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Introduction

There can be little doubt regarding the centrality of the concept of freedom in Kant's "critical" philosophy. Together with the doctrine of the ideality of space and time, it constitutes a common thread running through all three *Critiques.* Although Kant does not claim to have established the reality of freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* he does claim, on the basis of transcendental idealism, to have established its conceivability, that is, its compatibility with the causal mechanism of nature. Indeed, he even states that "were we to yield to the illusion of transcendental realism, neither nature nor freedom would remain" (A593/B571). And in the *Critique of Practical Reason,* where he does claim to have shown the reality of freedom, albeit from a "practical point of view," he characterizes the concept of freedom as "the keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason and even of speculative reason" (5: 3; 3). Finally, in the *Critique of Judgment,* Kant suggests that the faculty of judgment, by means of its concept of the purposiveness (*Zweckmässigkeit*) of nature, makes possible a transition from the realm of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom (5: 175–6, 195; 14–15, 35). Surely, then, it is no exaggeration to claim that, at bottom, Kant's critical philosophy is a philosophy of freedom.

Unfortunately, it is also no exaggeration to state that Kant's theory of freedom is the most difficult aspect of his philosophy to interpret, let alone defend. To begin with, even leaving aside "outer freedom" or freedom of action, which is central to Kant's legal and political philosophy but which will not be considered here, we are confronted with the bewildering number of ways in which Kant characterizes freedom and the variety of distinctions he draws between various kinds or senses of freedom. Thus, Lewis White Beck distinguishes between five different conceptions of freedom, and as we shall see, this list could easily be expanded with a little fine-tuning.[1] Of itself, this gives one pause to wonder whether it is possible to speak of *a* theory of freedom in Kant.[2]

Nevertheless, it is relatively noncontroversial that at the heart of Kant's account of freedom in all three *Critiques* and in his major writings on moral philosophy is the problematic conception of transcendental freedom, which is an explicitly indeterminist or incompatibilist conception (requiring an independence of determination by all antecedent causes in the phenomenal world). In fact, Kant himself emphasizes the point and insists that it is precisely because freedom involves this transcendental (nonempirical) component that it is the "stumbling block [*Stein des Anstosses*] of all empiricists

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but the key to the most sublime practical principles for critical moralists" (KprV 5: 7; 8).

Not surprisingly, however, this difficult conception has proven to be far more of a stumbling block than a key for generations of interpreters. Objections have been raised regarding the very intelligibility of the conception as well as against the alleged necessity of appealing to it. Indeed, the movement to replace it with a more palatable, compatibilist conception, which, as we shall see, is very much alive in the recent literature, can be traced back to Kant's own contemporaries.[3]

There are many reasons for this, and most of them are well known to any student of the secondary literature. First and foremost are the standard objections to Kant's appeal to the phenomenal–noumenal distinction, in order to reconcile his indeterministic conception of freedom with the causal determinism to which he is committed by the Second Analogy. The consensus among Kant's critics is that the application of this distinction to the problem of freedom leads to a dilemma from which there is no ready escape: Either freedom is located in some timeless noumenal realm, in which case it may be reconciled with the causality of nature, but only at the cost of making the concept both virtually unintelligible and irrelevant to the understanding of human agency, or, alternatively, freedom is thought to make a difference in the world, in which case both the notion of its timeless, noumenal status and the unrestricted scope within nature of the causal principle must be abandoned.[4]

The objections raised against the ethical dimensions of Kant's theory appear to be equally formidable, particularly insofar as they relate to his moral psychology. Thus, critics from Hegel to Bernard Williams have rejected Kant's account of moral freedom or autonomy, which supposedly requires us to conceive of moral agents as capable of setting aside all their interests and desires as "real-life" human beings and of acting solely from respect for an impersonal moral law. Against this, it is argued, first, that such a conception commits Kant to the absurd view that only genuinely autonomous actions are free, from which it follows that we are not responsible for our immoral acts; second, that it is impossible to set aside all one's interests and desires; third, that if one could, there would be no point to moral deliberation and nothing left to motivate one to act dutifully; and finally, that the attribution of moral worth to actions so motivated, and indeed, only to such actions, conflicts with our basic moral intuitions. Moreover, since (so the argument goes) it is only this understanding of the demands of morality that lends any credence to the assumption that morality requires transcendental freedom, once this is rejected, there is no longer any need to appeal to this problematic conception.

Finally, there are serious difficulties with Kant's endeavor to establish the validity of the moral law and with it his peculiar conception of freedom. Kant attempts this in both the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason,* and although the issue is controversial, it does seem that the attempt takes a radically different form in each work. In *Groundwork* III, Kant's

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apparent strategy is to provide a deduction of the moral law based on the necessity of presupposing the idea of freedom. Presumably convinced of the futility of such an approach, when he returns to the problem of justification in the second *Critique,* he reverses his course. Instead of attempting to derive the reality of the moral law from the idea of freedom, Kant now insists that the moral law can be established as a "fact of reason," which can, in turn, serve as the basis for a deduction of freedom. This move has been widely regarded, however, as a desperate and question-begging measure, an abandonment of the critical requirement to provide a transcendental deduction for a priori concepts or principles and a lapse into a dogmatism of practical reason.[5] And since Kant holds that it is only by way of the moral law that the actuality (as opposed to the mere conceivability) of freedom can be established, this means that his conception of freedom likewise remains ungrounded.

The problems mentioned in the preceding largely determine the agenda for this study of Kant's theory of freedom, which attempts to provide an analysis and defense of this theory in both its theoretical and practical dimensions. Naturally, I do not claim to be able to prove that Kant's theory is defensible in all of its details or that he is completely consistent on the topic. In fact, we shall see that even under the most charitable interpretation, many problems remain. Nevertheless, I do hope to show that given a sympathetic understanding of transcendental idealism, a good case can be made for Kant's incompatibilistic conception of freedom. In addition, I shall argue that the central features of Kant's moral psychology, including his conceptions of autonomy, moral worth, moral motivation, and radical evil, are much more plausible than they are frequently taken to be and that the standard criticisms (as well as some recent and influential defenses) suffer from a failure to consider these conceptions in connection with Kant's theory of rational agency. Finally, I shall argue that although the appeal to the fact of reason in the second *Critique* will hardly persuade the critic who rejects the basic thrust of Kant's moral theory, specifically the conceptions of the categorical imperative and autonomy, it does suffice to remove the specter of moral skepticism for someone who accepts the analysis of morality offered in the first two parts of the *Groundwork;* and that given the fact of reason (as well as transcendental idealism), there is a successful deduction of freedom from a practical point of view.

Although the overall argument is largely self-contained, it does presuppose the view of transcendental idealism I developed in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*. Moreover, since this plays a significant role in my analysis of Kant's conception of agency, a word is in order regarding it at this point for the benefit of those not familiar with the earlier work. Reduced to bare essentials, this interpretation of Kant's idealism holds that the transcendental distinction is not *primarily* between two kinds of entity, appearances and things in themselves, but rather between two distinct ways in which the objects of human experience may be "considered" in philosophical reflection, namely,

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as they appear and as they are in themselves.[6] As such, it can be (and has been) characterized as a version of the "two-aspect" interpretation of this idealism, which is to be contrasted with the familiar "two-object" or "two-world" interpretation, according to which appearances and things in themselves constitute two ontologically distinct sets of entities.[7]

Central to this interpretation is the conception of an "epistemic condition," which I use as a heuristic device in order to explicate the force and the significance of the transcendental distinction. By an epistemic condition I understand a necessary condition for the representation of objects. Space and time, the forms of human sensibility, and the pure concepts of the understanding are the specifically Kantian candidates for epistemic conditions. As conditions of the possibility of the representation of objects, epistemic conditions are distinguished from both psychological and ontological conditions. The former includes propensities or mechanisms of the mind that supposedly govern belief or belief acquisition, for example, Hume's custom or habit. The latter includes conditions of the possibility of the being of things, which, as such, condition things quite independently of their relation to the human mind and its cognitive capacities, for example, Newton's absolute space and time. Epistemic conditions share with the former the property of being "subjective" in the sense that they reflect the structure and operations of the mind and therefore condition our representation of things rather than the things themselves. They differ from them with respect to their objectivating function. Correlatively, they share with the latter the property of being objective or objectivating. They differ from them in that they condition the objectivity of our *"representation"* of things rather than the very being of the things themselves.[8]

Implicit in this conception is the necessity of distinguishing between things insofar as they conform to these conditions and are therefore knowable by the human mind and the same things as they are "in themselves," that is, as they are independently of the human mind and its cognitive apparatus. The former corresponds to things as they appear, or simply appearances; the latter to things as they are in themselves, or simply things in themselves. Although things considered in the latter fashion are by definition unknowable by us, we can think of them as possible objects of a divine mind blessed with nonsensible or intellectual intuition. Thus, we can think, although not know, things as they are in themselves.

Not only does this line of interpretation have abundant textual support, it also enables one to dismiss many of the familiar objections that have been directed against Kant's "noumenalism" on the two-object or two-world interpretation. With respect to the main concern of this study, it makes it possible to avoid attributing to Kant the view (suggested by much of his language) that free agency occurs in a distinct "intelligible world" or that distinct noumenal activities somehow intervene in (without interfering with) the causal order of the phenomenal world. It offers instead the more appealing contrast between two "points of view" or descriptions under which a single occurrence (a human action) can be considered.

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Admittedly, the two-aspect reading does not of itself suffice to answer all the salient objections to the Kantian theory of freedom. On the contrary, we shall find that it raises some problems of its own, which have not gone unnoticed in the literature. In particular, it leaves us with the problem of explaining the attribution of a double character, in Kant's terms, an empirical and an intelligible character, to a single subject (a rational agent). This is a problem because the two characters seem to be incompatible since the former involves subjection to causal determination (the "causality of nature") and the latter an independence of all such determination. Nevertheless, I shall argue that sense can be made of Kant's position on this crucial issue if one recognizes that it is rational agency that supposedly has both an empirical and an intelligible character.

To anticipate, the importance of this is that it permits us to interpret the contrast between empirical and intelligible character as holding between two models or conceptions of rational agency. The first, which relates to the empirical character of rational agency, amounts essentially to the familiar belief–desire model. This is used for the observation, causal explanation, and (to a limited extent) prediction of human actions, and it presupposes that an agent's empirical character, understood as a set of relevant beliefs and desires, functions as the empirical cause of the action. What is particularly interesting about this model is just that it is a model for the conception and interpretation of the intentional actions of human beings. Thus, although a causal model (roughly like Hume's), it does not involve the reduction of intentional actions to mere events or bits of behavior. In short, it is a model of rational agency and, as such, leaves ample "elbow room" for freedom of the familiar compatibilist sort. Moreover, we shall see that Kant's dissatisfaction with this model, at least as the whole story about rational agency, is the key to his rejection of the compatibilist solution to the free will problem of the kind familiar to him from the work of Leibniz and Hume.

The other model, which pertains to an agent's "intelligible character," appeals to the spontaneity of the agent as rational deliberator. This spontaneity, which is the practical analogue of the spontaneity of the understanding, may be characterized provisionally as the capacity to determine oneself to act on the basis of objective (intersubjectively valid) rational norms and, in light of these norms, to take (or reject) inclinations or desires as sufficient reasons for action. According to this model, then, the intentional actions of a rational agent are never *"merely"* the causal consequences of the agent's antecedent psychological state (or any other antecedent conditions for that matter) but require, as necessary condition, an act of spontaneity. The claim that this spontaneity is an ineliminable component in rational agency is what, for reasons that will become obvious, I call Kant's "Incorporation Thesis."

Since it can be thought but not experienced, this act of spontaneity is, in Kant's terms, "merely intelligible." As such, it does not enter into an empirical account or explanation of human action. Moreover, it is for this very reason that the intelligible character model, involving spontaneity, is compatible with the empirical character model, which lacks it. Since the former

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is empirically vacuous, they are simply not competitors. Given transcendental idealism, however, it does not follow from the fact that it is empirically vacuous, with no explanatory function, that it is altogether idle. On the contrary, I shall argue that it is an essential ingredient in the conception of ourselves and others as rational agents and that, as such, it functions in contexts of imputation and rational justification.

Among the major consequences of the Incorporation Thesis to be explored in the course of this study is the recognition that even heteronomous or nonmorally based actions are free for Kant in an incompatibilist sense since they are conceived (in accordance with the intelligible character model) as products of the practical spontaneity of the agent. Moreover, we shall see that this is not, as is sometimes thought, a late modification of Kant's views on freedom but rather is an essential ingredient already present in the first *Critique* and *Groundwork* (and, indeed, in the "precritical" writings). Finally, we shall see that the Incorporation Thesis provides the key to much of Kant's moral psychology, including the frequently ridiculed requirement that an act be "from duty" if it is to possess moral worth.

The study is divided into three parts. The first deals with Kant's views on freedom and rational agency as expressed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and some of his earlier writings. It is concerned primarily with the metaphysics of the problem, although attention is also paid to Kant's moral theory at the time of the first *Critique* and before, insofar as it sheds light on his views of freedom. This part consists of four chapters. The first analyzes the thesis and antithesis arguments of the Third Antinomy and Kant's appeal to transcendental idealism in its resolution. The second deals with Kant's distinction between empirical and intelligible character and with the problematic claim that both characters are to be attributed to rational agents. It is here that the major issues regarding Kant's conception of agency and his transcendental idealism are addressed. The third chapter analyzes the important contrast between practical and transcendental freedom, which, among other things, raises questions about the compatibility of Kant's discussions of freedom in the Dialectic and Canon of the first *Critique*. It is here that I discuss some relevant features of Kant's moral philosophy circa 1781. The fourth contrasts the view of freedom here attributed to Kant with the reconstructions of Lewis White Beck and Ralf Meerbote, each of whom bases his analysis, at least in part, on a two-aspect reading of Kant's idealism.

The second part deals with Kant's conception of moral agency and the central features of his moral psychology in his main writings on moral philosophy from the *Groundwork* on. As such, it is concerned with the concept of freedom as it is operative within what I term Kant's "fully critical" moral theory. This part consists of six chapters. The first (Chapter 5) is concerned mainly with the concept of autonomy, which is the essential ingredient in this fully critical moral theory. It explores the respect in which the attribution of the property of autonomy to the will marks a modification of the original first *Critique* conception of rational agency. The second (Chapter 6)

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analyzes Kant's views on moral worth as articulated in the *Groundwork* and his account of respect as the moral incentive in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Together, then, these chapters deal with the central features of Kant's moral psychology as they are expressed in the main writings on moral philosophy in the 1780s.

By contrast, Chapters 7–9 focus on features of Kant's position that, for the most part, are implicit in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* but become prominent only in the writings of the 1790s, mainly *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and the *Metaphysic of Morals*. Chapter 7 discusses the *Wille–Willkür* contrast and the associated conception of a *Gesinnung*, or underlying disposition. Chapter 8 analyzes the doctrine of radical evil. Chapter 9 explicates Kant's view of virtue and of holiness as a moral ideal. Finally, Chapter 10 considers and attempts to provide a response to the critiques of Kant's views on moral agency and moral psychology mounted by Schiller, Hegel, and in our own time, Bernard Williams.

The third part is concerned with Kant's attempts to justify the moral law and freedom in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. It consists of three chapters. Chapter 11 analyzes and defends a claim that is common to both works and that constitutes a necessary first step in the Kantian justificatory strategy, namely, that morality and freedom (in the strict or transcendental sense) reciprocally imply one another, which I call the "Reciprocity Thesis." Its significance stems from the fact that it shows that (for better or worse) Kant's moral theory rests ultimately on a "thick" conception of freedom and not on a "thin," relatively unproblematic conception of rational agency. Chapter 12 analyzes Kant's manifestly unsuccessful attempt in *Groundwork* III to provide a deduction of the moral law, which is based on the necessity of presupposing the idea of freedom. Chapter 13 then considers Kant's quite different strategy for certifying the moral law and establishing the reality of freedom through the fact of reason in the second *Critique*. As already indicated, it judges this effort to be a qualified success and, at the very least, a considerable improvement over the approach of the *Groundwork*.

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I
Freedom and rational agency in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

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1
The Third Antinomy

The Third Antinomy is not only the locus of the major discussion of the problem of freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* it is also the basis for Kant's subsequent treatments of the topic in his writings on moral philosophy. His central claim is that it is only because the resolution of this antinomy leaves a conceptual space for an incompatibilist conception of freedom that it is possible to give the claims of practical reason a hearing. The antinomy itself, however, is ostensibly concerned with a conflict between cosmological ideas (ideas of totality), which seems to have nothing directly to do with what is generally regarded as the "free will problem." Consequently, it is not surprising that many commentators tend to gloss over the cosmological dimension of Kant's account, either ignoring it completely or dismissing it as one more example of Kant being deflected from his proper philosophical course by architectonic considerations.[1]

Although certainly understandable, this wholesale neglect of the cosmological dimension of Kant's account of freedom is nonetheless misguided. As I shall argue in the present chapter, the cosmological conflict can best be seen as one between two generic models or conceptions of agency that can and, in the history of philosophy, have been applied both to rational agents in the world and to a transcendent creator of the world. Thus, although the conflict cannot be identified with the familiar debate between libertarianism and determinism, it does provide the conceptual framework in terms of which Kant analyzes this debate. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first presents some preliminary remarks regarding the Antinomy of Pure Reason and its role within the first *Critique*. The second analyzes the arguments of the thesis and antithesis positions of the Third Antinomy. The third considers Kant's claim that transcendental idealism is the key to the resolution of the antinomies and its particular relevance to the Third Antinomy. The fourth discusses the connection between the cosmological question and the question of human freedom. It thus serves as a transition from the mainly cosmological focus of the present chapter to the specific concern with rational agency that will occupy us for the remainder of this study.

I. Some preliminaries[2]

In a famous letter to Christian Garve written in 1798, Kant remarks that it was the Antinomy of Pure Reason that "first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself in order to resolve the

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ostensible contradiction of reason with itself" (12: 258; 252). This contradiction or conflict of reason with itself is manifested in the fact that it seems to generate two equally compelling but incompatible answers to some fundamental cosmological questions. Kant also suggests that, if unresolved, the situation would lead to nothing less than the "euthanasia of pure reason" (A407/B434), that is, a radical skepticism concerning the claims of reason. Accordingly, a major goal of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to resolve this conflict.

One of the keys to Kant's resolution is the location of the source of the conflict in reason itself. Specifically, he claims that it is located in reason's demand for an unconditioned totality of conditions (grounds) for any conditioned. This demand draws its apparent legitimacy from the principle that "*if the conditioned is given, the entire sum of conditions, and consequently the absolutely unconditioned* (through which alone the conditioned has been possible) *is also given*" (A409/B436). Both the demand and the principle reflect the need of reason to arrive at "such a completeness in the series of premises as will dispense with the need of presupposing other premises" (A416/B444). This need, in turn, is simply the logical requirement of the complete justification of every conclusion and explanation of every state of affairs.

Construed as a regulative idea, this requirement is certainly in order. Reason is never satisfied until every *explanans* is itself an *explanandum* and every conclusion grounded in self-evident premises. The problem arises when this regulative idea is construed constitutively, that is, when it is dogmatically assumed that the entire series of conditions for every conditioned is "given" or at hand. If the "conditioned" is the conclusion of an argument, then this assumption is certainly warranted; for the conclusion is not established unless all of the premises from which it follows are likewise given and justified. If, on the other hand, the conditioned is a state of affairs for which an explanation (set of conditions) is sought, then the assumption cannot be made. All that we can do is to look for further conditions, with no guarantee that they are attainable (even in principle).

Although the fallacious nature of this dogmatic assumption might seem obvious on the face of it, Kant insists that it is natural, indeed inevitable, given the identification of appearances with things in themselves. Very roughly, the main point is that if, in the manner of transcendental realism, we construe appearances as things in themselves, then in our legitimate search for conditions (explanations) we inevitably abstract from the temporally successive manner in which items are given in experience, or in Kant's terms, "empirical synthesis." After all, if the items in question are assumed to be things in themselves, that is, things whose nature can be defined independently of the conditions of human knowledge, then these latter conditions may be dismissed as "merely subjective," as limitations of the human cognitive situation that do not have any implications for the things themselves.[3] To do this, however, is to assume the legitimacy of an eternalistic, "God's eye" standpoint with respect to these things; and from such a stand-

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