

# Kant and the Categories of Freedom

*British Journal for the History of Philosophy*

17:4 (2009), pp. 799–820

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## I Introduction

In the second chapter of the *Analytic of Pure Practical Reason* Kant introduces the ‘table of categories of freedom in regard of the concepts of good and evil’. This table has baffled many interpreters and has been described as one of the most obscure parts of Kant’s critical system. Kant does not seem to give any detailed explanation of what the categories of freedom are supposed to do and how they are to be derived. Moreover, he does not appeal to or refer to these categories in the rest of his works<sup>1</sup> despite the fact that the table of the categories of freedom is supposed to allow us to survey ‘the whole plan of what has to be done, even every question of practical philosophy that has to be answered, and also the order that is to be followed.’ (5:67) It is not even always clear what the individual categories are since he only describes them by means of incomplete sentences. While leaving things unexplained in this way he states that he is not going to provide anything more ‘for the elucidation of the present table, since it is intelligible enough in itself.’ (5:67)

In this paper I will provide an account of the different categories, explaining how they fit together and what role they are supposed to play. I will try to make the table as intelligible as possible by explaining the categories in terms of well-known Kantian terminology. This analysis will place particular emphasis on the structural features that the table of the categories of freedom shares with the table of judgements and the table of categories laid out by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The key to an understanding of the categories lies in the realisation that the categories falling under each heading must form a synthetic unity whereby the

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<sup>1</sup> Precursors of the categories of freedom can be found in the form of the categories of morality and the categories of pure Willkür which Kant mentions in marginalia in his copy of Baumgarten’s *Initia philosophiae practicae primae* (cf. R6854, R6888 and R6948, all of which were probably written between 1776 and 1778). The closest to the categories of freedom that can be found after the publication of the *Critique of Practical Reason* are the categories of right and of morality to which Kant refers at various places in the *Vorarbeiten* to the *Metaphysics of Morals* (e.g. 23:218, 23:274 & 23:382), and which are also mentioned in the draft of a letter to Heinrich Jung-Stilling, written sometime after 1. March 1789 (cf. 11:10 & 23:494).

third one derives from the combination of the other two (cf. B110). Moreover, in the case of the categories of freedom, the first two categories falling under each heading must be morally undetermined and sensibly conditioned, while the third category is sensibly unconditioned and is determined only by the moral law (cf. 5:66).

## 2 The categories of freedom

Table of categories of freedom in regard  
of the concepts of good and evil

<p><b>1.</b> <b>Of Quantity</b> Subjective, according to maxims (volitional opinions of the individual) Objective, according to principles (precepts) <i>A priori</i> objective as well as subjective principles of freedom (laws)</p>	
<p><b>2.</b> <b>Of Quality</b> Practical rules of commission (<i>praeceptivae</i>) Practical rules of omission (<i>prohibitivae</i>) Practical rules of exceptions (<i>exceptivae</i>)</p>	<p><b>3.</b> <b>Of Relation</b> To personality To the condition of the person Reciprocally of one person to the condition of another</p>
<p><b>4.</b> <b>Modality</b> The permissible and impermissible Duty and what is contrary to duty Perfect and imperfect duty</p>	

The title of the table states that it is a table of the categories of freedom in regard of the concepts of good and evil. In order to understand what this means, we need to know what categories are in general and what categories of freedom are in particular. Moreover, we need to find out what it means to qualify them in regard of the concepts of good and evil.

To begin with, categories are fundamental pure concepts. According to Kant, all concepts bring different representations under one common representation. He says that concepts rest on functions. ‘I understand by function the unity of the act of ordering different representations under a common representation.’ (A68/B93) They are higher-order representations that determine which representations fall under them. The various representations are synthesised by being combined and ordered. This synthesis is rule-governed and the concepts provide the rules for synthesis. Thus, categories are fundamental concepts that have a function, namely to unify and order the manifold.

Categories of freedom or categories of practical reason are fundamental practical concepts that can be used in practical contexts and are concerned with rules for actions. They are to be distinguished from the categories of nature which are fundamental theoretical concepts to be applied in theoretical contexts and which regard experiences. The former make possible practical rules and therewith actions by ordering the manifold of desires. The latter are concerned with the synthesis of the manifold of intuition resulting in experiences. That is, in the case of experience the material is the manifold of intuition provided by noumenal affection and it is synthesised to produce experience. In the case of action it is the manifold of desires deriving from our sensible nature that is synthesised to give us practical rules upon which we can act.

More precisely, the categories of freedom are pure concepts of practical reason. Practical reason is concerned with agency resulting from the causality of freedom. All causation takes place in accordance with rules and causation through freedom takes place in accordance with practical rules. Actions are rule-governed and these rules of actions are practical rules or maxims.<sup>2</sup> Practical rules can be considered as orderings of the manifold of desires (cf. 5:65). That is, they are ways to unify, subordinate and co-ordinate desires. The manifold of desires is provided by our sensible side. This manifold is then taken up and synthesised by our practical reason, resulting in practical rules. This ordering and synthesising of the manifold takes place via rules. These rules of synthesis are the categories of freedom. The categories are needed to give a complete characterisation or specification of a practical rule since they concern the different fundamental features of practical rules, namely their quantity, quality, relation and modality. A practical rule must be determined with respect to each of these headings in the table of categories.

Accordingly, the table of the categories of freedom is the table of the pure and fundamental practical concepts that are concerned with the use of freedom, i.e. with practical rules or maxims of actions. Freedom is a kind of causality that is based on rules and which leads to actions. These actions and the practical rules on which they are based can be considered from two points of view. On the one hand, one can give a causal descriptive account of them which covers their phenomenal characteristics. This description and explanation proceeds by appealing to the causal laws that connect phenomena. On the other hand, actions can be subjected to moral evaluation when they are considered as the products of an agent's freedom (spontaneity). This latter assessment is performed in terms of the concepts of good and evil. It is from this viewpoint that the practical rules underlying the causality of freedom are considered.

A table of categories systematically represents and orders all the categories ap-

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<sup>2</sup>Practical rules have to be understood in a broad sense as first-personal rules in general and are not to be solely identified with the specific rules deriving from pragmatic imperatives (cf. Beck: 1960, p. 138).

plicable to a particular domain. Tables of categories possess a distinctive structure insofar as they consist of four headings, with three categories falling under each. According to Kant, we have this structure because the a priori division of a process of synthesis is tetrachotomous while that of a synthetic concept is trichotomous (cf. R3030). The headings correspond to sub-functions of the process of synthesis of the manifold. The categories represent ways in which the manifold can be synthesised, whereby each heading represents one feature with respect to which synthesis can take place. That is, the synthesis corresponding to each feature can be understood as a sub-function and is represented by a heading in the table of categories. The sub-functions are related in such a way that we have a progression, whereby each sub-function presupposes the previous ones, starting with quantity, which is the most basic one, followed by quality, relation and modality.

We can divide the categories falling under the titles into two classes, namely the mathematical categories and the dynamical categories (cf. B110). The former are the categories of quantity and quality and are concerned with the practical rule or experience considered in itself independently of any relation in which it stands. The latter are the categories of relation and modality and they focus on the connections to other objects, practical rules or experiences.

The categories falling under each title form a three-fold synthetic unity, whereby the first two produce the third when jointly combined, without the third category having a derivative status since it is based on a distinct function of synthesis. '[T]he third category always arises from the combination of the second with the first in its class.' (B110, also cf. letter to J. Schultz 17/02/1784, 10:366-367) These three categories constitute an exhaustive account of the fundamental principles of synthesis falling within each sub-function. There are precisely three of them because a synthetic unity requires '1) a condition, 2) a conditioned, 3) the concept which arises out of the combination of the conditioned with its condition.' (5:197) Any interpretation of the categories of freedom must respect this feature by giving an account of the categories that allows for the third category to result from the combination of the first and second category in a non-derivative way.

A peculiar feature of the table of the categories of freedom is that 'these categories concern only practical reason in general and so proceed in their order from those which are morally still undetermined and sensibly conditioned to those which, being sensibly unconditioned, are determined only by the moral law.' (5:66) Though the categories are concerned with practical rules and dispositions of the will, they also apply to non-moral actions since those actions also result from maxims. While maxims are not the objects of those actions, it nonetheless follows that these actions can be categorised by the categories as they contain maxims which are determined by the categories. This ascendance from morally undetermined to morally conditioned categories is one of the structural features that the table of the categories of freedom possesses and hence constitutes a necessary condition for any interpretation of the categories of freedom.

Sensibly conditioned features of practical rules are features that obtain in virtue of some sensible condition. If a practical rule is determined with respect to a sensibly conditioned category, then this rule possesses the feature corresponding to that category in virtue of some sensible condition. For example, rules of commission are sensibly conditioned since if a rule tells me to do x, then it does so in virtue of a sensible condition, namely the condition that I desire x. Similarly, subjective maxims are sensibly conditioned since if a rule holds for me, then it does so in virtue of a sensible condition, namely that it is based on an inclination that I have. Again, permissible and impermissible rules are dependent on sensible conditions, since if a rule necessitates problematically, then it does so in virtue of a sensible condition, namely that it leads to the satisfaction of a possible end.

Features that are determined by the moral law, on the contrary, are features that a practical rule possesses in virtue of the moral law. For instance, laws hold for everyone because of the universality of the moral law. Moral practical rules are rules of exception due to the overridingness of morality which requires us to make an exception if categorical and hypothetical imperatives clash. Similarly, moral practical rules are reciprocally implementable due to the universalisability of moral maxims that is required by the moral law. Finally, perfect and imperfect duties necessitate apodictically as a result of the categoricity of the moral law.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, any interpretation or reconstruction must meet the following two general criteria, namely it must give an account of the categories such that (i) the third category under each heading can be derived from the combination of the previous two, and (ii) the first two categories must be sensibly conditioned and morally undetermined, while the third one is sensibly unconditioned and morally determined. In addition, there are further criteria that apply to particular headings which can be identified by examining the tables of categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena* (cf. sections 3.3 & 3.4 below).

## 2.1 5:66 and 5:67

Kant's claim at 5:66 has been understood as indicating a progression from sensibly conditioned to morally determined categories within each heading of the table of categories.<sup>4</sup> An alternative interpretation of 5:66 is that the progression takes place not within each heading, but is rather a progression amongst the headings. That is, some have argued that the categories falling under headings one, two and three are sensibly conditioned and morally undetermined and that only the categories of modality are morally determined.<sup>5</sup> This seems to be supported by what Kant

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<sup>3</sup>All the examples of sensibly conditioned features and morally determined features will be explained in detail later on when the individual categories are examined.

<sup>4</sup>For ease of reference, I will refer to this interpretation as the 'proposed interpretation' and to the other interpretation as the 'alternative interpretation'.

<sup>5</sup>This reading is accepted by, among others, Bobzien and C. G. Schütz (cf. Bobzien: 1988, pp. 208-209 and section 3.4 below).

says at 5:67, namely that ‘in this table freedom is regarded as a kind of causality ... with regard to the actions possible through it as appearances in the sensible world, and that consequently it is referred to the categories of their natural possibility ... until the categories of modality introduce, but only *problematically*, the transition from practical principles in general to those of morality, which can only afterwards be presented *dogmatically* through the moral law.’

Generally, commentators reject the alternative interpretation because already the third category under the first heading seems to be morally determined. This category is that of a priori objective as well as subjective principles of freedom (laws), which clearly seems to be a morally determined category, thereby undermining the alternative interpretation. Attempts have been made to explain away this feature, but it will be shown in section 3.1 that these attempts fail.

Moreover, there are a number of other reasons why the alternative interpretation should not be accepted. One such reason is that there must be a qualitative difference between the first two categories and the third category falling under each heading. The three categories form a synthetic unity whereby the third is derived from the combination of the first two in such a way that it does not become a derivative category. The third category must still be fundamental and this is achieved by means of a qualitative difference that distinguishes it from the others. The best candidate for this qualitative difference in the case of the categories of freedom is that the first two are non-moral, while the third is moral.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the alternative interpretation would commit us to an interpretation of the categories of modality that cannot satisfy the first interpretative criterion and that conflicts with what Kant says in the Preface (cf. section 3.4 below).

While the alternative interpretation already stumbles when it comes to the first heading, the interpretation that is defended in this paper is not without its problems. It is usually seen to be unsuccessful due to the failure to give moral interpretations of the third categories under the headings of quality and relation.<sup>7</sup> This situation will be remedied in sections 3.2 and 3.3 below, where it will be shown that the third categories of these two headings qualify as good candidates for being morally determined, while the first and second categories are always sensibly conditioned.

A further objection to the proposed interpretation is that it clashes with 5:67. There Kant says that the categories of modality introduce the transition from practical principles in general to practical principles of morality. According to the proposed interpretation this means that practical principles that are synthesised in accordance with categories one and two of modality are practical principles in general, while those synthesised in accordance with the third category are practical

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<sup>6</sup>It is also noteworthy that Kant attributes a special significance to the third categories of nature since they play a crucial role in making possible the unity of experience.

<sup>7</sup>As a result of this situation some have argued that 5:66 does not commit us to any general criterion that is supposed to apply to all headings (cf. Graband: 2005, p. 56 footnote 65).

principles of morality. Bobzien objects to this reading, noting that Kant claims that the categories of modality introduce the transition, rather than claiming that the transition is introduced in the categories of modality (cf. Bobzien: 1988, p. 210). However, since we do not have practical principles that are not determined with respect to modality, it follows that the only way that the categories of modality can introduce the transition is insofar as that transition takes place within these categories.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, we can reconcile the claims made at 5:66 and 5:67 by noting that there is a shift from talking about morally determined categories in the former passage to practical principles of morality in the latter passage. While the third categories are determined by the moral law, we require the categories of modality in order to get practical principles. In particular, we require the third category of modality in order to get practical principles of morality. A morally determined category does not as yet give us a practical principle. A practical principle is one that is determined with respect to each of the headings of the table. A practical principle of morality is one that is determined with respect to each of the morally determined categories.

The third categories regard different aspects of moral principles and these aspects are determined by the moral law. This makes sense in that a moral principle must be determined with respect to each of the headings. The third categories of all headings are only involved in moral principles and specify the distinctive characteristics that moral principles possess, namely that they are characterised by (i) universality, (ii) overridingness, (iii) universalisability, and (iv) categoricity. These characteristics are determined by the moral law. None of these features is possessed by non-moral principles, and no moral principles lack any of these features.

If only the categories of modality should be morally determined, as suggested by the alternative interpretation, then this would imply that the quantity, quality and relation of moral principles would be sensibly conditioned. This, however, cannot be the case since moral principles are sensibly unconditioned. Two options present themselves. Either, one accepts the proposed interpretation of 5:66, which would imply that a moral principle is one that involves only the third categories of each heading. Or, one accepts Benton's claim that all categories, with the exception of the category of perfect duty and imperfect duty, are neither purely moral nor merely prudential. The latter option, however, does not fit with 5:66, as Benton himself notes (cf. Benton: 1980, p. 186). Moreover, as was mentioned above, it is not only the case that all moral principles possess those features characterised by the third categories, but also that all non-moral principles lack those features. Accordingly, we can conclude that the third categories really are sensibly unconditioned and determined by the moral law, as suggested by the proposed interpretation.

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<sup>8</sup>Moreover, both the notion of 'transition' (Übergang) and of 'introducing' (einleiten) seem to have connotations of referring to gradual processes.

## 2.2 Speculative intermezzo: The dogmatic presentation of the practical principles of morality

At 5:67 Kant says that ‘the categories of modality introduce, but only *problematically*, the transition from practical principles in general to those of morality, which can only afterwards be presented *dogmatically* through the moral law.’ This passage should be understood as making a reference to the fact of reason (cf. Beck: 1960, p. 153). More precisely, the fact of reason turns problematic moral principles into claims following analytically from the moral law that can be presented dogmatically. Morality consists of claims which are analytically entailed by the moral law. The moral law is the supreme principle of morality from which all of morality follows analytically. It is a synthetic principle that requires grounding. This grounding is provided in the Deduction in section III of the *Groundwork* and in the form of the fact of reason. Once the foundations have been secured by the *Critique of Practical Reason* we are entitled to use the dogmatic method to present the, initially problematic, claims of morality that follow analytically from the moral law.

The dogmatic presentation of the practical principles of morality through the moral law thus consists in using the dogmatic method for the presentation of these practical principles on the basis of the a priori principle embodied in the moral law. The moral law is the principle or formula by which one can dogmatically arrive at the individual token moral principles.<sup>9</sup> In this way morality is turned into a science and the table of categories constitutes the plan of this science (cf. 5:67 and R4911). This requires the fact of reason, since in order to use the dogmatic method without falling into dogmatism (cf. Bxxxv) the foundation must first be secured. As Kant says in the *Critique of Judgement* ‘[i]n order to utilise it dogmatically ..., we would have to be assured of the objective reality of this concept beforehand.’ (5:396)

Kant combines the two ideas of dogmatic method and practical grounding in his notion of a practico-dogmatic method, which is distinguished from a theoretico-dogmatic method. This notion becomes particularly prominent in his 1791 *Preisschrift über die Vortschritte der Metaphysik*. There he says that ‘Freedom, from which we have to begin, since we only cognise the laws of this supersensible entity, under the name of moral laws, a priori, therewith dogmatically, but only in a practical respect, according to which the final end is alone possible.’ (20:295) That is, we know the laws of freedom, i.e. the moral laws, a priori and therewith dogmatically, but only from a practical point of view. The principles of morality can be presented in a dogmatic manner once the fact of reason is given. The dogmatic employment requires that the objective reality of the concept in question be secured. If this foundation is provided by appealing to practical considerations, as

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Metaphysics of Morals*: ‘A division according to an a priori principle (in contrast to one that is empirical) can now be called dogmatic.’ (6:284)



is done in the case of the fact of reason, then the method is practico-dogmatic.

Thus, when Kant says at 5:67 that the categories of modality problematically introduce a transition to practical principles of morality which can afterwards be presented dogmatically, he means that the third category of modality is a problematic concept. This is because it presupposes transcendental freedom which is a problematic concept (cf. A254/B310) from a theoretical point of view. This is because we cannot theoretically cognise the objective reality of that concept. That is, the third category presupposes a problematic notion of freedom. It thereby ensures that the practical principles of morality, which relate to the third category of modality, are problematic principles until they receive grounding. Having received grounding, they can then be presented dogmatically. We can only ground the objective reality of freedom and of morality in practical considerations, more precisely in the fact of reason. Accordingly, we can only proceed practico-dogmatically, not theoretico-dogmatically.

### 3 The individual categories

#### 3.1 Quantity

Quantity is concerned with the extension or domain of the practical rule. It determines the domain of applicability – for whom this rule holds. There are:

1. subjective rules or maxims that hold for the agent
2. objective rules or precepts that hold for everyone with the same inclinations
3. laws that hold for everyone unconditionally and absolutely

This interpretation is supported by what Kant says at 5:67, namely that one knows from the heading of quantity ‘where one has to set out from in practical considerations: from the maxims that each bases on his inclination, the precepts that hold for a species of rational beings insofar as they agree in certain inclinations, and finally the law that holds for all regardless of their inclinations’. Moreover, it also accords well with his distinction of different principles in §1 of the first chapter of the *Analytic*. There he says that ‘[p]ractical *principles* are propositions that contain a general determination of the will, that has several practical rules under it. They are subjective, or *maxims*, when the condition is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will; but they are objective, or practical *laws*, when the condition is cognized as objective, that is, as holding for the will of every rational being.’ (5:19) This distinction between maxims and laws must simply be supplemented by precepts in order to arrive at the categories of quantity. Precepts are objective practical rules that are conditional on the presence of shared inclinations.

CRITERION (1): Subjective rules hold for one person, namely the subject. Objective rules hold for a plurality of people, namely those that agree in certain inclinations. When we combine subjective and objective rules, we get laws which hold

objectively for every subject. They are objective rules that do not depend on the contingencies of the subjects. They hold for the totality of all rational beings, and, according to Kant, ‘*allness* (totality) is nothing other than plurality considered as unity.’ (B111)

CRITERION (II): Subjective and objective rules only hold conditionally since they are based on inclinations, whereas morality binds unconditionally. Accordingly, the first two categories are sensibly conditioned since they depend on the inclinations of the agents, whereas laws are sensibly unconditioned since they do not depend on inclinations but hold unconditionally.

As mentioned earlier, it is the third category of quantity that has been considered as one of the main obstacles for the alternative interpretation of 5:66 which states that only categories of modality are moral categories. In response to this problem, both Benton and Bobzien have attempted to give a non-moral interpretation of the category of laws. ‘A law is always both universal *and* necessary, so that by putting the moral law under the heading of quantity Kant has abstracted from the law’s necessity and treated it only according to its universality.’ (Benton: 1980, p. 187) Similarly, Bobzien argues that the third category only coincides extensionally with moral laws (cf. Bobzien: 1988, p. 211).

It is indeed correct that the third category of quantity coincides with laws only as regards their extension, namely their universality. This, however, does not prevent this category from being sensibly unconditioned and determined by the moral law. Moral principles must hold for everyone and possess unconditioned universality. It is the moral law that determines this characteristic of moral principles. That is, a moral principle, like every other practical rule, must have a domain and this domain is characterised by the categories of quantity. Now, the moral law determines that moral principles must hold for everyone and accordingly that moral principles are ‘a priori objective as well as subjective principles of freedom’. From this it follows that the third category of quantity is determined by the moral law, as is to be expected given the proposed interpretation of what Kant says at 5:66.

### 3.2 Quality

Quality determines what the rule says – it is required for making a command in the same way that quality is required in judgements for making a claim. It does not specify the nature of the action but determines whether a particular action is to be performed or omitted or whether an exception is to be made. There are:

1. rules that tell us to do x
2. rules that tell us to not do x
3. rules that tell us to do x even though there is a rule to not do x, or not to do x even though there is a rule to do x

CRITERION (I): Exceptions clearly result from the combination of commissions and omissions, since they tell us to commit something even though there is a rule to omit it or to omit something even though there is a rule to commit it.

CRITERION (II): Practical rules of commission and omission are sensibly conditioned. The former depend on the faculty of desire, telling us to seek out that which is agreeable and promotes our well-being. The latter depend on the faculty of aversion and command us to avoid what is disagreeable and leads to ill-being. Good and evil, on the contrary, pertain to practical rules of exceptions. These are moral rules that are sensibly unconditioned. Only moral rules can be rules of exceptions since only the moral law can override other rules. Nothing but a categorical imperative can dismiss hypothetical imperatives. It is only when moral and inclination-based rules conflict that we have a real exception. Morality overrides the claims of inclination and hypothetical imperatives lose their normative force in these particular instances and an exception is to be made (cf. 5:93). In other cases, when different hypothetical imperatives clash, then all there is is a change of ends which results in a new rule being based on the new end. Properly speaking, in this case it is not rules that override each other but ends. That is, there are no sensibly conditioned rules of exceptions. No such exceptions exist because sensibly conditioned rules all have the same status and there is no normative difference between them that could let one rule trump another in such a way as to produce an exception.

It should be noted that there is an important distinction between there being exceptions to a rule and there being a practical rule of exception. While there are empirical exceptions to non-moral rules, these exceptions do not amount to practical rules of exceptions but simply constitute circumstances in which the precepts do not apply. Precepts have conditions built into them and we should not follow the precepts when these conditions are not met, but that does not mean that there is a practical rule of exception.

In order to have practical rules of exceptions that can override other rules, we need rules with different statuses, rules of a different nature. Different hypothetical imperatives have the same normative standing. The categorical imperative is the only thing that can trump them and thereby make possible exceptions to the practical rules embodied by hypothetical imperatives. The categorical imperative itself is a supreme normative principle that cannot be trumped and hence the only practical rules of exceptions that exist are those that tell us to follow morality at the expense of hypothetical imperatives.

It is not only the case that all rules of exceptions are moral rules, but that there are no moral rules of commission and no moral rules of omission. In other words, all moral rules are rules of exceptions. This is because the categorical imperative is a procedure for testing maxims or rules which involves rejecting those that do not possess the right form. A rule is proposed by inclination and assessed for universalisability. Non-universalisable rules are then rejected, which means that

the moral law requires us to make exceptions to such rules.

What look like moral commissions and omissions, such as the injunction not to lie, are in fact abbreviations of practical rules of exceptions. For example, the imperative not to lie amounts to the practical rule of exception that says that one should not lie even though there is a hypothetical imperative telling one to lie if it is in one's interest. That is, a hypothetical imperative suggests a rule, namely a rule to do x or a rule to not do x. This rule is then either accepted as permissible or rejected as impermissible. In the latter case we arrive at a practical rule of exception that is determined by the moral law. Such a rule tells us to do x even though the hypothetical imperative told us to not do x, or it tells us to do x even though the hypothetical imperative told us to do x. Since this is the only way in which the moral law determines concrete practical rules, namely by rejecting hypothetical imperatives that are proposed by inclination, it follows that moral practical rules are always rules of exceptions. Accordingly, we can see that it is the category of practical rules of exceptions that characterises the overridingness of moral principles and that, pace Beck, Benton et al., criterion (ii) does apply to the categories of quality (cf. Beck: 1960, p. 147 and Benton: 1980, p. 185).

Thus, there are general rules corresponding to hypothetical imperatives, but these rules are subordinated to morality. We thereby get practical rules of exceptions that tell us to do what is necessary to achieve one's ends *unless* they conflict with what is morally commanded. In cases of conflict we should make an exception to the general rule and instead follow the commands of morality.

Exceptions can come in two types, namely as exceptions to commissions and as exceptions to omissions. These two types correspond to negative and positive duties. In case that an exception is made to a rule of commission, we end up with a negative duty. The commission is ruled out as being impermissible, resulting in a negative duty not to act on certain hypothetical imperatives that are proposed by inclination. An exception to a rule of omission gives us a positive duty that tells us that a general rule not to do a particular kind of action is non-universalisable and that we thus have a positive duty to commit that kind of action.

From the categories of quality we can derive the priority of negative duties. This is because of the priority of exceptions to commissions. The first category is always the most basic in any synthetic division – it is the condition whereas the second one is the conditioned. Thus, since exceptions to commissions constitute negative duties, whereas exceptions to omissions constitute positive duties, and since the former type of exception is prior to the latter type, it follows that negative duties are prior to positive duties.

### 3.3 Relation

The categories of relation are dynamical categories. They are concerned with the relations in which practical rules stand. Pace Beck we should note that they are

not concerned with the moral evaluation of rules (Beck: 1960, p. 147) – only the categories of modality concern moral assessment and the prescriptive force of rules. The categories of relation are still concerned with the specification of the rules, with determining their content (cf. A74/B99). It is simply the case that one is no longer concerned with the intrinsic, but the relational features of the rules. Once again we can closely model the categories of freedom on the categories of nature by considering agents rather than substances and by focusing on practical rules rather than accidents *per se*. The categories concern:

1. practical rules as inhering in a subject and resulting from the freedom of that subject
2. practical rules that have effects on persons
3. practical rules that imply a reciprocal relation between agent and patient

There are a number of structural features that are peculiar to the categories of relation. One such feature is that the first two categories of relation are always, broadly speaking, sub-ordination relations, whereas the third category is a co-ordination relation. This results from the fact that the first two categories are concerned with what Kant calls ‘heteronomic’ relations, while the third category regards ‘homonomic’ relations (cf. R4762, 17:719). A relation is heteronomic if the *relata* are of different kinds, which implies that a *relatum* of one kind is sub-ordinated to another *relatum* of a different kind. The relation involved in the third category, on the contrary, is homonomic insofar as the *relata* are of the same kind, which implies that they are related by a co-ordination relation.

This condition is clearly met by the table of judgements. In categorical judgements there is a division between two concepts, whereby one is treated as the subject and the other as the predicate such that the predicate is sub-ordinated to the subject. In hypothetical judgements two judgements are sub-ordinated to each other in such a way that one becomes the condition of the other. In disjunctive judgements there is no asymmetrical relation between the different constitutive judgements; rather the different judgements are co-ordinated. The proposed interpretation satisfies this condition insofar as the inherence and dependence relations featuring in categories one and two are sub-ordination relations. Reciprocity, on the contrary, whether at the theoretical or practical level, is a kind of co-ordination, rather than sub-ordination (cf. B112).

Another structural feature is that the first category must be the basis of the others. Kant says in the *Prolegomena* that ‘as in *logic* categorical judgements are the basis of all others, so the category of substance is the basis of all concepts of actual things.’ (4:325 footnote) Accordingly, the category ‘to personality’ must be included in and form the basis of the other two categories. In the case of the categories of nature we have substances interacting in a co-ordinated and reciprocal manner giving us the third category, while the accidents of one substance are affecting those of another in the second category. This can be transposed to

the practical case by considering the substances as agents acting towards others, whether reciprocally or not.

A third structural feature is that the categories of relation must have correlates. All dynamical categories connect different things, whereby in the case of the categories of relation the different *relata* are correlates of each other (cf. B110). Subsistence and inherence are correlates, as well as cause and effect. In the case of the first two categories of freedom Kant only tells us one of the *relata*, without giving us the correlate that is supposed to be connected to it. Only reciprocity is a category of freedom for which the correlate is explicitly given. Practical rules seem to be adequate candidates for being the correlates of the first two categories. In the first case, they amount to accidents that stand in inherence relations, while in the latter case they count as the grounds of empirical effects.

We can thus specify the relational features of a practical rule in terms of (i) the subject in which it inheres, (ii) the effects it has on the condition of a person, and (iii) the effects it has on the conditions of different people if reciprocally implemented.

CRITERION (I): The third category is concerned with a reciprocal relation between agent and patient. This can be understood as the synthesis of the first two categories. The second category is that of an agent-patient structure, whereby the agent is specified by the first category. Now, the third category can be gained insofar as both agent and patient are considered as being classified by the first two categories at the same time. Reciprocity occurs where the patient of category two is himself an agent according to category one and *vice versa*.

CRITERION (II): The first two categories must be sensibly conditioned. This seems problematic when considering the first category, given that Kant identifies personality at 5:87 as being essentially tied up with freedom and independence of determination (cf. Bobzien: 1988, p. 211). However, while the notion of personality itself is non-sensible, the category 'to personality' is sensibly conditioned insofar as that which inheres in personality, i.e. its accident, is sensibly conditioned since it is an ordering of desires. That is, that which is related *to* personality is sensibly conditioned implying that the first category is sensibly conditioned. We are not concerned with personality *per se*, but with a relational category connecting practical rules to personality. While personality is sensibly unconditioned, this does not apply to the practical rules, thereby ensuring that the overall status of this relational category is that of a sensibly conditioned category.

There is a further consideration to which we can appeal in order to reduce the moral character of the notion of 'personality', thereby making it more plausible that this category is sensibly conditioned and morally undetermined. We can parallel Kant's move in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by interpreting the practical category 'to personality' as referring to phenomenal personality in the same way that Kant allows the theoretical category '*substantia et accidens*' to refer to phenomenal

substance (*substantia phaenomena*).<sup>10</sup>

We can see that the second category is sensibly conditioned insofar as it concerns the material effects on the state or condition of persons. Practical rules are classified in terms of the effects they have or are intended to have on persons. This interpretation may appear to cause problems for showing that the category of reciprocity is sensibly unconditioned insofar as this category focuses on the conditions of persons in the same way as the second category does. However, we can see that the third category is sensibly unconditioned because it involves abstracting from the material effects and only assesses the formal question as to whether or not the practical rule or maxim is reciprocally implementable. This category concerns the universalisability of moral practical rules that is embodied by the procedure for testing maxims that the categorical imperative prescribes.

More precisely, the third category is morally determined insofar as practical rules that are synthesised according to the relation of reciprocity are rules that bring about, if consistently implemented, the kingdom of ends. The kingdom of ends is equivalent to the notion of a moral world which Kant discusses in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. A moral world is a thoroughgoing systematic unity according to moral laws (cf. A808/B836). This understanding of the moral world clearly brings out the relation to the moral category of reciprocity. This is because a world or a community is a whole, a systematic unity that arises out of the reciprocal interactions amongst individuals (cf. R4524 & 14:173). The category of reciprocity is essentially connected to the notion of universalisability and the co-ordination of different agents insofar as the practical rule must be amenable to symmetrical implementation. In the theoretical sphere, Kant talks of the result of reciprocity being some form of causal ‘community’ (cf. R3104 & R3106). In the practical realm this then amounts to a moral community. Thus, the category of reciprocity is determined by the moral law and characterises the universalisability of moral principles. Once again we can see that, pace Beck, Benton et al., criterion (ii) does apply to the categories of relation (cf. Beck: 1960, p. 149 and Benton: 1980, p. 185).

### 3.4 Modality

Modality concerns the relation between the rule in question and other rules. Like the dynamical categories of relation it is concerned with the relational features of practical rules. However, unlike in the case of the categories of relation, we are here not concerned with broadly speaking metaphysical relations, but rather with logical relations. As a result, modality does not add anything to the rule itself, but puts it into a network, assessing its interrelations, in particular its compatibility

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<sup>10</sup>Kant himself does not use this notion of phenomenal personality. However, it should be noted that ‘personality’ does not always have moral connotations for him since he frequently uses the notion of transcendental or psychological personality (e.g. 28:296) and in one place even refers to ‘empirical personality’ (21:19).

with other rules. It is concerned with how the rule is to be asserted or assessed – as Kant says with respect to the table of judgement, modality ‘concerns only the value of the copula.’ (A74/B100) There are practical rules that necessitate:

1. problematically (possible – impossible)
2. assertorically (actual – non-actual)
3. apodictically (necessary – contingent)

In a footnote in the Preface Kant provides some explanation of the categories of modality. ‘Thus, in the table of categories of *practical* reason under the heading Modality, the *permitted* and the *forbidden* (the practically objectively possible and impossible), have almost the same sense in the common use of language as the immediately following category, *duty* and *contrary to duty*; here, however, the *first* mean that which harmonizes or conflicts with a merely *possible* practical precept ..., the *second*, that which stands in such a relation to a law *actually* present in reason as such. ... We have here to do only with the distinction of *imperatives* under *problematic*, *assertoric*, and *apodictic* determining grounds.’ (5:111 footnote) This clearly supports the suggested understanding in terms of possible, actual and necessary practical rules and their opposites, namely impossible, non-actual and contingent rules. This interpretation closely follows the categories of modality in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and gives us the different kinds of imperatives, namely hypothetical imperatives which are either problematic or assertoric and categorical imperatives which are apodictic.

A controversial implication of this interpretation is that we have to understand *Pflicht* and *Pflichtwidrig* in non-moral terms in this context.<sup>11</sup> According to Beck it is a ‘fatal objection’ (Beck: 1960, p. 150) to this view that it implies this non-moral understanding of ‘duty’. However, we can make sense of this notion of ‘duty’ since pragmatic imperatives are normative without being moral. Since we are bound by assertoric hypothetical imperatives it would seem to follow that they do qualify as duties in a loose sense. If we do indeed desire the end, then we ought to take the means necessary for the achievement of this end (unless the hypothetical imperative is overridden by a categorical imperative), where this ‘ought’ has to be understood as a non-moral ought.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Mellin accepts a similar interpretation, arguing that the second category of modality should be understood as involving assertoric imperatives and, accordingly, a broader understanding of ‘duty’ that is not specifically moral (cf. Mellin: 1802, p. 534). Benton also argues for a non-moral interpretation of the second category though he claims that all categories, except that of perfect and imperfect duty, are neither purely moral nor merely prudential (cf. Benton: 1980, pp. 186 & 189).

<sup>12</sup>Paton also appears to make room for a broad notion of ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’ since he states that all three kinds of imperative involve a kind of obligation – ‘corresponding to the three kinds of good action there will be three kinds of action in some sense obligatory’. (Paton: 1947, p. 114) This view can also be found in Kant’s claim that ‘[a]ll imperatives are expressed by an *ought* and indicate by this the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that by its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation).’ (4:413)



In general, all these practical rules involve some kind of normativity. They all necessitate the will. They are rules of practical necessitation (*necessitatio practica*), as opposed to pathological necessitation. They determine the will, whether problematically, assertorically or apodictically. All such practical necessitation is expressed by imperatives. It is not based on stimulus, but involves necessitation that is objective even though in the case of the first two imperatives it is non-moral practical necessitation (cf. 28:257-258).

Kant provides a clear distinction between problematical, assertorical and apodictical rules in the *Metaphysics Lectures* (Pöhlitz, 28:257), by assessing the practical necessitation that each of them involves. There he distinguishes them as follows:

- 1) *Necessitatio problematica*, where the understanding cognises the necessity of the use of the means under the condition of the given end, e.g. in geometry.<sup>13</sup>
- 2) *Necessitatio pragmatica*, where the understanding cognises the necessity of the use of the means with respect to the universal end of every thinking being.<sup>14</sup>
- 3) *Necessitatio moralis*. This is the necessity of the use of power of free choice, not as means to an end, but rather because it is in itself necessary.

Schütz criticises Kant's claim in the Preface: 'That in the Preface to the Critique of Pure Practical Reason what is permissible for an orator qua tali etc. is provided as an example of permitted actions appears to me to be a metabasis eis allo genos, namely into the rules of skill, which you yourself have so astutely distinguished from the commands of morality.'<sup>15</sup> (letter by C. G. Schütz 23/06/1788, 10:542-543) He then proposes his own revision of the categories of modality whereby all three of them are moral categories. It seems that Schütz is right in criticising the position whereby the first category is non-moral and the second and third are moral categories. Either, one should provide an interpretation whereby all modal categories are morally determined, in which case one should then accept the alternative interpretation of passages 5:66 and 5:67 that was rejected above. Or, one should have the first two sensibly conditioned and only the third one determined by the moral law. The second interpretation has the problem of committing us to a non-moral reading of 'duty'. However, it is strongly supported by the footnote in the Preface – there Kant is particularly clear that the first and second categories

<sup>13</sup>Kant gives the geometry example both in the footnote in the Preface and at 5:31.

<sup>14</sup>The universal end of every thinking being is, of course, self-love or happiness. As Kant says, there is 'one end that can be presupposed as actual in the case of all rational beings ... and that purpose is *happiness*.' (4:415)

<sup>15</sup>'Daß in der Vorrede zur Kritik der reinen praktischen Vernunft zu den erlaubten Handlungen als ein Beyspiel angeführt wird, was einem Redner qua tali erlaubt sey etc. scheint mir eine metabasis eis allo genos zu seyn, nemlich in die Regeln der Geschicklichkeit, die Sie selbst so scharfsinnig von den Geboten der Sittlichkeit unterschieden haben.'

of modality are not to be understood in a moral sense which is strong evidence for rejecting the former alternative.

The correlates into which each category is divided are exact opposites of each other. In the *Metaphysics Lectures (Vigilantius)* Kant says that ‘the categories of relation and modality carry with them sheer correlates, which are placed next to one another such that when one is posited, the other is posited. ... Just as little are reality and negation compatible next to each other, just as the modalities are cancelled by each other in their correlates.’ (29:1002) Some commentators have thought that this cannot straightforwardly be applied to the categories of freedom. For example, Mellin notes ‘It is noteworthy here that imperfect duty is not properly that which conflicts with a law that necessarily resides in reason (as it is the case with the other categories, namely the permissible and impermissible, duty and contrary to duty), which would be that which is contrary to a perfect duty.’<sup>16</sup> (Mellin: 1802, p. 537)

However, we can see that perfect duty and imperfect duty are correlates that constitute an exhaustive division once we understand that necessary and contingent duties exhaust the sphere of apodictic rules.<sup>17</sup> As Bobzien notes ‘The respective negative correlative concept could have been formed according to the principle [Prinzip] of making an exhaustive binary division within the domain identified by the relevant principle [Grundsatz].’<sup>18</sup> (Bobzien: 1988, p. 218 also cf. Graband: 2005, p. 63) The same happens within the theoretical sphere, where the categories of necessity and contingency are opposites since they characterise what is existent and since everything that exists either exists necessarily or it exists contingently. Categorical rules can be characterised as imposing necessary or contingent requirements. We are bound categorically by both perfect and imperfect duties, though the former bind us categorically to fulfil a necessary requirement, while the latter bind us categorically to fulfil a contingent requirement. A perfect duty is something where it is not possible to not do it, while an imperfect duty is something where it is possible to not do it. As Kant states: ‘Necessary is that of which the opposite is impossible; ... contingent is that of which the opposite is possible.’ (28:557)

The same applies for the other categories. That is, duty and contrary to duty do not exhaust the set of all rules or actions, i.e. it is not the case that every action is either classified as duty or contrary to duty. Rather, the categories of duty

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<sup>16</sup>‘Es ist hier merkwürdig, dass die unvollkommene Pflicht eigentlich nicht das ist, was einem in der Vernunft nothwendig liegenden Gesetz widerstreitet, (wie es bei den andern Kategorien, dem Erlaubten und Unerlaubten, der Pflicht und dem Pflichtwidrigen der Fall ist), welches das Pflichtwidrige einer vollkommenen Pflicht seyn würde.’

<sup>17</sup>It is clear that for Kant necessary duties are to be equated with perfect duties and that contingent duties are equivalent to imperfect duties (cf. 4:429-430).

<sup>18</sup>‘Der jeweilige negative Korrelatbegriff kann nach dem Prinzip gebildet worden sein, innerhalb des je durch den entsprechenden Grundsatz aufgespannten Bereichs eine vollständige Zweiteilung zu erhalten.’

and contrary to duty exhaust the set of all actions that are pragmatically necessary. The division is not between what is pragmatically necessary and what is not pragmatically necessary, but rather constitutes a division within what is pragmatically necessary, distinguishing what is positively pragmatically necessary from what is negatively pragmatically necessary. The former is required and harmonises with the actual end while the latter is negatively required since it conflicts with this end.

CRITERION (I): Beck thinks that the first structural criterion cannot be fulfilled. 'Whereas, before, the third category has been an almost Hegelian synthesis of the first two, the third category here arises from a logical division of the second. Of anything that is actual, we can say that it is either necessarily or contingently actual. Of an actual duty, Kant says – by a very tenuous analogy – that it is a duty of perfect or of imperfect obligation.' (Beck: 1960, p. 151) Again, by accepting a non-moral understanding of 'duty' we can avoid this consequence and provide an interpretation that satisfies the structural requirements. This provides yet more support for the offered reading of the categories of modality and of the proposed interpretation of 5:66. It is a fundamental characteristic of a table of categories that the categories falling under each heading constitute a three-fold synthetic unity. Categories are fundamental concepts and this can only be assured insofar as the third arises out of the other two in a non-derivative way. Accordingly, we cannot have the third category arising from a simple sub-division of the second, which implies that we must accept a non-moral understanding of 'duty'.

The third category arises from the other two since 'necessity is nothing other than the existence that is given by possibility itself.' (B111) Necessity is actuality in all possible worlds. Or expressed negatively, necessity is the impossibility of non-existence (cf. letter by J. Schultz 21/08/1783, 10:349). Accordingly, the third category is not to be seen as a sub-division of the second. Rather the third constitutes an exhaustive division of apodictic rules, while apodictic rules can be seen as a synthesis of problematic and assertoric rules. That is, synthesising problematic and assertoric imperatives gives us apodictic imperatives. Apodictic necessitation occurs if the possibility of the condition implies its actuality. Apodictically necessitating rules can then be exhaustively divided into necessary and contingent duties.

CRITERION (II): Apodictic practical rules are categorical imperatives. They are sensibly unconditioned and hold with necessity. Problematic and assertoric rules are hypothetical imperatives that are conditional on desires, possible and actual desires respectively. The practical necessitation of the first two categories is *necessitatio problematica* and *pragmatica*, respectively, while only that of the third classifies as a *necessitatio moralis*.

## 4 Conclusion

Thus, we can see that the table of categories of freedom in regard of the concepts of good and evil is the table of the pure fundamental practical concepts that govern the synthesis of the manifold of desires, thereby producing practical rules that are assessable from a moral point of view. Any interpretation of the categories must meet two general criteria deriving from the structure of the table, namely that (i) the third category under each heading derives from the combination of the prior two, and that (ii) the first two categories must be morally undetermined and sensibly conditioned, while the third is morally determined and sensibly unconditioned. The interpretation offered in this paper meets both criteria, as well as other structural conditions peculiar to particular headings.

Moreover, this interpretation makes the table intelligible by explaining the categories in terms of well-known Kantian concepts and distinctions, such as that between problematic, assertoric and apodictic imperatives. As Kant says in a footnote in the Preface, we have *only* to do with this distinction. Though the table of categories is not quite intelligible in itself, as Kant claimed, it is relatively straightforward once the terminological fog has been cleared. The categories of modality are easily understood once the connection to the different kinds of imperatives has been made. Similarly, we can appeal to Kant's characterisation of different principles in §I of the Analytic in order to get a good understanding of the categories of quantity. The categories falling under the heading of quality are straightforward and only the categories of relation are problematic but can be modelled on the categories of nature.

This interpretation of the categories of freedom implies that they are the fundamental characteristics of a practical rule that is assessable from a moral point of view. The manifold of desires is synthesised and ordered to produce a practical rule or maxim. This synthesis is subject to the rules embodied by the categories. Each heading represents one feature of practical rules with respect to which desires must be synthesised. The intrinsic characteristics of such a rule can be fully specified in terms of the mathematical categories in the form of: I/we/all - Do X/Don't do X/(Do, though rule that not/don't though rule that do). Its extrinsic characteristics are specified by means of the dynamical categories which determine that this rule inheres in a particular subject, has certain effects on the conditions of particular persons and may be co-ordinatable in such a way as to allow its reciprocal implementation. Moreover, the dynamical categories determine that this rule necessitates either problematically, assertorically or apodictically.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>I would like to thank Jens Timmermann and Allen Wood for helpful discussions and comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to the participants of the conference on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason at the University of St Andrews and to an audience at Stanford University.

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