

KANT ON FREEDOM & CONTROL

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1 Two Kinds of Freedom

Practical Freedom: the capacity to act in accordance with ends distinct from those dictated by one's immediate sensible impulses^{1,2}

Transcendental Freedom: the power to (i) initiate a causal series from oneself (ii) without being determined by any temporal ground³

- Transcendental freedom is a condition of practical freedom, and more generally, of the (i) imputability of action and the (ii) applicability of 'ought' statements
 1. Why is transcendental freedom necessary for practical freedom?
 2. Why does imputability require being a first-cause?
 3. Why must transcendental freedom be atemporal?
 4. Why do 'oughts' require transcendental freedom?

2 Imputation vs. Ascription

- An action is *imputable* just in case it is free, and thus the kind of act for which one can be responsible, and thus the proper object of (non-proleptic) praise, blame, and "reactive" attitudes such as resentment, gratitude, or forgiveness
- An action is *ascribable* just in case it is performed by an agent⁴

WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS under which an act is imputable rather than merely ascribable?

- Kant's answer seems to be that an act is imputable just in case we have control over it

3 Voluntarism

Direct Doxastic Voluntarism: We have voluntary (i.e. "at will") control over our doxastic attitudes (e.g. believing)

- **Objection:** If Kant's position that the rational mind is free entails that we have control over our doxastic attitudes then we should reject his position, because we cannot, e.g., believe at will

¹ we have a capacity to overcome impressions on our sensory faculty of desire by representations of that which is useful or injurious even in a more remote way (CPR: Canon, A802/B830)

² We thus cognize practical freedom through experience, as one of the natural causes, namely a causality of reason in the determination of the will, whereas transcendental freedom requires an independence of this reason itself (with regard to its causality for initiating a series of appearances) from all determining causes of the world of the senses (CPR: Canon, A803/B831)

³ the power of beginning a state of itself [*von selbst*]-the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature. (CPR: Resolution of the cosmological idea, A533/B561); cf. (A446/ B474)

⁴ All imputation is the judgement of an action, insofar as it has arisen from personal freedom, in relation to certain practical laws. In imputation, therefore, there must be a free action and a law. We can ascribe a thing to someone, yet not impute it to him; the actions, for example, of a madman or drunkard can be ascribed, though not imputed to them. In imputation the action must spring from freedom. The drunkard cannot, indeed, be held accountable for his actions, but he certainly can, when sober, for the drunkenness itself. (*Moralphilosophie Collins* 27:288 (1774/75-1776/77); see also MS 6:223, 227)

- Beliefs necessarily aim at the truth and the acquisition of an attitude at will means that the attitude can be acquired regardless of its truth, and so cannot be belief (see, e.g., Williams (1973), 148)
- **Reply:** Kant explicitly denies that the will can directly control the adoption or rejection of a doxastic attitude⁵

4 Kant's Combination of Source & Leeway Requirements

Source Requirement: An agent's volition to act is free only if she is the proper source of the volition

Leeway Requirement: An agent's volition to act is free only if it is (really) possible that the agent could either ϕ or $\neg\phi$

- Satisfaction of the Source requirement is necessary for free action and imputability
 - Structure of the phenomenal world is incompatible with an agent's being the proper source of her actions
- Leeway is **not** necessary for imputability or freedom – Kant characterizes divine actions as lacking leeway but nevertheless being free/controlled^{6,7}
- Leeway requirement is necessary for a system of 'oughts' to apply
 - The possibility of leeway depends on our satisfying the source requirement⁸

5 Control & Time

- Imputability requires control, and control is incompatible with temporal determination, but why is it incompatible?
 1. ~~Natural causation is incompatible with leeway~~
 - (a) God lacks leeway but has control
 2. ~~Natural causation is deterministic and freedom is indeterministic~~
 - (a) Indeterministic events are indistinguishable from those that just 'happen' and so cannot be under the agent's control⁹
 3. Natural causation (NC) is incompatible with being the source of an action
 - (a) NC entails the existence of a causal ground distinct from and independent of the agent?
 - (b) NC entails the existence of a ground over which the agent can exert no causal influence?
 - (c) NC entails the operation of a form of causality that is not characteristic of the activity of the agent's intellectual/rational faculty?
- The best explanation of (3) is (c), which also explains why Kant endorses (a)-(b)

⁵ The will does not have any influence immediately on holding-to-be-true; this would be quite absurd. [...] the will cannot struggle against convincing proofs of truths that are contrary to its wishes and inclinations. (*Logik Jäsche* 9:74 (1800); see also *Logik Blomberg* 24:156 (c. 1771))

⁶ One might raise the objection that God cannot decide otherwise than he does, and so he does not act freely but from the necessity of his nature...but in God it is not due to the necessity of his nature that he can decide only as he does, but rather it is true freedom in God that he decides only what is in conformity with his highest understanding. (*Pöhlitz Religion*, PR 132/28:1068 (1783/4))

⁷ freedom does not consist in the contingency of an action (in its not being determined through any ground at all), i.e. not in indeterminism ([the thesis] that God must be equally capable of doing good or evil, if his action is to be called free) but in absolute spontaneity. The latter is at risk only with predeterminism, where the determining ground of an action lies in antecedent time, so that the action is no longer in my power but in the hands of nature, which determines me irresistibly; since in God no temporal sequence is thinkable, this difficulty has no place. (Rel 6:50n (1793))

⁸ 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 in everything practical...It is impossible that something in [nature] *ought to be* other than what, in all these time-relations, it in fact is; indeed the ought, if one merely has the course of nature before one's eyes, has no significance whatever. (CPR: Clarification of the cosmological idea of...freedom, A547/B575)

⁹ If, then, one wants to attribute freedom to a being whose existence is determined in time, one cannot, so far at least, except this being from the law of natural necessity as to all events in its existence and consequently as to its actions as well; for, that would be tantamount to handing it over to blind chance. (CPrR 5:95)

References & Further Reading

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