of reason. In theoretical philosophy it is said that only objects of outer
sense are in space, whereas objects of outer as well as of inner sense are in
time, since the representations of both are still representations, and as
such belong together to inner sense. So too, whether freedom in the
external or in the internal use of choice is considered, its laws, as pure
practical laws of reason for free choice generally, must also be internal
determining grounds of choice, although they should not always be consid­
ered in this respect.

III.
PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS OF THE METAPHYSICS
OF MORALS
(PHILOSOPHIA PRACTICA UNIVERSALIS)

The concept of freedom is a pure rational concept, which for this very
reason is transcendent for theoretical philosophy, that is, it is a concept
such that no instance corresponding to it can be given in any possible
experience, and of an object of which we cannot obtain any theoretical
cognition; the concept of freedom cannot hold as a constitutive but solely
as a regulative and, indeed, merely negative principle of speculative rea­
son. But in reason’s practical use the concept of freedom proves its reality
by practical principles, which are laws of a causality of pure reason for
determining choice independently of any empirical conditions (of sensibil­
ity generally) and prove a pure will in us, in which moral concepts and
laws have their source.

On this concept of freedom, which is positive (from a practical point of
view), are based unconditional practical laws, which are called moral. For
us, whose choice is sensibly affected and so does not of itself conform to the
pure will but often opposes it, moral laws are imperatives (commands or
prohibitions) and indeed categorical (unconditional) imperatives. As such
they are distinguished from technical imperatives (precepts of art), which
always command only conditionally. By categorical imperatives certain ac­
tions are permitted or forbidden, that is, morally possible or impossible, while
some of them or their opposites are morally necessary, that is, obligatory.
For those actions, then, there arises the concept of a duty, observance or
transgression of which is indeed connected with a pleasure or displeasure
of a distinctive kind (moral feeling), although in practical laws of reason we
take no account of these feelings (since they have nothing to do with the
basis of practical laws but only with the subjective effect in the mind when our
choice is determined by them, which can differ from one subject to another
[without objectively, i.e., in the judgment of reason, at all adding to or
detracting from the validity or influence of these laws]).

* This section was numbered IV in AK.
THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

The following concepts are common to both parts of *The Metaphysics of Morals.*

**Obligation** is the necessity of a free action under a categorical imperative of reason.

An imperative is a practical rule by which an action in itself contingent is *made* necessary. An imperative differs from a practical law in that a law indeed represents an action as necessary but takes no account of whether this action already inheres by an *inner* necessity in the acting subject (as in a holy being) or whether it is contingent (as in the human being); for where the former is the case there is no imperative. Hence an imperative is a rule the representation of which *makes* necessary an action that is subjectively contingent and thus represents the subject as one that must be *constrained* (necessitated)* to conform with the rule. - A categorical (unconditional) imperative is one that represents an action as objectively necessary and makes it necessary not indirectly, through the representation of some *end* that can be attained by the action, but through the mere representation of this action itself (its form), and hence directly. No other practical doctrine can furnish instances of such imperatives than that which prescribes obligation (the doctrine of morals). All other imperatives are *technical* and are, one and all, conditional. The ground of the possibility of categorical imperatives is this: that they refer to no other property of choice (by which some purpose can be ascribed to it) than simply to its *freedom.*

That action is *permitted* (*licitum*) which is not contrary to obligation; and this freedom which is not limited by any opposing imperative, is called an authorization (*facultas moralis*). Hence it is obvious what is meant by *forbidden* (* illicitum*).

**Duty** is that action to which someone is bound. It is therefore the matter of obligation, and there can be one and the same duty (as to the action) although we can be bound to it in different ways.

A categorical imperative, because it asserts an obligation with respect to certain actions, is a morally practical *law.* But since obligation involves not merely practical necessity (such as a law in general asserts) but also *necessitation,* a categorical imperative is a law that either commands or prohibits, depending upon whether it represents as a duty the commission or omission of an action. An action that is neither commanded nor prohibited is merely *permitted,* since there is no law limiting one's freedom (one's authorization) with regard to it and so too no

*Kant repeatedly gives Zwang (constraint) and Nötigung (necessitation) as synonyms. Although Nötigung is perhaps his favored term, I have often translated Nötigung by the more common English word "constraint."*
duty. Such an action is called morally indifferent (indifferens, adiaphor- ron, res merae facultatis). The question can be raised whether there are such actions and, if there are, whether there must be permissive laws (lex permissiva), in addition to laws that command and prohibit (lex praeceptiva, lex mandati and lex prohibitiva, lex vetiti), in order to account for someone’s being free to do or not to do something as he pleases. If so, the authorization would not always have to do with an indifferent action (adiaphoron); for, considering the action in terms of moral laws, no special law would be required for it. 11

An action is called a deed insofar as it comes under obligatory laws and hence insofar as the subject, in doing it, is considered in terms of the freedom of his choice. By such an action the agent is regarded as the author of its effect, and this, together with the action itself, can be imputed to him, if one is previously acquainted with the law by virtue of which an obligation rests on these.

A person is a subject whose actions can be imputed to him. Moral personality is therefore nothing other than the freedom of a rational being under moral laws (whereas psychological personality is merely the ability to be conscious of one’s identity in different conditions of one’s existence). From this it follows that a person is subject to no other laws than those he gives to himself (either alone or at least along with others).

A thing is that to which nothing can be imputed. Any object of free choice which itself lacks freedom is therefore called a thing (res corporalis).

A deed is right or wrong (rectum aut minus rectum) in general insofar as it conforms with duty or is contrary to it (factum licitum aut illicitum); the duty itself, in terms of its content or origin, may be of any kind. A deed contrary to duty is called a transgression (reatus).

An unintentional transgression which can still be imputed to the agent is called a mere fault (culpa). An intentional transgression (i.e., one accompanied by consciousness of its being a transgression) is called a crime (dolus). What is right in accordance with external laws is called just (iustum); what is not, unjust (iniustum). 12

A conflict of duties (collisio officiorum s. obligationum) would be a relation between them in which one of them would cancel the other (wholly or in part). But since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain actions and two rules opposed to each other cannot be necessary at the same time, if it is a duty to act in

11 Vermögen
12 Sache ist ein Ding
13 right or less right
14 licit or illicit deed
15 gerecht . . . ungerecht
16 collision of duties or obligations
accordance with one rule, to act in accordance with the opposite rule is not a duty but even contrary to duty; so a collision of duties and obligations is inconceivable (obligationes non colliduntur). However, a subject may have, in a rule he prescribes to himself, two grounds of obligation (rationes obligandi), one or the other of which is not sufficient to put him under obligation (rationes obligandi non obligantes), so that one of them is not a duty. — When two such grounds conflict with each other, practical philosophy says, not that the stronger obligation takes precedence (fortior obligatio vincit) but that the stronger ground of obligation prevails (fortior obligandi ratio vincit).

Obligatory laws for which there can be an external lawgiving are called external laws (leges externae) in general. Those among them that can be recognized as obligatory a priori by reason even without external lawgiving are indeed external but natural laws, whereas those that do not bind without actual external lawgiving (and so without it would not be laws) are called positive laws. One can therefore contain only positive laws; but then a natural law would still have to precede it, which would establish the authority of the lawgiver (i.e., his authorization to bind others by his mere choice).

A principle that makes certain actions duties is a practical law. A rule that the agent himself makes his principle on subjective grounds is called his maxim; hence different agents can have very different maxims with regard to the same law.

The categorical imperative, which as such only affirms what obligation is, is: act upon a maxim that can also hold as a universal law. — You must therefore first consider your actions in terms of their subjective principles; but you can know whether this principle also holds objectively only in this way: that when your reason subjects it to the test of conceiving yourself as also giving universal law through it, it qualifies for such a giving of universal law.

The simplicity of this law in comparison with the great and various consequences that can be drawn from it must seem astonishing at first, as must also its authority to command without appearing to carry any incentive with it. But in wondering at an ability of our reason to determine choice by the mere idea that a maxim qualifies for the universality of a practical law, one learns that just these practical (moral) laws first make known a property of choice, namely its freedom, which speculative reason

---

4 obligations do not conflict
5 zur Verpflichtung nicht zureichend ist. Although Kant apparently uses both Verbindlichkeit and Verpflichtung for “obligation,” the latter seems at times to have the sense of “put under obligation” and to be closely related to verbinden, which I often translate as “to bind.”
6 the stronger obligation wins
7 the stronger ground of obligation wins
8 Vermögen
would never have arrived at, either on a priori grounds or through any experience whatever, and which, once reason has arrived at it, could in no way be shown theoretically to be possible, although these practical laws show incontestably that our choice has this property. It then seems less strange to find that these laws, like mathematical postulates, are incapable of being proved and yet apodictic, but at the same time to see a whole field of practical cognition open up before one, where reason in its theoretical use, with the same idea of freedom or with any other of its ideas of the supersensible, must find everything closed tight against it. – The conformity of an action with the law of duty is its legality (legalitas); the conformity of the maxim of an action with a law is the morality (moralitas) of the action. A maxim is a subjective principle of action, a principle which the subject himself makes his rule (how he wills to act). A principle of duty, on the other hand, is a principle that reason prescribes to him absolutely and so objectively (how he ought to act).

The supreme principle of the doctrine of morals is, therefore, act on a maxim which can also hold as a universal law. – Any maxim that does not so qualify is contrary to morals.

Laws proceed from the will, maxims from choice. In man the latter is a free choice; the will, which is directed to nothing beyond the law itself, cannot be called either free or unfree, since it is not directed to actions but immediately to giving laws for the maxims of actions (and is, therefore, practical reason itself). Hence the will directs with absolute necessity and is itself subject to no necessitation. Only choice can therefore be called free.

But freedom of choice cannot be defined – as some have tried to define it – as the ability to make a choice for or against the law (libertas indifferentiae), even though choice as a phenomenon provides frequent examples of this in experience. For we know freedom (as it first becomes manifest to us through the moral law) only as a negative property in us, namely that of not being necessitated to act through any sensible determining grounds. But we cannot present theoretically freedom as a noumenon, that is, freedom regarded as the ability of the human being merely as an intelligence, and show how it can exercise constraint upon his sensible choice; we cannot therefore present freedom as a positive property. But we can indeed see that, although experience shows that the human being as a sensible being is able to choose in opposition to as

1 das Vermögen der Wahl
2 liberty of indifference
3 Vermögen
4 ein Vermögen zeigt... zu wählen

380
THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

well as in conformity with the law, his freedom as an intelligible being cannot be defined by this, since appearances cannot make any supersensible object (such as free choice) understandable. We can also see that freedom can never be located in a rational subject's being able to choose in opposition to his (lawgiving) reason, even though experience proves often enough that this happens (though we still cannot comprehend how this is possible). – For it is one thing to accept a proposition (on the basis of experience) and another thing to make it the expository principle of the concept of free choice) and the universal feature for distinguishing it (from arbitrio bruto s. servo); for the first does not maintain that the feature belongs necessarily to the concept, but the second requires this. – Only freedom in relation to the internal lawgiving of reason is really an ability; the possibility of deviating from it is an inability. How can the former be defined by the latter? It would be a definition that added to the practical concept the exercise of it, as this is taught by experience, a hybrid definition (definitio hybrida) that puts the concept in a false light.

A (morally practical) law is a proposition that contains a categorical imperative (a command). One who commands (imperans) through a law is the lawgiver (legislator). He is the author (autor) of the obligation in accordance with the law, but not always the author of the law. In the latter case the law would be a positive (contingent) and chosen law. A law that binds us a priori and unconditionally by our own reason can also be expressed as proceeding from the will of a supreme lawgiver, that is, one who has only rights and no duties (hence from the divine will); but this signifies only the idea of a moral being whose will is a law for everyone, without his being thought as the author of the law.

Imputation (imputatio) in the moral sense is the judgment by which

---

6:227

" As Kant notes in the Critique of Pure Reason A 730, B 758, the German language has only one word, Erklärung, to express “exposition,” “explication,” “declaration,” and “definition.” Despite the strictures he places upon “definition,” he adds that “we need not be so stringent in our requirements as altogether to refuse to philosophic expositions [Erklärungen] the honorable title, definition.” At the conclusion of the present paragraph he gives definitio hybrida as equivalent to Bastaderklärung. See also his use of Definition and Erklärung (or definieren and erklären in, e.g., 248–9, 260 and 286–7). Both in the Doctrine of Right and in the Doctrine of Virtue, where Kant is discussing the Erklärung of the concept of virtue, I have used “define” and “definition,” indicating the German words in notes.

* Erklärungsprinzip
* animal or enslaved power of choice
? Vermögen
* erklärt aus
* willkürlich
someone is regarded as the author (causa libera) of an action, which is then called a deed (factum) and stands under laws. If the judgment also carries with it the rightful consequences of this deed, it is an imputation having rightful force (imputatio iudiciaria s. valida); otherwise it is merely an imputation appraising the deed (imputatio diiudicatoria). — The (natural or moral) person that is authorized to impute with rightful force is called a judge or a court (iudex s. forum).

If someone does more in the way of duty than he can be constrained by law to do, what he does is meritorious (meritum); if what he does is just exactly what the law requires, he does what is owed (debitum); finally, if what he does is less than the law requires, it is morally culpable (debitum). The rightful effect of what is culpable is punishment (poena); that of a meritorious deed is reward (praemium) (assuming that the reward, promised in the law, was the motive to it); conduct in keeping with what is owed has no rightful effect at all. — Kindly recompense (remuneratio s. responsio) stands in no rightful relation to a deed.

The good or bad results of an action that is owed, like the results of omitting a meritorious action, cannot be imputed to the subject (modus imputationis tollens).

The good results of a meritorious action, like the bad results of a wrongful action, can be imputed to the subject (modus imputationis ponens).

Subjectively, the degree to which an action can be imputed (imputabilitas) has to be assessed by the magnitude of the obstacles that had to be overcome. — The greater the natural obstacles (of sensibility) and the less the moral obstacle (of duty), so much the more merit is to be accounted for a good deed, as when, for example, at considerable self-sacrifice I rescue a complete stranger from great distress.

On the other hand, the less the natural obstacles and the greater the obstacle from grounds of duty, so much the more is a transgression to be imputed (as culpable). — Hence the state of mind of the subject, whether he committed the deed in a state of agitation or with cool deliberation, makes a difference in imputation, which has results.