**Recent Work on Freedom in Kant[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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Bacin, S., & Sensen, O. (Eds.). (2018). *The Emergence of Autonomy in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.

Moran, K. A. (Ed.). (2018). *Kant on freedom and spontaneity*. Cambridge University Press.

Watkins, E. (Ed.). (2017). *Kant on Persons and Agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Freedom lies at the heart of Kant’s philosophy. Three recent edited collections (all published by Cambridge University Press) explore this key idea in different ways, alongside other related concepts such as spontaneity, autonomy, agency and personhood. These concepts play important roles throughout Kant’s system of thought, and the collections reflect this breadth. For instance, spontaneity is an important part of Kant’s theoretical philosophy, where cognition involves some form of free activity. Freedom is also a crucial part of Kant’s practical philosophy, in that it is both what makes us moral agents capable of acting for the sake of the moral law, but also what gives us our distinctive moral status as ends in ourselves. This in turn is tightly related to autonomy, as we give the moral law to ourselves. And both freedom and autonomy play a foundational element in Kant’s political philosophy.

In what follows, I briefly summarise each of the collections. After doing so, I offer some general remarks about the state of the literature. In reading these collections, I came to think that scholarship on freedom in Kant is in a good place. We now have a serious, sympathetic and fairly comprehensive understanding of Kant’s views on freedom (amongst other things). My only concern is that this charity and sympathetic understanding is generally not extended to objections to Kant, which leaves the literature a little one-sided.

Let us begin with Kate Moran’s (2018) collection on *Freedom and Spontaneity*. I begin here, as this is perhaps the broadest of the three collections, exploring different ideas of freedom in Kant’s theoretical, practical and political philosophy. It is an original and rewarding collection, with chapters that display high levels of scholarship, but also offer some bold and interesting new avenues for work on freedom in Kant. The collection stems from a 2013 conference in honour of Paul Guyer. Its contributors include a good mix of early career and established philosophers, former students of Guyer, notable Kant scholars, and Guyer himself. The book is split into four main sections, covering: 1) Spontaneity, 2) Value and Freedom, 3) Autonomy, and 4) Kant’s Political Philosophy.

In her helpful introduction, Moran characterises spontaneity as “action of the mind or will that is not determined by a prior external stimulus” (2018: 1). The first section of the book looks at this activity in different aspects of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. The chapters do not always explicitly address Kant’s concept of spontaneity *per se*, but they do consider ways in which our cognition actively synthesizes, and our judgement is free. Rolf-Peter Horstmann begins the section with a dense and thoughtful discussion of the relationship between the understanding and the imagination. He argues that the imagination plays a different role than the understanding, in that it *apprehends*, transforming mere sensations into perceptions. In the second chapter, Brian Chance provides a compelling account of Kant’s departure from Wolff’s view of the understanding, and its significance for the critical project. In chapter 3, Michael Rohlf puts forward an interesting and original analysis of §26 of the B-deduction, arguing that in this section we can find independent support for transcendental idealism, and in particular, an argument that our representations of space and time are singular. Chapter 4 is an excellent discussion of taste by Jennifer Dole. Dole proposes her own candidate for the a priori principle of judgement of taste in Kant, namely that is our shared cognitive nature, and makes a convincing case for this over rival views.

The second section of the book turns to freedom in Kant’s practical philosophy, and its relationship to value. In chapter 5, Patricia Kitcher considers freedom, the formula of humanity and the highest good, with an intriguing discussion of how we can recognise others’ freedom (95-6). She offers her own suggestion of how this is possible on Kant’s account (99-100), where we automatically respect other rational beings, in a similar way to which we automatically respect the moral law. Thorpe takes up similar issues in chapter 6, exploring our capacity to recognise the humanity of others. This is an impressive, original, inter-disciplinary discussion. Thorpe draws upon developmental psychology to argue that our capacity to engage in joint co-operative activities is the most promising way to think about how we can recognise morally relevant others.

I agree with both Kitcher and Thorpe’s accounts of how we recognise others. But I was unsure whether we can accommodate these accounts into Kant’s own framework. After all, Kant is very careful about what respect for the moral law is. It is one unique peculiar feeling, and not any sort of *intuition*.[[2]](#footnote-2) One question for Kitcher is then: What exactly is our ability to automatically respect other rational beings? Is this also a feeling? My worry is it looks like some sort of *intuition* of others’ noumenal natures, something that is not going to be easy to reconcile with the epistemic limits of transcendental idealism. And a related question for Thorpe is: How are the kinds of *natural* practices he discusses capable of revealing information about the *noumenal* status of others?

In chapter 9, Julian Wuerth offers a convincing critique of various constructivist accounts of Kant’s meta-ethics, and argues that Korsgaard makes a similar mistake to the one Prichard warned of, namely providing non-moral reasons to be moral. Frederick Rauscher continues on this theme in chapter 10, arguing against Guyer’s emphasis on Kant’s claim that freedom is the inner value of the world. In general, Rauscher attempts to argue against value realism in Kant. He ends by offering a suggestion as to how to overcome the *arbitrariness* objection associated with anti-realism. The arbitrariness objection is that, if humanity and freedom are not independently valuable, why does practical reason have to assign value to them? Couldn’t practical reason equally assign value to something else? Rauscher’s suggestion is that “there is a ground for practical reason to assign value to humanity because in doing so practical reason is assigning value to its own free exercise. Reason valuing itself should be no surprise” (166). Rauscher might be right that reason values itself, but it is not clear this solves the arbitrariness issue. Let’s say that God values their own divine nature. This does not overcome Euthyphro style arbitrariness worries. For the question still remains as to whether God is right to value their own nature in this way, and this seems hard to answer positively unless that nature has an independent value, that explains their valuing of it – if it does not, this valuing looks groundless and arbitrary. The fact that it is not surprising that God values themself does not address this. After all, all sorts of things might value themselves, but that does not make them thereby valuable; Donald Trump thinks he is an excellent thinker, but he is not!

The third section of the book turns from freedom and value to Kant’s conception of autonomy. Karl Ameriks begins with an illuminating discussion of the German verb *bestimmen* (usually translated in English as ‘determine’), and the different sense of *selbstbestimmung* (or self-determination) in Kant. In doing so, he looks to steer a middle course between understanding autonomy in Kant as either too subjective or too law-like.

Chapter 10 is Kate Moran’s excellent discussion of inclination, need and moral misery. Moran explores Kant’s notorious claim that “the inclinations themselves, as sources of need, are so far from having absolute worth – so as to make one wish for them as such – that to be entirely free from them must rather be the universal wish of every rational being” (IV: 428. 14-17). Too often, the temptation is to ignore – or explain away – such passages, where Kant clearly states something that does not chime with our contemporary sensibilities. But Moran takes Kant’s claim seriously, and attempts to defend it, arguing that he is primarily worried about inclinations *as a source of need*, rather than inclinations themselves. Inclinations as a source of need are troublesome, Moran argues, because they hinder our pursuit of independence. I found this one of the best treatments of this issue I have read. And given this, it invites further discussion. For one, we are humans, we are not independent, we’re vulnerable dependent beings. A general worry with Kant is that he sees this as a hindrance rather than an acknowledgement of our real nature. And after all, what is wrong with having needs, being vulnerable, and depending on others?

In chapter 10, Barbara Herman provides a thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion of religion and the highest good in Kant. One minor complaint concerns her discussion of Kant’s notorious claim that reason is timeless. Herman offers a deflationary account of this claim, arguing that: “In a sense, every course of reason is timeless (e.g. a contradiction is timelessly invalid). A course of reasoning may be manifest at a time, realized or recognised in time, but its correctness is not a function of any act of reasoning” (221-22). This is true, but it doesn’t seem to really address Kant’s claim. After all, this is not the sense of timelessness that he is talking about; Kant is clear that things-in-themselves are not in time (A32-6/B49-53, A539/B567), and that transcendental freedom is not in time either (A539/B567, and R6343). The contrast with Moran’s chapter is worth noting. Kant’s philosophy contains a variety of strange, intriguing and puzzling claims, and I think these are worth taking head on, rather than side-stepping.

The fourth section of the book concerns Kant’s political philosophy. Here, Allen Wood looks to reframe the separation between Kant’s ethics and right. In doing so, he departs from Guyer, in thinking that the theory of right “is based solely on the formal consistency of external freedom according to universal law” (249), which Wood sees as “wholly independent of ethics” (249). In chapter 13, Michael Nance and Jeppe Von Platz provide a convincing discussion of some of the differences between Kant and Rawls, including a helpful account of the ways in which Kant’s Doctrine of Right involves non-contractualist normative commitments.

Finally, Paul Guyer offers a postscript on nature and freedom in Kant’s practical philosophy. This a rich chapter, and Guyer makes the case that there is always a gulf between nature and freedom for Kant, but not an unbridgeable one. He provides ample support for this, detailing various ways in which nature and freedom do interact throughout Kant’s practical philosophy. This is well-researched and informative, as expected. However, I wonder whether Guyer makes things too easy for Kant. For instance, he claims that the problem of noumenal causation is *easily* solved by the introduction of the concept of grounding (279). The basic thought is that, if we conceive of transcendentally free actions as *grounding* actions in the phenomenal world rather than *causing* them, then noumenal causation (or grounding) is no longer problematic. While this resolves some obvious worries that the very idea of noumenal causation might be a non-starter, it is not an easy fix.[[3]](#footnote-3) For one, it only goes one way. Guyer wants to talk of nature and freedom interacting, and while this provides a way for freedom to affect nature, it does not provide a way for our actions in the natural world to affect our noumenal freedom.

*Kant on Persons and Agency* (2018) edited by Eric Watkins, also stems from a conference in honour of an eminent Kant scholar, this time a conference for Karl Ameriks in 2016. The book is loosely divided into three related sections, on: 1) Autonomy, 2) Freedom, and 3) Persons. How are these related? In rough terms, Kant holds that we are free such that we can give the moral law to ourselves, and this autonomy is what is distinctive about our personhood. Structuring the book around these three concetsp gives it a slightly narrower focus than Moran’s collection, as it mostly leaves aside issues of spontaneity in our theoretical cognition and freedom in Kant’s political philosophy. And like the previous collection, the book delivers on its promise, providing some excellent work on these key Kantian topics.

Unlike the previous collection, this book features only very established academics. Every contributor is a professor, and a well-known name. Of course, this is not altogether a bad thing. These are all interesting thinkers, who have made significant contributions to our understanding of Kant.[[4]](#footnote-4) But the downside of this is that we do not hear from emerging thinkers in this area.[[5]](#footnote-5) Leaving this minor complaint aside though, this is a very good collection.

Eric Watkins begins the volume with a defence of Kant’s claims about the unconditioned goodness of the good will in the opening of the *Groundwork*. Watkins offers a sophisticated defence of the claim that the good will is good without limitation and an unconditioned good. I found this thought-provoking, and wanted to hear more. Kant also claims that it’s impossible to think of anything but the good will as good without limitation, which seems less convincing, and it would be interesting to hear Watkins say more about this.

Allen Wood offers a new reading and defence of the formula of universal law (and the formula of the law of nature). He argues that both defenders and critics of Kant have read too much into what Kant intended these formulas for. Wood makes the case that they are not universal criteria for the permissibility of maxims, universal procedures for the construction of moral truths, or general criteria of right action. Instead, they serve a less ambitious role, namely they help an agent, when they are tempted to violate a specific duty, figure out whether they are making an exception for themselves. This reading is original, and has some textual support. With it, Wood also hopes to circumvent the usual false negatives/positives worries with these principles (he gives an excellent overview of the dialectic of this in §4 of the paper). But this reading comes at a cost. After all, it relegates FUL and FLN to relatively minor roles. Kant doesn’t introduce the FUL with modesty though (see for instance, IV: 403. 18-22, and IV: 421: 6-10). Wood’s reading looks to make the FUL and FLN more defensible, but risks departing from what Kant himself thought.[[6]](#footnote-6) For instance, Wood writes that: “it is a background assumption in the four examples [in the *Groundwork*] that there might well be cases in which exceptions to, or exemptions from, specific duties are justified. Kant should not be seen as denying this obvious point just because this is not the outcome in the four examples he discusses” (39). Of course, allowing for exceptions to specific duties is plausible, but it is not clear that we can just easily attribute this plausible view to Kant. This is not due to a lack of charity, but stems from taking seriously things that Kant says that count against this; see, for instance, IV: 421n where Kant says that perfect duties admit of no exception.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This raises a general thought about the chapters in these collections. They are typically very favourable to Kant, going to lengths to find some way to defend some seemingly implausible thing that Kant said. Obviously, there’s merit to this approach: it leads to a charitable, sympathetic and sophisticated understanding of Kant’s views. But it can also lead to people sidestepping some of the views Kant actually held. In addition, you can have too much of a good thing. So far, we have seen a lot of this charitable work, and the field is beginning to look a little one-sided. After all, there are plenty of good objections to Kant, and they are typically not treated with the same sympathy or sophistication.

On this note, in chapter 3, Stephen Engstrom attempts to overcome the empty formalism objection and the arbitrariness charge to Kant’s meta-ethics. As always, Engstrom’s familiar blend of Kant, Aristotle, and Anscombe is intriguing, but he does not really deal with the empty-formalism objection, or contemporary challenges to constructivism. This is a bit of a shame. Engstrom is a serious thinker, and it would be good to see what made of these challenges.

In chapter 4, Pauline Kleingeld provides an interesting discussion of how Kant’s views on autonomy and consent changed in his political theory, and how this accounts for the fact that Kant doesn’t discuss the Principle of Autonomy much in his moral theory after the *Groundwork* and second *Critique*. This involves a key change in the 1790s, where Kant “drops the thesis that it *suffices* that the people *could* agree to a law and now adds […] that the citizens also *do* agree to it” (73). I found this interesting, and wanted to hear more. Does Kleingeld think that Kant had this wrong before the 1790s, and does that change how we should treat his views up until then?

Lucy Allais begins the section on freedom with an original and compelling reconstruction of Kant’s claims about our propensity to radical evil. I found this much more convincing than many of the things that Kant himself says about radical evil. After all, Kant says some deeply puzzling things about evil, which Allais lists early on. Allais goes on to give an original account of how we might have a propensity to evil that draws upon some Kantian resources.

In chapter 6, Willaschek defends Kant’s claim that freedom is a postulate. As usual, his work is thorough, impressively clear, and he makes a strong textual case. However, I found it a little bit one-sided. What are the potential downsides of viewing freedom as a postulate? For instance, Willaschek plays down Kant’s claims about the reality of freedom: “he does not mean to say that we are *really* or *actually* free” (115), and ends by claiming that we should understand freedom as practically necessary instead (118). Of course, this is a familiar move. But it comes with downsides. For one, if freedom is just a practical postulate, how can it have any causal efficacy in the world of experience?

In general, I worry that this is a weakness of work in this area. The Kantian system is full of intriguing and complicated tensions and puzzles. When presented with a puzzle, a familiar move is to note that the issue is *theoretically* unknowable, or unprovable, but *practically* necessary or important. This is an interesting and distinctively Kantian move. But it shouldn’t be the end of our investigations. What are the downsides of giving up on the theoretical here? Do we lose certain knowledge, or the possibility of practical ideas having real impact in the world of experience? These are not new questions.[[8]](#footnote-8) This is a collection dedicated to Ameriks, who posed similar questions to Allison’s practical reading of Kant’s theory of freedom back in 2003 (215-6), but these issues are not really addressed or developed in these collections.

In chapter 7, Guyer offers a defence of Kant and the freedom to choose against Reinhold, arguing that in his mature works, Kant always had some sort of distinction (even if implicit) between *Wille* and *Willkür*, which allows for the possibility of freely chosen immoral action. Again, this is thorough and well-researched, but also perhaps a little one-sided.

Dieter Sturma offers a reading of Kant, where the critical philosophy is determined by the realm of causes on one hand, and the space of moral reasons on the other. He also suggests that self-consciousness allows us to reconcile or combine these two spaces: “persons […] are capable of formulating maxims in accordance with the moral law in the realm of causes using the space of reasons as well as of reconstructing the nomologies of the realm of causes in the space of reasons. All this is revealed to those who spend enough time looking self-consciously and thoughtfully to the heavens.” (152) This is evocative stuff, but it leaves questions unanswered: How do these two realms interact? And, once again, how is this interaction possible given transcendental idealism?

Béatrice Longuenesse begins the section on persons, by considering whether Kant himself commits a paralogism, when he infers that I am transcendentally free, from the fact that I ought to do something. I found this to be a particularly original and thoughtful chapter. In the end, Longuenesse thinks that Kant should refrain from claiming that we know ourselves to be transcendentally free (168). She suggests that this is okay, because we think of free will as “a structure of the will endorsed from a first-person standpoint rather than a transcendental power” (173). Again however, it is not clear how this has efficacy in the world of experience. Longuenesse also views freedom as first-personal, which raises issues of how we have knowledge of others’ freedom?

In chapter 10, Barbara Hermann looks to find a place for animals in Kant’s ethics. In doing so, she maintains that our duties to animals are duties to ourselves, but argues that we should not be bothered by this (188). She provides a thoughtful and sophisticated attempt to make this workable, but I wonder why we should proceed down this path in the first place. Why not just think animals are intrinsically valuable? Herman dismisses this option early on (178), but without much discussion.

Robert Pippin offers a discussion of the dynamism of reason in Kant and Hegel. A key thought that emerges, again, concerns practical necessity. Pippin discusses the importance of cases that are unknowable but indubitable (203). Once more, this is an interesting Kantian move, but the potential downsides of it are not discussed. Stern (2015: 221) and Strawson (2010: 64) have made convincing arguments that the mere fact that I cannot doubt something does not *justify* my belief in it – at best, it provides an excuse for my belief. Now maybe they are mistaken, and it would have been interesting to read what Pippin has to say in response.

Finally, the collection ends with a chapter by Ameriks on Kant’s essay, ‘The End of All Things’. Ameriks offers a thoughtful treatment of Kant’s discussion of immortality, and noumenal duration.

Both this collection and the previous one read as something like *festschriften*. They sprung out of conferences in honour of Guyer and Ameriks, and the chapters do loosely relate to their work, interests, and the contributors also bear some relation to them. But it seems like publishers shy away from *festschriften* nowadays, so instead these books are both presented as – and perhaps editorially steered towards being – just general collections on freedom in Kant. Of course, that has its benefits, in that it makes the collections less narrow. But it does also miss something. After all, it is interesting to think about how Guyer and Ameriks have shaped the field, how they have influenced others, whether their students have now come to disagree with them, and so on. It would also be good to give Guyer and Ameriks venues to reflect upon what they have learned from decades of working on Kant, rather than just producing another chapter for a volume (this is not to say anything against the chapters they’ve produced, it would be just be good to give them the opportunity to offer something a little different).

Overall though, this is a very good collection. It contains some excellent chapters, which will be essential for people working on freedom, autonomy and persons in Kant.

The final collection, *The Emergence of Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (2019) edited by Stefano Bacin and Oliver Sensen, is not based on a conference to honour a Kant scholar, but instead stems from an autonomy reading group put together by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann. The chapters are chronological, and concern the emergence and development of the thought that the moral law is self-legistlated in Kant’s moral philosophy. As such, this volume is more tightly structured and textually focussed than the other two. And it will be absolutely invaluable for those wanting to trace the history of autonomy in Kant’s philosophy.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Only 2 out of the 11 chapters in this collection are written by women. I do not mean to single out just this collection. For one, I am not aware of what happened behind the scenes; edited collections are notoriously difficult to put together, and perhaps people declined invitations, or pulled out at the last minute. But all three of the collections here could do a bit better on diversity; out of the 37 chapters of the 3 collections, only 10 are written by women, and there is a lot of excellent work done by women on agency, freedom and autonomy in Kant.

The collection begins with Heiner Klemme providing some historical context for Kant’s discussion of autonomy. It then moves to Susan Meld Shell, who offers interesting and scholarly account of anticipations of autonomy in Kant’s writing in the 1750s and 60s.

In chapter 3, Stefano Bacin discusses Kant’s criticisms of rationalist moral principles (from 1762-1785). Bacin provides a thoughtful and excellent exploration of Kant’s different criticisms of these views, before they all get lumped together under the general heading of heteronomy. In chapter 4, Georg Mohr offers a well written account of autonomy and Kant’s criticism of moral empiricism between 1762 and 1785. This includes a helpful breakdown of Kant’s claims about feeling, sensibility and moral motivation (on pp. 78-9).

Sensen provides an informative and scholarly chapter on autonomy in Kant’s lectures on Ethics between 1770 and 1780. This chapter also involves some good critical engagement with points raised by Marcus Willaschek. Jens Timmermann’s offers a typically thoughtful and well-researched chapter on the emergence of autonomy in Kant’s thought, and the inadequacies of the Canon of *Critique of Pure Reason*. In chapter 7, Eric Watkins looks at parallels between the theoretical legislation of laws of nature in the *Prolegomena* (1783), and Kant’s account of autonomy in the *Groundwork*, and provides a helpful discussion of the points of comparison and contrast between these two works.

Marcus Willaschek offers an excellent discussion of Kant’s claim that freedom is a law to itself in the introduction to his Naturrecht Feyerabend Lecture Notes (1784). I found this chapter especially clear, and full of substantial engagement with Kant’s claims.

Pauline Kleingeld also addresses the Feyerabend lectures, providing an account of moral autonomy as political analogy in these lectures and the *Groundwork*. In doing so, she argues, we end up with an understanding of Kant’s conception of autonomy that overcomes the charge of voluntarism.

In chapter 10, Andrews Reath lays out Kant’s account of autonomy and heteronomy in the *Groundwork* and second *Critique*. In doing so, he defends the claim that only a self-imposed law could obligate us unconditionally. And, in the final chapter of the collection, Pierre Keller discusses autonomy after the *Groundwork*, arguing that Kant’s work in the 1780s and 90s provides “an integrated account of us as human beings and as persons who are also sensible beings embedded in the sensible world” (196).

A key theme that emerges from the collection is the familiar Kantian thought that only a self-imposed law could be unconditionally binding. This is powerful idea, and the collection traces the development of it (and surrounding views) in an impressive way, but the idea itself does not receive much scrutiny. This brings me to some general remarks on the state of Kant scholarship.

Almost all of the chapters in these collections are sympathetic to Kant. And this is no bad thing. It shows a commitment to charitable interpretation, and leads to a rich understanding of Kant’s views. But in reading through all 37 chapters, it began to feel a little one-sided.

In these collections, there is not much engagement with Kant’s contemporaries, successors or critics. There is some mention of Hegel by Pippin and Reinhold by Guyer, but almost no discussion of Fichte or Schelling for instance. This feels like a missed opportunity. After all, these thinkers were also engaging with issues such as freedom, and autonomy, and were keen to preserve or amend, or depart from aspects of Kant’s views. Of course, they all might be wrong, and it turns out that Kant was right about everything, but to really see this, we would need substantial engagement, which also shows sympathy and charity to these figures (and not just to Kant).

It is also slightly curious in that the different authors (and Kantians and Kant-scholars more generally) disagree about what Kant actually thought, so I ended up feeling like I was reading many defences of different Kants. What Kant said or thought is contested, but whether he was right was less contested.

I say this not because Kant scholarship is lacking, but because in many respects, it is in a really good place. Due to thinkers like Ameriks, Guyer, the other contributors here (Allais, Engstrom, Herman, Kleingeld, Reath, Timmermann, Watkins, Willschek, Wood), and some who aren’t (Allison, Cohen, Frierson, Henrich, Korsgaard, O’Neill), we have a sophisticated and sympathetic understanding of Kant’s theory of freedom. Why not start to put this into dialogue with his successors and critics, and treat their concerns in a similar way? This is also slightly puzzling, in that two of these volumes are in honour of Ameriks and Guyer, who were never shy about seriously critically engaging with Kant.

A worry is that Kant scholarship might become a bit too insular, both through lack of engagement with his successors, but also with contemporary philosophy. As one example, perhaps the centerpiece of the Bacin and Sensen volume is Kant’s thought that only a self-imposed law can obligate us unconditionally. It’s an important and substantial claim, and as such it warrants more critical engagement. As far as I can tell, it’s not something that contemporary meta-ethics thinks it obviously true. Of course, maybe contemporary meta-ethicists are mistaken, and Kant is right, but that would take critical engagement and dialogue to establish. And this is a little missing in these collections. For instance, various contributors make claims about the moral law being constitutive of agency, in one way or another, but there is not mention of Enoch’s (2006) shmagency objection to such a view in any of the three collections. Now again, perhaps these objections are mistaken, but that would take dialogue and engagement to establish.

Finally, while these are volumes on Kant and freedom, there is surprisingly little discussion of either transcendental idealism, objections to Kant’s theory of freedom, nor the combination of the two, namely whether transcendental idealism makes it hard for Kant to have a workable account of freedom. As discussed above, the timelessness of freedom gets a small mention (but is quickly dismissed as a problem). The same goes for issue of interaction between the noumenal and the phenomenal; in various chapters, authors point out that in parts of Kant’s practical philosophy, he assumes that our sensible and rational selves interact in important ways, and are integrated. That seems correct, but it doesn’t thereby magically transform transcendental idealism such that it can easily accommodate all of these things. Kant scholars are presumably attuned to how Hume’s philosophy has systematic limitations, which means that he might not be able to help himself to some of the concepts that he wants to deploy (is Hume entitled to talk of reason, the self, choice, and so on?). Kant faces similar questions. His practical philosophy involves all sorts of sophisticated treatment of the ways in which our freedom interacts with the world. The hard question is whether Kant’s theoretical philosophy, and in particular, transcendental idealism, can accommodate this. Again, this seems like a missed opportunity, given that transcendental idealism is one of the more interesting, unique, and remarkable features of Kant’s philosophy, and tightly connected to his conception of freedom.

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1. Thanks to Bob Stern, Jeremy Dunham, Martin Sticker and Mark Sinclair for helpful feedback on drafts of this review. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for instance, V: 31. 25-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For further discussion of this issue, see Hadisi’s (2019) review of this collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It does lead to some duplication, however. For instance, over the 3 collections, the following philosophers write two chapters: Allen Wood, Paul Guyer, Karl Ameriks, Barbara Herman, Eric Watkins, Pauline Kleingeld, and Marcus Willaschek [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Krista Thomason (2019) makes a similar point about this volume: “the collection features no work by junior scholars. The reasons for this are understandable, yet given how many emerging Kantians are working on persons and agency, the volume may have benefited from having new voices in the conversation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marshall (2019: 329) makes a similar point in his review of this collection: “However, that interpretation makes it hard to see why Kant would (in both the Groundwork and the second Critique) claim that FUL is the fundamental law of practical reason. Such a fundamental law would seem meant for more than correcting common mistakes in agents who already understood their general duties.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. To be fair, Kant says that they admit of “no exception to the advantage of inclination”, but it is not clear what that could mean in this case. After all, Kant doesn’t think that perfect duties admit of exception at all: “It does not even matter how morally worthy they are because strict duties set the limits within which other duties produce valid obligations. There are several such strict laws: not to murder, not to torture, not to lie etc. They admit of being unrestricted because, as omissions, they cannot conflict with each other. We may well be tempted to dismiss such unrelenting standards, but there can be no question that the philosopher Immanuel Kant was deeply committed to the idea.” (Timmermann 2018: 382) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Hegel’s discussion of Kantian morality in the *Phenomenology* (§616-19; 374-76). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Formosa’s (2019) praise in his review seems spot on: “This volume has a comprehensiveness and coherence to it that is not always present in edited collections. […] Part of this coherence is no doubt due to the book's resulting from a series of workshops in which the authors first discussed Kant's texts and then preliminary versions of their papers. But it is also surely due to the excellent work of Bacin and Sensen. The book covers all the obvious and important precursors, and some less obvious ones, in a careful and systematic way.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)