I

Freedom and Determinism

Pistorius’s review of Johann Shultze’s commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason originally appeared on pages 92–123 of the first part of the Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek, volume 66, dated 1786. Shultze himself intended merely to elucidate the first Critique and make its contents more accessible since the learned public had complained so much of its incomprehensibility. In the review, Pistorius’s criticisms of Kant as presented in Shultze’s commentary are imbedded in a broader criticism of Kant’s transcendental idealism and his conception of space and time. About one-fourth of the original review has been translated here.¹

First, the author’s theory of appearance⁰ and reality – which is constructed on the basis of his concepts of space and time – puts us in the aforementioned, exceedingly unfortunate and unstable position, even with respect to our individual existence. My conception of space and time [according to which space and time are partly grounded in objects] would extricate us from this situation. The actual existence of an objective intelligible world would no longer be so problematic, but rather reliable and certain. And what is even more important and interesting for us, if we could convince ourselves that representations and thoughts are genuine effects of the same kind of power, namely a thinking power, then we could trust even our inner sensation that we are not merely logical and apparent, but actual individual thinking subjects, or substances. In a word, we need no longer doubt whether there really are things in themselves that constitute the substratum of our intuitions and that appear to us. And still less, it

⁰ Schein

¹
I. Freedom and Determinism

seems to me, need we doubt whether there is in reality a thinking subject to whom things in themselves appear, and whether the subject that we designate as our I is this thinking subject. In general, the theory of illusion and truth would be able to achieve greater correctness and self-consistency which, it seems to me, the author’s theory lacks. According to the author’s theory, the existence of things in themselves is sometimes declared merely problematic, sometimes certain. Indeed, the former is asserted because we cannot know or cognize anything about them whatsoever. The latter is asserted because things in themselves must ground all appearances, which indicate things in themselves regardless of whether we can know anything about them or not. Independent of this consideration, I will show in more detail shortly that the author’s concepts make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for us to conceive of things in themselves as the possible foundation, or substratum, of appearances. On this theory, the author’s predilection for moral ideas, the advantage of reliability and truth that he grants to these ideas over all speculative manifestations of the power of thinking directed merely at cognition, seems to be biased and unfounded. The greater and more important interest that these moral ideas might have cannot give them this advantage (although, what can matter more to us than the conviction of our actual individual existence, or our substantiality, and what else do we have to lose if we have lost our I and must regard our self as a drop immersed in and swallowed up by the ocean?). Despite whatever interest these ideas might have, they are nothing but effects or modifications of the power of thinking. If all speculative effects – from sensible intuitions up to the ideas of reason – are specious and deceptive and have only the utility of giving our representations order and coherence, then what do the moral concepts have over them? If representations in general can be deceptive and illusory, then where is the sure mark by which we can cognize that some of those representations are not deceptive and illusory, and cannot be? – Once again, the greater interest [that moral concepts might have] cannot be this mark because once we concede that we must have concepts of the understanding and ideas of reason (as empty of all content and as deceptive as they may be) so that we can think systematically and in an orderly manner, and once we concede that they were thus necessary merely for the sake of a logical use, what hinders us from assuming that we must also have moral concepts, even with all their illusoriness and emptiness, in order to be able to act in an orderly and systematic manner, or to act morally, and thus what hinders us from assuming that they were necessary for the sake of a practical use? – Yet nothing seems to me to yield more confusion and inconsistency in the author’s theory of illusion and truth than his solution to the so-called third antinomy (which relies
entirely on that theory), i.e. the removal of the contradiction between the two propositions: “the human being is bound to natural necessity in all his actions,” and “the human being acts with freedom,” which, as the author asserts, are both supposed to be equally provable. The author seeks to show that both propositions are true at the same time in a different respect, or at least can be true. These different respects are, on the one hand, the human being considered as phenomenon with his actions as appearances, and on the other hand, precisely the same human being considered as a member of the intelligible world and the same actions considered as things in themselves. In the first respect his actions are (seemingly) subject to natural necessity and occur, like all other effects in experience, in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason; by contrast, in the second respect, as things in themselves, they are free, i.e. they presuppose no other actions as necessary conditions from which they must follow according to a law. I already confessed my inability to follow the author here in my review of the Prolegomena, and even though I see that this is indeed his view, this solution is still almost the most obscure aspect of his entire system for me. What to me seems so inconsistent and absurd in that system may indeed rest on some misunderstanding, but I truly wish that light might be shed on this obscurity and that the apparent contradictions might be explained away. My doubts primarily concern the concept of freedom itself, its origin, its content, and its objective validity. Freedom is supposed to be the capacity of a being to begin a state such that its action [110] is not, in turn, subject to another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature. I ask: Whence do we have this concept? We did not derive it from experience, this single source from which concepts that are not empty are supposed to flow. Hence it is a pure concept of reason, or essential and, as it were, inherent to reason; but in that respect, this concept has nothing over the so-called ideas of pure reason, i.e. the psychological, cosmological, and theological ideas. By what means does it attain the advantage of not being merely subjective and deceptive like these ideas? Whence does it alone obtain this objective validity such that it can be applied to the world of understanding, and such that what it indicates, namely transcendent freedom, can be predicated as a property of things in themselves or of members of this world entirely unknown to us? Is it consistent, on the

* It is curious that other philosophers assert exactly the opposite, namely, that the belief in natural necessity is grounded not in feeling but in reasoning, and that, by contrast, the view that we possess freedom is more of a less-enlightened feeling that they cannot entirely deny; and they therefore endeavor to discover the origin of that feeling and the reason why it deceives us.
one hand, to assert that we can cognize absolutely nothing of this world of understanding (which for us is = X), and, on the other hand, not only to assume that it consists of parts and members and to indicate reason as such a member of this world, but also to attribute a property to this reason in accordance with a concept which is perhaps a mere phantom, perhaps a deception in the sensible world necessary for the latter’s sake? Even supposing one does this only hypothetically, even this already transgresses the first Critical rule not to stray beyond the field of experience in the use of the understanding and reason, especially in view of the fact that if one purports that reason, a thing in itself, causes and determines actions which are intrinsically free but seemingly necessary, then this rule is violated in that one must transfer a concept of the understanding, namely that of cause and effect, to the intelligible world and likewise apply it to things in themselves. Is the content of this concept even internally consistent? As pertaining to the world of understanding, it is supposed to exclude time and all temporal determinations, and yet freedom is supposed to be a capacity to begin a new state. How can a beginning, and so too the end opposed to it, be thought without the concept of time getting mixed in, as in the case of arising, or ceasing and vanishing? To begin a state presupposes that this state was not yet, hence presupposes a time when it was merely possible and another time when it becomes real. Thus, this concept seems to presuppose temporal determinations, which it is also supposed to exclude. How can this be reconciled?* I ask further, if the human being’s entire soul, his entire power of representation with all of its effects, must be regarded as appearance (as it must on my

* With precisely the reasoning with which the author seeks to demonstrate the proposition in the First Antinomy that the world cannot have a beginning in time, it can also be demonstrated that in general no state can begin other than in time because a beginning always presupposes the concept of time. Mr. Kant argues as follows: “If it is supposed the world has a beginning, then there must be a preceding time in which it was not, namely an empty time. But now no arising of any object,” (hence also of a state) “is possible because no part of an empty time has, prior to another part, a condition of existence rather than that of nonexistence whether one assumes that it arises of itself or through another cause. Hence the world cannot have a beginning,” namely other than in time, and because it cannot have a beginning in time, it consequently cannot have a beginning at all. Now one can also just as justifiably infer that if a state should have a beginning, then it must have its beginning in time, and should a state not have a beginning in time, then it cannot have a beginning at all. Thus, according to this inference, the concept of freedom, to the extent it is supposed to exclude the concept of time, abolishes itself.

a Seelenwesen
assumption following from the author’s principles and his concepts of space and time), then how can one declare a part of this soul – and reason is not anything different – a noumenon or a thing in itself?! Whence can we know, despite the presumed complete ignorance of the intelligible world and things in themselves, that something belonging to the human being’s subjective and apparent power of thinking – namely his reason, and consequently himself insofar as he is endowed with reason – is a part of the world of understanding, a thing in itself? Just to presuppose this we would indeed have to know this world insofar as we would know that it contains manifold things or actual parts, and how are we to experience this here [112] in the sensible world given the unbridgeable gulf that the author sets between the two worlds? But supposing we know that the human being is a thing in itself insofar as he possesses reason, then at the same time we would also know with the same certainty that the rational being not only seems to be but really intrinsically is a thinking, self-subsisting subject, or a thinking substance. We would know he is a thinking being because reason simply entails thinking and an unthinking reason cannot be thought. We would know he is a substance because it is impossible that this thing in itself can be thought other than under the presupposition that it is a self-subsisting subject, as a true cause of genuine effects or of things in themselves (of free actions). And in this way we would again arrive quite unnoticed at the ordinary concepts not only of cause and effect, but also of substance and accident, which the author consistently seeks to represent as merely logical and applicable only to appearances, in particular in his Paralogism of Reason,¹⁰ but which here, it seems to me, the author must assume to be objective, or valid for the world of understanding. – If the human being’s actions are intrinsically free and only seem to be necessary, then I ask to whom do the human being and his actions appear as mere phenomenon and appearances, respectively? Indisputably, some subject must be assumed to this end, for it would be extremely nonsensical to speak of appearances as things which, as it were, are self-subsisting and do not relate to a representing subject, and which could exist elsewhere than in a representation, and an erring, limited, and incorrectly perceiving representation ³ at that. – Thus, the human being with his actions is an appearance to the human being himself. – I ask further: to the human being insofar as he is appearance, or insofar as he is a thing in itself? To assume the former, or to say “an appearance appears to another appearance,” again seems so extremely nonsensical to me that one must assume the latter and, as a consequence,

¹ Question mark missing in original.  
³ unrichtig wahrnehmenden Vorstellung
I. Freedom and Determinism

must also assume that the human being’s actually free actions (which likewise are things in themselves) appear as necessary to him, as a thing in itself, i.e. they occur otherwise than they are in themselves. Consequently, he beholds things in themselves, things belonging to the objective world of understanding, though [113] indeed obscured and distorted by the fog of sensibility. And in this way, we would at bottom arrive at the Leibnizian idealism which the author so strongly rejects. The sole difference between this idealism and the Critical idealism of the author would consist solely in the fact that Leibniz applies his idealism merely to objects of outer sense in space, but the author extends the Critical idealism to objects of inner sense in time as well. However, on this presupposition both philosophers would have to agree that all illusion and all deception arise solely from the senses, or from the limited faculty of representation, in particular to the extent it manifests as sensibility. Concerning this point, the author would also distance himself from his own system as a result of this solution and draw closer to the Leibnizian system by positing the otherwise entirely separate worlds in such close connection that the world of understanding would constitute not only the proper object and the material of the sensible world, but would intervene and be efficacious in the latter; for reason, a thing in itself, a part of the objective world of understanding, causes and determines illusory actions in the sensible world, though, to begin with, it certainly causes and determines only free actions in the world of understanding. But these, in turn, become illusory and parts of the sensible world insofar as human beings regard them not as they intrinsically are, namely free, but rather as necessary. These doubts and difficulties that stand in the way of the author’s theory of appearance and its application to his concept of freedom should be sufficient. I repeat once more that they may either entirely, or in part, arise from a misunderstanding; nevertheless, since they could occur to other investigators of the Kantian system, it indeed seems necessary to remove them if this system is to be recognized as lucid and internally consistent.

a Schein
Ulrich’s work comprises seven main parts. The translation contained in the present volume comprises selections of the first four: a discussion of the mutual exclusivity of determinism and indeterminism (part i); an overview of the groundlessness of indeterminism (part ii); an explication of the power of choice according to indeterminism (part iii); and a presentation of Ulrich’s Wolfian interpretation of freedom in light of determinism. In the remainder of the work Ulrich responds to objections to his compatibilist view of human freedom as the perfectibility of our practical cognition, such as whether determinism precludes imputation (part v), expands on the degrees of perfection of freedom (part vi), and provides a final comparison of determinism and indeterminism (part vii).

[16]

1. There is absolutely no middle path between necessity and chance, between determinism and indeterminism

§ 5. Necessity

Of all that has elsewhere been said at length about this concept in logic, metaphysics, and ethics, we only have to remember the following: necessity is either a physical (natural necessity) or a moral one. By the former term, we mean to indicate the thought that, by positing certain conditions, something else is inevitably posited, and that under absolutely identical circumstances the converse is not possible. In this case, we still have to distinguish external and internal necessity from their genera, i.e. foreseen\(^{b}\) and blind (or brute)\(^{c}\) necessity.

\(^{a}\) Umstände \(^{b}\) sehende \(^{c}\) brutisch
I. Freedom and Determinism

The thought of moral necessity is the thought, or our reason's cognition, that something ought to happen, even though it does not always actually happen because of this, but instead the opposite occurs, i.e. even though in experience this thought of ought, when it comes to its actual exercise, does not always have the required efficacy to bring about firm volition and does not always express sufficient causality. [17]

However, if the representation of moral necessity, or of the ought, becomes efficacious such that it brings about firm volition on its own, and the opposing stimuli are inefficacious, then given that (gradually achieved) efficacy of the thought “I ought,” the occurrence of such a decision is also true natural necessity. And likewise, when experience teaches that the thought of an ought does not express the required efficacy in a certain subject in a certain case, when Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor applies to it, then even this subject has its determining grounds for why it now proceeds this way and not another. Even in this case there is natural necessity.*

[19]

§ 6. Chance

Without going into the ambiguities of the term now, I understand here by “chance” an arising, a becoming, which has no determining grounds, but whereby, when something occurred, the opposite could have equally occurred under absolutely identical circumstances. I think that this concept is consistent with common parlance. [...] Whether chance can be avoided by the Kantian definition of transcendental freedom, or absolute spontaneity, and by the admittedly ingeniously

* If I am to explain myself in regard to my main argument to be executed further below, then I must say: each of our actual decisions is the result, hence either the sum or difference, or even the diagonal of the respective state of our reason and sensibility (reason here is taken subjectively, since here there is an arising and a becoming. Reason taken objectively is certainly immutable inasmuch nothing arises and nothing ceases).

Footnote omitted.  b Wirksamkeit  c bei Setzung  d Latin: I see what is better and approve of it but follow what is worse (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 7.20f.).  e entscheidenden Gründe. Ulrich employs entscheidende Gründe in the same way as other authors employ the more common expression bestimmende Gründe. We have rendered entscheidende Gründe as “determining grounds” throughout Ulrich’s text.  f Erklärung

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Ulrich

introduced attempt to unify freedom and natural necessity, or whether a middle path between necessity and chance can be found at all, will become apparent in what follows.¹ [20]

§ 7. Contingent

Contingency² shall signify either that a given subject, considered on its own and independently of the entirety of its circumstances, could be something else if it were under different circumstances; or, that in changing the circumstances it can become different; or, finally, where something is the case, it could have also been otherwise under absolutely identical circumstances (so-called formal contingency). In the third sense, contingency presupposes chance. As long as the reality of this concept of formal contingency is not justified by experience or a priori, it would be the most trivial objection against determinism that all formal contingency would disappear as a result of that concept.

§ 8. Determinism and Indeterminism

A determinist is someone who teaches that everything that happens has its determining grounds; consequently, he teaches that at the time and under the entirety of circumstances in which something happens, it could not fail to occur or now be otherwise. As a result, he teaches a true, universally conditioned necessity, even in regard to our respective volition, or our intentions and decisions. Regardless of how regular and good, or imperfect and deficient they may be, they could not now be otherwise given all internal and external circumstances. [21]

The indeterminist, on the other hand, fancies that the human mind, or even any rational being, possesses the capacity to will or not will under absolutely identical internal and external circumstances, in absolutely the same aggregate condition conceived of as entirely unaltered, or even to be able to will the opposite of what he actually decides to do. Accordingly, every finite volition has no determining grounds, and, in this sense, is true chance.

* I call determining grounds those grounds from which, if they repeatedly occurred in exactly the same way, the same result would always follow without exception. Therefore, determining grounds presuppose uniformity, lawfulness, regularity, order, and necessity.

¹ Zufälligkeit ² setzt ³ Vorsätze
I. Freedom and Determinism

§ 9. There is Absolutely No Middle Path between Necessity and Chance

If a rational being wills something or decides to do something in a current, entirely determined state, then he either could have refrained from the decision and decided otherwise under absolutely identical internal and external circumstances, or not. In the first case, is it not true chance that the decision turns out exactly a certain way, since, given the completely unaltered state of the subject, it could have turned out otherwise? And do we not have true necessity in the second case? Thus, just as there can be no third term between two contradictorily opposed terms, so too no middle path is possible between determinism and indeterminism, between necessity and chance in the ways of representing so-called free intentions and decisions. [...] [31]

§ 12. Evaluation [of Kant’s Theory of Freedom]

[...]

[32]

First, it is clear that Kant’s doctrine must in no way be confused with indeterminism. For with respect to appearances and the actions concerning the human being’s empirical character, from which perspective the indeterminist tends to regard him, Kant teaches the most decisive necessity and denies all freedom. With respect to the intelligible character, however, he knew to explain himself in such an ingenious way that from one side he avoids natural necessity (according to precisely the concept he determined), and from the other side he avoids chance, i.e. an arising without any determining grounds.

But since the denial of natural necessity in the Kantian sense precludes only determination by appearances, or by temporally preceding conditions, the question always remains whether grounds of the determination of the intelligible faculty are to be found in the intelligible character itself, which would not be temporally prior, but would nevertheless be grounds. In this case, there would be natural necessity understood in another way (§ 5.).

Second, the main point is certainly the transcendental idea of the possibility of a cause whose immediate effect begins in time, but whose causality itself does not begin, and is therefore not subject to the law of being determined by other preceding grounds.3 [33]

a Glieder  b Vorstellungsarten  c nach seinen [...] genau festzubehaltenden Begriff