

# CONTROL, BASING, & INFERENCE

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## 1 Rational Conditions

- Four features of rationally determinable conditions
  1. Activity (actualization of a capacity)
  2. Agency (i.e. “doings” as opposed to “happenings”)
  3. Fundamental responsibility (i.e. “imputability”)
  4. Deontic modal status (i.e. involving permission and requirement)

## 2 Control & Time

- Imputability requires control, and control is incompatible with temporal determination, but why is it incompatible?<sup>1</sup>
  1. ~~Natural causation is incompatible with leeway~~
    - (a) God lacks leeway but has control
  2. ~~Natural causation is deterministic and freedom is indeterministic~~
    - (a) Indeterministic events are indistinguishable from those that just ‘happen’ and so cannot be under the agent’s control<sup>2</sup>
  3. Natural causation (NC) is incompatible with being the proper *source* of an action
    - (a) NC entails the existence of a causal ground “outside” or distinct from and independent of the agent?
    - (b) NC entails the existence of a ground over which the agent can exert no causal influence?
    - (c) NC entails the operation of a form of causality that is not characteristic of the activity of the agent’s intellectual/rational faculty?

*The Leibnizian Objection:* If all of the determining grounds of my actions are *in* me, even though they unfold in time, then why aren’t my actions (or at least some subset of them) imputable to me?<sup>3,4</sup>

- The best explanation of (3) is (c), which also explains why Kant endorses (a)-(b), and why the Leibnizian is mistaken

### 2.1 Fundamental Powers: Spontaneity & Receptivity

*Receptivity:* A capacity, the nature of whose determining ground (i.e. that in virtue of which it actualizes) is independent of the capacity itself

<sup>1</sup> every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time. Now, since time past is no longer within my control, every action that I perform must be necessary by determining grounds *that are not within my control*, that is, I am never free at the point of time in which I act. (CPrR 5:94)

<sup>2</sup> If, then, one wants to attribute freedom to a being whose existence is determined in time, one cannot, so far at least, except this being from the law of natural necessity as to all events in its existence and consequently as to its actions as well; for, that would be tantamount to handing it over to blind chance. (CPrR 5:95)

<sup>3</sup> The production, or action whereby God produces, is anterior by nature to the existence of the creature that is produced; the creature taken in itself, with its nature and its necessary properties, is anterior to its accidental affections and to its actions; and yet all these things are in being in the same moment. God produces the creature in conformity with the exigency of the preceding instants, according to the laws of his wisdom; and the creature operates in conformity with that nature which God conveys to it in creating it always. The limitations and imperfections arise therein through the nature of the subject, which sets limits to God’s production; this is the consequence of the original imperfection of creatures. Vice and crime, on the other hand, arise there through the free inward operation of the creature, in so far as this can occur within the instant, repetition afterwards rendering it discernible. (T §388)

<sup>4</sup> even if I assume that my whole existence is independent from any alien cause (such as God), so that the determining grounds of my causality and even of my whole existence are not outside me, this would not in the least transform that natural necessity into freedom. For, at every point of time I still stand under the necessity of being determined to action by *that which is not within my control*, and the series of events infinite a parte priori which I can only continue in accordance with a predetermined order would never begin of itself: it would be a continuous natural chain, and therefore my causality would never be freedom. (CPrV 5:94-5)

*Spontaneity* A capacity, the nature of whose determining ground is *not* independent of the capacity itself

- Kant considers receptivity and spontaneity as fundamental and opposed capacities or powers of substances to bear properties
  - Why “fundamental”?
    - \* Kant understands all the other capacities of a being in terms of their manifesting either a receptive or spontaneous power<sup>5</sup>
  - Why “opposed”?
    - \* Kant canonically characterizes them as opposed<sup>6</sup>
      - The nature of the determining ground of the actualization of a receptive capacity is independent of the capacity itself while the nature of the determining ground of an (absolutely) spontaneous capacity is *not* independent of the capacity itself

## 2.2 Kant’s Objection to Imputable Temporally Caused Actions

1. All causality is lawful<sup>7</sup>
  2. If the causality of the cause of an action is temporal, then it is derived from a law of receptivity/sensibility rather than spontaneity/intellect<sup>8</sup>
  3. The causality of the cause of an action, whose grounds lie solely within the agent, is nevertheless still temporal insofar as it is or depends on a determinate temporal location (e.g., preceding or following)<sup>9</sup>
  4. ∴ Any condition determined through a temporal ground, even if that ground is wholly “in” one, is thereby a *receptive* rather than *spontaneous* condition
- While (1) is plausibly held by Kant’s opponents, (2) and (3) seem potentially question-begging
    - Why should the Leibnizian (or compatibilist more generally) admit them?

## 3 Basing

- The “basing” relation is a relation that exists between acts, states, etc. (i.e. “conditions”) such that one is rationally “based” on the other
  - What is the difference between “explained by” and “rationally based on”?
    - \* “reason why” vs “reason for which”<sup>10</sup>
- Varieties of RDC requiring basing
  1. Conceptualization (one ‘mark’ on another)
  2. Judgment (predicate on subject)
  3. Doxastic attitudes (e.g. belief or knowledge on evidence/reasons)
  4. Inference (conclusion on premises)

<sup>5</sup> All our representations have a twofold origin; they arise (1) from sensibility and (2) from the intellect. The first is called the lower, and the other the higher cognitive faculty. The first belongs to sensuality and the other to intellectuality. Everything that is sensible rests on receptivity; but what belongs to spontaneity belongs to the higher powers. We will have sensible cognitions, sensible pleasure and displeasure, and sensible desires. All three of these powers can be sensible. Intellectual pleasure is called moral feeling... (Metaphysik L<sub>2</sub>, 28:584 (1790–1))

<sup>6</sup> If we will call the receptivity of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way sensibility, then opposed to it [so ist dagegen] is the faculty for bringing forth representations itself, or the spontaneity of cognition, the understanding. (A51/B75)

<sup>7</sup> the concept of causality brings with it that of laws in accordance with which, by something that we call a cause, something else, namely an effect, must be posited (GIII, 4:446)

<sup>8</sup> Space and the things which occupy space thus determine themselves merely according to the laws of sensibility, to which they are posited in relation. Space and time are therefore also not thinkable through the understanding and therefore not determinate concepts of the understanding, but rather are merely the subjective form under which things appear to us. (Metaphysik Vigilantius 29:997-8 (1794-5); cf. Transcendental Aesthetic)

<sup>9</sup> it is a necessary law of our sensibility, thus a **formal condition** of all perceptions, that the preceding time necessarily determines the following time (in that I cannot arrive at the following time except by passing through the preceding one) (A199/B244)

<sup>10</sup> Davidson tried to explain the difference between *reasons that one has to act* (what are sometimes called “possessed normative reasons”) and *reasons for which one acts* (or what are sometimes called “motivating reasons” or “operative reasons”) as a difference consisting in the fact that the latter must be, but the former need not be, reasons that cause one’s action. ... If we use the term “explanation” to denote any adequate answer to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, then we can state Davidson’s insight by saying that your *reasons for which* are always “explanatory” reasons, whether or not the relevant kind of explanation is causal. An analogous point holds true of belief: a *reason for which* you believe is always a *reason why* you believe. (Neta 2019, 181)

### 3.1 Acquaintance, Cognition, Conceptualization

- The core of Kant's conception of basing concerns the difference between differentiation and recognition of the ground of such differentiation
- Kant distinguishes different forms of "objective content" (*objective Gehalt*)<sup>11,12</sup>
  - Acquaintance with an object entails distinguishing that object from others
    - \* Representation of features that render an object different or similar to others, though without awareness of the *ground* of that difference/similarity
  - Cognition of an object entails representing *why* or *how* that object differs from others
    - \* Cognition allows representation of the *ground* of difference or similarity—i.e. that *because of which* an object is similar or different
    - \* Kant's "Mark" (*Mermal*) theory of concepts construes grasp of a concept in terms of grasp of its content or the "grounds" of its cognition<sup>13,14</sup>
    - \* Representation of ground *as such* requires the generation of or transition to a mental state *on the basis of* the content of one's present or previous state
- QUESTION: What is does it mean to say that consciousness "suffices for a distinction, but not for a consciousness of the difference"? (see figure)

## 4 Inference

*Inference*: the *mental act* of connecting one contentful mental condition with another *because* of your representing one as supporting the other

- Kant's position: Inference requires absolute spontaneity, and since thinking requires the capacity for inference, if we are not absolutely spontaneous we are not genuine *thinkers*

### 4.1 The Taking Argument

- What is "taking"?

*Intentionalism*: Condition A is based on B in virtue of the representation that A is so based

- Prob<sub>1</sub>: overintellectualizes taking?
- Prob<sub>2</sub>: circular?

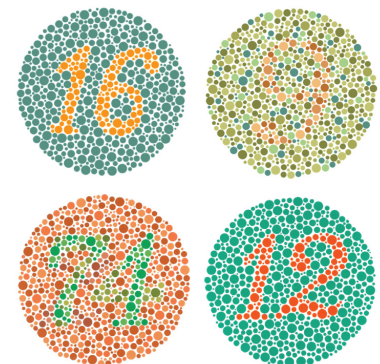
*Dispositionalism*: Condition A is based on B in virtue of the subject's disposition to A in virtue of B

<sup>11</sup> In regard to the objective content of our cognition in general, we may think the following degrees, in accordance with which cognition can...be graded: The **first** degree of cognition is: to represent something; The **second**: to represent something with consciousness, or to perceive [*wahrnehmen*] (*percipere*); The **third**: to be acquainted with something [*etwas kennen*] (*noscere*), or to represent something in comparison with other things, both as to sameness and as to difference; The **fourth**: to be acquainted with something with consciousness, i.e. to cognize [*erkennen*] it (*cognoscere*). Animals are acquainted with objects too, but they do not cognize them. (*Jäsche Logik* (1800) §X, 9:64-5; cf. *Dohna-Wundlacken Logik* (c. 1792) 24:730-1; *Wiener Logik* (1780) 24:846; *Logik Blomberg* (c. 1771) 24:132-3, 134-5, 136)

<sup>12</sup> Clarity is not, as the logicians say, the consciousness of a representation...Rather a representation is clear if the consciousness in it is sufficient for a **consciousness of the difference** between it and others. *To be sure, if this consciousness suffices for a distinction, but not for a consciousness of the difference, then the representation must still be called obscure [dunke]*. So there are infinitely many degrees of consciousness down to its vanishing. (B414-15; my italics)

<sup>13</sup> A mark is that in a thing [*Ding*] which makes up part of its cognition, or—what is the same—a partial representation so far as it is considered as ground of cognition [*Erkenntnisgrund*] of the whole representation (*Jäsche Logik* Introduction §8; 9:58)

<sup>14</sup> As one says of a **ground** in general that it contains the **consequences** under itself, so can one also say of the concept that as **ground of cognition** it contains all those under itself from which it has been abstracted, e.g. the concept of metal contains under itself gold, silver, copper, etc. (*Jäsche Logik* 9:96; emphasis in original)



Ishihara Color Test

- Prob: “blind” transitions

*Hybrid view:* Condition A is based on B in virtue of a representation of the relation between A and B, and in virtue of the disposition exercised in relating A and B<sup>15,16</sup>

1. Conceptual representation constitutively depends on the exercise of one’s capacity for inference—that is, the capacity for a particular kind of content-based connection of one mental state to another.
  2. Inference requires “taking” one state as the basis for the next.
  3. Taking is an act under the subject’s control.
  4. If the connection of one state to another is merely part of the “mechanism of nature”—that is, it is wholly determined by temporally preceding causes—then it is not under the subject’s control.
  5. ∴ Mental connections due to the mechanism of nature are incompatible with the subject’s engaging in inference—that is, inference requires transcendental freedom/absolute spontaneity
- What justifies (2)?
    - Constitutive laws of the intellect (see below arg)
  - What justifies (3)?
    - Inference satisfies 4 features of RDCs (i.e. active, agential, responsible, deontic modal status)

#### 4.2 *The Constitutive Laws Argument*

1. The acts of a faculty are governed by its constitutive laws
  2. The laws governing the intellectual faculty (*der Verstand; Intellectus*) are not those constituting the mechanism of nature
  3. If the ultimate ground of a transition from one mental state to another is due to the mechanism of nature then it would not be a transition determined by intellectual laws
  4. ∴ If a mental transition is intellectual/rational—i.e. if it is to count as *thinking*—it must be both lawful and independent of the mechanism of nature and thus transcendently free
- If this argument works it explains Kant’s “Taking” argument
  - If taking were not under the subject’s control then an “alien” causality would be at work, and the resulting mental activity or state could not thereby be characterized as a case of thinking. The constitutive laws argument also helps us understand why the imputability of an act is so closely linked to the causal conditions of its production.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The basing relation obtains between A’s reason R, on the one hand, and A’s C’ing, on the other, when A exercises a disposition to C when R by virtue of representing that very disposition-exercise in an object-involving way under the category *ex post justifying*. (Neta 2019, 211)

<sup>16</sup> [For Kant] what rational activity needs to exemplify is ... the attentive control required to connect *this* contentful state or judgment with *that* state or judgment. ... This account incorporates elements of dispositionalism, but avoids the worry about “blind” action. For example, if a rational subject is challenged as to why she judged in a particular way, and if her transition is one that makes sense to her, she would thereby be disposed to cite the relevant ground or reason for her judgment, whether or not she has the explicit concept of reason or ground. For example, a subject who has sorted a group of red and blue objects by their colors might cite those colors when queried as to why she sorted in the way that she did. Such a reply indicates that the subject has a grasp of her reasons even if she does not identify using such terms. Crucially though, the dispositions are not bare; that the subject’s rational activity is one of making sense of things accounts for her various dispositions to respond in the way that she does. (McLear, 16-17)

<sup>17</sup> one cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from any other quarter with respect to its judgments, since the subject would then attribute the determination of his judgment not to his reason but to an impulse. (/Groundwork III/, 4:448; see also CF 7:27)

### 4.3 *The Role of Self-Consciousness*

- QUESTION: Why, and in what way does self-consciousness explain our ability to make inferences (or for basing more generally)?
  - A<sub>1</sub>: It is the capacity whose exercise just *is* the reflexive representation of that very exercise in being ‘committed’ to the RDC in question<sup>18</sup>
  - A<sub>2</sub>: It is the capacity to be aware of the condition as one’s own that explains how it could be part of an answer to a “why” question, and thus (be in a position) be intelligible to the intellect<sup>19</sup>
- QUESTION: In what sense are A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> different?

### *References & Further Reading*

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<sup>18</sup> For an agent *A* to *C* for reason *R* involves *A*’s *de se*, object-involving representation of a particular explanatory relation between *R*, on the one hand, and her *C*’ing, on the other, and that object-involving representation represents that same explanatory relation under the category *ex post justifying*. Such a representation may be conceptual or nonconceptual, conscious or unconscious, accurate or inaccurate, and it may involve many different specific contents or guises. (Neta 2019, 204)

<sup>19</sup> a reason, or in Kant’s terms a “ground of cognition”, which is grasped as a reason (even if not explicitly in those terms), is taken by the agent as the basis for her judging in a particular way. But to do this the reasoner must be able to represent the ground as her basis for engaging in the act of judgment that she does (e.g. “red things are not blue” or “red things are extended”). Kant’s view is that it isn’t enough for there to simply be particular kinds of logical or material connections between the contents of one’s mental states. One must possess, and exercise, the capacity to be aware of contentful states as one’s own if being in such a state is to count as grasp of a reason for making one kind of mental connection as opposed to another. (McLear, 28)