Chapter 2: Kant’s Reciprocity Thesis

The concept of reciprocity is present in Kant’s earliest writings. The pre-Critical works that focused on physics, geometry, and mathematics carried reciprocal motion as a common theme. Kant’s desire to promote a theory of Living Forces, which hinged on understanding the dynamics of forces and fields, belies his ultimate interest in the interaction of human beings and the possibility of the influence of God and nature on human hearts and minds. His writing bears the clear influence of Leibniz, although Kant rejected Leibniz’s ideas on several critical points. Because the project at hand is to deal with the moral law and the notion of reciprocity therein, I will begin with an analysis of Henry Allison’s description of Kant’s ‘reciprocity thesis’ and work from that point deeper into the Kantian notion of reciprocity in general, which will move us chronologically from the Critical and post-Critical works back to the pre-Critical underpinnings. This will establish not only the key role that the concept of reciprocity plays in Kantian thought, but will also demonstrate my claim that Kant’s philosophical writings were, from the outset, based on a unified theme and aimed at a common end.

2.1 Kant’s Leibnizian Influence

Henry Allison claims that Kant’s reciprocity thesis is significant because it entails that freedom of the will is a necessary and sufficient condition of the moral law.¹ This thesis is presented by Kant in the Groundwork at 4:447 and affirmed in the Critique of Practical Reason “freedom and unconditional practical law

¹ Allison, p. 274
reciprocally imply each other.” The claim is that from the very concept of freedom, the moral law is given \textit{a priori}, and vice versa. Apart from its practical implications for the field of ethical theory (for instance, a sound rejection of utilitarianism through a required acceptance of the categorical imperative), the reciprocal relationships between the concepts of freedom and morality strike at the heart of the project Kant began tackling in his earliest writings—an understanding of the nature of God and man through the use of human reason. Is knowledge only to be found analytically, and experience only to be seen contingently, or is there a use of reason that can be both intelligible and empirical, based both on thought and on what is intuited? We can see Kant’s desire to make sense of these distinctions in his expressed concern regarding Leibniz’s ‘Truths of Reason’ and their import on what is human reason’s breadth and depth.

While Kant agrees with Leibniz’s rejection of Cartesian dualism as “foolish” because it fails to account for the necessity of the proposition that the determination of any body is changed by another motion, he also rejects Leibniz’s notion of ‘preestablished harmony’ as only a comparative or psychological freedom. Without a transcendental component, Kant believes that preestablished harmony yields merely “the freedom of a turnspit.” Leibniz followed in the Augustinian theological tradition of supposing a ‘kingdom of grace’ which Kant adapts to his own moral theory, but Kant must reject the Leibnizian idea that within that kingdom we are but “a piece of clockwork, an \textit{automaton spirituale}, which [God] must therefore have

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\item \textit{Cr. Prac. Reason} 5:29
\item \textit{Cr. Prac. Reason} 5:97
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wound up.”⁴ No divine manipulation can be causing human actions if said actions are to be truly free. What Leibniz offered was a representational freedom whereby man thinks of himself as making a choice although the reality that he would select a particular course of action was already necessitated by God’s initial selection of this world as the one that maximizes perfection and therefore as the world in which that particular choice was made.⁵ By analogy, man’s freedom would be like an optical illusion where an object appears in motion when in reality it remains fixed. Were Leibniz not wedded to analyticity as the necessary and sufficient condition for truth, he might have been able to reconcile the freedom of God with the concept of human freedom, because he would not have required a complete concept of every possible action to be contained in the concept of an infinite will. For Leibniz to forego the requirement of ‘complete concepts’ his system would have required a reduction of, or at least the possibility of, a challenge to God’s omnipotence. That was clearly an untenable situation for Leibniz. The Leibnizian limitation of truth to purely analytic propositions is unsatisfactory for Kant, and he makes a direct demonstration of that insufficiency in his discussion of causality as a category of intuition. In the first *Critique*, Kant states that the concepts of community and magnitude both require an outer intuition in space in order to,

conceive the possibility that if several substances exist, the existence of the one can follow reciprocally from the existence of the other (as an effect), and thus that because there is something in the former, there must on that account

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⁴ *Lectures*, 27:505
⁵ In Leibniz’s letter to the Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels of 12 April 1686, he states that “God, foreseeing and regulating everything from all eternity, chose in the first place the whole successive connection of the universe, and in consequence not just an Adam but a particular Adam whom he foresaw as doing particular things and having particular children.”
also be something in the other that cannot be understood from the existence of the latter alone.  

He goes on to say that Leibniz, “who ascribed a community to the substances of the world only as conceived by the understanding alone, needed a divinity for mediation; for from their existence alone this community rightly seemed to him incomprehensible.” But Kant shares Leibniz’s commitment to the omnipotence of God, though not the operational description Leibniz requires. Kant asserts in several works that “God alone is without limitations,” yet “no concept can be formed of how it is possible for God to create free beings” without giving rise to a contradiction of introducing the temporal condition into the realm of the supersensible. By imposing a complete concept of temporal actions upon the concept of God’s will, we would invoke the necessary tension between necessity and spontaneity, and would be asserting an intellectual intuition of God’s actual existence. This, according to Kant, is impossible. Were we to have an intellectual intuition of free action, then we would know “the spontaneity of the subject as a thing in itself.” Kant’s distinction between a thing as it appears and a thing in itself is key because, while we can have an intuition of appearances in the phenomenal world, he holds that we cannot generally intuit the noumenal underpinnings of those appearances. Not only does this mean that we cannot directly intuit an omnipotent God, it also leads Kant to conclude that we can intuit only the effects of people’s free actions, we cannot intuit their

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6 **Critique of Pure Reason**, B292.  
7 *Cr. Pure Reason*, B293.  
8 *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, 28:1113.  
10 *Cr. Prac. Reason* 5:99
motivation for choosing those actions. Instead, the ‘dynamical’ concept of freedom (as presented in the Third Antinomy) provides the bridge between sensible, practical actions and the unconditioned ground of those actions (i.e. the moral law) as contained, and originating, within us. The “dynamical concepts of the understanding”\(^\text{11}\) represent a progression in thought from representations of objects solely as they appear to a “synthesis of things not homogenous,”\(^\text{12}\) namely a connection between representations of appearances and grounds that are not [themselves] appearances.”\(^\text{13}\) As the discussion of Leibniz confirms, “the dynamical laws we are thinking of [i.e., reciprocity] are still constitutive in regard to experience, since they make possible \textit{a priori} the concepts without which there is no experience.”\(^\text{14}\) Thus, the rational concept of freedom does not provide an analyticity of intuitions within its complete concept, but instead provides an \textit{a priori synthetic} explanation of human freedom. This explanation does not, however, rob freedom of its necessity. On this point, Kant’s critique of Hume is of particular importance.

In the Preface to the second \textit{Critique}, Kant defends Hume a bit, saying that Hume was falsely labeled a ‘genuine skeptic.’ But according to Kant, Hume “left at least one certain touchstone of experience in mathematics, whereas genuine skepticism admits no such touchstone at all.”\(^\text{15}\) The first \textit{Critique} demonstrated the necessity and universality of a priori propositions, both analytic and synthetic. Where Hume mistakenly categorized mathematical propositions as entirely analytic, Kant

\(^{11}\) \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A529/B557.

\(^{12}\) \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A530/B558.

\(^{13}\) \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A537/B565.

\(^{14}\) \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A664/B692.

determines them to be synthetic a priori. For Kant, space and time “contain a principle of synthetic a priori propositions and of the possibility of a transcendental philosophy; [they contain] appearances prior to all perceptions.”16 A priori synthetic propositions of mathematics are “determinations of the object in general with respect to its relations in space.”17 Because, in his divergence with Leibniz, Kant also posited the ability to ascribe an effect to an action without also being able to know the motivation for that action, the determination of a thing in itself with respect to its appearance was also able to be considered apart from direct experience. Therefore, a priori synthetic propositions are “the law of [an object’s] coordination.”18 Kant is thereby able to use the synthetic a priori propositions of mathematics to counter Humean skepticism and to demonstrate an alternative to the Leibnizian analyticity criterion of truth. The principle of coordination that Kant identifies as a principally mathematic proposition comes to bear directly on Kant’s development of an ethical theory insofar as he must reconcile the way that man appears with the way that a man is, and thus avoid the aforementioned Leibnizian optical illusion.

In his 1763 work The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God, Kant takes up the Royal Academy of Sciences’ essay question: ‘Are the laws of motion necessary or contingent?’ explaining that no satisfactory response was submitted.19 Offering his own response, Kant argues that the laws of motion apply to objects in space and time and the very intuition of such

16 Opus Postumum, 22:434.
17 Opus Postumum, 22:33.
18 Ibid.
19 The prize was not awarded either time that question was posed, first in 1756 and again in 1758.
objects yields the logical necessity of the laws of motion. Kant’s test for logical necessity is the law of contradiction. If matter exists, it would be self-contradictory to imagine that it operates according to laws other than the laws of motion. The very presence of an object, according to Kant, requires a repulsive force which allows it to fill space and an attractive force to prevent it from being dispersed into the infinity of space. The laws of motion govern the coordinated movement of objects in space and time according to the “greatest possible economy of action,” and are “absolutely necessary.” Yet, the very possibility of matter that has a ‘living force’ determined in such a way is grounded in something else, some “one great common original being,” that is “originally moving but is not itself movable since it contains the totality of what is movable.” That, he argues, renders the laws of motion contingent “in the real sense of the term.” What is meant by the phrase ‘the real sense’ of contingency? Here, Kant is invoking a distinction between things as they appear and things as they are in themselves. This is a commitment to what he will later refer to as a ‘transcendental idealism,’ the concept of which requires the acceptance of a non-empirical realm that serves as the grounding of all empirical motion. Again, a discussion of mathematical propositions illuminates this for Kant and provides the basis of its broader application.

According to Kant, the a priori synthetic propositions of mathematics are determinations of objects made by consideration of intuitions alone. Those intuitions

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20 Only Possible Argument, 2:99-100
21 Only Possible Argument, 2:99.
22 Opus Postumum, 21:312.
23 Only Possible Argument, 2:100
carry with them the very concepts that make the intuitions possible, namely space and
time. But the a priori synthetic propositions of metaphysics are determinations of
objects made by concepts alone. Those, too, carry with them the concepts that make
them possible, namely the self-identified thinking subject. In both cases, reason,
acting within the thinking subject constructs representations of objects within itself,
thus creating the very representation of self. The identity that is self-represented
thereby has two constitutive elements: the self as an object situated in space and time
(phenomenon) and the self as a concept without reference to spatio-temporal
positioning (noumenon). This is Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism, roughly
speaking. By his own definition, “transcendental philosophy is the absolute principle
of determining oneself idealistically into a system of synthetic a priori knowledge
from concepts (or through them) with regard to the form of self-consciousness.”
Transcendental idealism serves as the foundation of mathematical knowledge because
the representation of objects within the subject carries the ‘real grounds’ of the
intuition; namely, space and time. This provides Kant an account of mechanical
causation and the generation of theoretical knowledge. Likewise, this transcendental
idealism provides philosophy with the ‘real grounds’ of the concepts that give
practical knowledge. It makes sense, then, that Kant’s Negative Magnitudes (1763)
posits the existence of a productive power, “something truly positive in itself,” that
leads to a cognition of grounds and consequences. In the Critique of Practical
Reason (1788), Kant presents a principle of causality that “itself contains the

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24 Opus Postumum, 21:97.
25 Negative Magnitudes, 2:169.
determining ground…the principle of morality.” In the *Opus Postumum*, it is made explicit that the a priori synthetic concepts that provide the law of coordination apply to beings as phenomena as well as noumena. With respect to the moral law, I maintain that Kant intended the concept of humanity to yield the determining principle (the categorical imperative), which as a synthetic a priori proposition creates a totality of “pure intelligences or things which stand in reciprocity with them.”

2.2 Freedom ↔ Morality

2.2.1 Morality→Freedom

According to Kant, if matter is presupposed, then the laws of motion follow because it is “self-contradictory to suppose it operating in accordance with other laws.” Similarly, if freedom is presupposed, Kant maintains that it is self-contradictory to suppose it operating in any way other than according to the moral law. So, for Kant, the moral law is absolutely necessary for us in the same way the laws of motion are for matter. The reciprocal implication of freedom and morality is as critical to the understanding of Kant’s practical philosophy as the laws of motion and the ideality of space and time are to an understanding of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. In fact, the argument tracks much the same way within each subject.

Kant gives us the following proposition, that Allison refers to as the ‘reciprocity thesis’:

26 *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:105.
28 *Only Possible Argument*, 2:100
Freedom if and only if morality

Our analysis of it begins as Kant’s explanation in the *Groundwork* does. From the concept of morality, we must examine what is commonly understood of it and determine what the true nature of the concept entails. Morality’s role in common application is as a tool of gauging imputability of actions to an agent. Both our own self-assessments and our judgment of others rely on the attributability of actions to their originating source. Who ate the last brownie? Who paid for the elderly woman’s prescriptions? Who left that child alone in the rain? Whether morally neutral, praise- or blame-worthy, the connection of action and subject must be accurately made for moral judgment to be meaningful. But imputability carries with it a notion of agency such that person A originated an action. Were there no connection between myself and a particular event, then there would be no basis for attributing that event (and any corresponding moral judgments) to me. The role of intentions, cooperative causation, and other matters concerning degrees of imputability are rich subjects that, while useful and interesting, are taken up in other contexts. It suffices to say that the concept of morality, to be practically applied, carries with it the notion of imputability.

Imputation is a significant concept for Kant in that it confirms for him the inner nature of man as a being of inner worth, with a disposition that stands ready to act according to good reasons. It is man’s reason that gives rise to the actions

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29 *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:29 says “[f]reedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other.” This appears less succinctly at *Groundwork* 4:447 which is the passage Allison initially draws attention to.
ascribed to him as an agent, and for Kant, the good reasons to act (imperatives) are all derived from the moral law as applied by each man’s “inner judge, who attends not at all to the frailty of nature, but examines the action as it is in itself.”\textsuperscript{30} Imputability, for Kant, is therefore a recognition of the moral law as the source of obligation to act. Thus, when one fails to act according to the moral law, he commits an offense for which he is morally liable. I discuss Kant’s assertion that ‘ought implies can’ in Chapter 3, but to accept moral judgment as meaningful is to accept that the subject of that judgment has two capacities: (1) the ability to act according to the moral law; and (2) the ability to desire to act according to one’s obligations. Therefore, while the moral law commands categorically, the individual acts particularly and with regard to the contingent conditions of his own experience. The necessary attribution of these qualities to the subject (in order to then attribute to that subject some acts) is a recognition of freedom. Were a person lacking the capacity to generate the principle or the feeling, then he would not be the originating source of any action. Kant provides two examples in his Lectures to illustrate this point: incapacity due to age (non-maturity), and incidental incapacity which is, in itself, attributable to some former action. The emphasis in Kant’s Lectures on a child’s inability to either maintain or to sustain himself or others implies a dependence on others such that the actions of a child cannot be regarded on par with the directed and reasonably intentioned actions of an adult. Therefore, children are held morally culpable for their actions only in degrees commensurate with their age because as we often say,

\textsuperscript{30} Lectures, 27:295
they didn’t know any better. One can attribute ‘pulling the cat’s tail’ to the baby without passing a negative moral judgment upon the rosy-cheeked boy, which illustrates the way in which attributability is not equivalent to moral imputability. It is a necessary condition of moral judgment that we know to whom an action ‘belongs; but it is not a sufficient condition.

In the Lectures, Kant uses drunkenness as an example of another morally relevant incapacity. I am embellishing his story quite a bit here: Consider George Bailey, before he realizes what a wonderful life he has. He gets into a fight at the local tavern. His friends are puzzled and concerned. They see that it was George who participated, but they can’t reconcile it with his otherwise sunny disposition. To avoid passing a negative moral judgment on their friend’s general character, they blame his actions on his drunkenness. It seems that Kant would agree with their decision. But does this mean that the angry drunk is like the youngest child—without moral imputability for any deed? No. George Bailey has moral culpability for his actions, but the influence of alcohol serves as a mediating cause. All deeds done under the influence are still attributable to him, the moral imputability is still present, though diluted (pun intended) by the alcohol. What he is primarily held responsible for is the decision to over-indulge. What happened under the influence becomes, therefore, accidental. Had he been drunk alone, at home, the fight likely would not have occurred. But for Kant, it is the very choice to so impair oneself, and

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31 It’s unfortunate that Kant predates Capra’s tale by 150 years, because I believe he would have enjoyed the message, but for Kant’s discussion of drunkenness as a mediator of imputability, see Lectures 27:289, 27:380, and 27:569-571.
therefore leave it up to circumstance what might actually happen, that is the deed of 
moral imputation upon Bailey. Like a child, the deeds done when one is unable to 
‘maintain’ himself are wholly attributable to the person, but whether they are also 
imputed to his character as a moral agent is directly proportional to the level of self-
maintenance he is capable of. Unlike a child, moral agents like Bailey have all 
actions that serve to diminish his capacity directly imputed to him and those actions 
are regarded as the ground of the series of consequences.

The moral distinctions made in situations of incapacity prove both the 
necessity and sufficiency of freedom to morality. The two-fold test of moral 
judgment then becomes first, attributability—who acted thus-and-so; and second, 
intentionality—what motive caused the action. An individual must always answer 
(to the internal judge of conscience and to others’ judgment): (1) was there no other 
actor but myself? And (2) was there no other motive than my own at work? If no 
other person is responsible and no intervening force skewed my motivation, then I am 
wholly morally accountable for my deed. If I had only “the freedom of a turnspit,” 
then I could not be held morally accountable for actions that did not originate with 
me. There is no individual ownership in a deed put upon me by another force, when a 
productive power of another has been substituted for my own, and therefore the 
concept of freedom is required for the concept of morality to be at all meaningful.

2.2.2 Freedom→Morality

Without reference to the foregoing, we must now ask if the assumption of 
freedom implies morality. Kant’s later writings, including the Critique of Practical
Reason (1788) and The Metaphysics of Morals (1797) affirm this connection, but that discussion occurs after the Groundwork (1785) explicitly asserts it. Kant’s first presentation of these ideas sheds light on the motivating force of the claim. In A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition (1755), Kant defines the “characteristic mark of freedom” as those actions “called forth by nothing other than motives of the understanding applied to the will” and “not necessitated in conformity with external stimuli and impulses…without there being any spontaneous inclination.”

Here Kant is rejecting the notion of a ‘freedom of indifference.’ Wolffian determinism, whereby all events are but links in a chain originating with and created by God, lends itself to only two options: Either (i) it could not be otherwise that A performs $x$; or (ii) God made A in such a way that every $x$ is of equal possibility, and therefore totally undetermined for A. Because the second option, of ‘radical freedom,’ conflicts with the concept of God as omnibenevolent (for allowing choices that might be evil), the first option, ‘strict determinism’ was preferred by many theorists at the time, including Leibniz. But Kant sees that the conception of freedom as a state of infinite options is false. For if every option were equally available, no action would present itself as uniquely reasonable. By definition, every option could be selected which means that selection is a matter of chance rather than reason.

32 New Elucidation, 1:400.
33 This is an assertion that relies on much prior discussion of the principles of reason. Propositions I-III of The New Elucidation deal with this issue and are affirmed throughout Kant’s works. See Inquiry 2:294-296 for a foundational discussion of reason.
requires that I can unite the concept of myself as actor with the predicate representing my choice of action. Were something entirely arbitrary, it could not be said to originate with me and would therefore not be united with me as subject. For even if I decided to act in a seemingly arbitrary way, that decision itself would be ascribable to me and would serve to unite subsequent actions to my agency. True arbitrariness means, for Kant, total non-origination. But if every effect has a determining ground (a cause), then a totally un-determined, un-originated action is impossible. So, not only does Kant say that a ‘radical freedom’ or ‘freedom of indifference’ is incompatible with human reason, he also says that it is fundamentally impossible.

The various representations of options that are thought to be equally available to an agent are themselves an example of the illusion of indifference because

In so far as we feel that we are ourselves the authors of the representations which contain the motives for choice in a given case, so that we are eminently able either to focus our attention on them, or to suspend our attention, or turn it in another direction, and are consequently conscious of being able not only to strive towards the objects in conformity with our desire but also to interchange the reasons themselves in a variety of ways and as we please—in so far as all that is the case we can scarcely refrain from supposing that the addressing of our will in a given direction is not governed by any law nor subject to any fixed determination. But suppose that we make an effort to arrive at a correct understanding of the fact that the inclination of the attention towards a combination of representations is in this direction rather than in a different direction. Since grounds attract us in a certain direction, we shall, in order at least to test our freedom, turn our attention in the opposite direction, and thus make it preponderant so that the desire is directed thus and not otherwise. In this way, we shall easily persuade ourselves that determining grounds must certainly be present.34

So even the consideration of options consists of a set of representations selected by us under certain conditions. There is much more to be said about the role of

34 New Elucidation, 1:403, emphasis original
representation in Kantian philosophy, but for the purposes of the current discussion we can say that reason has the capacity to order, group, and present representations according to our inclinations. The ability to act upon one of those representations is our spontaneity. As Kant says, spontaneity “is action which issues from an inner principle.”\(^{35}\) So, there is an inclination that orders our representations and a principle according to which we select an action. In this sense Kant says that it is correct to say that our chosen action was “bound to happen” because we constituted the options and selected amongst them according to inclination and a ‘sorting principle.’ But insofar as the inclination and sorting principle originate within us, the action is freely chosen by us, rather than determined from beyond us. This is reminiscent of the nature of necessity that Kant provided as a suggested response to the Royal Academy’s question regarding the laws of motion. Namely, there is an order according to which we can expect actions to conform in their outward appearance, but underlying that, and serving as the fundamental ground of any action is a reality that is not immediately publicly accessible. How, then, does this account of free choice imply morality?

Allison constructs the following argument\(^{36}\) for Kant’s claim that the moral law would be analytic if freedom were presupposed:

1. The will must be law governed.

2. The will cannot be governed by the laws of nature.

\(^{35}\) New Elucidation, 1:402, emphasis original

\(^{36}\) Allison, p.277.
3. The will is therefore governed by laws of a different sort; namely a self-imposed one.

4. The moral law is the self-imposed law of the will.

Allison notes the difficulties with steps 1 and 4. First, he says “Kant does not seem to offer an argument in support of the claim that a free will must be law governed or ‘determinable’ at all.” I disagree. It may be the case that no compelling argument for that proposition appears in the *Groundwork*, but I don’t believe it can be convincingly argued that Kant failed to discuss the need of the ‘free will,’ as pure practical reason, to be law-governed or determinable. He did so at least to the same extent that he established the same for theoretical reason and cognition. Allison then claims, I believe rightly, that “for Kant…the claims that a free will is necessarily subject to a practical law (step 1) and that it is necessarily subject to the moral law (step 4) are equivalent.” Given that the will requires a determining principle, there is a compelling reason (not merely a need) to ascribe the self-governance of the practical law to the will. Given Kant’s identity of the practical law and the moral law, the difficulties Allison finds with steps 1 and 4 are successfully avoided.

If what is required for free choice is both inclination and a principle of selection amongst options, then it seems that I am ‘most free’ when my inclination and principle correspond completely. Reason, in applying a principle for action, is connecting that action as a predicate to my concept of myself as the subject. The

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37 Ibid.
38 Allison, p. 278.
39 I am using this terminology as a descriptive tool only, I am not embarking on a Kantian analysis of freedom and its degrees, should it admit of such at all.
agent-action relationship should be no less subject to the consistency and lawlike predictability of other objects of knowledge, in that the effects of my actions directly relate to the character of that from which they originate. So, if the agent is a thing to which predicate actions are subsumed, there must be a principle that serves as the determining ground of the will. It must be a principle that can effect an outcome, lest it be some even greater moving principle that determines if one may will what one does will, in which case the principle of the will becomes an arbitrary criterion of action. The only consistent determining ground of the will is a principle such that the possibility of action in representation and the reality of action through that principle is binding. Again, Kant’s early writings are instructive in this vein. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766), he writes:

> Immediate presence in the totality of space only provides a sphere of external activity; it does not prove a multiplicity...nor, therefore, any extension or shape. They only occur when a space is to be found in a being which is posited *for itself on its own*.

This means that attribution of actions, necessary for moral judgments, presuppose the existence of an agent, but an agent can only be properly conceived of as containing a will that is able to represent itself, to itself, as a concept to which predicate actions are conjoined. In my own judgment, I must be able to discern the deeds to which I can properly be “regarded as the author” before I can assess the good or bad results that I can properly be considered to have effected. That conjunction cannot be arbitrary because that would allow for the possibility of individual mis-attribution (e.g., I hold

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40 *Dreams*, 2:325.
myself responsible for an action that is properly attributable to someone else). I would draw a comparison to the notion of a ‘coerced confession.’ It is clear to most why the justice system would be flawed if confessions were treated alike, regardless of any considerations of duress. The potential to hold a person liable (legally and/or morally) for an act that he may not have actually committed seems proportional to the level of coercion applied in extracting a confession. By ascribing guilt to a non-guilty party, one would not only harm the wrongly-sentenced, but also the society at large by failing to hold to account the legitimately responsible party.42 Proper attribution of actions to agents in necessary and of importance not only to oneself but also to the collective in which an individual has potential interaction. Proper coordination cannot be had if arbitrary ascriptions are allowed. Instead, there must be an objective rule for subsuming concepts, what Kant will later term “a ground of assent.”43

The principle according to which I can recognize myself as an author of deeds, and likewise with others, is the positive conception of freedom made possible only through the moral law. As Kant states in the *Analytic of Pure Practical Reason*, “the two concepts [freedom and morality] are so inseparably connected that one could even define practical freedom through independence of the will from any other than the moral law alone.”44 The autonomy of representations and action from inclination in accordance with a law is the very definition of Kantian freedom, positively conceived. Therefore, if freedom is assumed, the moral law must be also. This

42 These considerations have received much attention in the debate surrounding the torture of ‘suspected terrorists’ but, while interesting, that debate presents much too far of a digression from the present topic.
44 *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:94.
The doctrine of mutual implication is what Allison calls “Kant’s Reciprocity Thesis,” however, Allison’s discussion of these concepts is only the tip of the iceberg in defining the reciprocity thesis in full.

### 2.3 Allison’s Insufficient Attribution

That freedom and morality mutually imply one another is premised on the transcendental concept of totality. As Kant wrote in his *Inaugural Dissertation*, “whatever things are related to one another as joint parts with respect to any whole whatsoever, are understood as posited together.”

This applies to the concept of freedom and morality, for both concepts are thought as jointly ascribable to a subject. The transcendental ‘I’ is the whole to which the concepts of freedom and morality attach, necessarily posited together. By his own admission, Allison’s discussion of the mutual implication of freedom and morality is “a necessary first stage” in a transcendental deduction of morality, but by attaching the term ‘reciprocity’ to this thesis in a very narrow way, he obscures Kant’s more complete ‘reciprocity thesis’ that serves as the crux of the deduction Allison seeks. In the passages from the *Groundwork*, the *Religion*, and the *Critique of Practical Reason* that Allison cites, the focus is how freedom and morality relate to the concept of causality. But, as his discussion of Paton’s analysis reveals, Allison is exploring Kant’s thesis from the standpoint of causation as the law “which connects decisions (as causes) with their

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46 Allison, p. 274, emphasis added.
effects in the phenomenal world.”

This leads Allison to a discussion of Kantian maxims. When Allison takes up the topic of transcendental freedom, he argues that “a transcendentally free agent is, ex hypothesia, capable of selecting maxims that run directly counter to its dictates. Moreover, since the choices of a transcendentally free agent, including those based on desire or inclination, are grounded in a ‘law’ (maxim) which is self-imposed, such an agent would be autonomous in a morally neutral sense.”

This seems to put priority on the content of the maxim rather than its form. Moral praise and/or blame is derived from the proper alignment of maxim and motive, both of which hinge on a proper consideration of the rational agent and his humanity (as we will see in Chapter 4). That said, it is unclear how Allison would defend his claim that the choices of a transcendentally free agent are morally neutral. He says it is ‘on the basis’ of those actions being the result of a self-imposed law, but Kant is very clear in saying, repeatedly, that only actions carried out on the basis of a self-imposed law are eligible for moral praise or blame, and he does not discuss the possibility of those same actions being amoral.

In fact, the actions of God, even if considered only hypothetically, are given by Kant as an example of morally good actions. The reason he provides is that what God wills, is. This is contrasted with a human being who can be, according to Kant, at highest, only virtuous due to obstacles and inclinations that must be overcome in order to do what one ought.

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47 Allison, p. 277.
48 Allison, p. 287.
49 This is, in fact, a minimum qualification for Kant. Other considerations, such as the incentive to act ultimately determine if the action is praise- or blame-worthy.
50 See Metaphysics of Morals, 6:396-399 for a discussion of this contrast.
actions of a transcendentally free agent, if such an agent exists, are not only non-neutral, but are morally good.

This leads, then, to the first part of Allison’s statement: that a transcendentally free agent is capable of selecting maxims that run counter to its dictates. Kant’s rejection of ‘radical freedom’ as arbitrariness has been discussed earlier in this chapter, and it will be taken up in later chapters, but Allison might still fall back on the notion of ‘radical evil’ as an example of a type of agency. Isn’t radical evil, Allison might say, a case where the moral law fails to obligate completely and the agent manages to adopt a contrary maxim of action? Wouldn’t that indicate a capacity in the will to bypass maxims at its discretion? This possibility is discussed by Kant, and at several points rejected, in the Religion. When describing ‘radical evil,’ Kant indicates that there is a “reversal of incentives” within the agent. The moral law is still present in the maxims, but it is “subordinated” to the law of self-love.51 This is an important distinction. To assume that ‘radical evil’ is the capacity of a truly free agent is to confuse transcendental freedom with mere psychological freedom. This distinction will be developed in more detail later as I discuss Kant’s rejection of the concept of a human ‘predisposition to evil.’ As a preview, a predisposition to evil is an indictment of the will in general and, as such, of transcendental freedom (for if one has a faulty will he could not properly be said to be culpable for his actions. That would again plunge us into the irregularity of concept conjunction with an object of moral judgment). Instead, Kant says that there

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51 Religion, 6:36.
may be such a phenomenon as a ‘propensity to evil,’ but that is a psychological condition whereby the motive of respect is not properly observed. In such cases, the humanity of the person as a being having a will is not disregarded and culpability for actions may still be ascribed to agents, but mitigating factors with regard to the agent’s psychology may be admitted. What remains constant, for Kant, is that the capacity of the will to formulate maxims in accord with the moral law remains intact. This is consistent with the ‘case studies’ that Kant presents in the *Groundwork* with regard to incentives to action. Those cases are meant to illustrate the inversion of motives, not maxims, and thereby does not undermine transcendental freedom. Therefore, Allison’s description of a morally-neutral transcendentally free agent can not hold.

Were Allison less concerned with causation in the sense of phenomenal efficacy and instead focused on Kant’s notion of agency as *determinations* of action, he might have found a more compelling link with transcendental freedom. The relevant consideration of freedom and morality and the way in which Kant develops a ‘reciprocity thesis’ is not actually in relation to matter and its effects, as Allison suggests, but rather to the moral subject and his relation with the totality of agents. This is the level at which Kant’s true reciprocity thesis exists. Consider the following passage from the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:96):

> Hence nothing remained but that there might be found an incontestable and indeed an objective principle of causality that excludes all sensible conditions from its determination, that is, a principle in which reason does not call upon something else as the determining ground with respect to its causality but already itself contains this determining ground by that principle, and in which it is therefore as *pure reason* itself practical. Now, this principle does not
need to be searched for or devised; it has long been present in the reason of all human beings and incorporated in their being, and is the principle of *morality*. Therefore, that unconditioned causality and the capacity for it, freedom, and with it a being (I myself) that belongs to the sensible world but at the same time to the intelligible world, is not merely *thought* indeterminately and problematically (speculative reason could already find this feasible) but is even *determined with respect to the law* of its causality and *cognized* assertorically; and thus the reality of the intelligible world is given to us, and indeed as *determined* from a practical perspective, and this determination, which for theoretical purposes would be *transcendent* (extravagant), is for practical purposes *immanent*.

Here, Kant is invoking the notion of a being that is simultaneously aware of itself as having a particular identity in the sensible world and also having membership in the intelligible (i.e. not empirically-dependent) world, which means that the self-identity is at the same time a unity (as the transcendent ‘I’ to which concepts attach) and as a member of a totality within which the ‘I’ is a singular concept that participates with others of similar concepts. The participation, and therefore the self-identity, is wholly dependent on my representation of myself as a being admitting of concepts held in common with others. As we will see later, there is one concept that is consistently present when the moral law is active, the concept of humanity. And that concept brings together “thinking natures, who are reciprocally related to each other, as the effect of a genuinely active force, in virtue of which [they] exercise an influence on each other.”52

2.4 The Underpinnings of Kant’s Reciprocity Thesis

52 *Dreams*, 2:335.
According to Kant, morality is “the sole means of obtaining consciousness of our freedom”\(^{53}\) because morality requires that we think of ourselves as noumenally productive rather than merely phenomenally predetermined. This will be discussed more fully in the later chapters, but it is the necessity of morality that makes the concept of reciprocity so rich in the Kantian ethical theory. If man, as agent, can generate actions in the world, then there must be some rule or rules governing the interaction of men, for it is nothing more than a thought experiment to assume that there is but only a single agent in the world. Morality must, therefore, encompass some consideration of interactivity. Although Kant disagreed with Crusius on the nature of fate and morality, he did, in the *New Elucidation*, celebrate a point of agreement. Kant affirms Crusius’s assertion that “the mind is bound by a law, according to which its striving to produce representations is always united with a striving of its substance to produce a certain external motion, so that if the latter is hindered the former is also impeded.”\(^{54}\) Again, a precise accounting of ‘representation’ and its role in Kantian theory generally would be helpful here. In absence of that, though, we can still ascribe to Kant the view that the determining ground of action, while noumenal, generates representations of the phenemonal realm in a consistent way. Those representations must, by definition, exhibit spatio-temporal relations with other objects of experience in a manner consistent with the physical laws of motion. As presented in Kant’s earliest writings, the interaction of

\(^{53}\) *Lectures*, 27:506

\(^{54}\) This passage is cited by Kant in *New Elucidation* 1:412, but references the view Crusius developed in his own *Weg Zur Gewissheit und Zuverlässigkeit der menschlichen Erkenntnis* (Leipzig: 1747), specifically section 79-81.
substances in the world is law-governed. The law is not, however, the Leibnizian notion of ‘pre-established harmony,’ which Kant rejects as mere concordance, not interaction. He also rejects Malebranche’s ‘occasionalism’ as imposing a time-dependent, and thereby contingently determined, constraint on God’s power. Lastly, he rejects merely efficient causation as “threadbare”55 because it deals exclusively with representations of objects as though those representations (or appearances) were necessarily equivalent to substances. Each of these accounts negates the free choice of man by either putting all events in the hands of God or all events in a chain of efficient, secular causation. According to those views, man is reduced to the status of a puppet with either supersensible forces (God) or sensible forces (nature) pulling the strings. No actions under these theories could be, according to Kant, rightly imputed to man. Both freedom and morality are therefore impossible. What Kant develops in contrast to those views is a description of action as genuine interaction between substances. He foregoes pre-established harmony for generated harmony, occasionalism for regularity, and efficient causation for noumenal intentionality. In doing so, he embraces an ontology of dynamic motion, of forces and fields. Such can only be achieved by the concept of reciprocity.

Kant’s discussion of the reciprocal motion of substances begins in the pre-Critical writings. In the New Elucidation Kant says,

If, for example, body A moves another body B by striking it, a certain force and therefore a certain reality is imparted to the latter body. However, an equal quantity of motion is taken from the body which imparts the blow, so that the sum total of the forces in the effect is equal in magnitude to the forces

55 *New Elucidation*, 1:416
of the cause…Accordingly, the sum total of the forces is calculated from the effects which operate in conjunction with each another and are thus viewed in general as a totality.\(^{56}\)

The note to this section is of interest as well because in it, Kant explains that “in this case we may, in accordance with the usual sense of the term, conceive the imparted force as if it were a transmitted reality, although strictly speaking it is merely a certain limiting or directing of an inherent reality.” The significance of this passage is the clarification of the notion of a determining ground of action in a substance. B, prior to being struck, was moving in a particular direction that represents its internal determining ground, its movement into A’s path is either intentional or accidental and may be either beneficial or detrimental. If A is headed in the same direction, the collision compounds the motion, but if A is headed in the opposite direction, the collision frustrates the effort. This effect exhibits its own regularity and therefore must, according to Kant, be law-governed. In section 3 of the *New Elucidation*, Kant identifies two principles of metaphysical cognition that together comprise the “system of the universal interaction of substances”\(^{57}\) which is the system that accurately captures the notion of causation without eliminating the possibility of freedom or morality which motivates the inquiry in the first place. The two principles are that of succession and coexistence.

The principle of succession is a direct challenge to the Leibnizian notion of monads, or entelechies. According to Leibniz, monads are radically independent substances that reflect every other monad in the complete sense without thereby

\(^{56}\) *New Elucidation*, 1:407
\(^{57}\) *New Elucidation*, 1:415
effecting any one. But Kant illustrates that this concept makes it impossible for change to occur, because if a particular state is already present, then its opposite, by definition, is absent from the monad. Without an accounting of some effect from outside a monad, there would be no grounds for any change. To put it another way, if monads are preestablished complete concepts, then they couldn’t be other than they are. There is no change and therefore each monad is a timeless substance. The necessity for change (succession) proves, for Kant, that time is not a merely relational notation, but rather a fundamental condition for the possibility of experience. Likewise with space. Leibniz wanted spatial relations to be logically reducible to some non-relational features internal to the monad. But that does not allow for real interaction amongst substances. That is, at least in part, what Kant is addressing with the second principle of metaphysical cognition.

The principle of coexistence states, first, that finite substances, insofar as they are unique, do not contain the determining ground of each other. Having rejected (via the principle of succession) Leibniz’s idea of every individual monad containing a complete set of self-representations, Kant uses the principle of coexistence to reject Leibniz’s theory that every monad also contains a complete set of representations of every other monad. So, the principle of coexistence presupposes the concept of a plurality of substances. Second, the principle states that “nor are [finite substances] linked together by any interaction at all,”\textsuperscript{58} meaning that a plurality of substances does not, in itself, determine that the substances will interact. A plurality of

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{New Elucidation} 1:413
substances that are not, in themselves, necessarily determined as complete unchangeable concepts must be a plurality of beings subject to contingent representations. This is discussed in more detail in Kant’s *Physical Monadology* (1756) wherein he establishes the necessary impenetrability of substances that “the orbit of external contact” that such impenetrable substances occupy amongst each other. Substances that are taken together, as a plurality, must share at their base a common principle that is necessarily, rather than contingently, determined. In the *Physical Monadology*, the impenetrability of a substance is that fundamental principle. Therefore, the fundamental qualities of each substance must be similar, the principle of action guiding each of the same type, and each considered to be a constituent part of one space, a *totality*. As he states in his *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant believes that it is this concept of space that “contains the conditions of possible reciprocal actions” of matter. Plurality and totality, as the conditions of reciprocal actions amongst substances, are Kant’s notion of the universal harmony of things. The shared conditions of the possibility of action give regularity and order to the interactions of individuals without predetermining their motions. Just as the synthetic a priori propositions of mathematics gave rise to Kant’s views on metaphysics, so too did his ruminations on natural science contribute to his view of morality and specifically to the nature of interaction amongst moral agents, the view that results in his political theory being part and parcel of the overall moral project.

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60 *Inaugural Dissertation*, 2:413
2.5 Reciprocity as a ‘Dynamical’ Concept

What is the import, then, of the Kantian commitments with regard to substance, space, and time, on the moral project? In the “Analytic of Pure Practical Reason,” Kant explains that freedom is not merely illusory, not merely a psychological property, but instead it is “a transcendental predicate of the causality of a being that belongs to the sensible world.”\textsuperscript{61} Freedom requires the concept of causality to be attributable to an individual existing in the world, so there must be a recognition of the power of the individual will and also an acknowledgement of the chain of appearances generated by other wills with a similar power. We must distinguish between a thing as it appears and a thing in itself. The first Critique established the separation of time and space from the thing in itself but could not (as evidenced in the Dialectic) ascribe an unconditioned causality to a being that also appeared in the sensible realm. The reality of freedom was established as possible and necessary, but could not be proven actual. From the perspective of the first Critique’s speculative use of reason, the objective reality of human freedom would have required an intellectual intuition. Specifically, it would have required an intuition of the absolute unity of the chain of appearances and the inner actions of the will. But the practical use of reason, aimed not at determining objects of matter but of determining the will itself, allows a cognition of the self as a participant in the sensible realm and at the same time, as an active, intelligible being. It is self-reflection that provides reason with evidence of its own workings. Through it, we see

\textsuperscript{61} Critique of Practical Reason, 5:94, emphasis original
our intentions in sync with our actions. This self-reflection reveals the moral law as
the productive power of reason within us and as the generator of our outer actions in
accord with the moral law’s determination.

The determining ground of human freedom is the moral law given as the
categorical imperative. Only the categorical imperative can properly provide the
unity of the manifold and the connection of the diverse. The moral law requires
consideration of the concept of humanity as the noumenal and phenomenal situation
of the individual in relation to self and to others. As I will argue, the Kantian moral
timey sets two operating principles of action: (1) self-perfection; and (2) the
happiness of others. This in itself is a recognition of the reciprocal dependency on
others because our own self-reflection reveals that we have particular ‘projects’ that
we wish to effect. The noumenal community consists, by definition, of other agents
with that same capacity of willing. By motivating those projects to action, we each
recognize our effective power in the phenomenal world and have an awareness of our
relation to others. The product of our determinations can be either enhanced or
thwarted by the effective power of others. So, a purposive use of reason seeks a
harmonization of those effects in order to maximize the potential for actualizing
intent. That harmony of collective effects requires in itself a harmonizing of
individual intent. The categorical imperative, in its various formulations, is itself a
‘harmonization test.’ This confirms the ‘reciprocity thesis’ that freedom entails law-
governed action (morality) and morality entails freedom.
Thus, with the two metaphysical principles of cognition (succession and coexistence) serving as the basis of reciprocal action, I will examine Kant’s development of the categorical imperative and the derivation of duties therein as the ‘universal harmony’ that he frequently references. Reciprocity is therefore not only the fundamental principle of action manifested in the sensible world (as given in Newtonian physics) but it is the foundation of reason’s productive power (as given in the moral law). The reciprocity of freedom and morality entails reciprocity amongst people, in much the same way that, in Plato’s Republic, the ordering within the polis was a macro-manifestation of the ordering within the individual. It is no surprise, then, that the Dynamical Antinomies are described as Kant’s Platonic undertaking. Kant was seeking to connect the law of inner determination to the law of affectation in the sensible world. Therefore, reciprocity is the ideal that Kant seeks to cultivate via civil society. For Kant, civil society is an end that it is also a duty to pursue, and a properly ordered state would be an instantiation in the sensible world of the reciprocity of the noumenal realm. That would be the actualization of the universal harmony that Kant says God intends us to strive for.

As I will go on to discuss, Kant’s reciprocity thesis, in the fullest sense, goes beyond the mere conceptual interdependency of morality and freedom that Allison develops to the very underpinnings of the concepts in Kant’s transcendental philosophy. The reciprocity of concepts is, for Kant, the means by which to understand the reciprocity of substances. While his early discussions of the reciprocal motion of matter dealt only with the phenomenal realm, he was clearly
seeking a similar doctrine of interaction amongst intelligible beings, both as they appear and as things in themselves. This more complete reciprocity thesis informs Kant’s entire philosophical project, “to know oneself in the highest practical reason.”

This account shows how civil society is a moral necessity within which human agents are able to pursue ends and develop a virtuous character. The notion of ‘radical evil,’ for Kant, is very instructive in this regard. Kant describes radical evil as bringing with it “an infinity of violations of the moral law” and an indictment of “the universal disposition.” As we will see in the following chapters, the categorical imperative is binding on each human insofar as he embraces his membership in a noumenal, universal community. Radical evil represents a rejection of that membership, a denial of the humanity in oneself and in general. A corresponding rejection of the lawfulness of civil society would be no less blameworthy under the same consideration, namely—that both represent a fundamental failing of that first duty of self-knowledge.

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