**Interest and Agency**

Undeterred by Kant’s cautionary advice, contemporary defenders of free will advance substantive metaphysical theses in support of their views.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is perhaps unsurprising given the mixed reception of Kant’s solution of the conflict between freedom and natural necessity, which is supposed to vindicate reason’s withdrawal from speculation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Kant argues that neither libertarians nor determinists can win, because they deal with concepts of unrestricted scope, and proposes instead to regiment the reference conditions of each concept and to specify the domain, ‘world’, proper to each. However, the precise character of this solution, its conceptual and metaphysical commitments, continues to be a matter of controversy among Kant scholars.[[3]](#footnote-3) In particular, there is ever-renewed concern about the incipient dualism of the position. Although I will be examining some of this material, my primary aim in this paper is not to make a contribution to the interpretative debate about the antinomy. Rather, I want to draw on two lessons from Kant’s treatment of the antinomy to argue for the importance of a certain way of putting the problem of human freedom.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The first lesson is that to think well about freedom, we ought to consider why freedom matters and to whom. A more Kantian way of putting this is that we have an interest in freedom, which we cannot renounce.[[5]](#footnote-5) This inability is not a matter of brute compulsion; our interest in freedom is rational. Kant then explains the rationality of our interest in freedom by drawing a connection between normativity and freedom: freedom matters because it secures guidance by strong normative standards, and it matters to us, because we are beings who are responsive to such standards as ‘a measure and a goal’ for our strivings (*KrV* A 548, B 576).[[6]](#footnote-6) The main task of section 1 is to examine the philosophical motivation for the connection Kant draws between freedom and normativity. Because a certain conception of authoritative norms is essential to this task, I also examine in that context the extent to which influential deflationary interpretations of the antinomy can sustain a conception of norms with the requisite authority to provide for our rational interest in freedom.

Section 2 takes its cue from the second lesson of the antinomy, namely that the philosophical discussion about the nature and reality of freedom cannot be conducted fruitfully without careful regimentation of our use of the term. Whatever else follows from it, given particular interpretations of Kant’s broader philosophical commitments, this is also a point about good practice, which comes down to making sure that we relate the sense of freedom to its reference conditions, and to do this we need to establish our epistemic rights over the putatively referring domain. In practice, this means that we can start with the resources of empirical self-knowledge, seek to answer the question whether there is any sense in which human actions can be said to be free, then move on from there, through a form of regressive argument, to the more abstract conception of agency that supports the demanding and controversial sense of freedom as spontaneity.

Well apart from the specific substantive theses concerning normativity and agency I shall defend in the process of applying these Kantian lessons to the problem of freedom, I want to recommend this approach for allowing conceptual connections to emerge across fields of enquiry which, in contemporary philosophy, are usually kept apart. In the concluding section of the paper, I return to this topic and outline the basic features and prospective advantages of the moderate methodological holism I attribute to Kant.

**1. Interest**

The idea that human beings have an interest in freedom and that this has to do with the value we place on it is not original to Kant. Contemporary defences of free will also begin with an acknowledgement that it matters to show that we are free, and it matters because freedom preserves a good that is of central value to our moral lives, namely the applicability of robust conceptions of moral responsibility, which in turn enables ordinary practices of holding each other responsible.[[7]](#footnote-7) This good can be secured, so the familiar libertarian argument goes, only if it is possible to locate genuine authorship within the agent.[[8]](#footnote-8) In essence then, free will is a location problem created by the need to secure what is sometimes called ‘ultimate’ responsibility for our actions. It is appreciation of this location problem that has motivated theories that posit a distinctive sort of agent-causal power which is irreducible to any other sort of causal power. [[9]](#footnote-9) The idea of a noumenal self is regularly taken to be a version of this view.[[10]](#footnote-10) This is not the interpretation I defend here, mainly because I do not think that this would solve the problem that interests Kant.[[11]](#footnote-11) Especially in the first *Critique*, Kant presents reason as confronting a different location problem: the location of norms. Briefly, reason has an interest in freedom because reason is concerned with strong authoritative norms, for which an external perspective on normative practices is required and which only freedom, in the transcendental sense, can provide. In the following section, I examine the arguments adduced in support of this relation between norms and freedom, before I turn to consider an influential deflationary interpretation of the antinomy and examine how it deals with this relation.

**1.1.** One version of the location problem is given in a compact sub-section on the ‘Resolution of the cosmological idea of the totality of the derivation of occurrences in the world from their causes’:

[T]he latter [practical freedom] presupposes that although something has not happened, it nevertheless **ought** to have happened, and its cause in appearance was thus not so determining that there is not a causality in our power of choice such that, independently of those natural causes and even opposed to their power and influence, it might produce something determined in the temporal order in accord with empirical laws, and hence begin a series of occurrences **entirely from itself** (*KrV* A 534, B562).

The passage is complicated, because Kant runs together a number of things. First he draws a contrast between different causal powers, the human power of choice and the power of natural causes. This contrast raises deep issues that are central to the analysis of human agency in the following section. Secondly he suggests that there are different laws relevant to the different powers, determining their manifestations. It is in this context that the rational interest in freedom is expressed as concerning the location of the ‘ought’.

Kant states that it must be possible for the occurrences that are actions to embody –and be intelligible in terms of – an idea of what ought to have happened, even when that ‘something’ has not happened. There are two ways of interpreting this claim.

On the first interpretation, the claim is about unrealised possibilities. Support for this reading comes with the clarification that ‘this "ought" expresses a *possible* action’ (*KrV* A 548, B576 emphasis added). On this reading ‘ought’ is equivalent to ‘can’ – as ordinarily understood – and not the moralised ‘can’ in *KpV* 5:104. The claim then would be about the nature of freedom, understood as a two-way power, to do or to leave undone. This sense of freedom, which Kant, as we shall see, endorses at the empirical and psychological level, confronts us with a theoretical problem of accounting for what we mean by options. This is a theoretical modal problem about the very nature of possibility, on which Kant does not elaborate.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Grounds for not resting content with this interpretation come from the further specification of ‘ought’ as expressing ‘a species of necessity’ which does not occur in nature, the ‘ought, if one has the course of nature before one’s eyes, has no significance whatever’ (*KrV* A 547, B575). This ought is clearly normative. As such, it is a matter of practical cognition (*KrV* A 633, B 661). Such cognition is defined in contrast to any possible empirical cognition of nature. The content and modal profile of the ought is provided by reason itself: reason gives ‘laws which are imperatives, i.e., **objective laws of freedom**, and that say **what ought to happen** …and that are thereby distinguished from **laws of nature**, which deal only with **what doeshappen**’ (*KrV* A802, B830). Although this is the conceptual space that the moral law occupies, as the one authoritative and therefore categorical imperative, it is not invoked here and there is no immediate need to invoke it.[[13]](#footnote-13) That is, we do not need to concern ourselves with substantive normative matters, in order to understand the rational interest in freedom.

This is why: the basic thought is that there are some concepts with the following characteristic, they are concepts that have a claim to our attention and this claim to our attention is not explicable or accountable by pointing to any empirical facts. ‘Have a claim’ captures the idea that these concepts appear to us in the form of an imperative or a law. ‘Explicable or accountable by pointing to any empirical facts’ is a way of avoiding talk of derivation of the ‘ought’ from the ‘is’, since this is not Kant’s point here. The implied contrast, rather, is between two sorts of ‘ought’, one that is explicable or accountable by pointing at facts about physical bodies in space, or human beings in societies and so on, and one that has no such relation to these facts. Aside from this very general characterisation, we are not told anything about the content of this ‘ought’.[[14]](#footnote-14) That there is no substantive normative theory defended at this stage is philosophically significant, and not just a matter of intellectual history. It is significant because Kant appears to think that the conditions for norms that are non-arbitrary (‘objective’) and rationally commanding (‘reason ...gives laws’) – what I have been calling strong authoritative norms – *can* be given without reference to a substantive normative system.[[15]](#footnote-15) With these clarifications in place, the claim that captures the interest of reason in freedom can be put as follows: strong authoritative norms require or presuppose transcendental freedom (*KrV* A 534, B 562). Transcendental freedom, in this context, has the negative sense of offering us a perspective on human doing that is external to any stretch of human experience – this externality can be further underlined by the use of the term ‘world’. What are we to make of the relation between freedom and ‘ought’ that explains this interest of reason?

At first glance there is a threat of circularity: a sort of ‘ought’ is introduced to the discussion that is explicable without regard to natural facts, and then an external perspective to natural facts is invoked to secure this ‘ought’. Here is one way to avoid this incipient circularity. The contrast that gives the ‘ought’ that interests Kant is a contrast he refines later in terms of hypothetical and categorical imperatives. This refinement is important because it helps us get a grip on the right sort of strength and objectivity. Hypothetical imperatives can be felt very strongly, and they may also be non-arbitrary in the sense that they may be supported by excellent reasons. They are still not strong authoritative norms in the sense that is captured by ‘categorical’. Hypothetical imperatives are rules for which the antecedent may or may not hold; the antecedent, in other words, is deniable. Categorical imperatives possess no deniable antecedent. Hence they apply unconditionally. The formal characteristic of categorical imperatives, the absence of a deniable antecedent, does not require reference to natural facts and so averts the immediate danger of circularity. On the other hand, it underlines, for lack of a better word, the nature-transcendent character of the norms under discussion, which prompts the question about whether such norms exist.

Kant clearly believes there are such norms and indeed that they are essential to making sense of our ethical commitments. In the first *Critique*, he claims that the ‘ought’ just described is not just intelligible but eminently rational (*KrV* A 547, B 575; also A 802, B 830) and that we, qua rational beings, are responsive to the ‘ought’ for setting a measure and goal to our strivings (*KrV* A 548, B 576). These statements need not be taken on faith. The Dialectic, which is the broader context of this discussion, has as its general topic the search of reason for the unconditioned. So an argument could be made that the claim about the existence of strong authoritative norms is the product of rational reflective evaluations of the problem of regress of evaluative criteria. Kant does not offer this argument, but it would not be hard to reconstruct it. In the evaluative dialectic, any answer that aims to explain why some thing or some course of action is good is met with a further question about what explains the goodness of the *explanans*. If every answer we give is conditional on some other good, then its goodness can come into question and so on. Rational reflection on this problem leads us to an unconditioned norm that expresses a good without qualification.[[16]](#footnote-16) Such an unconditioned norm is located outside all conditioned series, and this is just the perspective of transcendental freedom. So reason has an interest in freedom because it has a stake in such normative standards, which represent reason’s ‘own order’ (A 548, B 576). Put differently: strong authoritative norms are irreducible to hypothetical norms, and this irreducibility requires a commitment to an external perspective, such as the transcendental perspective of freedom.

There are various ways of avoiding Kant’s conclusion, of course. One is by adopting an error-theoretical or a fictionalist position, both of which basically deny that the sort of ‘ought’ Kant is describing here exists, but concede that we may act as if such ‘ought’ did exist. These options absolve us of a commitment to transcendental freedom. At the same time, they do not directly challenge the way Kant spells out the interest of reason; rather, they represent ways of reducing the metaphysical burden and thereby the interest of reason to human interests. The danger in tying the account of freedom to our interest in this way is that all we are left is a reductive *argumentum κατ’ άνθρωπον*.[[17]](#footnote-17) A more ambitious and radical option is to offer a naturalist theory of norms. Normative naturalism, in its various guises, is usually – though not always – a rival to Kantian normativism, and in both its most prominent forms, reductive and neo-Aristotelean, it does not sustain an interest in transcendental freedom. Since my aim here is to explain the motivation for Kant’s holistic approach to the problem of freedom, engaging with various naturalisms exceeds the scope of the paper. Nonetheless, one important attempt to integrate Kantianism with naturalism is highly relevant to the paper’s concerns. I turn to it presently.

**1.2.** The interest of reason in freedom presented above goes against the grain of the currently influential defences of Kant’s conception of freedom that either seek to integrate it within an acceptably naturalistic framework or fully naturalise it. These defences are formulated in response to perceived problems with Kant’s resolution of the antinomy of freedom and natural necessity.

In the antinomy, Kant states that reason finds itself in contradiction with itself on the topic of the relation between freedom and nature. To see the problem, nature must be conceptualised as the realm of efficient causality, and freedom as a rival type of causal force. So understood, nature and freedom form a disjunct. If we accept the former, we need to deny the latter. In other words, nature leaves no room for freedom. Interventions by a causally efficient force that is not conceptualisable in terms of natural causality simply do not make sense. As the proponent of thoroughgoing causal determinism argues in the antithesis, once you allow such extra-worldly interventions you loose all grip on lawfulness in nature (*KrV* A 451, B 479). Importantly, this problem does not just arise within the pre-critical context that shapes the assumptions of the champion of determinism in the antinomy. It also arises given the basic assumptions of critical theoretical philosophy, centrally that nature is a causally closed system; as a unifying concept of the manifold, causality is a condition for sense-making in the first place.

Kant’s official strategy for dealing with the antinomy is *divide et impera*: determinism obtains within certain limits, freedom without these limits; in other words, natural causality and freedom are each the case in their appropriate domains. As a result, actions are explicable by reference to sensible conditions of experience and knowable as products of antecedent causes, and they are also intelligible through pure reason as products of freedom. As I said in the introduction, however, the precise commitments of this solution of the antinomy remain disputed and controversial. If the solution depends on ontological dualism, then it faces a difficult problem, namely to explain how the two worlds, the one in which determinism is true and the other in which it is not, relate to one another. As a result, ontological dualism is by and large rejected by sympathetic commentators. So, the question is how to apply the *divide et impera* strategy on a monistic ontology. Given the way Kant puts things in the antinomy, the options are either to argue that nature, as the realm of efficient causality, is in fact continuous with freedom, e.g. by showing emergent natural structures that are not subject to efficient causality, or to argue that efficient causality is not an obstacle to freedom, because we can look at things from a different perspective/aspect/point of view, or under a different description.[[18]](#footnote-18) I am interested here in the latter family of views because they are directly responding to the antinomy and the problem of ontological dualism. Aspect dualism is not immediately better off than ontological dualism, since it still has the problem of reconciling two mutually contradictory claims made by the inhabitant of our world, the only world available, who affirms both that she is free and that she is not free. The two-aspect solution is to specify the conditions under which each assertion is made. The popularity of this family of views, despite encounters with trenchant criticism, consists in its promise to capture what Kant himself thought to be a genuinely new take on the old problem of freedom.[[19]](#footnote-19) In what follows, I will look at Henry Allison’s version, partly because it remains the most detailed and influential one, and partly because of its sensitivity to the issue of authoritative norms.

Allison’s interpretation depends on two important distinctions. First is his distinction between ontological and epistemic conditions. Ontological conditions are necessary for something to be; in traditional theistic arguments, for example, God is the ontological condition for the world. ‘Epistemic’ conditions are a Kantian innovation on Allison’s reading; they explain how something becomes an object of cognition for us. Causality is such an epistemic condition. Once this is accepted, a ‘conceptual space’ opens up ‘for the non-empirical thought (though not knowledge) of objects, including rational agents’ (Allison 1990, p. 44). In other words, we can think of objects and of rational agents without reference to conditions that allow us to know them.

Second is the distinction between the theoretical and the practical standpoint. The theoretical standpoint is subject to scepticism about freedom; consciousness of freedom may well be thought to be illusory, e.g. I can doubt my belief that I am free. The practical standpoint is the standpoint of agents. Although it is possible to argue that from the first person perspective of deliberating and choosing what to do, agents presuppose that they are free, this is not the option taken by Allison, who argues that only if we choose to do the right thing as reason prescribes do we adopt the practical standpoint (Allison 1990, p. 247). The practical standpoint then is the standpoint of moral agency. Allison is keen to show that moral agency is not something extraordinary and otherworldly, but rather that it is continuous with rational agency broadly understood, that is, ‘our capacity to deliberate, choose, adopt maxims, and the like’ (Allison 1995, p. 25). At the same time, it is only an explicitly moral conception of the practical standpoint that can secure the argument about transcendental freedom, because only the moral practical standpoint presupposes that one acts under the idea of freedom. Note that Allison insists that transcendental freedom is not the real ground for our actions, so it should not be seen as explanatory for our capacity for rational agency; rather, he says, it is ‘the defining feature’ of our conception of ourselves as rational agents (ibid.). Of course, freedom as ‘defining feature’ is not analytically true of ‘rational agency’, but instead forms part of a synthetic conception of rational agency which comes to view when we assume the practical standpoint.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Accepting the argument so far, the question can still arise as to whether we can do without the sort of demanding exercises in rational agency required for morality; if we can, then the argument will be irrelevant. Allison suggests that we simply cannot sacrifice our view of ourselves as moral agents (Allison 1990, p. 247). Allison is not engaged in constructive metaphysics, so what supports the synthetic conception of our rational agency is actual normative practices. To take an interest in morality, in the sense of recognizing it as a source of reasons to do and to avoid doing, is an important, possibly essential, feature of human life. This type of argument is familiar from Peter Strawson’s defence of freedom as a presupposition for human reactive attitudes in his ‘Freedom and Resentment’. In the conclusion of that essay, he writes that ‘in the absence of *any* forms of these [human reactive] attitudes it is doubtful whether we should have anything that *we* could find intelligible as a system of human relationships, as human society’ (Strawson 1962, p. 25). Allison, like Strawson, seeks to approach and resolve metaphysical questions from within known facts about human relationships and society. From within the horizon formed by practices of excusing and condemning behaviour, in Strawson, or of figuring out what is right, in Allison, freedom is safe because it is presupposed in such practices and their demise is unthinkable.

Because Allison’s argument is very close to the one I presented in the previous section, it is essential to show where the difference between the two accounts lies. The basic difference is that on Allison’s account, it is the demand for normative justification addressed to and met by the rational agent that motivates the argument. [[21]](#footnote-21) As rational beings we are responsive to requests for justifying the things we do. Justification for doing the morally right thing requires transcendental freedom because anything else falls short. This is why from the practical, i.e. moral, standpoint entertaining doubts about freedom borders on the paradoxical. It is a practical version of the Moorean paradox: ‘*P*, but I do not believe that *P*’. Allison’s Kantian version would be something like ‘I am under the moral law and so free but I do not believe that I am free’. As we said before, it is not just any norms that secure freedom, but the moral law (‘the ultimate rational norm’ Allison 1990, p. 248; see too Allison 2011, p. 274). Notice, however, that the matter of the authority of the moral law is supposed to be dissolved in the substantive discussion about whether in acting on this or that maxim, the agent acts morally, i.e. has the law as her reason. But what does this mean? It is not a demand for introspection, because this is not a discussion about motivation. Rather it is about whether the agent’s prospective maxim is a good reason for action, that is, good for the agent to take it up as her maxim. In other words, the normativity of the standard (the law) she invokes in deliberating, choosing, and adopting maxims is analysable in terms of substantive discussions about competing reasons favouring this or that course of action – her reasons for acting in effect. Though the continuity Allison establishes with ordinary normative reasoning behaviour might be thought an advantage, the obvious question is whether the account has the resources to support the standard it invokes. Ordinary normative reasoning can sustain conclusions about what is best to do given such and such reasons, so the justification task confronted by Allison’s rational agents is carried out in a way that does not allow for the recognition of the unconditionality of the norm, unless there is some missing step, say, rational intuition, which Allison explicitly denies. The rational agent is now vulnerable to doubts of the practical sort because she may well ask herself what it is that she is doing while she is acting morally, and whether her actions exhibit transcendental freedom or upbringing.

The options are: either to abandon the modest methodology, and engage in constructive metaphysics in an effort to support the belief that human beings are free; or to abandon incompatibilism and give up on transcendental freedom, perhaps by embracing the possibilities of upbringing. In what follows I present Kant as giving us a further option: a discussion of human agency that sustains the interest in freedom without being reducible to such interest.

**2. Agency**

‘Agency’ is shorthand for the powers and abilities Kant attributes to human beings when it comes to considering actions. Immediately striking is Kant’s use of a causal vocabulary to describe the exercise of these different powers and his insistence that such exercise is free. To tease apart the different layers of the account, I start with a fairly uncontroversial, psychological and empirical sense of freedom, before moving to more general, controversial and demanding theses about the relation between causality and freedom.

**2.1.** A basic sense of ‘free’ with a long philosophical history and prominent in contemporary theories of personal autonomy concerns the idea of self-control. This basic sense ties to everyday experiences that confirm its soundness: each time we overcome a fear or yield to a temptation, we experience ourselves as exercising control or failing to do so. In theories of personal autonomy, control is judged by reference to ‘decisive best judgments’ (Mele 1995, p. 7) and to the range of ‘agentic skills’ that secure control (Meyers 2004, p. 69).[[22]](#footnote-22) Although not devoting nearly as much attention to it as contemporary authors, Kant does have a use for this sense, acknowledged in the first *Critique* as ‘psychological’ and ‘for the most part empirical’ (*KrV* A 448, B 476) and discussed in the moral and anthropological writings as attainment of ‘governance’ (*MS* 6:407) or ‘composure’ (*Anth* 7:252). It is important to recognise this empirical sense for a number of reasons. First and more generally, because it is the one most people can readily relate to and it would be a failing simply to ignore it. Second, in the context of Kant interpretation, because it helps qualify the traditional view that from the perspective of empirical psychology actions are not free. Third, and for current purposes, identifying what is ‘for the most part’ empirical and its shortcomings explains the motivation for moving the enquiry onto what is not empirical. [[23]](#footnote-23)

Minimally, to act is to make a difference in the world: when we act, we bring about something in the world that ‘does not exist but which can become real by means of our conduct’ (*G* 4:437). Obviously Kant is mainly interested in the sort of difference we make. Still before we look into evaluating an action, we have to account for it as what *has* become real by means of our conduct, in short, as ‘occurrence’ (*KrV* A 543, B 571). When it comes to explaining actions we explain them like any other occurrence, by reference to causes. When, for example, we want to find out why someone told a malicious lie, ‘one proceeds as with any investigation in the series of determining causes for a given natural effect’ (*KrV* A 554, B 582). The causes can be traced back to the person’s character, upbringing, bad company and the like. We cite all these facts as causal for the behaviour and therefore explanatory. Such deterministic explanations are available to us when we consider the action as *observers* (see *KrV* A 550, B 578).

Observation, however, also affords us a more intimate view of ourselves that takes into account feelings, desires, inclinations and the like. Actions are the product of a power: the *Begehrungsvermögen* or *facultas appetitiva*. This is the ‘power to be, by means of one’s representations, the cause of the objects of these representations’ (*MS* 6:211, translation modified)*.*[[24]](#footnote-24) The ‘cause of the objects’ is further analysed into ‘impelling causes’ (*Mrongovius* 29: 895, *Dohna* 28:677, *Vigilantius* 29:1014), which are distinguished into ‘intellectual’ causes, which Kant also calls ‘motives’, and ‘sensible’ or ‘sensitive’, which he also calls ‘stimuli’.[[25]](#footnote-25) This more intimate perspective on human psychology allows for ‘free’ to have application, in a negative sense, just in case the action is not the product of reflexes or unchecked inclinations, instincts, feelings or desires; in short, sensible causes.

If we ask why this negative sense of ‘free’ matters, there is an obvious answer to be found in Kant’s moral philosophy: freedom from sensible causes is freedom from pathological causes (*G* 4:397-99, *MS* 6:378), which opens the way for determination by potentially free-making motives, in particular the free-making motive in the singular, which is the moral law (*G* 4:427). Let’s call this the moralist shortcut. As we shall see, moralist shortcuts will be available at several stages of this regressive argument, and as a general strategy I shall seek to avoid them because they effectively allow the interest in freedom to overtake the argument about its nature and reality. More specifically, at this juncture, the effect of morally interpreting the positive sense of 'free' will be to make 'unfree' equivalent to 'immoral'; if 'unfree' is immoral, free immoral actions are not possible.[[26]](#footnote-26) This is an avoidable problem.

An alternative positive sense is given if an action is the product of control exercised over the various psychological prompts to action Kant collectively calls sensible causes. Obviously, there is scope for filling in the psychological elements that constitute and improve the exercise of control, but the bare idea of a check on prompts to action suffices to justify its importance: control is desirable because it allows the agent to ‘rise to *reflection*’ (*Anth* 7:251) and in so doing affords the agent freedom as a two-way power, to do or to leave undone (*KpV* 5:100; also *G* 4:455, *MS* 6:213, *Vigilantius* 29:1014).

However we refine our explanation by citing psychological causes, we still concern ourselves with the contrast between some antecedents, control, which we count as freedom-conferring, and some others, unchecked sensible causes. Since we are within the sphere of efficient causality, there is no reason to limit ourselves with the proximate causes and not to ask what antecedents are causal for the presence of control. In short, we have no *principled* way of blocking deterministic backtracking.

Deterministic backtracking is one of the reasons that motivates Kant’s criticism of those who call an action ‘free’ just in case it is ‘caused from within, by representations produced by our own powers, whereby desires are evoked on occasion of circumstances and hence actions are produced at our own discretion’ (*KpV* 5:96). Kant’s point is that the empiricist model cannot deliver on the promise that action is produced at our own discretion, because it does not touch the worry that the agent is simply acting out instructions of tradition, upbringing or nature. [[27]](#footnote-27) And a parallel worry can arise about empirical freedom, that is, actions caused through the exercise of reflective control over sensible causes. Composure is not a good in itself: ‘the calmest reflection’ can accompany passions, which ‘can co-exist with rationalizing’ (*Anth* 7:266). At issue are the reflective standards the agent brings to bear on the various contents she is trying to control, which can be woefully short of liberating (perhaps an example would be the maxim ‘do whatever pleases the master’).

There are a number of ways of addressing the worry. One is to take the moralist path again: since we look for genuinely liberating maxims, the obvious thing to do is to turn to the moral test for maxims that can ensure moral freedom. I do not dispute that for Kant genuine control is moral control. The problem with a substantive answer at *this* juncture is that control becomes something we stand to exercise very rarely. This problem also arises with contemporary non-moral substantive accounts of autonomy that make it a fine but rare achievement. In addition a particularly Kantian scepticism can arise when we seek to self-evaluate morally psychology about the genuineness of the empirically accessible contents that are causes for action.

Another option is to attack deterministic backtracking directly by asserting noumenal freedom (as Kant does in *KpV* 5:102-3). This is where some of the standard problems with two worlds begin to emerge. But there is a further conceptual problem, which was immediately picked up by Kant’s contemporaries. The assertion of noumenal freedom is an assertion of a global fact, that is, it concerns all actions. This is what it takes to counter another global fact that all appearances are subject to deterministic efficient causality. So actions are free full stop. But in this picture there is no space for a differential sense of freedom, which is necessary both if we are interested in control and to distinguish between moral and immoral actions. This is nothing to do with dualism, rather it has to do with the explanatory power of global facts: they explain everything.[[28]](#footnote-28)

These problems force us to examine the conditions that permit agents to control causes; such an account would need to be sufficiently general so as not to tie control to very demanding conditions, but not so general that it backfires. Such an examination is not an empirical inquiry into the specific circumstances that facilitate or impede control, but about its very possibility.[[29]](#footnote-29)

**2.2.** To establish the possibility of control, we do not seek the true conditional that spells out the circumstances for (proximally) controlled manifestations of the power of desire – for sure, control is sometimes possible in light of such and such conditions, and not possible at other times when such conditions fail to obtain. We seek rather to establish a permanent or necessary possibility. Necessity is not an empirical matter, hence the need for regressive questioning of the conditions for control. Kant provides these conditions by introducing the human power of choice.

For ‘power of choice’ Kant uses *arbitrium*, literally ‘judgment’, and of course also *Willkür* .[[30]](#footnote-30) *Willkür* is mainly a foil concept for moral willing, *Wille*, whereas *arbitrium* has a dialectically different role, which is to distinguish human from animal *arbitria* and to make the point that human choice is a choice that is free irrespective of how individuals respond to particular prompts to action:

For a power of choice is **sensible**, insofar as it is **pathologically affected** (through moving-causes of sensibility); it is called an **animal** power of choice (*arbitrium brutum*) if it can be **pathologically necessitated**. The human power of choice is indeed an *arbitrium sensitivum*, yet not *brutum* but *liberum*, because sensibility does not render its action necessary, but in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible causes (*KrV* A 534/B562).

That which can be determined only by inclination (sensible impulse, *stimulus*) would be animal choice (*arbitrium brutum*). Human choice, however, is a capacity for choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses. (*MM* 6:213)

In these passages Kant is describing a choice that is ‘free’ just in case it is a type that is independent from necessitation (or determination) by sensible impulses.

There are two contrast classes for human choice. One is animal choice, which is not just affected but necessitated by impulses; I’ll return to this shortly. The other is godlike choice, which does not require any sensible input and can create *ex nihilo*. Kant places human choice between these two, calling it free but sensible. In so doing, he stakes a claim against his rationalist predecessors, especially Baumgarten, who argued that sensitive choice cannot be free.[[31]](#footnote-31) For Kant, what affects choice is also what makes it possible: we choose on the basis of things we believe, desire or feel. Any of these things can be causes for actions, as per the account given previously. The only new element is choice, and what Kant is emphasising is that choice is exercised on contentful mental items, that is, facts about the agent’s various intentional states, about what she thinks, believes, desires, hopes, fears, etc.[[32]](#footnote-32) These facts give us the antecedent states that are causal for actions, and explain the claim that human choice is affected. Human choice is also free because these antecedents are not sufficient for its determination. This negative claim sounds like a familiar indeterministic thesis, defended by contemporary libertarians, but that is not quite what is at issue here: the substance of the claim is about the nature of choice; in particular, the constitution of the intentionality of choice such that the kind of agential control described previously is possible.[[33]](#footnote-33)

We said earlier that actions are occurrences, and indeed they are. However, they have a distinctive causal profile that they do not share with natural occurrences and which permits teleological concepts to apply to them. Actions are characteristically and essentially end-directed: ‘Every action ... has its end’ (*MS* 6:385). The notion of an end connects to choice: ‘an *end* [*Zweck*] is an object of the choice [*Willkür*] (of a rational being), through the representation of which choice is determined to an action to bring this object about’ (*MM* 6:381; see too *MM* 6:384).

To understand how efficient and final ends fit in the account, let’s use the earlier example of the malicious lie. The liar has an end she wants to achieve through her lying. The end is, let’s say, ‘to spread confusion in society’. The end is not a fact; it is a representation of an object that is not yet real as something *to be* achieved. The end makes sense in light of the facts about what she believes, for instance, ‘that confusion is entertaining and that lying maliciously is the best means for spreading confusion’. These facts are eventually causal for her lying. They exist alongside many other facts, the nonactional intentional states of the agent. The claim then is that in order for some of those states to lead to action, an end is necessary, and this is the representation that determines choice. Therefore, choice is not a link in a causal chain, made up of facts about the agent’s intentional states.

What then is choice? Kant discusses it usually in contrastive terms (human v animal). He does however also give the following helpful clue: choice is ‘consciousness’ of our ability to bring something about (*MS* 6:213). This is helpful because it sets choice in parallel with the ‘I think’ as playing a similarly unifying function: choice is the power to attend to and be moved by those facts among the many that are true about an agent’s intentional states in light of some end that appears worthwhile to the agent. Unless there is such a ‘unifying’ process of choice in light of some end, these facts cannot move the agent to act; they have to be lit by the representation of the end as wanted or worth pursuing. While it is true to say that such a representation cannot be the efficient cause, nothing in the model blocks the possibility that some facts about the nonactional intentional states of the agent are causal for some end which appears to be worth pursuing. More simply: choice is not free if we are programmed to pursue some pre-given ends. So, the final question is: in virtue of what is choice free?

**2.3.** The last question is about grounds. It leads us straight into metaphysical territory. Kant claims that the matter of grounds is beyond our comprehension; ‘no one can grasp the origination [*entstehen*] of a free action, since it is the beginning of all origination’ (4180, 17:446) and ‘the first ground of origination is not graspable’ (6446, 18:720).[[34]](#footnote-34) At the same time, Kant insists that we can *think* this more fundamental sense of freedom, which ‘contains nothing borrowed from experience’ (*KrV* A 533/B 561). When we consider any action that realizes some end empirically, we ascribe it to some agent as its proximate source, both spatially and temporally. If the thought of freedom as first ground is to contain nothing borrowed from experience, ‘beginning’ cannot be understood temporally nor ‘origination’ spatially. In addition, excluding temporal properties from our thought means that we cannot think of the performance of an action in terms of efficient causality. This leaves us with little more than the term ‘spontaneity’.

Kant takes up the notion from the Leibnizian tradition.[[35]](#footnote-35) For Leibniz, spontaneity is essential for securing freedom. At the same time, within Leibnizian metaphysics spontaneity is a correlate of pre-established harmony. Pre-established harmony is the negation of interaction of substances. The doctrine fits well then with the idea of spontaneity, namely, that the principle of the action lies *within* the agent. Kant rejects the theory of pre-established harmony (in the Amphiboly and Paralogism in the first *Critique*; see too ‘On a discovery’ 8:250). In addition, he is scathing about what he calls ‘comparative freedom’, which states that it is sufficient to secure freedom if actions are ‘caused from within’ (*KpV* 5:96). At the same time, Kant continues to have a use for ‘spontaneity’ to describe the beginning of a state from itself (*KrV* A 533, B561). I suggest we understand spontaneity, in this practical context, as a relation agents have to ends. So spontaneity is now the very antithesis of pre-established harmony: it states simply that ends are *set* by agents.[[36]](#footnote-36) Interpreting spontaneity teleologically, as a direct rebuttal of Leibnizian teleology, conforms with the instruction to understand beginning and origination without borrowing from experience and allows us to side-step the topic of efficient causality by focusing narrowly on ends (rather than on effects). [[37]](#footnote-37) Importantly, this conception of spontaneity counteracts the worry that we are programmed to pursue pre-given ends.

The question now is whether we have good reason to believe that we have a power of spontaneity as here described, which underwrites the freedom of choice, and which enables specific instances of control. We can think of this regress as reaching down to the conceptual conditions that enable us to make certain judgements, for example, that such and such action is free, or that human choice is free. To have a use for the predicate ‘free’ in the first judgment, we need to be in position to assert the second and so on. But we can also think of it more simply – and more ambitiously – as a regressive examination of what it takes to be free. Either way, we reach the ground of freedom that can be thought of and described as spontaneity but not known, let alone proven. Lack of proof means is that our claim to this concept is not theoretically secure. Kant argues, however, that it is both cognizable *and* enforceable ‘as soon as it comes to doing our duty’ (*Dohna* 28:677). This is because only as addressees of the moral law and so as standing ‘independent of the whole of nature’ (ibid.) do we commit ourselves to the idea that we *can* deliberate about ends. And here we reach the point at which the previous discussion about interest and the discussion about agency meet, namely in the notion of morally guided evaluative control (*Wille*). In the last section, I spell out the relation a bit more and how it is a fruitful approach to the topic of freedom.

**3. Conclusion**

I said at the start that Kant’s way of posing the problem of human freedom allows for the emergence of conceptual connections between two large fields of enquiry into the nature of normativity and the nature of freedom that are usually kept apart – to say nothing of sub-fields into epistemology, metaphysics, and psychology of normativity and freedom. The original connection comes down to a simple question: why does freedom matter? Or, in more Kantian terms, what is it to have a rational interest in freedom?

The answer is given in terms of the idea of a rational interest. Central to this answer is an argument about the importance of a type of norm that is unconditional, and capable of bringing to a halt the evaluative dialectic about the goodness of some thing or some course of action. Such a norm must be external to all series of conditional goods: a location given as ‘transcendental freedom’. We thus arrive at a type of normative externalism and anti-naturalism which explains the interest in transcendental freedom. At the same time, Kant is highly sensitive to ordinary understandings of human actions. This side of the enquiry is rooted in empirical psychology and a long tradition of thought about agential control over actions which conceptualises freedom as a two-way power. However, these connections with tradition and empirical psychology are incorporated in a theory that carefully delimits their range. Admitting that the predicate ‘free’ is applicable to actions just in case they display the requisite degree of executive control highlights the problems involved in establishing what the requisite degree of control is, and opens the way for deeper questions about the model of mind that underpins agential control. The enquiry that considers what must be the case for certain experiences of being in charge of our own affairs to be true, and which I called transcendental psychology, brings into view a different application of the predicate ‘free’ as characterising human choice. Choice is free because it consists in deliberation about ends in light of reasons and the formation of the intention to act in the pursuit of some end in light of the said reasons. At this stage, a metaphysical question emerges with some urgency: in virtue of what is choice free? With the answer to that question, spontaneity, given here as the power human beings have to set ends, we reach the farthest limit of our epistemic powers. Note that we reach this stage through a regressive argument which is not designed to offer the binding conclusions that deductive arguments, for example, are supposed to offer. To clinch the argument, Kant shifts the discussion to the idea of morally guided evaluative control. And because morally guided evaluative control is guidance by authoritative normative standards, the discussion about agency finally re-connects with the earlier discussion about the rational interest in freedom.

The advantage of treating the discussion of rational interest and of free agency together is that it brings to the foreground their complementarity. The end-setting claim about human agency is a non-normative fact about the sort of being we are talking about, more precisely the sort of powers such a being possesses. The claim about strong authoritative normative standards, namely that at the end of normative enquiry there is a norm which is unconditioned, i.e. has no deniable antecedent, is a normative fact, and a fact of reason no less. The connection Kant seeks to establish between normativity and teleology carves out a very distinct position in a domain of enquiry currently dominated by various neo-Aristotelean naturalisms. But when I said at the outset that this is a distinctively Kantian way of thinking about freedom, I did not just mean the content, but also the procedure. Kant invites us to think about freedom in a way that manages to respect distinct areas of enquiry while also showing the way they interconnect. Although, of course, morality is central to his concerns, moral theory is not the sole load-bearing component of his theory of freedom. And it is part of his negative argument that metaphysics cannot do the job alone either. Kant’s procedure is a kind of modest methodological holism: it is modest because it insists on proper boundaries for component enquiries, it is holistic because the theory of freedom is not reducible to any of the component enquiries, and it is methodological because it describes a way of going about the problem of freedom by identifying and calibrating the component parts proper to the topic. I believe this way of going about it is promising because it not only sets out to discover how things are, but also how we stand before them.

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1. There is a position of ‘mysterianism’ about free will, extensively defended by Peter van Inwagen, that reaches Kant’s negative results but through a very different path; see (van Inwagen 2000). More typical and representative views include (Kane 1999), (O’Connor 2000), (Clarke 2003), (Lowe 2008) and (Steward 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. References to the immediate reception of Kant’s theory of freedom are given in footnotes. In the twentieth century, an early generation of interpreters influential in the Anglophone reception of Kant’s thought considered the solution a failure or in need of radical re-thinking; see (Strawson 1966), (Bennett 1974 and 1984) and (Walker 1978). Their criticisms are summarised in (Allison 1990, p. 1-7), who together with (Korsgaard 1989) is one of the original champions of the two-standpoint view discussed below in section 1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The root of the controversy is disagreement about the nature and commitments of transcendental idealism, which is reflected in disagreement about the correct characterisation and best defence of Kant’s position on freedom. Recent compatibilist defences include (Hudson 1994) and (Rosefeldt 2012). (Wood 1984), associated with a compatibilist reading of Kant, defends the compatibility of compatibilism and incompatibilism, a characterisation also adopted by (Allison 1990, p. 249). On the incompatibilist side, see (Watkins 2005) and (Allais 2015). (Watkins 2005) offers an agent-causal account inspired by Tim O’Connor, though he also endorses the compatibility of compatibilism and incompatibilism, see (Watkins 2005, p. 333). (Hanna 2006, p. 419) proposes ‘post-compatibilism’, but see (Ameriks 2012, p. 87-99). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I use ‘human’ here to suggest a contrast not with divine freedom, but rather with conceptions of freedom that seek to arrogate god-like powers to human beings and which are justly criticised in the literature; see Strawson 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kant variably describes this interest as a need of reason, a cognitive need, or a human interest; see *KrV* A x; A 314, B 370; A 464, B 492; A 475, B 503. I take interest of reason to be unproblematically rendered as rational interest. The point I am focusing on here is somewhat obscured by received tradition, which encourages the view that the dialectic deals with the problems created when metaphysics overreaches; the *locus classicus* is (Strawson 1966) but its influence is widespread as illustrated by (Callender 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. By ‘strong’ I mean precisely not the normativity exemplified by rules of etiquette discussed in (Foot 1978), which (Copp 2007, p. 257-258) calls ‘generic’ to distinguish it from ‘authoritative’ normativity, which is closer to the ought in Kant’s sense of ‘categorical’. I explain this further below in 1.1; for extended discussion see (Deligiorgi 2012, chap. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See (Kane 1996); (Clarke 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The libertarianism in question is what (Coffman 2010, p. 157) calls ‘main brand’, which endorses incompatibilism and the principle of alternative possibilities; see (Clarke 2005, p. 408) and (Mele 2005, p.116). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See (Chisholm 1976) for a clear and economic presentation for the case in favour. See (Strawson 1994) for a refutation that draws the implications for moral responsibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Watkins (2005, pp. 408-419). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This is not to deny that Kant is concerned with moral imputability, e.g. *KrV* A 555, B583, *KpV* 5:98-100, or *Vigilantius* 29:1018-19. It is simply to deny that this is the main motive for the argument, or more weakly, that there is another location problem that is crucial to Kant’s normative commitments and which needs to be taken seriously. In parallel, as we shall see in section 2.3., he does use a causal vocabulary to describe what looks like agential powers of origination. Again, there is no point denying this. I see my task as showing how the shift in perspective I propose here, both about interest and in the next section about spontaneity, makes sense of the text and coheres with Kant’s metaphysical, epistemic, and moral commitments. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I believe that Kant’s theory of modality, presented in the first *Critique* much earlier in the context of the discussion of judgements, can provide us with an account of possibility that allows for robust alternatives. Very interesting in this context is Baldwin 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Looking back at the Dialectic from the vantage point of the second *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant sums the matter in slightly different modal terms: ‘Then [i.e. in the first *Critique*] the only point at issue was whether this *can* be changed into *is*’ (KpV 5:104-5) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In addition, Kant simply presupposes that such ‘ought’ exists; he does not countenance scepticism about it. I argue below that an argument about the need for such an ought, though not for its reality, can be reconstructed from the material given in the Dialectic. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The significance of this point becomes clearer if we contrast Kant’s optimism about the possibility of giving a general account of strong and authoritative norms with contemporary philosophers who, troubled by the ontological status of such norms, opt for an internal standpoint from within some substantive normative system, see (Scanlon 1998). I also pick up these points below in the discussion of Allison. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The expression good without qualification is one that Kant uses in the *Groundwork*, and it is significant that the latter starts with it since it is not just a ground-clearing work, but also a grounding work. I argue for this more extensively in chap 2 in (Deligiorgi 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. It is the reduction to interests that is the problem, not the form of the argument itself, which Kant himself endorses; see the ‘Real Progress’ essay, 20:306. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Wood is one well-known representative of this. But the current popularity of neo-Aristotelean interpretations partly though not wholly inspired by Korsgaard’s recent work are also relevant here. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Two-aspects views include those that embrace Davidson’s anomalous monism; (Meerbote 1984), (Hudson 2005); (Allison 1990); (Korsgaard 1989 and 1996); (Hill 1989); (Bok 1998); (Nelkin 2000). An alternative to both two worlds and two aspects views is the view of atemporal causality that does not disturb natural laws, but which is not provable and therefore dogmatic; see (Ameriks 1982 and 2008). For rejections of different versions of the two-aspects interpretation, see (Irwin 1984) and (van Cleeve 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (Allison 1995, p. 16) draws on a disanalogy between the self-certifying character of the spontaneity of the understanding and practical spontaneity where reflection can yield a conditional result only, if I take myself to be a rational agent, I must regard myself as free. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. (Allison 1990 and 2011) presents the argument in terms of various formulations of the so-called ‘Reciprocity Thesis’ that transcendental freedom and an unconditioned practical law stand in reciprocal relation. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The literature on epistemic and psychological skills for autonomous agents is vast. (Mele 1995) and (Meyers 2004) are indicative of the range of views on offer. Mele explicitly ties his account to the long tradition I mention here (1995, pp. 3-6). From the perspective of the free will debate, the question is whether such accounts need to be supplemented by the elusive ‘ultimate’ control, the sort that does not admit of deterministic backtracking; see (Kane 1999). I discuss Kant’s version of this issue below. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See (McCarty 2009) for a recent version of the claim that empirical psychology equals determinism. Unlike his empiricist predecessors, and successors, Kant shows little interest in external constraints of the sort that still figure prominently in current discussions, see (Mele 1995, chap 1). By contrast he is concerned with internal impediments to agential control and their overcoming. Kant does have a use of control (*Gewalt*) in passages such as (*KpV* 5: 94) where he gives his own version of a consequence argument, and (*KpV* 5: 101) where the challenge to human freedom comes from an almighty being. Kant speaks of failure of control as an illness (*Anth* 7: 251) and attainment of composure (*Anth* 7: 252) as desirable; see too the discussion of moderation and tranquility (*MS* 6: 409) and especially of ascetics (*MS* 6: 412). Kant is interested in that sense of free, which he sometimes calls ‘psychological’ (*KrV* A 448, B 476), because it secures as a corollary freedom as a two-way power ‘to do or to refrain from doing’ (*MS* 6: 213). Securing the application of reflection matters in light of the normative interest we have in freedom and more generally to respond to explanations of actions that merely cite differential response to environmental factors or conditioned association. It is an important part of the Kantian argument presented here that securing reflection is not a straightforwardly empirical task. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The faculty of desire, from now on ‘desire’ in the singular to distinguish it from desires, is mainly discussed, in the published works, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*KpV* 5: 21), the *Metaphysics of Morals* (*MS* 6: 211-213), the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (*KU* 5: 178-179 and 178n), and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (*Anth* 7: 251-282) and, among the lecture notes, in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*, dating from the mid-seventies to mid-nineties *L1* 28: 253-254; *L2*28: 577; *Dhona* 28: 676; *Mrongovius*: 893-894; *Vigilantius* 29: 1012-1013. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The distinction, if not the precise terminology, is familiar from the moral writings especially, which feature desires, feelings and sensuous impulses (*Antriebe*) e.g. in G 4: 434 though see too A 534, B 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. It is precisely this problem that motivated Reinhold’s proposal that freedom should be considered as fundamental self-activity of the will permitting a choice for either good or bad (see (Reinhold 2008) and see too (Watkins 2005, pp. 408-419). Effectively Reinhold argues for the metaphysical basicness of a two-way power, which Kant rejects under the label *libertas indifferentiae* (*MM* 6: 226-227). For Kant having such a two-way power is important (as in the pre-modern tradition of thought about *arbitrium*, see Aquinas) but it is not basic. Rather, it is a corollary of empirical psychological freedom. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Empiricist and rationalist compatibilists are targeted here for espousing this psychological and comparative sense of freedom (*KpV* 5: 97-102). The problem is familiar in the contemporary literature on compatibilist free will, see (Kapitan 2000) and on personal autonomy, see (Noggle 2008) for useful discussion and references. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This problem was posed sharply in (Ulrich 1788). For this reason, I think a more cautious interpretation of the noumenal self is a privative one that identifies the limits of what can be said on the topic of authorship as ultimate causal control. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The requisite generality is a feature of transcendental psychology, understood in the sense employed by (Rickert 1909) and occasionally revived in (Sullivan 1989, p. 79-80), (Allison 1990, pp. 54-56) and, more recently, (Wuerth 2014). Kant himself has no settled way of referring to these general features of free agency. He avoids and disparages the term ‘transcendental psychology’ (*Reflexion* 5553, 18: 228) because he associates it with ‘rational’ psychology, which is not the topic here. At the same time, he does not expect important structural distinctions to be a matter of empirical psychology (see for example *KU* 5: 258, also the *Prolegomena* 4, p. 304 and *KrV* A 848-849, B876-877). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Allison translates *arbitrium* as ‘will’ (1990, p. 55-56). Kant himself translates *arbitrium* as *Willkür* (e.g. *Mrongovius* 29: 896). Ameriks makes use of this terminological equivalence when he contrasts human *Willkür* with that of brutes (2012, p. 13, p. 185). *Willkür* is translated variously as ‘will’ and as ‘power of choice’, although I think the latter is preferable both for *arbitrium* and for *Willkür*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In the German rationalist tradition, discussed in (Sgarbi 2013), *arbitrium*, ‘choice’, can be *either* sensitive *or* free; see(Baumgarten 2013: 254-256, esp. 255). Sometimes Kant uses ‘pure’ in the sense of godlike (*KrV* A 534, B562, *Vigilantius* 29: 1015-1016,), sometimes in a positive sense as determination by the moral law (*Dohna* 28: 677), and sometimes to mean both (*MS* 6: 213). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In the contemporary literature, there is much discussion about whether it is the fact or the psychological attitude of the agent that is explanatory of the action. For present purposes it suffices to allow that facts about intentional states are causal. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For example, Kant says that actions that arise from one’s choice are ‘actions intentionally performed’ (*KpV* 5: 100). In a typically dense passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant joins desire, choice and reason to argue for the determinability of desire by reason and the determinability of choice by pure reason, where the two are not identical. So the question is how choice can, as (Ameriks 2012, p.185) put it, have ‘primary orientation toward the intellect’ without being already morally determined. Though some Kantians (see esp. (Allison 1990, p. 38)) have been tempted to locate freedom in ability to deliberate – a form of deliberative libertarianism as (Clark 2000) describes it – as I argue here I do not think this to be a stable position. For the kind of indeterministic argument I mention here, see (Kane 1996 and 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The point about freedom is a particular case of a more general confession of ignorance of ultimate grounds. The two *Reflections* show consistency over pre-critical and critical period, but see too *KrV* A 546/B 574, *G* 4: 459, *KpV* 5: 49, *MS* 6: 226, 22, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See (Sgarbi 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The contrast would be ends set by an all-powerful supra-individual agent, the theistic God or nature in some neo-Darwinian accounts. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The difference between ends and effects is captured in ‘Matter causes [*wirkt*]. Will acts [*Willkür handelt*]’ (*OP* 21: 226) from the *Opus Postumum*. My interpretation of spontaneity goes against the widely accepted view that spontaneity is a force apart. I think that Kant uses ‘spontaneity’ to engage with the tradition while moving beyond *both* the Aristotelian and Humean conceptions of force or energy. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)