

A/A-

Your paper is very well-written and well-organized. Your explication of Kant is exactly on-target for this prompt, and you are both clear and precise with how you lay out the arguments. Your explanation of the critique needs further development, though. Some noteworthy justifications that Carse presents for rejecting Kant's conception of autonomy are not adequately explained. Overall, great work.

In *"The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals,"* Kant argues that our ability to act autonomously is ultimately derived from our status as rational agents. However, many philosophers have disagreed with Kant's conceptualization of autonomy, claiming that it presents human beings as isolated "willers" who are completely independent from others. This paper will endeavor to explain Kant's definition of autonomy and address one of the arguments for why his conceptualization is problematic.

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Comment [A1]: Solid intro

Kant states that all individuals are born with the ability to reason, which imbues us with rational wills. (Ak4:395). We use these rational wills develop moral law, which is based in reason and universal for all human beings. (Ak4:431, Guidry-Grimes, 9/12/2012) Kant argues that our autonomy rests in our ability to create and follow this moral law.(Ak4:431) As both "subject and legislator" of this law, we are autonomous.(4:431)

Kant describes reason as a "supreme condition" to which "the private aims of the human being must, for the most part, defer." (Ak4:396) Since our will is grounded in

reason, it is not preoccupied with achieving external goals (such as happiness, or other goals that promote self-interest); it is only concerned with producing a good will. (Ak4:396) This means that the will is free in a “negative sense”; it does not act upon any factors outside of reason and must also be free from the operation of natural laws. (Johnson, 29, 30).

Comment [A2]: Great. You're focusing on the heart of the issue.

Furthermore, Kant argues that “duty” is the only legitimate motivation for following the moral law. Kant defines duty as “necessity of action done out of respect for the law.” (Kant 4:400). Kant does not believe that inclination or self-interest are legitimate motives for decision-making; in fact, he states that if we make decisions based on these factors, we are not acting autonomously. (Guidry-Grimes, 9/12/2012)

One way to understand Kant’s conceptualization for human autonomy is through the analogy of building a chair from Ikea. When we buy the chair, we have all of the parts we need to put it together in the box. This is much like Kant’s understanding of autonomy; we are born with all of the raw materials that we need (reason and will) to become an autonomous agent. However, unlike your typical Ikea chair, Kant believes that we have to create our own instructions (the moral law) to put it together. However, since the law is based on the principles of reason, it should be the same for all rational agents (universal). Returning to the chair analogy, this means that all chairs built by rational agents should actually look the same, even though each agent created our own instructions.

In "Vulnerability, Agency, and Human Flourishing," Alisa Carse argues that Kant's understanding of an autonomous agent is based on a myth that ignores human vulnerability. At the core of this myth is the conception of human beings as isolated "willers" who determine their own course of action free from any emotional or external influences.(Carse, 36) She refers to Norman Care's term "the myth of the in-control agent" to describe this idea, which is apparent throughout Kant's *"The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals."*(Carse, 35)

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The myth of the in-control agent promotes the idea that human beings ~~are~~ can be entirely self-determined and self-controlled, free from all external influences, such as anxiety, anger, and illness.(Carse, 36). Carse argues that this myth is false because it fails to take into account human vulnerability.(Carse, 35) Vulnerability enables us to build relationships, commit ourselves to tasks, and feel compassion, empathy, and solidarity with others.(Carse, 35, 47)

Carse argues that this myth of the "in-control agent" has a negative impact on our ability to flourish and make meaningful connections with others.(Carse, 47). She believes that this myth is dangerous because it tricks us into thinking that we are not vulnerable ourselves, and should not be vulnerable to others. By believing this lie, we are depriving ourselves of the benefits of vulnerability, such as friendship, compassion, empathy, and love.(Carse, 36) We are also denying the effects of physical and mental

illness, violence, loss, poverty and a number of other factors on our lives.(Carse, 47)
Carse states that these factors can overwhelm our reason and force us to make decisions based on something other than our rational will.(Carse, 38). However, unlike Kant, she does not dismiss the worth of decisions made according to these factors; she does not see reason as the only legitimate source of motivation and decision-making. (Carse, 48)

Comment [A3]: Why should they not be dismissed on her account? More elaboration needed to make this critique compelling.

Immanuel Kant presents us with the idea that all human autonomy is based on our ability to reason and act according to our rational will. He dismisses any actions that are not based on reason, claiming that they are not truly autonomous. However, Alisa Carse argues that Kant's conception of the autonomous is problematic, since it is based on the flawed assumption that the rational will is "invincible" to factors such as emotion and physical and mental illness. Contrasting these two positions helps to elucidate the debate between procedural and substantive accounts of personal autonomy.

Sources

Carse, Alisa. "Vulnerability, Agency and Human Flourishing." *Health and Human Flourishing*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2006.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Johnson, Robert. "Kant's Moral Philosophy." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University, 2012.