



Veronese "The Choice between Virtue and Vice" (ca. 1565)

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# Kant's System of Ends

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# Introduction – My theses

Kant has a system of ends.

The principle of Kant's system of ends is freedom as moral self-determination.

All objective ends of Kant's practical philosophy are contained in the modalities of freedom as moral self-determination.

These modalities are humanity, virtuousness, and the ideal of autonomy.

# Outline

1. Freedom as moral self-determination
2. Autonomy as the ideal of moral self-determination
3. Humanity as the capacity for moral self-determination
4. Virtuousness as actual degree of moral self-determination (and virtue as moral perfection)
5. Kant's system of ends

# 1. Freedom as Moral Self-determination

1. Freedom is the nodal concept of Kant's practical philosophy
2. The freedom in question is freedom as moral self-determination
3. The modalities of freedom as moral self-determination

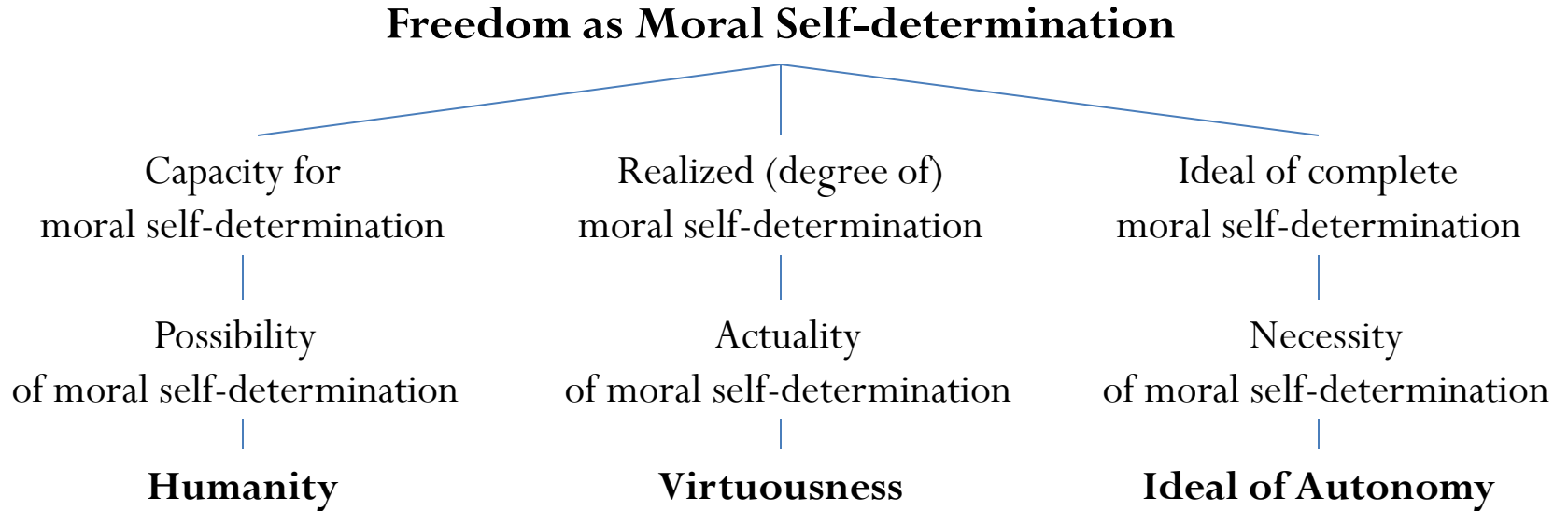
# 1.1 Freedom as the nodal concept of Kant's practical philosophy

- The practical is everything that is connected with free choice “whether as ground or consequence.” (*KrV*, A802/B830)
- Freedom is one of the “cornerstones of morality and religion,” (*KrV*, A466/B494) even the “keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason,” (*KpV*, 5:3)
- The dignity of human beings lies in our freedom: “Freedom and freedom alone makes us ends in themselves.” (*Feyerabend*, 27:1322)
- It is by virtue of freedom that the human being is the “final end of creation,” the “titular lord of nature,” “to which the whole of nature is teleologically subordinated,” (*KU*, 5:426, 5:431, 5:436)
- For freedom is “the inner worth of the world, the *summum bonum*.” (*Collins*, 27:344)

## 1.2 Freedom as moral self-determination

- Epistemically speaking, “freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other,” (*KpV*, 5:29) because,
- Ontologically speaking, “a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same.” (*GMS*, 4:446-7)
- And conceptually speaking “freedom and the will’s own lawgiving are both autonomy and hence reciprocal concepts” (*GMS*, 4:450)
- Accordingly, the “laws of freedom” are called “*moral* laws,” because they “say what ought to happen even though perhaps it never does happen.” (*MdS*, 6:214, 6:225; *KrV*, A802/B830) And so
- “Morality, which discerns purely *a priori* the laws of freedom, is a metaphysics of freedom, or of morals, just as metaphysics is called a metaphysics of nature.” (*V-Mo/Mron II*, 29:599)

# 1.3 Modalities of Freedom as Moral Self-determination





## 2. Autonomy as the Ideal of Moral Self-determination

- Autonomy is “the will’s property of being a law to itself.” (*GMS*, 4:446)
- This is ambiguous between capacity and ideal. To disambiguate, I use the term ‘ideal of autonomy’
- The principles of autonomous willing are spelled out in *Groundwork* II.
- Both individual and collective ideals.

# Ideal of autonomy as modality of freedom as moral self-determination

## Freedom as Moral Self-determination

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graph TD; A[Freedom as Moral Self-determination] --- B[Ideal of complete moral Self-determination]; B --- C[Necessity of moral self-determination]; C --- D[Ideal of autonomy]; D --- E[Objective end to be pursued];
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Ideal of complete  
moral Self-determination

Necessity  
of moral self-determination

**Ideal of autonomy**

**Objective end**  
to be pursued

(More details will be added as we go along)

### 3. Humanity

## The Capacity for Moral Self-determination

Three questions:

1. What is humanity?
2. Why does humanity have dignity?
3. What does it mean that humanity must be treated as an end in itself?

## 3.1 What Humanity is

- Humanity is “rational nature.” (*GMS*, 4:428-9, 4:431, 4:437).
- Rational nature is distinguished from the rest of nature in that “it sets itself an end.” (*GMS*, 4:437)
- The definition given in the *Metaphysics of Morals* echoes: “[t]he capacity to set oneself an end – any end whatever – is what characterizes humanity.” (*MdS*, 6:392)

# 3.1 Cont'd

- The capacity to set and pursue ends, two parts (corresponding to negative and positive aspects of freedom):
  1. Independence from sensible determination,
  2. Capacity for self-determination
- There is no capacity for self-determination without moral subjectivity – self-determination entails choice subject to the moral laws.
- So, humanity is the capacity for moral self-determination
- Same conclusion can be reached by delineation (humanity between animal and holy wills)

## 3.2 Why humanity has dignity

- What is it about the capacity for moral self-determination that confers dignity on persons and requires both certain attitudes and modes of treatment? Hard question.
- My suggestion: the dignity of humanity is the dignity of being the site and source of the moral law, which carries unconditional authority.

## 3.2 Cont'd

Not overwhelming textual backing for my claim.

Kant says: “Reason does not give us dignity. [...] [F]reedom and freedom alone warrants that we are ends in ourselves. [...] Under what condition can a free being be an end in himself? That freedom be a law to itself.” (*Feyerabend*, 1321-2)

“[T]here is indeed no sublimity in him [the human being] insofar as he is *subject* to the moral law, but there certainly is insofar as he is at the same time *lawgiving* with respect to it and only for that reason subordinated to it. [...] the dignity of humanity consists just in this capacity to give universal law, though with the condition of also being itself subject to this very lawgiving.” (*GMS*, 4:440)

## 3.3 Treating humanity as an end in itself

- Humanity is not the kind of property that can be pursued or promoted. Humanity confers status (dignity) and this status requires a certain attitude and certain modes of treatment.



# 3.3 Cont'd

Duties owed humanity in self and others

Object Kind	Duties to Others	Duties to Self	
		To natural self	- To moral self
Perfect (acts)	Respect rights	Self-preservation; no suicide, self- mutilation, drinking, etc.	Moral self- preservation; honesty, integrity; no lying, servility, etc.
Imperfect (ends)	Promote moral happiness	Seek <i>natural perfection</i> , cultivate the faculties of mind and body	Seek <i>moral perfection</i> , Pursue virtue

## 3.3 Cont'd – on natural perfection

- Note: the duty to seek natural (and moral) perfection not a duty to promote and pursue humanity.
- Natural perfection and culture:

“*Natural* perfection is the *cultivation* of any *capacities* whatever for furthering ends set forth by reason. [...] The capacity to set oneself an end – any end whatsoever – is what characterizes humanity [...] Hence there is also bound up with the end of humanity in our own person the rational will, and so the duty, to make ourselves worthy of humanity by culture in general, by procuring and promoting the *capacity* to realize all sorts of possible ends, so far as this is to be found in the human being himself.” (*MdS*, 6:391)
- (Moral Perfection: virtue)

# Summary of humanity

1. Humanity is the capacity for moral self-determination.
2. Freedom as the capacity for moral self-determination confers dignity on the person who has it, because she is the site and source of the moral law.
3. Treating humanity as an end in itself requires both omission of certain acts and the pursuit of certain ends (happiness of others, natural and moral perfection)

## Freedom as Moral Self-determination

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graph TD; Title[Freedom as Moral Self-determination] --- C[Capacity for moral Self-determination]; C --- P[Possibility of moral self-determination]; P --- H[Humanity]; H --- D[Dignity must be respected and served]; D --- E[Ends that are duties]; E --- F[Promote moral happiness, pursue natural and moral perfection];
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Capacity for  
moral Self-determination

Possibility  
of moral self-determination

**Humanity**

**Dignity**  
must be respected  
and served

Ends that are duties

Promote moral happiness, pursue natural  
and moral perfection

## 4. Virtue and Virtuosity as ideal and actual degree of moral self-determination

Three claims:

1. That Kant has two concepts of virtue:
  - i. Virtue as the ideal of moral perfection
  - ii. Virtuosity as the degree of moral perfection achieved by a person
2. That virtuosity is the measure of freedom as moral self-determination
  - i. The ideal of virtue is the closest beings like us can get to the ideal of autonomy
  - ii. Virtuosity is the degree to which a person has actually realized freedom as moral self-determination
3. That virtuosity is moral worth

# 4.1 Kant's general definition of virtue

- Kant defines virtue as a kind of “moral strength of the will,” (*MdS*, 405) a “*fortitudo moralis*,” (*MdS*, 6:380) or “firmly grounded disposition to fulfill one’s duty strictly.” (*RGV*, 6:23n)
- A holy will is disposed to do the right thing, because it has no conflicting interests. Human beings, by contrast, are always tempted by self-interest, so virtue is “moral disposition *in conflict*.” (*KpV*, 5:84)
- So, the moral strength that is virtue is the strength of moral self-mastery: “virtue [...] means strength in mastering and overcoming oneself, in regard to the moral disposition.” (*V-Mo/Collins*, 27:300)
- Abstracting from these and like passages, we can say that virtue combines three elements: understanding of what morality requires, the will to do it because it is what morality requires (a good will, moral disposition), and strength of the will to do it (self-mastery).

## 4.2 First concept of virtue – moral perfection

- Kant most often talks about virtue as an ideal: “[v]irtue is the moral perfection of man.” (*V-Mo/Collins*, 27:465)
- In this sense, virtue is the ideal of having a rightly informed good will and the strength of will to carry it out.
- The ideal of virtue cannot be realized, yet must be approximated:
  - “[V]irtue is an idea and nobody can possess true virtue.” (*V-Mo/Collins*, 27:463)
  - “Virtue is an ideal and unattainable, while yet constant approximation to it is a duty.” (*MdS*, 6:409)
  - “We cannot encounter virtue among men. But my reason must nonetheless have a concept of virtue, as it must be in its complete perfection.” (*V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:906)

## 4.2 Cont'd Second concept of virtue - virtuousness

- Since the ideal of virtue can and should be approximated, it follows that there is a degree to which any person has achieved virtue, her virtuousness
- So, virtuousness is the degree of moral perfection of a person
- Virtuousness is a function of moral understanding, goodness of will, and strength of will.



## 4.3 Virtue and virtuousness as modalities of freedom

- The ideal of virtue is the closest beings like us can get to the ideal of complete moral self-determination (the ideal of autonomy)
- Virtuousness is a measure of freedom as moral self-determination.

## 4.3 Cont'd

- “The more a man is virtuous, the more free he is.” (*V-Mo/Collins*, 27:464)
- “Virtue is a readiness, a freedom in action.” (*V-Lo/Wiener*, 24:923)
- “[T]he more [a human being] can be constrained morally (through the mere representation of duty), so much the more free he is,” so that “only in its [virtue’s] possession is he ‘free’ [...] since he is in possession of himself.” (*MdS*, 6:382, *MdS*, 6:405)
- “[T]he more a person practices self-compulsion, the freer he becomes;” (*V-Mo/Collins*, 27:269)

## 4.3 Cont'd: additional support

Acquisition of virtue through strengthening the means of freedom as moral self-determination:

1. Negative freedom – moral apathy
2. Positive freedom – moral strength

## 4.3 Cont'd – virtue distinguished from humanity and autonomy

Virtue is neither humanity, nor autonomy.

- Not humanity, for humanity equally a property of the wicked and the virtuous.
- Not autonomy, for even in the ideal, the moral self-determination of virtue is contingent and precarious. Holy beings are autonomous; humans not: “[a]ngels in heaven may be holy, but man can only get so far as to be virtuous.” (*V-Mo / Collins*, 4:465)
- “[*h*]oliness is the absolute or unlimited perfection of the will [...] the human being can *never* be *holy*.” (*V-Phil-Th / Pölitz*, 28:1075)

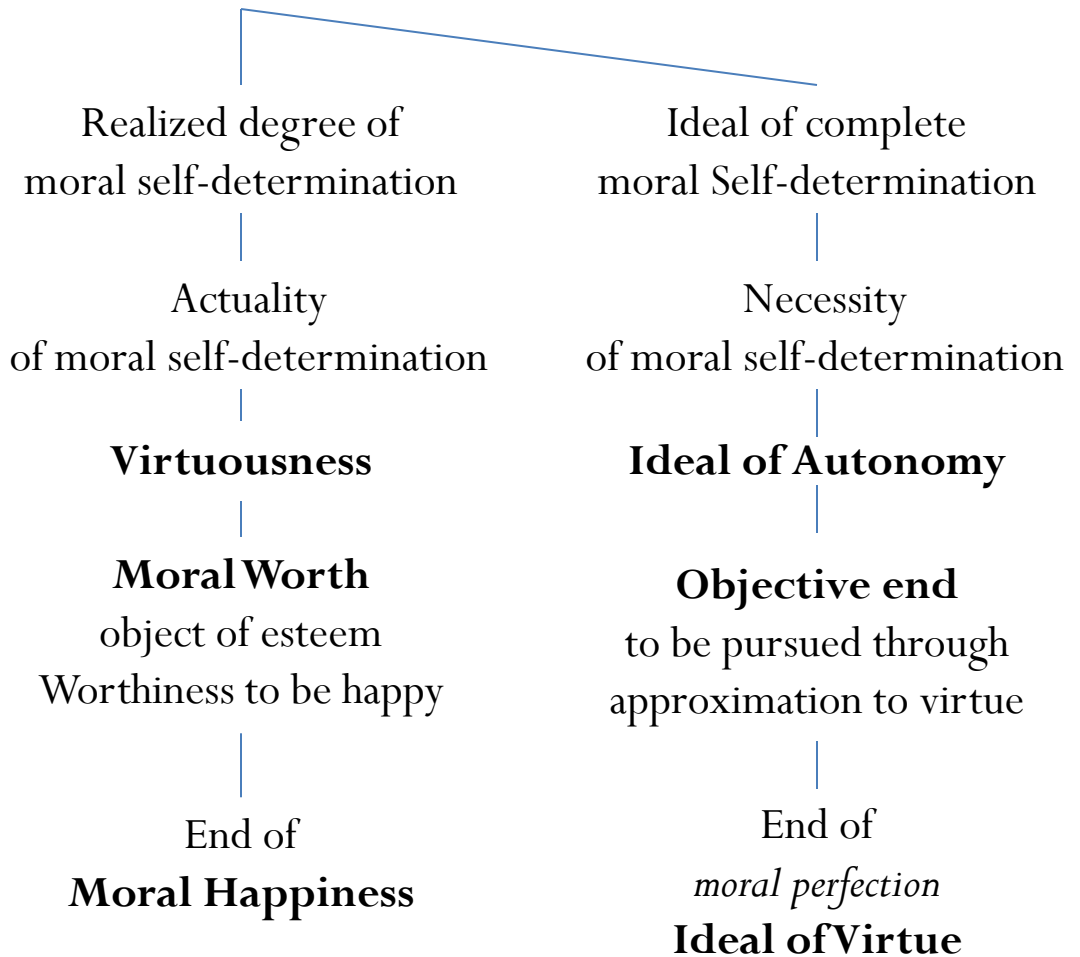
## 4.4 Virtue and moral worth

Moral worth is virtuousness, for:

1. The moral worth of a person is the degree to which she merits moral esteem.
2. Moral worth is also the degree to which it is objectively good that a person is happy.
3. The degree to which a person merits esteem is the degree to which she has acquired moral self-mastery.
5. Likewise, it is clear from Kant's discussions of the highest good that happiness ought to track virtue.
6. Thus, moral worth is virtuousness.

# Virtue – summary

## Freedom as Moral Self-determination



## 5. Kant's System of Ends

Four steps in Kant's identification of the final end of creation:

1. From natural ends to the end of nature
2. Distinction between the ultimate and the final ends of nature
3. The ultimate end of nature: culture (natural perfection)
4. The final end of nature: the highest good (ideal of virtue and moral happiness)

# 5.1 From natural ends to the end of nature

Reflection on internal purposiveness leads to search for external purposiveness.

Search for external purposiveness leads to search for an end of nature.

The end of nature must be an end that all things in nature serve as means and which it makes sense to create nature for the sake of.



## 5.2 Ultimate and final ends of nature

Internal and external purposiveness of nature:  
ultimate and final ends of nature

So, distinction ultimate end of nature (in nature) and  
final end of nature (not in nature)

The ultimate end of nature is that which all natural things serve as means to produce. The final end is the good that is served by designing nature with this teleological structure; the end for which the ultimate end is a means.

## 5.3 Culture (natural perfection) as the ultimate end of nature

The human being is the ultimate end of nature:

“[a]s the sole being on earth who has reason, and thus a capacity to set voluntary ends for himself, he [the human being] is certainly the titular lord of nature, and, if nature is regarded as a teleological system, then it is his vocation to be the ultimate end of nature.” (*KU*, 5:431)

## 5.3 Cont'd

Two candidates: culture (natural perfection) and moral happiness.

Not moral happiness; hence, culture:

“[T]o discover where in the human being we are at least to posit that ultimate end of nature, we must seek out that which nature is capable of doing in order to prepare him for what he must himself do in order to be a final end [...] among all his ends in nature there remains only the formal, subjective condition, namely the aptitude [Tauglichkeit] for setting himself ends at all [...] The production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (thus those of his freedom) is culture. Thus only culture can be the ultimate end that one has cause to ascribe to nature in regard to the human species. (*KU*, 5:431)

## 5.4 The highest good as the final end of nature

“we must raise the question of the objective ground that could have determined this productive understanding to an effect of this sort, which is then the final end for which such things exist.” (*KU*, 5:435)

The final end is not in nature, objectively and unconditionally good, served by culture. The final end, Kant argues, is the end freely set by the human being: the highest good – moral perfection and the moral happiness we may rationally believe it will produce.

## 5.4 Cont'd

- “Only in the human being, although in him only as a subject of morality, is unconditioned legislation with regard to ends to be found, which therefore makes him alone capable of being a final end, to which the whole of nature is teleologically subordinated. (*KU*, 5:435-6)
- “[t]hat which alone can make a world the object of divine decree and the end of creation is *Humanity* [...] in its full moral perfection.” (*RGV*, 6:60)
- “The final destiny of the human race is moral perfection, so far as it is accomplished through freedom, whereby man, in that case, is capable of the greatest happiness. God might already have made men perfect in this fashion, and allotted to each his share of happiness, but in that case it would not have sprung from the inner *principium* of the world. But that inner principle is freedom. The destiny of man is therefore to obtain his greatest perfection by means of his freedom. [...] This is the destined final end, and the highest moral perfection, to which the human being can attain, and for which, after the lapse of many centuries, we may still have hope.” (*V-Mo/Collins*, 27:470-1)



To Conclude...

# Freedom as Moral Self-determination

