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Kant's Concept of Freedom and the Human Sciences[1]

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The aim of this paper is to determine whether Kant's account of freedom fits with his theory of the human sciences. Several Kant scholars have recently acknowledged a tension between Kant's metaphysics and his works on anthropology in particular. Jacobs and Kain write that 'Kant made his intentions quite clear: he proposed a pragmatic empirical anthropology. The problem is, as commentators have noted, that it is not at all clear how these declared intentions fit with some central claims of his critical philosophy.'[2] Wood acknowledges the un-

1 For the sake of clarity in the references to Kant's writings, I have chosen to use titles rather than the author/date system. I have also included a citation to the English translation, followed by a citation to the German text of the Academy edition (volume and page number) in brackets. Insofar as the following works by Kant are cited frequently, I have identified them by these abbreviations: *Anthropology*: Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View; *C.J.*: Critique of Judgment; *C.P.R.*: Critique of Pure Reason; *C.Pr.R.*: Critique of Practical Reason; *Idea*: Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent; *Groundwork*: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals; *M.M.*: The Metaphysics of Morals; *Prolegomena*: Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics; *Religion*: Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason; *S.B.*: Speculative Beginning of Human History.

2 Jacobs and Kain 2003, 5. See also 'While it may be surprising to readers familiar with his 'empirical determinism,' in the context of his pragmatic anthropology, Kant employs conceptions of the human practical capacities that presuppose spontaneity. In the anthropology lectures, arguments about the presence and exact

expected nature of Kant's anthropological endeavours: 'The pragmatic approach to anthropology serves to indicate the great distance separating Kantian anthropology from […] what Kant's metaphysical theory of freedom and nature might lead us to expect.'[3] Louden actually holds that 'Kant did not satisfactorily address these issues, and in order for [him] to do so it will be necessary to offer conjectures that occasionally go beyond his texts.'[4] I believe that in order to clarify the issue at stake, the tension between Kant's metaphysics and his anthropology should be broken down into three distinct problems.

First, Kant's *Anthropology* studies the human being 'as a freely acting being.'[5] This approach thus presupposes that such an inquiry can acknowledge freedom and appeal to it in its accounts of human behaviour. Yet the *Critique of Pure Reason* clearly asserts that 'as regard [man's] empirical character there is no freedom; and yet it is only in the light of this character that man can be studied.'[6] This, in contrast, seems to indicate that the human sciences should be carried out independently of freedom.

Second, the *Anthropology* seems to suggest that empirical factors encompassed by culture, civilisation and mores can have an impact on the human being's moral status by generating some form of moral progress. Yet if freedom and moral agency are restricted to the domain of the intelligible, they cannot be influenced by anything empirical.

Third, the *Anthropology* provides numerous moral and prudential recommendations as to how one should behave in particular circumstances. Thus it seems to presuppose that anthropological knowledge, as well as the practical guidance based on this knowledge, can have an impact on the free choices we make. Yet how can the human sciences be legitimately, and efficaciously, prescriptive *vis-à-vis* our free choices?

Regarding the first problem, which I tackle in section I, I will hold that the human sciences can legitimately refer to 'practical freedom'

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nature of this spontaneity are generally avoided, but at numerous points it is clearly presupposed […] the lectures seem content to leave the details of spontaneity (or a justification for the lack of details) to be settled in ethical and metaphysical contexts' (Kain 2003, 235-236). Mary Gregor asks the following question: 'Now if empirical knowledge of men can yield only a general description of men's tendencies to behave in certain ways, how can pragmatic anthropology study man as a free agent and determine what he should make of himself?' (Gregor 1974, xvii).

3 Wood 1999, 206

4 Louden 2000, 19

5 *Anthropology*, 3 [7:119]

6 *C.P.R.*, 474 [B577-578]

understood as the power to determine one's aims and to act independently of sensuous impulses, through intentions and the representation of purposes. I will address the second and third problems in two steps. Section II will tackle them negatively through a distinction between the conditions of moral agency and the conditions of moral improvement. It will allow me to argue that the possibility of any direct influence of the empirical on the intelligible is metaphysically invalid in principle, and hence, that empirical factors cannot effect any direct change in one's moral character. In the third section, I will turn to the positive side of my account by focusing on the issue of the moral relevance of culture and civilisation as well as that of the human sciences (which study their influence), and suggest that they are morally relevant insofar as they make us more morally efficacious.

I The distinction between transcendental and practical freedom

To delimit the scope of my inquiry, it is important to note that within a Kantian framework the question of freedom can be tackled from two angles: a metaphysical angle, which amounts to the question of 'transcendental compatibilism' (i.e. the compatibility between transcendental freedom and natural determinism), and an epistemological angle, which amounts to the question of 'empirical compatibilism' (i.e. the compatibility between practical freedom and natural determinism in the empirical world).[7] The question that interests us here is the latter, for tackling the problem of freedom from the standpoint of the human sciences entails a focus on the status of freedom within an empirical perspective, that is to say 'practical freedom' rather than 'transcendental freedom.'

Kant defines transcendental freedom as a power absolutely independent from the natural world: it is 'a causality through which something takes place, the cause of which is not itself determined, in accordance with necessary laws, by another cause antecedent to it, that is to say, an *absolute spontaneity* of the cause, whereby a series of appearances, which proceeds in accordance with laws of nature, begins *of itself*.'[8] It

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7 These questions have given rise to innumerable discussions about the internal consistency of Kant's theory as well as its relevance for contemporary debates on compatibilism. Any attempt at discussing these issues falls beyond the scope of this paper. For good discussions, see Rosen 1989 and Wood 1984.

8 *C.P.R.*, 410-411 [A446]

should be distinguished from practical freedom defined as 'a causality of reason in the determination of the will.'[9] Contrary to transcendental freedom, practical freedom operates within nature itself as the faculty of choice 'which can be determined independently of sensuous impulses, and therefore through motives which are represented by reason.'[10] In other words, it is the power of determining ourselves apart from the coercion of sensuous impulses, a power that 'can be proved through experience.'[11] Yet how can it entail no break in natural determinism?

According to Kant, whether the will is determined by sensibility or by reason, the law of nature remains. For firstly, the two modes of causality are exercised according to a necessary rule: 'But I say: *the law of nature remains*, whether the rational being be a cause of effects in the sensible world through reason and hence through freedom, or whether that being does not determine such effects through rational grounds.'[12] Secondly, the ability of reason to motivate the will is for Kant a natural cause defined as the exercise of practical freedom: 'through experience [we] know practical freedom to be one of the causes in nature, namely, to be a causality of reason in the determination of the will.'[13] Thus rational causality implies no diminution of the necessity of natural laws. Whether a rational subject acts or does not act by virtue of rational principles, in the first case 'the action takes place according to maxims whose effect within appearance will always conform to constant laws'; in the second case, 'the effects flow according to mere natural laws of sensibility.'[14]

Therefore, the exercise of practical freedom is not in any sense in contradiction with the fact that every event has an antecedent cause. It is

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9 *C.P.R.*, 634 [A803/B831]

10 *C.P.R.*, 633 [A802/B830]

11 Ibid.

12 *Prolegomena*, 99 [4:345-346]

13 *C.P.R.*, 634 [A803/B831]. And he adds that although practical freedom is grounded on transcendental freedom, the former should be understood independently from the latter since the latter is 'a matter for speculative knowledge only, and when we are dealing with the practical, we can leave it aside as being an issue with which we have no concern' (ibid.).

14 *Prolegomena*, 99 [4:346]. Note that I choose not to discuss the issue of what is usually called Kant's 'predictability claim' about human actions (*C.P.R.*, 474 [B577-578]) for I believe that it is not directly relevant to my argument: there is no reason to think that the predictability claim, which is a mere epistemological claim, can constitute a threat to Kant's theory of freedom. The difficult question is whether free action is a challenge to determinism according to general laws. For discussions of the predictability claim, see Allison 1983, 326 and Rosen 1989, 140-1.

negatively 'the will's independence of coercion through sensuous impulses,' and positively 'the power of self-determination, independently of any coercion through sensuous impulses,' that is to say through the causality of reason.[15] In this sense, particular choices, and actions based on these choices, can be accounted for by their antecedent empirical causes (including feelings, desires, reasons and intentions) in the following fashion:

(1) One has a certain feeling of pleasure or pain.

(2) These experiences of pleasure and pain give rise to inclinations — either immediately, as in the inclination to escape a painful situation, or mediately, through the anticipation of potential pleasures and pains.

(3) These inclinations become interests insofar as the agent judges the pleasure or pain to connect with certain actions. One must actively take an interest in the object of one's inclination.

(4) These interests lead to a choice when the interest is considered as something to be realised by the agent. This involves the agent viewing the object of interest as both capable of being brought about and as something to be actually brought about through his activity. He must, in other words, decide to act for an end. Thus here, reason makes an inclination a choice by weighing it against other inclinations.

(5) This choice becomes action when the agent, through a further feeling, is actually motivated to act on the choice.[16]

The processes of reasoning, the motives and the desires leading to the production of an action are all part of the psychological make-up of the empirical subject.

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15 *C.P.R.*, 465 [B562]. As Frierson notes, Kant's '*psychological* account of human action is left thoroughly deterministic […] Of course, this determinism is only *empirical* determinism, not determinism 'all the way down.' Human actions are empirically determined in the sense that these actions follow from prior causes in accordance with laws of experience' (Frierson 2005a, 3). For discussions of Kant's views on psychology, see Hatfield 1998, Makkreel 2001, and Sturm 2001. They show that Kant does not deny the possibility of empirical psychology in general but merely denies the possibility of a scientific, empirical psychology based on the observation of the inner sense.

16 See *M.M.*, 373-6 [6:211-214]. This account is partly based on Frierson 2005a.

Consequently, the presupposition of freedom in the investigation of human beings is legitimate insofar as it is expressed in terms of 'practical freedom' — that is to say, the power to be partly, but not wholly, independent of natural desires. However, before he became aware of this ability to make free choices, 'man obeyed [the] call of nature' and 'instinct — that *voice of God* that all animals obey — must alone have first guided the beginner.'[17] On this basis, I want to suggest that focusing on Kant's account of how human beings surpassed the limits of instinct reveals some crucial features of the nature of practical freedom.

Through a reconstitution of biblical history, Kant portrays the first steps of freedom as the discovery of a capacity to satisfy hunger by the use of new foods through cookery experiments that oppose or at least diverge from the voice of instinct. Freedom is thus 'discovered,' human beings become conscious of it, and this discovery is made through their becoming aware of reason as an ability to choose between different things and thus to distance themselves from natural urges.

> The occasion for deserting the natural urges may only have been a petty matter; however, the result of this first attempt, whereby man became conscious of reason as an ability to go beyond those limits that bind all animals, was very important to and even decisive for his way of life. Perhaps a mere fruit whose appearance resembled that of others that he had tasted and found agreeable tempted man to experiment; or perhaps it was the example of some animal whose nature was fitted for consuming it (*S.B.*, 51 [8:112]).

Insofar as the human being becomes conscious of the existence of different ways of fulfilling his needs, he can now choose and oppose the dictates of instinct. The implications of this discovery are crucial for his development — freed from instinct, he now has 'his eyes open.'

> No matter how insignificant may have been the damage done to the voice of nature, man now proceeded with his eyes open. He discovered in himself an ability to choose his own way of life and thus not to be bound like other animals to only a single one […] besides the particular objects of desire on which instinct had until now made him dependent, there opened up to him an infinitude of them, among which he could not choose, for he had no knowledge whatsoever to base choice on; and it was now equally impossible for him to turn back from his once tasted state of freedom to his former servitude (to the rule of the instincts) (*S.B.*, 51 [8:112]).

Fackenheim proposes to define this 'ability to choose' as 'cultural freedom': it 'is only partly, but by no means wholly independent of natural desires. It may enlarge, transform or even pervert them; but it does not emancipate itself from them. Freedom, in this sense, we shall

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17 *S.B.*, 50 [8:111]

term cultural freedom. For it is essentially social in significance. […] Cultural freedom produces institutions and forms of government, and it is the source of tradition. Its expressions are the substance of history.'[18] Mary Gregor, for her part, describes this freedom as 'relative freedom.' And within this relative freedom, she distinguishes between two aspects: 'The *Metaphysics of Morals* stresses one aspect: man's ability to rise above the level of instinct and act in pursuit of ends. […] By it man is free not only to pervert his instincts that lead to his self-preservation and the preservation of the species, but to expand his desires *ad infinitum*. […] The *Anthropology*, accordingly, stresses the other aspect of freedom involved in civil society, the development of man's tendency to become a well-bred member of society who can live peacefully with his fellow men.'[19] Surprisingly, Fackenheim and Gregor do not relate what they call 'cultural freedom' and 'relative freedom' to Kant's concept of 'practical freedom.' However, I believe that they are in fact referring to one and the same power conceived from different perspectives (a cultural perspective for the former and a psychological perspective for the latter).

More precisely, on my interpretation, the *C.P.R.*'s 'practical freedom,' the *C.J.*'s 'culture of discipline,' the *Speculative Beginning*'s 'power of choice,' the *Metaphysics of Morals*' 'ability to rise above instinct,' the *Idea*'s 'freedom of will,' and the *Anthropology*'s 'freedom to act' are one and the same thing.[20] For I believe they all refer to the ability to determine oneself independently of sensuous impulses and to set one's own purposes. This power is precisely that to which the human sciences refer, a type of freedom that is distinct from the pure spontaneity of transcendental freedom: it is the intentionality at the basis of human action.

However, the identification of the *C.P.R.*'s practical freedom with free intentionality as described in Kant's works on the human sciences could be seen as problematic. For it could be argued that the former involves a determinant conception of freedom, namely self-determination and pure intentionality, whilst the latter is rather a question of skill

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18 Fackenheim 1956, 388-9

19 Gregor 1974, xxiii. Here, Gregor refers to the passage from the *Metaphysics of Morals* which considers man's duty to develop his natural perfection for a pragmatic purpose: 'as a being capable of ends (of making objects his ends), he must owe the use of his powers not merely to natural instinct but rather to the freedom by which he determines their scope' (*M.M.*, 565 [6:445]).

20 *C.P.R.*, 634 [A803], *C.J.*, 319 [5:432], *S.B.*, 51 [8:112], *M.M.*, 565 [6:445], *Idea*, 31 [8:19], *Anthropology*, 3 [7:119].

in realising certain ends.[21] I would like to address this worry in two steps. First, it is unclear that the latter is a question of skill in realising ends — or at least that it is merely a question of skill. For the intentionality at stake in the human sciences does involve deliberation and the adoption of ends, as suggested by Kant's definition of pragmatic anthropology ('pragmatic knowledge of man aims at what man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being') as well as by other passages already quoted.[22] Moreover, I am not claiming that the act of choosing freely and that of actualising that choice are the same, but rather that they stem from the same capacity or power. But if one remains unconvinced by the first point, I would like to suggest that secondly, what is at stake here is one and the same capacity analysed through different perspectives. For instance, as already suggested, this perspective can be psychological or cultural. And accordingly, Kant's analysis of practical freedom in the *C.P.R.* is, unsurprisingly, transcendental, that is to say 'concerned with pure *a priori* modes of knowledge.' In this sense, what it focuses on is the fact that this power is one of self-determination. Yet as Kant himself notes, '[The fact of] practical freedom can be proved through experience.' Human beings experience this capacity in the form of a 'will which can be determined independently of sensuous impulses, and therefore through motives which are represented only by reason.'[23] Intentionality, in the form of the representation of motives, is thus a crucial part of Kant's account of practical freedom in the *C.P.R.*

It is true, however, that from a transcendental perspective, the issue of skills in realising ends is irrelevant. As Kant notes in the *C.Pr. R.*, the categorical imperative 'must sufficiently determine the will as will even before I ask whether I have the ability required for a desired effect or what I am to do in order to produce it.'[24] In other words, in the case of moral imperatives, the will, and thus the motive, is determined independently of the question of skills. But this does not preclude further analyses, from different perspectives and in different contexts; and in particular it does not preclude the focus on its relationship to skill — in fact, this is precisely the role of anthropology *vis-à-vis* ethics. For as Kant crucially claims in the *M.M.*, there is a 'counterpart of a metaphysics of morals' that 'cannot be dispensed with,' moral anthropology,

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21 I would like to thank the referee of this journal who raised this objection.

22 *Anthropology*, 3 [7:119]

23 All quoted from *C.P.R.*, 633 [A802/B830].

24 *C.Pr.R.*, 154 [5:20]

which 'deal[s] only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in *fulfilling* the laws of a metaphysics of morals.'[25] This suggests that different philosophical domains deal with different — but complementary or at least compatible — aspects of human agency, and correlatively different dimensions of the same capacity can be more or less relevant to, or significant for, these domains; and yet there is no doubt that they can all refer to one and the same capacity. In fact, one may even argue that it is precisely the range of Kant's various perspectives on practical freedom, and the fact that they complement each other so effectively, that make it at once more plausible and more compelling. For this capacity is of course central to, perhaps even the keystone of, any analysis of human nature, whether transcendental, cultural or anthropological.

As a result, the human sciences, and pragmatic anthropology in particular, can legitimately study human beings *as* free beings and evaluate the contributions of freedom to their development: 'Pragmatic knowledge of man aims at what man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being.'[26] For what anthropology needs in order to study them *as* free is no more than practical freedom — which addresses the first problem set out in the introduction.

II The relationship between freedom, culture and morality

The second tension between Kant's metaphysics and his account of the human sciences lies in the possibility of an impact of the empirical on the moral, or of the sensible on the intelligible. The problem is that a range of textual evidence from Kant's works raises the hope that anthropological knowledge, as well as the practical guidance based on this knowledge, can have an impact on free choice, and that the empirical factors encompassed by culture, civilisation and mores can affect moral status — and in particular that they can occasion some form of moral progress. For instance, in his *Anthropology*, Kant seems to hold a quasi-Aristotelian form of moral habituation which, if taken literally, directly contradicts his moral and metaphysical framework.

> It is better to circulate small change than nothing at all. In the end, they can be converted into genuine gold coin, though at a considerable discount. […] Even the

25 *M.M.*, 372 [6:217]

26 *Anthropology*, 3 [7:119]

> appearance of the good in others must have value for us, because in the long run something serious can come from such a play with pretences which gain respect even if they do not deserve to. (*Anthropology*, 39 [7:152-153]; translation modified)

This seems to suggest that the appearance of virtue in a man who is playing the role of a virtuous man can gradually become part of his dispositions. For the 'something serious' which can come from the pretence of virtue should in this context be understood as the real thing, namely genuine virtue.[27] In this sense, the pretence of virtue might just lead to virtue itself. However, if freedom and moral agency are restricted to the domain of the intelligible, they cannot be influenced by anything empirical. In other words, given Kant's framework, we seem to be stuck with the impossibility of any type of direct influence of the sensible on the intelligible: empirical factors, whether political, cultural or social, cannot effect any direct change in the moral character of agents. To illustrate this tension, I examine Robert Louden's account of the relationship between culture and morality and the difficulties it faces.[28] Subsequently, I will suggest that a distinction between the conditions of moral agency and the conditions of moral improvement allows us to unravel some of these difficulties.

Culture understood in a broad sense constitutes, according to Louden, the necessary preparatory step for moralisation: 'moralisation […] necessarily presupposes the preparatory steps of culture and civilisation.' He argues that culture and civilisation as preparatory steps for morality encompass political and legal institutions, art, sciences and trade, education and even war.[29] For instance, he writes: 'human morality does presuppose a sufficiently developed, interconnected web of cultural institutions as a necessary condition for its own presence'; 'a physical, tangible, political structure in human life […] helps prepare the way for morality'; 'political and legal progress are both necessary

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27 That the pretence of virtue might lead to moral improvement is in fact suggested by a number of passages from the *Anthropology*: for instance, 'signs of well-wishing and respect, though originally empty, gradually lead to genuine dispositions of this sort'; 'when men play these roles, virtues are gradually established, whose appearance had up until now only been affected. These virtues ultimately will become part of the actor's disposition' (*Anthropology*, 39 [7:152] and 37 [7:151]).

28 I choose to discuss Louden's interpretation in particular since I believe that it exemplifies best the difficulties encountered by many Kantian accounts of the relationship between culture and morality. Hence, the objections raised here also apply to other interpretations, for instance Riley 1983, 80 and van der Linden 1988, 137.

29 Respectively in Louden 2000, 169, 109, 160, 53, and 143.

presuppositions for this deeper moral progress, as are cultural and scientific advances, growth in foreign trade.'[30] In other words, Louden holds that for Kant, culture, education, law, politics and religion are necessary preparatory steps for moralisation — necessary but not sufficient insofar as the freedom of the will to decide whether to be morally good or not remains.[31]

I believe that Louden's reading faces two problems, one involving his conception of the relationship between the cultural and the moral, and the other his notion of 'necessary preparatory steps.' The first problem is that his reading requires that culture can have an influence on morality, and thus that empirical factors can have an influence on the intelligible. As Louden writes in the context of education, 'Kant does believe that efficacious moral education is education that somehow cuts through the surface causal network [i.e. from the empirical to the intelligible] in order to affect the grounding of character.'[32] The reason for this claim is that he conceives of the issue at stake in terms of a dilemma. On the one hand, Kant's system does not allow for a causal influence of the empirical world on the intelligible world; the only possible causal connection between the agent and his environment seems to operate from the latter to the *empirical* character of the agent, rather than his intelligible character.[33] On the other hand, however, if the

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30 Louden 2000, 21, 149, and 160

31 As a referee of this journal pointed out, some passages in Louden as well as in Kant should be read as claims about the human species rather than individuals. And this would suggest that in this paper, I operate under the false assumption that Kant is only concerned with the individual. This is not the case however. Rather, I believe that when Kant is concerned with questions of freedom and morality, his claims presuppose that — in fact, they require that — whether he is talking about individuals, human beings in general or the species as a whole, they are equally thought of as free and thus morally responsible. In this sense, the fact that Kant sometimes talks about individual human beings and sometimes about the species is irrelevant to the argument put forward in this paper — which is why I may appear to be overlooking it. Of course, there is no doubt that in other contexts, contexts that have to do with biology and Nature's intentions for the species in particular, my claim does not pertain, since there, Kant does draw a sharp distinction between the status of the individual and that of the species (I have shown this in Cohen 2008a). But in the present context, it makes no difference to my argument, nor to my interpretation of Kant and Louden's views.

32 Louden 2000, 59

33 Louden in fact begins with this argument before turning to the stronger argument about empirical factors cutting through the causal network: 'Education does primarily concern empirical character, not intelligible character. The same is true of all the other preparatory steps for morality examined by Kant in other fields of impure ethics. Culture, arts, science, politics, law — each of these areas of human life

empirical environment has no bearing on the moral character of the agent, this entails that moral education, political institutions and socio-cultural conditions are irrelevant to his moral improvement. On this basis, Louden's reading requires Kant to renounce the claim that empirical factors cannot have an influence on the intelligible so that culture can be morally efficacious.

Yet the objections against Louden's reading have to do with Kant's conception of the relationship between the empirical and the intelligible, which is summed up in the following fashion: 'the sensible cannot determine the supersensible in the subject.'[34] In a footnote, Kant adds:

> One of the various supposed contradictions in this complete distinction of natural causality from the causality through freedom is given in the following objection to it. It is held that when I talk about nature putting *obstacles* in the way of the causality governed by laws of freedom (moral laws), or about nature *furthering* it, I do after all grant that nature *influences* freedom. But this is a misinterpretation, which is easily avoided merely by understanding what I have said. The resistance or furtherance is not between nature and freedom, but between nature as appearance and the *effects* of freedom as appearances in the world of sense (*C.J.*, 36fn [5:195-196]).

This is what Frierson calls 'the asymmetry between nature and freedom': 'Even if the empirical self is also phenomenally determined according to natural causation, nothing empirical determines the fundamental nature — in particular, the moral status — of the free self.'[35] It entails that we cannot in principle postulate, even practically, what is impossible from a theoretical point of view. In other words, the case of culture differs from the postulates of practical reason insofar as the latter do not contravene the asymmetry between freedom and nature (they require the possibility of an influence of freedom on nature alone) whilst the former does (it requires the possibility of an influence of nature on freedom, which is forbidden by the asymmetry thesis).[36] As a

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helps set the stage for moral life by shaping empirical character in ways that are analogous to that required by a virtuous moral disposition' (Louden 2000, 59).

34 *C.J.*, 36 [5:195]

35 Frierson 2003, 23

36 The postulates of practical reason 'are not theoretical dogmas but *presuppositions* having a necessarily practical reference and thus, although they do not indeed extend speculative cognition, they give objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason in *general* (by means of their reference to what is practical) and justify its holding concepts even the possibility of which it could not otherwise presume to affirm. These postulates are those of *immortality*, of *freedom* considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world), and the

result, against Louden's reading, we have to conclude that the possibility of a direct influence of culture on moral character is rendered metaphysically invalid in principle.

The second problem faced by Louden's account is that it fails to give an adequate interpretation of the propaedeutic role of culture, in particular regarding the question of its necessary status *vis-à-vis* morality. This appears clearly in the following passage: 'Culture (in particular the arts and sciences) and education are, along with law, politics, and religion, all necessary but not sufficient conditions for *human moralization*. There is no guarantee that people who have been exposed to these preparatory steps will be morally good, but human beings who lack all contact with them cannot possibly be morally good.'[37] By conflating the issues of 'moral agency' and 'moral improvement' and thereby using the two concepts interchangeably, Louden in fact misrepresents Kant's argument on both counts. Furthermore, his notion of 'propaedeutic' or 'preparatory steps' to morality is in fact detrimental to our understanding of the issues at stake.

To begin with, it is necessary for our understanding of the role of culture to distinguish between: (1) the conditions of moral agency, and (2) the conditions of moral improvement. On the one hand, there are conditions of the mere exercise of moral agency, namely a certain form of freedom, a minimal level of rationality and the consciousness of the moral law. However, these conditions are really *pre*-conditions of morality: they allow one to be moral in a broad sense (i.e. one can then choose to be moral or immoral), but do not seem to go any further. The conditions of moral improvement, on the other hand, seem to involve something extra: they help to be moral in the narrow sense of the word (namely, to be morally autonomous insofar as one acts from duty). In this context, the distinction between (1) and (2) presupposes the distinction between 'being moral as opposed to amoral' and 'being moral as opposed to immoral'; the former is the result of the conditions of moral agency whilst the latter is the result of the conditions of moral improvement.

More precisely, moral agency presupposes a certain skilfulness that Kant defines in terms of standing, walking, talking, conversing, and thinking.

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existence of God' (*C.Pr.R.*, 238 [5:122]). The distinctive feature of these postulates is that they do not contravene Kant's asymmetry thesis. For a brief account of their role *vis-à-vis* morality, see Gardner 1999, 314-19.

37 Louden 2000, 53

> The first man could thus *stand* and *walk*; he could *talk* (Gen. 2:20), even *converse*, i.e., speak in coherent concepts (v.23), consequently, *think*. These are skills that he must have developed completely by himself […]; but I assume him already to possess them so as to consider only the development of morality in his actions and passions, which necessarily presuppose that skilfulness. (*S.B.*, 50 [8:111])

These are the basics, to which Kant adds an extra four steps: (1) an ability to choose one's own way of life and set one's own purposes, which I defined as practical freedom; (2) a rational control over one's instinct for sex; (3) an expectation of the future; and (4) a conception of oneself as the true end of nature, that is a conception of nature as a means to achieve one's purposes.[38] These steps are precisely what I called the conditions of moral agency: they are necessary for 'the transition from the raw state of merely animal creature to humanity, from the harness of the instincts to the guidance of reason — in a word, from the guardianship of nature to the state of freedom.'[39]

Correlatively, the conditions of moral agency rest on the role of culture defined as 'what nature can accomplish in order to prepare man for what he himself must do in order to be a final purpose.'[40] Kant in fact defines culture in twofold terms. On the one hand, 'The culture of *skill* is indeed the foremost subjective condition for an aptitude to promote purposes generally; but it is not adequate to assist the *will* in the determination and selection of its purposes.'[41] On the other hand, the culture of discipline 'is negative and consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, a despotism that rivets us to certain natural things and renders us unable to do our own selecting […] in fact we are free enough to tighten or to slacken, to lengthen or to shorten [desires], as the purposes of reason require.'[42] The former can be understood as the external condition of moral agency, for it amounts to a minimal level of social, cultural and political organisation. The latter is

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38 *S.B.*, 50-53 [8:111-14]

39 *S.B.*, 53 [8:115]

40 *C.J.*, 318-319 [5:431]. For my present purposes, it is sufficient to note that the concept of final purpose is essentially moral; it is distinguished from the ultimate purpose, which is essentially cultural. See for instance 'It is a formal and subjective condition, namely, man's aptitude in general for setting himself purposes, and for using nature (independently of [the element of] nature in man's determination of purposes) as a means [for achieving them] in conformity with the maxims of his free purposes generally. Producing in a rational being an aptitude for purposes generally (hence [in a way that leaves] that being free) is *culture*' (ibid.).

41 *C.J.*, 319 [5:432]

42 *C.J.*, 319 [5:432]

the internal condition of moral agency in the sense that it amounts to the minimal level of self-mastery that is necessary to the exercise of the power of choice and allows the overcoming of one's inner nature (crude passions, desires and instincts).[43]

However, if these conditions are necessary and sufficient for moral agency, they are not sufficient for moral improvement insofar as the latter requires another set of conditions, as suggested in this reference to Rousseau: 'in his *Emile*, in his *Social Contract*, and in other works he seeks to answer this more difficult question: how must culture progress so as to develop the capacities belonging to mankind's vocation as a *moral* species […]?'[44] There is thus a clear distinction between the conditions of moral agency and the conditions of moral improvement, although both are in some sense 'cultural': the former have to do with the culture of skill and discipline, whilst the latter have to do with culture in the sense of civilisation. Yet as soon as we attempt to describe specifically what the conditions of moral improvement are, we run into a challenging difficulty: they seem to blend in with the conditions of moral agency. For if we go back to Kant's account of the culture of skill in the *Critique of Judgment*, it appears that it encompasses sciences and arts, social classes, social conflict, law, civil society and even war, and it is in this sense much broader than its equivalent in *Speculative Beginning*.[45] In fact, in the latter work, all the factors just mentioned are part of the conditions of moral improvement rather than the conditions of moral agency.[46]

I believe that this apparent inconsistency is due to the role assigned to culture in the *Critique of Judgment*: it encompasses both the conditions of moral agency and the conditions of moral improvement — the reason being that culture is at once the result of the former and the means to the latter. Yet, it is not that the two *problems* are identical; it is rather that the *solutions* to these problems are so interconnected that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them. This is partly the result of the developmental nature of each process. On the one hand, the development of reason and freedom follows a variety of steps, as described in *Speculative Beginning*; on the other hand, culture and civilisation's advance requires, in turn, the use of reason and freedom. In this sense, the conditions of moral agency and the conditions of moral improvement

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43 See Yovel 1980, 182-185 for a detailed account of this distinction.

44 *S.B.*, 54 [8:116]

45 See *C.J.*, 320 [5:432-433].

46 See *S.B.*, 55-57 [8:118-120].

develop hand in hand. Furthermore, the latter are in some sense the expression of the former; for as already suggested in section I, civilisation, political institutions and laws of justice, for instance, are effects of the development of reason. As a result, it seems that giving an account of the specific role of each facet of culture is an impossible task. Yet even if it is impossible from an empirical perspective, it remains that in principle, the two issues should not be conflated. On this basis, I submit that:

(1) The conditions of moral agency are necessary to become moral in a broad sense, but not sufficient for moral improvement (i.e. to become moral in a narrow sense). One cannot possibly be morally good without the conditions of moral agency.

(2) The conditions of moral improvement are neither necessary nor sufficient for moral improvement in the sense that one can become morally better without them; they are merely helpful.

With this distinction in hand, it appears that rather than talking about 'preparatory steps' in general (as does Louden), we should distinguish between 'necessary conditions for moral agency' and 'helpful conditions for moral improvement.' For in the case of the latter, it is more judicious, following Munzel and Frierson, to understand the role of culture and civilisation neither as necessary or sufficient, nor as enabling or preventing, but merely as helping or hindering moral improvement.[47] However, the second and third problems set up in the introduction still remain to be solved, namely how can empirical factors help moral improvement if they can have no direct impact on moral character? The aim of the final section is to address this issue through a close examination of the notion of help and hindrance.

III The helps and hindrances to moral efficacy

The preceding section has showed that the possibility of a direct influence of the empirical on the intelligible is invalid in principle, and hence, that neither the human sciences, nor culture and civilisation have any impact on the 'transcendental choice' of the agent; that is to say, they cannot effect any direct change in one's moral character. However, the aim of this section is to show that this does not entail that they

47 For instance, Frierson writes that 'it must be possible to be morally good […] *prior* to any empirical aids' (Frierson 2003, 90). See also Munzel 1999, 331-2.

are irrelevant to one's moral practice. In fact, I will suggest that they are crucial to it insofar as they have a decisive impact on the realisation of one's moral choices in the world — namely, they make us more morally efficacious.

For Kant, moral attitudes stem from a free choice of the agent, a transcendental choice so to speak, a pure act of the will: 'The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil,' and his 'moral education must begin […] with the transformation of his attitude of mind and the establishment of a character.'[48] And as shown in the preceding section, nothing empirical can influence this choice; genuine virtue has to be grafted onto a morally good character.

> We are, to a high degree, *cultivated* beyond bearing by all manner of social convention and propriety. But we are a long way from being able to regard ourselves as *moral*. For the idea of morality belongs to culture; and yet using this idea only in reference to semblances of morality, e.g., love of honour and outward propriety, constitutes mere civilisation […] All good that is not grafted onto a morally-good character is nothing but illusion and glistering misery. (*Idea*, 36 [8:26])

However, I will show that for Kant, once one's 'moral choice' is made, many empirical factors can help or hinder its realisation in the world, i.e. its being literally made real in the form of human actions. Thus if the aim is to obey the moral law, there are empirical means, means anthropology can uncover and recommend, that will help further its realisation. In this sense, anthropology identifies the helps and hindrances that are relevant to the realisation of duty, which consist in, negatively, regulating natural impulses and passions to strengthen our capacity for self-mastery; and positively, encouraging virtue by taking a social form.[49]

The role of moral anthropology appears most clearly in Kant's discussion of human temperaments, for it shows that, and how, the anthropological knowledge of temperaments is morally relevant. Through the analysis of the four human temperaments (sanguine, melancholic,

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48 *Religion*, 89 [6:44] and 92 [6:48]. There is no doubt that talking about an intelligible or transcendental choice is extremely problematic. A number of commentators have tried to salvage Kant's account in this respect (for instance, Allison 1990, 47-53 and Wood 1984, 89-93). However, these difficulties are irrelevant to my argument. For whether one would rather talk about a timeless choice, a moral revolution, or simply one's moral character, it remains that for Kant, nothing empirical can affect it.

49 For suggestions along similar lines, see Frierson 2005b, 2003 and Louden 2003, 2006.

choleric, and phlegmatic), anthropology shows that certain temperaments are more prone to passions than others.[50] For instance, the melancholic has no passions, whilst the sanguine has a tendency to emotional volatility. And on the basis of the fact that passions hinder our ability to choose rationally our purposes, it recommends the exercise and strengthening of our self-control in order to overcome, or at least refine, our passions.[51] This can be done, Kant suggests, through civilised social intercourse:

> though it be not virtue, it is still a practice and cultivation of virtue, when people conduct themselves in company in a civilised fashion; they thereby become gentler and more refined, and practise goodness in small matters. (*Lectures on Ethics*, 210 [27:456])

Civilised behaviour entails a self-restraint that both reveals and cultivates a capacity for 'self-mastery [which] is the beginning of conquering oneself. It is a step towards virtue or at least a capacity thereto.'[52] In other words, if politeness is not virtue, it is a step towards it, a step that exercises and strengthens self-mastery, and helps to overcome — or at least control and refine — passions. This helping or 'easing' of moral efficacy by certain cultural behaviour or factors can be further clarified by looking more closely at the relationship between civilised social intercourse and the cultivation of virtue — what Kant calls 'the virtues of social intercourse.'[53]

> The passion of love is much moderated through [politeness], when one plays around with the beautiful for the amenities of association and conceals the red-hot inclination, that otherwise would be difficult to suppress; the well-mannered association and the artful joke defeat the otherwise hard to overcome inclination. (*Lectures on Anthropology*, [25:930])[54]

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50 *Anthropology*, 198-201 [7:288-290]. For a detailed account of Kant's concept of temperament, see Larrimore 2001.

51 *Anthropology*, 173 [7:266]

52 *Lectures on Anthropology* [25:930]

53 *M.M.*, 588 [6:473]

54 See also 'Although the charms and passions are much exaggerated therein [books that serve for amusement] they still refine men in their feelings, by turning an object of animal inclination into one of more refined inclination; a man is thereby made receptive to the motive force of virtue on principles. They also have an indirect use, for in taming their inclinations, men become more civilised. The more we refine cruder elements, the more humanity is purified, and man is rendered capable of feeling the motive force of virtuous principles' (*Lectures on Ethics*, 210 [27:456]).

This ability to regulate our inclinations should be related to the culture of discipline mentioned in the preceding section: it 'is negative and consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, a despotism that rivets us to certain natural things and renders us unable to do our own selecting […] in fact we are free enough to tighten or to slacken, to lengthen or to shorten [desires], as the purposes of reason require.'[55] It amounts not only to the ability to rise above the level of instinct per se (as suggested in *Speculative Beginning*), but also, and more importantly in this context, to keep under control the passions and inclinations that are, for Kant, the main source of harm to freedom and reason: 'Inclination, which hinders the use of reason to compare, at a particular moment of choice, a specific inclination against the sum of all inclinations, is passion. […] One can also easily see that passions do the greatest harm to freedom.'[56] Thus, it is because 'passions are cancerous sores for pure practical reason' that combating and controlling them through civilised social intercourse, which brings about self-mastery, is a step towards virtue.[57]

In this sense, the moral guidance of anthropology consists in recommending what helps the realisation of duty (for instance, politeness and civilised behaviour) and warning against what hinders it (for instance, passions and inclinations).[58] Crucially, these helps and hindrances are by no means a guarantee of virtue. For being polite is not sufficient to be genuinely moral; but it certainly helps.

A passage from the *Metaphysics of Morals* suggests that civilised social intercourse has a second function that can be thought of as promoting, as well as helping, the realisation of virtue without cutting through the causal network.

> they [affability, sociability, courtesy, hospitality, and gentleness — the virtues of social intercourse] promote the feeling for virtue itself by a striving to bring this illusion as near as possible to the truth. By all these, which are merely the manners one is obliged to show in social intercourse, one binds others too; and so they still promote a virtuous disposition by at least making virtue fashionable. (*M.M.*, 588 [6:473])

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55 *C.J.*, 319 [5:432]

56 *Anthropology*, 172 [7:265]

57 *Anthropology*, 173 [7:266]

58 As Kant writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, moral anthropology 'deal[s] only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in *fulfilling* the laws of a metaphysics of morals' (*M.M.*, 372 [6:217]).

In other words, 'one who loves the illusion of the good eventually is won over to actually loving the good.'[59] However, in this function of civilised behaviour, namely the fact that it leads to the love of virtue, the process is less clear: how can the love of the illusion of the good lead to the love of the good itself? The reason why one loves the illusion of the good seems to be quite different in kind from the reason why one might come to love the good.[60] One way of looking at the issue is to focus on the practice itself. If one loves the illusion of the good and enacts this illusion in social intercourse, one might come to appreciate its worth and to love the good itself for its own sake. Correlatively from the point of view of the spectator, loving the illusion of the good in others may make us be polite in order to become lovable, which, in turn, exercises our self-mastery, leads us to control our passions and, eventually, to love the good for its own sake. In this sense, paradoxically, by deceiving others through politeness and social pretence, we in fact deceive ourselves and transform our pragmatic, polite behaviour into virtuous behaviour: 'To deceive the deceiver in ourselves, or the tendency to deceive, is a fresh return to the obedience under the law of virtue.'[61] This ability to deceive ourselves as well as others is thus a crucial means to the progress of virtue: 'Nature has wisely implanted in man the propensity to easy self-deception in order to save, or at least lead man to, virtue.'[62] By deceiving others through the pretence of virtue, we foster civil society; and in doing so, we deceive ourselves by transforming our pretence of virtue into a disposition for virtue itself.

As a result, mores, culture and civilisation have a negative and a positive role. Negatively, they regulate natural impulses and passions in order to strengthen our capacity for self-mastery.[63] Positively, they encourage virtue by taking a social form — 'they promote the feeling of virtue.'[64] They are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for moral improvement; they essentially facilitate the exercise of virtue from the standpoint of worldly action.

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59 *Lectures on Anthropology* [25:931]

60 Frierson proposes a different argument in favour of the shift from one to the other. He explains that 'the illusion of politeness can motivate by counteracting subrational hindrances to proper action' (Frierson 2005b, 14).

61 *Anthropology*, 37-8 [7:151]

62 *Anthropology*, 38 [7:152]

63 It can be noted, following Makkreel, that if the discipline of our inclinations is said to be negative, it points to a positive result by opening man up to purposes that are higher than natural purposes, namely moral ones (Makkreel 1990, 139).

64 *M.M.*, 588 [6:473]

IV Conclusion

As is well known, Kant has been described as defending fairly implausible views on the issue of the compatibilism between freedom and determinism.[65] He has even been described as claiming that our free actions somehow occur outside of time, in some intelligible world, whilst their effects, in the empirical world, are completely determined by natural laws. What I have tried to show in this paper, however, is that for Kant, from the pragmatic perspective of human action, there is no doubt that we do have access to, and an experience of, freedom, and that our rational and moral capacities are empirically exercised rather than happening in some timeless inaccessible world.

This does not mean, however, that Kant is being inconsistent — or rather, that the 'pragmatic Kant' contradicts the 'transcendental Kant.' For as Allen Wood has suggested, Kant's metaphysical solution to the question of free will has no implication for his understanding of human actions from an empirical, pragmatic perspective.[66] Its aim is simply to prove that freedom and natural causality are logically consistent. Interpreters who take him to say more than this are misguided, since on his own grounds, it is impossible to provide an account of what our freedom is, or how it relates to natural causality.

On this basis, the crux of my argument has relied on the claim that the recommendations of the human sciences have no impact on moral character, and yet that they do have a crucial impact on the realisation of moral choices in the world by making agents more morally efficacious. In this sense, I have suggested that the relationship between freedom and the human sciences has been misconceived, not only because Kant's conception of freedom is particularly problematic, but also, and more importantly perhaps, because the role of the human sciences *vis-à-vis* freedom has been misunderstood. For as I have argued, many issues raised by commentators disappear as soon as we understand how and in what sense Kant's anthropology is pragmatic.[67]

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65 For instance, Walsh writes that Kant's defence is 'desperately weak,' Mackie that it 'completely fails,' Bennett that it is 'worthless,' Walker 'a hopeless failure,' Williams 'a shattering failure' and so on; all quoted in Ward 1991, 385.

66 Wood 2005, 98-100

67 I have defended this claim in more details in Cohen 2008b.

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