Christopher Insole. ***Kant and the Creation of Freedom***. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xiv + 264 pp.

In this brilliant and stimulating book, Christopher Insole systematically unfolds Kant's struggle with a key metaphysical and theological problem: "how can it be said that human beings are free, give that they are created by God?" (1) The author handles a wide range of Kant's text from 1749 to the early 1800's with ease. Along with scholars such as Karl Ameriks, Insole argues that Kant's metaphysical and rationalist commitments continued throughout his critical period. Building on these insights, he examines the ways in which Kant's movement from pre-critical rationalism to his Copernican revolution influenced the development of his thought on how our creaturely and dependent status impacts the possibility of human freedom. Chapters two through seven are devoted to showing that the critical Kant still held that there are noumenal substances and that these were created by God. Chapters eight through ten are devoted to exploring more technical issues in Kant's solution to the problem.

The book begins with an exploration of the nature of divine freedom in Kant's thought. Two ideas take center stage here: first, Kant understands divine freedom in terms of independence from outside determining causes; second, this independence does not imply the capacity to do otherwise, which in no way characterizes Kant's characterization of divine freedom. Freedom, rather, means that "the will is oriented towards the good" (Chapter two). But how does such a necessary orientation to the good constitutive of freedom not imply a necessitation and dependence upon an outside force? How can the divine sovereignty be preserved if the divine will is ***necessarily*** oriented to the good? This is the subject of the third chapter, where this issue is analyzed in relation to God's creative activity, especially in regard to the question of whether God is constrained to create in particular ways. Insole points to Kant's understanding of God as the ground of all possibility: nothing is even possible, let alone actual, outside of God's founding activity. Reason, goodness, and rationality do not constrain God from without but are grounded in and by the divine nature itself, so that they are "internal factors shaping the divine will." While this is certainly an anti-voluntaristic understanding of God, here we do not have a privileging of the divine understanding over the divine will; rather, God as ground of all possibility transcends the bifurcation between reason and

will, and stands at the foundation of both. Goodness and rationality are as such internal to the very possibility of the creation of a world and do not bind God from without.

Chapter four explores why the freedom to do otherwise became important to Kant's conception of human freedom, and the metaphysical problem such a conception posed to rationalist commitments. After all, Kant's account of human freedom in the 1750's did not include such a capacity. At that point, Kant was quite content to hold that human freedom was fully compatible with God as creator and sustainer, and he did not believe that humans must be ***ultimately*** responsible for their actions: their creation, preservation, and their character all rested in God's activity. Insole traces how by the late 1760's and 70's Kant developed his understanding of transcendental freedom; here the idea that the human being must be ultimately responsible for his or her actions if she is to have moral accountability achieves prominence. Freedom, moreover, implies leeway indeterminism, that is, the capacity to do otherwise, and this means, furthermore, the capacity to chose other than the good. One of the key issues that Kant wrestles with here is how this kind of freedom (the capacity of the free ***Willkür***) can be possible if our existence is derived from another. Kant's rationalist commitments implied two important roadblocks to such an understanding of freedom. First, an existing being must be fully determinate, and its actions must be grounded in its determinate character. Second, since this character is that of a creaturely and dependent being, it is ultimately grounded in God. In his ***Nova Delucidato*** of 1755 Kant had argued that "…without an antecedently determining ground, there can be no determination of a being, which is conceived as having come into being; and hence, there can be no existence (***NE*** 1:397). This would seem to contradict the possibility of the freedom of the ***Willkür,*** which precludes predetermination through grounds. Despite these obstacles, Kant became convinced that morality required ultimate responsibility for action; hence the human being must be able to initiate a series of causes through a "self-activity from an ***inner principle***" (***ML1*** 28:267). How such self-activity could be possible in a created being, was however, something that Kant held "is not to be comprehended at all" (***R*** 4221; 17: 462). Insole argues that the ultimate responsibility requirement, as well as its consequence, the freedom of the ***Willkür,*** both implied an understanding of God as a cause that was alien and external to the creature; as such, God's power stood in competition with that of the

creature. The possibility of the freedom of the ***Willkür*** became one of the central issues driving Kant's critical turn.

Chapter five explores how Kant understood transcendental idealism as a guaranteeing the possibility of human freedom; we have knowledge only of phenomena, and causal determinism applies only to this sphere. This leaves open the possibility that we might be noumenally free, even though we cannot understand how noumenal freedom can even be possible. Insole convincingly shows that the critical Kant held that we are noumenal substances created by God; he cites Kant's second ***Critique*** where Kant notes that "God as universal original being ***is the cause of the existence of substances"*** (CPrR. 5:100). Of course, in thinking of ourselves as noumenal substances we are not applying the phenomenal category of substance to ourselves, but we are, rather, employing the unschematized category of substance. Noumenal substances ground all phenomenal appearances, and they do so in such a way that "each stage of the temporal empirical sequence depends equally and constantly on our intelligible (noumenal) action" (110). Along with Ameriks and Wuerth, Insole argues that there is a good deal of continuity between the pre-critical and critical Kant on the notion of substance: even for the critical Kant, substances are simple and self-identical. Kant differs from the rationalists mainly in the justifications used to arrive at these conceptions of substance, and the way in which the rationalists had put these conceptions to use. Moreover, while transcendental idealism opens up the possibility of that we are transcendentally free noumenal substances, a possibility that we can then assume as actual on practical (not theoretical) grounds, transcendental idealism stresses the epistemic limits of our cognition. We cannot cognize noumenal substances, and we have no understanding of how such substances and their transcendental freedom are even possible. Nevertheless, the needs of practical reason lead us to assume that we are indeed such substances, and that as transcendentally free agents who can begin a series of causes ***'von selbst,'*** we are noumenal first causes. Insole explores the coherence of such an understanding in the sixth chapter. Given that noumenal first causation is atemporal, how can it track the moral life? If a moral decision is made atemporally, grounding all phenomenal human behaviors, then how can we make sense of moral conversion or even of moral striving? Insole notes that notwithstanding these difficulties, the idea sits

"comfortably with Kant's wider account of noumenal substances (things in themselves) with causal and modal properties that are in principle unknowable to us." More importantly, practical reason "finds that it cannot do without the belief… in order to sustain morality" (126). Nevertheless, Insole points to a yet more important difficulty to the intelligibility of the notion: how can we make sense of the noumenal self's choice of evil? The problem becomes even more acute given that Kant had repeatedly argued that were humans not to have any sensuous impulses, they would always follow the moral law. Since, insofar as we are noumenal beings, we cannot speak of sensuous affections, this would seem to imply that noumenal subjects should always follow the moral law. As Insole puts it, "how would the noumenal self choose the principle of self-love over the principle of the moral law, given that they are in a state of freedom, and not under pressure from sensuous impulses or other external influences?" (130). Insole notes Kant's admission that evil is inscrutable, and that he is in good company with the best theologians. That the critical Kant did indeed continue to believe in God is the subject of the seventh chapter. Belief for Kant is not merely ***as if*** belief, but rather, morality requires belief in God's ***actual*** existence.

These considerations, namely Kant's continued affirmation of noumenal substances and their creation by God, set up the problems Insole handles in chapters eight through ten. How can God create free beings? What exactly is the relation of free human agency to God's omnipotence? These issues are explored from a theological and metaphysical perspective, in particular in relation to three possible positions regarding the relation of God's causality to the causality of created substances: these are occasionalism, mere conservation, and concurrentism. According to occasionalism, substances do not interact because they have no genuine power of their own; they only ***seem*** to interact. It is God who acts in them, God who "is the sole cause of all the effects in nature, with created natural substances making no causal contribution" (195). For example, the heat of the flame does not warm the room, God does so, on the occasion of the flame. This was the position of Malebranch, who argued this position followed from the idea that when God creates, he creates a fully determinate being, including both its intrinsic and relational properties. If, however, substances have no power of their own, producing no real effects, it is hard to understand what it means for them to have their own existence,

and not be reduced to mere emanations of the creator. For this reason, occasionalism was taken to be an extreme, and was often rejected by the medieval theologians. Two alteratives to occasionalism are concurrentism and mere conservation. Both positions aim to preserve a genuine causal space for the creature. According to mere conservation, God both creates and preserves substances, but substances, once given their ***esse*** by God, can themselves be considered the origin of their effects. Concurrentism attempts to steer a position between these two extremes by affirming that God is both the creator and preserver of substances ***and*** their effects, without, however, vitiating the causality of the substance itself. For the concurrentist, everything in nature, including all effects and actions of creatures, "directly and constantly depend upon divine action" (198). While most medieval theologians argued for concurrentism, careful analysis reveals significant difficulties in the coherence of the position, in particular when the "no splitting" requirement is taken into serious consideration. While this fact is noted in passing by Insole, he does not discuss these difficulties in significant enough detail. He is, instead, sympathetic to the position that the grammar of faith requires concurrentism.

After having traced the nature of these three positions, Insole explores Kant's position in relation to them. Kant is clearly not an occasionalist; Insole quotes Kant's claim that "if one assumes occasionalism…everything that is natural is entirely lost" (196). Given the critical Kant's commitment to transcendental freedom, the position most congenial to his aims would seem to be mere conservationism. God creates and sustains, but it is not God who acts in the creatures' acting. Insole puts a great deal of emphasis on Kant's affirmation in ***R*** 6057 that "space is nothing in itself and is not a thing as a divine work, but rather lies in us and can obtain only in us." From this he concludes that Kant is a mere conservationist: insofar as space and time are forms of intuition, they are not ***immediately*** produced by God. God creates and sustains the substances, but he is only the mediate or indirect cause of their effects, not directly imparting his own ***esse*** to their operations. However, it is not clear that this passage is fit to do all the work that Insole expects of it. Perhaps Kant here means only that space and time are not ***things,*** but are rather mere forms of intution and as such cannot be considered things as a divine work.

On the whole book does an excellent job of tracing the intricacies of Kant's views regarding the relation of divine power to human action. Kant denies that concurrentism

is true of natural substances, but this is because they are ***already*** fully determined by God, and as such cannot coherently be said to concur in God's actions. Kant's reasoning here stands fully in line with the Leibnizian tradition: were such concurrence to occur in the case of fully determined beings, either we must think of God's initial grounding of creatures as not sufficient to determine them fully, or we must think of God's causality as continuously interfering with itself. Such interference, however, does not occur in the case of free beings, for insofar as they are free, they are not fully determined by God, and as such they can "concur" with God's actions. Kant notes: "in respect of nature God is the sole cause, in respect or freedom, he concurs" (***R*** 4748, 17:696). Nevertheless, Insole argues that Kant's view of concurrentism is not fully orthodox. Kant thinks of concurrentism as a cooperation between divine and human efforts, so that each plays a necessary part, but only together are they jointly sufficient for the production of an effect. Problematic for orthodoxy is that this way of thinking of concurrentism splits the effect, so that while the human contribution may not, alone, suffice for the production of the effect, it must yet be considered wholly the work of freedom, and the individual is wholly responsible for it. On this score, Insole concludes, Kant is Pelagian and not in line with orthodox demands, which would require that ***no action of a creature,*** and no ***part*** of an action of a creature, be considered as fully its own.

Yet Insole is also sensitive to the subtleties of Kant's position: the verdict of Pelagianism is just too simplistic. He notes that notwithstanding all his misgivings into the traditional conception of concursus, Kant is willing to allow its possibility even in its more orthodox form, although we have no insight into it. He quotes the ***Religion*** where Kant writes of the possibility of divine grace as concurring with human actions: "Yet its impossibility (that the two may not occur side by side) cannot be proven either, since freedom itself, though not containing anything supernatural in its concept, remains just as incomprehensive to us according to its possibility" (***Religion,*** 6:191). We just have no insight into the possibility or impossibility of God's grace concurring with human actions. The possibility is as mysterious to us as the possibility of human freedom, which is inscrutable. And because we have no insight into the nature and possibility of human freedom, it may very well be the case that divine and human actions concur in such a way that we may consider our "own deed at the same time also as an effect of a higher being"

(***MPT*** 263-64). The real threat to freedom does not come from God, who for all we know works in and through the freedom of the creature, but from the external world, whose operation on the creature is mechanistic and impinges on it from the outside. Kant's transcendental idealism implied that while determinism may indeed hold on the phenomenal plane, we are noumenally free agents, and this freedom is, first and foremost the transcendental freedom of substances in relation to the world. While Kant recognized the difficulty of affirming both the free ***Willkür*** and our created status, our lack of knowledge regarding the real conditions of the possibility of human freedom and of the divine workings on the human soul means that a real concursus between God and the creature cannot be ruled out.

For its clarity of exposition and its clear identification of the problems that need to be addressed, as well as it familiarity with both the primary and secondary literature on the topic, Insole's book is invaluable. More, it seems, could have been said regarding Kant's understanding of what ***practical reason*** demands concerning our understanding of grace. Nevertheless, in regard to the metaphysical and theological problems the book does address, it is on the cutting edge of topics in Kant studies that have been neglected for too long. Its depth, breath and perspicacity make it a must read for anyone interested in 18th and 19th century philosophy of religion and theology.

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