

CHAPTER ELEVEN

KANT ON FORCE AND ACTIVITY

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Introduction

Preliminary remarks on power

Concepts such as *power* or *force* or *activity* manifest themselves in diverse ways in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). First of all, they are used in quite different contexts in Kant's writings. Sometimes 'power' refers to the subject's mental or physical capacity to do, or not to do, something (as in *Urteilkraft*, the power of judgment, or *Willkür*, often translated as the power of choice, or *Erkenntniskraft*, the power of cognition). Sometimes 'power' or 'force' refers to something underlying natural phenomena, or something that can be found in nature's workings (as in *Macht der Natur*, the power of nature, or *bewegender Kraft*, moving force, or *vis activa*, active force). Secondly, there are several German terms which all could in a relevant context be translated as 'power' or 'force', such as *Kraft*, *Macht*, and *Gewalt*, but also as 'ability', 'faculty', or 'capacity', such as *Kraft* and *Vermögen*.

In Kant's works we also find several definitions of power, as the following examples show:

[T]he principle of change is power [*vis*].¹

Among the different kinds of unity according to concepts of the understanding belongs the causality of a substance, which is called 'power' [*Kraft*].²

The concept of the relation or of the relation of the substance to the existence of accidents, insofar as it contains their grounds, is *power*.³

¹ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 12 (*Metaphysik Herder*, AA 28:49; unless otherwise indicated, the numbers following Kant's works refer to the volume and page of AA).

² *Critique of Pure Reason*, A648/B676.

³ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 328 (*Metaphysik L₂*, 28:564).

An internally active power [*Kraft*] in a being is called life[.]⁴

Now *means* are all the intermediate causes which the human being *has within his power* [*Gewalt*], whereby to effect a certain intent.⁵

Power [*Macht*] is a capacity [*Vermögen*] that is superior to great obstacles. The same thing is called dominion [*Gewalt*] if it is also superior to the resistance of something that itself possesses power [*Macht*].⁶

However, our aim in this essay is not to give an exposition of different kinds of definitions or of terms denoting or connoting power, or of the possibly very subtle semantic differences between them. Instead, we will be dealing with some philosophical questions arising from Kant's thoughts involving the concept of power and its close relatives.

The questions

The aim of this paper is to take a look at how Kant in his critical and pre-critical writings understands activity and passivity, both in nature and in rational beings. What is it for a thing to be active, to cause changes either in itself or in its environment? How is activity possible among finite substances? Are there fundamentally different kinds of activity in the world? How is it possible that some of the acts of some finite substances are free? It turns out that for Kant, as for many other philosophers discussed in this book, questions about activity, or active forces, are ineliminably tied to questions about passivity, or passive forces. This is true of natural objects which follow blindly deterministic laws of nature, but it is also true of us, rational human beings.

We cannot hope to discuss everything related to these issues. We focus on two themes: first, nature and its forces; second, human beings and their freedom. Our discussion of the first theme begins with Kant's pre-critical views on how finite substances act and interact. We will see how Kant starts by criticizing the Leibnizian view of substances as essentially, but only immanently, active, and ends up with what could be described as the general problem of causality. After that the ideas in the *Critique of Pure Reason* are discussed, mainly Kant's defence of the 'law of causality'. As we will see, by the end of the Transcendental Logic

⁴ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 295 (*Metaphysik Volckmann*, 28:448).

⁵ *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:192.

⁶ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 28, 5:260.

in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant has developed a view of nature in which there seems to be no place for freedom in any strong sense.

After that, the possibility and nature of free activity is discussed. This will involve the Kantian conception of freedom, which also leads us to questions concerning human will and to questions pertaining to morality (morality being, so to speak, the catalyst for the whole issue of freedom). According to Kant, we are not just passive receivers of external stimuli and impulses, which would thereby determine our actions. Instead, we are, or can be, autonomous agents, who have a capacity for free actions. One could say that in human being there is *power* to actively resist or overcome the restraints set by the incentives of the sensible world. The problem is, how is this possible?

Our two themes coincide with Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning. These can be defined as two frames of mind, or operative realms in which to do philosophy, or just two distinctive explanatory grounds. The first one is tightly connected to the empirical world of phenomena (and to forget this is to be led into metaphysical errors, of which the *Critique of Pure Reason* warns us). The second one, the practical, is not confined to the sensible, having the supersensible, or 'intelligible', as its primary object. In other terms, the theoretical is the realm of *being* (*sein*) (that is, what happens, has happened or will happen, or what observable properties something has), whereas the practical is the realm of *ought* (*sollen*) (that is, what ought to happen or have happened, or what something ought to be like). This distinction is fundamental in Kant's thinking (not to mention its being also a source of several problems in itself), and, as we shall see, it also defines his views on issues pertaining to power.

Substance, interaction, and force

The vis viva controversy

Kant's first philosophical work, *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte* (1747), focuses on the notion of force (*Kraft*, *vis*). Kant asks how should we understand what he calls the essential force of bodies. His discussion is meant to be a contribution to the so-called *vis viva* controversy, which had its origin in Leibniz's critique of Descartes' notion of 'quantity of motion'.

The most pertinent aspect of the *vis viva* controversy was the disagreement about the mathematical formula expressing the force of a moving body. According to Descartes' formula, the quantity of motion or "the power of any given body to act on, or resist the action of, another body" can be identified with the product of its size with its velocity.⁷ Leibniz argues that this formula leads in some cases to absurd conclusions; instead, he holds, the force of a moving body should be understood to equal its mass times its velocity squared. Behind this disagreement about physics, Leibniz holds, lie deeper disagreements about the metaphysics of force. The fundamental mistake in the Cartesian physics can be located in the view that the essence of material things is extension. This view, Leibniz claims, leads the Cartesians to the contention that matter is essentially passive. According to Leibniz, although modern philosophers such as Descartes had been in many ways right to criticize the Aristotelian hylomorphic theory of substances, they had gone too far in their rejection of substantial forms. It was in particular the active nature of finite substances which modern philosophers had misunderstood completely. This misunderstanding had led to mistakes in the physical theory, but it had also led to mistakes in metaphysics: when finite substances were denied of force, they necessarily lost their substantiality in the end as well. Thus, Leibniz feared, the logical end of modern philosophy was Spinoza's monism according to which there is only one substance, God or Nature, and everything else is only a mode of this one substance, a necessary consequence of its essence; a view which was an anathema for Leibniz.⁸

By the time Kant was writing his first work, mathematicians Euler and Lagrange had more or less solved the physical aspect of the *vis viva* controversy. To put it simply, it can be said that both Descartes and Leibniz were partially right: they were both onto something important in physics, for both mass times velocity and mass times velocity squared had turned out to be important quantities in the classical mechanics. Though apparently unaware of Euler's or Lagrange's work, also Kant develops a similar view. He thinks, though, that Leibniz is basically right in his criticism of Descartes' view of material substances. Descartes claims that the essence of bodies is extension, whereas Leibniz holds

⁷ *Principles of Philosophy*, II.43; CSM I, p. 243.

⁸ For more on Leibniz's views on force, see Repo and Viljanen's contribution in this volume.

that we have to assume something more fundamental still, and Kant wholeheartedly agrees:

Leibniz, for whom the human reason had so much to be thankful for, learned first, that bodies have fundamental power, which belongs to them even before extension.⁹

Kant claims, however, that such rationalist followers of Leibniz as Wolff had incorrectly understood the essential force of bodies as motive force (*vis motrix*). What Kant wants to do is to develop a more abstract notion of force, not conceptually tied to interactions in which moving bodies transfer part of their motion to other bodies. He wants to develop a notion of ‘active force’ (*vis activa*) of which motive forces are only a special case. What is interesting is that for Kant the most important reason for this kind of generalization of the notion of power seems to be purely philosophical: it helps to eliminate difficulties which early modern philosophers had encountered in trying to understand mind-body interaction. Kant saw the situation more or less like this: if one understands the essential force of bodies as a motive force, then it is clear that a body can act on a soul only by causing the soul to move. But this would require the soul to be material! Thus it becomes impossible to understand how bodies can act on immaterial souls. And it will be as difficult to understand how souls can have an effect on bodies, for the essential force of a soul, apparently, cannot be a motive force, but something completely different. Accordingly, Kant thinks that when we abandon the view of the essential nature of bodies as a *vis motrix*, and take as our basic notion of force a *vis activa*, it becomes possible to understand how interaction between body and mind is possible while retaining dualism. This is because it is basically the same force which dwells both in bodies and in souls.¹⁰

⁹ *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte*, 1:17, our translation.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that at least some remnants of this view can be found even in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the chapter on Paralogisms, Kant describes the question concerning “the community of the soul with an organic body” as a dialectical question which arises from the assumption made by transcendental realists that matter as an object of outer sense is in its own inner nature completely different from the nature of the soul (A384–385).

The principle of succession

A *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755), commonly known as *Nova Dilucidatio*, is the next interesting pre-critical text with regard to dynamic concepts. In this brilliant work Kant develops an amazing number of ideas, most of which are in one way or another connected with the question of how to understand the active nature of substances. Kant asks how change in general is possible in substances. It is not, however, the term ‘force’ (*vis*) with which he is now primarily occupied, but instead the term ‘ground’ (*ratio*). Kant considers the notions of determination and ground with the aim of proving what he calls, following Crucius, “the principle of the determining ground”. According to this principle “[n]othing is true without a determining ground”.¹¹

What does Kant mean by ‘ground’? His discussions of this notion are, as are the discussions of the same concept by his contemporaries like Crucius, rather intricate. Right at the beginning of his *Nova Dilucidatio* discussion, Kant introduces a distinction which considerably complicates the content of his notion of ground. This is the distinction between ‘antecedently’ and ‘consequently’ determining grounds. The former seems to be the more important kind of ground in the *Nova Dilucidatio*. It is, Kant explains, “the reason why, or the ground of being or becoming”. The latter notion, a consequently determining ground, is epistemic: it is “the ground of knowing”.¹² At a general level, which covers both kinds of grounds, Kant describes a ground as something which “converts things which are indeterminate into things which are determinate”. Following in Leibniz’s footsteps, Kant says that any subject-predicate truth requires some appropriate connection between the predicate and the subject. For Leibniz, the proper connection was containment: the subject-concept must in some sense contain the predicate-concept. Kant speaks about “the determination of a predicate in a subject”, thus giving the impression that his understanding of truth is less intensional than Leibniz’s, in other words, having less to do with

¹¹ *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:393.

¹² *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:392. Kant uses as an illustration the eclipses of the moons of Jupiter. They are, or they give, the consequently determining ground for the fact that light has a definite velocity and does not move instantaneously from one point to another. This was indeed the method used by Ole Römer in 1676. The antecedently determining ground for this same fact would give us an explanation for why light propagates in this manner.

concepts and more with the things concepts refer to. The determining ground is also, Kant says, not only the criterion of truth, but also the source of truth. In some sense, the ground for the fact that S is P is the cause and the explanation why S is P. The ground ‘determines’ the subject so that P, rather than not-P, applies to it.¹³

Grounds can be internal or external. When something has a property and continues to have it, the ground is something in the thing itself.¹⁴ But when something changes, the ground for the change cannot be solely the changing thing anymore. In Section 3 of the *Nova Dilucidatio*, Kant presents a principle which seems to be directly opposed to Leibniz’s view of how the substantial forces operate. The primitive forces of substances, for Leibniz, were intrasubstantial, primarily the foundation for the inner dynamics in the perceptions of individual substances. Substances are active in the following sense: every substance has its own individual essence which is a force responsible for producing the series of states which constitutes the being of the substance in question. There are no real causal interactions between substances, only the pre-established harmony instituted by God between them, guaranteeing that the perceptual states of different substances are not in conflict with each other but present the same world from different perspectives.

Kant, however, rejects the idea of substances as causally independent, claiming instead that there can be no changes in substances “except in so far as they are connected with other substances”. This is the content of Kant’s *principle of succession*.¹⁵ Without external connections substances would be completely immutable. It is (at least partly) by virtue of its changed relations to other substances that a change occurs in the

¹³ *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:392–393.

¹⁴ In *Nova Dilucidatio* (1:410) Kant says that inner determinations are posited in virtue of ‘inner grounds’. He also says that a ‘ground of truth’, in contrast to a ‘ground of existence’, does not need an antecedently determining ground at all, because of the identity between the predicate and the subject (1:396–397). This is surprising, because elsewhere Kant seems ready to describe the relation between a thing and its properties in dynamic terms. In his *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (29:770), Kant says that “in relation to accidents [a substance] has power insofar as it is the ground of their inherence” (*Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 178). In 29:823 of the same text Kant also says that “[e]very substance is active insofar as its accidents inhere” (*Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 181). This is true even in cases in which the state is determined partially from outside: “E.g., a representation of a trumpet sound inheres in me through an external power, but not alone, for had I no power of representation [*vim repraesentativam*], then it could be sounded forever and I could not have a representation” (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:410.

determinations of a substance. From the Leibnizian point of view, this kind of dependence on other entities is not compatible with substancehood. Thus it seems that Kant is making a radical break with such a strong interpretation of what the independence of substances requires.

One way to describe this shift is to say that whereas for Leibniz force was basically the inner principle of the development of a substance, Kant often understands force as relational. Newton's law of universal gravitation between bodies probably had an impact on Kant's cast of mind: gravitational force is a force between different things.¹⁶ One should notice, however, that Kant is also ready to speak about power in connection with the relation between a substance and its accidents. In general, a change in the determinations of a substance requires a change in its relations to other substances so that some ground, to be found outside the substance itself, can become active. But the particular change this external ground brings about depends upon the nature of the changing substance. Kant's discussion of the principle of succession is quite abstract: the nature of the external connection necessary for change is left open (although Kant says that "motion is the appearance of a changed connection"). He makes it clear, however, that the external connection in itself is not enough for change:

[E]ven were this simple substance to be included in a connection with other substances, if this relation did not change, no change could occur in it.¹⁷

Thus, changes in substances require changes in their relations. However, no change is completely determined from outside, for the nature of the affected substance is also relevant in determining the change that happens. A simple example comes from gravitation again: the gravitational force with which some body A affects body B depends upon the masses of both bodies.

Kant gives no less than three demonstrations for the principle of succession (or perhaps the three are just different versions of one and the same demonstration, Kant uses the expression "the same differently"). In all versions he makes use of his earlier discussion concerning the notion of ground. The crucial idea is this: "The inner determinations, which already belong to the substance, are posited in virtue of inner grounds

¹⁶ Kant speaks about "Newtonian attraction" later in *Nova Dilucidatio*, when he argues that "the concept of space is constituted by the interconnected actions of substances" (1:415).

¹⁷ *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:410.

which exclude the opposite.”¹⁸ If a substance is determined in some way, if it has, say, a property P, there is something in that substance, a ground, by virtue of which it is P, and this ground does its job, as it were, by excluding the determination not-P. A change would mean that the substance loses P and changes into not-P. But how is this possible if there is the inner ground which excludes not-P? According to Kant, “you must posit another ground”. But if the substance is alone, without connection to other substances, where would this other ground come from? Kant takes it to be “patently obvious” that this other ground could only come from outside the substance in question.¹⁹

It is clear that the principle of sufficient reason, or the principle of determining ground as Kant calls it, plays a role in the demonstrations of the principle of succession. But Leibniz accepted the principle of sufficient reason as well, and still from a Leibnizian point of view the above “demonstration” is anything but obvious. Kant has an interesting comment to make on the reasons why “those who give to the Wolffian philosophy its renown” have gone wrong and maintained that simple substances change in virtue of inner principles of change.²⁰ They have defined the notion of force in an “arbitrary” way by saying that force “means that which contains the ground *of changes*”.²¹ One ought instead, according to Kant, to define force as that which “contains the ground *of determinations*”. Why is the Wolffian definition (which is essentially the same as Leibniz’s definition of primary force) arbitrary? One way to understand Kant’s point could be that grounds of determinations seem to be more fundamental than grounds of changes. A substance changes if there is a time *t* and a property P such that the substance is P before *t*, and not-P after *t*. There are grounds for these determinations in the sense that there is something in the substance which explains why it is P before *t* and not-P after *t*. But how can something which explains the inherence of P in the substance at the same time explain the inherence of not-P? This does not seem possible, and so Kant concludes that the grounds of determinations cannot play the role of grounds of changes as well. Thus we need to look somewhere else for the explanation of changes.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Similar argument can be found already in Plato; see Pietarinen’s contribution in this volume (p. 20).

²⁰ *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:411.

²¹ *Ibid.*

The principle of co-existence

Next in *Nova Dilucidatio* Kant moves on to consider another principle, the *principle of co-existence*. We have seen that a connection between substances is a necessary condition for change. Now Kant says something more about how such connection is possible in the first place. According to the principle of co-existence, relations between finite substances require more than the mere existence of these substances. What is required is a “common principle of their existence”.²² Finite substances stand in relation to each other only because they have one and the same ultimate cause, namely God, and because this ultimate cause has “established the relations of things to each other, by conceiving their existences as correlated with each other”.²³

There is something very anti-Leibnizian here as well. Leibniz would agree with Kant that God is needed for there to be co-existence. But in Leibniz’s picture, God establishes the relations between created substances simply by establishing their existence. Relations cannot change independently of the internal properties of substances. Kant, however, emphasizes that something more than merely establishing existence of individual substances is required for relations to emerge.

The mystery of causality

It is sometimes said that there was a tendency in the rationalist tradition to confuse causal and logical relations. For Kant it seems to become more and more important to keep them separate.²⁴ The following illuminating passage is from the *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*, an essay published in 1763:

I fully understand how a consequence is posited by a ground in accordance with the rule of identity: analysis of the concepts shows that the consequence is contained in the ground. [...] And I can clearly understand the connection of the ground with the consequence, for the consequence is really identical with part of the concept of the ground. And, in virtue of the fact that the consequence is already contained in the ground, it

²² *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:413.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ One rather early text in which the distinction between logical and real grounds appears is *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1762) where the idea of God as the real ground of all possibility is the central theme.

is posited by the ground, in accordance with the rule of agreement. But what I should dearly like to have distinctly explained to me, however, is how one thing issues from another thing, though not by means of the law of identity. The first kind of ground I call the logical ground, for the relation of the ground to its consequence can be understood logically. [...] The second kind of ground, however, I call the real ground, for this relation belongs, presumably, to my true concepts, but the manner of the relation can in no wise be judged.²⁵

In this passage, which may already display some Humean influences, Kant's growing disagreement with the Leibnizian tradition obtains a clear expression. Kant begins the essay by drawing the distinction between two kinds of opposition. Two things are 'logically opposed' if there is a contradiction in the idea that they both exist. Opposition is 'real' if no contradiction is involved. Many examples of real opposition which Kant gives come from physics. A body may be subject to two motive forces in opposite directions, the result of which is rest. Another case is the one where the motion of one body is 'cancelled' by another in a collision. This cancellation is based upon what Kant takes to be fundamental to all matter, its impenetrability, in other words the fact that matter "fills" space.

Logic, or analysis of concepts, cannot help us to understand real opposition, or teach us which things are real grounds to which things.²⁶ How can we have knowledge of real grounds, then? According to Kant it is experience that teaches us this. But experience cannot teach us *why* something is a real ground for something else, only that this is in fact the case. In another text Kant is more explicit about this:

[A]lthough the resistance which something exercises in the space which it occupies is thus [through experience] *recognised*, to be sure, it is not for that reason *understood*. For, like everything else which operates in opposition to an activity, this resistance is a true force. [...] Now, every rational being will readily admit that the human understanding has reached its limit here.²⁷

²⁵ *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*, 2:202.

²⁶ In *The Only Possible Argument* Kant also considers two bodies that can have 'motive forces' in opposite directions, and as a result these motive forces can annihilate each other. Now Kant says: "From this it is also apparent that real opposition is something quite different from logical opposition or contradiction, for the result of the latter is absolutely impossible" (2:86). In the case of a real ground, logic is not sufficient to determine the consequent.

²⁷ *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, 2:322.

Enter the Critique of Pure Reason

Towards the end of his pre-critical period Kant clearly faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, he thinks that the world is constituted by active entities. He has rejected the Leibnizian pre-established harmony, a view in which substances were conceived as active only with regard to their own states. Instead he prefers a metaphysic which is more in line with Newton's physics: substances which interact with each other, and only by virtue of this interaction constitute a single world. But on the other hand, Kant thinks that Hume had really discovered something profoundly important in passages like this one:

All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another, but we can never observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected*.²⁸

Hume ended up with a projectivist account of causality. It may be the case that there are constant conjunctions between event-types, but that is all one can find in the things between which causal relations are thought to obtain. When we say that one thing causes another we imply that there really is a force between them, that the one produces the other. But this is only our projection, a projection explained by the fact that after we have experienced the conjunction often enough, an association between the ideas of those things has been established in our minds.

It is important to notice that the Humean view of causality involves more than just scepticism about the reality of the causal relation. The whole model of what a causal relation involves is changed from the roots: a strongly metaphysical model of causation that invokes the causal powers of substances and their ability to alter their own properties and other substances through this power is rejected and replaced by a weaker model of causation that invokes only event-event relations. However, it is possible to raise the sceptical question between the causal relata also in a model in which substances as active agents play the central role. In fact, it could be argued that this was just what Kant did in some of the pre-critical texts considered above.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant wants to give an answer to Hume. That answer cannot be head-on, however. He cannot insist that after

²⁸ *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section VII, "Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion".

all we are able to discover the necessary connections between things, either by reason or by experience. He cannot do this because he thinks that Hume was in some sense basically right.²⁹ How, then, is Kant going to defend a view in which real interaction plays a fundamental role? The notion of force does not play any significant part in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but there are nevertheless some interesting passages. Kant clearly takes the concept of force to be an *a priori* concept. In one passage he says that “force is something which understanding thinks in a representation of a body” (B30). Force is something which remains in our representation of a body even after we separate everything which sensation gives us, for example impenetrability, hardness, and colour. In the Table of Categories, Kant gives what he describes as “the true root concepts of pure understanding” (A81/B107). Besides these root concepts there are also derivative concepts, “equally pure”, called ‘predicables’. The concept of force is among these. From the category of causality one can derive the predicables of force, action, and undergoing.

If Kant succeeds in the Transcendental Deduction to show that there can be no experience without the application of the categories, then he has also given us reason to believe that concepts like force and action must have a role in our conception of the empirical world. Because the considerations in the Deduction have nothing directly to do with our themes, we are not going to discuss them. Instead we can take a look at some later parts of the first *Critique* where Kant develops his views of causality further.

In what he calls the Analogies of Experience Kant discusses some *a priori* principles involving the categories of substance, cause and effect, and interaction. The precise relation of the discussion to the earlier parts of the *Critique* is a matter of still ongoing debate, but all three analogies have something to do with the way in which a manifold of perceptions is transformed into a unified experience. The principle common to all analogies is, as it is formulated in the second edition, this: “Experience is possible only through the representation of a necessary connection

²⁹ In the *Prolegomena*, Kant writes that we can understand that Hume was right in claiming that, in Kant’s words, “we in no way have insight through reason into the possibility of causality, i.e., the possibility of relating the existence of one thing to the existence of some other thing that would necessarily be posited through the first one” (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, § 27, 4:311).

of perceptions" (A176/B218). We have seen that Kant earlier wondered about the necessary connection: how can distinct things be necessarily connected so that the occurrence of one necessitates the occurrence of the other? It is clear that Kant has not rejected the idea that in some sense causality involves necessity. His way of showing how this is possible is now transcendental: events in nature are causally connected by virtue of the fact that such a connection is a necessary condition of experience.

The First Analogy involves the category of substance; according to it, the 'quantum' of substance remains the same in all changes of appearances. Kant says that change can be perceived only in substances (A188/B321). Thus the metaphysical underpinnings of Kant's theory of change seem to be similar to those of the pre-critical writings: substance-accident ontology. The Second Analogy concerns causality and Kant formulates it like this: "All alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect" (A189/B232). Kant's proof of the Second Analogy is closely connected with answering the following question: how is it possible to represent a succession of states of an object? Kant argues that the fact that there is what he calls the subjective sequence of apprehension is an insufficient base for the representation of an objective sequence of appearances. Representations may occur in us in a certain temporal order. But the temporal order of the events in the external objects does not correspond to the subjective temporal order of experiences in any simple way. If I walk around a house, I receive a series of experiences of the different determinations of the house, but though my experiences come one after another, I do not think that the corresponding determinations of the house follow one another in the same manner. In some other case, for instance when I see a ship floating down the river, the subjective order corresponds to succeeding positions of the ship (A1982/B237). Why so in this case, if not in the first? Kant says that "the former [the subjective sequence] proves nothing about the connection of the manifold in the object, because it is entirely arbitrary" (A193/B238).

If Kant is right in the Second Analogy, the empirical world with objective processes in which objects change their states is necessarily a causal world with necessary law-abiding connections between different events. This does not mean that Hume's point about the presence of causal powers in the world is not correct. Kant admits that much when he says that "temporal sequence is accordingly the only empiri-

cal criterion of the effect in relation to the causality of the cause that precedes it" (A203/B249). He also makes essentially the same point about our causal knowledge he made in the later pre-critical texts considered above, namely that it is not possible to have *a priori* causal knowledge: "Now how in general anything can be altered, how it is possible that upon a state in one point of time an opposite one could follow in the next—of these we have *a priori* not the least concept" (A207/B252). Towards the end of the Second Analogy, Kant turns once again to discuss a very Leibnizian theme, the connection between the concept of substance and the concept of action. In the First Analogy Kant had proved the connection between substance and permanence. The Second Analogy establishes the connection between substance and activity: "This causality leads to the concept of action, this to the concept of force, and thereby to the concept of substance" (A203/B249). Kant raises a question concerning the relation of these two crucial features of substances, namely their permanence—the feature he emphasizes in the First Analogy—and their active nature.

The Second Analogy is basically the claim that every change in the universe is a causal process. The Third Analogy concerns not changes directly but the things that change, substances. Kant's formulation of the Third Analogy is this: "All substances, insofar as they can be perceived in space as simultaneous, are in thoroughgoing interaction" (A222/B257). Kant, once again, seems to have had in mind the Newtonian view that all bodies exert gravitational force on all other bodies. That the principle is *a priori* comes as a bit of a surprise, given that until Newton, the prevailing view in the new physics was that substances act only on those with which they are in immediate contact. Leibniz, of course, had claimed that substances do not interact at all, and Kant is here once again distinguishing himself from that view. But in this regard Kant's discussion is not as far from some Leibnizian themes as one might first think. A common theme is the question concerning the unity of the world. What makes it the case that substances, in some sense independent from each other in their being, belong to the same world? For Leibniz, the universal harmony established by God constitutes the fact that substances belong to the same world. In his proof of the Third Analogy, Kant argues that without interaction, we would be unable to determine whether objects exist simultaneously, given that time cannot be perceived. As Henry Allison puts it, "the basic claim is that thoroughgoing interaction is the condition under

which distinct substances can be experienced as coexisting in a common spatiotemporal world”.³⁰

Activity, freedom, and the human subject

Our superiority over nature

In his earliest work, Kant saw the question of active forces to be fundamentally connected with the mind-body problem. Of all the intertwining philosophical problems Kant’s biggest concern, however, would eventually come to be the relation of morality with other issues concerning the world and the place of human subject in it. The main problem is that we seem to arrive at a very deterministic world view, one which is not easily made compatible with human freedom. This is a serious problem because, at least according to Kant, world without freedom leaves no room for morality. Already in his pre-critical work, Kant thought that if there were no freedom, our moral concerns would be meaningless, our claims about right and wrong nonsensical.³¹

Later on Kant is very strict on this, freedom being “absolutely required for everything moral”.³² Already from this we could conclude that there must be freedom, but is it only that we would like to think so because such a conclusion presumably seems more acceptable, or simply nicer, than strict determinism? Are we not, as the argument goes, causally determined just like everything else in nature? How can it be that each and every event is conditioned by another event, but our actions, or at least some of them, are not? How can we speak of moral responsibility if freedom is not ensured?

It is a widely accepted idea that morality requires freedom, and it is also one of the key thoughts in Kant’s philosophical system. Indeed, Kant was a thinker not willing to deny the existence of morality. Rather, morality plays the ultimate role in making us human beings. Freedom, of course, does not follow straightaway from the need to presuppose morality, but the latter sets a motive for establishing freedom and gives us reasons to look further into the matter. So, granted that morality implies freedom, what evidence, on the other hand, we have of moral-

³⁰ Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, p. 261.

³¹ See e.g. *Lectures on Metaphysics*, pp. 81–82 (*Metaphysik L*, 28:269).

³² *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:190.

ity? As Kant puts it, we are aware of *moral law*, which “absolutely commands us, and by virtue of the existence of this law we can infer the freedom of our actions”.³³

Should we not be suspicious of such an inference? Maybe, but Kant has a point here. Despite being the sensuous creatures we are, we are also rational creatures by our very nature. Our thinking is not guided only by what we sense and perceive in the world. For example, even though we will never meet a perfectly virtuous human being, we can think what qualities such a person would have. Knowing this, we can set a standard for our own conduct and try to get as close to it as possible.³⁴ In other words, we can put such an ideal into regulative use, and we do seem to recognize something like this taking place in us and in the behaviour of other people.

Not only are we “at least acquainted with the (moral) laws of freedom”,³⁵ but we can also raise ourselves above nature, regard ourselves as independent of it:

[T]he irresistibility of [nature’s] power [*Macht*] certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness [*Ohnmacht*], but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of and a superiority [*Überlegenheit*] over nature on which is grounded a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside us, whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion [*Gewalt*].³⁶

This capacity has direct moral connotations. Just as we can regard ourselves as not utterly dominated by nature, it is within our power to put our interests and pragmatic ends aside, and give room to “our highest [i.e., moral] principles”.³⁷ This also indicates, as the quote above suggests, that humanity is not about natural self-preservation, but rather about rising above such a thing.³⁸ The clearest example of this would be an unselfish moral action.

³³ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 490 (*Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1022).

³⁴ See the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A569–570/B597–598.

³⁵ *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:191.

³⁶ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 28, 5:261–262. The context here is Kant’s theory of the sublime.

³⁷ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:262.

³⁸ Cf. *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:26. See also *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:392, where humanity is distinguished from animality by the human capacity to set oneself ends.

Even though moral value is the primary value in Kant's thinking, there are also other important values which support the moral one and seem to give it, so to speak, empirical meaningfulness (in addition to good deeds and so on, of course). For example, acting according to moral law, which for Kant is strictly a rational law, is valued by Kant also because it is sublime.³⁹ This is at least the case when one is not only "subject to moral law" but "at the same time *lawgiving* with respect to it and only for that reason subordinated to it".⁴⁰

Kant takes beauty to be another human cultural value, which, *via* the feeling that is part of experiencing it, "greatly promotes morality".⁴¹ When contemplating a beautiful object, Kant thinks, we value the given object for itself without any aim of profiting from it.⁴² The fact that we act disinterestedly towards it in that situation then at least suggests a possibility for putting our personal interests aside in other situations, too.⁴³ Eventually this points to the capacity for acting freely, not just going after whatever our arbitrary interests make us desire.

Nonetheless, on these matters experience does not secure much. We cannot explain the moral law empirically by showing what happens in the world, because it is what we *ought to do* that counts.⁴⁴ Then again,

³⁹ See the *Critique of the Practical Reason*, 5:117. Here it may be appropriate to point out that the fact that Kant is against moral feeling theorists such as Epicurus or Shaftesbury (see e.g. the so-called *Inaugural Dissertation*, 2:396) does not mean that he is against such feelings *per se* but against making those, instead of rational reasoning, the very foundation of morality. So, for Kant, however much we may have empirical evidence for moral feelings or some such, it is not enough to found a philosophical account of morality.

⁴⁰ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:440.

⁴¹ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:443.

⁴² E.g. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 2, 5:204.

⁴³ Kant writes in the remark on § 29 (5:267) of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: "The beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest; the sublime, to esteem it, even contrary to our (sensible) interest." Paul Guyer, who quotes the passage in Guyer and Allison, "Dialogue: Paul Guyer and Henry Allison on Allison's *Kant's Theory of Taste*", p. 125, takes this to mean "that the experience of the beautiful teaches us that it is possible for us to act disinterestedly, that is, out of disinterested motivation, while the experience of the sublime reminds us that we must often overcome sensible interests or inclinations in order to do this, but also to suggest that the experiences of the beautiful and the sublime actually prepare us to act morally by strengthening dispositions to feeling that are, as Kant says in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, 'serviceable to morality in one's relations with other people'". Henry Allison writes in the same article (p. 134) that "the experience of beauty has an important propaedeutic function, helping us to break with our sensuous interests and thereby providing a kind of bridge to morality". See also Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 167–168.

⁴⁴ E.g. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A318–319/B375.

we do acknowledge this 'ought', which, in turn, makes the causal necessity of our actions suspect. According to Kant, the latter is not only so because of our moral concerns, but also explanatorily, as hinted, for example, in this pre-critical passage:

But the necessity of nature alone cannot be the explanatory ground of everything; the first ground of origination must happen through freedom, because nothing but freedom can furnish a ground of origination, of which more is said in the Rational Theology.⁴⁵

Yet, the doctrine Kant calls rational theology leads us to speculations about the idea of God, which are not necessarily helpful here. As Kant says elsewhere: "I will explain natural appearances as though they came from the constitution of nature; I cannot call on God. For that would mean putting aside all philosophizing."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, God can be either useful or indeed a necessary idea from the *practical* point of view, and the very same applies to the idea of freedom as well. Moreover, we must take the question out of empirical context altogether.

The human being as noumenon

It was shown above that for Kant the concern about morality acts as the most important motivation for solving the problem of freedom (the latter being a direct follow-up to the questions pertaining to causality which is for the 'critical' Kant the category that contains such concepts as force and activity). The questions about freedom and morality seem to be thoroughly intertwined, as the lack of one seems to mean the lack of the other. Kant has already given us plenty of insights supporting both human freedom and human morality, but the problem remains: human freedom could still be said to be only an assumption. But is it, for Kant, only that? His 1770s lectures on metaphysics display Kant's 'empiricist' tendencies on the matter:

A human being thus *feels* a faculty [*Vermögen*] in himself for not allowing himself to be compelled to do something by anything in the world. Often because of other grounds this is indeed difficult; but it is still possible, he still *has the power* [*Kraft*] for it.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 24 (*Metaphysik L₁*, 28:200).

⁴⁶ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 130 (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:774).

⁴⁷ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 70 (*Metaphysik L₁*, 28:255, emphases ours).

The quote suggests that the human power of acting freely is not to be seen just as a practical assumption, but also as something we are somehow conscious of, even though not necessarily immediately.⁴⁸

In some places Kant does not seem to approach freedom as a problem at all, but rather takes many things more or less for granted:

Practical freedom can be proved through experience. For it is not merely that which stimulates the senses, i.e., immediately affects them, that determines human choice, but we have a capacity [*Vermögen*] to overcome impressions on our sensory faculty of desire by representations of that which is useful or injurious even in a more remote way; but these considerations about that which in regard to our whole condition is desirable, i.e., good and useful, depend on reason. Hence this also yields laws that are imperatives, i.e., objective laws of freedom, and that say what ought to happen, even though perhaps it never does happen, and that are thereby distinguished from laws of nature, which deal only with that which does happen, on which account the former are also called practical imperatives.⁴⁹

On the other hand, what is *not* known by us is

whether in these [free] actions, through which it prescribes laws, reason is not itself determined by further influences, and whether that which with respect to sensory impulses is called freedom might not in turn with regard to higher and more remote efficient causes be nature[.]⁵⁰

Here Kant thinks as if he was our contemporary. It could be so that we just do not know enough to settle the question about freedom. If we were to have access to all possible information, maybe then the so-called practical freedom, together with all our actions and omissions, would be shown to be as necessitated as anything that happens in the world.

Then again, it should be emphasized that after the passage quoted above Kant adds that we should not concern us with such a possibility

⁴⁸ E.g. in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 264 (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:897) and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:29–30) Kant denies that we are immediately conscious of freedom. It is rather the consciousness of the moral law that reveals freedom, as already suggested above (more of this later on).

⁴⁹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A802/B830, emphasis ours. Cf. *Opus postumum*, 22:53: “The possibility of freedom cannot be directly proved, but only indirectly, through the possibility of the categorical imperative of duty, which requires no incentives of nature.”

⁵⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A803/B831. See also A549–550/B577–578 and *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 264 (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:897), where Kant speaks of the possibility of ‘secret stimulus’ working in us.

“in the practical sphere”. Practically speaking, we nonetheless decide whether to do this or that, if anything, and at least to this extent the reducibility of freedom to causal mechanisms is “merely speculative question, which we can set aside as long as our aim is directed to action or omission”.⁵¹ What else are these decisions and doings and refrainings but everyday facts of life, and as such empirically known by us?

So, the genuine philosophical problem seems to be what Kant calls *transcendental freedom*.⁵² In the first *Critique* Kant defines it as “an absolute causal spontaneity [*Spontaneität*] beginning from itself a series of appearances”⁵³ and as “a faculty [*Vermögen*] of absolutely beginning a state, and hence also a series of its consequences”.⁵⁴ Later, when speaking of it as “freedom in the cosmological sense” and emphasizing it to be “transcendental idea of freedom” Kant defines it as

the faculty [*Vermögen*] of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature.⁵⁵

This sets us a tricky problem in two ways: as a general philosophical question of the possibility and explicability of freedom, and as a more specific question concerning Kant’s way of conceiving the human subject.

The general philosophical question would then be whether we can make nature and freedom compatible. If we take determinism to mean simply that every event has a cause, we can easily arrive at a compatibilist solution.⁵⁶ For example, if I now decide to go out of my room, I am the cause of that event. Being free means just that I can have an effect on a causal series in this sense and to this extent. But let us suppose that we want to know exactly what happens in the given situation.

⁵¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A803/B831.

⁵² At the time of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (see e.g. 5:97), Kant holds that transcendental freedom is the necessary grounding condition for morality. Securing transcendental freedom would then be the basis for Kant’s moral philosophy, so the stakes are high. Kant’s earlier view is different, e.g. in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 80 (*Metaphysik L*₁, 28:267): “Practical or psychological freedom was the independence of the power of choice from the necessitation of stimuli. This is treated in empirical psychology, and this concept of freedom was also sufficient enough for morality.”

⁵³ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A446/B474.

⁵⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A445/B473.

⁵⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A533/B561.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 489 (*Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1021), where Kant makes a distinction between determinism and predeterminism.

There we have certain limitations stemming from the fact that if we want to explain what happens, we must deal with appearances, or empirical phenomena. When examining the causal chain, we cannot arrive at any freestanding first cause, for example, my decision to leave the room, because there is always a further cause lurking around the corner. That is, theoretically speaking, we cannot prove the supposed freedom of my action just as we cannot prove the existence of the first mover, or God.

Maybe it indeed was I as an autonomous agent who began a new series of consequences, assuming that I in fact left the room, but it is equally possible that my action was just a compulsory reaction to various sensuous incentives having an impact on me. Maybe I was, to use Kant's phrase, only being "controlled by the strings of nature".⁵⁷ Whatever explanation we try and propose, the empirical fact remains: all we really had before us were appearances of various causes and effects preceding and following each other in time. From this we could conclude just as Kant did:

Thus in regard to this empirical character there is no freedom, and according to this character we can consider the human being solely by observing, and, as happens in anthropology, by trying to investigate the moving causes of his actions physiologically.⁵⁸

What is really important here, however, is that for Kant this does not imply an absolute denial of freedom. As Allison points out, the claim that for any action there is always an empirical-causal explanation does not preclude freedom.⁵⁹

As rational beings we can reason what we *ought to do*, and it could very well be so that to fulfil my duties I ought to stay in my room until I have finished the task given to me. Even if I went out right away when I noticed the bright blue sky, I can still reason quite clearly that I *ought not to have acted* that way. The 'ought' here refers to the rule-generating property of our reason, that is, to our ability to set for ourselves principles and control our actions according to them. 'What happens?' is an empirical question, and in the current example we can answer it by referring to the empirical fact of this one person leaving

⁵⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A463/B491.

⁵⁸ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A550/B578.

⁵⁹ Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, p. 42. Similarly, Allison emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the question of explanation from that of imputation.

the room (preceded and accompanied by many other empirical facts, such as what happened in the person's brain and so on). Now, 'What ought to happen?' is not an empirical question at all, Kant thinks. To answer it, we must acknowledge certain non-empirically given grounds for action. Someone could say, very much in Kantian spirit, that I should have acted out of duty and not have left the room before my task was done (assuming the task was not unreasonable or impossible to accomplish). Someone else could say, very much in anti-Kantian spirit, that I did the right thing by following my more natural urge to postpone the task. Either way, what is set before me is a rule, or principle, by which to act, reminding us that "the realm in which *principles* [...] have power is not one of nature but of freedom".⁶⁰

Hence, the principles that regulate action make explicit the *human* causal powers (and it happens to be so that morality is the domain where these principles are put into their most pure use):

Now that this reason has causality, or that we can at least represent something of the sort in it, is clear from the imperatives that we propose as rules to our powers of execution [*Kräften als Regeln*] in everything practical. The ought expresses a species of necessity and a connection with grounds which does not occur anywhere else in the whole of nature.⁶¹

Broadly put, reason determines the will (*Wille*) via principles, and the will has the power (*Willkür*) to begin a course of action according to these principles.⁶² At least we can explain freedom in this way. Furthermore, as transcendental freedom is, after all, an idea, it lacks by definition any explanation given on phenomenal grounds. It is indeed intelligible and conceivable, but not empirically demonstratable in a definite fashion (as it lacks, in more Kantian terms, an object of intuition). Still, an idea may be necessary. We cannot, so to speak, nullify freedom. Rather, our reason must think of it.⁶³ Whatever can or

⁶⁰ *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:82.

⁶¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A547/B575.

⁶² To be more precise, there are two kinds of principles, objective and subjective. Kant calls the latter 'maxims'. These are the principles by which we actually act, be they good or bad. An objective principle is a law on which we should base our actions regardless of any other principles that we may have set ourselves. Ultimately, it would be the universal moral law overriding subject's inclination-based or other non-moral willings. (See e.g. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:400–401; 4:420–421; *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:20.)

⁶³ One could also speak of a need of reason. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:5), Kant speaks of "a *need having the force of law*, to assume something without which that cannot happen which one *ought* to set unflinchingly as the aim of one's conduct".

cannot be said of freedom in a theoretically fitting manner, we cannot rid ourselves of the possibility of freedom (when regarded as an idea). Kant puts much weight on our limits as knowing subjects: we lack theoretical knowledge of transcendental freedom but we also lack absolute grounds of claiming that there is *not* such a thing.⁶⁴

According to Kant, human reason has a natural interest to seek unity and coherence.⁶⁵ Interestingly for our purposes, he uses the concept of power as an example of this. As we are confronted with all kinds of powers or forces in nature, we try and subordinate these powers, which at first seem to manifest themselves in very diverse and unconnected ways, under one fundamental power. That is, we systematize our perceptions according to certain maxims of thought, such as ‘seek the greatest unity and interconnection among things’ (this formulation being ours not Kant’s). The important thing here is, however, that as we can only recognize powers by observing the workings of nature, and despite our successful effort to reduce various derivative powers to more primitive ones, the ultimate cause of this or that power will remain hidden from us.⁶⁶ Moreover, we cannot know for sure whether we have found any absolutely fundamental power, towards which our reason nonetheless strives.⁶⁷ Similarly, our reason strives after absolute freedom, or absolute spontaneity, and the first cause independent of any prior cause. For Kant, it almost seems irrelevant that reason cannot achieve its goal on theoretical grounds. Thus the question must be taken to the non-empirical or noumenal realm, which also poses the most obvious problem for Kant’s account of freedom. How to *positively* argue for freedom on such grounds? What is the talk about the special kind of causality of freedom, or of reason, really about?

As already suggested in the passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason* quoted above (p. 271; A533/B561), Kant claims transcendental freedom to be an atemporal, that is, a self-determining power or faculty, “causality

⁶⁴ This is already evident in Kant’s thought in 1770s, e.g. in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 82 (*Metaphysik L*₁, 28:270).

⁶⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A648–651/B676–679. The context here is Kant’s analysis of the regulative use of the ideas of reason.

⁶⁶ See *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 328 (*Metaphysik L*₂, 28:564). This applies to physics as well as to psychology (or as he calls it, “physics of spirits”).

⁶⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A649–651/B677–679. Regarding some power as fundamental follows rather from the presupposition of the “systematic unity of nature”.

of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature". Elsewhere Kant also speaks of the will

that does not draw its determining, and indeed adequate, grounds (intellectual) from states and conditions of the previous time but, rather, performs the action by self-determination (spontaneity) and without being necessitated by any cause of the previous time.⁶⁸

We can quite easily *think* of a cause that is not being determined or necessitated by what happened before if it is permitted to put the cause in question outside the confines of time so to speak. The question remains, though, would that be an explanation of a capacity for free *action*? Then again, Kant sees reason as the ultimate human power. It is also, metaphorically speaking, the supreme court that decides where to set the limits of our understanding. As Kant writes in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

[Reason] proves its highest occupation in distinguishing the world of sense and the world of understanding from each other and thereby marking out limits for the understanding itself.

Because of this a rational being must regard himself as *intelligence* (hence not from the side of his lower powers) as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of understanding; hence he has two standpoints from which he can regard himself and cognize laws for the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions[.]⁶⁹

Emphasizing a previously made point, we just cannot consider our "own kind" of causality, or spontaneity, but "under the idea of freedom".⁷⁰

Furthermore, in his later writings Kant insists that the causality of freedom, even though not compatible with the causality of nature from the theoretical standpoint, is nonetheless a *fact*:

But what is quite remarkable, there is even one idea of reason (which is in itself incapable of any presentation in intuition, thus incapable of theoretical proof of its possibility) among the facts, and that is the idea of freedom, the reality of which, as a particular kind of causality (the concept of which would be excessive from a theoretical point of view) can be established through practical laws of pure reason, and in accordance

⁶⁸ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 487 (*Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1019).

⁶⁹ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:452.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

with these, in real actions, and thus in experience.—It is the only one among all the ideas of pure reason whose object is a fact and which must be counted among the *scibilia* [things that can be known].⁷¹

Before this passage Kant first defines facts as “objects for concepts the objective reality of which can be proved”, and then as “things, or their properties, which can be established by means of experience (one’s own experience or the experience of others, by means of testimony)”. At first glance it may seem that these definitions turn the *idea* of freedom into a very peculiar kind of fact, but in addition to ‘extending’ the concept, Kant seems to, above all, point to the application of practical laws, which is something experientially realizable. This, taken together with the following passage from the second *Critique*, also reveals the link to morality once again:

I ask instead from what our *cognition* of the unconditionally practical *starts*, whether from freedom or from the practical law. It cannot start from freedom, for we can neither be immediately conscious of this, since the first concept of it is negative, nor can we conclude to it from experience, since experience lets us cognize only the law of appearances and hence the mechanism of nature, the direct opposite of freedom. It is therefore the *moral law*, of which we become immediately conscious (as soon as we draw up maxims of the will for ourselves), that *first* offers itself to us and, inasmuch as reason presents it as a determining ground not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions and indeed quite independent of them, leads directly to the concept of freedom.⁷²

Such rational laws, in turn, “are also something that properly belongs to a human being as noumenon, and constitutes the character of the latter”.⁷³ This makes sense, because they are something not empirically given to us, and also something we have despite of whatever it is that is empirically given to us. But how we are to explain this, is beyond our abilities: “In short, we cannot explain what is working in us.”⁷⁴ On the other hand, this holds equally of explaining freedom and of explaining nature in its innermost workings, as the active power in itself remains incomprehensible in both realms. Keeping this important point in

⁷¹ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 91, 5:468.

⁷² *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:29–30. Cf. *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 491 (*Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1023).

⁷³ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 491 (*Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1023), emphasis removed.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

mind the challenge is not to remain on the freedom-side of the issue, but rather on both sides.⁷⁵

The plain answer would then be that we have two standpoints which allow two kinds of causalities not contradicting one another.⁷⁶ Not only are they logically compatible, but self-standing on their own. It is noteworthy that Kant is strictly an incompatibilist when it comes to explaining theoretically the phenomenal realm of appearances. But it is equally noteworthy that Kant seems to argue all along that we are not in a position to give absolute priority to such a stance. In fact, Kant recognizes the insistence on the incompatibility between nature and freedom as based on “the common but deceptive presupposition of the absolute reality of appearance”.⁷⁷ In Kant’s thinking such a presupposition would ultimately be based on the false identification of appearances with the things in themselves. The coexistence of nature and freedom is further supported by the special role of transcendental freedom in the antinomies of pure reason in the first *Critique*.⁷⁸ The outcome of the Third Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas, that is, the conflict between the affirmation of freedom (thesis) and its denial (antithesis), is, as Allison has put it, that both are dogmatic in their own way.⁷⁹

As should be clear by now, Kant has no simple and straightforward argument for human freedom. There are two main reasons for this. First, Kant developed and fine-tuned his view for decades. Second, to have a deep understanding of Kant’s arguments one needs to examine his philosophical project thoroughly and as a whole (which is something beyond the scope of this paper). Still, an unkind interpreter could say that Kant does not argue *for* freedom but rather gives too much force

⁷⁵ Here one could consider such sources as *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 82 (*Metaphysik L*, 28:270), *Critique of Pure Reason*, A318–319/B375, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 76, 5:403, and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:121, spanning almost twenty years of Kant’s thinking.

⁷⁶ One could of course protest, as many have done, that to explain free action it is not a legitimate move to separate sensible from supersensible—or empirical from intelligible—as two somewhat independent points of view. Eventually this leads to questioning Kant’s whole critical system, also known as transcendental idealism. We will not, for obvious reasons, follow such a lead here.

⁷⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A536/B564.

⁷⁸ For Kant, the idea of freedom is, compared to the ideas of God and immortality, special also in the sense made explicit in the following passage: “But among all the ideas of speculative reason freedom is the only the possibility of which we *know* a priori, though without having insight into it, because it is the condition of the moral law, which we do know” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:4).

⁷⁹ Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 23.

on presuppositions. In one sense this is also the outcome of our analysis, namely that Kant rather argues for the limits of what can be positively and plausibly said of such matters as the freedom of our actions. Then, if the answers seem insufficient, the reason for that is not so much Kant's argumentation but the subject matter itself. At any rate, here we find ourselves close to the heart of Kant's critical project.

Epilogue: human being as originator

On the basis of Kant's general picture of agency, we can make the following distinctions. On the one hand, we have internally determined free actions, which are based on the intellect's own motives. From these can arise spontaneous actions, controlled by the will. In Kant's own words: "Whoever is determined by motives is free, for he acts according to the laws of his own reason according to spontaneity and not according to receptivity."⁸⁰ When someone acts 'according to spontaneity', reason has the active and determining role. Reason is thus the source of the human causality of freedom and the lawlike imperatives according to which the subject acts or refuses to act, and this cannot be explained exclusively by the causality of nature.

On the other hand, we have externally determined antecedently necessitated actions. All human beings, including those who act freely, have desires and impulses, but those who just react according to them in a non-spontaneous way are passive, that is, act 'according to receptivity'. Here nature takes the active role. Any such situation can be explained by the causality of nature, and the laws pertaining to it.

It seems plausible enough that actions are either antecedently necessitated or autonomous (that is, not determined by antecedent natural causes but by the human will). Only in the latter case the human being can be seen as having active power, being thus an originator of actions, not just a puppet acting according to the causal influence of external forces. But, as already hinted, no person is completely outside external influence, and in that sense no human action should be regarded as purely self-determined. As Kant writes,

⁸⁰ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 378 (*Metaphysik Dohna*, 28:677).

stimuli will and must not be excluded from the human power of choice, for otherwise it would be a pure power of choice, a pure self-dependent being, which can determine itself only according to the laws, not against them.⁸¹

At the level of genuine actions, “highest freedom of all”, “utterly independent of all stimuli” would thus be no human freedom (yet we do possess the idea, which we can put into regulative use).⁸² What thus seems to matter in free human agency taking place in real life situations is subject’s capacity to control, or act against, external influence. Again, a couple of Kant’s definitions are in order: “Freedom in the practical sense is the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility.”⁸³ In other words, it is based on “a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses”.⁸⁴ According to Kant, this faculty, or power, also separates human beings from mere animals: both human and animal power of choice are sensible, that is, pathologically affected, but only the latter is pathologically necessitated.⁸⁵

Then, if one can suppress sensible impulses, being thereby not necessitated by them, one is free. This is possible because of what Kant calls *arbitrium liberum* (free choice).⁸⁶ But it seems to follow from the above that in actual cases our actions are only ‘comparatively’ (relatively) free. Consider the following pre-critical view:

One can be forced by sensuality to act contrary to the intellect, but one can also be forced by the intellect to act contrary to sensuality. The more a human being has power [*Kraft*], by means of the higher [intellectual] power of choice [*Willkür*], to suppress the lower [sensitive] power of choice, the freer he is. But the less he can compel sensuality by the intellect, the less freedom he has. If one compels oneself according to rules

⁸¹ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 485 (*Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1016).

⁸² The quotations are from the *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 71 (*Metaphysik L*, 28:256).

⁸³ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A534/B562. Cf. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:226.

⁸⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A534/B562. Still, as Allison (*Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, p. 39) writes, “even desire-based or, as Kant later termed it, ‘heteronomous’ action involves the self-determination of the subject, and, therefore, a ‘moment’ of spontaneity”.

⁸⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A534/B562. Human beings, in contrast to animals, are also “beings whose causality is teleological, i.e., aimed at ends” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 84, 5:435).

⁸⁶ E.g. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A802/B830.

of morality, and the lower power of choice is suppressed by the higher power of choice, then that is *virtue*.⁸⁷

We could say, of course, that if one acts according to the moral law, which holds universally, one is free from the ‘necessitation by impulses’ in the fullest possible sense. We could also speak of our power of choice as pure in the sense of being “determined merely by the representation of law”.⁸⁸ On the other hand, can we ever be absolutely certain whether we really base our actions on such a law?⁸⁹ Could it not be so that we are being motivated by something else but we just do not know it? What we would also like to have, if we are to be called absolutely free agents, is the possibility to knowingly act against any such law, even if it is not a good thing.⁹⁰

But we can here leave aside the problems of interpreting Kant’s account of morality and its many details. If we focus, instead, on issues encountered in Kant’s theoretical philosophy, as scrutinized above, we find some interesting similarities. Just like external connection, without which substances are left immutable, is needed for any change to occur, there would be no action whatsoever without external forces interacting with the human agent. That an agent is only relatively free does not then need to imply that she would not really be free. Rather, without some kind of interconnection, the human subject would be neither active nor passive: he or she would be no more determining than determined.

⁸⁷ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 71 (*Metaphysik L₁*, 28:256–257). Cf. *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:402, where Kant suggests that we are free only if we act according to the representation of the good, and the better we succeed in this, the freer we are.

⁸⁸ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, pp. 378–379 (*Metaphysik Dohna*, 28:677). Here morality is once again the ultimate basis: without it such a pure power of choice would be “absurd”. Cf. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:213: “Human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by pure will.”

⁸⁹ Cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:47: “[T]he moral law is given, as it were, as a fact of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious and which is apodictically certain, though it be granted that no example of exact observance of it can be found in experience.”

⁹⁰ Cf. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 5, 5:210: “For where the moral law speaks there is, objectively, no longer any free choice with regard to what is to be done[.]” This could be taken to imply that subjectively speaking, there is still room for free choice. We could choose to act on a not-so-good maxim, regardless of the moral law. We should prefer the latter, but even if we act contrary to it, we would still remain free agents (albeit far removed from virtuous ones).

We are subjects whose essence involves being under the influence of external forces. But we are essentially active with regard to the external world as well, and it is not only in his discussions on freedom where Kant emphasizes this. The idea of active subjects can be found in the centre of the theoretical philosophy of the first *Critique* as well. In the beginning of the so-called B-deduction, Kant makes a foundational claim that what we receive through the senses is a manifold which is not, as given, a unified whole, but only a plurality. This plurality can begin to have the form of a world only through an act of combination. And this combination is an “act of spontaneity”, or an “act of subject’s self-activity”.⁹¹ Thus it is not only freedom but cognition—the world as an object—which requires the capacity to act as an originator.

⁹¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B129–130.