

# Moreau's Law in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in Light of Kant's Reciprocity Thesis

Dan Paul Dal Monte

*Temple University*

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## Abstract

In this paper, I explore a tension between the Law in the novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, by H. G. Wells, and Kant's reciprocity thesis. The Law is a series of prohibitions that Moreau has his beasts recite. Moreau devotes his time to transforming animals through a painful surgery into beings that resemble humans, but the humanized beasts are constantly slipping back into animalistic habits, and so Moreau promulgates the Law to maintain decorum. Kant's reciprocity thesis states that free will is the necessary and sufficient condition of moral practical laws. That is, in order for a moral practical law to be applicable, there must be free will, and, if free will is present, then there will be a moral practical law that sets a standard for the free will. However, in Wells's novel, the humanized beasts seem to lack free will. So, how can a law be applicable to them? By delving deeper into the mystery of Moreau's strange island, I will shed light on the otherwise cumbersome concepts of free will, natural impulses, and practical laws, as well as their interrelationships. The upshot will be a deeper understanding of personhood through an exploration of the instinctual nature of animals, moral law, and free will.

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## Introduction

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, a work of science fiction by H.G. Wells, the titular Doctor Moreau is an eccentric scientist, obsessed with a desire to impart human features to animals, through a brilliant but extremely painful process of vivisection. We learn of Moreau's controversial and strange project through the first-person account of the unfortunate Prendick, an English castaway who by chance finds himself on Moreau's secluded island and sees the semi-successful results of the doctor's experiments. Though able to talk and walk upright, the humanized animals still seem to retain their bestial instincts. Therefore, Moreau makes them periodically recite "the Law," a series of prohibitions (Wells, 58). The prohibitions are meant to shape the behavior of the humanized animals so that they behave more like humans. For instance, Moreau has them chant that they are not to go on all fours, or claw at the bark of trees. This feature of the plot

is interesting in light of Kant's reciprocity thesis, which he discusses in both *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. The reciprocity thesis posits a reciprocal relationship between freedom of the will and practical laws, i.e., laws that establish norms for behavior that derive ultimately from the Categorical Imperative, a formal condition on all practical laws that requires that, in order for a practical law to be valid, it must be a law that all could follow (Kant 1996, 5:46).<sup>1</sup> The reciprocal relationship consists in the fact that without freedom of the will, practical laws that prescribe certain behaviors do not apply, and, if freedom of the will is present, then practical laws apply (Allison, 395). In this paper, I will argue there is a tension between the Law which Moreau imparts to his humanized beasts and the reciprocity thesis. I will show that the humanized beasts lack freedom of the will, and therefore that it is puzzling how practical laws can be applicable to them. I will resolve this tension by articulating a philosophical framework by which Moreau's promulgation of the Law is not inconsistent with the fact that the humanized beasts lack free will.

In reconstructing and resolving this tension, I intend to shed light on related philosophical issues. Exploration of Moreau's promulgation of practical laws to humanized animals will shed light on such questions as: How are we to define free will? If both humans and animals have wills, are they different? If so, in what respect? And, how are we to differentiate between practical and natural laws that govern physical objects? Ultimately, an articulation of an underlying philosophical framework that resolves the tension between Moreau's Law and the reciprocity thesis will shed light on personhood and its relationship to practical laws.

## **Kant and Freedom**

In this section, I will establish that the humanized animals in *Moreau* lack freedom of the will. This will sharpen the conundrum characterizing Moreau's Law. If the humanized animals had free will, then, from a Kantian framework, there would be no need to philosophically challenge the promulgation of the Law. But, the fact that the humanized animals lack free will, which I demonstrate in this section, will stimulate a search for a consistent philosophical framework in Wells's novel that will show one can promulgate a law to creatures that lack free will. To begin this exploration, I will first more thoroughly articulate the distinction between *arbitrium liberum* and *arbitrium brutum*, a distinction Kant introduces in *Critique of Pure Reason*. A distinction between types of causality underlies the distinction between *arbitrium liberum* and *arbitrium brutum*.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant identifies two types of causality, one from nature and one from freedom. The feature that distinguishes the types of causality is *spontaneity*, the power of initiating a sequence of events without antecedent causes. Causality according to nature lacks spontaneity insofar as an antecedent cause gives rise to every natural cause. Kant writes, "it is a universal law—even of the possibility of all experience—that everything that happens must have a cause..." (1998, A533/B561). Causality provides a structure that makes our experience coherent. Without antecedent causes, our experience would consist in isolated fragments. Things would emerge unaccountably out of nothing.

On the other hand, the causality of freedom does have spontaneity. Kant arrives at this conclusion by identifying a problem with natural causality. The fact that antecedent causes must precede natural causes means there can be no completion in a series of natural causes. If everything must have a preceding cause, then one ends up with an infinite regress. The prospect of an infinite regress leads reason to conceive of a spontaneous cause that would stop the regress, because it would require no antecedent cause (A533/B561). The spontaneous cause is a *transcendental* idea, because one could never encounter it in experience. Experience must be causally structured, and so there cannot be a spontaneous cause without an antecedent cause in experience.

Kant therefore refers to causality from freedom as transcendental freedom, i.e. it is causality that is spontaneous and so cannot pertain to the realm of natural causality in experience (A533/B561). Transcendental freedom is what separates *arbitrium liberum* and *arbitrium brutum* (A534/B562). Animals have *arbitrium brutum*, whereas humans have *arbitrium liberum*. This means that a human being, though part of the world of natural causality, nevertheless retains the power to spontaneously generate causal sequences. For example, a human being might feel an urge to eat cake. The urge, though, does not *necessitate* the human being to eat the cake. Since the human being has transcendental freedom, he or she can opt not to follow the urge. In Kant's words, "The human power of choice is indeed...not *brutum* but *liberum*, because sensibility does not render its action necessary, but in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses" (A534/B562). Animals, on the other hand, which have *arbitrium brutum*, lack transcendental freedom. This means that natural causality fully determines, not just influences, their behavior. Kant writes, "it is called an animal power of choice (*arbitrium brutum*) if it can be pathologically necessitated" (A534/B562). If animals have a will, then, it has to be a byproduct of antecedent causes. An animal can only will something because instincts necessitate them to will it. A human will, on the other hand, is able to determine itself independently of any antecedent cause.

In sum, the difference between *arbitrium liberum* and *arbitrium brutum* is transcendental freedom, the power to spontaneously generate causal sequences. Transcendental freedom is necessarily outside of the natural causal order because the latter cannot sustain a cause that is without an antecedent cause. We now have a necessary condition for free will from a Kantian perspective. Free will must involve the power to determine oneself in a way that antecedent causes do not necessitate.

### **Moreau's Humanized Animals: *Arbitrium Liberum* or *Arbitrium Brutum*?**

I will now show how the humanized animals in *Moreau* lack free will, understood as spontaneous causation. The eventual goal is to establish a philosophical tension between the humanized animals lack of free will and the reciprocity thesis. The reciprocity thesis holds that it does not make sense to apply practical laws to beings that lack the power to determine themselves. If the humanized beasts in *Moreau* have only a will that is entirely the byproduct of antecedent instincts, how can one hold them to practical laws that require them to determine themselves in certain ways?

A close reading of the story of Moreau's island reveals that the humanized animals lack *arbitrium liberum*. In spite of Moreau's surgical ingenuity and the many recitations of the law, there is much animality in the behavior of the humanized animals. In their initial encounters with Prendick, they peer at him with furtive glances (Wells, 33). This behavior is reminiscent of a wary animal, which at a hint of movement will become tense and, if frightened, dart into hiding. Moreau's creatures talk, but their ideas are simplistic. At one point, Prendick asks one of the creatures for its name, and the creature responds, "No!" and runs into the undergrowth (43). Later in the book, Prendick encounters an Ape Man who always jabbars about what it calls "big thinks" (122). Whenever Prendick deviates in his communication from everyday interests, the ape man repeats the idea and shares it with his companions. The difficult concepts that Prendick imparts, however, mean nothing to the Ape Man. "He had an idea, I believe, that to gabble about names that meant nothing was the proper use of speech" (122). Thus, the Ape Man is intellectually advanced enough to take an interest in the concepts Prendick uses, but manages only to parrot the sound of the words. The Ape Man gains no understanding.

In another episode, Prendick observes a creature drinking from a stream on all fours (Wells, 40). This behavior indicates the constant battle waged by Moreau against the animal instincts of his creations. Moreau tries to impose a law on his creatures to eradicate behavior typical of animals, such as drinking from a stream on all fours. The creatures repeat, "Not to go on all-Fours; that is the Law" (58). Prendick hears the animals as they recite the Law, a series of statements having to do with Moreau's ability to punish violators. The animals chant, "*His* is the House of Pain. *His* is the Hand that makes. *His* is the hand that wounds" (59). It seems that Moreau has to maintain a fear in the minds of his creatures of his own power in order to control their animalistic tendencies, e.g. to claw at bark, to suck up drink, to chase other men. Moreau recognizes the limits of his work: "The stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again..." (116). In a dramatic scene, a beast man attacks Montgomery, Moreau's assistant on the island. "Montgomery lay on his back with the hairy grey Beast Man sprawling across his body. The brute was dead, but still gripping Montgomery's throat with its curving claws" (110). After the death of Moreau—he dies while pursuing a converted puma—Prendick has to invent a myth to keep the beast creatures in subjugation. Upon hearing that Moreau has died, the Ape Man asks, "Is there a Law now?" (Wells, 108). Prendick, made nervous by the implications of this question, responds by claiming that Moreau, though dead, is still invisibly watching. "He has changed his shape—he has changed his body...For a time you will not see him" (108). But, eventually the beast people see through Prendick's ruse.

After Moreau's death, the loss of the artificial human-like habits Moreau instilled is precipitous. Prendick writes, "It would be impossible to detail every step of the lapsing of these monsters; to tell how, day by day, the human semblance left them; how they gave up bandaging and wrappings, abandoned at last every stitch of clothing; how their hair began to spread over the exposed limbs..." (Wells, 123). In one horrific scene, Prendick sees a Hyena-Swine gnawing at the dead body of St. Bernard creature, who has been loyal to him. "My St. Bernard creature lay on the ground dead, and near his body crouched the Hyena-

Swine, gripping the quivering flesh with misshapen claws, gnawing at it and snarling with delight" (125). In sum, the humanized animals in *Moreau* only follow Moreau's Law when he is present to enforce it. Animal instincts take over when Moreau dies. The human-like traits are only a superficial veneer.

But perhaps the mere ability to adopt human-like traits, if only temporarily, is evidence of the presence of *arbitrium liberum*. To adopt human-like traits might presuppose the ability to determine oneself independently of animal instincts. It is, however, my position that the humanized animals lack *arbitrium liberum*. There are indicators of *arbitrium liberum* that the humanized animals lack.

### **Indicators of *Arbitrium Liberum***

If one could identify some indicators of *arbitrium liberum*, then show that the humanized animals lack these indicators, I could establish that the humanized animals lack *arbitrium liberum*. But it is hard to say what would count as evidence of *arbitrium liberum*. Transcendental freedom is by definition impossible to identify in experience, since an uncaused cause cannot be found in experience (Kant 1998, A533/B561). We can only, then, spot indications of the presence of transcendental freedom, not transcendental freedom itself. How, then, might transcendental freedom give an indication of itself?

Recall that transcendental freedom gives one the ability to shape one's behavior independently of natural influences. So, a soldier who sees a grenade on the ground and covers it with his body to shield his comrades from the explosion while suffering death is possibly showing evidence of transcendental freedom. It is possible that natural influences drive such behavior. Perhaps the anticipation of the embarrassment the soldier would suffer if he did not cover the grenade drives him to act. But, it could have been the case that the soldier, with respect to natural impulses, was completely averse to covering the grenade with his body. Nevertheless, he throws his body upon the grenade because he reasons that it is his duty to do so. The soldier therefore does something that is counter to all his natural impulses. It seems the only way to account for this is by positing transcendental freedom. Transcendental freedom allows him to make a choice contrary to all his natural impulses. Natural impulses only influence, not necessitate, his will, and so he is able to choose independently of natural impulses. So, one possible indicator of transcendental freedom is behavior that is contrary to natural impulses.

I will now present another indicator of the presence of transcendental freedom. To exercise transcendental freedom requires sophisticated rational capacities. It requires the ability to evaluate one's natural impulses. The exercise of transcendental freedom is inconsistent with unthinking submission to one's natural impulses. One has to have the ability to establish a reflective distance from natural impulses. Transcendental freedom goes hand in hand with sophisticated rational capacities like the ability to make normative distinctions between one's impulses, anticipate consequences, and conduct pro and con analyses. Christine Korsgaard, an important commentator on Kant, writes, "But we human animals turn our attention on to our perceptions and desires themselves, on to our own

mental activities, and we are conscious *of* them. That is why we can think *about* them” (Korsgaard, 93). Transcendental freedom presupposes some level of ability for self-reflection. If one cannot establish a reflective distance between oneself and one's impulses, then one cannot help but unthinkingly submit to them.

Given these two indications of transcendental freedom, which I think, though arguable, are at least reasonable, I will now return to the story of Moreau's beast men. First, there is no indication of the beast men having the ability to behave in ways contrary to their natural impulses. One might object to this claim by pointing to the humanization Moreau has instilled in the beast men. After all, if they can walk upright, and drink with their hands instead of sucking from a stream, is this not evidence of the conquest of natural impulses? It is important to recognize, however, that any obedience to Moreau's Law is due to the fear of pain Moreau is capable of inflicting. I have already described the chanting about Moreau's House of Pain. Prendick notes, “A horrible fancy came into my head that Moreau, after animalizing these men, had infected their dwarf brains with a kind of deification of himself” (Wells, 59).<sup>2</sup> If the beast men, therefore, follow the Law, it is only in obedience to a natural impulse that Moreau has implanted, i.e. the fear of the pain associated with punishment. Change in behavior is not necessarily evidence of transcendental freedom, i.e. that one has overcome one's natural tendencies. Instead, the change could come from a change in one's environment. Moreau's beast men, by adapting to the Law, are still acting in accordance with their natural aversion to pain. This becomes more evident during the lapse the beast men undergo once Moreau is gone. Without the threat of punishment, the beast men revert to doing what is most natural to them. If the beast men had transcendental freedom, they might hang on to the habits Moreau had imparted even after he was gone. Some of them might continue to behave in human-like ways because it is right, regardless of their instincts. But, the beast men do not do this, and instead create a nightmare scene in which Prendick has to worry about falling asleep lest one of the beast men decides to kill him.<sup>3</sup>

Nor is there evidence of sophisticated rational faculties in the beast men. I have already demonstrated how simplistic their speech is and how even the more advanced Ape Man mimics Prendick's “big thinks” without comprehension. It is important to note that Moreau has the beast men continuously recite the Law in the form of a ritualistic chant. It seems continuous repetition is necessary because there is no internalization of the Law. In other words, none of the beast men grasp the goodness of the Law and then impose it on themselves independently, because it is good and not because of the threat of punishment. The beast men instead repeat the chant associated with the Law to maintain a fragile conditioning. The chant is meant to remind them of a threat in the environment—Moreau—that was not there before, and of a series of consequences—punishment by Moreau—that will ensue for behavior that before involved no aversive consequences. Obedience to the Law is therefore a response to newly implanted instincts. It does not arise from a critical reflection on these instincts. The beast men's change in behavior is due to an antecedent cause, i.e. Moreau's threat of punishment. Since the basis for adherence to the

Law has an antecedent cause, the beast men's adherence to the Law cannot be transcendental.

In this section, therefore, I have debunked the idea that the beast men in *Moreau* have free will. There is a tension, then, arising from Moreau's promulgation of the Law and the absence of free will, because of the reciprocity thesis. Kant states, "For this concept means nothing else, and those laws are possible only in relation to the freedom of the will; but on the presupposition of freedom they are necessary, or, conversely, freedom is necessary because those laws are necessary..." In other words, there is a logical reciprocity between practical laws and freedom such that freedom is both the necessary (practical laws apply only if freedom of the will is presupposed) and the sufficient (if freedom is there then practical laws apply) condition for practical laws (Allison, 395). Causality from freedom, or transcendental freedom, is the condition for the applicability of practical laws, because practical laws presuppose the ability to change one's behavior to conform to these laws. It would not make sense to prescribe a practical law to a creature fully determined by antecedent causes, i.e. fully ensconced in natural causality. Such a creature is helplessly subject to natural impulses. To exhort such a creature to change its behavior would be fallacious, since such an exhortation presupposes the creature has the ability to change. A creature without transcendental freedom, though, can only be what its nature dictates. Kant writes, "We cannot ask what ought to happen in nature, any more than we can ask what properties a circle ought to have..." (1998, A547/B575). For Kant, causality in nature consists in merely passive cause-effect relationships between preceding causes and the inevitable deterministic byproduct of these causes. Since nature can only be what it is, it does not make sense to demand that it ought to be different. Ought implies can, and nature cannot be different from what it is. I have shown how the humanized animals lack *arbitrium liberum*, or transcendental freedom, and so are fully ensconced in nature. There is therefore a tension in Moreau's promulgation of the Law, an exhortation to follow a certain standard, to the humanized animals, which are fully products of natural causality. I will now, however, provide a way to resolve the tension between Moreau's Law and the humanized animals lack of transcendental freedom by identifying an ambiguity in the term "law."

### **Ambiguity of the Term "Law"**

Henry Allison provides a discussion of Kant's reciprocity thesis in his article, "Morality and Freedom: Kant's Reciprocity Thesis." It is helpful to go through this discussion to illustrate an ambiguity in the term "Law." By identifying this ambiguity, one can defend the application of the Law to Moreau's beast people without affirming that these creatures have free will.

The first step in the development of the reciprocity thesis is that a will must be law-governed. Allison writes, "As a 'kind of causality' the will must, in some sense, be law-governed or, in the language of the Second Critique, 'determinable' according to some law (a lawless will is an absurdity)" (Allison, 398). Let us suppose that the opposite of *law-governed* is *random*. A will cannot be random because to will something by definition

entails selection. For example, if one wills to go out to eat, one is selecting this option over other possible options—stay home and cook, not eat, etc. There are reasons behind the selection of the option to go out to eat. The willing, therefore, of the trip to the restaurant is principled. To will something in a way that is completely unprincipled is incoherent. If one acts randomly, in a way that is completely open to any possible act, one does not will one's acts. Random action is not willed but simply happens, because random actions by definition lack any principle, or, in other words, a law.

The next step in the development of the reciprocity thesis is that the laws that determine the free will cannot be the laws of nature (Allison, 398). If the laws of nature determine a will, then it cannot be free. We can set aside for the sake of argument a compatibilist objection to this point. In Kant's view, if natural laws that govern planetary orbits and falling objects and other such things also determine the will, then it is *arbitrium brutum*. So, it has to be some other kind of law that determines the free will. Laws of nature structure events in cause-effect relationships. Under the laws of nature, there are antecedent causes for every event, and so transcendental freedom cannot exist under the laws of nature. Transcendental freedom cannot have an antecedent cause.

The laws that govern free will must be self-imposed (Allison, 398). Natural laws, since they are built into nature, are not self-imposed. The law of gravity, for example, is not self-imposed, but exists as part of the natural world. The laws that one self-imposes are practical laws, normative standards for behavior. Transcendental freedom can impose on itself a practical law and so act as a self-determining power, whereas one can only be passively subject to a natural law that acts as a determining antecedent cause.

A quick note of clarification of Kantian terminology is needed. By the phrase, "natural law," I mean a lawful relationship between natural processes. "Natural law" is not to be confused with a practical law that is built into human nature, e.g. a moral law that constitutes an innate conscience. Natural law, in the context of this paper, refers to a descriptive, not a prescriptive, law. Natural laws describe how physical things are related in patterned ways, e.g. laws of gravity, of the relationship between pressure and volume, etc.

A practical law can be self-imposed, since it is prescriptive, rather than descriptive. It states what ought to be the case, not what necessarily is the case, as with natural laws. It does not make sense to say that one can self-impose a law that is necessarily the case regardless. The fact that a person can apply practical laws shows that we are not fully determined by natural laws. If we were fully determined by natural laws, then we would never be able to shape our behavior according to a practical law. It is clear that, for Kant, a person participates in a transcendent realm, existing beyond the natural realm.<sup>4</sup> The human person is influenced but not controlled by natural impulses and also regularly engages with practical laws, which can be self-imposed, unlike natural laws. Since the practical laws can be self-imposed, they have to be transcendent, because everything in nature is the result of a preceding cause and so cannot be self-imposed.



Animals, that lack *arbitrium liberum*, do not share in the bifurcated existence of human beings. The beast men in *Moreau* participate only in the natural plane. If practical laws are transcendent insofar as they are self-imposed and so separate from the causal network of nature, then they cannot apply to beast men. One cannot require a creature to self-impose a practical law if the creature is incapable of self-imposition, and fully subject to antecedent causes. There is, not, however, a philosophical confusion in Moreau's promulgation of the Law to the beast men. Moreau's Law is not a practical law, but a natural law, and therefore applicable to the beast men.

To sum up, the word 'law' can refer to practical laws, which have a special property of transcendence and so are amenable to self-imposition. Also, 'law' can refer to natural laws. Natural laws unite causes and effects in nature in regular, predictable patterns. What Moreau is doing when indoctrinating his beast men is proposing a new natural law. Moreau establishes consequences for behavior that he sees as undesirable. He will bring his beast men to the House of Pain if they suck from a stream or crawl on their hands and knees. The beast men fear Moreau because of his ability to inflict pain. Without Moreau, the beast men can crawl or suck from streams without fear of punishment. When Moreau dies, the beast men still retain some fear because of Prendick's claims of Moreau's continued presence. But, it does not take long for these fears to dissipate. The beast men only assimilate Moreau's injunctions because of the threat of pain. Prendick writes, "I found their simple scale of honor was based mainly on the capacity for inflicting trenchant wounds" (Wells. 121).

When the beast men obey Moreau, they are only responding to the natural impulse to avoid pain. Moreau's presence means that there is a new natural law. Causes and effects are united in a way that they had not been previously. Moreau ensures that there would be punishment for reversion to animalistic behavior. Moreau's Law is not a practical law that the beast men are supposed to impose on themselves. The word Law is a "big think" that has no meaning for them, at least in the sense that it communicates some practical principle of behavior. Rather, the beast men are responding instinctively to a reconfigured environment. It is Moreau's presence that connects certain behaviors with pain, and the beast men, merely out of aversion to the pain, avoid the behaviors. In the same way, one's eyes reflexively turn away when confronted with a bright light. It is not as though one elects to turn one's eyes away from the light. The change in behavior is not due to some principled stand. Instead, one is reacting to one's instinctual aversion to pain. There is an antecedent cause of the aversion of one's eyes that fully determines it, i.e. the shock of the bright light. So, what Moreau is doing when he has his beast men recite the Law is reminding them of a reconfigured environment, in which a new *natural* law would entail new consequences for certain behaviors. The animals become cognizant of the environmental change and adjust out of aversion to pain. Their adjustment to more human behavior has an antecedent cause that fully determines it, i.e. sensitivity to pain. But, once Moreau is gone, the natural law he created is gone too. The human-like behavior loses its antecedent cause, and it quickly dissipates.

If Moreau's law is a natural law, then the lack of free will on the part of the humanized animals does not constitute problem. Natural laws do not presuppose free will, nor does free will necessitate them. Moreau's Law, therefore, does not clash with the reciprocity thesis, since there is only a reciprocal relationship between *practical* laws and free will. There is, therefore, a philosophical framework underlying Wells's novel that can consistently fit with Kant's reciprocity thesis. I developed this framework by drawing a distinction between practical and natural laws, and establishing a special relationship between practical laws and free will.

This reflection, informed by a Kantian perspective, throws some light on the theme of personhood. It seems that the power of self-determination is a strong indicator of personhood. To be more precise, I think it is fair to at least say that self-determination is a sufficient condition for personhood. Of course, defining personhood is a much larger project, and in this paper I can only shed some light on the topic. However, it seems fair to say that a being that has the power to determine itself is different in kind, not merely degree, from impersonal objects and animals. We would never identify a rock, for instance, as a person, because a rock has no power to determine itself. It is only subject to external forces. There may be some room for debate about animals, but many would hesitate to identify them as persons because their behavior consists, on some accounts, in mere blind responses to instinctual urges. Transcendental freedom, or *arbitrium liberum*, is related to personhood, since transcendental freedom imparts the power of self-determination. The reciprocity thesis, i.e. that practical laws presuppose transcendental freedom, therefore entails that practical laws apply to persons. There is therefore a special relationship between practical laws and personhood.

### **The Withdrawal of Prendick**

At the end of the book, Prendick manages to escape Moreau's island and return to civilization. However, his experience on the island has disturbed him, and his inclination is to withdraw from human company. He writes, "I have withdrawn myself from the confusion of cities and multitudes, and spend my days surrounded by wise books..." (Wells 131). I will now discuss Prendick's angst once he has fled the island and returned to civilization. Prendick in the final chapter looks at other human beings with a new suspicion. He writes of them, "I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale" (Wells, 130). Prendick has become suspicious of men because he fears that they will break out into animality just like the beast men did on Moreau's island.

Prendick's reaction is relevant to this paper because it reframes the central problem of the paper. The initial conundrum had to do with how a law could be legitimately promulgated to humanized animals that bear only a superficial resemblance to human beings and lack free will. Now, Prendick's withdrawal from human beings introduces the same conundrum, but from a different angle. The conundrum has now become, how can a practical law be relevant to *real* human beings who nevertheless, many times, behave like animals and so seem to lack free will? Prendick fears that, like the humanized animals on

the island, real human beings are always on the brink of savagery. It seems as though Prendick thinks that only a fragile layer of psychological conditioning is keeping civilization intact, just as a fragile conditioning kept the humanized animals from insurrection. The question implicit in Prendick's withdrawal is, therefore, how can a practical law be relevant to real human beings who nevertheless display animalistic proclivities, and so seem to lack free will? Probing Prendick's suspicions of humanity can further concretize the Kantian framework to which I have been appealing.

It is interesting that Wells chose Prendick as his narrator, instead of taking a third-person, omniscient perspective. With Prendick as the narrator, there is a chance for fallible interpretations. It may be the case that Prendick's suspicion of humanity at the end of the novel rests on a philosophical confusion. One can surely empathize with Prendick's fears given his ordeal on the island. This philosophical confusion, moreover, draws us into greater philosophical clarity. I've shown how there is a distinction between the beast men and real persons. Real persons have many of the same instinctual reactions of animals. Kant mentions "inclinations," his term for favorable or unfavorable reactions we might have to things in our environment (Kant 1996, 4:397). They too are aversive to pain, at times aggressive, at others covetous and lustful. Society has to maintain structures that inflict pain on people when they give in to their natural impulses. There is thus a resemblance between real persons and humanized animals insofar as the introduction of disincentives into the environment can shape behavior. But, at least according to the Kantian model, persons are also able to impose practical laws on themselves. Persons can act from duty, regardless of whatever inclinations they might have (4:397). They can do this through rational activity, without prompting by natural impulses and even *contrary* to natural impulses. Persons can recognize rationally the goodness of rejecting certain natural impulses and will at times follow this rational recognition in ways that might frustrate their natural impulses. Prendick therefore draws a false equivalency between beast men and persons when he says that he fears that what happened on the island will reoccur in human society. It is not the case that human civilization is immune from a collapse. However, persons have a different relationship to practical laws than the humanized beasts. This relationship consists in the ability to self-impose practical laws in a way that transcends the flux of natural impulses.

Moreover, this ability is not a mere product of training that can be lost through neglect. Instead, the ability of persons to self-impose practical laws arises from a fundamental metaphysical difference between persons and animals, i.e. transcendental freedom, the ability to cause in a way that is never fully determined by prior causes. Seeing as humans have transcendental freedom, they are accountable to practical laws, and therefore Prendick, as mentioned above, draws a false equivalency between beast men and persons. Human beings, as persons, are accountable to practical laws, because of the reciprocity thesis, in a way that beast men are not. And so, Prendick's false equivalency draws us into a philosophical inquiry that helps delineate the Kantian framework with still greater precision.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored a tension between Moreau's imparting of the Law to his beast men and Kant's reciprocity thesis. How can the beast men adhere to practical laws if they lack *arbitrium liberum*? I have shown how the search for a consistent philosophical framework underlying this imagined scenario, including Prendick's puzzling withdrawal, can illuminate our understanding of cumbersome concepts like free will, practical and natural laws, and animal and human will. I ended by showing how Prendick's withdrawal at the end of the novel invites further philosophical exploration. Through the application of a Kantian framework to Wells' admirably consistent story, I have contributed to a deeper understanding of personhood. Specifically, I have suggested that practical laws have a unique applicability to persons.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a very good commentary on the reciprocity thesis, see Allison, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> At this point in the story, Prendick is under the false impression that Moreau's creatures are animalized men, and not humanized animals.

<sup>3</sup> One possible exception here might be the Dog Man. He remains loyal to Prendick even as the other beast men are in open insurrection after the death of Moreau. But Wells makes it clear that the Dog Man is merely obeying its instincts, i.e. the *natural* loyalty of a dog. "The Master's will is sweet,' said the Dog Man, with the ready tact of his canine blood" (Wells, 119).

<sup>4</sup> In other words, we have membership in an intelligible world (Ameriks, 64).

