirical character "appear in alterable shapes" (A549/B577), the intelligible character is unalterable: "The causality of reason in the intelligible character *does not arise* or start working at a certain time in producing an effect" (A551/B579). It is as if my life were a film that unfolds in time – a "sequence of [my] existence as a sensible being" (KpV, AA 05: 97f) – while the film itself exists apart from its representation in temporal sequence. Although freely grounded, actions as appearances are describable and even predictable by laws of nature.

Yet, if you know today that I will lie tomorrow, how can I be free to choose? The lie *as an act of my empirical character* appears in a moment, but the *free choice* of my noumenal character that grounds the appearance of me lying tomorrow does not – and so "in the moment when [a person] lies, it is entirely his fault" (A555/B583). The actions we experience are not free: they are *temporal effects* of timeless free choices – appearances grounded in things in themselves (A537/B565). We call them free only

because their *ground* is free. For Kant, freedom is *lawful and autonomous self-legislation* – and in no way does the predictability of autonomy violate its freedom:

> One can therefore grant that if it were possible for us to have such deep insight into a human being's cast of mind […], we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse and would nevertheless maintain that the human being's conduct is free. (KpV, AA 05: 99.)

Neither Kant's nor my aim is to speculate about the metaphysics of freedom (A557/B585). The import thus far is that there is a logically coherent way to reconcile freedom and nature through transcendental idealism, and "if we would give in to the deception of transcendental realism, then neither nature nor freedom would be left" (A543/B571). But ultimately this is just to say that appearances are not self-sufficient but grounded on things in themselves. Thus the problem of how atemporal choices can ground temporal actions is in fact the same as the general problem of how things in themselves can ground appearances – not an additional one. And crucially, as Kant remarks, we do not even know *how* natural causes produce events – how substances interact – just that they *must* do so (A448/B476). Thus he does not wish to speculate how free will might produce actions but to show that *if* there is morality, our will *must be able to do so*. Freedom is, then, both "an inscrutable faculty" (KpV, AA 05: 47) and "the only […idea] of pure reason whose object is a fact" (KU, AA 05: 468).

It is this question of the very possibility of morality that transforms the idle and playful metaphysical speculation into a profound riddle of human existence. Were it not for morality, we could rest content with the mere logical compatibility of freedom and nature – with the logical possibility of freedom. But, as I will explicate shortly, *moral agency* needs not only freedom but also the capacity to *be conscious* of freedom: if we could not cognise our freedom, we could not be conscious of our capacity to act and to influence our behaviour, and hence, ultimately, could not act and take moral responsibility for our actions at all – for *ought* implies *can*. And, as I will show, symbolic cognition is a necessary for this possibility to *act* morally *from* freedom, albeit neither for freedom nor for morality themselves.

All objective reality – even practical objective reality of freedom – requires *intuition* (e.g. FM, AA 20: 279f). Hence the dilemma: since the categories apply to objects only via intuition, and free grounds cannot be intuited, either Kant would have to violate this limitation or freedom could only be an empty logical construct, the objective reality of which *neither* our theoretical *nor* practical reason could cognise. Both horns are unacceptable for Kant: freedom must have practical objective reality, and this fact has to respect the boundaries of the categories. Thus there must be a third way to represent freedom, one that has more than logical significance yet falls short of theoretical cognition proper. This third way is to apply the categories *analogously* via *symbols* (KU, AA 05: 351–3; FM, AA 20: 279f).[4]

There are two ways to *present* (darstellen) an object of a concept – to "mak[e] something sensible" (KU, AA 05: 351). Schematic presentation is *direct* and *demonstrative*, symbolic presentation only *indirect* and *analogical*. Both confer objective reality to concepts:

> If objective reality is accorded to the concept directly (directe) through the intuition that corresponds to it […], this act is called schematism; but if it cannot be presented immediately, but only in its consequences (indirecte), it may be called the symbolization of the concept. The first occurs with concepts of the sensible, the second is expedient for concepts of the super-sensible […]. (FM, AA 20: 279.)

In symbolic presentation "it is merely the rule of [the procedure of schematization], not the intuition itself, and thus merely the form of the reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept" (KU, AA 05: 351, tr. amended). Symbols "transport[] […] the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept" (KU, AA 05: 352f). Symbolic presentation does not *determine* objects but only *reflects* on them, producing thereby mere indirect "cognition by analogy" (FM, AA 20: 280, tr. modified). If I say e.g. that evil moves like a serpent, I do not determine evil directly through the intuition of a moving serpent, for evil – as abstract

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[4] Cf. Chignell, Andrew: *Are Supersensibles Really Possible? Kant on the Evidential Role of Symbolization*. In: V. Rhoden et al. (eds.): *Recht und Frieden in der Philosophie Kants*. Berlin 2009, 99–109.

and intelligible – does not move at all. Rather, I apply my *reflection* on this intuition to evil, whereby I *present* evil *to myself* as evasive and deceitful *like* a serpent.

Symbolic cognition does not contradict the view that pure categories lack objective significance. For "the symbolic is merely a species of the intuitive", and in it "empirical intuitions are also employed" (KU, AA 05: 351f). Symbolic presentation "performs a double task, first applying the concept to the object of sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere rule of reflection on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only the symbol" (KU, AA 05: 352). Symbolic presentation is not unschematised but on the contrary *rests on schematisation*: we first present an object schematically and only then use it as a symbol for something that cannot be presented schematically: "even though no corresponding intuition can be put under the *rational concept* of freedom […], nevertheless a sensible intuition must first be given for the *concept* of *the understanding* (of causality)" (KpV, AA 05: 103f).

Since unschematised categories have not undergone schematisation, they have only logical significance as empty thoughts. Symbolic presentation has undergone schematisation, yet it is only indirectly *grounded on* a schema and not direct presentation *through* it. Unlike commonly thought, the distinction between schematic and symbolic presentation is thus not one between schematised and unschematised categories but *a further division of the schematised*: whether an intuition is presented as a direct correspondent of a concept or as a mere indirect analogue to it.

Kant employs the concept of analogy in various ways.[5] A central distinction is between *mathematical* and *philosophical* analogy. The former is *quantitative* and *constitutive*, the latter *qualitative* and *regulative*. In mathematics, by knowing the lengths of the sides *a*, *b*, and *c* of two figures and the identity of the ratios *a:b* and *c:d*, one can cognise the length of *d* (Prol, AA 04: 357n). Here *d* is fully determined because it is of the same kind as *a*, *b*, and *c*: their difference is only quantitative.

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[5] See Callanan, John: *Kant on Analogy*. In: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16/4 (2008), 747–772.

Philosophical analogy is, however, "a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things" (Prol, AA 04: 357), where from "the identity […] of two *qualitative* relations [… and] three given members I can cognize and give *a priori* only the *relation* to a fourth member but not *this* fourth *member* itself" (A179/B222). Accordingly, I know *actions* as well as *natural causes* and *effects*, and by analogy I can present the unknown member *freedom* so that it is to *action* as *cause* is to *effect*. Yet, since natural causes as phenomena are "wholly dissimilar" to free noumenal grounds, I do not hereby cognise freedom itself – only how it is related to actions and that it grounds them.

Indirect cognition can become cognition proper only if all members of the analogy can be presented also directly – so that one could determine if the analogy fits. This is possible in mathematics and in natural science, but impossible for such dissimilar things as sensible causality and supersensible freedom. Fortunately, practical philosophy does not require direct, full-fledged metaphysical determination of freedom. It suffices to present how freedom relates to actions: what freedom is *for our practical reason*. Through analogy "a concept [… is] sufficiently determined *for us*, through we have omitted everything that could have *determined* this concept […] *in itself*, for we determine the concept only with respect […] to us, and we have no need of more" (Prol, AA 04: 358).

There are two aspects to this "need". First, symbolism is necessary, for if we could not present our power of choice to ourselves as a kind of free causal power, we could not *cognise* ourselves as rational *agents*, capable not only of theoretically *thinking* the moral law but also of practically *acting from* it. The unschematised concept of ground suffices only for a stale and empty thought of an ungrounded act, not for the symbolic presentation of a free will *in us*. Second, symbolic presentation also *suffices* for practical reason – which concerns *what ought to be* – by providing "practical determination of what the idea of [freedom] ought to be for us and for the purposive use of it" (KU, AA 05: 353). Thus analogical cognition of freedom through natural causes as its symbols and actions as its appearing effects in part facilitate its practical objective reality – and thereby makes it possible for us to act morally *from* the moral law, not just *in accordance with it*.

CONCLUSION

Freedom can be cognised symbolically as a capacity to produce actions through rational choices, analogous to the capacity of natural things to causally influence each other. This is neither to merely *think* freedom as an unschematised logical ground nor to *directly cognise* it as a schematised cause. That freedom is to actions as causes are to effects is not to say that freedom *is* causality. Although the ontological character of freedom must remain unknown, it is necessary for morality that we can present in ourselves such a capacity for self-legislation. If we could not cognise our capacity to influence our actions, then *even if we were free*, we would still remain mere passive spectators of our lives, incapable of *using* our freedom through self-conscious, deliberate, and autonomous moral action. Thus symbolic cognition is not just the only coherent solution to the riddle of supersensible causality in transcendental idealism but even a necessary condition of the possibility of our very agency itself.