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IS KANT'S ACCOUNT OF FREE WILL COHERENT?

by

PAUL A. DUMOND

Under the Direction of Eric Wilson, PhD

ABSTRACT

Whether Kant's account of free will is coherent or not depends upon how we interpret him. On the one hand, if we understand Kant as providing some metaphysical solution to the problem of free will, which secures the *reality* of free will for agents, then his account seems to be incoherent. One the other hand, if we understand Kant's account as merely providing a defense of the assumption, or idea of freedom for practical purposes, then his account seems to be useful and coherent. I will argue that the latter account of free will is the one that Kant provides in his works, and will illustrate how this account might shed light on to our epistemic limits and our nature as human beings.

INDEX WORDS: Immanuel Kant, Free Will, Causation, Moral responsibility, Practical philosophy

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PAUL A. DUMOND

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DEDICATION

To mom and dad. This thesis is the direct result of all your love and support.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will argue that whether Kant's account of free will is coherent or not depends upon how we interpret him. On the one hand, if we understand his account to be some sort of robust causal/theoretical explanation of how humans have freedom, which provides a positive theory of free will meant to work out how free will and causal determinism or natural necessity may be metaphysically compatible with each other or to show how, to be free, agents must exempt themselves in some way from the natural causal order, then his account is incoherent. Interpreted in this way, the account would face a dilemma which, to my mind, is insurmountable. On the other hand, if we understand his account to be merely a defense of the idea of free will—one that merely presents a conceptual framework within which we may make room for the *idea* of freedom—then his account seems to be useful, and helps to deepen our understanding of ourselves. To provide a defense of the idea of freedom in this sense, means to assume the idea of freedom and show that no amount of theoretical knowledge of the world, or of natural necessity, shows our idea of freedom to be impossible.

There is much to suggest that Kant takes himself to be presenting the latter defense of free will, rather than a metaphysical theory. Indeed, he explicitly denies that a theoretical solution to the problem of free will is possible, and claims that all that is left once this is recognized, is to defend the idea of freedom; "to repel the objections of those who… boldly declare that freedom is impossible" (*GMS*, 4: 459).[1] In what follows I will present Kant's account of free will and argue that it is best understood not as a theoretical metaphysical solution to the problem of free will, but as a defense of the idea of free will.

[1] All references to Kant's work refer to the *Akadamie* pagination; all translations used appear in the Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant.

In §1 I will briefly outline Kant's account of free will. In §2 I will present the dilemma that faces his account if we take it to be a theoretical solution. In §3 I will turn to consider Allen Wood's interpretation of Kant's account of free will. Wood's interpretation is one of the most sophisticated interpretations to argue that Kant's account should be understood as a theoretical explanation of freedom. He deals directly with the role that causation plays in Kant's account, which is crucial to understanding the dilemma I raise in §2. I will argue that even his interpretation of Kant does not get around the dilemma. Finally, in §4, I will argue that we should not understand Kant's account as a theoretical solution at all. Rather, his account should be understood as a defense of the idea of freedom, which merely attempts to safeguard our presupposition that we are free.

2 KANT'S ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM AND CAUSATION

The problem of free will arises for Kant because of a tension between what he terms "causality as natural necessity" and "causality as freedom" (*KpV*, 5: 94). The former, is a kind of causation that is grounded in, and necessitated by, prior causes and conditions in time. The latter is a kind of causation that is not grounded in any prior cause and exists outside of time.[2] Kant explains the distinction between the two kinds of causality in the following way, "The concept of causality as *natural necessity*, as distinguished from the concept of causality as *freedom*, concerns only the existence of things insofar as it is *determinable in time* and hence as appearances, as opposed to their causality as things in themselves" (*KpV*, 5: 94). He claims that from the concept of causality as natural necessity "it follows that every event, and consequently every action that

[2] Essentially, the concept of natural necessity is like that of the contemporary concept of 'causal determinism' and the concept of freedom that Kant is working with is similar to a libertarian, or agent causal concept of freedom. However, I will continue to use his terms to refer to these two concepts.

takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time" (*KpV*, 5: 94).

The core issue, for Kant, is one of control. The tension between these two concepts of causality is that, if we were to consider an agent as existing solely in time, then that agent would be governed by causality as natural necessity. The problem with considering an agent as existing solely in time is that every action that such an agent performs would be caused by events in the past outside of her control, and thus she would lack the kind of control over her actions Kant believes is necessary for free will. He claims that if an agent existed solely in time as an appearance, then freedom for that agent would be impossible: "if one takes the determinations of the existence of things in time for determinations of things in themselves, then the necessity in the causal relation can in no way be united with freedom" (*KpV*, 5: 94); "if appearances are things in themselves, then freedom cannot be saved" (*A*536/*B*564). For an agent to have the kind of control over her actions necessary to be considered free, she must be able to govern her actions through causation as freedom. Freedom, on Kant's account, "must be thought as independent from everything empirical and so from nature generally" because "without this freedom…, no moral law is possible and no imputation in accordance with it" (*KpV* 5: 97). What is at stake, For Kant, is our ability to act according to the moral law, which commands necessarily, and allows us to impute moral responsibility to ourselves and others. He sees natural necessity as, at least *prima facie*, conflicting with freedom in so far as it robs the agent of control over her actions. Thus, Kant attempts to show that no contradiction exists between causation as natural necessity and causation as freedom: "Philosophy must therefore assume that no true contradiction will be found between freedom and natural necessity… for it cannot give up the concept of nature any more than that of freedom" (*GMS*, 4: 456).

Kant supposes that there are two main paths to removing the contradiction that seems to exist between causality as natural necessity, which I will refer to as empirical causation, and causality as freedom, which I will refer to as intelligible causation. The first path is to "except [agents] from the law of natural necessity" (*KpV*, 5: 95). However, this path is a nonstarter because to except agents from the law of natural necessity is "tantamount to handing [freedom] over to blind chance" (*KpV*, 5: 95). Natural necessity ensures regularity among the objects of appearance because it adheres to strict causal laws which we can observe and understand. To except agents from natural necessity would be to remove any chance of regularity in their actions, and would be the same as giving up the idea of natural necessity (at least as it applies to agents). Neither of these results are acceptable.

The second, and for Kant, the only path to removing the seeming contradiction between freedom and natural necessity, is "to ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time, and so too its causality in accordance with the law of *natural necessity, only to appearance, and to ascribe freedom to the same being as a thing in itself*" (*KpV*, 5: 95). Kant says that "the natural necessity which cannot coexist with the freedom of the subject attaches merely to the determinations of a thing which stands under conditions of time and so only to the determinations of the acting subject as appearance" (*KpV*, 5: 97). That is, natural necessity applies to an agent's actions only when the agent considers herself as existing in time. Furthermore, she can take up another point of view towards herself, such that "the very same subject, being on the other side conscious of himself as a thing in itself, also views his existence *insofar as it does not stand under conditions of time* and himself as determinable only through laws that he gives himself by reason" (*KpV*, 5: 97). Kant expands on this explanation by saying that for the agent, when viewed as existing outside the conditions of time, "nothing is… antecedent to the determination of his will,

but every action…is to be regarded in the consciousness of his intelligible existence as nothing but the consequence… of his causality as a *noumenon*" (*KpV*, 5: 97-98). "Thus," he continues, "the intelligible cause… is outside the series [of events in time]; its effects, on the contrary, are encountered in the series of empirical conditions. The effect, therefore can be regarded as free with regard to its intelligible cause, and yet simultaneously, in regard to appearances, as their result according to the necessity of nature" (*A*537/*B*565). Moreover, Kant claims that when we consider agents as intelligible objects, "nothing hinders us from ascribing to this [intelligible] object… another *causality* that is not appearance even though its *effect* is encountered in appearance" where this other causality is to be understood as intelligible causality (*A*538-39/*B*566-67).

So, it is from the point of view in which we understand an agent as existing outside the conditions of time, as an intelligible object, that we may understand the agent as being completely and radically free, and possessed of intelligible causality. Kant's solution to the problem of free will is to make a distinction between the agent considered as appearance, or as existing in time, and the agent considered as thing in itself, or intelligible object existing outside of time, and to ascribe to each point of view a unique kind of causation. When an agent is considered as an appearance or an empirical object existing in time, that agent is governed by natural necessity, such that "if it were possible for us to have such deep insight into a human being's cast of mind… that we would know every incentive to action… we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse" (*KpV*, 5: 99). When we consider an agent as an intelligible object existing outside of time, we can understand all the actions that that agent performs as being caused by intelligible causes which allows the agent "to act from itself, without needing to be preceded by any other cause that in turn determines it to action" (*A*533/*B*561). The resulting account of free will removes the seeming contradiction between

natural necessity and freedom by considering two ways in which we may understand an agent, and by ascribing a distinct type of causality to each point of view.

One might be tempted to understand Kant's account of free will as offering a theoretical explanation of how agents may actually have free will. On this view, the account seems to state that every agent has some sort of dual existence, intelligible and empirical, and that every action an agent takes is governed by two distinct kinds of causation; one sort of causation as viewed from within time, empirical causation, and another sort of causation as viewed from outside of time, intelligible causation. I think that this interpretation of Kant's discussion of free will is incorrect. If we interpret Kant in this way his account of free will is incoherent, as I will show in the next two sections. But despite the incoherence of his account, Kant still offers us a viable defense of the idea of freedom, which I will take up in §4.

3 THE DILEMMA OF CAUSATION

If we take Kant's account described above as a theoretical solution to the problem of free will it faces a dilemma. The dilemma addresses the question of just *how* these two distinct kinds of causation can both explain an agent's actions. There are at least two ways of interpreting the account as it has been articulated above, and it seems to me that neither interpretation is a viable option for Kant, who not only wishes to assert that agents are free in a robust sense (cf. *A*533/*B*561), but also that natural necessity governs all events in time and allows humans to gain scientific knowledge of the world, and so is also indispensable.

3.1 The First Horn: Overdetermination

One interpretation of Kant's account of free will, which is described briefly in Pereboom (2006), is that both the empirical and the intelligible causes are sufficient causes of an action by an agent. We might understand Kant's account of free will, on this interpretation, as saying that both the intelligible and the empirical causes bring about one and the same action at the same time, and it is in virtue of the intelligible cause that the agent is free. This would seem to be a viable interpretation of the above account. After all, Kant seems to suggest just this kind of picture when he assures the reader that, considered as merely an appearance existing in time, an agent's actions are fully determined by prior events in time, and that, considered as an intelligible object, an agent's actions are determined by a timeless cause. The question he takes himself to be answering is whether "*both* [empirical causality and intelligible causality], each in a different relation, might be able to take place *simultaneously* in one and the same occurrence" (*A*536/*B*564 emphasis added to 'simultaneously'). Thus, one natural way to interpret his account is to think of both the empirical and the intelligible causes as being sufficient causal explanations of an agent's action.

However, this interpretation runs into a problem immediately. If we are to understand Kant's account as saying that both the empirical and intelligible causes are sufficient explanations for an agent's actions, and that both are present simultaneously in the same occurrence, then it seems that an agent's actions are always overdetermined. Pereboom concurs, saying that "…at least on [this interpretation], it would seem that… an event in the empirical or phenomenal world is overdetermined in a peculiar way" (2006: 551). Overdetermination describes when two distinct yet sufficient causes simultaneously bring about one and the same event. On Kant's account, both intelligible causation and empirical causation are sufficient to bring about an agent's action. When we consider a particular action performed by an agent, and wonder what caused her to perform

this action, we would have to answer that it was *both* the empirical cause located in time and governed by natural necessity, *and* the intelligible cause located outside of time and associated with the agent as intelligible object. Indeed, "by one strand of its causal history [an] empirical action has a sufficient cause in an [intelligible subject], while by another strand this same action has a sufficient cause in a deterministic series of events that traces back to a time before the (empirical) agent was born" (Pereboom 2006: 551-2). To say this, however, is just to say that the agent's actions are overdetermined; that both natural necessity, and the intelligible causation of the agent are each a sufficient cause for an agent's actions.

However, if natural necessity and the chain of empirical causes are a sufficient explanation for every action an agent performs, then it is hard to see how the intelligible cause adds any sort of control or freedom to the agent. If my act of picking the bunch of green grapes instead of the bunch of red grapes can be sufficiently explained by reference to only the empirical causes that necessitated my action, then the fact that I was also contributing some sort of intelligible cause to my action seems to have no impact or effect on my action. The antecedent empirical events which necessitated my picking the green grapes are sufficient to bring about my actually picking the green grapes, regardless of the presence of my intelligible causation. If we already have a sufficient explanation for why I picked the green grapes which does not include a reference to any intelligible causation or freedom on my part, then it appears the intelligible causation that Kant posits to secure freedom does not actually provide an agent with any more control over her actions. There is no sense in which my intelligible causation is *more* sufficient than the empirical causes which necessitate my action, and thereby allows me to assert that it was due to my intelligible causation, and this causation alone, which caused me to pick the green grapes instead of the red grapes. If our actions are truly overdetermined, as this interpretation would have it, then both causes are equally

sufficient causes of my actions. Since this is the case, it appears the intelligible causation that agents possess does not secure freedom so long as empirical causes are equally sufficient causes of their action. I would have picked the bunch of green grapes whether my intelligible causation was present or not, and even in the case where my intelligible causation is present, it still does not seem to add any sort of control to my action.

On Kant's view, an agent lacks freedom just in case the cause of her actions is empirical and lies outside of her control in the past. This is precisely the situation he claims we are in when we regard agents as merely appearances in time. It is in virtue of the agent's status as an intelligible object which allows her the kind of control necessary over her actions to be free of the necessity of empirical causes (cf. *KpV* 5: 96-7). However, if both sorts of causes are sufficient to bring about an agent's action, and indeed we are led to believe that both causes may stand as sufficient explanations of her action, then it is hard to see how she has the kind of control over her actions that Kant asserts she has. It seems to me that, regardless of the presence or absence of the agent's intelligible causation, if we can sufficiently explain the agent's actions by referring solely to empirical causes, then the agent's actions are out of her control for precisely the reasons that Kant gives above.

Beyond the mere fact that overdetermination would not secure freedom of the will, Kant cannot accept overdetermination as a viable causal explanation of an agent's actions for purely theoretical reasons.[3] Although much of what Kant says about the relationship between empirical causes and intelligible causes implies that both are sufficient causes of an agent's actions, and both occur simultaneously in one and the same occurrence, such a view seems impossible given Kant's explanation of intelligible causes, which are causes that can only be attributed to agents insofar as

[3] I am indebted to Eddy Nahmias for pointing out this criticism of Kant's account to me.

they are things in themselves existing *outside of time*. But for overdetermination to obtain, the two causes which bring about the same effect must happen simultaneously. It is difficult to understand how a cause which is supposed to exist outside of time could happen simultaneously with a cause which exists solely in time.

However, Kant implies that intelligible causes are sufficient causes of an agent's actions when he says that "in [the agent's existence outside of time] nothing is…antecedent to the determination of his will, but *every action*…is to be regarded… as nothing but the consequence… of his causality as noumenon" (*KpV*, 5: 97 emphasis added). Furthermore, in the first *Critique*, Kant is concerned with "whether… every effect in the world must arise *either* from nature *or* freedom, or whether instead *both*… might be able to take place *simultaneously in one and the same occurrence*" (*A*536/*B*564 emphasis added). He answers this question by asserting that, indeed, both empirical causes and intelligible causes bring about one and the same occurrence (*A*537/*B*565). Thus, it appears he is suggesting that every action that an agent performs is caused by not only the empirical causes which exist in time, but also by the intelligible causes which exist outside of time. But such a picture is unavailable, since it implies that the timeless intelligible cause could somehow occur *simultaneously* with empirical causes. It is not clear to me how something which is said to exist outside of time could occur *simultaneously* with anything.

If we are to interpret Kant's account of free will as a theoretical solution and thus claiming that *both* intelligible and empirical causes are sufficient explanations of an agent's actions, then his account of free will asserts that an agent's actions are always overdetermined by two distinct causes. Thus, the account would seem to not secure free will, since the role of intelligible causes, through which an agent has the kind of control over her actions necessary to be free, begins to look superfluous. Beyond intelligible causes being superfluous on this interpretation, it seems that his

account does not allow for such overdetermination to exist in the first place, since intelligible causes exist outside of time, and as a result could not occur simultaneously with anything. It seems to me that this interpretation of Kant's account does not secure free will for agents and is theoretically inconsistent. It is therefore not a viable interpretation of the account.

3.2 The Second Horn: Denying Natural Necessity

A second way to interpret Kant's account of free will, which has been articulated by Allison (1990, 2004) and Wood (1984), is to assume that each point of view from which we may consider an agent gives only part of the whole causal story. On this interpretation, we might understand Kant as saying that the empirical cause by itself is not entirely sufficient to bring about an agent's action, or if it is, it is possible for an agent to override empirical causation to bring about an event "contrary to [empirical causation's] force and influence" (*A*534/*B*562). In either case, the empirical cause is only a part of a more complex causal explanation for why an agent acted in the way that she did; the empirical cause "leaves room," so to speak, for the agent's intelligible cause to fully determine the agent's action, or else it can be overridden. That is, the empirical causes of an agent's actions would be considered insufficient causes of the agent's actions. Empirical causes, therefore, would not be the cause of an agent's actions by themselves. Instead, one would need to also analyze the agent's intelligible existence to gain an understanding of the intelligible causes which actually bring about the agent's actions.

On this picture, we would be taking seriously the idea that to understand an agent as an empirical object is to understand the agent only partially, and that to gain a full understanding of an agent would be not only to take up the empirical point of view towards the agent, but also to consider the agent as an intelligible object capable of acting through intelligible causes. Thus, we

might even say that to understand an agent from a purely intelligible point of view is also to understand the agent only partially. It is not until we view an agent's actions from both the empirical and the intelligible point of view that we gain a full understanding of why an agent acted the way she acted. Allison refers to this interpretation as the "two aspect view" and "reduced to its bare essentials, this interpretation of Kant… holds that the distinction [between intelligible and empirical worlds] is not *primarily* between two kinds of entity, appearances and things in themselves, but rather between two distinct ways in which the objects of human experience may be 'considered' in philosophical reflection, namely, as they appear and as they are in themselves" (2004: 3-4).

If we understand this interpretation as merely a kind of conceptual or epistemic framework within which we can gain a deeper understanding of agents, rather than a metaphysical explanation of how agents are actually free, then I think it is closer to Kant's actual position (which I describe and defend in §4). However, if we take this interpretation to be a metaphysical explanation for how agents are actually free, then it is not much better than the interpretation presented in §2.1. To interpret Kant's account in this way is just to deny that natural necessity applies to human agents. If empirical causes are not the sufficient causes of an agent's actions, from any point of view, then this interpretation seems to rob empirical causes of the sufficiency that Kant assumes that they have when he describes natural necessity. For example, on this interpretation, if we were to enquire as to why an agent acted in a particular way, and to answer that question we looked at all and only the empirical events in time that preceded her action, we would not find a sufficient causal explanation for why she acted as she did. Something crucial to the explanation of her behavior would be missing. The reason we would not have a sufficient explanation for the agent's actions is that the empirical cause is only a part of the story on this interpretation, and thus could

not in principle ever be a sufficient causal explanation on its own. One would only gain a fully sufficient causal explanation for an agent's actions by also examining the intelligible causes which flowed from her intelligible existence, in addition to the empirical causes.

It is important to note here that if empirical causes are no longer sufficient on their own to explain an agent's actions, then Kant must deny his own statement that "if it were possible for us to have such deep insight into a human being's cast of mind… that we would know every incentive to action… we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse" (*KpV*, 5: 99), and to deny this, is just to deny that natural necessity applies to human agents. In Kant's discussion of free will, things such as incentives, desires, motivations, and the like, are all empirical phenomena which are strictly located in time and thus are excluded from the intelligible world. These incentives, desires, motivations, and the like, are the empirical causes of an agent's actions. However, if empirical causes provide only partial causal explanations for an agent's actions, and to gain a complete explanation we would need to account for the agent's intelligible causes as well, which act through the agent's reason, then it would not be the case that if we knew everything about the empirical causes of her actions we would be able to predict all her future actions with mathematical certainty. Something would be missing from the explanation, namely the causal efficacy of the intelligible causes through the agent's reason.

Kant cannot afford to deny that natural necessity applies to humans. Natural necessity is the basis for all scientific knowledge about the world. It is the mechanism through which science can provide definite answers to the questions it poses and it is the presence of natural necessity which enables our experience of the empirical world to be coherent and understandable. It is precisely because the world we experience follows definite laws of cause and effect that we can make sense of the world at all, according to Kant (*GMS*, 4: 455). So, if one were to deny that

natural causes were sufficient to bring about an agent's actions, one would effectively be denying natural necessity. This is not a route available to Kant, since to deny natural necessity is to deny our ability to do science, and worse yet, to deny our ability to make sense of our experiences at all. Thus, the second interpretation of Kant's account does not seem to be a viable interpretation either.

4 WOOD—INTELLIGIBLE CAUSATION AND EMPIRICAL CAUSATION

Allen Wood (1984) presents an interpretation of Kant's account that, on the surface, seems to be a viable response to the dilemma raised in the last section. Wood's interpretation relies on a passage in which Kant says that practical freedom

> presupposes that… an action's cause in [the empirical world] is not *so* determining as to preclude a causality lying in our will, a causality which, independently of these natural causes and even contrary to their force and influence, can bring about something determined in the temporal order according to empirical laws, and thus can begin a series of events wholly of itself. (*A*534/*B*562).

Wood then presents his interpretation of this passage, saying:

> Kant's theory apparently holds that because [empirical objects] are not things in themselves, nature is *not* the complete and self-sufficient cause of events, at least not human actions. Rather, the complete and self-sufficient cause of actions is our free will, located in the intelligible world. Nature, in the form of sensuous impulses, enters into the production of our actions only insofar as we freely permit sensuous motives to be substituted for a priori rational principles in determining our choices (1984: 87).

Thus, on Wood's reading of Kant, empirical causes are not sufficient causes of an agent's actions at all, but are merely the result of the agent's will, or existence as an intelligible object. The intelligible causes stand as the only sufficient causes of an agent's actions, or else the agent allows empirical causes to determine her actions by means of her intelligible being. So, it appears that on Wood's interpretation, an agent's actions are always ultimately caused by her free will, in some sense or other, which we must understand as merely intelligible and existing outside of time.

Furthermore, empirical causes are efficacious in bringing about an agent's actions only insofar as she allows such empirical causes to govern her actions.

I believe that Wood's interpretation of Kant's account of free will is essentially an embrace of the second horn of the dilemma presented in §2.2, and thus is not a viable interpretation. If empirical causes are not complete and self-sufficient causes of an agent's actions, as Wood suggests, then empirical causes are not real, but merely apparent, causes of our actions and the real sufficient causes of our actions actually lie in the intelligible world. Beyond this, Wood's interpretation implies that natural necessity, as Kant conceives of it, is false, at least as it concerns human beings. But as was stated in §2.2, Kant cannot give up the idea that natural necessity applies to humans without contradicting himself and calling into question whether humans are fully a part of the natural order of things. It may be the case that Kant has in fact contradicted himself, however, I am willing to take him at his word when he says that we "cannot give up the concept of nature any more than that of freedom" (*GMS*, 4: 456). Given that Kant in this quotation is explicit about not willing to give up the idea of nature, or natural necessity, we should be suspicious of other statements he makes which imply that natural necessity has been denied, as is the case with the quotation in *A*534/*B*562, which Wood uses to support his interpretation of Kant.

Wood is aware of this line of objection to his interpretation, and suggests that his interpretation of Kant does not actually have the consequences just described. Wood states,

> "It is tempting to describe Kant's theory by saying that the natural empirical causes of actions […] are not real causes but only apparent; furthermore, that on this theory everything in the phenomenal world goes on […] just as if our actions were caused by antecedent events, but in reality their causes lie outside of nature altogether…" (1984: 87).

He rebuts this line of thinking by stating that, "Kant would reject this description of his theory" because, "Kant's principle of empirical causality says that every event in time is determined by antecedent events according to necessary laws" and that "every human action does

conform to this principle" (Wood 1984: 87). The idea is that, so long as human actions conform to the principle of empirical causation as described by Kant, every human action, when viewed as an event in time and space, is the result of empirical causes. The only caveat being that these empirical causes are not the complete and self-sufficient causes of human actions. Thus, Wood claims that empirical causes are real, not merely apparent, causes of an agent's actions so long as any causes of the agent's actions conform with Kant's principle of empirical causation, despite empirical causes not being the self-sufficient causes of the agent's actions. And furthermore, Wood thinks that these empirical causes of an agent's actions still leave some room over for the agent's intelligible cause to bring about their action, thus securing free will for the agent.

I think Wood's response to the line of objection I raised above fails for two reasons. The first reason why Wood's response fails is that Kant's principle of empirical causes is more specific than Wood suggests. Wood characterizes Kant's principle of empirical causation as merely "determined by antecedent events according to necessary laws," but Kant himself provides a more specific definition of the principle in the second *Critique.* He states, "The concept of causality as *natural necessity*… concerns only the existence of things insofar as it is *determinable in time*… from [this] it follows that every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time" (*KpV*, 5: 94). As we can see from this quotation, Kant does not characterize empirical causation as flowing from any antecedent event according to necessary laws, but is explicit about such antecedent events and their effects being located *in time.* If intelligible causes are the self-sufficient causes of an agent's actions, as Wood suggests, then the causes of the agent's actions do not, in fact, conform with Kant's principle of empirical causality.

Wood seems to have distorted Kant's theory of empirical causation to try to reconcile Kant's account of intelligible causation with his account of empirical causation. In defining empirical causation as simply "determined by antecedent events according to necessary laws" Wood has eliminated time from Kant's principle, which plays a crucial role in the concept of natural necessity. For Kant, empirical causation is a much more robust principle than antecedent events determining their causes in conformity with a necessary law. For something to be empirically caused the antecedent event that determines the subsequent event must be located *in time*. But as Wood admits, an agent's intelligible causes are not located in time and since they are not located in time, Wood's account of intelligible causes runs directly contrary to Kant's principle of empirical causation, even though Wood seems to claim that this is not the case. If Wood's proposal were the picture of freedom that Kant held, then it would not be the case that our actions had empirical causes, precisely because the sufficient causes of the agent's actions would be intelligible causes, i.e. causes outside of time.

The second reason why Wood's response fails is that Wood identifies empirical causes as lacking sufficiency in the case of human actions which seems to imply that natural necessity does not apply to human beings, a result which Kant cannot accept. If the empirical inclinations and motivations which drive an agent to action, when viewed as an appearance in time, are not complete and self-sufficient causes of that agent's actions, it is difficult to understand how exactly natural necessity applies to an agent at all. Recall that, according to Kant, natural necessity would allow an observer with perfect knowledge of an individual's motivations and inclinations, to predict with mathematical certainty every future action of that individual considered as appearance. Given this statement, even if human beings are not *merely* appearances but something more, one would expect that when observing an agent from an empirical point of view, their

inclinations and motivations would be the sufficient and complete causes of all their future actions. If they weren't, it would be very hard to understand exactly how full knowledge of the agent's inclinations and motivations would yield the kind of predictive power that Kant claims such knowledge would yield.

Thus, by eliminating the sufficiency of empirical causes to make room for the sufficiency of intelligible causes Wood's interpretation of Kant is simply an embrace of the second horn of the dilemma presented in §2.2. By claiming that empirical causes are not complete or self-sufficient causes of an agent's actions, Wood does indeed secure free will for an agent, but the cost is not one that Kant would pay. If empirical causes are not self-sufficient causes of an agent's actions, then we cannot say that natural necessity applies to that agent. And if it is indeed the case that natural necessity no longer applies to human agents, as Wood's interpretation seems to suggest, then the problem of free will would never arise in the first place, and it would seem to follow that no science of human behavior could ever exist.

Furthermore, Wood's interpretation seems to introduce a sort of dualism into Kant's theory overall, where some objects, like billiard balls, are subject to natural necessity and other objects, namely human beings, are exempt from natural necessity. Given that Kant takes all objects to have both an intelligible and empirical aspect, Wood's interpretation also forces one to consider whether any object is subject to natural necessity at all, or whether the phenomena we observe in the empirical world are just the result of hidden intelligible causes, and any empirical explanation that we may give to explain such phenomena is hopelessly confused and incomplete. Although Kant might indeed think that any empirical explanation of phenomena is incomplete, this only serves to cut against the claim that Kant's account of free will is some sort of theoretical explanation of how agents actually have free will.

Any one of these implications of Wood's interpretation of Kant is unacceptable given the parameters Kant has set in place for himself. Taken together, they reveal the deep conceptual problem that plagues Kant's account of free will. Although there are a host of other viable interpretations of his account of free will which I have not considered here, if we focus solely on the causal account of free will and the range of interpretations I have presented here, it appears that Kant's account, if understood as a causal and theoretical explanation of free will, is plagued with deep conceptual problems and inconsistencies. I simply do not see any way for Kant to assert that *both* empirical and intelligible causes are sufficient causes of an agent's action without falling into overdetermination, or without somehow limiting the efficacy of the empirical causes—options which run roughshod over the parameters he has set for himself and his theorizing. Thus, it is my view that Kant's account, if understood as a theoretical solution to the problem of free will, is simply incoherent.

5 KANT'S DEFENSE OF FREEDOM

As I argued above, if we understand Kant's account of free will as offering some sort of theoretical explanation for the reality of free will, such an account is incoherent. Here I will argue that we should not understand his account as providing a theoretical explanation for the metaphysical reality of free will. Instead we should take his account as merely providing room for the *idea* of freedom for practical purposes. In my defense of this deflationary reading of Kant's account, I wish to set aside the question of whether more metaphysically robust readings of his account (such as Langton: 1998, Strawson: 1966, Guyer: 1987, Allison: 2004) may also be useful in the same way. My interpretation of Kant's account takes its inspiration from John Rawls (2003) and Jonathan Bennett (1984).

Kant is aware that a theoretical explanation of free will which attempts to reconcile freedom of the will with natural necessity via a causal theory involving intelligible causes and empirical causes is a difficult task to accomplish. He even harbors some doubt about whether such an enterprise could ever succeed claiming, "freedom is only an *idea* of reason, the objective reality of which is doubtful" (*GMS*, 4: 455). Furthermore, he is careful to note that his account has "not been trying to establish the *reality* of freedom" nor has he "even tried to prove the *possibility* of freedom" (*A*557-58/*B*585-86). Rather, "freedom is treated here only as a transcendental *idea*, through which reason *thinks* of the series of conditions in appearance starting absolutely through what is sensibly unconditioned" (*A*558/*B*586 emphasis mine). And this idea of freedom is, "the independence of our reason from the order of nature and thus of the spontaneity of pure reason" (Rawls 2003: 288, cf. *KPV* 5: 132).

The sorts of things that may be explained theoretically, according to Kant, are the empirical phenomena we encounter in experience. Freedom is not directly encountered in experience and so lies outside the boundary of things which can be explained theoretically. As such, it is merely an idea which must be *defended*: "Now, where determination by laws of nature ceases, there all *explanation* ceases as well, and nothing is left but *defense*, that is, to repel the objections of those who pretend to have seen deeper into the essence of things and therefore boldly declare that freedom is impossible" (*GMS*, 4: 459). Natural necessity poses a threat to the idea of freedom insofar as it implies that freedom is impossible. So, one way of understanding what Kant is trying to do in his discussion of free will is to defend our conviction that we are free, from the threat posed to it by natural necessity.

So, it seems that we should not take his account of free will as providing some sort of metaphysical explanation of the reality of free will. Rather, it seems that Kant's account is meant

to be taken as merely the defense of the *idea* of freedom, an idea which Kant thinks is fundamental to our being human, and understanding ourselves as such. When we understand his account in this way, we see that rather than making metaphysical claims about the nature of reality and of agents, Kant is simply arguing that if we take up different points of view towards an agent—an intelligible point of view and an empirical point of view—natural necessity is no longer a threat to the idea of freedom, and we can accommodate both ideas. Taking up these two points of view toward agents does not mean that we must understand agents as actually divided between two worlds, nor does it mean that we have proved the reality of freedom. It simply means that we may accommodate the idea of freedom in our understanding of ourselves without that idea conflicting with our understanding of natural necessity, and vice versa.

It is helpful to get clear on what Kant means by defense here. One natural way of construing what he means by this is to think of constructing a theoretical justification for freedom. However, as we have just seen, this is not what Kant intends to do. His skepticism about the viability of any theoretical explanation of freedom is enough to show us that constructing a theoretical justification for the idea of freedom could not be what he has in mind. What he means by providing a defense of the idea of freedom is more of an act of protecting the idea of freedom from theoretical attacks which attempt to show that freedom is impossible. That is, he does not want to show that freedom is not impossible, but instead he wants to show that any argument that claims freedom is impossible cannot succeed.

Rawls has a particularly clear and insightful summary of the meaning of defense in Kant's practical philosophy stating that, "Kant views philosophy of defense… as the defense of our faith in reason and the reasonable faith that sustains it. While we cannot give a theoretical proof of the possibility of freedom, it suffices to assure ourselves that there is no such proof of its impossibility"

(2003: 324). Indeed, Kant himself claims that, "no insight can be had into the possibility of the freedom of an efficient cause, especially in the sensible world: we are fortunate if only we can be sufficiently assured that there is no proof of its impossibility, and are now forced to assume it" (*KPV* 5: 94). Thus, when Kant claims that he has not tried to prove the reality, nor even the possibility of freedom, but merely to defend the idea of freedom, it is this sense of defense that he has in mind. As Rawls continues, "It is essential to see that Kant is not presenting an argument that the beliefs of reasonable faith [of which freedom is one such belief] are true by the criteria of empirical and scientific truth; it is not his intention to lay out evidence aimed at making a convincing theoretical case" rather, "he presents instead considerations showing why we are entitled to affirm those beliefs" (2003: 325).[4]

The considerations that Kant presents to show why we are entitled to presuppose the idea of freedom are our capacity to deliberate, and our imputation of moral responsibility to ourselves and to others. When presenting these considerations, Kant's main argument is that we cannot make sense of deliberation, nor can we make sense of our imputing moral responsibility to ourselves and to others, without first presupposing the idea of freedom. Indeed, "the footpath of freedom is the only one on which it is possible to make use of our reason in our conduct" (*GMS*, 4: 455-56). And as a result, the idea of freedom is "practically *necessary* – that is necessary in idea, without any further condition – for a rational being who is conscious of his causality through reason and so of a will (which is distinct from desires)" (*GMS*, 4: 461).

[4] Although Kant does attempt to provide at least the framework of a theoretical case, as was shown in the previous two sections, this theoretical case is incoherent and should be abandoned. Furthermore, Kant's defense of free will does not seem to depend on the merits of his theoretical case.

Kant provides two examples to illustrate these considerations, and defend freedom as a practically necessary idea. The first example is the 'gallows example' (*KPV* 5: 30). It is an empirical fact that we can and often do deliberate about how to act in a given situation, and the gallows example is meant to illustrate how reason is used by an agent in deliberation to cause himself to act, in spite of his impulses and inclinations. In this example, a man is asked to give false testimony against some other honorable man for political reasons, or face death by hanging. Kant claims that in such a situation the man confronted with this choice between giving false testimony and hanging, would at least find it possible to "overcome his love of life" so that he may act in a way that conforms with the moral law, i.e. not give false testimony (*KpV* 5: 30). In this example, we see that the man is confronted, on the one hand, with strong desires and inclinations to save his own life and violate the moral law by giving false testimony, and on the other hand, he is confronted with his duty to the moral law, which reason presents to him and which requires that he not give false testimony against the honorable man.

The upshot of this example is that despite the man's inclinations and desires, which can cause him to give false testimony, his reason, as distinct from his desires, can cause him to act in such a way that he does not violate the moral law. He is capable of not giving false testimony because he infers that it would be wrong to do so. This inference that it would be wrong to give false testimony, is based in the man's ability to consider different possible future actions as radically open to him. Reason reveals to the man different possible actions to take; it makes its own order which has not yet occurred and leaves it up to the man to decide how to act. Indeed, "reason does not give in to those grounds which are empirically given… but makes its own order according to ideas, to which it declares actions to be necessary that have not yet occurred… [and] presuppose[es] of all such actions that reason can have causality in relation to them" (*A*548/*B*576).

Kant claims that the only way to make sense of the man's reasoning causing him to act against his impulses, is to presuppose that he is free, insofar as he can act on principles which do not have their cause in the empirical world (i.e. they are not sensuous impulses, like the man's love of life). Instead, these principles have their cause in reason which we must think of as distinct from nature, in some sense.

Kant's second example is the 'malicious liar' example (*A*554-5/*B*582-3). This example is used to show how, despite being able to give an empirical explanation for why a person was determined to act wrongly, we still impute moral responsibility to them, which can only be understood if we have presupposed the idea of freedom. In this example, Kant asks us to imagine a person who has brought about a certain confusion in society by use of a malicious lie. He then goes on to describe the sorts of judgement that we could make about this liar. He supposes that if we were to investigate the reasons why the liar told his malicious lie, we would soon come up with many empirical facts about the liar, such as his poor upbringing, the influence of bad friends, or that the liar could not control his impulses and felt no shame in performing immoral acts. Kant suggests that "even if one believes the action to be determined by these causes, one nonetheless blames the agent" (*A*555/*B*583). Furthermore, we do not blame the agent *because* of these causes, but rather we blame the agent because we understand that the agent could have used his reason to determine his actions instead of acting on the basis of his sensuous impulses. In short, we blame him because we recognize that he could have acted for reasons wholly distinct from his desires and inclinations but did not in fact do that. Kant claims that the only way to make sense of blaming the malicious liar for his lie, is to assume that he could have acted on the basis of reason rather than impulse alone. But to assume this is just to presuppose the idea of freedom.

Thus, if we look at both the gallows example and the malicious liar example, we find that the idea of freedom is everywhere presupposed. Indeed, Kant claims that "human being[s] can never think of the causality of [their] own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom; for independence from the determining causes of the world of sense is freedom" (*GMS*, 4: 452). In both examples above, he illustrated what many of us presuppose when we act, namely, that we have the ability to act on the basis of our impulses on the one hand, and an ability to act on the basis of reason and principles on the other. And it is because we take ourselves to be able to act on the basis of reason, as distinct from our impulses and inclinations, that we are free in a practical sense, according to Kant. Indeed, since in both examples presented above the only way for us to make sense of the agent's ability to use their reason was to presuppose the idea of freedom, thus demonstrating its practical necessity, he asserts that "every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect" (*GMS* 4: 448).

So, we can understand Kant's defense of the idea of freedom as addressing two distinct problems. The first problem is the conflict between natural necessity and our ability to deliberate and act on the basis of that deliberation. "In a nutshell, deliberation involves viewing some questions about the future as radically open, while [natural necessity] seems to imply that they are all really closed" (Bennett 1984: 110). The second problem is the conflict between natural necessity and our practice of imputing moral responsibility to ourselves and others. If natural necessity is true, and that is all there is to the world, then it appears "our propensity to blame" and impute moral responsibility to ourselves and others "can be made to look unfair by its being brought up hard against the hypothesis of [natural necessity]" (Bennett 1984: 108). What Kant's defense of the idea of freedom is meant to do, is to assure us that despite a seeming conflict between the idea of natural necessity and the idea of freedom, we can secure our conviction that we are free

in a practical sense despite natural necessity. How he claims to secure this conviction is by making a distinction between two points of view from which we may consider ourselves. One point of view from which we consider ourselves an intelligible being outside of time, and another point of view from which we consider ourselves as an empirical being in time.

This distinction between the intelligible point of view and the empirical point of view applies differently to each of the two problems mentioned above. In the first case, when we consider our ability to deliberate and act on the basis of that deliberation, "Kant invites us to contrast (a) following the order of things as they present themselves with (b) framing for oneself and order of one's own and… acting under the idea of freedom" (Bennett 1984: 111). According to Bennett, "(a) involves looking at one's future not as a deliberating and deciding agent but rather as a predicting self-observer who tries to work out what he will do by applying causal laws to his known present condition" (1984: 111). In other words, (a) requires us to take up the empirical point of view towards ourselves as agents. We must view ourselves as located in time and view our actions as governed by natural necessity. Of course, the contrast with (a) is to take up another point of view toward ourselves such that we *are* deliberating and deciding agents who can frame an order of our own and act under the idea of freedom. It is by taking up this latter point of view that we can consider ourselves free in a practical sense. Indeed, as Bennett argues

> we do not know enough to [be predicting self-observers] … but we cannot be comfortable with the thought that our practical deliberations are a *pis aller*, that our status as deliberating agents is a pure product of our ignorance. This is what Kant offers to rescue us from. He is saying that our deliberating stance is securely and deeply grounded [and] is not in danger – even in principle – of being swept aside by an inrush of knowledge of our structure and the laws that govern us (1984: 111).

Thus, we can understand Kant as saying that even though we are ignorant of many facts about why we act in the ways we act, it is not merely this ignorance which sustains the conviction that we are agents capable of deliberating and acting because of that deliberation. Kant claims that

even if we had full knowledge of these facts we would *still* regard ourselves as capable of determining our actions because of our deliberation. No amount of theoretical information can show the idea of freedom to be impossible.

The argument that might be given in defense of this contrast is that "there may be narrow limits on how much self-prediction it is in principle possible [for the agent] to do whether or not [natural necessity] is true and however much knowledge [the agent] acquires" (Bennett 1984: 111). That is, there may be facts about the agent which would be the basis of her prediction for how she will act, such that, if the agent was thinking about her prediction, the facts about the agent would no longer be an adequate basis for the agent's predicting how she will act (Bennett 1984: 111). Indeed, Gilbert Ryle, whose theory Bennett suggests is quite similar to Kant's, puts the matter nicely,

> A prediction of a deed or thought is a higher order operation, the performance of which cannot be among the things considered in making the prediction. Yet as the state of mind in which I am just before I do something may make a difference to what I do, it follows that I must overlook at least some of the data relevant to my prediction (1949: 176).

So even if an agent had full knowledge of all the facts necessary to make an accurate prediction of what she will do next, the very act of making such a prediction would add a new fact into the equation that would necessarily be overlooked by the agent making the prediction. Thus, "a certain peculiarity in the notion of self-prediction serves as a barrier which – without invoking noumenalist metaphysics – prevents the [thought of natural necessity] from conflicting" with the thought that I am a deliberating agent who can frame a set of possible actions each of which are open to me (Bennett 1984: 112). This peculiarity also allows for us to make an epistemic distinction between ourselves as self-predicting observers completely governed by natural necessity, and free deliberating agents. Something which is similar to the distinction Kant makes between agents considered as intelligible beings and agents considered as empirical beings.

In the second case, a similar argument to can be made when we consider our imputing moral responsibility to ourselves and to others. Bennett suggests that one way of understanding Kant's defense of freedom is by considering a similar defense of freedom presented by P.F. Strawson. Strawson considers the basis of our imputing moral responsibility to ourselves and others as grounded in what he calls the personal reactive attitudes. These attitudes, which include resentment and gratitude, among others, are subjective reactions that we have in response to the actions of others and our actions, and their consequences (Strawson 1962: 186-8). This is contrasted with what Strawson calls the objective attitude, which when taken up towards another person "is to see him, perhaps as an object of social policy; as a subject for what… might be called treatment… to be managed or handled or cured or trained…" (1962: 190). Bennett suggests that "the personal reactive attitudes are… in conflict with the objective [empirical] attitude [point of view] in which one seeks to gather the facts, to understand the situation, to discover the etiology of the behavior so as to alter its chances of recurring" (1984: 110). Thus, the personal reactive attitudes seem to conflict with the objective attitude. The latter can be understood as the empirical point of view, which compels us to look at the causal history of an action and realize that what occurred was just the result of natural forces necessitating certain outcomes, whereas the former compels us to view the action as in some sense the doing of the agent herself. However, "it is not that [natural necessity] logically conflicts with blameworthiness, but rather that the raising of the question of [natural necessity] [i.e. looking into an action's causal history] conflicts with the feelings and attitudes that go into blame and make it what it is" (Bennett 1984: 109).

The upshot of this distinction is that both the reactive attitudes and the objective attitude are useful and necessary in their own way. The objective attitude, when appropriate, allows us to see an agent as affected by the causal conditions of the world, that is, as subject to natural necessity.

And our reactive attitudes, when appropriate, allow us to impute moral responsibility to ourselves and others which presupposes in some sense the idea of freedom. So, one way of understanding Kant's discussion of the idea of freedom and imputing moral responsibility to the malicious liar, is that blaming the liar is an appropriate response in the situation despite us fully understanding the empirical causal history that lead to the lie. Thus, as Strawson might argue, we have these reactive attitudes towards ourselves and others regardless of whether natural necessity is true or not (1962: 192-3).

Although Kant does not invoke the language of reactive attitudes, his theory is quite similar to Strawson's, as Bennett argues. Strawson's theory "shares certain abstract features of Kant's [defense of] freedom" but "the big difference between Strawson and Kant is that whereas Kant's theory ties blameworthiness to a thought of ungiven facts [intelligible causes], Strawson says we must go outside all the facts and introduce a dimension of feeling" (Bennett 1984: 110).

Indeed, both interpretations presented by Bennett cohere nicely with Kant's project of showing that no amount of theoretical knowledge can show that the idea of freedom is impossible. Even in cases where know all the facts necessary to make an accurate prediction of our next action, we will persist in thinking of ourselves as agents capable of deliberating and acting because of that deliberation. Likewise, even if we know the whole causal history of the malicious liar's life leading up to his lie, we will still impute moral responsibility to him because of his ability to reason and act according to those reasons. Our belief in the idea of freedom is not harmed by our knowing empirical facts about the world.

Accordingly, how we accommodate for such a belief is by making an epistemic, as opposed to ontological, distinction between ourselves as intelligible beings and ourselves as empirical beings. If we think of ourselves as having not only empirical but intelligible aspects, we can make

sense of how we are able to act under the idea of freedom in a practical sense. This, I claim, is the real lesson at the heart of Kant's discussion of free will. The distinction between the intelligible and the empirical is simply an epistemic distinction which is meant to defend the idea of freedom from being destroyed by theoretical knowledge, and from the thesis of natural necessity. By *thinking* of ourselves as in some sense distinct from the natural order of things we can accommodate the idea of freedom which helps us make sense of acting on the basis of reasons. And by *thinking* of ourselves as a part of the natural order of things, we can recognize our role in the world around us, order our experiences accordingly, and appreciate the world's influence on ourselves. These two points of view may not track an actual ontological distinction, but they help us make sense of our own experience, our own humanity, and safeguard the idea of freedom.

Kant wants to safeguard our presupposition of the idea of freedom because he takes it to be a fundamental aspect of our humanity, and rightly recognizes that it is the basis for our conception of ourselves as agents and as morally responsible for our actions. Without these two concepts, it would be hard for us to consider ourselves fully human. Indeed, our agency and practices of imputing moral responsibility are so central to our humanity, Kant argues, that the idea of freedom is a practical necessity. It is something we assume just in virtue of being human, and for that reason alone, Kant takes up its defense.

6 CONCLUSION

Kant's discussion of free will might be taken to be a theoretical account of how we are actually free. If we understand him in this way, his theory is incoherent. I have tried to argue that Kant is better understood as eschewing a theoretical account of free will in favor of a defense of the idea of free will, in which he assumes the idea of freedom and defends it from those theories

which attempt to show that freedom is impossible. My point is quite modest. I have set aside many questions which still linger. One might wonder whether the sharp distinction Kant draws between reason and our inclinations and impulses is correct, or whether our imputing moral responsibility is sufficient to justify systems of retributive punishment. I have also left aside a discussion of the limits of human knowledge which Kant makes note of throughout his work, and which is implicit in his defense of freedom. These questions will have to be taken up in some other work.

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