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La actualidad de la
Crítica de la razón pura:
Parte Teórica

The epistemological interpretation of transcendental idealism and its unavoidable slide into compatibilism

DANIEL DAL MONTE¹

Abstract

In this paper, I first defend Kant's critique of compatibilism. Kant rejects as semantic subterfuge a form of compatibilism that tries to assimilate a form of freedom *within* a deterministic causal series. I will address two major compatibilist theories: those that ascribe freedom based on reactive attitudes, and those that ascribe freedom based on some causal integration involving psychological drives of the agent. I then proceed to undermine the epistemological, or methodological, interpretation of transcendental idealism by showing how the only theory of freedom it can formulate is a compatibilist one.

Keywords: Kant, compatibilism, free will, methodological interpretation, transcendental idealism, determinism

La interpretación epistemológica del idealismo trascendental y su inevitable desplazamiento hacia el compatibilismo

Resumen

En este artículo, defiendo primero la crítica de Kant al compatibilismo. Kant rechaza como subterfugio semántico una forma de compatibilismo que intenta asimilar una forma de libertad dentro de una serie causal determinista. Abordaré dos grandes teorías compatibilistas: las que atribuyen libertad sobre la base de actitudes reactivas, y las que atribuyen libertad sobre la base de alguna integración causal que involucra impulsos psicológicos del agente. Luego procedo a socavar la interpretación epistemológica o metodológica del idealismo trascendental al mostrar cómo la única teoría de la libertad que puede formular es una compatibilista.

Palabras clave: Kant, compatibilismo, libre albedrío, interpretación metodológica, idealismo trascendental, determinismo

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1. Introduction

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explicitly rejects compatibilist views of freedom. A compatibilist concedes that determinism is true but still tries to maintain the viability of freedom. Determinism need not fully undercut our freedom, the compatibilist argues, so long as we understand freedom in a certain way. Freedom, a compatibilist might say, is the ability to pursue what one wants, but not the ability to determine what one wants (see Schopenhauer 2013: 531). Deterministic causation, outside of our control, limits our desires, and so our freedom consists of acting on them but not in choosing them. Thomas Hobbes, for instance, wrote that the freedom of an individual consists of his finding “no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to do” (1985: II, Ch. 21). As long as there is no obstacle in the way of the individual’s achievement of his wants, the individual is free, according to the compatibilist, although his desires are determined.

Kant, however, is clear that any attempt to refashion the notion of freedom to adjust to determinism diminishes it to the point that it is no longer freedom. The compatibilist, having already acknowledged the reality of determinism, cannot at the same time believe that freedom is a spontaneous, uncaused power to author events. The latter is the libertarian conception of freedom. A libertarian conception of freedom posits the will as the ultimate source of action. As Robert Kane puts it, “the ultimate source of our actions lies in us and not outside us in factors beyond our control” (2007: 5). If it is the source, the will cannot be the byproduct of causal powers acting in its environment.

The compatibilist concedes the reality of determinism. If there is freedom at all for the compatibilist, then, it can only be ensconced in a deterministic causal network that extends into the individual’s environment. So, a libertarian conception of freedom, which defends a conception of freedom as the source of an action, is very different from the conception of the compatibilist. A compatibilist conception of freedom cannot allow freedom to be the source of action, since freedom is in fact, for the compatibilist, determined by pre-existing causes.

To call some action ‘free’ that is ultimately the product of deterministic causation, even if it finds its proximate origins in desires, or

higher-order desires, is, for Kant, a kind of semantic trickery. Determinism, for Kant, means the absence of freedom, no matter how one may reset the conditions of freedom so that they conform to the presence of determinism. Kant writes,

If, as is admitted by these men themselves, these determining representations themselves have the ground of their existence in time and indeed in the *antecedent state*, and this in turn in a preceding state [...] these determinations may be internal and they may have psychological instead of mechanical causality [...] which may therefore bring with them psychological freedom [...] but *nevertheless natural necessity* (*KpV*, 5:96).

Kant caustically remarks that the so-called ‘freedom’ of the compatibilists is “nothing better than the freedom of a turnspit, which, when once it is wound up, also accomplishes its movements of itself” (1996: 5:97). In other words, compatibilist theories of freedom merely provide verbal window dressing for what are deterministic causal sequences. There are devices, such as clocks, that generate activity of their power, once they are prepared to do so by a human. But, the mere fact of being able to power their activity is not nearly enough to establish freedom for the clock. In the same way, the mere fact that one can act without constraint on a certain desire—and so is animated by one’s psychological drives—is not enough to establish freedom, if that person is also at the same a product of deterministic causation.

Compatibilists exaggerate the difference between proximate and ultimate causation into one between freedom and determinism. The analogy with a turnspit is perhaps somewhat infelicitous, as a turnspit presumably does not have desires. Nevertheless, a human that is determined psychologically, is just as woodenly mechanistic as a turnspit. It does not matter, as far as establishing freedom, that there may be no obstacle in the way of the desires of this human, just as it would not matter if there are no obstacles in the way of a turnspit.

In this paper, I will first defend Kant’s critique of compatibilism. I will then show how epistemological interpretations of Kant’s transcendental idealism can only provide a basis for a compatibilist conception of freedom. I will proceed to do this by showing how epistemological interpretations

presuppose an anti-realist attitude to both determinism and transcendental idealism. Once this presupposition is exposed as fallacious, I will prove that the best that epistemological interpretations can provide are compatibilist versions of freedom. The upshot is that epistemological interpretations end up clashing with Kant's explicit commitments as well as taking on all the weaknesses of compatibilist theories of freedom.

2. Contemporary compatibilism and its problems

In this section, I will defend Kant's rejection of compatibilism by identifying some problems with contemporary compatibilism. Compatibilism has grown in sophistication in the many decades that have passed since Kant. In fact, most contemporary philosophers are compatibilists (see Pereboom 2001: xvi). Differing argument styles defending compatibilism have emerged.

The major figure associated with one version I will describe is P.F. Strawson. This version holds that our notion of freedom is grounded in so-called 'reactive attitudes'. Freedom for Strawson consists of the mere psychological assumption behind these reactive attitudes, and not any ontological reality rooted in some special form of causation.

Strawson's reactive attitudes consist in human reactions such as praise, blame, admiration, and gratitude, all of which presuppose the idea that the person to whom we are reacting is free and therefore morally responsible. We do not, for instance, react to an object like a tree with the same kind of admiration with which we react to a human being. When we admire a human being, we admire them for qualities of which they are in some way the source—at least, there is the *presupposition* of sourcehood in the reactive attitude. The person is *responsible* for their admirable actions, whereas a tree is just the passive bearer of admirable properties (see Strawson 1982: 75).

Reactive attitudes are a permanent feature of human relationships, according to Strawson. Even if the scientific community were to prove that determinism is true, this would not undermine our reactive attitudes. The first step in Strawson's argument is, therefore, a psychological thesis that, regardless of how convinced we are of the truth of determinism, we will continue to praise, blame, and admire people as if they are morally

responsible. The thesis is purely psychological because the reactive attitudes that characterize everyday interchanges with other human beings are independent of any kind of metaphysical facts about the nature of the person. It could turn out that a certain kind of ontological reductionism is true, such that all of the human behavior is understandable in terms of the DNA. Nevertheless, we would still regard people with blame when they err, as if it were *they* who erred, and we could not instead account for their misbehavior in terms of some biological predestination.

Strawson writes (1982: 81):

The human commitment to participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships is, I think, too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that a general theoretical conviction might so change our world that, in it, there were no longer any such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them.

The next step in Strawson's argument is normative. Because reactive attitudes are so deeply interwoven into the fabric of human life, efforts to square them with metaphysical postulates are merely academic. We do not need to ask whether our reactive attitudes, which presuppose the freedom and responsibility of individuals with whom we interact, are consistent with metaphysical reality. We need not preoccupy ourselves with arcane philosophical debates about whether or not we are *really* free. The presupposition that we are free is simply inextricably woven into our daily lives, and it will not change no matter how often we are chided by philosophers and/or scientists. Our reactive attitudes do not require an "external 'rational' justification" (Strawson 1982: 82).

I argue that Strawson has attempted to build a compatibilist account of freedom (see Pereboom 2001: 90). Freedom can exist along with determinism because we presuppose freedom in our reactive attitudes, even if we also accept the reality of determinism in our more speculative moments. Strawsonian freedom is not grounded in some ontological reality having to do with a special sort of causation. Instead, it is grounded in the pervasive social phenomenon of reactive attitudes. This sort of grounding of freedom, since it avoids questions of causation, is compatible with determinism.

There is another broad category of argument for a compatibilist conception of free will. Derk Pereboom describes this second type of account as picking out “causal integrationist conditions” (2001: 100). Strawsonian compatibilism is distinctive in that it establishes a version of freedom that can exist regardless of any causal circumstances that might characterize the agent. Freedom amounts to a psychological stance that characterizes our intersubjective relationships. Since we retain this psychological stance independently of our ontological situation, it is needless to parse the kind of causation we may or may not be exercising.

3. Causal-integrationist versions of compatibilism

On the other hand, causal-integrationist compatibilism² *does* concern itself with metaphysical aspects of the agent’s causal situation. While accepting determinism, the causal integrationist compatibilist draws distinctions within the category of deterministic causation that are metaphysical in nature. These metaphysical distinctions are crucial to distinguish between free and unfree acts. Causal-integrationist accounts identify free actions as those that are integrated especially with the psychology of the agent.

For instance, A.J. Ayer articulates a conception of free action that emphasizes a specific role for the desires of an agent in the causal history of an action. Let us say an agent has a strong desire to take a course in the philosophy of mind. The agent acts freely only insofar as this desire leads to the action of the agent. If the agent’s desire is the driving force behind the action of the agent, then the action is a free act. This could all be maintained while at the same time defending the view that the desires of the agent are themselves the product of deterministic causation.

If, on the other hand, the agent has a strong desire to take a course in the philosophy of mind, but his practically-minded parents distressed at the prospect of him wasting time on an impractical topic, coerce their son into taking a course on core accounting practices, then he is not acting freely. His strong desire to take a course on the philosophy of mind is not driving his behavior. Instead, his parents have intervened and so the agent is acting under constraint.

² The terminology is derived from Pereboom (2001: 103).

For a compatibilist like Ayer, freedom and necessity are not opposed. One can still act freely, even while one's desires are fully determined by external causes, so long as one's desires are the driving force behind one's actions. It is freedom and constraint that *are* opposed. One is not acting freely when one's behavior is being directed by external pressures against one's desires. "For it is not, I think, causality that freedom is to be contrasted with, but constraint [...] If I am constrained, I do not act freely" (Ayer 1982: 19). Ayer's account is a causal-integrationist account in the sense that it identifies freedom with a certain integration of one's action with one's psychology—in the case of Ayer, one is free when one's actions are integrated with one's desires.

Another causal-integrationist compatibilist account is that of Harry Frankfurt. A free action is for Frankfurt is one that results from a first-order desire that is in conformity with a second-order volition (1971: 5–20). Frankfurt gives a taxonomy of different desires. There are first-order desires, which take the form of *A* wants to *X*, where *A* is the agent and *X* is some activity or object. First-order desires are desires for certain activities or objects—e.g. I want to take a philosophy course. Second-order desires are desires to have certain desires. They take the form *A* wants to *X*, where *X* is a certain desire. For example, I might desire to desire to take a philosophy course—in other words, I approve of my desire to take a philosophy course. The opposite may also be true: I may have a second-order desire to not want my first-order desire to take a philosophy course. Finally, there are second-order volitions, which are a more serious form of second-order desire, in which the agent wants a certain desire to be part of his or her will. For example, not only do I want to want to take a philosophy course, I want to *act* on my desire to take a philosophy course (i.e. make it part of my will) (Frankfurt 1971: 13–15).

Free action for Frankfurt consists of a special causal integration understood in light of this taxonomy of desire. Free action occurs when an agent acts on a first-order desire that is in accordance with a second-order volition. That is, an agent acts freely when he acts on a first-order desire—e.g. a desire to take a philosophy course—that is in accord with a second-order volition—e.g. the agent wants the desire to take a philosophy course to be part of his or her will. An agent does not act freely when he or she acts according to a first-order desire—e.g. the desire to take a philosophy

course—that is not in accord with a second-order volition—e.g. the agent does not want the first-order desire to take a philosophy course to be part of his or her will. Perhaps the agent is helpless to avoid the allure of philosophy, but wishes to rid himself of it because it is filling his mind with doubts!

4. Criticism of contemporary compatibilism

It is legitimate to ask if Kant would continue to maintain his adamant rejection of compatibilist accounts of freedom if he were to encounter them in the sophisticated form they have taken in contemporary philosophy. It is my view that Kant's criticisms still hold. In the second *Critique*, Kant writes, in reference to compatibilist solutions to the philosophical problem of free will, that “some still let themselves be put off by this subterfuge and so think they have solved, with a little quibbling about words, that difficult problem” (*KpV*, 5:96).

Kant's insight here, i.e. that compatibilist accounts of freedom do work that is merely semantic quibbling, is compelling. ‘Freedom’, according to some compatibilist accounts, is not an ability to override natural causality, rooted in a real metaphysical power that is exempt from natural causality. Instead, ‘freedom’ is refashioned to allow us to continue to believe in it in spite of our acknowledgment of uninterrupted determinism. Freedom consists of a mere psychological attitude or a mere harmonization between what we want and what we want to be part of our will.

Such semantic refashioning, though, attempts to solve the contradiction between freedom and determinism not by establishing a real reconciliation between the two realities but diluting the definition of freedom to make it compatible with determinism. Compatibility is achieved at the expense of losing any meaningful sense of freedom. After all, people manipulated by ingenious neuroscientists, whom no one would intuitively regard as free, are capable of having reactive attitudes, and of wanting what they want to be part of their will (see Pereboom 2001: 112).

Though the scope of this paper is too limited to provide an extensive treatment of compatibilist theories of freedom, I will provide what I think are some powerful justifications for Kant's rejection of it. These arguments

against compatibilist versions of freedom are ultimately intended to build a case against epistemological interpretations of transcendental idealism. If all epistemological interpretations can give us are compatibilist versions of free will, then they are in severe tension with Kant's clear commitment against compatibilism, and also suffer from all the deficiencies of compatibilism which I here expose.

5. Question-begging incompatibilist arguments

The first problem with compatibilism I will identify is that at the heart of arguments for compatibilism is a fallacy of begging the question. To define freedom a certain way, as compatibilists do, and then to claim that freedom is consistent with determinism, amounts to begging the question. The original question compatibilists try to answer is whether freedom is compatible with determinism. Compatibilism amounts to a defense of an affirmative answer to this question. To answer this question affirmatively, though, by defining freedom in a way that is already compatible with determinism, is to assume what one is trying to prove. This is a central problem for both argument styles of compatibilism that I have mentioned. The point is therefore worth reemphasizing.

Begging the question is, of course, the logical fallacy of prejudging as true in the premises of one's argument that which one hopes to establish in the conclusion. The question for compatibilists is whether or not freedom and determinism are compatible. They set out to answer this question by assuming a definition of freedom that is already compatible with determinism. Therefore, compatibilist arguments assume what they are trying to prove.

So, Strawsonian compatibilism begins with the attempt to address the question of whether or not free will and determinism are compatible. That these two realities are compatible is what the argument for Strawsonian compatibilism seeks to prove. To prove compatibility, Strawsonian compatibilism adopts a definition of freedom—namely, a psychological version that consists of reactive attitudes—that already assumes that freedom is compatible with determinism. Other definitions of freedom—for instance, as an absolute causal spontaneity—could have been selected that would have shown the failure of compatibilism. But, the argument for

Strawsonian compatibilism conveniently adopts a definition of freedom that will lead to a successful defense of compatibilism.

Similarly, Frankfurtian compatibilism argues for the compatibility of free will and determinism by presupposing in its premises a definition of free will that is compatible with determinism, when it could have selected other definitions of freedom.

The begging the question fallacy is common to both routes to compatibilism I have outlined. Moreover, each route to compatibilism errs in its ways. I will begin with the flaws unique to the compatibilist account of Strawson.

6. Problems unique to the Strawsonian compatibilist

As I said earlier, this compatibilist account moves from a psychological thesis, i.e. that theoretical considerations about determinism will not dislodge our reactive attitudes, to a normative thesis, i.e. that esoteric metaphysical exercises are superfluous and dehumanizing. Contemplating ways in which human beings are determined warps our relationships with other people, such that we regard them as objects to be manipulated and managed. Strawson writes (1982: 82):

Finally, to the further question whether it would not be *rational*, given the general theoretical conviction of the truth of determinism, so to change our world that in it all these [reactive] attitudes were wholly suspended [...] it is *useless* to ask whether it would not be rational for us to do what it is not in our nature to (be able to) do.

Yet, this move from psychology to normativity does not really address the fundamental question of compatibilism, which is whether or not freedom and determinism can be reconciled. At best, Strawson's compatibilist account offers practical guidance. Even if determinism is true, we should not try to rid ourselves of the inevitable emotions of resentment, praise, and blame that characterize human relationships. But, compatibilism has to do more than merely offer practical guidance. Compatibilism is supposed to answer the question of whether freedom and determinism are reconcilable in a conceptual way. To merely recommend that it is best to

move on from questions of the consistency of freedom and determinism, and just continue to interact with one another in the way that is most natural to us, leaves unanswered the philosophical and conceptual matter of whether or not freedom and determinism are compatible. Just the fact that we ought to maintain the status quo does not have any bearing on the issue of whether or not free will and determinism are *conceptually* compatible.

Strawson tries to dismiss the conceptual question of whether or not freedom and determinism can be reconciled as an example of over-intellectualization. Reactive attitudes so deeply embedded in human relationships that it is erroneous to even attempt to evaluate these attitudes in terms of some metaphysical inquiry that is independent of them (1982: 78). But the question compatibilists try to answer requires a philosophical treatment that addresses the consistency of the concepts of freedom and determinism. Compatibilism already presupposes, therefore, the importance of the theoretical issues relating reactive attitudes and metaphysics that Strawson dismisses as a mere distraction from the commitments most fundamental to our nature. To say that reactive attitudes are a permanent feature of human society, and we are therefore just going to work within the framework they form, is practical guidance. This guidance does not answer the central question of compatibilism, which has to do with the logical consistency of freedom and determinism.

The normative recommendation, therefore, we get from Strawson has to do with how we ought to live our lives. But, the normativity that compatibilist theories are supposed to offer is theoretical, i.e. whether or not it is *logical* or *consistent* to believe in both freedom and determinism.

The mere fact that a belief in freedom, presupposed in the reactive attitudes, can persist even given determinism, does not mean that freedom is actually consistent with determinism. This is true even if we define freedom in a reductive way as a reactive attitude. If a thoroughgoing determinism is true, then the reactive attitudes that characterize human relationships are also determined. So, there is no question of the reactive attitudes *not* being there. It is not as if we are *maintaining* our presupposition of freedom even in the face of determinism. We could maintain—i.e. willfully and deliberately hold—our presupposition of freedom if determinism were *not* true. In such a case, we would be exercising judgment about whether the presupposition of freedom is viable or appropriate.

If determinism is true, though, it just so happens, as an inevitable product of deterministic causation, that there are these reactive attitudes that presuppose freedom. And the mere presence of the presupposition of freedom that results from deterministic causation does not mean the former and the latter are consistent, in a theoretical sense. Beliefs that are the product of deterministic causation are not truth-sensitive, nor are they sensitive to the conditions of logical consistency. These beliefs just happen to characterize the subject and are not the product of a considered, free judgment.

The task of the compatibilist is to reconcile freedom and determinism, but it seems all that Strawson's theory does it to identify a co-occurrence. There is deterministic causation, and the presupposition of freedom in the reactive attitudes occurs because of deterministic causation. This co-occurrence is fully consistent with the idea that freedom, *qua* reactive attitude, is *not* conceptually/philosophically consistent with determinism.

7. Problems with causal integrationist accounts

I will now introduce criticisms of compatibilist accounts that identify causal-integrationist conditions. Harry Frankfurt writes, "It is only because a person has volitions of the second-order that he is capable both of enjoying and of lacking freedom of the will" (1971: 210). Volitions of the second-order occur when someone desires that a certain desire constitutes his will (see Frankfurt 1971: 9). Those beings that lack second-order volitions do not arbitrate over which of their first-order desires are incorporated into their will, and it would be hard to characterize such a being as free. Such a being would be pulled along by its strongest first-order desire, whatever it happens to be.

Frankfurt's distinction between second-order volitions and first-order desires is illuminating, and it captures some of the difference between situations in which we recognize someone as free, and situations in which we do not. For instance, we would say that someone who is a drug addict does not act freely because they are acting on a first-order desire to obtain drugs, but they lack a second-order volition to incorporate the first-order

desire into their will. This person is acting against their will, and so not freely. But, Frankfurt's account is flawed.

First, as I stated earlier, such an account begs the question of whether or not freedom and determinism are compatible by defining freedom in a way that permits it to be compatible with determinism. There are other problems, though. One only has to extend the logic in Frankfurt's attempt at compatibilism to expose its flaws.

Let us say, along with Frankfurt, that a person who has a first-order desire to take drugs, but lacks a second-order volition to make this desire her will, is not free. Why exactly, one might ask, isn't such a person free? A reasonable answer is that they have not made their first-order desire their own, and so their will, which is based on their first-order desire, is not their own (see Frankfurt 1971: 14). The person is acting *against* her will, established in her second-order volition, and so is subject to some alien force. Derk Pereboom writes: "Like Ayer, Frankfurt can also be viewed as attempting to capture the intuition that for an agent to be morally responsible for an action is for it to be really his" (2001: 104). The first-order desire is not *representative of the person* because she has not endorsed it with her second-order volition. We would view a person who is gripped by an overpowering first-order desire, which runs contrary to her second-order volitions, as a pathetic victim, perhaps even pathological, rather than free. The first-order desire is alien and not her own because she condemns it with her second-order volition.

But, we need to take a deeper look at the second-order volition. If determinism is true, then this second-order volition is the product of deterministic causation beyond the person's control. If the first-order desire is not the person's own because they did not endorse it with a second-order volition, doesn't it follow that the second-order volition is not the person's own because they did not endorse *it*? Moreover, if the second-order volition is the product of deterministic causation, does it constitute genuine endorsement of the first-order desire? After all, can someone truly endorse something if they can't help but endorse it?

In sum, we can ask the same questions about the second-order volitions that we can about first-order desires if determinism is true. If one is not free if one is driven by a first-order desire one does not endorse, then

it also follows that one is not free if one is driven by second-order volition, for a certain first-order desire, one did not endorse.

In the end, Frankfurt's distinction between the conflicted state in which first-order desires clash with second-order volitions, and an integrated state, seems arbitrary. Even in the integrated state, the person has not fully identified with their actions, given the fact that the second-order volition is the result of deterministic causation.

Even sophisticated contemporary accounts of compatibilism, then, of which Kant was unaware, remain vulnerable to the criticisms of compatibilism that Kant leveled in the second *Critique*. Compatibilist accounts of freedom try to dance around our reservations by redefining freedom in question-begging ways. Or, such accounts just accept the fact that attributions of freedom are not going away and then act as though some genuine resolution of the tension between freedom and determinism has been achieved.

The problems of contemporary compatibilism will also plague interpretations of Kant's theory of freedom that misrepresent it as a compatibilist account. I will now address a certain style of interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism that inevitably leads to a misrepresentation of Kant's theory of freedom as compatibilist. Such a misrepresentation weighs down Kant's theory of freedom with all the problems of compatibilism I have just identified. There is also the considerable problem, of course, that Kant himself rejected compatibilism. No interpretation of his transcendental idealism that leads to compatibilism can avoid reconstructing Kant's central doctrine in a way that contradicts other explicit commitments in his work.

8. Differing versions of Kant's transcendental idealism

I will focus on two broad camps that have formed in the scholarship on the proper interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism. There is a multitude of different interpretations of transcendental idealism, but they can be understood in terms of a spectrum of views that give different degrees of epistemological and metaphysical import to the central distinction of transcendental idealism, that between appearances and things in themselves.

Kant believes that our mental faculties have a certain structure through which we receive impressions of the external world. Since these impressions are filtered through this cognitive structure, the appearance of a thing is different from the thing as it is in itself, independent of this structure (see *KrV*, Bxxvi).³

The two camps of interpretation I will address are epistemological interpretations of transcendental idealism and ontological interpretations. An epistemological interpretation sees the difference between appearances and things in themselves as merely epistemological. Appearances and things in themselves are not separate entities, nor are they even different properties of the same entity. The only appropriate way to differentiate between appearances and things is through epistemology. We can only cognize that which conforms to our cognitive structure, and so we can cognize appearances, but not things in themselves. “We can have cognition of no object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as it is an object of sensible intuition” (*KrV*, Bxxvi).

Epistemological interpretations make this epistemological modesty about things themselves central while rejecting any kind of ontological separation between appearances and things in themselves.⁴ Henry Allison argues that positing an ontological distinction between appearances and things in themselves distracts from the ‘epistemological thrust’ of transcendental idealism, which indicates that there are cognitive structures that we bring to experience and that we cannot know reality apart from them. When we talk about the difference between appearances and things in themselves, we are not talking about two different things or metaphysically distinct aspects of a thing, but two ways of *considering* a thing. We can consider a thing as it appears, in conformity with our cognitive structures, and as it is independent of these cognitive structures (Allison 2004: 16).

Ontological interpretations can accept the epistemological differences between appearances and things in themselves, but for the things in themselves and appearances represent two distinct things, and not merely two distinct ways of considering things. The ontological interpretation

³ References to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* follow the customary practice of citing the pagination of the 1781(A) edition and the 1787(B) edition.

⁴ Incidentally, it seems that the difference in epistemic access between appearances and things in themselves has to do with a metaphysical difference. We cannot know things in themselves because they are not objects of perception that have conformed to our cognitive structures.

agrees that we can only cognize appearances, but also affirms that there is an ontological difference between appearances and things in themselves. Karl Ameriks, for instance, writes (2003: 104),

The epistemic interpretation, in understanding transcendental idealism as the claim that human knowledge is governed by certain sensible conditions, does not insist on Kant's own stronger conclusion, which is that there are objects which in themselves have *genuine* ultimate properties [i.e. they are not mere modes of considering objects] that do *not* conform to those conditions.

I will now argue that it is the epistemological interpretation that precludes the possibility of transcendental freedom. Transcendental freedom is the ability to begin a series of events spontaneously, apart from the influence of prior causes. Kant writes, "A causality must be assumed through which something happens without its cause being further determined by another previous cause, i.e. an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself [...] hence transcendental freedom" (*KrV*, A446/B474). If the epistemological interpretation precludes transcendental freedom, then the best account of freedom it can offer is a compatibilist account. If all that we are left with is a compatibilist account of freedom, then we are left with the severe challenges for compatibilism I have already detailed. Compatibilism leaves us only with some semantic maneuvers that merely hide the truth that we are really no different from a machine that operates according to some built-in algorithm.

A key premise of my argument, that the best account of freedom that the epistemological theory can provide is a compatibilist one, is that there is a presupposition of anti-realism in the epistemological account of transcendental idealism that is false. Since the epistemological interpretation is allergic to any kind of ontological difference between appearances and things in themselves, there is the curious implication, when considering a human individual, that the person is *neither free nor determined*. Freedom and determinism pertain to different perspectives one might take on a person. But, neither one has a privileged ontological status. It is not as though one is *really* determined, and the consideration of oneself as free is merely a fiction. Nor is it the case that one is really free, and the appearance of oneself as determined is just that—an *appearance* that is an

object of mental perception but does not exist independently of perception. This sort of definitive resolution of the question of freedom and determinism, in which the person is either *really* free or *really* determined, would betray the epistemological interpretation's commitment to avoiding any ontological distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Relegating one perspective as a mere appearance, and affirming another as an ultimate reality, is precisely the sort of stance taken by philosophers like Ameriks (i.e. genuine ultimate properties) that the epistemological interpretation rejects. Allison, therefore, reaches the following conclusion: "It must suffice to note that the illusion is not that we are free, or, for that matter, that we are causally determined. It lies rather in the assumption that we must *really be* one or the other in some ontologically privileged, context-independent sense" (2004: 49).

With the anti-realist presupposition, there is a way to reach a kind of incompatibilist account, though even this is unsatisfactory. But, once one undercuts the antirealism, there is no option left but compatibilism.

9. The two-aspect interpretation of transcendental idealism and its implications for transcendental freedom

There is a debate about the nature of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in transcendental idealism. The debate hinges on whether or not there is an ontological difference between things in themselves and appearances, or if the difference between things themselves and appearances is merely a matter of which perspective one takes. A concrete illustration of the two positions might involve a radar and a sentence, respectively. The ontological theory sees appearances as if they were bright lights on a radar screen and things in themselves as if they were objects deep in the sea that people using the radar can never directly perceive (see Hartnack 2001: 27). The example shows how the ontological theory views things in themselves and appearances as different things. Whereas the bright lights are merely two-dimensional luminous points on a screen, the objects of which they are indicative are much larger three-dimensional objects deep in the ocean.

As for the epistemological interpretation, a concrete illustration may involve a sentence spoken aloud. Let us say one does not know the language

in which the sentence is spoken. The words are unintelligible. But, if someone does know the language, then the same sentence is intelligible. The example shows that the two-aspect theorist sees appearances and things in themselves not as ontologically distinct (the sentence is the same ontologically regardless of whether it is understood or not), but as relating to two different perspectives. One perspective includes the conditions for knowledge, whereas the other does not.

A two-aspect view cannot sustain ontological priority. That is, in the relationship between appearances and things in themselves, there cannot be one that has ontological priority, in the sense that it is more fundamental and capable of existence independent of the mind.

As I have noted, this rejection of ontological priority leads to an anti-realism about free will. Allison refers to the work of Michael Dummett to develop his anti-realist view on free will. Dummett is an influential contemporary philosopher who developed an anti-realist theory that defined the notion of truth not in terms of some objective state of affairs, that is independent of what we can know, but in terms of evidence which we can know. Statements can only be true or false in terms of the evidence available to our perspective. They cannot be true or false independently of the limitations of this perspective. So, if we are debating about the characteristics of some person long dead of whom we have no evidence, whether or not that person was brave is neither true nor false, because there is simply no evidence related to that person from our perspective (see Dummett 1978: 146).

Applied to free will, anti-realism means that, from a deliberative perspective, in which we see ourselves as making decisions, we have evidence that we are free and so, from this perspective, we are free. From a theoretical perspective, in which we see ourselves from outside and subject to deterministic causality, we have evidence that we are determined. When we see ourselves as determined, we cannot at the same be free, since there can be no truth for the anti-realist beyond perspective. By the same token, when we see ourselves as free, we are not determined, because of the absence of evidence for determinism from the deliberative perspective.

The incompatibilist commitment that free will and determinism are contradictory is consistent on this anti-realist account. One could argue that, in this anti-realist account, freedom and determinism never coexist. They

pertain to separate perspectives which one cannot take simultaneously. Since, in this anti-realist account, perspectives cannot be taken simultaneously, then the evidence peculiar to each perspective, for determinism and freedom, cannot coexist. Freedom and determinism are permanently separated in the anti-realist account, and it can, therefore, be consistent with the belief that freedom and determinism are incompatible.

It must be said, though, that an anti-realist free will, that merely exists from a certain perspective, sounds like a version of free will all too similar to the sort of semantically ornate versions of free will a compatibilist would create. Such a version of free will, that exists only from a certain perspective, is fully compatible with deterministic causation. I can take a certain perspective in which I intuit myself as free, but this does not mean that I am the source of my actions.⁵ The perspective could be an anti-realist one, which does not entail any objective reality independent of the perspective. Having transcendental freedom as a mere perspective, and not as an actual causal power, is fully compatible with determinism. Calling a person free, merely based on a perspective, is not a designation Kant would readily accept, as we have seen.

10. Evaluation of the epistemological interpretation

The anti-realism of the epistemological interpretation allows it to formulate a kind of incompatibilist version of freedom, in which determinism and freedom are understood as incompatible. The anti-realist interpretation affirms both freedom and determinism, but only from certain perspectives. Recall that Henry Allison advances the, I must say, bizarre view that the human person is *neither* free nor determined, in a context-independent sense. Christine Korsgaard, another prominent advocate of a non-metaphysical interpretation of transcendental idealism, maintains equality of privilege between the two standpoints: “Both interests are rational and legitimate. And it is important that neither standpoint is privileged over the other—each has its own territory” (1996: 173). It is not as though I am *really* free, or *really* determined, in an absolute sense. Anti-realism saturates the

⁵ Being the source of one’s action, instead of the action being the product of alien forces internal or external to oneself, is accepted by some philosophers as a condition for free will. For instance, Roderick Chisholm conceived of an agent as a ‘prime mover unmoved’, having a nearly God-like ability to initiate new sequences of events without any determination from prior causes (see 1964: 32).

epistemological interpretation, such that both freedom and determinism are true only from a perspective, and not as objective facts regardless of what evidence one might have from a given perspective. So, in this anti-realist version of the self, it seems there is no absolutely existing self.

Since freedom and determinism are true only from certain perspectives, and the perspectives, moreover, are mutually exclusive, it is not the case that the epistemological interpretation affirms a compatibilist position, in which freedom and determinism coexist. The ultimate aim for this paper, which I stated at the outset, is to show that the epistemological interpretation has no other option but a compatibilist conception of freedom. The route I will take to show this, then, is first to undermine the anti-realism of the epistemological interpretation. It is only in virtue of anti-realism that the epistemological interpretation can maintain an incompatibilist position, albeit a weak one that Kant would most likely find repellent. There are good reasons to reject both the idea that Kant was an anti-realist, and that anti-realism about the person is a strong philosophical position. Without the anti-realist assumption, I will show how incompatibilist versions of freedom are *impossible* for the epistemological interpretation.

11. The first argument against anti-realism: anti-realism cannot be applied to the thesis of the third antinomy

We know from the third antinomy in the transcendental dialectic of the first critique that it is transcendental *realism* that cannot resolve the contradiction between transcendental freedom and total determinism. Transcendental realism ignores the transcendental structures of the human mind. Therefore, the transcendental realist views experience as the reception of objects that exist independently of the mind, instead of consisting of appearances that conform to the conditions of possible experience associated with the mind, and so are dependent on the mind. “The transcendental realist therefore represents outer appearances [...] as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility” (*KrV*, A369). If the transcendental realist sees a cup, therefore, she views her experience of the cup as consisting entirely in mind-independent properties. The experience of the cup is simply the reception of the cup as it is, apart from any observer.

Transcendental realism drives a contradiction between free will and determinism because it posits both as mind-independent entities. Transcendental realism is therefore forced to try to fit together causality according to natural laws and transcendental freedom *in the same series*. This is not possible, because the two are contradictory. There cannot be both an uncaused, spontaneous cause and causality that only follows from previous events according to natural laws.

Kant applies his transcendental idealism to create two separate levels, appearances and things in themselves so that transcendental freedom and determinism can coexist. Transcendental idealism allows causality according to natural laws and transcendental freedom to exist in separate series. Causality according to natural laws is a mere appearance, which exists only insofar as it is an object of perception. Transcendental freedom, on the other hand, has an absolute existence that is independent of any perceptual faculty.

What is of particular interest, for this paper, is the issue of anti-realism concerning the resolution of the contradiction between transcendental freedom and determinism. As I have noted, the epistemological interpretation applies anti-realism to both transcendental freedom and determinism. Neither are objective realities; both exist from mere perspectives, in which there is a warrant to believe in them that is exclusive to that perspective.⁶

Transcendental realism fails to resolve the third antinomy because it refuses to incorporate anti-realism at all. Appearances for the transcendental realist are not appearances that only have a perspective-dependent existence, but are instead objectively existing facts. The epistemological interpretation is partially correct to apply anti-realism as the key to the resolution of the third antinomy.

However, the version of free will we get in the epistemological interpretation misapplies anti-realism in a way that clearly strays from Kant's commitments. Anti-realism ought not to be applied to transcendental freedom. For Kant, anti-realism applies only to appearances. It is appearances that exist only as objects of perception, and so they are

⁶ For an excellent comparison of Kant's transcendental idealism to contemporary anti-realism, see Lucy Allais (2003).

appropriately understood, in an anti-realist way as existing only from a certain perspective and not objectively. “If we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relation of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us” (*KrV*, A42/B59).

Things in themselves, on the other hand, are capable of existing independently of the mind. It would not be right to apply anti-realism to things in themselves. In fact, such an application would amount to a contradiction, since a thing in itself is by definition that which cannot be subjected to an anti-realist interpretation. Things in themselves refer to that aspect of things which is *independent of perception*. Kant in the Preface speaks of “things as objects of experience and the very same things as things in themselves” (*KrV*, Bxxvi). When we consider a thing as a thing in itself, we are considering it as it is independent of experience. It is therefore contradictory to interpret a thing in itself in an anti-realist way, as if we could understand a thing in itself as something that exists only from a certain perspective.

Kant is clear that the third antinomy is a *dynamical* antinomy. The dynamical antinomies, which are the third and fourth antinomies, differ significantly from the mathematical antinomies, which are the first and second antinomies. The respect in which these two sets of antinomies differ is that, in the dynamical, there is a non-sensible intelligible element paired with a sensible appearance. In the mathematical antinomies, on the other hand, there are sensible appearances in both the thesis and the antithesis sections (see *KrV*, A531/B559).

So, in the third dynamical antinomy, we deal with the sensible appearance of empirical causality according to natural laws, but also the non-sensible intelligible reality of transcendental freedom, which cannot be included in any experience. In the first antinomy, one of the mathematical antinomies, we deal in both the thesis and the antithesis arguments with a sensible appearance, namely, the world (see *KrV*, A426/B454).

The significance of this disparity is great. Since appearances are part of both the thesis and the antithesis arguments in the mathematical antinomies, anti-realism can be applied to both. The mathematical antinomies are resolved by determining that both arguments are false.

Neither of them is objectively true. So, we conclude the first antinomy with the position that the world is neither finite nor infinite in duration and magnitude. The world cannot have a determinate duration or magnitude, since, as a mere appearance, it does not exist as a whole. That is, the world does not have an absolute existence, and only exists as an object of perception. Any kind of determinate magnitude, whether finite or infinite, requires being able to exist independently from these perceptual faculties (see *KrV*, A522/B550).

Allison applies the same sort of solution to the third antinomy. But, this is erroneous. The third antinomy is a dynamical antinomy. This means that it includes a non-sensible element—in this case, transcendental freedom. As a non-sensible element, one cannot apply anti-realism to transcendental freedom. The way to solve the third antinomy is not by applying anti-realism to both parts of the argument, but by applying it only to one. In this scenario, both the thesis and the antithesis arguments of the third antinomy *may be true* (see *KrV*, A531/B559). There can be transcendental freedom, so long as we understand natural causality as existing only as an appearance.

Transcendental freedom cannot be an appearance, so it cannot be subjected to an anti-realist treatment. What Allison tries to do is to turn Kant into a Putnam-style anti-realist who gives no place to the notion of a thing in itself, that can exist independently of any perspective. A Putnam-style anti-realist rejects the idea that anything can exist independently of a certain theory. Lucy Allais writes (2003: 373),

The rejection of ‘theory-independent’ reality has been important to Putnam, but Kant clearly believes in theory-independent reality, in his views about things as they are in themselves: the way things are as they are in themselves is entirely independent of us and our knowledge of them.

Kant’s belief that there is an ultimate reality independent of any theory also is inconsistent with the idea that there cannot be one uniquely true theory. It is not as though what is real is a function of what theory one happens to adopt, and so there is a multiplicity of possible true theories. The idea that we are both free and determined, depending on the perspective one

adopts, is rejected by Kant. There *is* an ultimate truth about the human person.

If transcendental freedom is to exist, then, it must exist as an objective, perspective-independent fact. If it exists, it would be thing in itself, and these are perspective-independent by definition. The epistemological interpretation begins to flounder once it acknowledges this. If the epistemological interpretation tries to develop an account of freedom based on its version of transcendental idealism, it first has to acknowledge that freedom cannot be subjected to an anti-realist treatment. It has to exist as a perspective-independent, absolute reality.

Causality according to natural laws also has to be given a place. However, the epistemological interpretation cannot simply give determinism a conditional, perspective-dependent reality, while permitting to transcendental freedom a mind-independent reality. This kind of distinction is an ontological one that the epistemological interpretation obviously rejects. Mind-dependent realities are ontologically different from absolute realities.

The only way, then, that the epistemological interpretation can affirm both the existence of natural causality and transcendental freedom is by treating them both as objective, perspective-independent facts. This is the only way to close the ontological distinction between natural causality and transcendental freedom.

Once the anti-realist interpretation of transcendental freedom is exposed as faulty, we have to understand it as a thing in itself. Determinism also would have to have, then, an absolute mind-independent status, to preserve the epistemological interpretation from an ontological distinction.

Of course, we know that this sort of participation in the same causal series, by causality according to natural law and transcendental freedom, is impossible. The only option is to somehow refashion one's understanding of transcendental freedom to make it compatible with determinism. One could perhaps understand transcendental freedom as a sort of harmony between one's second-order volitions and first-order desires. But, of course, this is the compatibilism that Kant rejects and which leaves one so deeply unsatisfied.

12. Anti-realism subverts the grounding relationship between practical and transcendental freedom

The anti-realist solution to the free will problem we find in the epistemological interpretation cannot effectively frame the distinction between practical freedom and transcendental freedom, and the kind of relationship they have. This distinction can be parsed in terms of a distinction between a positive capacity for freedom and a negative condition having to do with the absence of necessitation by psychological drives. Transcendental freedom, that is, is the positive capacity for starting a new series of events from oneself.

By freedom in the cosmological (Kant arrives at the necessity of transcendental freedom through an argument for the necessity of a first cause) sense, on the contrary, I understand the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature (see *KrV*, A533/B562).

Practical freedom is a mere negative attribute of *not* being necessitated by one's impulses/desires. Practical freedom means the human power of choice is affected by impulses, but not necessitated by them (see *KrV*, A534/B562).

The relationship between practical freedom and transcendental freedom, according to Kant, consists of the fact that practical freedom is *grounded upon* transcendental freedom. "It is especially noteworthy that it is this transcendental idea of freedom on which the practical concept of freedom is grounded" (*KrV*, A533/B561). In other words, one can be independent of one's desires/impulses in virtue of the fact that one can initiate sequences of events from oneself. One's ability to initiate events from oneself gives one a veto power, as it were, over the desires and impulses that pressure one to act one way or another.

The united reality of practical freedom grounded on transcendental freedom presents a sort of reality that straddles the two worlds, so to speak, of appearances and things in themselves. On the one hand, there is transcendental freedom, which is necessarily outside of experience and its spatiotemporal framework. As an unconditioned cause, transcendental freedom cannot figure in experience. "Freedom in this signification is a pure

transcendental idea, which, first, contains nothing borrowed from experience, and second, the object of which also cannot be given determinately in any experience” (*KrV*, A533/B561). At the same time, there is practical freedom, that seems to be within experience, since it has to contend with the desires/impulses that occur at particular times, in particular contexts.

There is no way the anti-realist version of free will in the epistemological interpretation can capture this sort of relationship between practical and transcendental freedom. In this epistemological version, we view ourselves as transcendently free from a certain perspective, i.e. the deliberative perspective. In this perspective, we have abstracted from the epistemic conditions by which we come to represent objects to ourselves. Among these epistemic conditions are space and time. So, in the practical perspective, we have an absolute sovereignty over our decisions, and we are abstracted from the various desires that arise concerning a specific spatiotemporal location. The abstraction from these desires occurs because, in considering ourselves as transcendently free, we are abstracting from the epistemic conditions of space and time.

Once we shift to the theoretical perspective, epistemic conditions are restored, and we see ourselves in space and time, as part of a causal network which determines us. In the theoretical perspective, transcendental freedom does not remain as a ground. It disappears since the anti-realist presuppositions of this account of free will mean that whatever lacks evidence in a given perspective does not have an objective existence. The epistemological interpretation presents transcendental freedom as something that is not *verification-transcendent*, i.e. capable of existing independently of the perspective in which it is verifiable (see Allais 2003: 376).

The idea that transcendental freedom just *disappears* once one considers oneself from the theoretical perspective, in the spatiotemporal framework, is not consistent with Kant’s comments on the relationship between practical and transcendental freedom. Practical freedom, I have noted, is immersed in a temporal context, since it is immersed in the flux of desires. Our practical freedom makes us immune to necessitation by these desires. Practical freedom, then, is a kind of retention of transcendental freedom even amid the psychological pressures of desires and their

necessarily temporal context. Practical freedom straddles two worlds. It is a capacity conferred by transcendental freedom, in the non-spatiotemporal world of things in themselves, that manifests itself in the spatiotemporal world of appearances, in which desires unfold over time.

This sort of picture is very different from the kind of picture we get in the anti-realist interpretation. In the anti-realist interpretation, once epistemic conditions are restored, and we see ourselves as an object in the spatiotemporal world, we are *determined*. The practical perspective is gone, and there can be no objective reality of our transcendental freedom independent from this perspective. It is far from clear, then, that we can have a sort of practical freedom, immune to the pressure of desire, once we shift perspectives and consider the self as an object in the empirical world. If transcendental freedom is not verification-transcendent, then it cannot ground practical freedom once we shift away from the deliberative, first-person perspective.

Once one becomes aware of psychological drives operating in time, one has taken the theoretical perspective, in conformity with the epistemic conditions of time and space. According to the anti-realist epistemological interpretation, there is no transcendental freedom once one has taken the theoretical perspective. In this case, transcendental freedom cannot be a ground, as one views oneself from the theoretical perspective, for practical freedom.

The failure of anti-realism to properly frame the idea that practical freedom is grounded on transcendental freedom means it must be abandoned. Once it is abandoned, we acknowledge the possibility that transcendental freedom is perspective-independent. Determinism also is a characteristic of the person, as Kant's interest in defending transcendental freedom does not mean any compromise on determinism (see *KrV*, A550/B578). But there can be no ontological distinction in the epistemological interpretation. So, if transcendental freedom is perspective-independent, determinism must also be so.

But, we know that transcendental freedom and determinism cannot exist in the same series, as two perspective-independent realities. This is why transcendental realism fails to resolve the third antinomy. The only 'solution', which ultimately fails, is to refashion transcendental freedom as a compatibilist version of freedom.

13. The vacuity of the anti-realist perspectives

The epistemological interpretation is motivated by the alleged strangeness of certain implications of the ontological interpretation. One implication of the ontological interpretation is that we assume that appearances, which alone are cognizable, are caused by things that are outside the mind, which we cannot cognize. But, by restricting cognition to appearances, one prohibits oneself from making any claims to knowledge of what might exist independently of experience. So, one cannot assert the reality of things in themselves, as mind-independent grounds of experience.⁷ There seems to be a contradiction, therefore, at the heart of transcendental idealism.

Another seemingly untenable implication is that, if we are aware only of a conditional mind-dependent reality, we can never have access to reality as it is in itself. We are therefore doomed to skepticism. We can never know the external world because knowledge means grasping the intrinsic predicates of things and not merely the way they appear to consciousness.⁸

To avoid paradox and eternal entrapment in a mere illusion, we are supposed to adopt the anti-realist epistemological view. But, in the anti-realist rendition of freedom, the two perspectives from which we view the person, either from within or from the outside, are vacuous. The perspectives have content only insofar as they have a certain meaning. But, they lack content to the extent that they refer to no aspects of things. Allison says explicitly that we are *neither* free nor determined (see 2004: 49). The perspectives have a certain conceptual content, but they are not rooted in any real aspect of the person, because there is no person independent of the perspectives.

So, the perspectives have psychological and conceptual content. We know what being free and determined mean. But, as far as having any ontological root in the person, these perspectives lack any. The perspectives are therefore vacuous. In the same way, I might take a perspective on one of Kant's books and see it as a black cat. This perspective has psychological/conceptual content but is vacuous insofar as it is completely disconnected from the ontology of the book.

⁷ This sort of objection has been around since Kant first came out with his ideas and is fairly easy to rebut. See Jacobi (1815: 304).

⁸ Henry Allison attributes this criticism to H.A. Prichard (see 1909: 71–100).

Hoke Robinson provides an example of a vacuous perspective:

Normally, a consideration of a thing under some aspect or respect *A* would be vacuous if there is no sense in which the thing has, or is, *A*: I can consider the *Pietà* as a great work of art, a lump of marble, an expression of religious faith, or a valuable commodity, but to consider it as a rocket or as a mathematical formula is just to be mistaken (1994: 421).

A vacuous perspective, then, is one that has no connection to the thing being considered. A vacuous perspective is merely psychological, without any point of anchor in the ontology of the thing being considered. There is some objectively existing thing that constrains the number of non-vacuous perspectives one might take on a thing. Seeing the *Pietà* as an expression of religious faith is not vacuous, because it highlights a real aspect of the work of art, i.e. that it elevates the mind to faith in a higher power. The perspective in which one sees the *Pietà* as an expression of religious faith has roots in the ontological reality of the work of art. But, seeing the *Pietà* as a mathematical formula is vacuous, since it has nothing to do with what this work of art actually is.

In the same way, one might challenge the anti-realist version of free will. We have two perspectives, neither of which correspond to any objective reality that is perspective-independent. We can conclude that there really is no objectively existing person. I am nothing more than mutually exclusive perspectives.

I see no reason that this view—that the self is just a mental phenomenon—is any less bizarre than the view that one can only know appearances and not ultimate reality, or that ultimate reality is something we cannot cognize but causes what we can cognize.

Moreover, one might take the approach of Robinson to vacuous perspectives, and apply it to the anti-realism of the epistemological interpretation. “Thus if the two *considerations* [of a thing as an appearance and as a thing in itself] are to be non-vacuous, we must ultimately deal with the *aspects* to which the considerations are directed” (Robinson 1994: 421). That is, to avoid a situation in which we are dealing with just two empty perspectives, having only a mental content and no roots in an extramental

reality, we have to inquire into the aspects of things. We have to move from mere psychological considerations to ontological aspects.

If we try to root the two considerations in ontological aspects of things, we end up with compatibilism. Rooting considerations in ontological aspects is the only hope for providing some ontological credibility, i.e. non-vacuity, for the perspectives. So, the perspective from which one is determined, let us say, is rooted in an aspect of the self that is really determined.

If there is a determined aspect, then the only freedom the self can have is compatibilist. This is because there can be no ontological distinction, between the self as it appears and the self as it is independently of epistemic conditions, in the epistemological view. So, if there is a real aspect of determinism to the self, then freedom has to be within this aspect and, of course, this can only be compatibilist freedom.

If, on the other hand, one tries to posit a real aspect of freedom, then determinism cannot be a mere appearance. To designate freedom as a real aspect, and determinism as a mere appearance, that is purely mental and not ontological, amounts to making an ontological distinction between them. An epistemological view, of course, cannot tolerate this. So, again, we have to intermingle determinism with freedom, by making it also an *ontological* aspect. This intermingling can only mean that freedom is compromised and we end up with compatibilism.

14. Conclusion

In this paper, I surveyed compatibilist theories of free will and identified major flaws in these approaches. Then, I showed how an epistemological interpretation of transcendental idealism leads to an anti-realist conception of the human person, such that the person is neither free nor determined. I made the case, then, through a series of three arguments that the anti-realism about the person is untenable. Though the epistemological interpretation can present incompatibilism of sorts through its anti-realism, the untenability of anti-realism means that its only hope is a compatibilist theory. The epistemological interpretation, therefore, ends up twisting Kant's view of freedom into a compatibilist theory which is both deeply flawed and something that Kant surely would reject.

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