

INCORPORATION, IDENTIFICATION, & AGENT-CAUSATION

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1 Korsgaard's Compatibilism

1.1 Two Arguments About Deliberation

THE DEVICE

[Kant's ...] point is not that you must believe that you are free, but that you must choose as if you were free. It is important to see that this is quite consistent with believing yourself to be fully determined. To make it vivid, imagine that [...] you know that [...] your every move is programmed by an electronic device in your brain. [...] The important point here is that efforts to second guess the device cannot help you decide what to do. [...] In order to do anything, you must simply ignore the fact that you are programmed, and decide what to do – just as if you were free (Korsgaard 1996a, 162)

THE PREDICTOR

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)

1.2 Questions For Korsgaard

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?
4. Are there distinct (practical vs. theoretical) “standpoints” from which one can both believe and deny the truth of determinism without irrationality?^{1,2}

¹ 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; *first*, insofar as he belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); *second*, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical but grounded merely in reason. (GIII 4:452)

² 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 1996a, 173).

- What constitutes a “standpoint”?
- Does the existence of different standpoints allow for contradictory beliefs?

1.3 Two Problems for Korsgaard’s Interpretation

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”³
2. Korsgaard’s compatibilist reading of Kant fails to explain why he might have thought that only **Transcendental Idealism** could provide the basis for freedom of action/rationality

2 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 action⁴

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?⁵

3 Identification & Agent-Causation

3.1 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?
- Persons form a class distinct from either “wantons” or mere “animals”
 - Wantons lack (4), while animals lack both (2) and (4)

³ 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)

⁴ 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

⁵ 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)

3.2 Identification & Wholeheartedness

- Why do we need identification?⁶
- What is identification?⁷
 - Is it a causal notion?
 - * How could Frankfurt appeal to a causal notion here if his theory is “non-historical”?⁸
 - * 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?

3.3 The Problem of Agency

Authorship condition: the concept of an agent requires that the agent *does* something, as opposed to the agent’s merely being the *subject* of behaviour (or intention to behave)⁹

Agent-causation: $S \phi$ ’s just in case S , who is not identical with any of their s -involving mental states and events, non-deviantly causes ϕ

Event-causation: $S \phi$ ’s just in case certain s -involving mental states and events non-deviantly cause ϕ

- QUESTION: Is authorship possible without agent-causation?
 - Velleman: Yes, we just need a desire that satisfies the “agent role”
 - Franklin: No, only agent-causation can satisfy the authorship condition

3.4 Franklin’s “It Ain’t Me” Argument

1. An agent s self-determines a decision d only if (i) s adjudicates between his various motivations for or against d , and (ii) on the basis of this adjudicating process s determines or causes d .
 2. If the members of some set of states and events play the causal roles of (i) and (ii), then s plays the causal roles of (i) and (ii) only if s is identical to (some members of) this set of states and events.
 3. An agent is not identical to any state or event or any set of states and events.
 4. Therefore, if the members of some set of states and events play the causal roles of (i) and (ii), then s does not self-determine d .
 5. Therefore, if s self-determines d , then s , and not merely states and events, causes d .
- Velleman’s “identification reductionism about self-determination” denies (2); the agent can count as playing a distinctive causal role even if his causal role is played by states and events that are not identical to him, so long as these are states and events with which he is identified (Franklin 2016, 1124)

⁶ 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)

⁷ 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 1988, 21)

⁸ 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)

⁹ What makes us agents rather than mere subjects of behaviour—in our conception of ourselves, at least, if not in reality—is our perceived capacity to interpose ourselves into the course of events in such a way that the behavioural outcome is traceable directly to us. (Velleman 1992, 465-6)

- The functional role of the agent is to “take sides”, and whatever plays this role cannot be identical with whatever it may take sides for/against¹⁰
- The satisfier of this role is another state or event that can motivate the agent – i.e. a desire
- The desire that fills this functional role is the desire to act in accordance with reasons¹¹

References & Further Reading

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¹⁰ The functional role of agent is that of a single party prepared to reflect on, and take sides with, potential determinants of behaviour at any level in the hierarchy of attitudes; and this party cannot be identical with any of the items on which it must be prepared to reflect or with which it must be prepared to take sides. (Velleman 1992, 477)

¹¹ What really produces the bodily movements that you are said to produce, then, is a part of you that performs the characteristic functions of agency. That part, I claim, is your desire to act in accordance with reasons, a desire that produces behaviour, in your name, by adding its motivational force to that of whichever motives appear to provide the strongest reasons for acting, just as you are said to throw your weight behind them. (Velleman 1992, 479)