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Kant's Intelligible Standpoint on Action[*1]

This essay attempts to render intelligible (you will pardon the pun) Kant's peculiar claims about the intelligible at A 539/B 567 – A 541/B 569 in the first *Critique*, in which he asserts that

> (1) ... [t]his acting subject would now, in conformity with his intelligible character, stand under no temporal conditions, because time is only a condition of appearances, but not of things in themselves. In him no action would begin or cease. Consequently it would not be subjected to the law of all determination of everything alterable in time: everything *which happens* finds its causes in the appearances (of the previous state). In a word, his causality, in so far as it is intellectual, would not stand in the series of empirical conditions which the event in the world of sense makes necessary. (A 539/B 567 - A 540/B 568) ... in so far as it is noumenon, nothing happens in him, no alteration which requires dynamical determination in time .... One would quite rightly say of him, that it of itself begins his effects in the world of sense, without the action's beginning in him himself ... (A 541/B 569)[2]

What does Kant mean by claiming that intellectual causality is such that in one's intelligible character as noumenal agent, actions neither begin nor end, nor does anything happen in one? Do these claims have meaning merely by contrast to the familiar experience of empirical causality, in which actions have discrete durations and events occur? Is he merely inferring from this familiar sensible experience an ontologically and metaphysically independent, epistemically inaccessible "world," which can be conceptualized only through the negation of those terms and propositions that characterize this one? Or is he offering a

positive, substantive characterization of a different aspect of human experience of which, on the one hand, we can have no knowledge, strictly speaking; but with which, on the other, we are equally familiar?

I defend the latter alternative as best describing Kant's view of the intelligible world. Passage (1)'s confounding air of paradox – and the paradoxical way in which I have just characterized what I believe to be the insights he tried to express there – can be dispelled by invoking as a reminder Kant's oft-repeated claim merely to articulate that which is inherent in ordinary thought and everyday experience. I argue here that Kant's infamous "two standpoints" thesis was meant to do this *for a part of ordinary experience which is in theory inaccessible to knowledge in his technical sense*. In order to appreciate the insights into ordinary thought and everyday experience Kant expresses in Passage (1), we need first to understand his conception of a *Grund*.[3]

I. *Gründe*

Kant's solution in the Third Antinomy to the question whether freedom of the will is compatible with the universal necessity of causal law is to argue that there is one action that can be interpreted as free or as causally necessitated, depending on the standpoint one takes on it. He instructs us at the outset as to how to think about these standpoints. He reminds us of the doctrine of transcendental idealism he has already tried to establish: that appearances are not things in themselves, but merely law-governed empirical representations which therefore must have *Gründe*. These *Gründe*, in turn, are not themselves law-governed empirical representations. (A 537/B 565) He now characterizes them as an intelligible cause of sensible action. So *Gründe* are intelligible rather than sensible, and themselves cause sensible action. He goes further by arguing that the intelligible world is the *Grund* of the sensible world, and indeed, at Ak. 451 in Chapter III of the *Groundwork*, that the noumenal subject is the *Grund* of the empirical subject.[4] What kind of causes are *Gründe*?

I argue elsewhere[5] that a *Grund* , for Kant, comprises the conceptual presuppositions of objective empirical knowledge, i.e. the logically necessary functions of thought established in the Table of Judgment; and that, according to Kant, these functions of thought yield highest-order explanatory first principles.

These principles are rational ideas of an unconditioned condition that subsumes its series of empirical conditions. The finite sequence of members of that series are represented in our experience as appearances. And when Kant claims that a *Grund* is an intelligible cause of certain appearances, he means to say at the very least that these empirical conditions are determined by a rational idea that is neither empirical, nor sensible, nor spatiotemporally external to the agent who conceives it.

I have also argued elsewhere[6] that there are at least two ways in which a rational idea might determine (*bestimmen*) an empirical representation. First, it might fix its form; i.e. it might structure and specify that representation as an instantiation of the idea. So, to take an empirical analogue,[7] my idea of a vacation cottage might specify the form of anything I identify as a vacation cottage as small, ranch style, and low-slung. In these properties, all such cottages would instantiate my idea of a vacation cottage, regardless of the other properties that distinguished them from one another. In this sense my idea of a vacation cottage is the *formal cause* of my identification of certain empirical objects as vacation cottages. For it both structures my perception of those objects and thereby is instantiated in them. Similarly, an intelligible cause such as a highest-order rational idea would be similarly the formal cause of the representations it structures and in which it is instantiated.

But second, a rational idea in itself might bring an empirical representation into existence. Just as my empirical idea of a vacation cottage causes me to build a vacation cottage, and so is the *efficient cause* of the vacation cottage I actually build, similarly, a highest-order rational idea considered as an intelligible cause might actually bring that of which it is an idea into existence, as when my idea of honor causes me to act honorably. In this second sense the idea is the efficient, i.e. precipitating cause of those empirical representations. (A 318/B 375)

The concept of a formal cause may shed some light on the sense in which the intelligible world is the *Grund* of the sensible world: Rational ideas that structure and subsume lower-order concepts, principles and theories thereby structure and subsume the sensory experiences that constitute our knowledge of the empirical world. But this does not explain how the intelligible world could

be the efficient cause of the sensible world. Nor does it fully explain the sense in which the noumenal subject could be the *Grund* of the empirical subject. In these cases there is more involved than solely the structuring and subsumption of an empirical conception under a highest-order rational one.

All three of Kant's highest-order rational ideas determine their instances in the formal sense: we each must regard our individual souls as immortal, irrespective of personality; our actions as free, irrespective of their particular goals; and every representation of God as representing an omnipotent being. By determining the structure and content of our rational faculties, all three ideas of reason thus determine the quality of our experience. But the rational idea of freedom also determines empirical representations in the efficient sense, because this rational idea subsists within and directly animates its instances. The idea of freedom can inspire agents who have this idea to embody it in their actions. By causally affecting our rational faculties, this particular idea of reason can not only determine the quality of our action, but in addition causally engender our action as well. But how? How can a mere idea – an abstract conceptual entity – precipitate physical behavior? (Ak. 439)

I have argued elsewhere[8] that Kant thinks the sensory matter of appearances is the result of the effect of things in themselves on our sensibility; and these are neither empirical nor sensible, nor necessarily external to the agent, either. By contrast with rational ideas, it seems that these sorts of things in themselves causally affect our sensibility, not our reason. So these sorts of things in themselves seem on the face of it distinct from the rational ideas of unconditioned conditions. Whereas the former efficiently cause our sensations of empirical objects, the latter formally cause our apprehension of their form. The metaphysical kind of things in themselves Kant mentions at A 143 fn. seems therefore distinct from the conceptual kind of things in themselves Kant is discussing at A 537/B 565.

So things in themselves, it seems, can be of two sorts. Some can causally affect sensibility and thereby give rise to the sensory matter of appearance; let us call these *metaphysical Gründe*. But others, it seems, can causally affect reason, and both effect human actions and specify their form; let us call these *conceptual*

Gründe. Whereas metaphysical *Gründe* are purely efficient causes, it seems that conceptual *Gründe* may be both efficient and formal causes.

II. Three Hypotheses About *Gründe*

I now defend three hypotheses conjointly:

(A) *denotation*: the one-way relation of conceptual to metaphysical *Gründe* is one of denotation.[9]

According to (A), metaphysical *Gründe* would be what the concepts constitutive of conceptual *Gründe* refer to. So (A) presupposes that metaphysical *Gründe* exist.

(B) *causation*: the one-way relation of metaphysical to conceptual *Gründe* is a causal one.

(B) implies that the actual unconditioned conditions to which the ideas of reason refer – God, free agency, the immortal soul – are in themselves formal and efficient causes that affect our sensibility and ultimately generate our concepts of them. In a similar manner, those concepts themselves as formal and efficient causes affect our intellect and motivate action guided by them.

(C) *inference*: the one-way relation of (A) to (B) is inferential.

(C) says that *if* the one-way relation of conceptual to metaphysical *Gründe* is one of denotation, *then* the one-way relation of metaphysical to conceptual *Gründe* is one of causation. (C) instantiates the more general rule that if a term or concept T succeeds in denoting an object or state of affairs O within a subject S's conceptual scheme (and I do think there are conceptual schemes), then O plays a causal role in S's grasp of T.

If these three hypotheses – *denotation*, *causation*, and *inference* – were true, we could of course have no way of knowing it, and Kant would have no resources within the official constraints of his epistemology for stating it. So my defense of these hypotheses will be covert and indirect. In what follows I consider their application to each of three rational ideas. I first try to show, in very rough terms, how these three hypotheses might work together, when applied to Kant's Idea of the immortality of the soul, to shed light on one of his notoriously cryptic assertions about synthesis. Next I apply them counterfactually, to a concept that is not one of Kant's highest-order Ideas of

Reason at all but shares certain key characteristics with them, namely the concept of a unified force field. In this part of the argument you may substitute any plausible alternative "theory of everything" you prefer for that of a unified force field if you wish. Finally I try to spell out the implications of these hypotheses when applied to the case of greatest interest for this discussion, namely the Idea of freedom. With the aid of the hypotheses of *denotation*, *causation*, and *inference*, I then turn to the analysis of the intelligible standpoint and Kant's claims about its spatiotemporal transcendence. Only here do I sketch an answer to the "paradox" of moral motivation Kant describes at Ak. 439.

Take first the Idea of the immortality of the soul. If this Idea of Reason is a conceptual *Grund*, then conceiving of ourselves as permanent and spatiotemporally transcendent is a conceptual presupposition, and therefore a formal cause, of our empirical self-conceptions – in whatever other particular thoughts and experiences those self-conceptions may consist. Kant argues in the Paralogisms that I must conceive myself as *permanent* in the following respects: first, in being an enduring subject having transient experiences that are properties of it; second, in being simple and unitary; third, in being a numerically self-identical thinking being, i.e. as a person; and fourth, in being metaphysically discrete. (A 341/B 399 - B 432).

Kant also might have argued that I must conceive myself as *spatiotemporally transcendent* in the following respects: first, in my ability to grasp the meaning of any particular spatiotemporal situation I am in, in general and universal terms that transcend it; second, in my ability to remove myself in thought from that particular spatiotemporal situation, and imagine myself in some other one; third, in my ability to enter a realm of abstract thought in which spatiotemporal constraints fall away entirely; and fourth, in my logical inability to conceive the world as persisting without me. I have argued elsewhere[10] that each of these aspects of our rational self-conceptions as immortal souls is a consequence of the transcendental and synthetic status of the "I think" as the "vehicle of all concepts." (A 341/B 399)

Now suppose *denotation* to hold, i.e. that this necessary self-conception were a conceptual *Grund* that denoted a metaphysical *Grund*, namely my actual immortal soul. According to *inference*, *causation* would then also hold: my actual

immortal soul would then causally affect my sensibility, just as ontologically independent objects do. First, my actual immortal soul would efficiently cause in me sensible representations of its properties, i.e. the transient mental events that in fact constitute my empirical consciousness: thoughts, emotions, memories, concepts, deliberations, etc. which I take myself to experience. For Kant such empirical mental events as represented presuppose conformity of the sensations that supply their matter to the necessary and permanent requirements of the synthetic unity of consciousness. But that synthesis itself would be, literally, the effect of a "blind but indispensable function *of the soul*," (A 78/B 103; italics added) i.e. of imagination.

Second, therefore, my immortal soul would affect my sensibility as a formal cause, by synthesizing its representations into a unified whole (cf. B 153, B 156-157, fn.). So we might think of an immortal soul as a kind of magnetic field matrix function of some sort (whether strong, weak, electromagnetic, or gravitational is – you will pardon the pun – immaterial for our purposes) that systematically condenses and organizes the sensible data received by certain sentient material objects, namely human beings. I do not claim that this is what Kant actually meant at A 78/B 103, but I also would not deny that he might have.

Now I have already argued elsewhere[11] that the unifying function of synthesis is iterated at increasingly abstract conceptual levels – under the name of "subsumption" – in order to insure conceptual unity not only in understanding, but also in reason. If *causation* holds, and my immortal soul efficiently and formally causes the synthetic unity of my self at all levels from the empirical to the transcendent, then it causes me to formulate – i.e. to synthesize – that highest-order rational conception of myself as an immortal soul that in fact ensures synthetic unity. And then the conceptual *Grund* and formal cause of my experience of myself as a subject is efficiently caused – according to *denotation* – by its referent, namely my actual immortal soul and metaphysical *Grund* of that experience. My immortal soul is what in fact leads me to the rational Idea of my immortal soul.

Of course we could not know this to be true, since knowledge for Kant requires the unified synthesis of sensible intuitions under the categories of the understanding. The *causation* hypothesis, when applied to the immortal soul as

an efficient and formal cause of this synthetic unity, would explain Kant's cryptic description of synthetic unity as the effect of a blind but indispensible function of the soul. *Causation* thereby would explain the possibility of empirical knowledge. But by definition this hypothesis could not itself be the object of it.

Next consider a different kind of case. Suppose, by analogy, that, contrary to fact, the rational idea of a unified force field were for Kant an unconditioned condition that explained the lower-order principles, hypotheses, and observed physical phenomena of objects and events. This idea would be a formal cause of our identification of that phenomena, in that our idea of it would structure our perception of them: nothing inexplicable in terms of it would be among them. And the formulation of the theory of a unified force field as a highest-order rational concept would assume the truth of *denotation*, i.e. that it referred to what really existed; that it was a true explanation of all of those phenomena, including our empirical selves. If in fact a unified force field really did exist, this would insure that the rational idea of a unified force field actually had application, that it succeeded in denoting what it purported to denote.

The concept of the unified force field itself implies the truth of *inference*, and so of *causation*: the actual unified force field would be, by hypothesis, the efficient cause of the physical phenomena of objects and events we observe. That force field would also formally structure that phenomena. But since we ourselves, as empirical human beings, are among the physical phenomena it structured, it would also indirectly formally structure our cognitive ability to investigate and grasp it as an explanatory hypothesis. In this case, this rational idea would be a conceptual *Grund* that denoted a metaphysical *Grund* – and, moreover, explained why the metaphysical *Grund*, i.e. the actual unified force field – efficiently caused discrete physical phenomena to appear to us as they did.

So, just as for the immortal soul case, the unified force field that was efficiently causing all available phenomena would thereby cause us to structure and specify formally our experience in conformity with the idea of it:[12] *denotation* would legitimate *inference*, and so imply *causation*. The force field itself would bear a certain generative causal relationship to our sensibility, cognition, and experience, which in turn led us rationally to hypothesize it as the ultimate

explanation of that experience. The actual unified force field would be what in fact led me to the idea of a unified force field.

Again – just as for the immortal soul case – we could not know that a unified force field really existed in Kant's technical sense of the term. The concept of a unified force field as an efficient and formal cause of my belief in a unified force field would violate Kant's criteria of knowledge, by failing to provide any sensible intuition to be synthesized. That is why it is a theory, an explanatory hypothesis, rather than an object or event. In explaining why physical phenomena appear as they do, and therefore why sensible intuitions are available for synthesis at all, this hypothesis would thereby offer the sufficient condition of such knowledge (A 651/B 679). But by definition it could not itself be the object of it.

In fact such a theory would probably be about three-quarters up the ladder in the ascending series of *Vernunftschlüsse* for Kant, and could only approximate asymptotically the true and complete explanation of physical phenomena. It could not be a first cause in Kant's sense, because nothing in it would prevent us from pressing further the question of what brought that unified force field itself into existence. Only the rational Idea of a first cause itself could do that. But *if it were*, we would conceive it not merely as a highest-order regulative unifier of our experience, but thereby as a true explanation of that experience, even though we would have no way to confirm that conceptualization independently. We would think that the very fact that this theory unified and explained all of our experience at the highest order of comprehension was compelling evidence for its truth.

Of course there are many other ways in which this counterfactual supposition violates Kant's strictures on a highest-order unconditioned condition. My aim in bringing it up has been merely to illustrate how the relations between conceptual and metaphysical *Gründe* might work for a rational idea that is just as metaphysically counterintuitive as the ones Kant actually considers, but somewhat less philosophically controversial.

Now, finally, consider how this reasoning might work for the particular *Grund* Kant actually does have in mind in the solution to the Third Antinomy. In this case, too, *denotation* legitimates *inference*, and so implies *causation*. I argue

elsewhere[13] that the form of all four of the Antinomies is generated by the hypothetical *Vernunftschluß*. The content of the Third Antinomy is generated specifically by the quest for a first or spontaneous cause. This is the rational and unconditioned idea of a free agent in herself. According to Kant, the ascending series of *Vernunftschlüsse* concerned with causal explanation requires us to conceive this Idea. Since this is a highest-order conceptual *Grund*, such an agent does not herself appear as one in the series of causally determined conditions, nor, therefore, can we have empirical knowledge of her. But the effects of this *Grund* are representations that can appear in the empirical series.

In particular, the unconditioned rational Idea of a free agent as a conceptual *Grund* has the following empirically ascertainable effects on empirical action. Consider first its role as a formal cause. The Idea of free agency formally causes me to conceive my own behavior in a way that is consistent with this Idea: as self-caused, self-ascribed, intentional, and uncompelled by immediate external sensible causes. Maxims, i.e. action-descriptions[14] satisfy these conditions. And rational human agents must conceive themselves and others in accordance with this Idea of Reason, because so doing is necessary for having unified experience (A 651/B 679).[15] So any behavior conceived as an action must conform to this Idea of rational free agency, on pain of conceptual incoherence.

Therefore, this idea also formally causes me to conceive the behavior of other empirical human subjects as equally consistent with it. As Kant observes, "It is not enough that we ascribe freedom to our will on whatever *Grund*, if we do not have sufficient *Grund* for attributing exactly the same to all rational beings." (Ak. 447) Our *Grund* for attributing the same freedom to all rational beings is the conformity of the empirical behavior of all, including ourselves, to the Idea of free action, i.e. to the "rule and order of rationality" (A 550/B 578) that defines free action in the first place. Since rationally unified experience is a necessary condition of unified agency, all such agents must exhibit the formal effects of this conceptual *Grund* in their empirical actions.

Because of its formal causality, the Idea of free agency has efficient causality as well. By leading me to conceive myself and others in a certain way, it affects my motivational reactions to them: it efficiently causes me to ascribe responsibility, praise, or blame to all empirical human agents I conceive as free.

So it efficiently causes me to assume responsibility for, evaluate, and guide my own actions accordingly. The highest-order Idea of rational free agency as a conceptual *Grund* of my behavior both formally structures my conception of myself and other human agents to conform to it, and also efficiently precipitates certain corresponding attitudes, emotions, and actions that express it.

But in order for the unconditioned rational Idea of free agency to be an efficient cause of empirical action, it must refer to actual free agents who have this Idea. Free action – *transcendentally* free action – just is action efficiently caused by the agent's own unconditioned rational ideas, rather than by external empirical conditions. An agent is transcendentally free if and only if her actions are caused by rationally unconditioned Ideas. The Idea of free action is an unconditioned rational idea. If I have this Idea, and this Idea efficiently causes me to act rationally and treat others rationally, then I must be, in myself, actually free; and the Idea of free action that governs my behavior also denotes it. Hence *denotation* is confirmed by the efficacy of the Idea of free action in causing me to act freely.

Denotation implies that I am both the conceptual and the metaphysical *Grund* of my actions. I am the conceptual *Grund* of my actions in that, first, my unconditioned rational self-conception as a free agent formally structures and specifies the way I appear to myself – i.e. as a particular and conditioned individual, who nevertheless can be moved to responsible action by unconditioned rational ideas. And second, it efficiently moves me to such actions.

Therefore, by *inference*, I am also the metaphysical *Grund* of my actions, in that my rational conception of myself as the kind of agent whose unconditioned rational idea of free agency precipitates her actions *is itself an unconditioned rational idea of free agency that precipitates <u>my</u> actions*. In myself I am in fact the kind of agent to whom my unconditioned rational idea of free agency refers.

Now of course I cannot know this to be true. I and my actions are fully explicable in terms of the empirical causal series in which we appear as members. That is the only kind of knowledge of them, in Kant's technical sense, I can have. But what this empirical series of appearances cannot explain is the constant causal conjunction I experience, of my empirical actions with an

antecedent Idea that is not an empirical appearance at all, namely my rational conception of myself as free. Empirical causal explanation can shed no light on the causal connection between my rational, nonempirical self-conception and the rational, empirical actions consequent on them. Only the highest-order rational hypothesis that I am in fact noumenally free – i.e. that that very same rational self-conception veridically denotes a matter of metaphysical fact – can explain *that* causal nexus.

Here again, *denotation* legitimates *inference*, which in turn implies *causation*: If my conception of myself as free denotes the noumenally free agent I am in fact, then we can infer that I as noumenally free agent am causing myself to conceive myself as free. *That my actions are in fact motivated by the rational Idea of free agency in turn causes me to conceive those actions as free, to conceive myself as a free agent, and therefore to denote my noumenal self accordingly.* So, just as in the case of the immortal soul case and the unified force field case, the Idea of freedom unifies all of my experiences of action, whether my own or others', at the highest order because free agents are in fact causing these experiences. Free agents are being motivated by the rational conception of themselves as free to act rationally, and thereby to instantiate that conception in their empirical behavior. And by so identifying that behavior as rationally motivated, I am led to the highest-order idea of freedom. Again, it is actual free action that leads me to the rational idea of free action that denotes it. This is no more metaphysically suspect than the rational idea of a unified force field denoting an actual unified force field.

What, then, causes me to realize those ideas that seem to have no noumenal referents? Can a merely empirical idea efficiently cause me to do something? So, for example, can the mere idea of a vacation cottage precipitate in me vacation cottage-building activity? In this sense no empirical idea is *merely* an empirical idea, for every empirical idea instantiates a conceptual *Grund*. But not all empirical instantiations of a conceptual *Grund* seem to denote metaphysical *Gründe*. For example, my idea of a vacation cottage does not denote a noumenal vacation cottage in itself. Then what causes me to build one?

All of the ideas I intend to carry out in action, whether transcendent or empirical, are my ends (Kant identifies ends as ideas at A 318/B 375). My ends are described by my maxims. My maxims, in turn, predicate my intended

actions of me as their subject, in categorical indicative judgments.[16] Therefore my ends – and so my ideas – instantiate my rational conception of myself as a free and causally effective agent who is capable of carrying out my ideas. This is the noumenal referent, i.e. the metaphysical *Grund* that all such ideas denote.

Of course not all ideas can *be* ends for all agents, i.e. not all ideas can be efficient causes as well as formal ones. Why is it that some agents merely dream about vacation cottages whereas others go ahead and build them? And more importantly, why is it that some agents merely conceive of themselves as morally virtuous, whereas others actually are?

In order for me to carry out my ideas in action, there needs to be a rule-governed causal relationship between the content of the idea I have and the action I perform in its service, such that the mental occurrence of the idea precipitates the corresponding appropriate action. This is Kant's notion of the *character* of an efficient cause. (A 539/B 567) Its rule-governed causal relationship to its effect insures that, other things equal, the conjunction of idea and action will be regular rather than intermittent or random. It also insures that, other things equal, this conjunction will be between the content of my idea and an action suited to carry it out, rather than some other unrelated or arbitrary action. We ordinarily refer to such intentional behavioral regularities as *dispositions*, and I shall follow that convention. I shall say that a free agent has a *metaphysical predisposition* to construct a vacation cottage, or, respectively, to virtue, if the idea of a vacation cottage, or virtue, causes her to realize these ideas in action.[17]

If I am not, as a matter of metaphysical fact, predisposed to virtue, the idea of virtuous action might still be a pseudorational formal cause of action. That is, I might still rationalize my vicious behavior under the rubric of virtue, dissociating or denying any evidence of their incompatibility. But since my behavior would be in fact otherwise motivated, these ideas would not be efficient causes of action.

III. The Intelligible Standpoint

With the aid of the foregoing analysis of Kant's concept of *Gründe*, I now defend an interpretation of Kant's concept of the intelligible or supersensible

world. On this interpretation, Kant's intelligible world is to be understood as the realm of conceptual *Gründe* that are presumed to denote metaphysical *Gründe* which bring those conceptual *Gründe* into existence. That is, it is the realm of abstract, regulative ideas, concepts, principles, and theories that we assume – but do not know – to be true foundational explanations of empirical states of affairs.

Kant first introduces the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible in the first *Critique*, in the A Edition section on Phenomena and Noumena. He describes noumena as objects of understanding only, which could be given to an intellectual intuition – that is, one which intuited things as they were in themselves through the intellect, not as empirical appearances through the senses. (A 249; also see B 310) Noumena, he says, are intelligible things. He equates the distinction between phenomena and noumena, first, with that between the world of the senses and that of the understanding (*Verstandeswelt*), and second, with that between the sensible and the intelligible world.

In the Metaphysical Deduction Kant has already explained that abstracting the categories of the understanding from sensibility yields the logical forms of judgment; and he later explains that extending them beyond the purview of sensibility yields ideas and inferences of reason. So the world of pure understanding Kant here describes should be understood as the world of rational ideas he develops in the Dialectic.

> (2) [T]he concept of appearances ... already of itself supplies us with the objective reality of noumena... For if the senses represent to us something merely as it appears, this something must also be in itself a thing, and an object of a non-sensible intuition, i.e. of the understanding. That is, a cognition must be possible in which no sensibility is to be found, and which alone has absolutely objective reality, through which, namely, objects are represented to us as they are ... Thus there would be, outside the empirical use of the categories ... a pure and objectively valid use; ... for here an entirely different field would stand open before us; as it were a world thought in the mind (perhaps even intuited), which could employ our pure understanding not less but rather far more nobly. (A 249-250)

This passage, which Kant struck from the B Edition, makes a number of important points. First of all, he thinks that if it were possible to intuit objects

through the intellect alone, i.e. through reason, this mode of access would yield knowledge of things as they are in themselves which was absolutely objective. In this Kant follows Plato's account of knowledge in the *Republic*, where the world of forms is a higher and truer reality, accessible only through trained intellectual discrimination.

In this connection Kant regards appearances from a different vantage point than that which he has assumed throughout the Aesthetic and Analytic. There he was concerned to demonstrate the status of law-governed appearances as an index of empirical objectivity. Correspondingly, particularly in the Anticipations of Perception, he valorized the senses as the touchstone of the real. In deleted passage (2) from the discussion of Phenomena and Noumena, by contrast, the senses deceive us as to the true nature of reality, just as they do for Descartes. Only through the operations of the intellect do we discern the nature of things as they are in themselves.

Secondly, in passage (2) non-sensible knowledge would be representational, just as is empirical knowledge. So even if we had intellectual intuition through which to apprehend the nature of things in themselves, this faculty would not provide us with the open window onto the world that naive realism requires. Although it would represent things as they are, it would still represent them mediately. In this way intellectual intuition would be different from sensible intuition, which brings us into unmediated relation with objects. The reason for the difference is that intellectual intuition would be a kind of knowledge (*Wissen*), and therefore inherently representational, whereas sensible intuition is merely a kind of acquaintance (*Kennen*), which is not.

A third important point in passage (2) is Kant's characterization of the intelligible world as an object of thought in the mind, and so one that employs pure understanding far more nobly than does the sensible world. This distances him somewhat from a Platonic metaphysical realm of abstract objects, and so from any too literal understanding of his talk of two different "worlds." Kant's intelligible world is a mental world of conceptual objects fashioned by the intellect in accordance with the demands of reason; conceptual objects that represent actual states of affairs as they really are.

So on Kant's view here, the pure categories of understanding applied transcendently to yield ideas thereby yield absolutely objective representational knowledge of things as they are in themselves. In the intelligible world, we examine higher-order concepts and theories that describe the way things really are and explain why they appear as they do. In the intelligible world of the mind, the conceptual *Grund* of appearance is an object of intellectual contemplation that has as its denotation their metaphysical *Grund*.

Now in the B Edition Kant finds doctrinal reason to repudiate the possibility of intellectual intuition (B 313-314; also see B 68, 71-73, 159), and with it the positive concept of noumena here described (A 255/B 311, *passim*). But Kant's denial of intellectual intuition, and of the concept of noumena as anything more than a limiting concept denoting the boundaries beyond which empirical knowledge cannot tread, is consistent with the second and third elements in the substantive concept of the intelligible world just described. Certainly we must observe Kant's stated restrictions on his technical use of the term "knowledge" as more or less interchangeable with "experience," and as therefore requiring the synthesis of sensible intuition under the categories. This implies the rejection of the first claim above, that the intellection (or intuition) of objects as they are in themselves could yield absolutely objective knowledge.

But the intelligible world of rational ideas in the mind may nevertheless provide a noble use of the pure understanding. And even though these rational concepts (*Begriffe*) cannot, by definition, yield empirical knowledge, they can still yield us representations that give us theoretical and explanatory *insight* into things as they are. These conceptual representations can make empirical knowledge comprehensive and coherent, and in so doing, enable us to grasp (*begreifen*) the deeper reality that lies behind the sensible appearances. That is, we *begreifen* this deeper reality through *Begriffe*. This is not full-fledged empirical knowledge (*Erfahrung*, *Erkenntnis*); but it is not nothing, either. It is in fact no more mysterious or different than what any explanatory hypothesis tries to achieve.

So the external sensible world includes passively received sensory impulses and reactions, in addition to spatially external physical events. And there also exists a strictly internal realm of the mind, in which we engage in pure

and spontaneous intellectual activity – thought, reasoning, synthesis, analysis, and reflection:

> (3) Only man, who is familiar with all the rest of nature solely through the senses, also cognizes himself through simple apperception, and indeed in actions and inner determinations that he cannot class with impressions of the senses. He is to himself in part phenomenon; but in another part, namely in regard to certain faculties, a purely intelligible object. For the actions of these faculties cannot be classed with the receptivity of sensibility. We call these faculties understanding and reason. The latter in particular is distinguished quite properly and especially from all empirically conditioned powers. For it considers its objects solely in conformity with ideas, and determines the understanding accordingly, which then makes an empirical use of its (indeed similarly pure) concepts. (A 546/B 574 – A 547/B 575)

The primary significance of passage (3) is its equation of the intellectual activities of understanding and reason with those "acts and inner determinations which [we] cannot class with impressions of the senses" that enable us to identify ourselves as "purely intelligible object[s]." The concepts and ideas we generate by using our understanding and reason are those we "produce entirely from ourselves and thereby manifest our activity ..." (Ak. 451)[18] So only the concepts and ideas we generate through understanding and reason situate us in this world. On this conceptual interpretation of the intelligible standpoint, that we cannot know (*erfahren*) the contents of the intelligible world follows by definition of what the intelligible world is. It is a realm of purely conceptual activity, distinct from sensibility. We can grasp (*begreifen*) its contents by *thinking*, *conceiving*, and *identifying* them. But since knowledge in Kant's technical sense requires the contribution of sensibility, it follows that we cannot know them.

The last sentence of passage (3) further develops the claims Kant has already made in Paragraphs 24 and 25 of the B Deduction: that synthetic understanding is spontaneous and active, and that it not only formally specifies the passive subject's form of sensibility but also causally determines it. Here Kant adds that it is reason that shapes the understanding in this manner. In the *Groundwork* he adds, further, that reason is even more purely spontaneous that

understanding. Understanding, although active and spontaneous to some degree, is limited to the production of those concepts that subsume sensible representations under rules and so unify consciousness. Reason, by contrast, produces ideas that transcend sensibility and thereby demarcate the limits of understanding itself (Ak. 452).

It is then because we exercise our rational faculties in spontaneous intellectual activity that, on Kant's view, we must regard ourselves as free, by definition (Ak. 448). That is, if it is *reason* we are exercising, then by definition we must regard that activity as spontaneous, original, and uncoerced by external influences. We express our intelligible character and situate ourselves in the intelligible world, by engaging our minds and intellects in the activity of rational thought.

Can unconditioned rational ideas themselves be determined by "higher and more remote acting causes," as Kant seems to allow in the Canon (A 803/B 831)? I have argued that if these causes are noumenal, then they can: metaphysical *Gründe* can cause us to have highest-order conceptual *Gründe*, namely the empirically unconditioned ideas of God, freedom, and immortality, that denote them. Since, on this thesis, these ideas denote matters of metaphysical fact, the causal efficacy of these facts in generating our ideas of them does not undermine their unconditioned status. (So, for example, the actual existence of a first cause that effects our idea of that first cause does not imply that our idea is not the idea of a *first* cause after all.)

But if these "higher and more remote acting causes" are assumed to be empirical, then they cannot determine unconditioned rational ideas, by definition. Certainly the *empirical event* of my thinking them can be thus determined; as when my reading Descartes' *Meditations* leads me to reflect on the spatiotemporally transcendent nature of my immortal soul. And certain my *empirical ability* to think them can be, since in order for me to grasp the sense in which my actions presuppose my freedom, my brain must be so wired as to enable me to reason about what the concept of action implies, and so to understand and apply the law of noncontradiction. But the *propositional content* of unconditioned rational ideas – the ideas in themselves, so to speak – are not the kind of entity that can be the result of empirical causes, any more than the

law of noncontradiction itself could be. They are universally valid, abstract, spatiotemporally transcendent conceptual objects that exist independently of us; and that we therefore have temporal occasion to discover, rather than to invent.

So when my unconditioned rational idea of free agency efficiently causes me to hold others responsible for their actions, the hypothesis that this demonstrates my transcendental freedom is not refuted by pointing out that I got this idea from reading Kant's *Groundwork*; nor by arguing that therefore, my tattered copy of Kant's *Groundwork* is the empirically conditioned appearance that causes me to hold others responsible for their actions. Like the law of noncontradiction, the ideas of God, freedom and immortality are necessary formal and efficient preconditions of coherent empirical experience. If the law of noncontradiction cannot be the result of "higher and more remote acting [empirical] causes," the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality cannot be, either. All of these must stand or fall together.

IV. Spatiotemporal Transcendence

Finally I apply this analysis of Kant's concept of the intelligible as the veridical conceptual in order to illuminate his cryptic assertions in passage (1). By claiming that the noumenal subject is nontemporal, Kant means that the highest-order concepts and insights grasped by the subject's rational intellect – remember, the true locus of personhood for Kant – are not themselves indexed to particular times or places. So, for example, the principle that ~(P.~P) is true regardless of time or place; the concepts of moral virtue or of freedom may find application in any time or place; the ideas of the immortal soul and of God transcend time or place; the law of acting on universalizable maxims holds for all times and places. Pure reason, as Kant points out, is not subject to the form of time. (A 551/B 579)

Certainly we may visit in thought, or fail to visit, such principles, concepts, ideas, or laws at particular times or places. So we need to observe the distinction between the *propositional content* of rational thought which transcends particular time and place, and the particular spatiotemporal occasion – the *empirical mental event* – of our thinking it. The nature of the intelligible world is defined by its abstract and universal conceptual content; and this content defines

our outlook on and behavior in the world. As a formal cause it is permanently "there" for us, regulating our perceptions, emotions, and actions. But we are not permanently "there" in it. To say that we have an intelligible character is not to say that we are always conscious of its abstract content.

When we are not, we are mentally locked into the concrete material reality of our spatiotemporal location and circumstances, exercising neither abstract speculation nor flights of creative imagination nor universalized reasoning. We experience time passing with the successive occurrence of sensible events. From this standpoint our thoughts, emotions and actions are among those events. We situate them in the temporal series as effects of prior events and causes of future ones. That is, we view them in relation both to their empirical histories and to their empirical purposes. We conceive them in terms of their merely empirical significance, and respond to them accordingly.

When by contrast we regard our thoughts, emotions, and actions as instantiations of abstract concepts, we become aware of the content of those abstract concepts as such, and manipulate them intellectually in ways we may be unable to manipulate the material circumstances that instantiate them. And then we "lose ourselves" in abstract thought, and cease to experience the passage of time. At that temporal location and for that temporal duration in which we are engaged in reasoning with abstract concepts, the awareness of spatiotemporal location, duration, and individuation – and so the awareness of the sense of empirical selfhood, and of personal identity – fall away. With them disappear the necessary conditions for empirical knowledge. What remains is conscious, active, impersonal intellection, moving purposefully through a conceptual terrain without concrete signposts and mapped only by the laws of reason. Thus our intelligible character consists in the metaphysical predisposition to regard empirical events as instantiations of abstract universal concepts and principles, and so to transcend in abstract thought the personalizing and limiting constraints of time and place.

Within propositional content, then, we can also distinguish that which does satisfy Kant's description of "employ[ing] our pure understanding ... far more nobly" than does the empirical (A 249-250) from that which does not. For example, thinking about what to cook for dinner tonight may remove me in

thought from my actual spatiotemporal location. But only by transporting me to a different one which I plan to effect. So I conceive both locations from the empirical or sensible standpoint; planning the future does not transport me to the intelligible world.

Kant's view that the moral worth of an action has nothing to do with its results follows naturally from his conception of the sensible standpoint. All such results, and all such hypothetical reasoning about empirical action and its results, concern merely empirical events and their spatiotemporal interactions. Since reasoning with hypothetical imperatives involves reasoning about events at one spatiotemporal location with regard to results they are intended to cause at a future one, it fails to disentangle the agent from the sensible web of spatiotemporal interactions in which she is embedded.

The imprisoning character of the empirical world thus cannot be explained merely by its thoroughgoing causal determination. For we have seen that as noumenally free agents we are also causally determined – intellectually, *by reason,* to deliberate in accordance with its laws and initiate empirical actions that carry them out. Rather, the sensible empirical world constricts us because it individuates, locates, and plants us in a spatiotemporal order which, because it need bear no relationship whatsoever to "the rule and order of rationality" (A 550/B 578) – i.e. the order of abstract objects of thought we denote through concepts, and the systematic logical and conceptual relationships we discover among them – offends against our deepest metaphysical disposition: the disposition to rationality. Moral worth requires the intellectual transcendence of spatiotemporality – i.e. transcendental freedom – because only then can we exercise *without arbitrary constraints* the capacities of rationality and intellection that distinguish us from other sentient creatures.

Thinking about whether to share my dinner with the indigent gets me underway. For it requires me to subsume the events of an envisioned spatiotemporal location under the abstract, spatiotemporally transcendent principle of helping the needy – itself an expression of the good will. By subsuming the action's maxim under the spatiotemporally transcendent idea of the good will, I lift myself in thought beyond the spatiotemporal web in which I

am embedded, and thereby secure my transcendental freedom. Only from this spatiotemporally transcendent perspective can intellectual causality function.

To take another example: thinking about how to meet next month's car loan payment locates me squarely in the sensible world, for again I merely connect in thought my present spatiotemporal location with an envisioned future one that I hope to effect. By contrast, by inferring that meeting next month's payment is the right thing to do, I take the intelligible standpoint on that same action. For I subsume its maxim under the spatiotemporally transcendent concept of rightness, and so identify it as universalizable. From the intelligible standpoint, empirical events are mere occasions for contemplating, analyzing, or reasoning about the abstract matters of universal principle that unify them.[19] As we descend in the series of *Vernunftschlüsse* toward the concrete, specific, and spatiotemporally local, we approach the empirical standpoint, of actual and envisioned conditions in the sensible world of empirical action. The closer we get, the more individuated particulars proliferate, and the more they seem to complicate the requirements of reason.

My personal incentive for choosing the ingredients for dinner, or for saving money for next month's car payment, is a representation of "what itself in a more distant way is useful or harmful ... [and] ... what, in regard to [my] entire condition, is desirable, i.e. good and useful" (A 802/B 830; also see A 534/B 562) as the envisioned causal consequence of my action. So action motivated accordingly is an example of the practical freedom that characterizes the empirical standpoint. But it has no moral worth, because it is governed by hypothetical imperatives.

By contrast, the transpersonal incentive for sharing my dinner with the indigent, or paying off my car loan, is a direct representation of a property of the action, namely its rationality. Since rationality is itself an unconditioned idea, action motivated accordingly is an example of the transcendental freedom that characterizes the intelligible standpoint. In the last inference in the descending series of *Vernunftschlüsse*, I recognize that the description of the envisioned action – i.e. its maxim – can be subsumed under these more general premises.[20]

Now recall from the conclusion to Section II Kant's definition of the *character* of an efficient cause as that rule-governed causal relationship between

the content of the idea one has and the action one performs in its service, such that the mental occurrence of the idea precipitates the corresponding appropriate action. (A 539/B 567) Recall also that I defined a *metaphysical predisposition* to a certain kind of action as the rule-governed causal conjunction of an agent's antecedent idea and the consequent appropriate action she takes to realize it. The last inference in the descending series of *Vernunftschlüsse*, in which I recognize that the maxim of my action can be subsumed under the idea of rationality – i.e. that this maxim is a reason for my performing it – legitimates and authorizes my performing it. The legitimating recognition of my intended action as rational is the precipitating factor that, ceteris paribus, selects that action from the array of possible responses I am disposed to make to the situation. It thereby initiates actualization of my metaphysical predisposition to act accordingly.

So the reason Kant says that no action begins or ceases in our intelligible character is because our intelligible character consists entirely in *metaphysical predispositions* to act in accordance with the abstract propositional content of the rational concepts and principles with which we judge – just as we earlier saw in the case of virtue. The abstract propositional content of these principles are not events, and the predispositions to act on them are not, either. Neither abstract propositional content nor predispositions "happe[n] in [us]," nor do they "begin or cease" inside us. The minute any event – whether thought or action – does "happen," we "begin [our] effects in the world of sense." (A 541/B 569) Particular episodes of judgment and deliberation are empirical psychological events through which we can gain conceptual access to the intelligible standpoint, if we reason abstractly enough. There we manipulate rational universal concepts and principles in the manner just described, and infer from them as conclusions of reason the particular empirical actions we envision. If we are metaphysically predisposed to act on our rational conclusions, the resulting action actualizes that predisposition. But a fuller account of moral motivation lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

Endnotes

[1]It is a very great privilege to have been invited to contribute to this volume honoring Professor Gerold Prauss. The suggested parameters of the collection have motivated my focus on a topic drawn from Chapter VII of a larger project in progress, *Kant's Metaethics*. I have attempted to present this material here in an independent and self-contained form, and apologize in advance for the several junctures at which the following discussion falls short of that goal. Earlier versions were presented to the Midwest Study Group of the North American Kant Society; Florida State University's conference, "Kantian Themes in Ethics;" and the Getty Research Institute's Scholars' Seminar. Comments received on those occasions have improved the present discussion considerably.

[2]All translations from the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Grundlagen der Metaphysik der Sittlichkeit* are my own. All references to both works are parenthecized in the text.

I assume in what follows that the Dialectic of the first *Kritik* lays the conceptual and terminological foundation for the *Grundlagen*; that most of the latter is unintelligible in the absence of detailed familiarity with the former; and that the latter is largely continuous with and a further development of many of the concepts and arguments that first make their appearance in the former. I defend these assumptions in *Kant's Metaethics.*

[3]There are certain words in Kant's technical terminology that are untranslatable into English, and in my opinion *Gründe* is one of them (*Vernunftschluß* is another, rendered very inadequately by "syllogism"). "Grounds" carries too much the association of coffee grounds, playgrounds, and fairgrounds, whereas "basis" either begs or ignores all the interesting questions.

[4]"[O]ne *must necessarily* suppose, above this constitution of [one]self as subject composed of blatant [*lauter*] appearances, something else that underlies it, namely [one's] "I" as this may be constituted in itself ..." (Ak. 451; italics added)

[5]"Kant on the Objectivity of the Moral Law," in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, Eds. Andrews Reath, Barbara Herman, and Christine

Korsgaard (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 240-269; and at greater length in *Kant's Metaethics*, Chapter V: "Reason."

[6]"Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," *The Philosophical Forum XXIV*, 1-3 (Fall-Spring 1992-93), 188-232; and at great length in *Kant's Metaethics*, Chapter IV: "Understanding."

[7]Here I am grateful to Reinhardt Meyer-Kalkus.

[8]*Kant's Metaethics*, Chapter II: "Matter;" also see Footnote 17 of "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," *op. cit.* Note 6.

[9]Here I have benefitted from discussion with Günther Zöller.

[10]*op. cit.* Note 6.

[11]*op. cit.* Note 5.

[12]Of course we can structure and specify our experience in conformity with more than one Idea at a time, provided the ideas are compatible. The concept of a unified force field is fully compatible with Kant's three actual Ideas of Reason. For example, in accordance with the speculative suggestions above as to how we might think about the concept of an immortal soul as a functional physical (though immaterial) entity, we might conceive immortal souls as magnetic field matrix functions on the unified force field.

[13]*op. cit.* Note 5.

[14]I defend the equation of maxims with action-descriptions in "Kant on the Objectivity of the Moral Law," Note 5, and at greater length in *Kant's Metaethics*, Chapter VI: "Action."

[15]"[T]o every rational being possessed of a will we must also lend the idea of freedom as the only one under which he acts. ... But we cannot possibly think a reason, which consciously in regard to its judgments receives guidance from elsewhere. For in that case the subject would ascribe the determination of his power of judgment not to his reason, but rather to an impulsion. Reason must view itself as author of its principles, independently of alien influences." (Ak. 448)

[16]For a discussion of categorical indicatives and their relation to the moral law, see "Kant on the Objectivity of the Moral Law," *op. cit.* Note 5.

[17]And I will suppose the canonical questions about the individuation, identification, and prediction of dispositional traits to have been answered.

[18]"[I]n regard to what may be in [us] of pure activity (which reaches consciousness not through affection of the senses, but rather without mediation) [we] must class [ourselves] in the *intellectual world*, with which [we have] no further familiarity (*kennen*)." (Ak. 451)

[19]"[O]ne positions (*sich setzen*) only an idea as the sole point of view (*Gesichtspunkte*) from from which one can extend that unity which is so essential to reason and so beneficial to the understanding." (A 681/B 709)

[20]*op. cit.* Note 16.