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## Concepts of freedom: ethical, epistemological, ontological

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CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM:  
ETHICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, ONTOLOGICAL

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the defense of freedom appeals to moral responsibility: if we are not free, then we have no moral responsibility, but we believe in responsibility, so we must acknowledge that we are free. In this thesis, I show some of the ways that this argument has been attacked, both by showing that we might not be morally responsible and by showing that we might be morally responsible without being free. Then I argue that the defense of freedom needs a broader scope in order to succeed. Arguments from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are used to show that we must be free in order to acquire knowledge and to progress, individually or as a society. Then Heidegger's ontological notion of freedom is explicated in conjunction with the problem of explaining human creativity, which also seems to depend upon a very broad concept of freedom. The defense of freedom is strengthened by this consideration of other human activities, besides the practice of holding others morally responsible for their acts, the explanation of which seems to require a concept of freedom.

## INTRODUCTION

Freedom is an elusive concept. We ordinarily believe that we make hundreds of choices each day—which shoes to wear, which cereal to buy, which book to read—and that all of these decisions could have gone another way. And yet, when we begin to look more closely at freedom itself, considering what it is, how we can have it, and where it comes from, it quickly slips out of view, behind the causal laws that we use to organize our understanding of events and beneath all of the easily identifiable reasons that we have for acting one way rather than another. In philosophy, many writers have despaired over the possibility of reconciling our ordinary concept of freedom with the need for a rigorous, scientific explanation of the events that take place in the world. It is therefore increasingly common to find philosophers who think that freedom is not only an elusive, but also an incoherent and unnecessary concept. I think that this is a very bad trend, and, in the following, I will attempt to defend the importance of retaining the concept of freedom in our philosophical vocabulary, regardless of the difficulties that doing so introduces. My argument is basically against determinism, although it proceeds somewhat indirectly.

The first chapter is a review of several articles from the standpoint of ethics, which, at first glance, seem to have little to do with each other, even though the subject of each concerns the relation between freedom and responsibility. The first two parts address several writers who pose challenges to the possibility of holding people responsible for their acts at all, while in the remaining two parts, I discuss two compatibilists who think that responsibility is possible without a concept of freedom. The point of this review is ultimately not to argue against these philosophers, but to demonstrate the complexity that plagues any effort to defend freedom from an ethical point of view. Although the question of moral responsibility is a serious one, it is something of a moving target as well, which seems to make it easier for freedom's detractors to

find ways around the importance of the issue of freedom, itself, when the issue is approached in this manner. I conclude that this point of view is too narrow, and, that the frame of reference of the defense needs to be broadened.

This is possible, because we depend upon freedom to explain more than moral responsibility—it is also necessary to ground the normative values which structure scientific research, the possibility of progress in human lives and in society, and the creativity which human beings often reveal in their interactions with other types of beings. Thus, the defense of freedom can be strengthened by the development of a concept of freedom which is sufficiently broad to envelop these other roles that freedom plays in our lives.

The other chapters tackle this task of broadening the notion of freedom. I use an interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* to show how freedom is necessary for knowledge and human progress. Then I look to Heidegger's writings on freedom for the even more radical concept of freedom which is needed to account for creativity.

Although the compatibilists may find it relatively easy to explain away freedom insofar as it is connected to moral responsibility, they will face a much more difficult task when they realize that freedom is necessary to ground the very inferences that they make in their arguments, or the creative ways that they bring old concepts to bear on new situations in order to address the issue. In other words, if freedom is necessary to explain the possibility of philosophy itself, then philosophers might find it more difficult to try to eliminate it from their vocabulary.

## CHAPTER ONE: FREEDOM AND ETHICS

The concept of freedom is most often invoked in ethical literature, by those who hold that moral responsibility cannot be imputed to any agent unless she is conceived as free. Freedom, in this context, has both a negative and positive aspect: the agent must be free from causal necessitation of her acts or any sort of coercion; she must also be in control of her acts, since random behavior would not be imputed to the agent. In fact, the first of these two aspects generates so many difficulties on its own that the second is rarely addressed. The apparent conflict between causal determination and moral responsibility stems from the consideration that, if everything that happens, including any human action, is causally determined by events that precede it, then it is difficult to explain why human beings should be held morally responsible for the things they do. To claim that human beings possess freedom is one way to resolve this conflict, but the existence of freedom raises problems of its own—in addition to concern over the source of this freedom and its manner of interacting with the causal chains in which it supposedly interferes, the existence of freedom seems to undermine our ability to explain any events according to causal rules, insofar as those rules lose their universality and applicability to a large range of events in the world. Some writers (the incompatibilists) therefore insist that freedom must be retained, in order to preserve our intuitions about moral responsibility; others (the compatibilists) strive to develop an explanation of responsibility which is consistent with causal determinism, so that the concept of freedom and all of its attendant problems can be done without. In this chapter, I will examine a number of arguments pertinent to this debate, not in hopes of resolving it, but in an effort to show that the assumptions which are necessary to make the inference from moral responsibility to freedom have become very difficult to defend, and that defenders of freedom, like myself, would do well to seek another strategy altogether. These

arguments do not conclusively prove that freedom is impossible, but they do indicate that our notions about moral responsibility have become very confused.

The relationship between freedom and moral responsibility is usually thought to depend upon the inference in the following argument, which, for convenience, we can call the ‘argument from responsibility’:

- (1) If human actions are determined by natural causes, then human beings are not morally responsible for their acts.
- (2) Human beings are morally responsible for their acts.
- (3) Thus, human actions cannot be determined by natural causes; that is, there must be some sort of freedom in human actions.

Each of the two premises has come under scrutiny. The compatibilists, who tend to resist the metaphysical complications that go with any theory of freedom, challenge the first premise and argue that there is no conflict between determinism and moral responsibility. We will consider two different arguments in this genre, those developed by Harry Frankfurt and Peter Strawson. The second premise is questioned by Thomas Nagel and Friedrich Nietzsche in somewhat similar ways. Nagel expands on a thesis put forward by Bernard Williams—that the responsibility of even a free agent is eroded by the role of “moral luck” in various ways, which reveal paradoxes within our concept of responsibility. Nietzsche launches a more complex argument that targets both the concept of free will and that of moral responsibility—he says that people develop these concepts, in order to project the cause of their bad feelings outside of themselves, thereby *avoiding* taking responsibility for themselves, while attributing responsibility to other people. Strawson’s argument, we shall see, cannot withstand Nietzsche’s criticisms, but the others are more difficult to disregard. We will start with Williams, Nagel and Nietzsche, then turn to the compatibilists.



## 1.1 Moral Luck

Thomas Nagel, as I said, takes issue with the second premise in the argument from responsibility, that is, that human beings are morally responsible for their acts. He shows that our intuitions about responsibility become paradoxical when we reflect upon them. His article, “Moral Luck”, is a response to and expansion of a theme introduced by Bernard Williams, in another article with the same title. We can glance at the Williams article first, then go on to Nagel’s arguments.

Williams begins by noting that morality is supposed to provide us with the means by which we can protect our lives from the vicissitudes of good and bad luck—if we behave morally, in other words, then, no matter what happens, we should not have to regret what *we did*, even though we might deplore what ultimately *happened*. If you urge your parents to leave the city that is supposed to be hit by a hurricane (New Orleans), but the hurricane veers and hits the place to which they evacuated (Baton Rouge), and they die as a result, you would be unhappy about what actually happened, but you wouldn’t blame yourself—you did the right thing given the information that you had at the time. Williams examines a number of cases where regret is still possible after doing what seemed right at the time—where someone behaves in the way that he thinks is best, but the course of future events can determine whether or not he continues to approve of or to regret his own acts. If Gauguin had failed to produce great art in the South Pacific, his abandonment of his children would seem worse than it does under the actual circumstances. Yet, Williams says, if this can happen, then the importance of morality in our lives seems to be diminished—moral behavior cannot in fact give us immunity to luck (Williams, 20-39). Nagel’s response to this article more clearly reveals the connection of this problem with the issue of freedom.

Nagel enumerates four ways in which moral luck might compromise the responsibility of an agent for her acts. In each of these, either good or bad luck can affect the resultant moral judgment. First, the issue which primarily concerned Williams is a problem—the results of an action might color the judgment that is passed upon it retrospectively. Second, agents aren't thought to control the “inclinations, capacities, and temperament” with which they are endowed, but our evaluations of them do not stop short of judging these qualities. Third, the circumstances within which one acts are outside of her control. And finally, comes the classic problem of free will—an agent cannot control the antecedent causes of her acts. As the last of these is inconsistent with the supposition that agents have freedom, anyway, we needn't address it here. Each of the others, however, remains a problem even if the agent is granted enough freedom to control her individual acts.

Williams' cases all investigate situations in which some moral risk is taken—something that might be bad is done in hopes of a glorious result, or a minor act of negligence escalates into a major wrongdoing because of the circumstances. In these, it is the degree of culpability that changes, because of the outcome of an act—the initial act was not something praiseworthy in any case. So, Anna Karenina was wrong to leave her child for a love affair, in any case, but that the love affair turned out badly made the initial crime so much the worse. It is negligent to smoke in bed, but if doing so leads to a fire in which people are killed, it becomes criminal. Now, these cases are peculiar, but they do not constitute a challenge to the second premise in the argument—these are cases in which responsibility increases rather than disappearing. The inconsistency in our judgments, however, is something that will only increase as we consider the other types of luck.

Reflection on our response to matters of constitutive luck reveal a deeper paradox. It doesn't make sense to hold someone responsible for the character that they possess, if in fact

they always manage to perform the right acts, yet we still have a tendency to condemn certain character types. We think that it is bad to have a sexual attraction to children, even if the pedophile never acts on her desires and keeps them well hidden, even though we must admit that the inner workings of sexual desire are beyond conscious control. In this case, trying to focus on the shifting target of moral evaluation seems to make the entire enterprise absurd. Nagel notes that Kant was aware of this difficulty and tried to accommodate it, in claiming that the qualities of one's character "might provide the background against which obedience to moral requirements is more or less difficult, but they could not be objects of moral assessment themselves" (Nagel, 359). And yet, "we might be persuaded that these moral judgments are irrational, but they reappear involuntarily as soon as the argument is over" (Nagel, 360). This paradox in moral responsibility reveals that our understanding of the matter is not as clear as we usually think—the meaning of the second premise is not as evident as it seems at first glance. The luck in circumstances demonstrates a similar problem.

This issue is perhaps the easiest to perceive and the most difficult to resolve. People act within a context of opportunities for moral behavior that is beyond their control. All of my friends appear to be morally superior to Nazi concentration camp guards or antebellum slaveholders, but, in fact, none of my friends have had the opportunity to reveal how they would behave in the circumstances which brought down those guards and slave owners. My friends' moral superiority is at least partly a matter of good luck, and the criminality of the guards and slave owners is at least partly a matter of bad luck. If I had to face more difficult situations than the ones that have been presented in my lifetime, I might think far worse of myself. Yet no one controls the circumstances that the world presents to them. Nagel says,

A person can be morally responsible only for what he does; but what he does results from a great deal that he does not do; therefore he is not morally responsible for what he is and is not responsible for. (This is not a contradiction, but it is a paradox.) (Nagel, 360).

So, even if one supposes that agents have control over their own acts, moral responsibility requires them to have control over a whole range of other facts—facts about the results of their acts, their dispositions, and the circumstances surrounding their acts—and this they clearly never have. The second premise of the argument from responsibility, then, contains paradoxes which threaten our acceptance of it. Nietzsche, as we will see, further explores this paradoxical nature of moral responsibility.

## 1.2 Nietzsche

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche echoes the sentiments expressed by Nagel:

*Nobody* is responsible for being here in the first place, for being constituted in such and such a way, for being in these circumstances, this environment (Nietzsche, 36).

Yet Nietzsche's challenge to the argument from responsibility goes further. He claims that we propose the argument as a whole in an attempt to justify harming other people. We want to believe that other people are responsible, he says, because we want to be able to blame and punish them for their acts:

Wherever responsibilities are sought, what tends to be doing the seeking is the instinct of *wanting to punish and rule*. One has stripped becoming of its innocence when some state of being-such-an-such is traced back to will, to intentions, to acts: the doctrine of the will was essentially invented for the purposes of punishment, that is, for purposes of *wanting to find people guilty* (Nietzsche, 35).

And we want to punish other people, because we believe that doing so will help to alleviate our own bad feelings, without our having to take responsibility for those feelings. Nietzsche argues throughout this section of *Twilight of the Idols* that our usual notion of causality runs backwards to our actual experience—in reality, we experience something and look back in time to find the cause, so that the effect precedes the cause. For example, we hear an unexpected noise; then we look to see what made it. Since this is the way that we operate, however, we don't always need

to be careful about the causes that we use to explain events. We will accept the most familiar or conventional explanation, just to have some explanation. This is precisely what we do when it comes to feelings, he says:

Most of our general feelings...arouse our drive to find causes: we want to have a *reason* for feeling that we're in *such and such* a state—a bad state or a good state. It's never enough for us just to determine the mere fact *that* we find ourselves in such and such a state... (Nietzsche, 33).

And, if I can find a cause of *my* emotional state in *your* behavior, then I have the added advantage of *not* being responsible. Punishing you is also justified, then, insofar as it might be a way to change the bad feelings that I experience. Yet, since this last belief—that punishing others will change our own feelings—is also false, the whole project of attributing responsibility is pathological. Holding others morally responsible is a way to try to justify acts of cruelty.

Nietzsche's reflections suggest an expansion of the argument from responsibility to include an account of the motivating feelings which he claims are involved:

- (1) I feel bad because of what you did.
- (2) If you are free, then you are responsible for what you did.
- (3) If you are responsible for what you did, then I am justified in punishing you.
- (4) If I punish you, then my bad feeling will evaporate.
- (5) You are free, thus, I can punish you, (by 2 & 3) and
- (6) I should, because doing so will make me will feel better (by 1 & 4).

This argument is problematic, however, because it betrays a misunderstanding of the way feelings really work. (1) is false, because the causes for feelings are always internal to the person who feels them. Although my feelings are responses to events, the particular feelings that I have about any event depend upon my own beliefs, desires, and attitudes, and not upon the event. This is why the same event can elicit different feelings from different people—if a teenager wrecks a car, one parent may be furious while the other only feels grateful that the child wasn't hurt. Furthermore, we do not have to act in the ways that our feelings seem to dictate. We are born with both instinctive and idiosyncratic emotional responses, but we do not have to

be controlled by these—our actions need not be determined by our feelings. The parent who is furious about the wrecked car can still hide her feelings, if she has a reason to do so. And, just as feelings have internal causes, only internal changes can change the feelings—so (4) is also false. Getting revenge for a murder doesn't eliminate the grief that one feels for the murdered person, nor does punishing anyone for any crime eliminate the losses that resulted from the crime. Any good feelings that result from revenge or punishment stand on their own, so to speak. If revenge makes me feel good, then, it is because I enjoy hurting people—the good feeling is not connected to any alleviation of the bad feeling associated with the act to be avenged. Although the relation between the other premises, (2) and (3), still allows us to draw the first conclusion, (5), the motivation for punishment is gone, and without that, there remains no reason to establish your responsibility for what you did. Whether you are responsible for what you did, or not, you are still not responsible for my feelings—dealing with the feelings that I have is always going to be my own responsibility.

Nietzsche's explanations damage the argument from responsibility by throwing the second premise even further into confusion. They are also damaging to the first compatibilist argument that I want to examine, the one proposed by Peter Strawson.

### 1.3 Strawson

The tendency that Nietzsche highlights, that is, to want to hold people responsible so that they can be punished, and to base the responsibility of others upon one's own feelings, is one that continues to render the philosophical literature suspect. Consider, for example, the influential and highly regarded essay by Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment". Strawson cheerfully exemplifies the pathology exposed by Nietzsche, first in explicitly framing his argument as an attempt to find a justification for punishment, and then by suggesting that the needed justification can be found in our *feelings* about other people and their behavior; he even

singles out, as an exemplary moral feeling, that one about which Nietzsche had so much to say: resentment.

Strawson begins by presenting the problem of the relation between determinism and moral responsibility, as a sort of dialogue between parties whom he calls the ‘optimists’, our compatibilists, and the ‘pessimists’, or incompatibilists. That is, the optimists believe that moral concepts can retain their meanings, even if determinism is true—they object to the first premise in our original argument—while the pessimists hold that unless true agency exists, moral concepts and practices are meaningless. In the following, I will substitute the more familiar terms for those used by Strawson, as an aid to clarity<sup>1</sup>. Strawson aims to reconcile these two views, but, in his words:

[C]an there be any possibility of reconciliation between such clearly opposed positions as those of pessimists and optimists about determinism? Well, there might be a formal withdrawal on one side in return for a substantial concession on the other (Strawson, 374)

The concession is to be required of the compatibilists, and Strawson hopes that it will be sufficient to stop the incompatibilists from clinging to their metaphysical notions of the will or agent. What are the compatibilists to concede?

A corollary to the incompatibilist’s view seems to be that if determinism is true, we should alter our moral practices in significant ways, such as eliminating punishments for moral wrongdoing. Strawson says that the incompatibilists rightly complain that the compatibilists have given no positive sense to the word ‘freedom’ which adequately justifies “the practices of moral condemnation and punishment”. The claim that these practices are *useful* insofar as they allow us to regulate human behavior in socially desirable ways is not enough, for it gives us a world in which the powerful regulate the behavior of the weak, for no apparent reason beyond the fact that they are able to do so. Strawson’s compatibilists have no response to this criticism, so he

constructs one for them, hoping that it will be sufficient to stop the pessimists from going on about metaphysical entities which somehow manage to escape natural law (Strawson, 376).

So, Strawson admits right away that his aim is to justify punishing and condemning other people. For example, if we are considering the punishment to be allocated to a participant in the Nazi's attempt at genocide, Strawson's incompatibilists rightly argue that an appeal to "the efficacy of these [punishments] in regulating behaviour in socially desirable ways" is inadequate, because what society desires is not always what is good and right—the concentration camp officer's behavior was *consistent* with the desires of *his* society, after all (Strawson, 376). In this case, then, Nietzsche's diagnosis was right on target—the incompatibilists want a theory of freedom in order to justify their desire to punish, and Strawson argues, not that the desire to punish is itself suspect, but that we can justify punishments without committing ourselves to the metaphysical baggage that a theory of freedom drags along with it. And Strawson's proposed solution explicitly appeals to the very structures which Nietzsche criticizes—the emotional state of those who want to punish.

Strawson's insight, briefly, is that our normal understanding of participation in human relationships involves a set of natural, human attitudes which cluster around the facts that (1) we expect others to display a certain amount of good will or regard towards us, and (2) we are grateful when they do so and resentful when this attitude is noticeably lacking. Considerations with respect to these 'participant attitudes' will form the core of his adjustment to the compatibilist's position.

We suspend these natural attitudes, he says, under two sets of conditions. The first occur within our normal relationships—we might excuse someone's bad behavior, because they acted out of ignorance, or while under unusual stress, or when coerced, but in these cases we continue to see the person as someone who should ordinarily be subject to the normal attitudes. We



simply excuse him or her for the particular act, which they performed under unusual conditions. The second set of conditions under which we normally suspend this attitude are those in which we view the person as being, due to immaturity, insanity, or something like brainwashing, systematically incapable of participating in normal adult relationships. For these, Strawson says that we adopt what he calls the ‘objective attitude’—which is just the suspension of the normal participant attitudes.

From here, he goes on to say that we can also adopt this ‘objective attitude’, at times, with respect to people whom we judge to be normal, but irritating:

We *have* this resource and can sometimes use it: as a refuge, say, from the strains of involvement; or as an aid to policy; or simply out of intellectual curiosity. Being human, we cannot, in the in the normal case, do this for very long, or altogether. If the strains of involvement, say, continue to be too great, then we shall have to do something else—like severing a relationship. (Strawson, 379)

Because we have this resource, he says, we must consider whether or not it should be the predominant attitude that we adopt towards all people, given the supposed truth of determinism. His answer to this question, however, is already given in the passage above—because we are human, we cannot adopt this attitude for long, and besides, to do so would mean the end of human relationships as we understand them, with all of their “reciprocated adult loves” and “essentially *personal* antagonisms”.

His conclusion is that compatibilism does not require us to adopt such an attitude, and further, that even if it did require such, we would be unable to do so. The problem, however, need not arise, insofar as the reactive attitudes themselves provide an adequate basis for understanding and perpetuating our moral concepts and practices, at least insofar as a justification for punishment is what is at issue. Punishment is not only useful, then, under compatibilism and according to Strawson, it is also right in cases where someone has failed to accord another human being the requisite attitude of good will. We know that this has happened,

presumably, because when someone does this, we feel bad. Strawson has made the very mistake that Nietzsche locates at the source of theories of freedom and morality—the mistaken belief that someone else can be held responsible for our own feelings, and further, that punishing the other person is an appropriate response to these feelings.

It seems correct to think, however, that one person can never be responsible for another one's feelings, and to blame and punish another merely on the basis of one's feelings seems the epitome of injustice—simple blood lust—rather than a justification of morality. I hurt, so I want to hurt someone else; and I say that she is responsible for my feeling so as to make my cruelty seem good and right. Or worse, I'm a sadist, and any justification for causing harm to others is welcome. Strawson argues that we have very little control over our feelings, and he seems to think that acting on the basis of strong feelings, without further analysis of the situation, is not only acceptable, but constitutes the justification for morality itself. Nietzsche's analysis certainly seems to apply to Strawson's moral theory, showing that the confusion surrounding moral responsibility—the second premise of the argument from responsibility, is deep and persistent.

And still there's more—although Strawson's compatibilism doesn't look much like morality upon closer examination, Harry Frankfurt launches an attack on the first premise of the argument that fares better.

#### 1.4 Frankfurt

In his article, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," Harry Frankfurt shows that the relationship between freedom and moral responsibility is not as clear as the first premise of the argument from responsibility makes it seem. He uses a series of examples to lead his reader to the intuition that moral responsibility does not require freedom at all, if freedom is defined as having "the ability to do otherwise". This is so, because:

There may be circumstances that constitute sufficient conditions for a certain act to be performed by someone and that therefore make it impossible for the person

to do otherwise, but that do not actually impel the person to act or in anyway produce his action. A person may do something in circumstances that leave him no alternative to doing it, without these circumstances actually moving or leading him to do it—without them playing any role, indeed, in bringing it about that he does what he does (Frankfurt, 830).

The example which brings this most clearly into focus is the story of Black and Jones<sub>4</sub>. In this scenario, Black wants Jones<sub>4</sub> to do something very badly, and he is prepared to use coercion to insure that the deed is done. He chooses, however, not to use the means of coercion which he possesses, unless it is clear that Jones<sub>4</sub> is going to fail to act as Black desires. So, either way that Jones<sub>4</sub> decides, he will do the act which Black prefers—either he will do it on his own, or Black will force him to do it—so it would be incorrect to say that he could do otherwise. As it happens, however, Black does not need to use his means of coercion, because Jones<sub>4</sub> performs the desired act without interference. In such a case, we would hold Jones<sub>4</sub> morally responsible for the act, even though he could not have done otherwise.

This example confounds the usual relationship which is assumed to hold between freedom, coercion, and responsibility. We typically think that someone acts freely, so long as they are free to perform more than one act in the situation, and that therefore they are responsible. Frankfurt demonstrates that this notion of responsibility is mistaken—that someone can be held responsible, even if the act they choose is the only act they could possibly perform. Frankfurt suggests that moral responsibility hangs on the reasons that someone would give for their action, rather than the presence or absence of alternate possibilities. If the absence of alternatives is in fact the sole reason for acting, then responsibility is rightly suspended. If, on the other hand, the act is chosen for reasons of one's own, and the absence of other possibilities doesn't affect the choice, then responsibility is unaffected by the lack of freedom.

Given this scenario, the thesis that determinism conflicts with responsibility is undermined. In order for someone to be judged innocent on the basis of the determinism

inherent in the causal nexus, they would have to cite that determinism as the sole reason for acting as they did, but this would seem very odd in any case where deliberation is possible.

I find this argument troubling, because it seems to suggest that we are responsible for our acts whenever we act under *the illusion* that we freely choose from a number of possibilities, but, whenever this illusion is absent, we are able to recognize the coercion which is operant in the case and to retain our innocence. Responsibility begins to look like a simple lack of understanding. But, to keep our focus on the issue at hand, what we discover from Frankfurt is that the simple relation which is assumed to hold between freedom and responsibility becomes more complex under investigation, and the defense of freedom by this route becomes proportionally more complex, as well.

Thus, the simple argument which is supposed to show the relationship between moral responsibility and freedom is subject to a variety of criticisms. Neither of its premises retains its intuitive evidence upon reflection. On the other hand, the authors whose works we have considered here draw different conclusions from the failure of this argument. Frankfurt concludes that we are responsible, even though we aren't free; Nagel simply concludes that responsibility is paradoxical, and he attributes this to the two points of view from which we are able to view ourselves; while Nietzsche thinks we can *achieve* freedom and responsibility, but that neither is automatically given with human nature. Answering the question about freedom, then, insofar as it is related to moral responsibility, has become a task similar to untying the Gordian knot.

I think there is a simple reason for this. The attempt to ground freedom on moral responsibility, alone, has too narrow a focus. Those acts for which we can be held morally responsible constitute a relatively small percentage of all of the acts we perform in a lifetime. The compatibilists, because they fail to see the wider importance of a theory of freedom to our

understanding of human activity, feel comfortable in arguing against it, so long as all that is at stake seems to be this smallish category of acts. Freedom, however, has an essential connection to values of any kind—whenever we value one course of action, we do so in the belief that more than one course of action is possible. And the category of *activities with value* is much wider than that of acts for which we feel morally responsible.

For example, every notion of progress depends upon values—to progress is to move closer to what is valuable. We tend to believe in the possibility of progress, at both the individual and the societal levels. We think that we can deliberately shape our own behavior into better patterns than those into which we were thrown by chance—we can learn more, develop skills, eliminate bad habits, and so on—but clearly freedom is necessary to these projects. If only one future is really possible, then our efforts to guide our lives, by choosing activities that we value, are clearly futile. The same goes for any efforts to improve society as a whole.

In non-moral realms, however, we also need concepts of value and freedom to explain our system of knowledge: the value accorded to accurate descriptions, logical thinking, simplicity, and creativity in theoretical contexts directs all of our investigations into the workings of nature. Science simply wouldn't be possible without the thousands of small choices, guided by these values, that have to be made along the way, that is, without freedom.

Non-moral values and freedom are also needed to explain the creativity and change that results from human efforts. Birds and beavers have constructed the same sorts of dwellings for millennia, but the changes in human constructions in just the past two centuries have been dramatic. Few would argue that homes with running water are not better than those without—homes with wireless internet access were unimaginable just half a century ago. Some idea of what is good or better is clearly needed to explain these sorts of changes in human construction. Human beings always seem to exert control over their environments in ways that other animals

cannot. We are able both to develop new procedures for doing things and to choose the procedure which is best for the task at hand, yet neither would seem to be possible if all acts were determined through nature, if we did not evaluate and choose.

Thus, the scope of our defense of freedom needs to be wider. In order to begin to develop such a defense, we will follow the lead established by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. We can find therein the role that freedom plays in our acquisition of knowledge, which makes deliberate progress possible. Then, we can turn to Heidegger for insight into the role played by freedom in creativity.

## CHAPTER TWO: FREEDOM AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The issue of freedom in Kant's philosophy is also usually addressed through his ethical writings, as that is where he has the most to say about it. Yet the ground for the ethical theory of freedom is laid in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In the Third Antinomy, Kant argues for the intelligibility of a type of causality which is different from that in nature, that is, freedom. He also argues against the determinism of dogmatic empiricism. And, as Henry Allison demonstrates, the ground for the concept of freedom which is elaborated in the remarks on the Antinomy argument is laid even earlier, in Kant's notion of the spontaneity of understanding and reason, as revealed through apperception. In this chapter, I will investigate these arguments and their implications, and as I am not a Kant scholar, I will also depend heavily upon Allison's interpretation and defense, in both *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* and *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. The upshot is that, according to Kant, we could not have any knowledge if we did not act freely in understanding experience and in reasoning about it, i.e., if determinism is true.

### 2.1 The Third Antinomy

We should briefly review the place of the Antinomy in the argument of the first *Critique* as a whole. This argument falls in the second division of the work. The first division is called the Analytic, and it presents and defends Kant's own theory of Transcendental Idealism. The second division is called the Dialectic, and in it, Kant shows how his rivals have been led astray by an illusion and that their theories lead to seemingly irresolvable controversies, but that these problems are all solved by Kant's theory. The Antinomy is merely one section of the dialectic—it is concerned with the four different sorts of problems that the rival theories engender in the realm of cosmology. The third antinomy deals with the conflict between determinism and freedom, but it addresses these as cosmological issues rather than issues of agency, at least

initially. Kant then, in his remarks on the initial argument, goes on to apply the findings to the familiar issue of agency.

As is usual, Kant addresses a number of concerns simultaneously in the Antinomy arguments. I will try to isolate the thread which is important for the current study, but in so doing will leave out a great deal more that could be said about this section of the *Critique*. I'm also going to overlook the criticisms of the arguments which have been offered over the past several centuries—I'll be taking Allison's defense as adequate. The goal of this study is simply to elaborate Kant's theory of freedom as it is presented in this book.

Our goal in this analysis is to clarify the connection between several relations: freedom is related to causality in a definite way, and this relation corresponds to the relation between apperception and inner sense, as modes of self knowledge, which corresponds to the relation between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, or between transcendental knowledge and empirical knowledge, within knowledge in general. These are all manifestations or interpretations of the same relation, and the mission of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to demonstrate that when these are not strictly distinguished and held apart, confusion and error results.

The Antinomy presents a debate between competing philosophical positions. Kant views both of the parties to the debate as holding dogmatic positions, and he is opposed to both, as they are there presented. The overall argument is a complicated *reductio*. Not only does each party defend his own position by showing the incoherence of its opposite, but Kant means the failure of both positions to show that a common presupposition is flawed. For our purposes, this flawed presupposition can be stated as, "What we learn from experience can be elaborated in order to give us knowledge of the totality of reality." This wrongly conflates the empirical and the transcendental, by supposing that we can infer the truth about the reality which transcends



possible experience from the presumption that our empirical knowledge can be both complete and consistent.

For simplicity, I will use the words ‘Thesis’ and ‘Antithesis’ as if they were the names of the parties to the debate. So, we will see that Thesis argues that, in order to provide a complete explanation of the empirical, we must assume that it is finite, and that what lies beyond the limits of experience, the transcendental, can consequently be *known* to be *unlike* what we experience—and since experience is necessarily structured by causality, what is beyond experience is freedom. Antithesis argues that consistency requires the universality of natural causality, so it must be extended from the empirical to the transcendental, from experience to whatever lies beyond experience as well, giving us a reality which is *known* to be infinite, yet governed by a single set of laws. Note that both parties also make the assumption, with which Kant agrees, that the unity of experience demands that natural causality be the only one to which we refer in giving explanations of experience itself. So here is a simplified version of the overall argument:

Assumptions:

- (1) What we know of experience can be elaborated to provide an explanation of the whole reality. From the presumption that our empirical knowledge can be both complete and consistent, we can infer the truth about the reality which transcends possible experience.
- (2) Experience itself requires a unified theory of causality—natural causality must be assumed to be the only one operating within experience.
- (3) What lies beyond experience must be governed either by natural causality, or by some other sort of causality, which we call ‘freedom’. (It is either natural causality or it is not natural causality.)

Thesis:

- (4) Assume that the causality operating beyond experience is the same that we encounter elsewhere in nature (which implies the truth of determinism).
- (5) Natural causality is a temporal relation—each effect must be preceded in time by its cause.

(6) Each cause must, in turn, also have another cause, which must also precede it in time, and thus the causal chain must stretch infinitely into the past.

(7) This, however, contradicts one of the requirements in (1) above, i.e., that our empirical knowledge can be complete. Insofar as an infinite causal chain is by definition never completed, there can be no complete explanation for the effects that lie within experience, if they depend upon an infinite chain of other causes.

(8) Thus, the causality operating beyond experience must be different from natural causality—it must be freedom—and the empirical realm must be conceived as finite.

Antithesis:

(9) Assume we know that the causality operating beyond experience is different from that in experience (which implies the existence of freedom).

(10) In this case, our knowledge is inconsistent, or lacks unity: some effects have causes of the usual, natural sort, and others result from this other sort of causality, but there is no way to determine which causality is operating at different times.

(11) This, of course, contradicts the other requirement in (1), i.e., that our knowledge is consistent—i.e., that it is knowledge at all, and it fulfils the conditions of possible experience. If we are to have knowledge of the transcendent, it must meet the conditions for any possible knowledge.

(12) Thus, the only causality must be natural causality, and reality must be conceived as infinite.

Kant's overall conclusions:

(13) Subconclusions (8) and (12) appear to be contradictory, but in fact they constitute a false dilemma, resulting from the flawed assumption in (1). The neglected third possibility is the claim that we cannot infer anything definite about the transcendental realm from our knowledge of the appearances which constitute experience, although we can form intelligible ideas about what may be there. (A fourth possibility would be that we don't know anything, but Kant rejects that one.)

(13) Therefore we *cannot know* what manner of causation operates beyond the boundaries of experience.

We don't know that freedom exists, but we also don't know that determinism is true. Both of the antinomy positions are dogmatic errors, based, as Kant shows, upon the false presupposition that knowledge of the transcendental can be based upon knowledge of the empirical. If this

presupposition is rejected, then both of these positions can be true, so long as they are restrained to their appropriate sphere—natural causality is the only one operating within empirical experience, and transcendental freedom may be supposed to operate outside of experience.

In other words, there are conflicting requirements placed upon knowledge by the two positions in the debate. On the one hand, there is completeness: we should be able to explain everything in experience. On the other, there is consistency or universality: our explanations must refer to unified laws of nature. ‘Thesis’ says that the completeness requirement entails a finite world with a supernatural causality, but this violates the consistency (or universality) requirement. ‘Antithesis’ says that consistency requires a single causality, and therefore we can know that the world is infinite, because the causal chain leading up to the present must be infinite. Kant argues for a separation of these two requirements. Completeness is the subjective requirement based on the maxim which governs the search for knowledge—“seek unity!” Consistency is the objective requirement derived from the conditions under which knowledge is possible—the object of knowledge must be unified. The subjective rule governing how we come to know things must be separated from the rules governing the objects of which we have knowledge. The normative rules of action are different from descriptive laws of nature. Note that the presence of a rule for action implies the existence of both values and freedom. We only invoke normative rules, when we believe that at least two courses of action are possible and that one is better than the others. The normative rule specifies the valuable course of action. Thus, the subjective, normative rules lead us to think that we must be free, while the objective, descriptive rules prohibit any inclusion of freedom in our explanations of the empirical world.

This difference in the rules that we apply is insufficient to justify the conclusion that we know we are free, (or that we know we are not free), but it does broaden the scope of the activities for which freedom provides the most intuitive explanation, from the set of actions with

moral significance to the larger set to which *any* normative rules apply. This is the key point, to which we will return in a moment. First, however, it is important to note that our justification for accepting causal laws is no more secure than that for an explanation based on freedom. As Kant says, in the remark on the thesis:

How such a faculty [as freedom] is possible is not so necessary to answer, since with causality in accordance with natural laws we likewise have to be satisfied with the *a priori* cognition that such a thing must be presupposed, even though we do not in any way comprehend how it is possible for one existence to be posited through another existence, and must in this case keep solely to experience (A448/B476<sup>2</sup>).

Hume's demonstration that the laws of causality are not derived directly from experience is tacitly accepted—causality, for Kant, is an *a priori* concept which functions to organize experience, and not part of experience. But if so, then causality is as much of an imposition on experience as is freedom. Causality is no more intelligible than freedom; freedom is no less intelligible than causality.

## 2.2 From Cosmology to Epistemology

Although the debating parties in the antinomy consider freedom as a cosmological problem, concerning the size of the empirical world and the types of causality which explain its functioning, Kant's solution to the problem introduces epistemological concerns. The limits of the empirical world become, not its actual physical limits, but the limits to what we can know, and beyond those limits lies the unknown. Deciding what forces operate in the unknown, transcendental realm is a matter of determining the *a priori* concepts which are necessary to explain the fact that we have experience and knowledge of it, and we find that explaining experience and knowledge requires that we presuppose *both* causal laws, which give unity to the object of knowledge, *and* freedom, which gives the subject the power to perform the fundamental acts of knowing. Now we can look more closely at the way that freedom operates in the process of attaining knowledge.

In the comments on the thesis in the third antinomy, Kant characterizes freedom as “the faculty of beginning a series in time entirely on its own”, and he says, of his example of standing up from his chair,

...this decision and deed do not lie within the succession of merely natural effects and are not a mere continuation of them; rather the determining natural causes of that series entirely cease in regard to this event, which indeed follows upon that series, but does not follow from it; and therefore it must be called, not as far as time is concerned but in regard to causality, an absolutely first beginning of a series of appearances (A450/B478).

A free act is therefore one which comes after a causal series has come to an end; one effect is presumably prevented while a new cause is brought forth in “decision and deed”. Kant doesn’t mention a choice among various possibilities, here, but it follows from the fact that natural causality would lead to one event and freedom leads to another that anytime freedom operates, more than one possible course of events exists—at least two, and probably more—Kant could remain sitting, he could stand, or he could fall to the floor, if someone were shooting through his window, for example.

Freedom also has an important connection to maxims and imperatives of all sorts, and the values towards which they guide us, as we saw above. If one is commanded to do something, that one could fail to do it is implied. According to Allison, Kant believes that

*both moral and pragmatic or prudential imperatives indicate a causality of reason. Given this, it is clearly a mistake to claim that, in the first Critique, at least, Kant introduces his noumenalism merely to account for the possibility of acting on the categorical imperative (as contrasted with the capacity to act on imperatives in general)...Kant regards the capacity to act on the basis of imperatives in general...as the defining characteristic of free agency. (Allison, 1990, 35-36).*

These imperatives include both moral and all other normative rules. The deterministic account presented by Antithesis, above, does not allow for the sort of spontaneity which Kant regards as necessary to account for this capacity to act on the basis of imperatives. In order to grasp the

importance of the non-moral imperatives and the freedom that accounts for them, then, we need to follow a suggestion proposed by Henry Allison:

In order to understand Kant's seemingly gratuitous insistence on a merely intelligible moment of spontaneity in the conception of rational agency, we must look not to his moral theory or motivational psychology but rather to his views on the spontaneity of the understanding and reason in their epistemic functions. Indeed, Kant himself indicates the connection when, in a famous passage, he states that through mere apperception we are conscious of certain faculties, namely understanding and reason, "the action of which cannot be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility" (A547/B575). Since the operative contrast with the receptivity of the senses for Kant is always the spontaneity of the understanding (and reason), the clear implication is that apperception provides us with a consciousness of this spontaneity and that this consciousness is an inseparable component of the conception of ourselves as cognitive subjects (Allison, 1990, 36).

Several points made here deserve emphasis. First, freedom is being said to be essential to the operation of understanding and reasoning. This freedom shows itself in the contrast between these active faculties with the faculty of sensibility, which passively receives impressions. And finally, one becomes aware of this spontaneity or freedom in apperception—in one's consciousness of one's own cognitive functions. There is therefore no argument which can demonstrate that this spontaneity exists—the antinomy cannot prove that freedom exists—rather the demonstration is phenomenological. Kant shows us where to look for freedom, and we must look into our own experience in order to discover it. Insofar as transcendental freedom lies beyond actual experience which can be described or represented, even beyond the "inner sense" of self-knowledge, it cannot be described or demonstrated in the usual ways. Rather, it shows itself to those who analyze their own thought processes. We'll revisit all of this in just a moment, but first, a summary. Freedom is:

- 1) an origin of motion and a beginning in causality
- 2) where more than one possibility exists—both decision to act or not to act, and choice among possibilities--
- 3) connected to the use of imperatives and the values they depend upon, and
- 4) found through apperception.

With these thoughts in hand, we can go on to the task of locating the intelligibility of freedom within apperception.

### 2.3 Finding Freedom

First, then, we need to get clearer on what apperception is, so that we know where to look for this intelligible freedom. Before we dive into that, however, a brief review of the mechanics of Kant's epistemology will be helpful. Kant identifies six distinct faculties of knowledge: sensibility, understanding, imagination, inner sense, apperception and reason. Freedom, as we noted above, is found through apperception, which is the consciousness of oneself as a unified subject, but it is essential in the active operations of understanding, imagination, and reason as well. Sensibility and inner sense are both passive. We will discuss inner sense together with apperception in a moment. Sensibility receives the information emitted by objects in the world as a manifold, structured by the forms of intuition, space and time. This is a passive process—we receive information from the world, and nothing that we do can affect the sort of data that the world gives us—the given is simply given, and we simply receive it. So there's no freedom there—in fact, Kant says that this is the foundation of our finitude as human knowers. If we did control the data of sensibility, then we could think of ourselves as creators of the sensible things, just as a director controls the speech and movements of the actors under her control in order to create a movie, or a painter controls the layers of paint on his canvas in order to create a picture. As passive, however, we simply receive the information that the world sends our way. We are not free to sense whatever we choose. When looking at my truck, I see red, no matter what color I would like to see there.

Understanding, however, is purely active—it “runs through, takes up and combines” the manifold presented by sensibility, synthesizing it into, first, concepts, and then, judgments which assign the appropriate predicates to the subject of a proposition. Imagination is a mediating

hybrid between sensibility and understanding, with which we actively summon up images of things which are not presently before us: “*Imagination* is the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence** in intuition” (B151)—it is partially active and partially passive. Both imagination and understanding acquire all of their content from sensibility, but reason, which creates systems of knowledge based upon logical inferences, can generate its own hypothetical entities or ideas—the theoretical entities or processes which are needed in order to generate a complete explanation of experience. The ideas of reason include the idea of a thing-in-itself, outside of experience, which produces appearances, as well as the ideas of the soul, the world, and God.

Finally, apperception and inner sense are the two modes of self-knowledge distinguished by Kant. Inner sense is “the consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception” (A107), and it is empirical, or *a posteriori* and contingent—through inner sense we receive impressions of ourselves which pass through consciousness, in a way that is analogous to the reception of information from other objects through sensibility. Even though we might experience this as *one* stream of consciousness, its unity is not a necessary unity, insofar as it is based on an inductive inference about empirical data. Kant thinks, however, that such a necessary unity must exist in consciousness, because the syntheses and inferences by which knowledge is constituted require a necessarily unified ground. Because each synthesis functions by making a manifold into a unity, some source of that unity must be found in the knowing subject. Some single part of consciousness must be able to hold the different images together in a synthesis, to hold the subject and predicate together in a judgment, and to hold the premises and conclusion together in an inference, and it must further have an awareness of its own activity. Kant locates this necessary unity in the *a priori* self-consciousness which he calls apperception:



This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name **transcendental apperception**. That it deserves this name is already obvious from this, that even the purest objective unity, namely that of the *a priori* concepts (space and time) is possible only through the relation of the intuitions to it. The numerical unity of this apperception therefore grounds all concepts *a priori*, just as the manifoldness of space and time ground the intuitions of sensibility (A107).

This subjective ground for concepts is not experienced, yet it is still a part of consciousness—it is inferred as necessary to explain how the manifold presented in sensibility gets “gone through, taken up, and combined” into unified objects by the acts of synthesis. Its unity is therefore intelligible, rather than empirical, and it is known through its effects (or, we might say, ‘traces’), rather than directly—i.e., if it were not there, we could have no experience, we do have experience, thus, it must be there. Our awareness of ourselves therefore divides into two: we have experience, through inner sense, of the empirical character of our thought processes, and we infer, in apperception, the necessity of a unified, intelligible ground in ourselves for all of our acts of synthesis. Although it seems paradoxical to say that a part of consciousness cannot be experienced, Kant is quite clear about how this unity reveals itself:

Just this transcendental unity of apperception, however, makes out of all possible appearances that can ever come together in one experience a connection of all of these representations in accordance with laws. For this unity of consciousness would be impossible if in the cognition of the manifold the mind could not become conscious of the identity of the function by means of which this manifold is synthetically combined into one cognition. Thus the original and necessary consciousness of the identity of oneself is at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances in accordance with concepts, i.e. in accordance with rules. . . . For the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this *a priori*, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action, which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, and first makes possible their connection in accordance with *a priori* rules. (A108, underlining added).

If we note the underlined parts of this passage, we see that apperception appears to be our consciousness of our own mental activity—the acts which form thoughts, as opposed to the content of those thoughts. There is unity in experience because the mind uses “one function”,

the identical action, in every cognition—following one type of rule. The rule is the same that we found in the resolution of the antinomy, above: “seek unity!”. Now we can recognize that this is the rule of synthesis, the foundational rule which underlies all of the knowing acts of the understanding. The action of thinking is distinct from the content of thinking—it forms thoughts, according to rules, laws, or concepts; it combines, or synthesizes. It is active, not passive.

We now need to consider why Kant would think that we must suppose that the acts of synthesis which are performed by understanding, imagination, and reason require us to presuppose *freedom*. Understanding involves both bringing concepts to experience and making judgments about things (or constructing propositions, by adding a predicate to the subject). In both of these activities, we have *choices to make*. My pet can be properly conceptualized as ‘Toby’, ‘a dog’, ‘a canine’, ‘a mammal’, ‘an animal’, or ‘an Earthling’, depending upon the sort of thinking that I am trying to do about him. And he can be judged ‘male’, ‘brown’, ‘mixed-breed’, ‘sweet’ or ‘stubborn’, in different propositions: e.g., “My dog is brown” or “Toby is one stubborn animal”. Furthermore, it would be wrong to apply the concepts “goat” or “lake” to my pet, just as it would be wrong to make judgments such as “Toby is a poodle” or “My dog is white”. The use of understanding involves following rules, or imperatives—we cannot explain it without reference to *values*. Given a particular sensible impression, there are right and wrong ways to apply concepts and predicates. Knowledge depends upon these values, on using the right concepts in reference to the impression at hand. And no simply causal account can explain how we distinguish between the right and wrong concepts or predicates to apply in these acts. We therefore must suppose that in understanding, we act freely. Our consciousness of this freedom arises in apperception, in our consciousness of the synthetic act which underlies all of

our thinking, and when we reflect upon the conditions which are necessary for us to perform this act.

This necessity for freedom, and the way it escapes our ability to describe, appears perhaps even more clearly when we think about the activity of reasoning. The difficulty that we face in trying to describe these acts in the same way that we can describe any part of experience is familiar from our efforts to teach struggling students how to make inferences in logic classes. Consider the act of making an inference from these two points of view: (1) you are solving a puzzle or providing a proof, and you work through the various inferences until you arrive at a solution, and (2) you try to describe what you are doing to another person. We know that something that belongs in (1) must be missing from (2), since, if it were not, we would have a great deal more success than we actually do in teaching logic to students. Our descriptions of the process can take our students only so far—beyond that, the student has to actually *perform inferences*. The act of inferring can only be described, however, either by giving further examples, or by stating the rule. A student can repeat the rule, but still be unable to make the inference—knowing the rule isn't sufficient to guarantee the correct performance. It is also revealing that, when we want to test someone's ability in logic or math, we don't give them the same problems that we used in teaching them—we give them new problems which they haven't seen before. What they are supposed to learn *exceeds* what we can actually show them—and they can only show it back to us by this strange test involving something *new*. They have to learn *how*, not *that*. They have to learn to make choices, according to rules, guided by values, and that they can fail at this task further indicates the role that freedom plays. The rules do not causally necessitate the correct performance, they simply present the sort of thinking that we value in our systems of knowledge, the connections between judgments that are valuable in extending our knowledge of the world.

So freedom is found through reflection upon the activities which constitute knowledge, in apperception. In the awareness of our own activity, we also perceive (1) an origin of motion and a beginning in causality, (2) that more than one possibility exists—both decision to act or not to act, and choice among possibilities, and that (3) our act is connected to the use of imperatives and maxims and guided by values; that is, we follow rules, specifically, the rules that we give to ourselves in autonomy, or freedom. In apperception, we know our own freedom, and without this freedom, we could not explain the syntheses by which knowledge is constituted. So, if we were causally determined in everything that we do, then we couldn't apply concepts, make judgments, or perform inferences. Since we do all of these things, we must have freedom.

This ability to conceptualize and systematize information about the world makes the progress that is manifested in human activities possible. Through observation, description, and analysis, the way that light is affected by its passage through lenses led to the science of optics and the construction of microscopes. Microscopes made it possible to learn that diseases are often transmitted by microscopic organisms. This knowledge led to the development of modern hygiene, which makes medical treatments more effective. Progress in this area, as in so many others, depends upon the values which guide scientific inquiry and the freedom which makes it possible to choose the better modes of inquiry and explanation over, for example, astrology or demonology. This ability to follow rules, however, stops short of explaining the possibility of creativity in thought. Creativity often involves using concepts in the “wrong” way, applying them in unprecedented ways. And this human ability suggests that freedom goes deeper than that which is needed to explain the faculties of knowledge. For insight into this more radical freedom, we turn to Martin Heidegger.

### CHAPTER THREE: FREEDOM AND ONTOLOGY

We have seen that Kant, although he was mostly concerned with freedom as the condition for ethics, also showed the necessity of freedom as a ground to epistemological theory. Heidegger takes this a step further, showing that freedom is fundamentally an ontological notion, a characteristic of being. In the following, I will show how he works through from the epistemological questions, which we considered above, to his ontological theory, and then we can consider how he relates freedom to being. This discussion will proceed through a number of topics: the finitude of human knowing, the understanding of being that is implied by this finitude, Heidegger's conceptions of truth and transcendence, and finally to his discussion of "openness" and freedom. I feel that it is better to paraphrase Heidegger than to quote long sections of his writings, as his writing style is notoriously convoluted and replete with his peculiar neologisms, but I will try to be careful about citing the portions of his books where he discusses the topic at hand. And some preliminary explanation would probably also be helpful.

First, then, Heidegger sharply distinguishes the study of beings, as they reveal themselves to us in experience, from the study of being, or the ground for these appearances. Thus it is always important to remember that 'beings' or 'a being' *cannot* be identified with 'being'. This distinction is similar to, but not identical with, Kant's distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. The main difference is that Heidegger feels it is a mistake to try to conceptualize being in the same ways that we do beings—insofar as being is the ground for all conceptualization, we must try to think and talk about it in a different way than we think and talk about what it produces. This is, of course, also what Kant thought, but Kant still relied on empirical concepts to discuss ontological issues. Heidegger works very hard to keep these separated. He uses a verb when he means 'being' (*Sein*) and he uses nouns to refer to 'beings'

(usually *das Seiende*). Because this ambiguity is present in our English word ‘being’, we do not have to use two different words, but it is important to pay attention to the form of the word ‘being’ in use at any particular time, whether it is ‘being’, ‘a being’, or ‘beings’—these do *not* all refer in the same way. In Heidegger’s other references to being, he carefully uses terms that could never be applied to beings, and there are many of these in his various books: nothing, the abyss, the clearing, death, etc.. Those with which we will be concerned are time, difference, openness and, of course, freedom, all of which we will get to in due time.

Another preliminary consideration: Heidegger often presents his own thinking as an interpretation of Kant’s writings, although he clearly goes beyond anything that Kant consciously intended. Heidegger was a close reader of Kant’s texts, and we find his commentaries thereon in both his published works and in his course lectures. He was, however, extremely critical of the interpretations of Kant proposed by his contemporaries (including Husserl, who thought it necessary to “bracket” the question of the existence of things in order to focus upon our knowledge of experience), and he was critical of Kant himself. These criticisms run together in a sense—the main problem with Kant scholarship, for Heidegger, is that it takes Kant at his word, so Heidegger thinks that neither the other scholars nor Kant himself saw through to the essential accomplishments of Kant’s *oeuvre*. Heidegger admits that his own interpretation of Kant is a violent one, but this doesn’t mean that he *misrepresents* Kant. He simply pushes Kant’s thinking through to the conclusions that Kant himself was unable or unwilling to draw, while making the needed corrections along the way. Just as we, above, traced Kant’s theory of freedom back from the ethical arena into his epistemological theory, Heidegger will trace the ontological implications of Kant’s thinking.

### 3.1 Finite Knowledge and Ontological Knowledge

Heidegger never doubts that Kant means for the appearances provided through intuition to reveal some aspect of the real things-in-themselves. And, in fact, evidence for this interpretation is found very near the beginning to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, when Kant discusses the difference between finite and infinite intuition. The difference between these is not so much a difference in the quantity of knowledge possessed by a knower; rather it is a difference between the finite dependence on other beings for information, and the infinite capacity to create beings through the intuition of them. God's knowledge is presumably of the latter kind, according to traditional theology—his knowledge of creation is simultaneous with its production—no mediation through thinking is required. Now, whether or not an infinite intuition exists, we know that our knowledge is not of this creative kind. We depend upon the information which is provided in appearances, and these appearances signal the existence of beings other than ourselves. We do not produce the appearances; so they must be produced by something other than ourselves. Heidegger says, "This intuition presupposes the being to be encountered via intuition as already being" (Heidegger 1997, 59). We know only as much about these other beings as is revealed to us in our reception, which is limited to what our faculties of knowing make possible—it is finite—but our knowledge relates directly to the beings themselves.

Thus, being in the midst of, and related to, other beings is the first pre-condition to any human knowledge. Heidegger calls this phenomenon "Being-in-the-World", and it is one source of human ontological knowledge. We are *familiar* with being insofar as it grounds all of the appearances which we gather through our faculty of intuition, but this faculty does not give us direct knowledge of the being of the beings. Such knowledge would be possible only for an intuition which created the appearances that it intuits. But we still have an acquaintance with

being, so to speak, and we have it before reflecting on being—it is pre-ontological knowledge, which grounds all of our activities insofar as they involve other beings—that is, all of our activities. Yet intuition is not the only source of our ontological knowledge. Reflection on intuition reveals that we have a pre-ontological *understanding* of being, and we can investigate our own understanding in order to get closer to an explicit conception of being. Our understanding of being is itself a manner of being, a way that we are. When we investigate understanding, then, as Kant does in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we are already investigating our own being, and the *a priori* conditions which make understanding possible therefore reveal being itself. The *a priori* is the ground for our understanding, the activity which produces this manner of being. In other words, apperception gives us another way to know being—we know ourselves as being, we know the being that we are.

This reflective route to ontological knowledge gives us something different than that which is delivered through the activity of understanding and intuition. The latter two, working together, give us conceptually structured objects—beings which are known as a constant presence in experience. But apperception, as we saw in the investigation of Kant’s theory above, gives us knowledge of our own activity. The difference between our knowledge of other beings as constant presences and our knowledge of our own activity reveals itself as a temporal difference. Objects are what they are, because they persist through time; in some respect they stay the same. But activity is change through time—in acting, I am outside the present, remembering how I have done things in the past and projecting what I am doing into the future. Knowledge of this activity is thus different from the knowledge of the constantly present beings—it is ontological knowledge, knowledge of our own manner of being, of being in ourselves. Therefore, Heidegger says, the human being is exemplary for the question of being—we are the beings to be interrogated with respect to the question of the being of beings, because



we are familiar with our own being, as it is manifested in our activity (Heidegger, 1996, §4).

The investigation into the conditions which make our activity possible is an ontological investigation.

Now, Heidegger diverges from Kant at this point. While Kant is interested, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the conditions which make human knowledge possible, Heidegger is interested in all kinds of human activity. To focus on knowledge to the exclusion of the other things that human beings do, he believes, will give an incorrect answer to the ontological question. So, while Kant focuses on synthesis as the single function which underlies all acts of knowing, Heidegger is interested in the many different ways that human beings can be engaged with other beings such that characteristics of those other beings are revealed. Heidegger's notion of truth is much broader than the usual epistemological notions—he thinks that the truth of beings is revealed in many other ways besides making correct judgments about them, or describing them correctly. So, we'll have to look at the notion of truth, before we advance into the question of freedom.

### 3.2 Truth and Transcendence

Heidegger chooses the Greek word *aletheia* for truth, which he translates as unconcealment or disclosedness, and which we can also think of as revelation. (The first two translations are preferable, in a sense, because they retain the negated form of the Greek word, and thereby retain the implicit reference to the concealed and closed, but 'revelation', I think, has some intuitive advantages, which are useful in this introductory context.) He conceives truth as a property of beings, rather than of representations or propositions. The unconcealment of beings, he says, is a truth more originary than any truth of correspondence. The truth of propositions, of correspondence, or the adequation of the intellect to things, presupposes the prior unconcealment of the things in their truth; propositions can then represent this unconcealed nature of beings or

they can fail: they are true or false, correct or not. So truth is originally in the being truly appearing, the being appearing as it really is.

This revision of the notion of truth also allows truth to occur in situations which do not involve representation. Heidegger believes that there are many possible ways of “comporting” oneself towards objects which allow them to reveal themselves as they are, and moreover, he believes that to describe them “correctly” is merely one of these ways of bringing them into unconcealment, or truth. Thus, he posits a plurality of truths along with a plurality of falsehoods—when the truth is that the object is revealed, rather than that the object is “correctly” described in a proposition, multiple truths, or ways of unconcealing become possible. We can approach beings, or comport ourselves towards them, in many ways which reveal (or fail to reveal) their true being, and description is only one of these ways; we enter into various relations with beings. Working with tools, making things, creating a work of art, and naming or describing things are all ways of comporting oneself towards them so that they reveal themselves to us; furthermore all different kinds of descriptions—scientific, poetic, or those in ordinary language—have some validity, according to this scheme, insofar as they allow the being to reveal itself as it truly is. Although Heidegger thinks, in some places, that the interaction with an object as gear is usually prior to the interaction which describes, in an important sense they are incomparable—one is not true and the other false, as with conflicting propositions; they are simply different ways that human beings allow the other beings around them to reveal themselves. Neither is inherently “better” than the other; both provide a mode of access to the truth of the being. The comportment of working with things is, Heidegger believes, more “originary” insofar as the mode of description is derived from it, but this distinction does not impugn our ability to describe.

An example will be helpful. In using a coat as a shield against the cold, I allow it to reveal its warmth by wearing it outdoors—wearing it is a way of interpreting its manner of being. When I phone my daughter to tell her about the coat I have bought, I allow it to reveal its colors and shape by examining it—examining it is another way of interpreting its manner of being. Both ways of interpreting are “right”, and each has its distinctive mode of failure. Paradoxically, when the coat fails as an item of gear, I notice it more than when it succeeds—if it is not heavy enough to keep me warm, I notice this and hurry to get inside. When it is doing its job properly, I barely notice the coat and look to other things. We reveal the truths about beings, most of the time, without even conceptualizing them or being conscious of them. While I am typing, I’m revealing the supportiveness of my chair and the floor underneath, the warmth of my jacket and the heater in the apartment, and the light from a lamp and the window, but, until I stop to describe them, none of these beings enters my thoughts. They are simply there in my world, as parts of my activity. Even though I stop thinking about them and get on with the next section of my paper, they continue to play their supporting roles in my activity, revealing their true sturdiness, heat, and light.

Our ability, as human beings, to comport ourselves towards objects in various ways—to move from one mode of comportment to another—is what Heidegger calls transcendence. Transcendence is also grounded in human temporality. Above, we noted that activity is a temporal matter—it requires projecting plans into the future and drawing upon the experience and knowledge of the past. Each type of activity constitutes a mode of comporting oneself towards beings. And the ability to switch between different modes is also a sort of transcendence of beings. Depending upon the sort of project that we are undertaking—which means consulting with the future, with a goal for our activity—we choose the way of interacting with the other beings in the world which is suitable, a choice which is informed by our past

experiences with beings. Heidegger says that, in this way, human beings stand outside of the present, gathering the past and the future together to make a present for themselves, to make themselves in the present. In saying this, he means to draw our attention to the root meaning of the verb *to exist*, which is *to stand out*, and he calls human existence “ek-static temporality”, in another reference to the same root meanings. This making of a present might even be a sort of creative intuition—the sort of intuition possessed by an infinite knower (see Heidegger 2005, 172), although it doesn’t repair human finitude in any way. Our making of the present is still bounded both by our limited experience in the past, our limited amount of time in the future, and, most importantly, by the dependence upon the unconcealment of other beings which is the primary condition of all of our knowledge and activity.

### 3.3 Openness and Freedom

In Kant, human transcendence involves all of the conditions which make knowledge possible: space and time, the categories, and apperception. Yet, in his lectures on Kant, Heidegger emphasizes that insofar as *time* is the form of all inner sense, and all experience, to be experience, must have its ground in intuition, all of the other conditions for knowledge can be expressed as determinations of time. Kant reveals the temporality of the categories in the chapter of the first *Critique* called “On the Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding”:

Now a transcendental time-determination is homogenous with the category (which constitutes its unity) insofar as it is universal and rests a rule a priori. But it is on the other hand homogenous with the appearance insofar as time is contained in every empirical representation of the manifold. Hence an application of the category to appearances becomes possible by means of the transcendental time-determination which, as the schema of the concept of the understanding, mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former (Kant, A138-39/ B177-78).

Heidegger also demonstrates the way that the three types of synthesis, which Kant discusses in the first edition version of the transcendental deduction, also have a temporal basis, but this demonstration is far too complex to revisit here (see Heidegger 1997, §24.). Thus, Heidegger

says, human temporality is the unifying mode of transcendence—time is the ultimate *a priori* structure, making all of the others possible, and therefore making all experience possible. Time is the condition for every possible mode of comportment towards beings and for the human capability to choose among possible modes. Our experience of time is therefore the closest we get to an experience of being, yet there is no direct experience of time. We experience beings changing in time, and we experience our own activities which take up time, but not time itself. Heidegger uses his idea of the open to elaborate our indirect experience of being as time.

Keep in mind, however, that, for Heidegger, unlike Kant, the experience which is rendered possible by human transcendence is not knowledge of an object—rather, human beings, through their activities, reveal beings as multiple components of a meaningful interrelated structure: beings are always revealed as parts of a world, and as related to the other parts of the world. The manifold of intuition is transformed by human transcendence into a world of beings standing in various relations to each other—into experience. The beings and their relations to each other constitute experience as a pre-formed whole, and the investigation of particular objects within the world comes later, as the result of an effort to focus.

Human Dasein—a being that finds itself situated in the midst of beings, comporting itself towards beings—in so doing exists in such a way that beings are always manifest as a whole. Here it is not necessary that this wholeness be expressly conceptualized; its belonging to Dasein can be veiled, the expanse of this whole is changeable... Yet the understanding of this wholeness, an understanding that in each case reaches ahead and embraces it, is a surpassing [transcendence] in the direction of world (Heidegger 1949, 121).

The “open” can then be defined as the structure which makes this structured experience possible—the condition for the possibility of the relations that hold between things in a world. The other essential point here, is that while openness is related to being and to time, Heidegger also calls it *freedom*. We will investigate his reasons for doing so, but first we should elaborate this notion of the open further.

In considering the relation of correspondence and reference between a statement and a thing, Heidegger says, in a passage which plays on the root meaning of the German word for object, *Gegenstand*, which means “standing opposed”:

“[T]o present here means to let the thing stand opposed as object. As thus placed, what stands opposed must traverse an open field of opposedness and nevertheless must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something withstanding. This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the openness of which is not first created by the presenting, but rather is only entered into and taken over as a domain of relatedness.... (Heidegger 1967, 141).

This openness, the framework of the world, is in the distinctions, relations, and references between things which allows them to come together as a totality of meaningful experience, as a world—but the emphasis must be placed on the *between*. What is between things is openness, and it makes possible all beings and events. As such, it is being itself, the ‘not’ of all distinctions:

The nothing is the “not” of being, and is thus being, experienced from the perspective of beings. [Being is not-a-thing: nothing]. The ontological difference is the “not” between beings and being. [Beings are not being.] Yet just as being, as the “not” in relation to beings, is by no means a nothing in the sense of a *nihil negativum*, so too the difference, as the “not” between beings and being, is in no way merely the figment of a distinction made by our understanding (*ens rationis*) (Heidegger 1949, 97).

Further, “Comportment stands open to beings” (Heidegger, 1967, 141) and “The openness of comportment as the inner condition of the possibility of correctness is grounded in freedom” (Heidegger, 1967, 142). Openness of comportment allows beings to appear in the open. To say that this openness is the distinction between a knowing subject and the known object, or the distinctions between objects themselves, is both right and wrong—but probably more wrong than right. It is right insofar as all of these epistemological distinctions are *founded* on the indirect experience of openness, or freedom, to which Heidegger wants us to attend. It is wrong because to say ‘knowing subject’ and ‘known object’ is already to move away from the openness itself, to

characterize things in the reductive language of epistemology, which eliminates significant parts of the experience itself, because knowing is only one among the many possible modes of comportment. The use of tools requires an open comportment to things, but it does not require the conceptualization necessary to knowledge. I am usually unaware of the presence of the tool when I am using it; my thinking will generally be absorbed by the object to which I apply the tool, rather than the tool itself, unless I am thinking about something else entirely, which is also possible. The teacher focuses on the calculation rather than the chalk and black board; the carpenter focuses on the wood, not the sandpaper or hammer. A skilled knitter can think about the conversation in which she is engaged, while her knitting proceeds unimpeded. These interactions with beings constitute most of what we do in the world—I hardly ever think of the sidewalk under my feet when I’m out for a walk—but the openness of comportment is essential to all of them. The open includes the *a priori* conditions for knowledge, but it includes a great deal more, as well. It is this general openness, which both enables experience and reveals itself in experience, with which Heidegger is concerned, and not any particular reductive account of it. He advocates the phenomenological method for just this reason, within which openness on the side of the human being is partly a freedom from the prejudices inherited from the tradition and partly the freedom to experience the thing as it presents itself, openness to experience itself, whatever it reveals, but to say that the openness of comportment is merely that which is characteristic of the phenomenologist is again to retain the subject/object distinction and to focus too much on one way of revealing beings, to the exclusion of the many other possible ways. In other words, the phenomenological approach *to knowing* is one in which human beings are free to experience the self-showing of the thing as it is in its own being, but knowing is only one way of interacting with beings. I can also use them, admire them, play with them, make them, etc. This openness is the emptiness that allows us to encounter beings, along with that which lies

between them, distinguishing them from and relating them to each other. It is the invisible structure of the world. As the ground against which, or the medium within which, beings maintain their presence, it is being.

We also encounter this openness in our own manner of being, however. Insofar as we are essentially acting all of the time, we appear to ourselves as temporal (rather than merely present) beings. Our existence is spread out through time, reaching into the past and projecting into the future. So the openness of time itself is the medium in which we appear to ourselves. Our being is temporal, grounded on time. Yet, as beings who have this openness at the center of their being, beings who stand outside of themselves, human beings are essentially constituted by freedom. Human being is transcendent, the possibility of entering into various relations with other beings. And this is what freedom means. We are constantly acting, choosing among different possibilities for acting, and acting in transcendence of the present beings and the laws which govern their relations to each other. Freedom is necessary to explain the very mode of existence which is characteristic of human beings.

Openness is not, however, merely human freedom. This notion moves freedom away from the exclusive domain of the subject, and, in so doing, unsettles the subjectivity of the subject even more than the refusal of epistemological language does. Heidegger says,

The human being does not ‘possess’ freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive Da-sein, possesses the human being—so originarily that only it secures for humanity that distinctive relatedness to beings as a whole as such [transcendence] which founds all history (Heidegger, 1967, 145-46).

Entering into the open, real freedom as ground, the human being acquires the ability to transcend which enables human freedom. Here we have Heidegger’s ontological concept of freedom displayed, insofar as that is possible.



This project began as an attempt to sort out the meanings of negative and positive freedom, yet it quickly became something more involved than that. A return to these concepts might be helpful, however, in classifying the various kinds and levels of freedom that we have discussed. “Negative” freedom is the absence of some impediment to acting as one wishes to act—the impediment here is *not* causal determinism, but an empirically determinable impediment, such as handcuffs or prison walls or laws forbidding the act and prescribing punishment to those who commit it. This negative freedom is thoroughly *a posteriori*, a component of experience rather than a condition for it. Utilitarians, empiricists, and compatibilists all tend to claim that this is the only important sort of freedom, some going so far as to claim that it is the only intelligible sort of freedom.

Kant disagrees, saying that a “positive notion” of freedom is also conceivable—a freedom that depends on the presence of something rather than on the absence of something. Kant, however, does mean for his positive notion to coincide with a negative freedom from natural causality. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, he says:

*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of all nonrational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes. [This] definition of freedom is *negative* and therefore unfruitful for insight into its essence; but there flows from it a *positive* concept of freedom, which is so much the richer and more fruitful . . . . Natural necessity was a heteronomy of efficient causes, since every effect was possible only in accordance with the law that something else determines the efficient cause to causality; what, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will’s property of being a law unto itself? (4:446-447)

Kant’s positive freedom is autonomy or freedom of the will, and the empiricists object to it on the basis of the metaphysical suppositions which are supposedly necessary to support it—what and where, they ask, is this “will,” and how can we explain its relation to the person whom we know in experience? Kant’s explanation, in the first *Critique*, is that this freedom is an alternate

sort of causality, which, although it possesses a source outside of experience, is capable of beginning a causal series in experience. It is the human ability to be the originator of a causal chain of events. We have seen how this autonomy, in the realm of knowledge, amounts to applying the law of synthesis, “seek unity!” to one’s own activity, thereby “originating” the causal series which result from the correct application of concepts to experience and the correct combination of concepts into judgments. The will is then the unified ground which must be presupposed in order to explain the unity which is found in those different experiences which are brought together under a concept. Kant’s concept of freedom is therefore an *a priori* positive concept, although it merges with an *a priori* negative freedom from heteronomous causation.

Heidegger says that his notion of freedom is prior to both these positive and negative concepts. In the essay, “On the Essence of Truth”, he says:

Freedom is not mere absence of constraint with respect to what one can or cannot do. Nor is it on the other hand readiness for what is required and necessary (and so somehow a being). Prior to all this (“negative” and “positive” freedom), freedom is engagement in the disclosure of beings as such (Heidegger, 1967, 145).

Heidegger’s freedom is not a sort of causality, like Kant’s freedom of the will, and, although it is negative, it is neither the *a posteriori* negative freedom of the empiricists nor (merely) Kant’s *a priori* negative freedom from heteronomous causality. Heidegger’s freedom is an *a priori* negativity which enables the experience of beings, as beings of one kind or another, and therefore must precede every type of causality: the ontological relations, those constituting a world within which beings (including human beings) can appear, must precede every causal relation, even the autonomous relation between a being and itself.

Why are these relations characterized as free? Human transcendence can allow the same being to appear within different worlds or interpretative contexts—as an item of gear, an object for scientific observation, or an aesthetic object—and this transcendence depends upon a

corresponding flexibility or looseness in the beings themselves—they allow these different, true interpretations. This human transcendence and the variability of the objects are two aspects of the same freedom or openness. Heidegger uses the difficult term ‘*gelassenheit*’ to indicate this freedom—it is translated as ‘releasement’ or ‘letting be’ and requires flexibility on both sides of the interaction between the human being and a being. We let ourselves be open to experiencing the beings as they reveal themselves, while the beings let themselves be revealed as sometimes this and sometimes that sort of being. The openness is *between* the beings in a world, ourselves included. We don’t control this openness, the way we presumably control the causality of willing, rather we allow ourselves to enter into the open (let ourselves be in the open) and find ourselves in the midst of beings which allow themselves to be part of one constructed world (the workshop, for example) or another (the museum or laboratory). Our world is sort of like an elaborate jigsaw puzzle, which can be reassembled to make different pictures from the same pieces—the assembly depends both upon the pieces being able to be components of different pictures and our ability to perceive the same piece as a part of one picture now and a part of a different picture later. The freedom which makes this possible is neither a characteristic of the human being (positive freedom) nor an *a posteriori* characteristic of the other beings (negative freedom)—rather it is the openness *between* these beings, which makes every interpretative relationship between human being and other beings possible.

We said earlier that Heidegger’s concept of freedom would provide some insight into the possibility of human creativity. Now we can say more about why this is so. We can start with a mundane example, from culinary science, and proceed to a more sophisticated example in physics. Fuel-burning torches used to be used primarily by plumbers to weld pipes together. Then sometime in the past few decades, an unknown pastry chef decided to try using a torch in the kitchen to caramelize the sugar on her *crème brûlée*. This worked remarkably well, giving

the chef more control over the heating of the sugar than was ever possible by running the whole dish under a broiler, and now butane torches can be found in most professional kitchens and many home kitchens, as well. This creative use of a tool required a shift in thinking of the sort that Heidegger describes, a shift that, at first, meant breaking a rule by using a tool the wrong way—using a tool designed for melting metals to melt sugar. Einstein’s creative thinking led to a similar shift in the way that we think of space. Although Newton’s law of gravity works pretty well to explain the motion of the planets and the way things tend to fall towards earth instead of floating above it or flying away from it, gravity is a problematic notion in science, because it requires one object to act upon another across some distance. Einstein discovered a solution to this problem, but it required a radical shift in the way that we conceive of space. Ever since Descartes portrayed space through the use of three axes intersecting at right angles, we have tended to think of space as a grid made up of straight lines and right angles. Einstein showed that if we conceive of space differently (wrongly)—permitting the lines to curve and the size of the angles to vary, then we can explain gravity as a force which affects the space in the vicinity of a large object rather than as an attraction between distant objects. The object flying through space in the vicinity of earth travels “straight” along the axes of space, obeying Newton’s laws of motion, but the earth’s gravity causes these axes to curve in toward the surface of the planet, so the flying object flies “straight” into the ground. Creativity requires a freedom from the rules that govern the correct use of concepts; we can find new ways to use old tools and words. Heidegger’s concept of freedom is the only one broad enough to explain human creativity.

## CONCLUSION

In this discussion of the problem of freedom, we started out by examining some articles that address the premises of the argument from responsibility. Williams, Nagel, and Nietzsche pose challenges to the supposition that people are morally responsible for their acts, while Strawson and Frankfurt question the connection between freedom and responsibility. We concluded that the project to ground a theory of freedom on this ethical basis, although perhaps not impossible, would be rather complicated, while still not addressing some of the other important roles that freedom plays in our understanding of human actions. Even if a moral concept of freedom can be established, this may not be enough to explain our belief that progress, either individual or societal, is possible. Furthermore, such a concept of freedom might not be sufficient to ground the normative values that ground scientific research or the kind of freedom that is implicit in human creativity. In order to cut through the knot of the ethical arguments, while searching for a more fundamental notion of freedom, we turned to an investigation of the theories of freedom suggested by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and in Heidegger's writings on the subject.

In the argument of the Third Antinomy, Kant demonstrates that the idea of freedom is no less intelligible than the idea of causality—he opens a conceptual space for a theory of freedom. After considering the comments on the antinomy, in which Kant further elaborates the idea of freedom, we traced this notion back into his epistemological theory. Therein, we saw that a notion of freedom is necessary to explain the actions executed by the faculties of understanding and reason, and that this notion is broad enough to explain the normative aspects of knowing as well as the possibility of progress.

Turning to Heidegger, we found that he argues that Kant's theories reveal an ontological notion of freedom. Insofar as our ability to know about other beings extends beyond the

representational encounters with which Kant was concerned, the freedom that Kant found also extends to every other sort of encounter with beings, as well. Freedom, for Heidegger, is the ground for the possibility of the temporal mode of existence which is characteristically human. Only a notion of freedom with this breadth can explain human creativity.

Kant claims that freedom is merely intelligible, because it is not a component of experience. Heidegger says that freedom, like being, cannot be addressed with the same concepts that we use to describe beings—as an essentially temporal notion which refers to what lies beyond or between every presenting object, it calls for a language that avoids the straightforward references of ordinary nouns and adjectives. Insofar as freedom is a condition for thinking about experience, or even for existing in the manner that we do, any description of it obviously challenges our usual ways of thinking and speaking. Thus, developing a *positive* concept of freedom is not necessarily an achievable goal. Freedom does seem to be central to our understanding of ourselves and our interactions with the world, however. As such, we need to persist in our efforts to think about it, in spite of the difficulties, rather than trying to explain it away.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Professor Rocha suggested that Strawson adopted these terms so as to clearly distinguish his position from that attributed to the optimist. If we keep in mind, however, that Strawson is developing a new compatibility position, I think we can get by without the confusing new names.

<sup>2</sup> All references to Kant will be to the standard pagination rather than to the pages in the translations that I am using, which are listed in the Bibliography.

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