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**THE COHERENCE OF THE CRITICAL PROJECT OF THE
*GRUNDLEGUNG***

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RESUMO: o objetivo do presente artigo é oferecer uma visão geral do projeto da *Grundlegung* (“Fundamentação da metafísica dos costumes”) e de sua coerência interna. Isto será argumentado baseado nos problemas filosóficos e filológicos que a obra foi proposta a resolver para ter completamente atingido seu propósito, e o porquê foi necessário a Kant aplicar sua filosofia crítica a essa necessidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Filosofia crítica. Crítica da razão pura. Fundamentação da metafísica dos costumes.

ABSTRACT: The aim of the present article is to offer an overview of the project of the *Grundlegung* and its inner coherence. This will be argued based on the philosophical and philological problems the work was supposed to solve in order to have fully achieved its purpose, and why it was necessary for Kant to apply his critical philosophy to this need.

KEYWORDS: Critical philosophy. Critique of pure reason. Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals.

The *Grundlegung zur metaphysic der sitten* is one of Kant's most famous works about morality. Kant set himself to explain the very nature of morality and defend what he truly believed morality to be. He took this enterprise very seriously since, as he states, morality is easily misunderstood and can lose its true essential meaning. He accused his predecessors of not exercising such caution.

But it might be a not unworthy object of consideration to ask whether pure philosophy in all its parts does not require each its particular man, and whether it would not stand better with the learned trade as a whole if those who, catering to the taste of the public, are accustomed to sell the empirical along with the rational, mixed in all sorts of proportions unknown even to themselves - calling themselves 'independent thinkers', and those who prepare the merely rational part 'quibblers' - if they were warned not to carry on simultaneously two enterprises that are very different in their mode of treatment, each of which perhaps requires a particular talent, and the combination of which in a single person produces only bunglers (...).¹

The proper meaning of "morality" has been controversial since the concept began to take shape in ancient Greece. In this context, Kant was not an exception. In Kant's mind, the general concept of morality constituted a philosophical problem as much as a philological one. In the *Grundlegung*, the subject of morality was not only a matter of discussion of which system should prevail, according to the philosophers of Kant's time, but also a problem of pointing out what was to be understood by "morality" in the first place.

It is true that Kant claimed to be the first to have properly separated pure ethics from empirical considerations,² and thereby find the true nature of the supreme principle of morality. On the other hand, he was doing nothing new presenting that which common reason already thinks about morality, albeit not in a clear way. This is also valid for the concepts that he borrowed from the Greeks, since he was inspired by previous philosophy. As an illustration of this point, for instance, part of the content of Kant's general moral theory was inspired by the *ancients* (the ancient Greek philosophers), as Kant himself seems to admit in the very first pages of the *Grundlegung*.³

¹ Kant's works are cited following the Akademie pagination and its edition number. Abbreviations are used to designate the *Grundlegung zur metaphysic der sitten* as GMS, and the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* as KrV. GMS, 04: Ak. 388.

² See. GMS, 04: Ak. 388; 389; 390; 391; 411.

³ See. GMS, 04: Ak. 393.

Moderation in affects and passions, self-control, and sober reflection not only are good for many aims, but seem even to constitute a part of the *inner* worth of a person yet they lack much in order to be declared good without limitation (however unconditionally they were praised by the ancients).⁴

The qualities of “courage” and “self-control” were, for the Greeks, two of the primary moral virtues, along with “wisdom”, “justice”, and sometimes “piety”.⁵ With careful analysis it is noticeable that the qualities of “courage” and “self-control” are not really the properties of a good will, but rather are part of Kant’s ethical theory. For he say of these qualities:

Without the principles of a good will they can become extremely evil, and the cold-bloodedness of a villain makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes than he would have been held without it.⁶

As Manfred Kuehn reminds us:

(...) Character was for Kant already in 1772–73 closely bound up with active desires or willing. But he seems to have talked in these lectures only of the necessity of a good character, not of the necessity of a good will that plays such an important role in his later work. In 1775–76 this changes. Kant notes in the anthropology lectures of this semester that ‘the character is in human beings the most important thing. Everything depends on whether it is good, and therefore we must investigate the source of the character.’⁷

This search for the source of the character, as Manfred Kuehn points out, was to be founded on the good will. According to Kant’s mature thinking, although the qualities of the character as part of the inner worth of a person are not good in themselves in the absence of the influence of a good will, they do have their function in his moral system. They are not all to be abandoned, since Kant says that these same qualities are “even conducive to this good will itself and can make its work much easier, but still have despite this inner unconditioned worth, yet always presuppose a good will.”⁸ In Kant’s moral philosophy, qualities, or indeed the general concept under the name of these qualities, were inspired by the Greeks. Another example of the same kind of inspiration comes from the concept of autonomy given by Schneenwind:⁹ the concept

⁴ GMS, 04: Ak. 394.

⁵ See Plato, *Meno* 78d–e, *Republic* 427e; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.6–12; Cicero, *On Duties* 1.15.

⁶ GMS, 04: Ak. 394.

⁷ KUEHN, M. *Ethics and anthropology in the development of Kant’s moral philosophy*. In: TIMMERMAN (edit.). *KANT’S Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 20.

⁸ GMS, 04: Ak. 394.

⁹ SCHNEENWIND, J. B. *A invenção da autonomia*. Tradução de Magda França Lopes, Rio Grande do Sul: Editora Unisinos, 2005, p. 527.

of autonomy, central to Kant's moral system, was extracted from the political thinking of the XVII and XVIII centuries, where it was used to discuss the property of self-governed states.

Hence, although Kant knew where to search for an uncontroversial conceptual framework for his ethical theory based on previous ethical discussion, to him the problem was how to separate the empirical part from the pure part contained in this set of concepts considered under the general name of "morality".¹⁰ For Kant, the questions "What is morality?" and "What do we mean when we say we ought to be moral individuals?" still remained open. For Kant believed that neither previous philosophers nor the common man had reached any clear and correct idea of what morality is.

As acknowledged by Kant, the very notion that we do not know exactly what to think, when we think about moral affairs, is an indication of the necessity of identifying something in human thought that is minimally universal about it. Simply put: what do all of us, in a more or less accurate way, think in common about "morality"? Kant seemed to believe that there is at least one thing universal about morality. According to him, our immediate thinking is usually based on a principle. This principle he called the "categorical imperative".¹¹

The aim of the present article is to offer an overview of the project of the *Grundlegung* and its inner coherence. This will be argued based on the philosophical and philological problems the work was supposed to solve in order to have fully achieved its purpose, and why it was necessary for Kant to apply his critical philosophy to this need. In what follows, an attempt will be made to clarify some of the most important reasons for Kant not to have started with the mere definition of the categorical imperative and then proceed to its justification followed by a comparison between the critical project of the *Critique of pure reason* and the *Grundlegung*. Finally, this paper

¹⁰ This set of concepts is expounded in the three sections of the *Grundlegung*, the main ones being: "good will", "duty", "will", "freedom", and "autonomy". Many of the other concepts presented in the work relate to these concepts as complex propositions: "actions done for the sake of duty", or are built as new concepts from the joining of preexisting concepts, examples being free will, autonomous will, and so on.

¹¹ See GMS, 04: Ak. 404.

reaches the conclusion that the understanding of Kant's critical philosophy in the *Grundlegung* is to be found in its inner coherence, that is, not in full comparison with the first *Critique* but rather inside its own boundaries.

I

According to Kant, the categorical imperative is the principle underlying our judgments of actions and decisions in everyday life, whether for good or bad conduct. Accordingly, the task of clarifying and explaining the principle would have been of primary importance in the way the *Grundlegung* was structured. In the first section, "Transition from common rational moral cognition to philosophical moral cognition", the *Grundlegung* starts with an exposition of the concepts that are part of common reason regarding morality. It is only in the second section, and to some extent in the third section, that Kant offers, respectively, a formulation of the categorical imperative and some clarification of what he is suggesting to be universal about morality.

If we persevere, however, in the task of clarification of the universal elements present in the human mind concerning the principle of morality, a first approach to making the categorical imperative intelligible would be to define its scope by means of the application of the principle in the real world. This can be seen when a simple explanation for popular common reason is sought, as found in the first section of the book. This procedure seems feasible, but is not without problems. Even in the simplest possible explanation, there are difficulties with the elaboration of the categorical imperative supported by examples. Firstly, it seems hard to understand what is precisely meant when we think of the categorical imperative as a concept of morality, even when we believe that we are applying it in our judgments or actions. Examples of the applied principle could not help a more enlightened mind to understand the concept of morality. From the perspective of the principle's application, it could be illustrated by its effects in the real world, which we simply call actions. Some specifications could be given to point out that certain actions are made according to the principle, while others are not. Apart from the subtlety that would be lost concerning very similar actions, from Kant's point of view there is an additional problem in attempting to understand the meaning of

the categorical imperative by means of its application. According to Kant's general theory of morals, this is because experience cannot enable us to distinguish actions that are moral from those that are not. Moral actions have some features that cannot be detected *a posteriori*. In summary, beyond the conformity of the action with the rule expressed in the principle, moral actions involve the intention of the agent and their conformity to an *a priori* universally valid law.

As the *Grundlegung* presents to us, the natural way to comprehend the conceptual meaning of morality, as well as its principle, would be to start from the common understanding that we all have about issues of morality and proceed to the philosophical approach, which has the advantage of conceptual accuracy. This would be in agreement with the formal structure of the book in relation to this point. The part of the book that concerns this task is divided into two sections. The first is called "From common rational moral cognition to philosophical moral cognition" and the second is "Transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals". Obviously, the third section, "Transition from the metaphysics of morals to the critique of pure practical reason", is missing from this scheme, because its aim is not to clarify the categorical imperative, but to prove its validity. Hence, aside from the task of exploring morality and its principle, Kant sets himself to accomplish one other task in the *Grundlegung*, stating: "The present groundwork is, however, nothing more than the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality".¹² By establishment, Kant means the justification of the principle of the categorical imperative. Consideration of the first task alone would not be sufficient for a complete definition of what Kant considered the purpose of the *Grundlegung* to be. However, it is nonetheless necessary, since it is important that we first agree on the principle that we commonly regard as moral, and then try to determine its possibility.

Up to this point, one would not find any difficulty in understanding Kant's objectives in the *Grundlegung*. The problem is that in this work, Kant attributes a specific meaning to the word "critique". As in the first *Critique*, his intention with the *Grundlegung* was to incorporate the project into his critical philosophy. While in the first work, the term "critique"¹³ has a broad meaning that encompasses the

¹² GMS, 04: Ak. 392.

¹³ The term "Critique" is to be understood in this paper only to be referring to the idea of Kant's general project in the *Critique of pure reason*.

“transcendental deduction”, the solution of the antinomies and the foundation of the *a priori* synthetic judgments in physics and mathematics, the *Grundlegung* has a purpose that is much humbler although not easier. This is to present a metaphysics of morals, given that the categorical imperative pertains to pure philosophy, as much as to prove the existence of a supreme moral principle. Although the objectives of the two works are different, there are some similarities that make them both part of Kant's critical philosophy. Notwithstanding, an understanding of the critical project of the *Grundlegung* is to be found in its inner coherence, rather than in full comparison with the *Critique of pure reason*.

Whereas in the case of the *Grundlegung*, one who reads the work for the first time is not presented with any clear definition of the meaning of the supreme principle of morality, this was not so in the first *Critique*, which is perhaps not so surprising. In essence, Kant took the meaning of synthetic *a priori* judgments for granted. Out of all the philosophers of his time, he claims to have been the first to make a proper distinction between analytical and synthetic judgments,¹⁴ and it is clear that he was sufficiently well grounded in the sciences to be able to show where to find them. Whereas in his moral doctrine it seems difficult to understand the application of a moral principle, in his epistemological theory, the kind of principle with which he was concerned could be easily found in physics and mathematics. Any talented philosopher who could understand the method and the body of knowledge of these sciences could also understand that Kant was equating the principles found in them to a very specific kind of human judgment. He called this *a priori* synthetic judgment. It would not be very hard for Kant to make his audience understand the object of his investigation: the conditions for possible *a priori* synthetic judgments in mathematics and physics.¹⁵ If this is not immediately clear, one can find in the Introduction of the second edition of the *Critique of pure reason* a statement where Kant takes the whole problem of the *Critique* to be summed up in the following statement:

One has already gained a great deal if one can bring a multitude of investigations under the formula of a single problem. For one thereby not only lightens one's own task, by determining it precisely, but also the

¹⁴ See. Introduction (B): *Critique of pure reason*. KANT, I. *The critique of pure reason*. Edited [and translated] by Paul Guyer, Allen W Wood. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹⁵ KrV, B 19.

judgment of anyone else who wants to examine whether we have satisfied our plan or not.¹⁵

The real problem of pure reason is now contained in the question: “How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?”¹⁶ Accordingly, the general problem of the *Critique*, understood in the form of a question, concerns finding the conditions of the synthetic *a priori* judgments in general.¹⁶ This enlightens the understanding of the object of investigation in the *Critique* and helps to convey the idea that the problem is more easily stated in a single sentence than in the *Grundlegung*. Even though, as Gardner emphasizes: “In his later writings Kant formulates the fundamental problems of ethics and aesthetics too in terms of synthetic *a priori*”.¹⁷

Although, in the middle part of the *Grundlegung*, Kant gives a hint about what might be the problem he was preparing to deal with in the form of a moral “synthetic *a priori* proposition”, his concern was much more with the clarification and exposition of what was to be understood by the supreme principle of morality, rather than with the principles of theoretical sciences discussed in the *Critique of pure reason*. This is supported in the text, because Kant simply says: “Synthetic *a priori* judgments are contained as principles in all theoretical sciences of reason.”¹⁸ As stated in other passages, it is possible to conclude that Kant believed that for one to have a glimpse or, though not fully developed, idea of a synthetic *a priori* judgment, one only had to look in the right place, namely in the theoretical sciences of Newtonian physics and mathematics. In the *Grundlegung*, this was not even possible. According to Kant, nobody had correctly described (or, better, discovered) the principle before he did, so nobody could be debating it in formal ethics. On the other hand, since some features of the categorical imperative had been correctly interpreted by his predecessors, while others had not been, it was necessary to provide a clear description of the principle.¹⁹

Hence, in the first *Critique*, Kant’s purpose, although having a broader scope than the work we focus on here, was to show how *a priori* synthetic judgments are possible. This hopefully sheds some light on why Kant, in the *Grundlegung*, tells us that

¹⁶ GARDNER, S. *Routledge Philosophy guidebook to Kant and the Critique of pure reason*. First published by Routledge 11. London: New Fetter Lane, 1999, p. 51.

¹⁷ Idem, 1999, p. 51.

¹⁸ KrV, B 14.

¹⁹ See WOOD, A. *What is Kantian ethics?* In: *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited and translated by Allen W. Wood with essays by J. B. Schneewind . . . [et al.], New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 157-180.

it is necessary for us to agree on the object of our investigation, before the investigation itself. In Kant's opinion, there was no previous agreement on what constituted either morality or a body of unchallengeable principles that could be regarded as morality, as there was in physics and mathematics. Thus, the internal coherence of the project of the *Grundlegung* is not to be found in full comparison with the project of the first *Critique*, although the two works share many of the same main characteristics.

II

One of these characteristics is to be found in their methods, with both seeming to begin from presupposed assertions about human cognitive and practical capabilities, and proceeding to the justification of these assertions by a “transcendental deduction”²⁰. Another is that they offer a new approach to metaphysics, which Kant hoped his successors would follow. In both works, the aim is to resolve the lack of universal agreement in metaphysics, which then is supposed to be rescued from its lack of universal agreement, and to be put it on an unstoppable progress following the examples of Newtonian physics and mathematics. Once more, there are differences in the way Kant organized his critical projects. In the first *Critique*, one can easily grasp the object of inquiry by becoming acquainted with the formal principles of mathematics and physics, while the demands of the categorical imperative for moral actions make the moral examples in the practical realm impossible to detect. Hence, there is the need for a conceptual definition of the principles of morals or practical philosophy. Surprisingly, such a definition is not presented in the *Grundlegung*, as one might have expected. Indeed, Kant does not offer a clear and precise definition of either morality or its principle, other than the one that is presented briefly in the *Preface*.

(...) natural and moral philosophy can each have their empirical part, because the former must determine its laws of nature as an object of experience, the latter must determine the laws for the will of the human being insofar as he is affected by nature - the first as laws in accordance with which everything happens, the second as those in accordance with which everything ought to

²⁰ See. The Transcendental Doctrine of Method - Third Chapter: The architectonic of pure reason. KANT, I. *The critique of pure reason*. Edited [and translated] by Paul Guyer, Allen W Wood. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998. KrV, A 832/ B 860.

happen, but also reckoning with the conditions under which it often does not happen²¹.

Instead, Kant begins the first section of the *Grundlegung* with a baffling statement: “There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a good will”.²² It is clear that he is not presenting us with a definition of morality, but rather with a concept of a good will. Kant then proceeds to explain what is to be properly understood by this. Later on, with the same analytical attitude, he introduces the concept of *duty*. This way of setting things out is not arbitrary.

The reason why, in the beginning of the book, Kant proceeded to analyze these concepts, instead of just giving a clear definition of morality and its principle, is that he believed that common reason, when dealing with moral affairs, immediately connects the concept of morality with the concepts of “good will” and “duty”. According to this view, the common reason thinking about morality is not so much aware of a precise definition of it as it is of the concepts generally associated with it.

This sheds some light on why Kant starts from the common reason moral understanding, presenting the concepts that normally come with it. In the second section, Kant introduces a new approach to clarify the meaning of morality. The second part of the book provides us with two directives. It is formally designed to present morality in its pure form and to give a philosophical approach to its principles. In this section, there is no more room for common reason and its notions about what morality might be. Throughout the section, Kant asserts that it was finally possible to separate pure morals from empirical considerations, a task which only philosophical knowledge could help in performing.

I here ask only whether the nature of the science does not require the empirical part always to be carefully separated from the rational, placing ahead of a genuine (empirical) physics a metaphysics of nature, and ahead of practical anthropology a metaphysics of morals, which must be carefully cleansed of everything empirical, in order to know how much pure reason could achieve in both cases; and from these sources pure reason itself creates its teachings *a priori*, whether the latter enterprise be carried on by all teachers of morals (whose name is legion) or only by some who feel they have a calling for it.²³

²¹ GMS, 04: Ak. 388.

²² GMS, 04: Ak. 393.

²³ GMS, 04: Ak. 389.

The second section, “Transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals”, begins with an exposition of the concept of duty. Surprisingly, Kant continues with the concerns of the first section. The formula of the categorical imperative is not yet presented to us, with the text proceeding to justify the closure of the explanation that the concepts linked to morality were not in danger of being misunderstood in terms of their true *a priori* essence. From the beginning of the section, the argument finally reaches the explanation that although the concept of duty could be described by common reason, it could not be inferred from experience.

If we have thus far drawn our concept of duty from the common use of our practical reason, it is by no means to be inferred from this that we have treated it as a concept of experience. Rather, if we attend to the experience of the deeds and omissions of human beings, we encounter frequent and, as we ourselves concede, just complaints that one could cite no safe examples of the disposition to act from pure duty; that, even if some of what is done may *accord* with what *duty* commands, nevertheless it always remains doubtful whether it is really done *from duty* and thus has a moral worth.²⁴

Although Kant may not have begun to achieve the purpose of his exposition in the first pages of the second section, he was preventing any inconsistencies with his general pure philosophy theory. This is coherent with his approach in the second section, because the clear exposition of the *a priori* concepts of morality is to be properly done with the transition of the merely philosophical approach to the metaphysical one.

If, then, there is no genuine supreme principle of morality which does not have to rest on pure reason independent of all experience, then I believe it is not necessary even to ask whether it is good to expound these concepts in general (*in abstracto*), as they, together with the principles belonging to them, are fixed *a priori*, provided that this cognition is distinguished from common cognition and is to be called ‘philosophical’. But in our age this might well be necessary. For if one were to collect votes on which is to be preferred, a pure rational cognition abstracted from everything empirical, hence a metaphysics of morals, or popular practical philosophy, then one would soon guess on which side the preponderance will fall.²⁵

In the critical project of the *Grundlegung*, metaphysics should be able to accomplish the task of clarifying the concepts pertaining to the general idea of morality and its supreme principle. Not losing sight of the overall project in the *Grundlegung*, metaphysics is, in Kant’s judgment, the proper kind of knowledge for an exposition of

²⁴ GMS, 04: Ak. 406.

²⁵ GMS, 04: Ak. 409.

morality, giving its principle the *a priori* properties it might be thought to have.²⁶ On the other hand, in the first *Critique*, metaphysics was more subject to an inquiry based on methodological considerations, because once the true purpose and method of metaphysics are discovered, it should be able to assist philosophy, following steps made in physics and mathematics towards progress and correctness. Hence, in the *Critique of pure reason*, critical philosophy was the branch of knowledge responsible for supervising the activity of reason, as well as its ends. From an overall perspective, the aim of the critical project was to achieve the proper use of reason in philosophy. In the *Grundlegung*, critical philosophy has the same usefulness, since it contributes to practical philosophy finding its way towards correctness and progress. In addition, it has a much more specific contribution: to enable common reason, as much as developed reason, to reach a proper understanding of the nature of morality in the first place.

The second purpose of the critical project, as mentioned briefly before, is to prove the validity of the categorical imperative or, as Kant calls it, the supreme principle of morality. Tracing some of the similarities and differences between the critical project of the *Grundlegung* and the first *Critique* concerning this issue, the first similarity that comes to the attention is Kant's concern with *a priori* synthetic judgments in the realms of both theoretical and practical reason.

In the preface of the *Critique of pure reason*, Kant outlines that his problem in that work was to answer the question of how *a priori* synthetic judgments are possible. Unfortunately, it is not possible to perceive all the challenges, the extent, and the implications of the much deeper problem of the *Critique* structured throughout the work with simply attaining to this point, but it sums up the philosophical project in a very simple way. Every philosophical system has to solve its chosen problems, and answering this question would be the key to solving every minor implication contained in the more specific problems, and its relation to the more general aims of the work²⁷. This enables us to be consistent with what is to be understood by not only the sole problem of the *Critique*, but also the various specific problems that all relate to the same question: How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?

²⁶ For a full discussion of this point, see. PATON, H. J. *The aim and structure of the Grundlegung*. The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 31 (Apr., 1958), pp. 112-130.

²⁷ Here “aims” is used, rather than “aim”, because depending on what guides the right direction towards progress and correctness, the sole problem of the *Critique of pure reason* can be understood in multiple ways.

In the *Grundlegung*, it seems that Kant had a similar approach to defining what was to be solved in the work, by focusing on the conditions for a possible *a priori* synthetic principle of morality (the categorical imperative). He says:

Thus if freedom of the will is presupposed, then morality follows together with its principle from mere analysis of its concept. Nonetheless, the latter is always a synthetic proposition: an absolutely good will is that whose maxim can always contain itself considered as universal law, for through analysis of the concept of an absolutely good will that quality of the maxim cannot be found. Such synthetic propositions, however, are possible only when both cognitions are combined with one another through the connection with a third in which they are both to be encountered²⁸.

III

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is clear that Kant had a similar conception about the foundation of the *a priori* principles of human cognition, whether they stem from theoretical reason or practical reason. Nonetheless, different approaches were used. To begin with, each work is distinct in terms of the way that the problems are structured. In the first *Critique*, the general problem concerning the conditions for possible *a priori* synthetic judgments involves many specific problems, such as Hume's remark on inductive experience and its lack of necessity and universality, the everlasting disagreement in rationalist philosophy, and so on²⁹. As in the *Grundlegung*, its problem is singly rooted in the clarification of the supreme principle of morality and its validation.

Secondly, evidence for the problem of the *Critique of pure reason* being far more complex than the one presented in the *Grundlegung* can be found in Kant's remarks about the necessity of solving it, but from outside his own philosophy. The need to answer the question of how *a priori* synthetic judgments are possible is related to the foundation of Newtonian physics as a universal and necessary knowledge, with philosophy in general only succeeding in producing *a priori* synthetic judgments. As in

²⁸ GMS, 04: Ak. 447.

²⁹ See. Preface to second edition (B) – KANT, I. *The critique of pure reason*. Edited [and translated] by Paul Guyer, Allen W Wood. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998. KrV, B vii.

the *Grundlegung*, the place where the problem was born is to be found in the inner coherence of the work.

The work sets out to provide a precise exposition of the true meaning of morality and its principles, and in doing so can exhibit a certain degree of *petitio principii*. In the first two sections of the book, where Kant presents us with general concepts related to morality and the categorical imperative as its supreme principle, he takes for granted the validity of morality understood in the way he presented. Nonetheless, he was aware of his mistake, which he calls a “circle” (as in a vicious circle). Although the interpretation of the circle and its connection with the previous exposition has its own exegetical problems,³⁰ there is no doubt that Kant understood it to be a case of *petitio principii*.

One must freely admit it that a kind of circle shows itself here, from which, it seems, there is no way out. In the order of efficient causes we assume ourselves to be free in order to think of ourselves as under moral laws in the order of ends, and then afterward we think of ourselves as subject to these laws because we have attributed freedom of the will to ourselves, for freedom and the will giving its own laws are both autonomy, hence reciprocal concepts, of which, however, just for this reason, one cannot be used to define the other and provide the ground for it, but at most only with a logical intent to bring various apparent representations of the same object to a single concept (as different fractions with the same value are brought to the lowest common denominator)³¹.

In the *Grundlegung*, there is coherence in the way that Kant deals with the adequacy of his critical philosophy to address the topic of morality. This coherence is not found outside the work, when comparison is made with the first *Critique*, although it touches on the boundaries of the latter.

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³⁰ Paton called the attention to a very specific problem in Kant's exposition of the previously developed argument concerning the validity of the categorical imperative in the form of a vicious circle. It seems that the “circle”, as it is called by Kant, totally misrepresents the argument that was being built since the first section, reaching its conclusion in the second section. See. PATON, H. J. *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971, p. 225.

³¹ GMS, 04: Ak. 450.

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