

Self-Constitution: Action, Identity, and Integrity
Lecture Three: Autonomy, Efficacy, and Agency
Christine M. Korsgaard

I. The Kantian Imperatives as Constitutive Principles of Action (From Lecture Two)

Kant's definition of action: determining yourself to be the cause of an end

Hypothetical Imperative: Taking the means to an end is constitutive of determining oneself to be the *cause* of the end.

Categorical Imperative: Willing a universal maxim is constitutive of determining *oneself* to be the cause of the end.

II. Disparity with the *Groundwork*

If both imperatives are constitutive of action, we never act only on a hypothetical imperative.

If heteronomous action is action governed only by a hypothetical imperative, heteronomous action is impossible.

If we choose actions (acts for the sake of ends) rather than mere acts, we never act only on a hypothetical imperative.

III. Constitutive Standards must be derived from the function of action

The function of action is self-constitution, or the constitution of agency

The essential characteristics of an agent are autonomy and efficacy

Efficacy = conformity to the hypothetical imperative

Autonomy = conformity to the categorical imperative

>Conformity to the imperatives makes us agents.

IV. The Problem of Animal Action

Kant's problem in the *Groundwork*: the will is practical reason (the causality of living beings insofar as they are rational)

If autonomy is essential to action, how do animals act?

A related problem: If autonomy is essential to action, how is bad action possible?

Aristotle's problem in *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1:

Action is involuntary, voluntary, or chosen

The voluntary requires a "contribution" from the agent.

The contribution seems to be the agent's choice.

If choice is essential to the voluntary, how is merely voluntary action possible?

CMK's problem: if conformity to, or trying to conform to, the hypothetical and categorical imperatives is essential to action, and non-human animals do not conform to imperatives, how can non-human animals act?

V. Action

Action is Intelligent Movement:

Intelligent = movement that is responsive to a representation or conception that the animal forms of its environment.

Movement = effecting a change in the world by effecting a change in oneself

Intelligent movement has **intentional content**, and is subject to a standard of efficacy, or success and failure

A thesis from Aristotle: what licenses the intentional description of a movement is not accompanying thought, but the form of the moving object.

Action= intelligent intentional movement, movement guided by a conception or representation of the environment.

Human Action = intelligent intentional movement, movement guided by a conception or representation of the environment and a conception of what one is doing, that is a conception of a law.

Why we assign the movement to the animal as its author:
because an animal is formed so as to produce a movement of that kind

Instincts= principles that govern an animal's movements as it guides itself through its environment, principles inherent in its form

Action from Instinct: autonomous animal action, action governed by the animal's own laws

VI. Kant's Moral Psychology

Incentive: motivationally loaded representation of an object

Principle: description of an agent's response to an incentive (the agent's "contribution"), the treatment of the incentive as a ground for doing a certain action

Principles for human beings: rational principles telling us whether to treat the incentive as a reason for doing a certain action

Principles for animals: instincts telling the animal to treat the incentive as occasion for taking a certain action

Self-Constitution:

How animals constitute their wills: the same way they constitute themselves in general

How human beings constitute our wills: by choosing the laws of our own causality

Two senses of Autonomy:

Acting in accordance with the laws of your own causality

Spontaneity: choosing the laws of your own causality

To Note: Professor Christine Korsgaard will give a seminar on Thursday 30 May, at 2.15 in the Ryle Room, 10 Merton Street. The purpose of the seminar is to discuss questions raised by her Locke Lectures on 'Action, identity and integrity'. Everyone is welcome, and welcome to ask questions.