

# COMPATIBILISM, IDENTIFICATION, & PERSONS

Colin McLear | PHIL 971

Sept 29, 2020

## 1 Kant's Compatibilism?

### 1.1 Textual Evidence for Compatibilism?

1. The Canon of Pure Reason<sup>1,2</sup>
2. The *Critique of Practical Reason*<sup>3</sup>
3. The *Review of Schulz*<sup>4</sup>
4. *Groundwork* III<sup>5,6</sup>

QUESTION: To what extent does the evidence merely show that Kant construed *agnosticism* about transcendental freedom as compatible with acceptance of practical freedom rather than the *compatibility* of belief in freedom and determinism?

### 1.2 Deliberation & Two Standpoints

- Deliberation is an activity according to which one must proceed “as if” one is “free” in weighing reasons for believing or intending

Occasionally one meets the objection that the freedom that we discover in reflection is a delusion. Human actions are causally determined. The philosopher's bugbear, the Scientific World View, threatens once more to deprive us of something we value. When desire calls we think we can take it or leave it, but in fact someone could have predicted exactly what we will do. But how can this be a problem? The afternoon stretches before me, and I must decide whether to work or to play. Suppose first that *you can predict* which one I am going to do. That has no effect on me at all: I must still decide what to do. I am tempted to play but worried about work, and I must decide the case on its merits. Suppose next *I believe that you can predict* which one I'm going to do. You've done it often enough before. What then? I am tempted by play but worried about work, and I must decide the case on its merits. [...] The freedom discovered in reflection is not a theoretical property which can also be seen by scientists considering the agent's deliberations third-personally and from outside. It is from within the deliberative perspective that we see our desires as providing suggestions which we may take or leave. (Korsgaard 1996b, 94-6)

1. Does deliberation presume that the future is genuinely (i.e. metaphysically) “open” or just that it is not predictable (i.e. it is merely epistemically open)?
2. Does deliberation presume that one has the ability to do or refrain (i.e. that one has leeway) from doing the action being deliberated upon?
3. Does deliberation presume that one's deliberations are causally efficacious? If so in what sense?

<sup>1</sup> for the present I will use the concept of freedom only in a practical sense and set aside, as having been dealt with above, the transcendental signification of the concept, which cannot be empirically presupposed as an explanatory ground of the appearances but is rather itself a problem for reason.

<sup>2</sup> But whether in these actions, through which it prescribes laws, reason is not itself determined by further influences...in the practical sphere this does not concern us, since in the first instance we ask of reason only a **precept** for conduct; it is rather a merely speculative question, which we can set aside as long as our aim is directed to action or omission. ... The question about transcendental freedom concerns merely speculative knowledge, which we can set aside as quite indifferent if we are concerned with what is practical (A803-4/B831-2)

<sup>3</sup> One can therefore grant 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...as well as all the external occasions affecting them, we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse and could nevertheless maintain that the human being's conduct is free. (5:99)

<sup>4</sup> the practical concept of freedom has nothing to do with the speculative concept, which is abandoned entirely to metaphysicians. For I can be quite indifferent as to the origin of my state in which I am now to act; I ask only what I now have to do, and then freedom is a necessary practical presupposition and an idea under which alone I can regard commands of reason as valid. (8:13)

<sup>5</sup> I say now: every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy (GIII 4:448)

<sup>6</sup> I follow this route - that of assuming freedom, sufficiently for our purpose, only as laid down by rational beings merely *in idea* as a ground for their actions - so that I need not be bound to prove freedom in its theoretical respect as well. For even if the latter is left unsettled, still the same laws hold for a being that cannot act otherwise than under the idea of its own freedom as would bind a being that was actually free. Thus we can escape here from the burden that weighs upon theory. (4:448, note)

4. Are there distinct (practical vs. theoretical) “standpoints” from which one can both believe and deny the truth of determinism without irrationality?<sup>7</sup>
  - What constitutes a “standpoint”?
  - Does the existence of different standpoints allow for contradictory beliefs?

### 1.3 Reasons to Reject a Compatibilist Reading

1. Kant explicitly rejects the claim that freedom is compatible with our reason being temporally determined in its activity as a “wretched subterfuge” and nothing more than the “freedom of a turnspit”<sup>8</sup>
2. Compatibilist readings are unable to explain how Kant’s conception of spontaneity is compatible with temporal determination
  - Presumes that Kant has a non-question-begging argument for why time is a feature of receptivity rather than spontaneity
3. Compatibilist readings of Kant fail to explain why he might have thought that only Transcendental Idealism could provide the basis for freedom of action/rationality

### 1.4 The Incorporation Thesis

*Incorporation Thesis:* An incentive provides sufficient ground for choice if and only if it has been “incorporated” into an agent’s maxim of action<sup>9</sup>

1. Is incorporation an act?
  - (a) if incorporation is an act then it is brought about through some capacity or another, but what capacity would this be?
2. Who is doing the incorporating? The agent, or just some proper part of the agent?
3. How central is the incorporation thesis to Kant’s overall position?<sup>10</sup>

## 2 Frankfurt on Persons

A person possesses:

1. Self-consciousness
2. Rational capacities
  - Means-end reasoning
  - Critical evaluation of attitudes
3. First-order desires
4. Second-order volitions
  - capacity or actual volitions?

<sup>7</sup> The deliberating agent, employing reason practically, views the world as it were from a noumenal standpoint, as an expression of the wills of God and other rational agents. [...] The theorizing spectator, on the other hand, views the world as phenomena, mechanistic, and fully determined. The interests of morality demand a different conceptual organization of the world than those of theoretical explanation (Korsgaard 1989, 37).

<sup>8</sup> It is a wretched subterfuge to seek to evade this by saying that the kind of determining grounds of his causality in accordance with natural law agrees with a comparative concept of freedom ... Some still let themselves be put off by this subterfuge and so think they have solved, with a little quibbling about words, that difficult problem on the solution of which millennia have worked in vain and which can therefore hardly be found so completely on the surface. That is to say, in the question about that freedom which must be put at the basis of all moral laws and the imputation appropriate to them, it does not matter whether the causality determined in accordance with a natural law is necessary through determining grounds lying *within* the subject or *outside* him, or in the first case whether these determining grounds are instinctive or thought by reason; if, as is admitted by these men themselves, these determining representations have the ground of their existence in time and indeed in the *antecedent state* ... if the freedom of our will were none other than the latter (say, psychological and comparative but not also transcendental, i.e., absolute), then it would at bottom be nothing better than the freedom of a turnspit, which, when once it is wound up, also accomplishes its movements of itself. (CPrR 5:95-7)

<sup>9</sup> freedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself); only in this way can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice (of freedom). Rel 6:23-4

<sup>10</sup> But freedom of choice cannot be defined - as some have tried to define it - as the capacity to make a choice for or against the law (*libertas indifferentiae*)... Only freedom in relation to the internal lawgiving of reason is really a capacity; the possibility of deviating from it is an incapacity. How can that capacity be defined by [erklärt aus] this incapacity? It would be a definition that added to the practical concept the exercise of it, as this is taught by experience, a hybrid definition [*Bastarderklärung*] (*definitio hybrida*) that puts the concept in a false light. (MM 6:226)

- Persons form a class distinct from either wantons or mere animals
  - Wantons lack (4), while animals lack both (2) and (4)

### 2.1 Identification & Wholeheartedness

- Why do we need identification?<sup>11</sup>
- What is identification?<sup>12</sup>
  - Is it a causal notion?
    - \* How could Frankfurt appeal to a causal notion here if his theory is “non-historical”?<sup>13</sup>
    - \* Is it causality from the agent or from some proper part thereof?
  - If non-causal then in what sense could identification be an instance of the agent “making up one’s mind” (p. 172) concerning what to do?
- Who (or what) is doing the identifying?

### 2.2 Freedom of Will

- The concept <person> brings with it the free will problem<sup>14</sup>
- Two Desiderata on any account of freedom of will<sup>15</sup>
  1. Why only humans (persons) are free
  2. What the value of a free will is (i.e. why persons care about being free)

### References & Further Reading

Ameriks, Karl. 2000. *Kant’s Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Frankfurt, Harry G. 1971. “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person.” *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1): 5–20.

———. 1988. *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frierson, Patrick R. 2010. “Two Standpoints and the Problem of Moral Anthropology.” In *Kant’s Moral Metaphysics: God, Freedom, and Immortality*, edited by Benjamin J. Bruxvoort Lipscomb and James Krueger, 83–110. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Hill, Thomas E. 1989. “Kant’s Theory of Practical Reason.” *The Monist* 72 (3): 363–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27903146>.

Kohl, Markus. 2015. “Kant on Determinism and the Categorical Imperative.” *Ethics* 125 (2): 331–56. <https://doi.org/10.1086/678370>.

———. 2016. “Kant on Idealism, Freedom, and Standpoints.” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 98 (1).

<sup>11</sup> the assignment of desires to different hierarchical levels does not by itself provide an explanation of what it is for someone to be identified with one of his own desires rather than with another. It does not make clear why it should be appropriate to construe a person as participating in conflicts within himself between second-order volitions and first-order desires, and hence as vulnerable to being defeated by his own desires, when a wanton is not to be construed as a genuine participant in (or as having any interest in the outcomes of) conflicts within himself between desires all of which are of the first order. (Frankfurt 1988, 166)

<sup>12</sup> When a person identifies himself decisively with one of his first-order desires, this commitment “resounds” throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders. (Frankfurt 1971, 16)

<sup>13</sup> The fundamental responsibility of an agent with respect to his own character is not a matter of whether it is as the effect of his own actions that the agent has certain dispositions to feel and to behave in various ways. (Frankfurt 1988, 171)

<sup>14</sup> The concept of a person is not only, then, the concept of a type of entity that has both first-order desires and volitions of the second order. It can also be construed as the concept of a type of entity for whom the freedom of its will may be a problem. This concept excludes all wantons, both infrahuman and human, since they fail to satisfy an essential condition for the enjoyment of freedom of the will. And it excludes those suprahuman beings, if any, whose wills are necessarily free. (Frankfurt 1971, 14)

<sup>15</sup> My theory concerning the freedom of the will accounts easily for our disinclination to allow that this freedom is enjoyed by the members of any species inferior to our own. It also satisfies another condition that must be met by any such theory, by making it apparent why the freedom of the will should be regarded as desirable. (Frankfurt 1971, 17)

- Korsgaard, Christine M. 1989. "Morality as Freedom." In *Kant's Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, edited by Yimiyahu Yovel, 23–48. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- . 1996a. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1996b. *The Sources of Normativity*. Edited by Onora O'Neill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lavin, Douglas. 2004. "Practical Reason and the Possibility of Error." *Ethics* 114 (3): 424–57. [https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3121076/Lavin\\_PracticalReason.pdf?sequence=2](https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3121076/Lavin_PracticalReason.pdf?sequence=2).
- McCarty, Richard. 2009. *Kant's Theory of Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McKenna, Michael, and Derk Pereboom. 2016. *Free Will: A Contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Nelkin, Dana K. 2000. "Two Standpoints and the Belief in Freedom." *The Journal of Philosophy* 97 (10): 564–76.
- Paton, H J. 1947. *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. London: Hutchinson & Company.
- Pereboom, Derk. 2008. "A Compatibilist Account of the Epistemic Conditions on Rational Deliberation." *The Journal of Ethics* 12 (3-4): 287–306. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-008-9036-9>.
- Tenenbaum, Sergio. 2012. "The Idea of Freedom and Moral Cognition in Groundwork III." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84 (3): 555–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2010.00462.x>.
- Wolf, Susan R. 1990. *Freedom Within Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wood, Allen W. 1984. "Kant's Compatibilism." In *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, edited by Allen W Wood, 73–101. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.