

11 Kant on freedom of the will

Although there can be no doubt regarding the centrality of the concept of freedom in Kant's thought, there is considerable disagreement concerning its proper interpretation and evaluation. The evaluative problem stems largely from Kant's insistence that freedom involves a transcendental or non-empirical component, which requires the resources of transcendental idealism in order to be reconciled with the "causality of nature." There is also, however, a significant interpretive problem posed by the number of different conceptions of freedom to which Kant refers.¹ In addition to "outer freedom" or freedom of action, and a relative, empirically accessible or "psychological" concept of freedom, which admits of degrees, Kant distinguishes between transcendental and practical freedom, both of which seem to involve indeterminism in the sense of an independence from determination by antecedent causes. Moreover, within this sphere he conceives of freedom as both absolute spontaneity (negative freedom), which is a condition of rational agency as such, and as autonomy (positive freedom), which is a condition of the appropriate moral motivation (acting from duty alone).

Given this complexity, the present discussion must be highly selective.² Specifically, it will focus initially on the nature of and relation between freedom as spontaneity and as autonomy. But since both of these senses of freedom affirm (albeit in different ways) an independence from natural causality, this necessitates a consideration of the relationship between freedom (in both senses) and transcendental idealism. And to situate Kant's views in their historical context, I shall frame the discussion with a brief account of the treatment of free will by some of his predecessors, on the one hand, and his idealistic successors, on the other.

I. FREEDOM OF THE WILL IN KANT'S PREDECESSORS

In the German context, the agenda for the discussion of freedom of the will in the eighteenth century was set by Leibniz, who approached the topic in terms of his principle of sufficient reason. After Leibniz, the main participants in this discussion were Christian Wolff and Christian August Crusius. The former developed and systematized the Leibnizian position and the latter was its foremost critic. Accordingly, a brief consideration of the views of these three thinkers is essential to the understanding of Kant's position.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

Leibniz's philosophy is built on two great principles: contradiction (or identity) and sufficient reason. The former states that "a proposition cannot be both true and false at the same time"; the latter that "nothing happens without a reason why it should be so rather than otherwise."³ Whereas the first governs (logically) necessary truths, which hold in all possible worlds, the second governs contingent truths, which hold in the actual world. In addition to factual truths and laws of nature, the latter includes the basic propositions of Leibniz's metaphysics.

The principle of sufficient reason can have this metaphysical function, however, only because it involves a certain kind of necessity. Since God is a supremely perfect being, it follows (according to this principle) that God could choose only the best of all possible worlds. Already during his lifetime, Leibniz was attacked on this point for denying divine freedom, subjecting God to an overriding necessity or fate. Typically, he dealt with this problem by distinguishing between an absolute or logical necessity and a relative or hypothetical one: the former apply to necessary and the latter to contingent truths. Accordingly, Leibniz denied that it is absolutely necessary for God to create the best of all possible worlds, while also admitting that there is a sense in which he must choose the best, since anything else would constitute a violation of the principle of sufficient reason.

Leibniz applied the same general framework to the analysis of human freedom. Thus, he denied that the voluntary actions of finite rational agents are absolutely necessary, since their non-occurrence

does not involve a contradiction, while insisting that their occurrence is certain (and is known timelessly by God), since their non-occurrence would violate the principle of sufficient reason.

So far it might seem that Leibniz had “saved” freedom only by contrasting contingent truths about the occurrence of human actions with logically necessary truths such as those contained in mathematics. This is obviously inadequate as an analysis of freedom, however, since (among other things) it fails to distinguish between voluntary actions and other occurrences in nature, which are causally rather than logically necessary. But Leibniz was well aware of this problem and attempted to deal with it by appealing to two more necessary conditions of a free act: spontaneity and choice (or intelligence). As he puts it at one point:

Aristotle has already observed that there are two things in freedom, to wit spontaneity and choice, and therein lies our mastery over our actions. When we act freely we are not being forced, as would happen if we were pushed on to a precipice and thrown from top to bottom; and we are not prevented from having the mind free when we deliberate, as we would be if we were given a draught to deprive us of discernment. There is contingency in a thousand actions of Nature, but when there is no judgment in him who acts there is no freedom.⁴

As this passage indicates, by “spontaneity” Leibniz understood the absence of compulsion by any external cause, and by “choice” (or “intelligence”) the recognition (or at least belief) that a course of action is, in given circumstances, the best. Like contingency, spontaneity alone is insufficient for freedom since it characterizes some actions of inanimate objects (e.g., a ball which has been set in motion along a smooth trajectory) as well as the behavior of nonrational animals.⁵ Thus, again following Aristotle, Leibniz thought that we can speak meaningfully of freedom only in the case of voluntary actions, in which an agent makes a conscious choice based on the perception of some good.

Although understanding freedom in this way enabled Leibniz to bring free actions under the principle of sufficient reason, it entails that, given a motive and a specific set of circumstances, an agent will invariably choose to act according to what is perceived to be the best. In other words, an agent could not have chosen otherwise under the same circumstances. Rather than denying this implication, however,

Leibniz attempted to reconcile it with freedom by appealing to his dictum that a reason or motive “inclines without necessitating.”⁶ He does not mean by this that free agents have a capacity to disregard their motives (that would constitute a violation of the principle of sufficient reason), but merely that being motivated to X does not render the performance of X anything more than hypothetically necessary. Consequently, freedom for Leibniz is compatible with a certain kind of necessity.

Christian Wolff

If Wolff may be said to have modified the Leibnizian conception of freedom at all, it is by emphasizing even more strongly its deterministic features and its intellectualism or anti-voluntarism. The first of these is a consequence of his attempt to derive the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction.⁷ Since the former supposedly governs all that exists, its demonstration on the basis of the principle of contradiction threatens to reduce everything to a matter of logical necessity in the manner of Spinoza. Indeed, the charge that he taught a universal determinism was one of the main reasons for Wolff’s expulsion from Halle in 1723.⁸

Nevertheless, Wolff did not think that the attribution of a logical necessity to the principle of sufficient reason entails that everything based on this principle is itself logically or “absolutely” necessary. Accordingly, he retained Leibniz’s distinction between absolute and hypothetical necessity and subsumed free actions under the latter. Also, like Leibniz, he located the distinctive feature of free actions in the kind of grounds they have, not in their lack of sufficient determining grounds. Specifically, free actions for Wolff are those that are performed on the basis of what the intellect perceives to be best. Thus, rejecting the characterization of freedom as the capacity to choose either of two contradictory things on the grounds of its violation of the principle of sufficient reason,⁹ he defined it instead as “the ability of the soul through its own power of choice to choose, between two equally possible things, that which pleases it the most.”¹⁰

This conception of freedom must be understood in terms of Wolff’s above-mentioned anti-voluntarism. Strictly speaking, there is only one mental faculty for Wolff: the cognitive. The other two traditionally conceived faculties (will and desire) are subsumed under it as

reflecting different degrees in the distinctness of one's cognition.¹¹ Although it follows from this that an agent will necessarily "choose" what seems the best in a given situation, this does not undermine the freedom of choice. The latter is preserved because the action is determined intellectually by what is perceived (rightly or wrongly) to be the best rather than being the result of compulsion by external forces. Moreover, like many eighteenth-century thinkers (including Hume), Wolff insisted that such a conception of freedom is not only compatible with morality but required by it because its alternative (the so-called "liberty of indifference") effectively deprives an agent of any motive or reason to act.¹²

Christian August Crusius

As already noted, Crusius was the foremost opponent of Wolffian thought in Germany and, as such, exercised a major influence on Kant.¹³ For present purposes at least, the focal points of his critique are the Wolffian understanding of the principle of sufficient reason and its intellectualism or anti-voluntarism. Not only did Crusius reject as spurious Wolff's attempt to demonstrate the principle of sufficient reason, he also repudiated the intellectualization of the real, that is, the equation of conditions of knowing (or consistent thinking) with ontological conditions. Against this virtual collapsing of ontology into epistemology or logic, Crusius (anticipating Kant) distinguished sharply between ideal and real grounds, between the logical relation of ground and consequent and the real relation of cause and effect. The latter has a kind of necessity, which Crusius never succeeded in explaining very well, but is quite distinct from the logical necessity based on the principle of contradiction.¹⁴

Armed with this sharp distinction between conditions of knowing and conditions of being, Crusius thought that he had created the conceptual space for a genuine freedom of the will. This is not only because the necessity governing the real is not a logical necessity, which even the Leibnizians acknowledged, but because the principle of sufficient reason governs our understanding of things rather than the things themselves. Thus, anticipating Kant, Crusius claimed that the endeavor to comprehend freedom leads to an unavoidable conflict of principles: on the one hand, we cannot conceive an action without a cause (which rules out freedom in a stronger-than-Leibnizian sense), while, on the other hand, we must

assume freedom (in a strong sense) in order to conceive of the possibility of moral agency.¹⁵

Crusius's basic claim is that the distinction between these two kinds of conditions entails that our inability to understand or explain freedom does not preclude its reality. On the contrary, he insisted on the reality of freedom as a fundamental power of the soul, which can be known to be actual, even though it remains inexplicable. Within the framework of his epistemology, Crusius explained this in terms of a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: symbolic and intuitive.¹⁶ The former comprehends things in terms of their relations to something else and the latter consists in an immediate awareness. Accordingly, we can have a direct assurance of realities that we cannot understand. Freedom is one such reality.

Crusius's justification for this claim turns on his voluntarism. Indeed, to underscore this point, he introduced a distinct science ("*Thelematologie*") whose special provenance is the will.¹⁷ In this context, Crusius defined the will as the power to act according to one's ideas. His point is that a capacity for cognition does not entail a capacity to act according to its determinations.¹⁸ Since Crusius thought that the will, as the chief power of the mind, has an executive function that presupposes, but cannot be performed by, the intellect, he denied that God would create a being with understanding but no will.¹⁹

Moreover, for Crusius, this function of the will presupposes freedom in a strong sense. Consequently, the Wolffian account of freedom will not do since it is a thinly veiled determinism, which reduces virtue to a matter of luck.²⁰ Against this, Crusius insisted that freedom must involve a capacity to choose between given alternatives since it is only on the basis of this assumption that acts can be imputed to an agent. As he puts it at one point, "A willing that one could in identical circumstances omit or direct to something else is called a free willing."²¹ And later, in defining the most perfect concept of freedom, he writes:

Whenever we freely will something, we decide to do something for which one or several desires already exist in us. . . . Freedom consists in an inner perfect activity of the will, which is capable of connecting its efficacy with one of the currently active drives of the will, or of omitting this connection and remaining inactive or of connecting it with another drive instead of the first one.²²

For Crusius, then, rather than being determined by its strongest desire or, in the intellectualist version, by what is perceived to be the best, the will (or self) is conceived as somehow standing apart from its desires, with the capacity to determine which, if any, of them are to be acted upon. Such a conception of agency makes no sense from the Wolffian standpoint, with its reduction of all the powers of the mind to cognition, but Crusius thought that he was able to accommodate it by means of his sharp distinction between intellect and will.

II. KANT'S CONCEPTION OF RATIONAL AGENCY

Although Kant's eventual understanding of freedom of the will has strong affinities to Crusius's, his initial account is Wolffian. Thus, in his first metaphysical venture, Kant defends the distinction between absolute and hypothetical necessity against Crusius and, in good Wolffian fashion, insists that the question of freedom concerns the nature of the necessitating ground rather than the kind or degree of its necessitation (*New Elucidation*, 1:400). Accordingly, freedom of the will is said to consist entirely in its being determined by "motives of the understanding" rather than by external stimuli (*New Elucidation*, 1:400). Appealing to Leibnizian terminology, Kant defines spontaneity as "an action which issues from an inner principle," and remarks that "When this spontaneity is determined in conformity with the representation of what is best it is called freedom" (*New Elucidation*, 1: 402).

Leibnizian conception
of spontaneity

Remnants of this view are to be found in some of Kant's lectures on practical philosophy and associated *Reflexionen*, where he appeals to a relative, empirically based conception of freedom. In this context, he speaks of degrees of freedom, corresponding to degrees of rationality, and correlated with degrees of imputability. Indeed, as late as 1784–5, Kant is cited as claiming that, "The more a man can be morally compelled the freer he is; the more he is pathologically compelled, though this only occurs in a comparative sense, the less free he is" (*Moral Philosophy Collins*, 27:268). It is difficult to know what to make of such claims, particularly those stemming from the period after the initial publication of the first *Critique*. But since Kant used Baumgarten as his text and this remark (and many others like it) is taken from a student's notes, it seems plausible to assume that he was stating the latter's view rather than his own.

Be that as it may, in his metaphysical lectures of the seventies Kant repudiates the Wolffian conception of freedom on essentially Crusian grounds. Thus, he now distinguishes sharply between an absolute and a relative or conditioned spontaneity of the kind advocated by the Leibnizians. The former is claimed to be essential to freedom in the genuine or transcendental sense, while the latter is compared to that of a watch or turnspit (*Metaphysik L₁*, 28:267–8).²³ In fact, at one point Kant seems to have entertained a speculative proof of transcendental freedom that anticipates later idealistic accounts. According to this proof, the very conception of oneself as a thinking being proves one's transcendental freedom. As Kant puts it:

When I say: I think, I act, etc., then either the word "I" is used falsely or I am free. Were I not free, I could not say: I do it, but rather I would have to say: I feel a desire in me to do, which someone has aroused in me. But when I say: I do it, that means spontaneity in the transcendental sense.

(Metaphysik L₁, 28:269)

Nevertheless, even at that time Kant did not regard the self's transcendental freedom as unproblematic. Unlike his later treatments, however, its problematic feature is found in its apparent conflict with our ontological status as dependent beings.²⁴ The problem is to understand how such a being could have anything more than the relative spontaneity recognized by the Leibnizians. His resolution of the problem at this point is basically that of Crusius: we know that we are free in the transcendental sense, but we cannot explain how this is possible (*Metaphysik L₁*, 8:270–1).

The "critical" Kant retained the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of freedom, while denying its knowability. This denial is a consequence of the limitation of our cognition to phenomena, that is, to things as they appear in accordance with our forms of sensibility. Since the idea of transcendental freedom is the thought of an agency that is not determinable by sensible conditions, we cannot be said to know that we possess it. Kant also insists, however, on both the possibility and necessity of thinking our freedom, understood as an absolute spontaneity. Freedom, so conceived, is a transcendental idea (a necessary idea of reason), which is required for the thought of ourselves as cognizers and as agents.

The idea that even our capacity to think presupposes absolute spontaneity seems to have its roots in the speculative proof noted

the argument from
self-consciousness
or first-person

above. As Kant develops it in his later writings, the basic point is that to consider oneself as a cognizer is to assume such spontaneity. This is because to understand or cognize something requires not simply having the correct beliefs and even having them for the correct reasons, it also involves a capacity to take these reasons (whether rightly or wrongly) as justifying the belief. In short, the thought of ourselves as self-conscious cognizers is inseparable from the idea of our absolute spontaneity.²⁵

Kant recognized, however, that this is not sufficient to justify freedom in the practical sense, that is, freedom of the will as it is usually understood. The problem stems from the fact that our epistemic spontaneity appears to be self-certifying in a way in which our practical spontaneity is not. The first part of this story is familiar, albeit hardly noncontroversial. Since spontaneity in the above-mentioned sense is a necessary condition of thinking, I cannot think of myself as thinking without attributing such spontaneity to my mind. Expressed in Cartesian terms, I cannot coherently doubt that I am a thinker because such doubt is itself an act of thinking. But since it does seem possible to doubt that one has a will, or, equivalently, that one's reason is practical, this line of argument cannot be directly carried over into the practical sphere. For all that we know, we might be nothing more than thinking automata: beings who are capable of thought, but whose actions are governed by instinct rather than practical reason.

"self-certification"
problem

Here again, the influence of Crusius is evident. For both thinkers it is the separation of intellect and will as distinct powers of the mind that opens up the possibility, which is unintelligible from the Leibnizian point of view, that we might have the former without the latter. Unlike Crusius, however, Kant does not deny such a state of affairs on theological grounds, but seems to have held that it is a possibility that cannot be excluded by the resources of theoretical reason.²⁶

The main point, however, is that from the practical point of view, this possibility is moot. At least from a first-person perspective, while engaged in deliberation regarding the proper course of action, we necessarily presuppose our freedom. To take oneself as a rational agent capable of choice and deliberation is to assume that one's reason is practical or, equivalently, that one has a will. As Kant famously puts it, "Now I assert that to every rational being having a will we

must necessarily lend the idea of freedom, also, under which alone he acts" (*Groundwork*, 4:448).

As we shall see below in connection with the Third Antinomy, this idea is that of an uncaused cause, that is, of an agency capable of making an "absolute beginning," by which is understood the capacity to initiate a causal series that is not itself determined by any antecedent condition. In its application to the human will and its practical freedom, this means that we are rationally constrained to regard ourselves as spontaneous initiators of causal series through our choices. Otherwise expressed, **we cannot, at least from the first-person point of view, regard our choices as the predetermined outcomes of either the state of the world or of our own psychological state, including our beliefs and desires.**

Perhaps Kant's best formulation of this conception of freedom is in a passage from *Religion*, where he writes:

[F]reedom of the power of choice [*Willkür*] 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).

(*Religion*, 6:24)

Although this characterization of the freedom of the power of choice is part of Kant's discussion of how the moral law can be an incentive for sensibly affected beings such as ourselves, it is noteworthy that he claims that it applies to any incentive (including those based on inclination). Consequently, it is best viewed as providing a model for the thought of free agency in general rather than merely moral agency. Nevertheless, its force is normative rather than descriptive. **It is not the case that introspection invariably shows that we never act on an incentive without first "incorporating it into one's maxim"; it is rather that we necessarily conceive our agency according to this model insofar as we take ourselves to be acting on reasons. This act of incorporation may also be seen as the practical analogue of the spontaneity that we necessarily attribute to our understandings in cognition.** Just as reasons to believe cannot function as reasons unless we take them as such, desires do not of themselves provide us with a sufficient reason to act. They can become

Religion incorporation text

reasons only insofar as we freely assign them this status, by subsuming them under a principle of action (maxim), which we likewise freely adopt.²⁷

If we put this central Kantian idea into its historical context, it may be seen as a successor to the Leibnizian dictum that motives incline without necessitating. The difference is that, under the influence of Crusius, Kant construed the distinction between inclination and necessitation in much stronger terms than the Leibnizians. Whereas the latter meant by this merely that a strong inclination to X does not make it absolutely necessary that one will do X (though all things considered, it makes it certain), for Kant such an inclination does not, of itself, even give one a sufficient reason to X.

III. IMPUTABILITY AND AUTONOMY

Kant's account of the relationship between morality and freedom is complicated by the fact that it encompasses two issues: imputation and motivation. His treatment of the former consists in a relatively straightforward application of the general conception of rational agency to morally relevant acts. The basic idea is that the imputability of actions presupposes freedom in the strong sense of absolute spontaneity. Accordingly, unlike the Leibnizian view, for which a merely relative spontaneity, understood as a lack of external compulsion, suffices to ground responsibility, for Kant it requires that the agent is not predetermined at all. In other words, without violating the psychological continuity of the person, we must consider an imputable act as if it were an "absolute beginning."

Once again, this is close to the position of Crusius, who defended the traditional view that freedom involves a capacity to have chosen otherwise in a given set of circumstances. Kant, however, gives a somewhat different twist to this thought in the light of his conception of morality. Rather than defining freedom simply as the capacity to do otherwise in the sense of an ability to choose either for against the dictates of morality, Kant typically appeals to the principle that "ought implies can." Thus, the weight of his account falls on the idea that, no matter how dire one's circumstances, one is aware through one's consciousness of standing under the moral law that one *can* do what duty requires, simply because one *ought* to do so. Moreover, it is in this sense that we must understand Kant's claim, which

may at first seem to conflict with the previous analysis of rational agency, that without the moral law such freedom would have remained unknown to the agent (*Practical Reason*, 5:30).²⁸ It is not that the consciousness of the moral law first makes us aware of our rational agency, since insofar as we take ourselves to be acting we are necessarily conscious of that. **It is rather that this consciousness makes us aware of a capacity to disregard all our inclinations, even our natural love of life, when duty requires it.**

This conception of freedom rests on the assumption that moral considerations give one a sufficient reason to act or, as Kant usually puts it, that the moral law serves as an incentive. To understand this, however, we need to consider the doctrine of the autonomy of the will. As introduced in the *Groundwork*, autonomy is defined as “the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)” (4:440). It is contrasted with the principle of heteronomy, which denies that the will can give itself the law and assumes that the object (whatever happens to be desired) must give the law to the will (4:441). Consequently, to attribute heteronomy to the will is not to claim that it is causally determined, but rather that it requires some antecedent desire in order to have a reason to act.

Kant claimed that the will’s heteronomy was presupposed by all previous moralists, including voluntarists such as Crusius (*Practical Reason*, 5:39). His basic objection is that it is incompatible with the possibility of the categorical imperative since the latter not only determines what our duty is in given circumstances, but requires us to act *from* duty, which is possible only on the assumption that the will is autonomous. Thus, unlike most present-day conceptions of autonomy, Kant’s is an all-or-nothing affair: either the will has it or it does not. Moreover, if it does not, morality must be rejected as a phantom of the brain (*Groundwork*, 4:445).

In the *Groundwork*, Kant argues also that the positive conception of freedom (autonomy) follows from the negative conception (spontaneity) and that given autonomy, “morality together with its principle follows from it by mere analysis of its concept” (4:447).²⁹ Or, as he puts it in the second *Critique*, “[F]reedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other” (5:529). Both formulations come to the same thing, namely, that freedom (construed as autonomy) is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient condition of

morality.³⁰ Consequently, given the significance that Kant attributes to autonomy, it is no wonder that he devoted the third part of the *Groundwork*, which is intended to establish the reality of the categorical imperative, to a "deduction" of the autonomy of the will.

Although it is impossible to examine here this complex and difficult argument, which was replaced in the second *Critique* by an appeal to the "fact of reason,"³¹ it is necessary to consider briefly Kant's distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür*, which is a central feature of his treatment of the will in his later writings. Whereas in the *Groundwork* Kant simply identified will (*Wille*) with practical reason, thereby equating the question of whether we have free will with the question of whether our reason is practical, in these later writings he introduces a more complex account of the will as containing both legislative and executive functions.³²

In addition to creating problems for the translator since each of these terms can be rendered as "will," the situation is further complicated by the fact that *Wille* itself is taken in two senses: a broad sense in which it connotes the faculty of volition, or will as a whole, and a narrow sense in which it connotes the legislative function of this faculty. Accordingly, both *Wille* in the narrow sense and *Willkür*, which is here translated as "the power of choice," are aspects of *Wille* in the broad sense.

It is tempting to correlate these two aspects of will with the two conceptions of freedom (spontaneity and autonomy). In fact, this works nicely in the case of *Willkür*, the freedom of which consists in an absolute spontaneity. The situation is more complex in the case of the connection of *Wille* and autonomy, however, since Kant does not seem to have been of one mind on the matter. Thus, in the published text of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant states that only *Willkür* can be regarded as free, whereas *Wille* must be thought to be neither free nor unfree since it is directed to giving law rather than to action (6:226). By contrast, in his unpublished preliminary notes (*Vorarbeiten*) for this work, Kant entertains the possibility that *Wille* might be free in a different sense than *Willkür* because it is law giving rather than law following (23:249). Perhaps the best way to render Kant consistent on this point is to keep in mind the distinction between the two senses of *Wille*. When Kant denied that *Wille* as such is either free or unfree, he had in mind the narrow sense of the term. *Wille*, so construed, may not be thought to be free with regard

to the legislation of the categorical imperative, since this is its fundamental law. But, conversely, it does seem possible to attribute autonomy to *Wille* in the broad sense since it is conceived as legislating to itself.

IV. FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

The centerpiece of Kant's account of freedom is the third antinomy in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and its attempted resolution through an appeal to transcendental idealism. Like each of the four antinomies, the third is presented as a conflict between cosmological ideas, that is, between ways of conceiving the world as a whole (as a totality of conditions). In this case, it is a conflict between the conception of the world as containing an infinite series of causal conditions, each of which is itself conditioned by its antecedent condition, and the conception of this series (and, therefore, the world as a whole) as anchored in something that is itself unconditioned. On Kant's analysis, each side is capable of demonstrating a contradiction in the opposed view. But since it is assumed by both parties that these alternatives are themselves contradictory, the refutation of one is seen as equivalent to the demonstration of the other.³³

Insofar as this dispute is explicitly concerned with a cosmological issue regarding the need for (and possibility of) a first cause, its connection with the question of free will is not immediately evident. Kant's explanation turns on the conception of freedom as absolute spontaneity. As we have seen, to consider oneself as free in this sense is to conceive oneself as initiating through one's choice a fresh chain of events or an "absolute beginning." But the problem with such a conception of agency is that it appears to conflict with the principle of the second analogy: "Everything that happens (begins to be) presupposes something which it follows in accordance with a rule" (*Pure Reason*, A 189).

Kant's general approach to the antinomial conflict is to suggest that the appearance of a contradiction rests on a misunderstanding, which is itself a consequence of the transcendental realism assumed by both parties to the dispute. Since Kant regards such realism as the contradictory opposite of his own transcendental idealism, he defines it in relation to the latter. Underlying the contrast between the two forms of transcendentalism is the distinction

between objects considered as they appear, that is, qua given under the subjective conditions of human sensibility (space and time), and these same objects considered as they may be in themselves, that is, qua thought independently of these conditions by some putative "pure understanding."³⁴ Whereas the transcendental idealist limits human cognition to objects considered in the former way, the transcendental realist ignores this distinction and assumes that our cognition, even of the spatiotemporal objects of human experience, concerns objects considered in the latter way. In Kant's terms, the transcendental realist treats mere appearances as if they were things in themselves.

According to Kant, this confusion leads directly to the misunderstanding underlying the antinomial conflict as a whole and can be avoided only by replacing transcendental realism with transcendental idealism. This is because **the transcendental realist is committed to the assumption that the totality of conditions must be "given" (at least for God) independently of our piecemeal and successive cognition of them.** Consequently, such a realist necessarily assumes that this totality consists of either a finite or an infinite number of conditions. In the case of the third antinomy, the issue is whether there is a first, uncaused cause or an infinitely extended causal chain, every member of which is itself causally conditioned.

Things look rather different from the transcendently idealistic point of view, however, since it is no longer assumed that there is some ultimate fact of the matter, not even one to be determined by God. The claim is rather that each position is legitimate, if relativized to a point of view. From the empirical point of view, every condition must itself be conditioned, which leaves no room for an absolute beginning or uncaused cause; whereas from the intellectualist point of view, which is concerned with the conditions of coherent thought rather than experience, it is necessary to assume some such cause in order to satisfy reason's demand for completeness. Kant's claim is that transcendental idealism (unlike transcendental realism) is able to reconcile these two points of view by introducing a distinction between conditions of experience and conditions of thought. This creates logical space for the possibility that both parties may be correct: the determinist with respect to objects of possible experience and the indeterminist with respect to merely intelligible objects.

In applying this schema to the human will, Kant invokes a distinction between empirical and intelligible character. The will in its empirical character is described as “nothing other than a certain causality of . . . reason, insofar as in its effects in appearance this reason exhibits a rule in accordance with which one could derive the rational grounds and the actions themselves . . . and estimate the subjective principles of his power of choice” (*Pure Reason*, A 549/B 577). Although it may appear strange to find the will in its *empirical* character described as a causality of reason, **Kant’s point is that, even at the empirical level, the voluntary actions of human beings exhibit a “character” that is distinct from that of physical occurrences since they reflect a set of underlying intentions.** These intentions constitute the “subjective principles of the power of choice.” They are empirical insofar as they can be inferred from overt behavior and used to explain past actions and predict future ones.

The notion of an empirical character therefore involves a deterministic, though not reductionistic, picture of human agency, and it is this picture to which Kant thinks we appeal when we are simply observing human behavior, “and, as happens in anthropology, . . . trying to investigate the moving causes of [a person’s] actions physiologically” (A 550/B 578). It is also, in all essential respects, the view of such agency affirmed by the Leibnizians and most forms of compatibilism to the present day. **Since agency, so conceived, is itself part of the natural order, there is no problem regarding its compatibility with this order. At least for Kant, however, the problem is that, under this assumption, there is also no freedom.**

As Kant viewed the situation, **freedom is required to account for the “ought” (both moral and prudential).** Since this involves considering human actions normatively in relation to practical reason rather than descriptively in relation to the conditions of their experience and explanation, it requires a different conception of agency, one that allows us to conceive of the will as capable of an absolute beginning. The function of the notion of an intelligible character is to provide the requisite conception.

Kant’s thesis that one and the same volition may be considered from these two apparently conflicting points of view and assigned two such characters has been deemed deeply paradoxical, if not outright incoherent, by many. Of particular concern is Kant’s attempt to illustrate this thesis by means of the notorious case of

the malicious lie. Faced with such an act, Kant suggests, we first enquire into its motive causes and then seek to determine the degree to which the act and its consequences may be imputed to the agent. In considering the former question, we naturally appeal to explanatory factors such as “bad upbringing, bad company . . . the wickedness of a natural temper insensitive to shame . . . carelessness and thoughtlessness, as well as to other occasional causes that may have intervened” (A 554/B 582). In short, it is assumed that the act can be fully explained in terms of a combination of environmental factors and character traits. But in spite of this, Kant maintains, we still blame the agent. Moreover, we do not do so on the familiar compatibilist grounds that the act is the consequence of the agent’s own bad character. Rather, we do so because we presuppose that:

[i]t can entirely set aside how that life was constituted, and that the series of conditions that transpired might not have been, but rather that this deed could be regarded as entirely unconditioned in regard to the previous state, as though with that act the agent had started a series of consequences entirely from himself. (A 555/B 583)

If one is to avoid reducing Kant’s account to sheer nonsense, this claim must be considered with great care. First, we must keep in mind its context, which is that of a critique of the attempt to conceive imputation solely in terms of a Leibnizian-type view of agency. As Crusius had already claimed, this view is inadequate because it reduces one’s virtue or viciousness to a matter of luck. But if this is to be avoided, it does seem necessary to regard an agent as acting in a way that is not determined entirely by character and circumstance, that is, as capable of initiating an absolute beginning.

Second, in spite of Kant’s language, we need not take him as affirming the utterly implausible view that one’s past behavior, disposition, and circumstances play no role in governing one’s actions, as if one’s present self were discontinuous with one’s past self. This would amount to a form of the liberty of indifference, justly ridiculed by the Leibnizians and many others. Consequently, Kant is not claiming that, all things considered, it would be equally easy for the liar to speak the truth on that occasion. He is claiming rather that he could have done so. Or, perhaps better, that we must presuppose that he could have done so if we are to blame him for the lie.

Third, we must keep in mind the status of freedom as a transcendental idea, which, as such, has no explanatory role. It is not that in some cases we appeal to freedom of the will in order to explain an action, while in others we judge that the agent had no choice in the matter. Certainly, we often distinguish actions in these terms, considering the former voluntary and the latter involuntary, and Kant has no problem with this distinction. His point is rather that it applies only within the explanatory framework of empirical character and does not touch on the transcendental question. The latter concerns the very conception of a voluntary action insofar as it is deemed imputable. And it is to resolve this question that transcendental idealism is required.

Considered as a whole, Kant's account may be seen as an attempt to reconcile two apparently conflicting principles: 1) the deterministic principle of the second analogy, which holds that every occurrence (including the voluntary actions of rational agents) has an antecedent condition from which it follows according to a rule; and 2) the thesis that the conception of ourselves as genuine agents to whom actions are imputed requires the attribution to the will of freedom in a strong (indeterminist) sense. Given this problematic, transcendental idealism is presented as the only hypothesis on the basis of which both of these principles can be maintained.

two apparently
conflicting principles

Nevertheless, such a resolution appears vulnerable at three points. One is the coherence of its proposed solution. If transcendental idealism is, as many critics charge, itself incoherent, then appealing to it to reconcile these principles is of no greater import than appealing to the concept of a round square would be with regard to the question of how a figure can be both round and square. The other two points concern each of these principles taken singly. For if we abandon (or modify) either the deterministic principle of the second analogy or Kant's essentially Crusian conception of freedom, then the need to appeal to transcendental idealism apparently disappears.

Although some defenders of Kant have chosen the first route, which involves the reduction of the causal principle to a merely regulative status,³⁵ the usual move is to take the second, which amounts to an appeal to some form of compatibilism. Whether at the end of the day this provides an adequate conception of freedom remains an open question that cannot be decided here. What should be clear, however,

is that Kant rejected the compatibilist conception of freedom as he understood it. On this issue, Kant stands firmly with Crusius rather than the Leibnizians. Thus, while defending the general thesis that freedom is compatible with causal determinism, which is the defining mark of compatibilism, he rejected the conception of freedom in terms of which this compatibility is usually understood. This is the source of both the complexity and much of the interest of Kant's account.

V. FREEDOM OF THE WILL IN KANT'S SUCCESSORS

This final section will discuss briefly the concept of free will in three of Kant's idealistic successors: Fichte, Hegel, and Schopenhauer. Although other thinkers, for example, Schelling, undoubtedly could have been included, these three arguably provide the most interesting case studies of the development and criticism of Kant's thought on the topic.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Whereas for Kant and his predecessors freedom is a problem (albeit a vitally important one) for philosophy, for Fichte it provides the foundation of philosophy. This is reflected in Fichte's characterization of his own position as a "system of freedom,"³⁶ which he also misleadingly describes as nothing more than the Kantian philosophy "properly understood."³⁷

Fichte's creative reconstruction of the Kantian philosophy is articulated in various versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre* and related writings, which he composed in the middle and late 1790s. It is based largely on two principles, each of which breaks with orthodox Kantianism. The first is that the absolute autonomy (independence) of the I is the mandatory starting point of philosophy in the sense that everything is to be explained in terms of the I and its conception of itself, while this self-conception is not itself to be explained in terms of anything more fundamental.³⁸ The second is that the I is not a thing or substance (a Cartesian *res cogitans*) but an activity. Specifically, it is the activity of self-determining or self-positing, which Fichte, following Kant, viewed as essential even to the theoretical

use of intelligence. Accordingly, consciousness of self is just the consciousness of this activity, and the task of philosophy or *Wissenschaftslehre* is to spell out the necessary conditions and implications of this activity and the consciousness thereof.

Since to posit itself the I must confront an objective world (the not-I), which opposes and limits its activity, Fichte avoids what he takes to be the misguided appeal of some Kantians to a pregiven realm of things in themselves.³⁹ Instead, he “deduces” the reality of an external, physical world as a necessary condition of self-consciousness. Rather than a bizarre flight into metaphysical fancy, Fichte’s position may be seen as grounded in a radical reinterpretation of Kant’s distinction between two standpoints and his division of the philosophical terrain into transcendental idealism and transcendental realism. As already noted, for Kant the contrast between the two standpoints concerns two ways of considering things and events (including human actions): as they appear under the spatiotemporal conditions of sensibility and as they are thought through pure reason independently of these conditions. And for Kant at least one key difference between the two forms of transcendentalism is that the former allows for the distinction between the two standpoints, whereas the latter denies its legitimacy.⁴⁰

Rejecting the appearance–thing in itself distinction as ordinarily understood, Fichte regards the contrast between the two standpoints as between the points of view of the philosopher and of ordinary consciousness. The latter is inherently and appropriately realistic (in the sense of Kant’s empirical realism), with the result that the I is viewed as a being among beings. This may also be equated with the naturalistic standpoint assumed by science. For the philosopher, however (at least the idealistic philosopher), the mandatory starting point is the I itself, of which the philosopher becomes aware through a reflection on her own self-determining activity. Thus, it is from the standpoint of philosophy, and only from this standpoint, that primacy is assigned to this activity of the I and the objective world is viewed as existing only for and through it.

This is closely connected with Fichte’s methodological dichotomy between idealism and dogmatism, which replaces the Kantian dichotomy between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism. Although clearly modeled on the latter, Fichte’s understanding of the fundamental division of the philosophical terrain

is oriented more to the question of the nature and status of the I than to the epistemological question of the conditions and limits of *a priori* knowledge. Put simply, whereas Fichtean idealism takes the I as starting point, dogmatism, in its various forms, starts with a pregiven world of beings (including human beings), and its project is to explain the possibility of the I, in both its cognitive and practical dimensions, on this basis. Not surprisingly, Fichte asserts that this project fails because dogmatism cannot account for the possibility of the I as self-reverting activity, whereas idealism, starting with the latter, can account for the experience of an objective world of things with which the dogmatist begins and which defines the standpoint of ordinary consciousness.

Even though the theoretical portion of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is devoted entirely to demonstrating the latter thesis, Fichte readily admits that the dogmatist will never be convinced by its argument.⁴¹ More generally, he held that the conflict between idealism and dogmatism is irresolvable at the theoretical level. Nevertheless, Fichte thought that he could overcome this impasse through a radicalization of the Kantian principle of the primacy of practical reason. He does this by insisting that all reason is at bottom practical, which for Fichte means that practical considerations, that is, those concerning the conditions of the possibility of the I as self-reverting activity, constitute the ultimate court of appeal in philosophy.

Consequently, while Fichte agrees with Kant in denying the possibility of a theoretical proof of freedom, he has quite different reasons for doing so. One of these is the status assigned to freedom or self-determination, which, as inseparable from the thought of the I, itself serves as a first principle of philosophy and, as such, cannot be demonstrated. Although Kant, as we have seen, took freedom (in the sense of absolute spontaneity) to be inseparable from the thought of the I and at one time even used this as the basis for a demonstration of freedom, he never took the I as the first principle of philosophy in anything like Fichte's sense. Another, even more un-Kantian, reason is Fichte's pragmatic, even proto-existentialist, orientation. Anticipating themes developed in the past century, Fichte, with his doctrine of self-determination, not only regarded the existence of an I as prior to its essence (what the I makes of itself), he also seems to have divided all people (including philosophers) into two classes: those who affirm and those who attempt to deny their

freedom. Accordingly, he suggests that the kind of philosophy one adopts (idealism or dogmatism) reflects the kind of character one has.⁴² Idealists affirm their freedom, understood as the act of self-determination, while dogmatists deny it by conceiving of themselves as determined rather than as self-determiners. Thus, dogmatism is seen not merely as a defective philosophy but as the sign of a character defect as well.⁴³

Considered from the practical point of view, this self-determining activity takes two forms and involves two conceptions of freedom, which correspond roughly to Kant's distinction between spontaneity and autonomy. In Fichte's preferred terminology, the former is characterized as "formal" and the latter as "material" or "absolute" freedom.⁴⁴ Each is made the central topic of a distinct work.

Formal freedom is the concern of the *Foundations of Natural Right* (*Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*) (1796), which contains the systematic statement of Fichte's legal and political philosophy. In the spirit of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, he attempts to "deduce" such freedom as a necessary condition of self-consciousness. The work is concerned, however, with a specific form of self-consciousness, namely, that of oneself as a particular individual with determinate desires and ends. Since this involves a conception of oneself as an end-setter, it is inseparable from the consciousness of one's capacity to set ends and to strive to realize them in the external world. Fichte's key claim here is that this consciousness is possible only insofar as one finds oneself as a finite rational agent among others. As he puts it at one point, "The human being . . . becomes a human being only among human beings."⁴⁵ Fichte develops this thought in connection with his conception of a "summons" (*Aufforderung*), which can stem only from another rational being. Since it is only through such a summons to do or refrain from a certain course of action that I can be aware of my capacity to choose, it becomes a necessary condition of my awareness of myself as a free, self-determining individual. But since in being aware of a summons one must also be aware of the free agency of the summoner, it follows that I can consider myself as free only insofar as I consider other finite rational beings as free in precisely the same sense, that is, as self-determining end-setters or free individuals.

Nevertheless, Fichtean formal freedom is a limited conception of freedom, which fails to do full justice to the self-determining activity of the I. This is because the kind of self-determination it

requires consists merely in the setting of one's own ends as a rational agent. Confronted with alternative courses of action, I myself choose which one to adopt. Although equivalent to freedom of choice as traditionally understood, from the Kantian standpoint it provides a merely heteronomous conception of freedom. The problem is that, while attributing to rational agents a certain independence from their desires and a capacity to determine which ones to act on (spontaneity), it regards this choice as arbitrary rather than as norm-governed. Expressed in contemporary terms, the limitation of this conception of freedom as the basis for an adequate understanding of self-determination is that it does not "go all the way down." One may determine on which desires one chooses to act, but if one does not also determine the principles governing one's choice, one is not fully *self-determined*.

Fichte's account of material or absolute freedom, which is developed in *The System of Ethical Theory* (*Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*) (1798), takes the form of a reflection on the conditions of a complete self-determination (one that does go all the way down). Consequently, it is based on the questionable assumption that the latter is intelligible, that one can speak meaningfully of the I as constituting or determining itself, as it were, out of whole cloth. Fichte's basic claim, which provides the foundation of his ethical theory, is that such self-determination requires governing one's choice of maxims by a self-legislated principle. It turns out, however, that the only principle that qualifies in this respect is the demand to determine one's freedom solely in accordance with the idea of self-determination.⁴⁶ Or, as he also puts it, "The I shall be a self-determined I."⁴⁷ This amounts a radicalization of the Kantian principle of autonomy, as the result of which autonomy, understood as complete independence of any thing or value that is not rooted in the I and its self-determination, is reconceived as an infinite task rather than as a constitutive feature of the will. As moral agents, we are obligated to strive to attain full autonomy or self-determination even though, in virtue of our finitude, this can never be completely attained.⁴⁸

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Like Fichte, Hegel granted a foundational role to the concept of freedom and equated it with self-determination. But whereas Fichte

understood the latter as an apparently groundless act of self-positing, through which the I supposedly constitutes both itself and its other (the non-I), Hegel understood it in more "concrete" terms as a "being-with-oneself-in-an-other" (*Beisichselbstsein in einem Anderen*).⁴⁹ In terms of Hegel's dialectical logic, this means that freedom is attained through an overcoming of the otherness of the other, by which its otherness is negated, while its being is preserved. As Hegel shows graphically in his account of the life and death struggle in the *Phenomenology*, the latter is necessary because a simple, "abstract" negation (killing the other), does not leave an other in whom one's freedom can be actualized.⁵⁰ Consequently, the other must be negated in a way that preserves its being, that is, it must be "superseded" (*aufgehoben*). The famous master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*, which immediately succeeds this struggle, is presented as the first and inherently flawed attempt to attain freedom so understood. Since the other (the slave) is conscious merely of his total dependence on the master, that is, of his unfreedom, the master is not able to find his freedom fully actualized in the slave's consciousness. The basic idea, which has clear affinities to Fichte's conception of a summons, is that one can find one's freedom only if it is freely (not slavishly) recognized by the other. Moreover, since only a free being can freely recognize the freedom of another, this means that no one is fully free unless all are free. Such a condition of universally recognized freedom is the goal of history, which, rather than being the infinite task it was for Fichte, Hegel believed to have been already attained (at least in principle) in the laws and institutions of post-revolutionary Western Europe.⁵¹

In the *Philosophy of Right*, this conception of freedom, the full attainment of which is identified with humanity's or "spirit's" self-realization, is applied to an analysis of the human will. Thus, it is here that Hegel's "speculative"-historical account makes contact with what is usually regarded as the problem of free will. Although this account involves the usual Hegelian obscurity, the basic goal is to analyze the problem in the light of the conception of freedom as being-with-oneself-in-an-other. This analysis begins with the concept of will, which, like Kant, Hegel identifies with practical reason or intelligence.⁵² Also, like Kant, Hegel asserts that the will, so conceived, is inseparable from freedom. Accordingly, he claims that "freedom is just as much a determination of the will as weight

is a basic determination of bodies." And, again, that "Will without freedom is an empty word, just as freedom is actual only as will."⁵³

Hegel differs from Kant and stands much closer to Fichte in his understanding of practical reason. Whereas Kant begins with a separation of theoretical and practical reason and endeavors to unite them, Hegel rejects the Kantian dichotomy and begins instead with the idea of their inseparability. According to Hegel, neither will nor intelligence (thought) are possible apart from one another and the difference between them is simply between theoretical and practical attitudes. Thus, on the one hand, will is itself merely "a particular way of thinking – thinking translating itself into existence," while, on the other hand, it is only in thinking that one is with oneself and can, therefore, find oneself in another, which is the goal of the will as free.⁵⁴

This interpenetration of thought and volition leads, in turn, to the most distinctive feature of the Hegelian conception of a free will, namely, its unification of apparently conflicting conceptions into a single concrete idea or "concept." In light of this concept, Hegel provides what amounts to a rational reconstruction of the concept of a free will in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, which he then uses in the body of the work as the basis for an analysis of the distinct spheres of right (Abstract Right, Morality [*Moralität*], and Ethical Life [*Sittlichkeit*]), each of which is viewed as the actualization of a particular dimension of concrete freedom.

The elements of this reconstruction are a set of interrelated dichotomies, which express in somewhat different terms what may be described as the subjective and objective poles of the concept of freedom. These include universality (or negative freedom) and particularity; infinitude and finitude; form and content; being for-itself and being in-itself. In each case, the first element stands for the moment of independence or indeterminacy. Thus, universality, or negative freedom, represents the indeterminacy through which consciousness stands apart from and above its particular contents. This indeterminacy is also expressed in the idea of the infinitude of the will, understood as its opposition to everything finite (including an agent's drives and inclinations). Similarly, this represents the "formal" side of willing, in contrast to the particular content chosen. Finally, it is also the free will as it is for-itself in contrast to this will as it is in-itself, that is, in its inherent nature, which consists

in willing something determinate rather than in simply remaining indeterminate.

Since the first or subjective side of the dichotomy corresponds to what is usually thought to be the full or adequate characterization of free will, at least on an indeterminist account, Hegel argues, in effect, that this sense of adequacy is illusory because the conception it embodies is inseparable from, and dependent on, its polar opposite. Just as in the master-slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, the universality of the will turned out to be dependent on its particularity since the latter is the source of the content to be willed, the infinitude dependent on its finitude, and so forth. The lesson drawn from this is that an adequate understanding of freedom must integrate each of these opposing moments. In other words, the "truth" of freedom (in contrast to its "certainty") involves both universality and particularity, infinitude and finitude, form and content, and the will as it is both for and in itself. Thus, the initial elements in each of these pairings, which most previous philosophers have seen as both necessary and sufficient for freedom, are viewed by Hegel as merely necessary conditions, which, if not combined with their dialectical opposites, constitute merely the appearance or form of freedom.

This provides the justification for Hegel's definition of freedom as being-with-oneself-in-an-other since it supposedly shows that a freedom that does not somehow incorporate otherness is nothing more than an empty abstraction. Accordingly, the problem is to understand how otherness can lose its character of simple unfreedom and become dialectically transformed into an essential ingredient in freedom. Hegel's claim is that this is possible only if this otherness is itself an expression of freedom. Only then do we find freedom fully actualized as it is in-and-for-itself. Or, as Hegel also puts it, "The will in its truth is such that what it wills, i.e., its content, is identical with the will itself, so that freedom is willed by freedom."⁵⁵

By understanding freedom in this way, Hegel may be said to have changed the subject, which is why here, as in other areas of philosophical inquiry, it is so difficult to juxtapose his views in a straightforward way to those of other thinkers. Thus, rather than worrying, as previous philosophers (including Kant and Fichte) had done, about the reconciliation of freedom with natural causality, Hegel's analysis focuses on the relation between a formally free choice and its

content. Although Hegel would no doubt agree that in a sense he has changed the terms of the debate, he would also contend that this is the result of a dialectical analysis of the inadequacy of the way in which the problem has traditionally been framed. Indeed, he might suggest that this inadequacy consists precisely in an exclusive focus on the issue of the causal indeterminacy of a putatively free choice, thereby neglecting the substantive issue of the content of such a choice. His position seems to be that if the latter is ignored, one will be left with nothing more than an empty, abstract freedom, which is not worthy of the name and which corresponds to the so-called "liberty of indifference" that was dismissed by the Leibnizians and many others in the rationalist tradition.

Our present concern, however, is with Hegel's use of this analysis against Kant. According to Hegel, in virtue of his commitment to the categories of abstract understanding, which reflects a failure to attain Hegel's own speculative standpoint, Kant was led to conceive of freedom merely as "arbitrariness" (*Willkür*) or as a "formal self-activity," by which Hegel apparently understood simply the freedom to do as one pleases. Although the most common idea of freedom, it is also the least adequate since by viewing the content of the will's choice (provided by competing drives and inclination) as given to it from without, it reduces the will's freedom to a mere contingency. The latter is a moment of genuine freedom, but Hegel suggests that it is a delusion to take it as equivalent to freedom. And Kant, like all advocates of a "reflective," that is, nonspeculative, philosophy, is deemed subject to this delusion.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, whatever the merits of Hegel's positive account, he seems to have seriously misrepresented Kant's view of free will. Expressed in Kantian terms, what Hegel is doing is characterizing Kantian freedom solely in terms of freedom of choice, thereby ignoring the intimate connection between *Willkür* and *Wille*.⁵⁷ In fact, properly understood, freedom for Kant does not consist in the sheer arbitrariness of choice, but in a choice governed by rational norms stemming from *Wille* or practical reason. Much as in Hegel, then, genuine Kantian freedom may be seen as involving a "synthesis" of form and content, with the former stemming from *Willkür* and the latter from *Wille*. The basic difference consists in the location of the source of these norms: in the autonomous pure practical reason

of the agent for Kant, and in the objectively existing laws and institutions of a society for Hegel. Admittedly, this is an important difference, but it is one that cannot be considered here.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer's views on free will are of interest here for three reasons. The first is his uncompromising determinism with regard to particular actions, on the basis of which he dismisses a compatibilism such as Leibniz's as an inadequate, even duplicitous "middle way," which endeavors to preserve the term "free will" while emptying it of any sense.⁵⁸ The second is the connection of this determinism with a radical voluntarism, which effectively identifies ultimate reality (under the guise of the Kantian thing in itself) with will. The third is his use of Kant's contrast between empirical and intelligible character, which Schopenhauer describes as "the greatest of all achievements of the human mind," to offer an alternative conception of freedom.⁵⁹

Schopenhauer's determinism is based on his appeal to the principle of causality, which he regards as one of the four distinct forms assumed by the principle of sufficient reason. As in Kant, nothing happens without a cause from which it follows necessarily. But rather than recognizing only the familiar mechanical, physical, and chemical causes, Schopenhauer assigned the causes of human actions to its motives insofar as they determine the will.⁶⁰ Consequently, Schopenhauer insisted that motives are every bit as much causes as any others since they involve the necessitation of their effects. He also thought that this is not always recognized, however, because of a confusion of the free with the voluntary.

The reason for this confusion is traced to self-consciousness, which makes one aware of a capacity to do as one wills: to choose either A or B, if one so wills. Schopenhauer acknowledged the genuineness of this awareness, but rejected its identification with a consciousness of freedom of the will. The latter concerns a supposed capacity to will what one wills, which he rules out on the grounds that it either directly violates the principle of sufficient reason (since it assumes that there could be a choice without a reason) or leads to an infinite regress, whereby an agent must be thought as willing to will, *ad infinitum*.

Although Schopenhauer regarded motives as causes, he did not view them as alone sufficient to determine the will. Since they always work in conjunction with character, the same motives could lead people with different characters to act in different ways under similar circumstances. Nevertheless, a person with a particular character will always act in the same way under the same circumstances. Thus, to claim that I (Henry Allison) could have acted differently is to say that I could have been a different person. Unfortunately, this is impossible since one can change one's behavior but not one's character, even though we can only discover this character after the fact by considering what we have done. Like many other thinkers, then, Schopenhauer located the ultimate determining ground of voluntary actions in a person's character because it determines the motives by which a person can be moved to act and to what extent that person is susceptible to these motives.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Schopenhauer's account lies in his near identification of character and will, which he viewed as the true core of the self. In other words, Schopenhauer is a voluntaristic determinist.⁶¹ Like other voluntarists, for example, Crusius, he granted primacy to the will over the intellect. Indeed, Schopenhauer regarded the latter merely as an instrument or tool of the former, in the sense that its function is to determine which course of action is best suited to attain the ends projected by the will.⁶² Unlike most voluntarists, however, he used this to deny freedom of the will. In fact, according to Schopenhauer, it is precisely the prioritizing of intellect to will in philosophers such as Descartes and Leibniz that led to their erroneous doctrines of free will. His point is that by making will subordinate to intellect, and even reducing volition to an act of thought, these intellectualists effectively reduced the question of what one is to what one knows, thereby assuming that by increasing one's knowledge one can change one's character.⁶³ Schopenhauer acknowledged that Spinoza did not come to such a conclusion, but he described him as a philosopher who reached the correct (deterministic) conclusion from false premises.⁶⁴

Consequently, Schopenhauer's denial of freedom of the will rests not only on the universal scope of causality and the conception of motives as causes, but also on his core doctrine of the unchangeableness of character. According to Schopenhauer, our (empirical) character is something with which we are born and cannot change.⁶⁵

Greater knowledge and experience may change how we act under given circumstances by making it clear that a certain course of action is good or harmful for us, but it does not fundamentally change who or what we are.

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer reconceived rather than denied freedom and, as noted above, did so by appealing to Kant's distinction between empirical and intelligible character. According to his reading of Kant, a person's empirical character (or will as phenomenon) is the necessary consequence of a timeless choice by the intelligible character (or will as noumenon). The choice must be timeless in order to be free because the principle of sufficient reason governs what occurs in time, and such a timeless choice is conceivable because time pertains merely to the phenomenal realm. Although Schopenhauer attributed this doctrine to Kant, he also suggested that it was anticipated, albeit in a mythopoetic manner, by Plato in his famous "Myth of Er" in the *Republic*.⁶⁶

Schopenhauer apparently thought also that this doctrine of a timeless choice of character was required to do justice to our sense of moral responsibility. Even though we may know that our particular actions are determined by a combination of character and circumstances and that this character is itself fixed before birth, we nonetheless rightly hold ourselves responsible for our deeds.⁶⁷ But given the manner in which the issue is framed, the only way to save the freedom requisite for responsibility ("true moral freedom") is to regard ourselves as responsible for who we are, that is, for our character. And since the latter is innate and unchangeable, this means that we must conceive of our empirical character as the result of a timeless choice.

Although Schopenhauer, like Fichte, presented his view as a reformulation of Kant's position correctly understood, it is doubtful that Kant would have countenanced it. In fact, in spite of some indications to the contrary, it is clear from his example of the malicious lie that Kant would have rejected Schopenhauer's thesis that one chooses one's empirical character out of whole cloth and that freedom consists entirely in this choice. For Kant it is not only the case that such a person could have chosen not to be a liar but also that, given both his character and circumstances, he could at that moment have chosen not to lie. In short, Kant, unlike Schopenhauer, wished to preserve the freedom of particular acts. An agent must be deemed able to

have chosen differently under the same circumstances because the categorical imperative dictates that he ought to have done so. But since Schopenhauer famously rejects Kant's conception of morality as based on a categorical imperative, arguing instead for an ethics of sympathy, he has neither need nor room for the Kantian conception of a free action.⁶⁸

NOTES

1. For a systematic discussion of this issue, see Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's "Critique of Practical Reason,"* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, pp. 176–208, and "Five Concepts of Freedom in Kant," *Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction* (Festschrift for Stephan Körner), J. T. J. Srednick, ed., Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987, pp. 35–51.
2. For a fuller examination of these topics, the reader may wish to consult my *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, esp. pp. 54–70, 85–106, and *Idealism and Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 129–42.
3. *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. by H. G. Alexander, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956, p. 15 (Leibniz's Second Letter, §1). Leibniz refers to both principles, albeit often with somewhat different formulations, in virtually all of his philosophical writings.
4. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §34, trans. by E. M. Huggard, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, p. 143. See also §288, p. 303.
5. See Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. xxi, §9, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
6. *Ibid.*, §8. The formula appears frequently in Leibniz and in the *Theodicy* (§43, p. 147) he suggests that it corresponds to the maxim of the astrologer's, "Astra inclinant, non necessitant."
7. Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, Auch allen Dingen Überhaupt*, §31, 5th edition 1781, reprinted by Georg Olms, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 17–18.
8. See Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 259.
9. Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken*, §511, vol. 1, pp. 312–13.
10. *Ibid.*, §519, vol. 1, p. 317.
11. *Ibid.*, §§878–9, vol. 2, pp. 544–6.
12. *Ibid.* §512, vol. 1, pp. 313–14. For a discussion of Wolff's ethics that highlights this point, see J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 435–42.

13. The following discussion of Crusius is heavily indebted to Heinz Heimsoeth, *Metaphysik und Kritik bei Chr. A. Crusius*, Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1926; Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, pp. 394–402; and Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, pp. 445–56.
14. See Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, pp. 396–7.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
16. Crusius, *Entwurf der notwendigen Vernunftwahrheiten*, §102, in *Die Philosophischen Hauptwerke*, vol. 2; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsgesellschaft, 1964, pp. 171–3. See also Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, pp. 399–400.
17. Crusius, *Anweisung vernünftig zu leben*, §1; *Die Philosophischen Hauptwerke*, vol. 1, pp. 2–3.
18. Crusius, *Vernunftwahrheiten*, §427, pp. 826–7; §445, pp. 866–7; Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, p. 401.
19. Crusius, *Vernunftwahrheiten*, §445, pp. 866–7; §454, pp. 885–6.
20. Crusius, *Anweisung*, §40, p. 46; Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, p. 449.
21. Crusius, *Anweisung*, §43, p. 54; Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, p. 449.
22. Crusius, *Anweisung*, §43, pp. 54–5; Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, p. 449.
23. Kant later used the comparison to the freedom of a turnspit to denigrate the Leibnizian conception in *Practical Reason*, 5:97.
24. *Metaphysik L₁*, 28:268–70. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that Kant still wrestled with this problem in his “critical” period. See *Practical Reason*, 5:100–4.
25. See *Groundwork*, 4:448; *Review of Schulz*, 8:14. I discuss this issue in *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, pp. 37–9, and *Idealism and Freedom*, pp. 98–106; 130–4.
26. Nevertheless, there remains a teleological, if not theological, component in Kant’s approach to the issue. For example, in the *Groundwork* he speculates that if nature had aimed at our happiness rather than our morality, it would have left things up to instinct rather than to practical reason (4:395).
27. Elsewhere I have termed this the “Incorporation Thesis.” See *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, pp. 5–6 and *passim*, and *Idealism and Freedom*, pp. 118–23, 130–5, and 139–42.
28. See also Kant’s earlier claim in the same work that the moral law is the “*ratio cognoscendi* of freedom” (*Practical Reason*, 5:4n).
29. Kant often contrasts a positive and a negative sense of freedom, albeit not always in the same terms. In the *Groundwork*, freedom in the

positive sense is identified with autonomy, while in its negative sense it is understood as the will's capacity to exercise its causality independently of determination by alien causes (4:446). The former is contrasted with heteronomy and the latter with natural necessity.

30. I have termed this the "reciprocity thesis." For my discussion of this thesis, see *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 201–13 and *Idealism and Freedom*, pp. 136–8 and *passim*.
31. I analyze this deduction and the subsequent doctrine of the fact of reason in *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 214–49.
32. For my discussion of this distinction, see *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 129–36
33. For my most recent analysis of the arguments of the third antinomy, see *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 376–84.
34. The reader should be apprised of the fact that the proper interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism remains an extremely controversial matter. Although the basic issue is whether the appearance–thing in itself distinction is understood as holding between two kinds of thing (the "two-world" view) or between two ways of considering the same thing (the "two-aspect" view), there are a number of other points in dispute (including the correct understanding of the latter view). I discuss this topic, including the relation between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism, in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, esp. pp. 20–73.
35. Most notably Beck, "Five Concepts of Freedom in Kant" and *The Actor and the Spectator*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975, and Stephan Körner, "Reply to Professor Beck," *Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction*, pp. 52–8.
36. This is from the draft of a letter to Jens Baggesen, April/May 1795. The citation is from Daniel Breazeale, editor's introduction to J. G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994, p. vii note. Breazeale also cites similar claims from other letters.
37. *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre, in Fichtes Werke*, herausgegeben von Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1971, Band I, pp. 468–9. *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, p. 52.
38. According to Breazeale, Fichte initially affirmed this principle in his "Review of *Aenesidemus*." See Breazeale, editor's introduction to his edition and translation of Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 14–16.

39. In the "Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*," Fichte denied that such a doctrine was actually asserted by Kant himself. See *Fichtes Werke*, I, pp. 481–9; *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 66–76.
40. For Kant the distinction between the two standpoints is grounded in his foundational doctrine that there are two indispensable and irreducible sources of cognition: sensibility, through which objects are given in intuition, and understanding, through which they are thought by means of concepts (See *Pure Reason*, A 50–2/B 74–6). Although both are necessary for cognition, the understanding has a broader scope since it contains rules for the thought of "objects in general," regardless of how they may be given in sensibility. And for Kant this is what allows us to think, though not cognize, things as they are in themselves. I discuss the connection between Kant's two cognitive faculty doctrine, which I term the "Discursivity Thesis," transcendental idealism, and his critique of transcendental realism in the first two chapters of *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*.
41. *Fichtes Werke*, I, pp. 429–31; *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 15–16
42. *Fichtes Werke*, I, p. 434; *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 20.
43. *Fichtes Werke*, I, p. 505; *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 90.
44. I am here largely following the account of Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, esp. pp. 121–31.
45. *Fichtes Werke*, III, p. 39; *Foundations of Natural Right*, edited by Frederick Neuhouser and translated by Michael Bauer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 37.
46. *Fichtes Werke*, IV, p. 59.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 149, 229.
49. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (Elements of the Philosophy of Right)*, §23. The following discussion is indebted to that of Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, esp. pp. 18–54.
50. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, "Die Wahrheit der Gewissheit seiner Selbst," *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 109–10, §§175–7.
51. This is the central theme of the various versions of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.
52. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §4.
53. *Ibid.*, §4 Zusatz.
54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, §21 *Zusatz*.
56. *Ibid.*, §15.
57. This misrepresentation is pointed out by Allen Wood in his editorial notes to the English translation of the text *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 399n2.
58. Schopenhauer, *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, trans. by Konstantin Kolenda, Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1960, p. 15.
59. Schopenhauer, *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, p. 15.
60. See Schopenhauer, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1974, esp. pp. 70–2; and *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, pp. 36–7.
61. Although some subsequent philosophers, most notably Nietzsche, who was himself deeply influenced by Schopenhauer, fit this category, most of his predecessors on this score appear to have been theologians, for example, Luther, intent on defending the doctrine of original sin.
62. See, for example, *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, p. 101.
63. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, Indian Hills, CO: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1958, vol. 1, p. 292.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
65. Schopenhauer, *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, pp. 54–5.
66. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, pp. 113–14.
67. Schopenhauer, *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, pp. 91–9; *On the Basis of Morality*, pp. 112–13.
68. I wish to express my gratitude to Klaus Brinkmann for his helpful comments on a draft of the third part of this essay.