

## Kant and Hegel on Freedom: Two New Interpretations

The issue of freedom in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel has been illuminated by two very important new books: Henry Allison's *Kant's Theory of Freedom* and Allen Wood's *Hegel's Ethical Thought*.<sup>1</sup> On their respective topics, these works are surely the most significant studies now in English. They can be compared profitably on many issues, but the major question they provoke in common is the following: can Kant's theory of freedom be defended in contemporary 'incompatibilist' terms, as Allison believes, or is it vulnerable to Hegelian criticisms of the 'compatibilist' sort that Wood presents? I shall argue that the answer to *both* of these questions is negative, and that there is a third option: namely that Kant's real theory of freedom is not as well off as Allison contends, nor as weak as Wood claims.

To begin to understand these claims, one must first break the notion of freedom down into its *metaphysical* and *ethical* aspects. At the metaphysical level, Allison presents and defends Kant as an incompatibilist,<sup>2</sup> but in a way that allegedly does not involve what he calls the 'noumenal' metaphysics that traditional interpreters, such as Wood and myself, have claimed to be present—and present in a coherent fashion—within Kant's theory. As a Hegelian, though, Wood (unlike myself) finds this metaphysics deeply objectionable. But while Allison means to develop and defend a 'non-noumenal' version of incompatibilism on allegedly Kantian grounds, I will argue that, even if incompatibilism is not refutable (and it is not quite as bad as Wood implies), it is not especially attractive either, and that it is not even needed by most Kantians, despite the fact that Allison and Kant himself certainly are committed to it.

<sup>1</sup> Both books were published by Cambridge University Press in 1990. Page references in the text without further citation will be to Allison's book. Wood's book will be cited as *HET*.

<sup>2</sup> I will be understanding incompatibilism here as the denial of compatibilism, where compatibilism is taken to be the thesis that one could be said to be free even if one did not have any absolute power to do, or attempt to do, otherwise.

The ostensible need for incompatibilism comes largely from moral considerations. Allison does argue that Kant has good non-moral as well as moral reasons for insisting on incompatibilism, but I will counter that his arguments fall short, and that the only kind of freedom that we demonstrably need to assert is compatibilist freedom, freedom that has its locus in the empirical autonomy of ethical life—the kind of freedom that is the common core of Kant and Hegel’s practical philosophy.

There are thus several relations between all these different philosophers which must be kept distinct. Allison is trying to save Kant’s theory of freedom from both what he takes to be traditional and improper interpretations—notably including Hegel’s and Wood’s—of what that theory *means*, and from traditional and improper objections to its defensibility. I will be arguing in part with Wood (and Hegel) against Allison on the issue of the meaning of Kant’s theory, and in part with Allison against Wood (and Hegel) on the issue of the defensibility of Kant’s theory. Thus, in the end, although I will be defending an important part of what Allison and Wood say, I will also be concluding that in their major efforts here—Allison’s defense of Kantian incompatibilism and Wood’s attack on it—they both fail.

Before getting into the details of the crucial arguments, it is necessary first to have more of an overview of Allison’s analysis.

Allison stresses the evolution of Kant’s practical philosophy. He argues that in the first edition of the first *Critique*, Kant still had a ‘semi-Critical’ view. This view ascribes to the self an ‘intelligible character’, a general capacity to act independently of particular sensible stimulation. Allison contends that this capacity shows that Kant’s position cannot be assimilated to compatibilism, and that it clearly reveals Kant already understood that our freedom is not limited to moral action.<sup>3</sup> But Allison stresses that at this point Kant still has not explained how the self is ‘autonomous’, i.e. capable of guiding itself specifically by a pure moral law that it gives to itself apart from sensibility altogether. And Allison argues that, even when this doctrine is developed in the *Groundwork*, it is inadequately justified, and that therefore, in what I have called the ‘great reversal’ (p. 201), Kant recasts the ‘deduction’ of freedom and morality in the second *Critique*. Rather than trying to argue from ‘negative freedom’ to ‘positive freedom’, Kant now begins with the notion of positive freedom implicit in the ‘fact of reason’, i.e. ‘our common consciousness of the moral law as supremely authoritative’ (p. 238). Instead of seeing this shift as a ‘regression’ to dogmatism—as I have charged<sup>4</sup>—or as a strategic retreat to a ‘coherentist’ approach to morality—as John Rawls has

<sup>3</sup> This theme is developed in another important recent work which complements Allison’s nicely, viz. Onora O’Neill’s *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge, 1989). One should also compare these works with Gerold Prauss’s *Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie* (Frankfurt, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> K. Ameriks, *Kant’s Theory of Mind* (New York, 1982).

proposed—Allison ends by judging that, even if, as I have argued, Kant's effort here does not provide the 'independent warrant' for his theory that Lewis White Beck had claimed (p. 245), it is none the less 'a qualified success' (pp. 7, 248). Apparently this is because, although a skeptic might well raise the 'epistemic possibility' that the 'fact of reason' and the freedom it involves is an illusion, 'what is denied [by Kant] is . . . the possibility of considering it as illusory from the practical point of view' (p. 247). The denial of this possibility is presumably significant in a compelling rather than dogmatic or pragmatic way, because to give up this 'point of view' would allegedly be to give up 'the whole, conception of ourselves as moral agents' (p. 247). At the center of this conception is the Kantian notion of the 'unique, pure character of the moral interest' where 'to take an interest in morality' is to 'recognize the moral law as providing reasons for and restrictions on action . . . [that] do not reflect any of our needs as sensuous beings' (p. 247). At the very end, Allison concedes that, since he has not defended this notion in detail, this leaves 'a certain tentative character to the defense of the fact of reason' (p. 249). For this reason, contemporary non-Kantian ethical theorists of all kinds, and not just Hegelians, will hardly be converted by Allison's apologetics. Moreover, it remains unclear whether Kant's argument from morality for freedom has even the 'qualified success' that Allison claims. Here a lot hinges on the relation between the content of Kantian ethics and its supposed metaphysical preconditions.

In metaphysics, Allison aims to steer a middle course. He insists that Kant's transcendental idealism is crucial to understanding and defending Kant's theory of morality and freedom, but only because it can be given a non-'noumenalist' meaning. Here Allison builds on his earlier work, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*,<sup>5</sup> which had claimed that the ideality of space and times rests just in their being epistemic conditions of our experience, and not in their being in any ontological contrast to some more fundamental set of noumenal things or properties.<sup>6</sup> Allison's interpretation of Kantian idealism has proven, quite understandably, to be a very popular strategy, especially since it is developed in a way that is much more historically sensitive than most approaches in English to Kant. There are, however, alternatives which should not be discounted.

Those who share Allison's distaste for the noumenal may argue against his insistence that Kant's 'incompatibilist' conception of rational agency is what is

<sup>5</sup> In reviewing that interpretation here, Allison says, 'epistemic conditions . . . reflect the structure of the mind and therefore condition our representation of things rather than things themselves' (p. 4). I still do not see what grounds the 'therefore' and the 'rather' in Allison's remark, unless it is a matter of stipulation that would make the (theoretical) unknowability of things in themselves an uninteresting matter of definition.

<sup>6</sup> In his new work Allison appears to retreat from this a bit in saying that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves is 'not *primarily*, between two kinds of entity' (p. 3). However, the new book does not lend itself to developing this concession; for, by focusing on the human self, it happens to concentrate on the entity for which Kant was most interested in not asserting a radical duality of phenomenon and noumenon.

central and appealing in his practical philosophy. Allison does a good job of showing how Kant himself was attached to this conception, but this does not prove that Kantian ethics could not be developed more effectively (e.g. by Thomas Nagel)<sup>7</sup> without it. Alternatively, it can be argued that Kant's own idealism has stronger ontological commitments than Allison accepts—and ones that he might as well embrace.

These alternatives become significant when one sees that, like Kant, Allison is willing to grant that the law of causality governs all of the natural world.<sup>8</sup> If one then also insists on an incompatibilist conception of freedom, it seems hard not to place that freedom in our noumenal, i.e. non-spatio-temporal, capacities. Allison worries that this move would put our freedom in a 'timeless noumenal realm' which makes it 'virtually unintelligible and irrelevant' (p. 3). But if this move is rejected, what is to be made of Kant's talk of our 'intelligible character' and 'transcendental freedom'? Allison resists understanding this talk in terms of a literal causal relation between something non-empirical and something empirical. Rather, it is said to reflect what is simply a different perspective, a practical perspective on oneself as having a capacity to determine oneself by non-sensible norms. But, surely, any actual determining must itself be regarded ultimately as either caused naturally or not so caused. If nature is the closed system that Allison allows, then the latter option appears excluded, even if, as he claims, we 'can't help' but think ourselves free 'regulatively' in a practical respect. On a traditional 'noumenalist' reading, however, Kant's idealism easily leaves room for freedom by ensuring that we do not have to take nature to be a closed system. It is along this line that Wood, for example, has defended the coherence of the notion of intelligible character as a timeless causal ground of one's free choices,<sup>9</sup> but Allison rejects this notion because of unnamed 'notorious problems' (p. 51). Allison's alternative is that we are to think of reason not as an efficient ground or force, but just as the 'guiding rule' (p. 51) for our free adoption of maxims. But again, either this adoption is solely a temporal act, and then, with a non-noumenal metaphysics, it is absolutely determined after all; or else the Kantian must move back to a noumenal ground to save the claim of freedom. Allison claims that the spontaneous

<sup>7</sup> Allison remarks that his interpretation has similarities with Nagel's stress on the idea that 'nothing moves me to action without my agreeing to it', and that we have a capacity to 'stand back' from our motives and evaluate them (p. 82). But Nagel does not believe that these phenomena require an incompatibilist theory, and I agree with him that the burden of proof is on those who claim it does, especially if one appeals, as Kant often does, to what is presumed by common sense.

<sup>8</sup> Allison tries to detach Kant's claim that every event has some cause from the thesis that all occurrences must be subsumable under empirical laws (p. 34), but, as Michael Friedman has recently argued, in *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), these claims are necessarily connected for Kant. Allison himself argues against Beck's somewhat similar but desperate attempt to construe the Second Analogy as a mere regulative principle (p. 73). There Allison also nicely allays the old objection (recounted by Beck and Irwin) that Kantian transcendental freedom, if posited anywhere, has, absurdly, to be posited everywhere.

<sup>9</sup> A. Wood, 'Kant's Compatibilism', in *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. A. Wood (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 73–101.

consciousness involved in the adoption of maxims is not an ordinary temporal act, but is rather a thought (p. 5) and not an ‘experience’ (a determined spatio-temporal occurrence)—but it would seem that this reduces either to a mere abstraction, or else to a kind of intellectual intuition after all. Allison repeatedly denies that this is what he intends, but he does speak of being ‘directly aware’ of free agency (p. 44). Moreover, although the traditional view of Kant that Wood articulates has been expressed in terms of ‘two worlds’ or ‘two selves’—and this is a main reason it has been rejected—such talk is not really essential to it, for all that the view requires is a being that has at least two aspects, viz. spatio-temporal and (underlying) non-spatio-temporal powers.<sup>10</sup> Given traditional theology (i.e. at least that part which Kant accepted), there need be nothing clearly incoherent in the mere thought of such a being, and given Kant’s other views, it seems most appropriate (for him) to posit that we are such a being.

In sum, if Allison insists on holding Kant to an incompatibilist metaphysics, it is unclear that he can get a good argument for the kind of freedom that this requires; and if in any case he insists on asserting that this kind of freedom does exist, then, if he wants to do metaphysics and remain in Kant’s framework, it appears that he might as well also accept the traditional dual (phenomenal/noumenal) ontology of Kantian idealism.

The traditional interpretation has a straightforward way to explain how Kant can insist that freedom somehow ‘makes a difference’ to us even if we can’t ‘intervene’ in experience by literally changing the course of nature. Kant says, for example, that the ‘resolution’ to rise out of a chair can be a ‘causally unconditioned beginning’ (A451/B479). Now, surely the temporal aspect of this resolution, if it is not to (as it cannot, given the Second Analogy) disturb natural laws, must itself fit into those laws, and so accord with being in that respect causally conditioned. So, if there is absolute or ‘transcendental freedom’ here, it would seem to have to lie in there also being something not temporally conditioned, such as our timeless noumenal ‘character’ (*Gesinnung*). Allison grants that when Kant speaks this way he suggests a ‘picture of reason functioning literally as a timeless causal power’ (p. 48), but for Allison this is a hopelessly ‘cryptic account’ (p. 26) and not Kant’s real meaning. But just what is it that is supposed to be especially ‘cryptic’ about this; why can’t one’s timeless character be the ultimate and free

<sup>10</sup> This is contra Allison’s claim that ‘actual timelessness must (!) be thought of as a property of a distinct noumenal self or agent and, therefore, not of one with an empirical character’ (p. 52). (If Allison were right, it would seem to me that he would also have to say that even Leibnizian monads are ‘distinct’ beings from their empirical character.) Allison adds that the idea of a literally timeless character seems irreconcilable with the thought that our maxims involve ‘sensuously affected’ agents ‘standing under imperatives’ (p. 52). But the mere non-spatio-temporality of our intelligible character does not eliminate its finitude and susceptibility. A will can be flawed, or self-contaminated, internally, i.e. non-spatio-temporally, and this flaw can then have its appropriate ‘expression’ in a spatio-temporal character. Kant and traditional theology speak explicitly in such terms, and no matter how far-fetched it may seem to some, such talk appears at least conceptually coherent.

reason why one happens to be such that one is in the temporal situation where one must, *given* that situation, act in time as one does? That there is an *uncaused* cause (the choice of character) here should not be a special problem, since nearly all systems will end up with something that is uncaused. That the character itself is to be thought of as outside time, *qua* being *not time dependent* in its origin or nature, does, as Kant stresses, fit our own self-understanding in many ways. That something timeless in this sense can be the *ground* of something that is in time (such as moving up from a chair) is mysterious, to be sure (as all causality is ultimately mysterious)—and yet, given Kant's own stress, which Allison accepts, on the idea that causality is a 'dynamic' category linking 'heterogeneous' items, there is nothing incoherent in the notion. To say that an act took place *because* of the character then is to say that ultimately everything else provided the circumstances for that kind of character to operate as it did. Moreover, to say all this in the way Kant means is (I believe) just to add that an individual's being that kind of character is not itself a brute fact but something due to one's self, one's transcendental (and itself uncaused) power of choice, so that acts are imputable to one's self as their *real ground*.

In contrast, what Allison stresses is that here the transcendental idea of freedom is to be 'viewed as performing a modeling or regulative function with respect to the conception of ourselves as rational agents' (p. 26). That may also be true, but what is really cryptic is why he thinks Kant should be taken to mean this *rather than* that there is also a 'straightforwardly causal' (p. 32) relationship here.<sup>11</sup> Allison worries that such a relationship 'seems to foreclose the possibility of regarding the empirical character as itself an expression or instantiation rather than merely as a product of the causality of reason [i.e. the person's choice as a being with reason]' (p. 32). But it 'forecloses' no such possibility; the claim that there is noumenal causation (i.e. a noumenal cause with an empirical effect) does not entail the claim that there is 'merely' such causation, nor that a phenomenal 'expression' of reason is inappropriate, let alone impossible. And it does not have to 'raise the specter of ontologically distinct' (p. 32) beings; a noumenal character can underlie a phenomenal appearance of that very being, just as an empirical thing can underlie its appearance.<sup>12</sup> In other words, whatever story Allison wants to tell about the 'modeling' function of our idea of ourselves as free rational agents

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Allison's discussion at p. 44, where he rejects those who assume that 'being causally determined must be an ontological condition', because (Allison claims) 'for Kant, however, the concept of causality is merely an epistemic condition'. I would rather say that for Kant the theoretical and schematized concept of causality functions as an epistemic condition, but this leaves it free also to have a real and practical use apart from its sensible ('epistemic') schematization—where a 'practical' use is not simply a matter of some perspective we take, but rather reflects ultimate reality (ontology) as revealed to us by what our moral commitments seem to require.

<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with denying that in general we can assert a one-to-one correspondence of phenomena and noumena, for that would obviously threaten the thesis of the (theoretical) unknowability of things in themselves.

should be a perfectly acceptable addendum to Kant's noumenal metaphysics. The problem with that metaphysics is not what it excludes, but what it adds—and not because the addition is impossible or incoherent, but because its value is unclear: beyond satisfying a metaphysical desire to be able to regard oneself as an uncaused cause, it does no more work by itself.

Allison is quite successful in diagnosing various bad reasons that some interpreters may have ascribed to Kant as grounds for positing a noumenal causality of reason—but this diagnosis does not undercut the coherence of Kant's own ground. For example, Allison is right to counter those (including Wood)<sup>13</sup> who suggest that it was only to avoid mechanistic psychological hedonism that Kant spoke of reason as a noumenal cause (p. 35); but this point counts against only one bad way of thinking of our noumenal causality, not against the idea as such. We can agree with Allison that the suggestion runs clearly afoul of Kant's basic belief that, even if humans do universally seek pleasure, they are still rational and in some sense spontaneous agents who do so because of maxims that they have a ground for in a non-mechanistic sense. We can even agree, as Allison also stresses, that Kant believes these maxims have an expression in our empirical, temporal being, and that, as Kant says, this expression takes the form of 'laws of freedom' (A802/B830), e.g. about what ought to be done even for the sake of prudence. But we need *not* agree that the mere capacity to act according to such laws already defines us as having free agency in an *incompatibilist* sense.

Allison sees that there does appear to be a jump in such a conclusion, but he tries to make it plausible by pointing out that even in mere epistemic contexts, in acts of understanding that do not even involve the agency of something like getting out of a chair, Kant also speaks about ('intellectual') instances of synthesis or 'spontaneity' (p. 38). Just as the Kantian doctrine of apperception says that one's thoughts must always be able to be 'taken' as one's own, so, on the Kantian theory of agency, one's maxims must always be not sheer givens but 'taken' as one's own (p. 40). However, from all this Allison wants to conclude, 'the adoption of . . . a rule cannot itself be regarded as the causal consequence . . . of being in a state of desire' (p. 40). But, so far, I see no mature Kantian ground for this conclusion, apart from a dogmatic interest in an incompatibilist metaphysics that would underwrite moral imputations. And Allison himself concedes that these general considerations show not that 'we *really do* possess' a non-determined character, but rather just that we 'cannot *conceive*' (p. 41) of ourselves otherwise. But why not; why can't the compatibilist say that the fact that we don't *directly* see any desire necessitating a particular act still doesn't show that there is no desire in

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Allison's discussion of Wood at p. 49. I can agree with Allison against Wood here just on the point that it is misleading (though certainly encouraged by Kant) to speak of reason itself as the ultimate cause for action, rather than a particular person's power of choice (which then may agree to opt for rationality).

us at all which is ultimately behind it?<sup>14</sup> Allison goes to some lengths (in large part with the thought that he is refuting my interpretation of the ‘Canon’) to show that Kant does not mean to be *encouraging* a compatibilist position here (pp. 57–62),<sup>15</sup> but that does not show that, for all that has been said, the position has been *excluded* either.

Kant himself was extremely ambiguous about all this, and he suggested in many passages that freedom is involved in all sorts of simple experiences, including strictly logical judgments. But he also eventually stated that such experiences do not really settle the issue of freedom; they do not show that we are not very complicated ‘turnspits’ after all. Moreover, there is the obvious point that Kant easily could have made his incompatibilism quite clear, if he had wanted to, in the first edition of the Paralogisms, for if he had just stayed with the standard list of topics, he would have had immediately to address the question of whether there is a good proof of our absolute freedom.

All this reveals why Kant’s discussion of autonomy is so important and why it culminated in his ‘great reversal’, which tries to show that our absolute freedom must be clear from (and solely from) our commitment to maxims that involve (either through acceptance or rejection) specifically moral ends. But here again another instance seems to appear of the weakness that plagued arguments from the general capacity to adopt maxims. That weakness lay in inferring from the *psychological* absence of a particular causal *content* in one’s intentions (i.e. one doesn’t see that one is acting as the ‘mere’ effect of a particular force) to the *metaphysical* absence of any natural cause as the *efficient* ground of the act which has that content. Similarly, in moral contexts, the fact that certain maxims involve a rule whose content makes no essential reference to human desires still does not show that the actual adoption of such maxims—and even the adoption of them for the reason that there is no such reference—is not in fact caused by desires.

<sup>14</sup> I have discussed a passage where just this point is made in Kant’s recently available ‘Moral Mrongovius II’ lectures; see the Academy edition, vol. 29, p. 1022, and my ‘Kant on Spontaneity: Some New Data’, *Proceedings of the VII International Kant Congress 1990* (Berlin, 1991). In that paper I did not have the space to develop the criticisms that I think can be made of the Kantian position, so it can appear there that I am closer to Allison’s position than is really the case.

<sup>15</sup> Allison says my discussion ‘seems based partly on the assumption that practical freedom amounts merely to a compatibilist conception’ (p. 62). My point, however, is rather just that Kant does not say enough here to rule out compatibilism—and that he does need to say more if he is to be true to his own beliefs. (So I don’t want to say that what Kant calls ‘practical freedom’, as opposed to transcendental freedom, *means* something compatibilistic, but just that it could be consistent with the truth of compatibilism.) Allison (in part) follows Beck in defending the Canon by saying that ‘from the practical standpoint ... speculative questions about the transcendental status of our practically free acts simply do not arise’ (p. 64). But if this ‘practical standpoint’ isn’t simply a crude stance of willful ignorance, then it seems that, given Kant’s own views, it must face up to the possibility that we are a ‘turnspit’. It is Kant who says that, if metaphysics leaves us with no room for freedom, we should drop morality, no matter how much we are ‘practically’ committed to it (B xxix), and this seems to me to be the most consistent position for him to adopt, even if I also believe that he did not always take it seriously enough, and that we need not be as unsympathetic to compatibilism as he was.



Allison suggests that the causal theorist must be supposing that ‘rules or principles function as efficient causes, which can produce or evoke a positive response (“pro-attitude”) in an agent’ (p. 51). But such a specific claim is not at all needed. The compatibilist hypothesis is not that ‘rules’ about sensible ends, or even beliefs about such rules, need be what cause our actions, but rather just that there can be desires present that in some, perhaps totally hidden, way are their ultimate efficient cause.

This hypothesis may seem similar to the ‘anomalous monism’ that Ralf Meerbote has ascribed to Kant, and that Allison rejects as ‘fundamentally wrong-headed’ (p. 81). For Meerbote, our rational agency is defined via our capacity for reasoned preference, which is said to be free just in so far as it involves apperception and deliberation. Allison is certainly right that this definition does not do justice to Kant’s view that our reason has an ‘intelligible character’, an ultimate imputability, and a type of practical freedom (to adopt maxims even contrary to reason) not necessarily found in beings with all the capacities Meerbote outlines. But on the extra question of whether, apart from Kant’s own beliefs, ‘the conception of ourselves as a rational agent’ with transcendental freedom is absolutely indispensable, Allison offers no extra defense but just applauds Kant for trying to ‘come to grips’ with the problem (p. 82), i.e. with trying to formulate an unrefuted version of incompatibilism. This attempt can be admired, but without our having to concede that it shows that Kant (or Allison) gives adequate attention to the possibility of a sophisticated compatibilism.

The most sophisticated challenge that Kant raised against this possibility was his claim, in the second *Critique* and after, that the ‘fact’ of our accepting moral demands requires that we think of ourselves as absolutely free. An obvious problem for this approach is that it makes it appear that in non-moral contexts we could have no assurance of our freedom. This problem explains why Allison puts such an emphasis in his book on many earlier passages where Kant spoke of freedom in non-moral contexts. We have seen the limitations of such passages, and surely the easiest way to understand Kant’s ‘great reversal’ is to say that he also came to appreciate these limitations. Nonetheless, Kant’s later theory gives some attention to the problem of non-moral contexts by developing (especially in the *Religion*) the notion of intelligible character in such a way that it concerns the entirety of one’s life. That is, once it is admitted that every human action implicitly involves some maxim, and that each maxim must be implicitly judged with regard to its permissibility by the overall ‘*Gesinnung*’ that defines the person, then it turns out that all action contexts have at least some relation to morality, and so can be seen as affected by whatever freedom that requires.

Allison does a superb job of explaining how this notion of *Gesinnung* is developed by Kant, but he does not get far with proving that whatever moral attitude it involves requires (as Kant assumed it did) an incompatibilist meta-

physics. The ‘phenomenal’ fact that the maxims permeating our moral life appear as ‘self-imposed’ rules hardly settles the question of whether this imposition is free of natural determination. For Kant, the question of asserting our freedom ultimately comes down to the issue of whether there is moral autonomy in the sense of ‘motivational independence’ from all our needs as sensuous beings. (As Allison points out (p. 98), from just the idea that there is such an independence, one might still think that it could take a non-moral form, but in fact for Kant the only way we really can think of it is entirely in moral terms.) But how is such independence to be established? One line of argument that might seem very relevant here is the claim that moral demands have an unconditional form which cannot be grounded by any feature of our contingent ‘natural constitution’ (cf. p. 100). But even if this were allowed to show that the *justification* of ‘categorical’ imperatives cannot be based in anything ‘material’ and contingent, this still does not show that, if they are rather based in the legislative form of practical reason as such (which is ‘autonomous’ here as a principle, not as a property of a particular will), then they could have applicability only to beings who are autonomous in the specific sense of *efficiently* and *freely* determining themselves. Once again, from the content of a principle that is being followed, the causal history of the being that does the following (or even the generating of the principle) cannot be inferred. Moreover, it remains unclear that we can assert, in a non-question-begging way, that there are such ‘categorical’ imperatives, or that there must be unconditioned values.<sup>16</sup>

Like many other contemporary Kantians here, Allison tries to link the Copernican image of transcendental idealism to the specifics of Kant’s practical philosophy, and in particular to its rejection of ‘heteronomous’ principles, of principles that locate value ultimately in some natural object independent of us. But even if the content of morality is determined by the structure of reason (rather than external contingent ‘nature’) itself, this does not make it ‘ideal’ in any significant ontological sense. Whatever reason requires, it requires absolutely of all beings. So the denial of transcendental realism is not requisite for the content of Kantian morality, and this fits nicely with the fact that its basic content was developed before Kant changed his metaphysics to idealism. The only reason Kant’s practical philosophy calls for idealism is his supposing that that philosophy requires incompatibilism, and that the ideality of space and time—but not of moral principles—is the only way to keep incompatibilism from being precluded.

In sum, neither the content of Kantian morality, nor the idealism associated with its metaphysics proves that we are self-determining practical beings in an absolute sense. The independence of the issue of the content of morality from the question of the metaphysical nature of moral agents can be clarified further by

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the first part of my ‘Kant on the Good Will’, in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten: Ein Kooperativer Kommentar*, ed. O. Höffe (Frankfurt, 1989), 45–65.

means of a distinction that Allison himself stresses. Against those who suppose that Kant must believe, with a psychology that is hopelessly unrealistic, that people are always aiming at either just pleasure or just duty, Allison reminds us of the distinction between ends and grounds of action (p. 102). The ground of a sympathetic person's action may be that person's own pleasure, even though what the person aims at and has in mind are the pleasures of others, just as the ground of a good person's action can be duty, even if that person's immediate object is not the satisfaction of duty as such but rather the proper treatment of those who happen to be around the person. But this means that, whatever the ends are that make up the overt content of our intentions, our actions can also have hidden grounds of a different form. And whether or not these grounds are themselves also intentional in some sense (e.g. *qua* a principle of maximizing pleasure)—and they need not be—it seems clear that they could be or have causes that escape our knowledge. In fact, something like this is precisely Kant's own point, insofar as he is trying to suggest that, in addition to the evident natural history of one's actions, there can be (and, indeed, we are to think that there must be) hidden non-natural grounds as well. But this game works both ways, for metaphysically it is also open to the compatibilist to say that there can be ultimate natural grounds behind whatever ostensible free grounds we posit. Moreover, in his theory of 'incentives' and 'respect'. Kant goes to some length to show that even the actions of an ultimately free and moral agent will always have natural antecedents of a certain sort; all that he adds is that, metaphysically, these antecedent conditions can themselves be seen as relevant to a situation that we are in ultimately because of a cause that is non-sensible. Yet even if we allow that this is a metaphysical possibility, we need not say that it is a possibility that we 'cannot help' but affirm.

It is precisely this kind of objection that Wood has found at the heart of Hegel's critique of Kant. On Wood's interpretation, 'For Kant, whether or not one acts from duty is morally crucial because the autonomy or heteronomy of one's actions depends on how they are psychologically caused' (*HET*, p. 150). There may be some difficulties with the details of how Wood understands this causation in Kant (especially in suggesting a kind of intellectual determinism rather than libertarian incompatibilism), but his general point conforms closely with our analysis. What Wood likes about Hegel's ethics is that such causal questions are almost entirely ignored, and emphasis is placed instead on the content and actualization of the proper principles.

It was said that for Hegel causal questions are 'almost' ignored because, as I have noted elsewhere,<sup>17</sup> in some of his discussions of freedom Hegel, like Allison, also seems to desire an *incompatibilist* metaphysics that is not burdened by the noumenalism of traditional Kantian ontology. My objection then was that the

<sup>17</sup> K. Ameriks, 'Hegel's Critique of Kant's Theoretical Philosophy', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 48 (1985), 1–35.

*grounds* for asserting such freedom were even more obscure in Hegel than in Kant. But there are also reasons why this objection is not so pressing here. On the one hand, Hegel need not be as committed as Kant is to the universal rule of the principle of causality (and dropping that commitment immediately makes incompatibilism much easier to hold). The causal principle is the true keystone of Kant's theoretical philosophy, whereas it is not such a central feature of the Hegelian system. A certain causal 'looseness' in nature need not be such a basic embarrassment to the Hegelian, whereas it would cause a fundamental revision of Kant's transcendental account of experience. More importantly, there is present in Hegel a host of considerations for arguing that practical philosophy can get along well with a compatibilist notion of freedom. That philosophy spells out all sorts of ways in which specific modes of determination in the lives of human beings can warrant making sufficient distinctions within experience between basic levels of freedom.<sup>18</sup> Hegel does not always clearly or consistently develop this notion, but, precisely because his notion also stresses autonomy in its meaning, it could be profitably incorporated by revisionist—i.e. compatibilist—Kantians as well.

Although it is Hegel's philosophy that stresses that one might as well 'factor through' the admittedly indeterminable mysteries of the ultimate causal grounds of our action (and thus give compatibilism a chance), it should not be forgotten that, as we have just argued, Kant himself does not stress these causal factors when trying to determine the *principles* that are relevant for morality. Hegel needs extra grounds for specific objections against those principles, and yet, as Wood himself has argued, the Hegelian attack on the content of Kantian morality is not very persuasive when disengaged from the criticism of the Kantian theory of moral motivation. Indeed, for the most part, Hegel really wants to accept and amplify many of the Kantian principles. Hence as a theory of moral *action* there need not be much difference (except in detail) between Kant and Hegel. The crucial differences emerge rather when one looks at their accounts of the role of our intentions in morality.

It is here that Allison mounts an effective counter-attack on Wood, for Wood's Hegelian theory of moral motivation is extraordinarily liberal in its content and extraordinarily harsh in its dismissal of the Kantian alternative. His Hegelian claim is not only that action 'from duty alone' is difficult to discern, especially when it is presumed to require a non-natural, absolutely free cause; the claim is that such action is practically 'incoherent', and that, whatever moral intentions

<sup>18</sup> Richard Schacht has nicely documented Hegel's treatment of freedom along this line as consisting in 'self-conscious rational self-determination', such that 'true freedom becomes possible only with the emergence of the properly organized state as an existing reality'. R. Schacht, 'Hegel on Freedom', in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre (New York, 1972), 300, 326. Schacht can be criticized only for overlooking incompatibilist passages in Hegel, and for not attending enough to the metaphysical dimensions of the issue; cf. *HET*, pp. 150–1.

one might have, these need be only one factor in the action, not 'the' determining one (cf. p. 186; *HET*, pp. 152–3).<sup>19</sup> All our action, supposedly, involves our particular interests, and if the moral goodness of, for example, a policy of honesty is just *one* of the factors behind an otherwise selfish grocer's action, that can make it enough, on this view, to warrant approval as worthy.<sup>20</sup>

From this Hegelian perspective, one simply dismisses questions about whether there was a free 'inner' decision to go against morality or not. As Wood says, Hegel's theory is in general 'strikingly compatibilist':

For Hegel I am responsible for doing a certain deed under a certain description if I in fact did the deed, knew what I was doing under that description, and intended to do it under that description. In principle these conditions could all be satisfied even if there were no possibility that I could have done otherwise. (*HET*, p. 151)

While I have been arguing that Kantians shouldn't prematurely exclude this kind of theory (and also that Kantians and Hegelians should be able to agree on combining it with at least the basic principles of 'abstract right'), it should also be noted that the theory is not without its faults, and its advantages can be exaggerated. At the metaphysical level, it has hardly refuted the possibility of Kantian incompatibilism, even on its 'rich' traditional formulation. Moreover, even at the empirical level, the idea that personal interests are always a factor in human action is hardly a strong objection to Kant, for he stresses that very fact as well. What Kant adds is just the thought that we can believe that a wholly disinterested factor can also be the relevant cause of an action. So, even if, as we have stressed, any such presumably 'pure' factor might still turn out to have an interest behind it after all; and even if, as Wood stresses, we can never in principle settle this question even on Kant's own account, still none of this shows that we should totally dismiss our causal hypotheses. If in fact the best view we have of a particular situation is that it seems that the ultimate intention of the action was completely disinterested, why should that conclusion not be the one affirmed, at least tentatively? (And if that goes against deterministic psychology, then that may just be all the worse for such a psychology.)

Such a possibility is of more than incidental and metaphysical interest. As Allison notes, there is something morally dissatisfying about the Hegelian's idea that merely taking some account of moral considerations is enough to gain moral worth for oneself. If we are in the business of assessing such worth, and we take it as a predicate of the person or character involved, and not just of the outer action and its form or consequences, then why not be concerned with what the causally overriding intention really was? Thus, why not say that a grocer of 'good will' is someone who truly does act 'from duty', at least to the extent that such motivation

<sup>19</sup> Cf., also, Wood, 'The Emptiness of the Moral Will', *Monist*, 73 (1989), 454–83.

<sup>20</sup> Allison reconstructs Wood's view this way: 'an action has moral worth if its moral goodness is one of the reasons why the agent performs it' (p. 190).

appears accessible to us? That is, why not say that the action is ‘worthy’ when and only when it at least has the appearance of a dominant orientation toward that end? Whether that orientation is one that ultimately requires a compatibilist or incompatibilist account is another issue—one that current theorists, like Kant and Hegel as well, have presumed is easier to settle than it really is. We ought not believe, for all that Allison has said, that Kant has vindicated incompatibilism, but we also do not have to believe, for all that Wood has said, that Hegel has buried it. What we can believe is that it is worth getting on with constructing a social theory that can be acceptable to both Kantians and Hegelians, despite the irreconcilable and perhaps unresolvable metaphysical differences that remain.