

Introduction

Kate Moran

Spontaneity – understood as an action of the mind or will that is not determined by a prior external stimulus – is a theme that resonates throughout Immanuel Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy. Though spontaneity and the concomitant notion of freedom lie at the foundation of many of Kant’s most pivotal theses and arguments regarding cognition, judgment, and moral action, spontaneity and freedom themselves often remain cloaked in mystery, or accessible only via transcendental argument. Kant never addresses spontaneity head-on in any of his published texts, but this fact belies its importance in Kant’s system.¹ It is a hallmark of rational agency and condition of the rational agent’s ability to cognize and act.

In the theoretical sphere, questions regarding spontaneity pertain especially to the pure concepts of the understanding and, in particular, the spontaneous act through which the cognizing subject applies these concepts. This spontaneous act underlies nothing less than the possibility of human cognition and, by extension, Kant’s notion of the self and the transcendental apparatus that characterizes his critical philosophy. Spontaneity is closely related to Kantian notions of “thinking” (as opposed to intuiting), “understanding,” “apperceiving,” and “judging” (see Pippin 1987:450). Though the set of questions that may be raised about Kant’s notion of spontaneity in this context is vast, several themes emerge as being of central concern. In particular, how shall we interpret Kant’s account of the acts of understanding and imagination through which the subject synthesizes cognition? What is the nature and origin of the pure concepts of the understanding? How shall we interpret Kant’s notoriously difficult

¹ Kant does discuss spontaneity in the L₁ Metaphysics lectures; curiously the discussion drops out of later lectures.

arguments regarding the application of these concepts in the Transcendental Deduction? And how might we understand judgment more generally, especially when it is extended to include the faculty that underlies disinterested judgments of taste?

Though it would be a mistake simply to equate Kant's notion of epistemic spontaneity with practical spontaneity or moral freedom, there are obvious similarities between the theoretical and practical spheres. The central similarity is that rational choice, like cognition, is unexplainable in terms of prior, sensible influence (Allison 1996: 132). In the practical sphere, then, the mystery of spontaneity manifests itself as a series of questions about the nature of rational agency and, ultimately, about moral freedom, or autonomy. Kant makes it clear that the moral law is the law of freedom. But already in this statement we confront a number of puzzles about freedom and its relationship to the moral law. Just how should we understand the type of freedom at issue in this claim? Is it a capacity rationally to set and pursue ends (including non-moral ends)? Or is it best understood as the capacity to act in accordance with self-imposed laws? Beyond this, there are a number of questions about the precise role that freedom plays in Kant's argument for the moral law. Is freedom a value that ought to be protected or even, in a sense, maximized? Or is it better understood as a property of the will that makes unique demands – especially regarding universality – on its subject?

Questions regarding the freedom of moral subjects become even more complex when we take into account the fact that autonomous moral agents are also sensible agents, subject to inclination and desire. This fact generates a series of questions about the moral challenges that the embodied rational agent confronts. How, for example, shall we understand Kantian notions of virtue and virtuous struggle? And how should we interpret the ultimate unification of sensibility (understood in terms of happiness) with freedom (understood in terms of virtue) in Kant's concept of the highest good?

Finally, freedom also constitutes the basis of Kant's political philosophy. Kant claims that his universal principle of right is based upon "the innate right of freedom," and this naturally generates a series of questions about the type of freedom at issue in Kant's argument. Is it the same type of freedom referred to in his ethical philosophy? And how does a system of right emerge from freedom? Further, what are the implications of this principle of right for embodied agents who unavoidably live together on a bounded sphere? For example, what, if any, system of distributive justice is prescribed by this commitment to freedom in political theory?

OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

Part I Spontaneity: Pure Concepts of the Understanding, Imagination, and Judgment

In Chapter 1, Rolf-Peter Horstmann examines what Kant calls the “transcendental function” of imagination. Since Kant repeatedly characterizes both the understanding and the imagination as faculties of synthesis, the imagination’s precise role is not always obvious from the text. Is the imagination simply to be identified with the understanding? Or might it be in some sense distinct from the understanding, while still functioning under the guidance of the understanding? Or might the imagination have a role to play in cognition that is wholly distinct from that of the understanding? Horstmann argues that the imagination has the task of differentiating from among the totality of a subject’s sense impressions those that comply with general conceptual rules, and those that are not subject to these rules. The challenge in delineating imagination’s role in this respect is to show how the imagination can have a role distinct from that of the understanding. Nevertheless, Horstmann argues that we pay a steep price for simply subsuming imagination under the understanding. Specifically, it becomes difficult to explain how it is possible that – already at the level of receptive sensibility – material is available that is fit for the synthesizing activities of the understanding. His chapter thus defends an interpretation according to which imagination has an *apprehending* function. On this account imagination transforms mere “sensations” or impressions – non-individuated and unstructured psychological events – into what Kant calls “perceptions,” i.e., conscious, contentful representations that constitute the material out of which intuitions are synthesized.

In the next chapter, Brian Chance continues this investigation into cognition by considering the origin and nature of the pure concepts of the understanding, or the categories. Contrary to the view that *a priori* intuition provides content to the categories that is constitutive of their being categories, Chance argues that the categories are products of the understanding alone and introduce a purely intellectual content into cognition. To advance this claim, Chance examines the differences between Kant’s conception of the understanding and the conception of the understanding endorsed by Wolff and his followers. Specifically, he argues that Kant’s assertion in the *Inaugural Dissertation* of a “real use” of the understanding in is an overt rejection of the Wolffian conception of

the understanding as the capacity to render distinct content that is already present in sense and a catalyst for the issues raised in the 1772 Herz Letter that Kant does not fully address until the first *Critique*. In defense of his reading, Chance also argues that Kant borrows the language he uses to describe the categories from the Wolffian tradition. For the sense in which Kant affirms the purity of the understanding is precisely the sense in which Wolff and his followers deny it. And since Kant also identifies this purity with the understanding's spontaneity, Chance argues that there is a deep continuity between Kant's rejection of the Wolffian account of the understanding and his rejection of the Wolffian account of reason.

With a discussion of the categories in place, the volume proceeds to consider Kant's argument in the second edition of the transcendental deduction (the B-Deduction). In Chapter 3, Michael Rohlf argues that the B-Deduction is part of Kant's argument for transcendental idealism in the first *Critique*. Rohlf begins by arguing against the common assumption that the argument for transcendental idealism is contained within the Transcendental Aesthetic. He then develops his interpretation of the B-Deduction's role. In particular, Rohlf argues that section 26 of the B-Deduction is intended to prove that our representations of space and time are singular. Building on Beatrice Longuenesse's interpretation of section 26 (Longuenesse 1998: chapter 8) – according to which space and time, as formal intuitions, are first generated by a transcendental synthesis of the imagination under the synthetic unity of apperception – Rohlf further argues that the formal intuition of time supplies the “bare representation of unity as applied to time.” Crucially, Rohlf argues, this is a condition of assigning schemata to categories and applying these categories to empirical representations.

Spontaneity is central not only to Kant's account of cognition, but also to his account of judgments of taste. In metaphysics lectures from 1794, for example, Kant remarks that “the beautiful arts are such that they do not coerce approval from people, but rather leave their judgment free, so that their approval is given spontaneously. In them no rules can be despotically prescribed, they are rather a free play of the imagination. . .”² But this description leaves open a question about what the principle of taste is, and how it is possible. In Chapter 4 Jennifer Dobe argues that the experience of beauty begins in a feeling of pleasure that we perceive as both free and as arising from a shared human nature. Dobe thus contributes to the

² *Metaphysik K*, XXVIII 815–16, following Guyer's translation in the Cambridge edition of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

longstanding debate about what the principle of judgments of taste is. She argues that the principle, and thus the basis of these judgments, is our shared cognitive nature, according to which our imaginations are attuned to our understanding's need for unity.

Part II The Inner Value of the World: Freedom as the Keystone of Kant's Moral Philosophy

Part II of the volume examines the role of freedom as a foundational component in Kant's moral philosophy. In Chapter 5, Patricia Kitcher considers Kant's notion of freedom, its relationship to the formula of humanity, and the relationship of the formula of humanity to the highest good. Though Kitcher thinks freedom and the formula of humanity do serve to demonstrate the moral law's bindingness, she rejects the idea that freedom can be defined in terms of the capacity to set ends, or that freedom itself is an end that Kant's moral philosophy enjoins us to pursue. Instead, she advances a novel interpretation of Kant's claim that "we must necessarily lend to every rational being that has a will also the idea of freedom" (*GMS* 4:448) by looking at Kant's remarks about how it is that we can regard others as rational thinkers in the first *Critique*. Ultimately, Kitcher argues, this interpretation explains the bindingness of the moral law and, by extension, provides an argument for the duty to promote the happiness of others that does not depend upon thinking of happiness as intrinsically valuable.

In Chapter 6, Lucas Thorpe considers a series of questions about how agents recognize freedom in – and ascribe freedom to – other individuals. Thorpe considers three central questions: First, what does it mean, from a Kantian perspective, to be "human" in a morally-relevant sense? Various answers have been offered in response to this question – including, for example, the view that it is a capacity for agency that constitutes the capacity for humanity, or, alternately, that it is a capacity for morality that constitutes this capacity. Thorpe offers a novel amendment to the second view – that "to be 'human' in the morally relevant sense is to have the capacity for morality, and that this involves: (a) the capacity to recognize others as ends rather than merely as means and (b) the capacity to enter into relations of ethics community with us." This answer, however, leaves open a series of questions about how we go about ascribing moral status to others, and what justifies our doing so when we do. In response to these sorts of questions, Thorpe defends a view he calls "moral reliabilism," which includes two components: first, that agents have quasi-perceptual

ability to pick up on various types of social affordances, in particular the ability to engage in ethical interaction. Second, the view includes a normative claim that we should assume that this capacity is reliable as a postulate of pure practical reasoning. Thorpe draws on recent research in developmental psychology to support his view.

The next two chapters consider how Kant's claims regarding freedom function in his argument for the moral law itself. In Chapter 7, Julian Wuerth presents a positive interpretation of Kant's strategy for arguing for the categorical imperative. Wuerth calls this strategy the "elimination of sensibility process," according to which Kant systematically eliminates the offerings of sensibility in order to isolate the teachings of pure reason. The chapter then applies the findings of this discussion to an assessment of Kantian constructivist strategies in ethics, especially the constructivism of Christine Korsgaard. Wuerth points to some problems with a number of constructivist systems, and then argues that Korsgaard's constructivism, for all of its virtues, does not respect Kant's distinction in kind between reason and sensibility and in the end falls short as an interpretation of Kant's argument.

In Chapter 8, Frederick Rauscher considers Kant's claim in the Collins lecture that "freedom is the inner worth of the world" (*Collins* 27:344) and argues against a realist interpretation of this assertion. On a realist conception, value would be a property of humanity independent of both the empirical moral agent and the transcendental conditions for moral agency as such. The chapter advances several arguments to show that such a value property either could not exist, or would be unknowable to the moral agent. Rather than an intrinsic property, Rauscher argues that value is merely a formal ordering imposed by reason upon nature. To say that humanity has absolute value is simply to say that, in the order that pure practical reason imposes on the ends of rational agents, humanity has a higher place than any other end. Just as the value of contingent ends of empirical moral agents is simply their place in those agents' subjective ordering of ends, so humanity as a necessary end for all rational agents is simply the place of humanity in pure practical reason's objective ordering of ends.

Part III Freedom as Autonomous Willing: Kant's Sensible Agent

The volume proceeds to consider the complexities of the embodied Kantian moral agent – an agent who is simultaneously subject to inclination yet capable representing the moral law. In Chapter 9, Karl Ameriks

argues for a middle path between two extreme but common objections to the *Groundwork's* account of moral self-legislation as autonomy. The first of these argues that to speak of the moral law as rooted in self-legislation is to be too ambitious, overly subjective, and to ignore the essentially receptive character of reason. According to this objection, the focus on self-legislation suggests a failure on Kant's part to recognize reason as a capacity that appreciates reasons to act given to the subject by what is essentially outside of it. The contrasting second objection stems from a worry about what can appear to be an overly close connection drawn between morality and freedom as autonomy. Here the critic objects that the emphasis upon the "nomos" of autonomy in the *Groundwork* is too restrictive, and in a sense overly objective, insofar as it makes our actions appear so thoroughly law-oriented that it seems to leave open only two alternatives for agents: They can either be forced by reason to follow the moral law or forced by natural necessity to fail to follow the moral law. In contrast to Kant's own later works, such an account does an injustice to our faculty of free choice, or at least our ability to act in ways more complex than these two narrow options. In his chapter, Ameriks steers a middle course between the Scylla of subjectivity and the Charybdis of lawlike freedom, arguing that the transition from section II to section III in the *Groundwork* can be read as providing an account of autonomy defensible against both of these objections.

The volume then begins to consider a series of questions prompted by the observation that human agents are autonomous, and yet simultaneously subject to inclination and desire. In Chapter 10, Kate Moran considers the attitude that autonomous agents ought to take toward inclination. Kant himself often describes inclination as the antagonist of moral willing and virtuous struggle, even suggesting at one point that "to be entirely free from [inclination] must . . . be the wish of every rational being" (*GMS* 4:428). Moran argues that this assertion – and others like it – are often misunderstood as a wholesale indictment of inclination. She offers an analysis of the text that demonstrates that Kant's concern is not with inclination as such, but with inclination as a source of need and neediness. The chapter continues to consider Kant's conception of neediness, and his account of the ideal stance toward inclination – something he calls independence. Though independence is an impossible ideal for free, yet sensible, agents, it is nonetheless an informative ideal. In particular, the ideal serves as a standard against which one can measure the ways in which agents fall short of complete independence. Moran offers a sketch of the

“moral misery” that agents experience when need gains ascendancy over freedom.

In Chapter 11, Barbara Herman examines Kant’s discussion of religion and the highest good in Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. In other texts, Kant’s arguments regarding the highest good revolve around a pair of concerns: that human beings can never will well enough to deserve happiness, and that desire for the highest good is not consistent with good willing. But in the *Religion*, Herman argues, Kant’s main concern is with the corrosive moral anxiety that arises in even the best of us faced with a propensity to evil whose source is the heart, not the will. Kant argues that this anxiety can be resolved by adopting the narrative of overcoming in Christian theology, using the son of God as a prototype or typic for a reformation of moral sensibility. Religion provides a perspective of infinite time, without risking antinomy, and a notion of sacrifice and gift that allows us to draw past bad willings, as well as our potential for moral lapse, into a narrative of improvement that redeems them. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the end of the ethical community in the *Religion*. Since Kant sees an ongoing threat to human goodness arising from the ways we pursue separate purposes, the solution is a union around a common principle: an ethical community, understood as a kind of church. Herman thus finds in Kant an argument that human nature might require something contingent, namely religion of a certain sort, if the highest good, and so the freedom of which we are capable in this life, is to be realized.

Part IV Freedom on a Bounded Sphere: Kant’s Political Philosophy

The fact that human agents are free also lies at the basis of Kant’s political philosophy. The next two chapters in the volume consider Kant’s argument for the principle of right, and the implications of this principle. In Chapter 12, Allen Wood argues against the view that Kant’s principle and duties of right are based in his ethics. He argues instead that right and ethics have distinct foundations, but that both are part of morals (*Sitten*) and are unified through their shared conception of obligation, namely, conformity to universal laws. Over the course of his discussion, Wood advances several arguments against the view that ethics serves as the foundation for right in Kant’s thought. In place of that view, he argues that the only foundation for Kant’s principle of right is a question about what can justify coercion. The answer to this question, Wood argues,

simply involves the formal consistency of freedom according to a universal law. But he argues that this does not transform imperatives of right into hypothetical or pragmatic imperatives. Rather, the rightful authority rests upon a rational response to the categorical command of reason.

In Chapter 13, Michael Nance and Jeppe von Platz explore the political implications of the innate right to freedom in Kant's *Doctrine of Right*. In particular, they ask whether the innate right to freedom implies a theory of distributive justice. To answer this question, they investigate Paul Guyer's argument that Kant's theory of property in the *Doctrine of Right* implies a Rawlsian conception of distributive justice (see Guyer 2000b). Guyer's argument for this conclusion is that Kant's theory of property implies a contractalist theory of distributive justice that, in turn, implies that the distribution of property rights must be fair to all affected by it, and that this fairness is secured only by something like Rawls's second principle of justice, the difference principle. Nance and von Platz question each stage in this argument. In the first place, they argue that Kant holds a *conventionalist*, though not necessarily a contractalist, view of property rights. They next argue that if the contractalist ideal is interpreted in terms of what is *acceptable* to each member of society, this yields a principle of mutual advantage. If, on the other hand, contractualism is interpreted as placing moral constraints on the terms it is permissible to offer other members as terms of society, then this yields a principle of formal equality. Neither strategy yields the difference principle. Nance and von Platz thus conclude that Kant's *Doctrine of Right* is compatible with, but does not require, a variety of principles of distributive justice.

Postscript: Freedom and Nature

All of the contributors to this volume have been inspired by Paul Guyer's groundbreaking work on Kant's philosophy. In the postscript to the volume, Guyer considers another difficult Kantian question: Given his emphasis on freedom and spontaneity, how does Kant intend to bridge the gap between freedom, on the one hand, and nature, on the other? Guyer argues that Kant advances a thesis regarding the unity between a morally perfect world and the natural world as early as 1781, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Nevertheless, in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant claims that this third *Critique* is needed in order to bridge the "incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible" (*KU* 5:176). Guyer argues that the third *Critique* does not mark a

shift in Kant's conception of the relationship between freedom and nature. Indeed, throughout the critical decade, Kant continues to argue for a bridge between freedom and nature. Guyer examines three of these bridges: First, though it may on its face seem as though a good will is all that is required by morality, Kant's ethics actually demands actions of agents who are embodied and active in the natural world. In particular, Kant is concerned with agents' freedom to set and pursue ends, and that this capacity be preserved and promoted. Second, though the decision to make the moral law one's fundamental maxim may seem to be a purely noumenal matter belonging to a free, autonomous will, it is both reflected in nature and affected by nature. Third, Guyer argues that Kant's ultimate view of the highest good is that the "moral world" that represents the object of morality is something that can only be realized in nature. All of these features of Kant's moral theory demonstrate that while freedom and spontaneity are indeed hallmarks of his philosophical system, they nevertheless act upon nature, and are affected by nature.