

DAWES HICKS LECTURE ON PHILOSOPHY

KANT'S CONCEPTION OF FREEDOM

By STEPHAN KÖRNER

*Fellow of the Academy*

Read 18 October 1967

A TRAVELLER arrives at a cross-road. After some deliberation he chooses to turn left rather than right and so continues his journey. Nature and his past being what they are, he may be mistaken in his assumption that it was open to him to take the other turning. Is any traveller, and quite generally any planner, ever right in assuming that a realizable or effective choice between genuine alternatives is open to him; or do nature, and his past in it, alone determine his every course of action?

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Pu. R. B.*, 329)<sup>1</sup> Kant describes the vacillations of a reflective person who, unable to decide between his awareness of apparently free choices and his belief that he is subject to the laws of nature, could 'detach himself from any practical interest'. He would 'be convinced today that the human will is free' whereas 'tomorrow when considering the unbreakable chain of natural events, he would judge freedom to be nothing but self-deception . . .'. Yet whatever his frame of mind, 'if it came to doing and acting, this play of merely speculative reason would vanish like the shadowy pictures of a dream . . .'. Kant is not content with a philosophical position—mildly sceptical or Pyrrhonian—which would require a sharp and ultimate division between mere theorizing and the thought which, as Hume put it, accompanies 'action, and employment, and the occupations of common life'. For him a theory which fails to do justice to practice must give way to one which is acceptable to real men, who do not only reflect and predict, but also act and plan.

Such a theory must, by taking into account the results of a great many investigations, exhibit the interdependence of theoretical and practical thinking. But if, as Kant holds, an understanding of the concept of human freedom depends less on the

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations of the titles of Kant's works are obvious. The page numbers are those of the relevant volumes of the edition by the Prussian Academy of Sciences (Berlin, 1910 ff.). The translations are my own.

detailed content than on the general structure of theorizing and planning, any such theory would have to be philosophical. Its tasks would be to provide a definition of freedom which conforms to our awareness of choosing in the light of our empirical beliefs and our prudential and moral evaluations; to show that, and in what sense, the concept of freedom so defined is not empty; to indicate the range of the concept's applicability and, as far as possible, give criteria for its correct application; to demonstrate the compatibility of the assumptions that man is free and capable of recognizing his freedom in particular instances, with the best available empirical, especially scientific, knowledge; and to show in what sense and to what extent a person may be both free and determined by his past.

Since Kant's approach to these tasks is one of the most persistent, searching, and thoughtful ones ever attempted, it is to be expected that some illuminating lessons should result from examining it historically and critically. The criticism will in the first place have to be internal: it will have to devote attention to the 'architectonic' of the Kantian philosophy, to try 'to apprehend correctly the *Idea of the whole* and in its light all parts in their mutual interrelations' (*Pr. R.* 10). It will, in particular, have to consider whether the misgivings were in fact groundless which, as he tells us (*Pr. R.* 106), he occasionally felt about the consistency of his accounts of pure and of practical reason. In the second place, the critical examination will have to be external: it must take note of the growth of non-philosophical, especially scientific, knowledge in so far as it led to the modification and replacement of assumptions which Kant, without questioning them, used in his arguments. Lastly, and most important, our criticism will have to be philosophical: that is to say, it will have to consider whether Kant's descriptions, analyses, and interpretations are tenable and whether they justify the conclusions which he draws from them. It will, moreover, have to confront his account with possible alternatives and examine how far it is left unscathed by such confrontations.

(i) *Kant's account of the limitations of practical by empirical thinking.* Before a planner can evaluate and—effectively or ineffectively—choose between alternative courses of action he must be able to discern them. Before he can deliberately change the world in which he finds himself, he must have, and be able to apply, a method for differentiating the external world into objects and attributes, i.e. properties and relations of which external objects (or objective phenomena) are the bearers. Among these

attributes there may be in particular such as are 'constitutive of', and such as are 'individuating' for, external objects. Let us—adapting the Kantian definitions to our purpose—call an attribute *constitutive* of external objects if, and only if, (a) it is applicable to external objects and (b) an object's being an external object logically implies the attribute's applicability to the object. And let us call an attribute *individuating* for external objects if, and only if, (a) it is applicable to all external objects and (b) its applicability to an external object logically implies the object's being distinct from all other external objects. If a method for differentiating the external world employs among its attributes at least one which is constitutive of, and at least one that is individuating for all external objects, then I call the set of these constitutive and individuating attributes 'the categorial schema of external phenomena associated with the method of differentiation'. (Strictly speaking a categorial schema is associated not only with a method of differentiating phenomena, but also with a logic—namely, the logic which underlies the method of differentiation and to which the term 'logically implies' in the definition of constitutive and of individuating attributes implicitly refers.)

This definition of a categorial schema is intended not to pre-judge the question of a possible multiplicity of such schemata. At the same time it fits the categorial schema which Kant expounded in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The individuating attributes of the Kantian schema, as exhibited in the Transcendental Aesthetic, are the location of external objects in an absolute three-dimensional Euclidean space and in an absolute directed, one-dimensional time. The constitutive attributes, as exhibited in the Transcendental Analytic, are the twelve categories enumerated in the well-known table (*Pu. R. B*, 106). Of these the most important for our purpose is the category of 'causality and dependence'. It is the only category of the Kantian schema which is predictive in the sense that its applicability not only confers objectivity on phenomena, but provides a premiss for inferences from empirical propositions to empirical propositions describing temporally separated phenomena.

The applicability of the categorial schema limits the scope of empirical thinking and, to the extent to which practical thinking is dependent on empirical thinking, also the scope of practical thinking, in particular the applicability of the concept of freedom of choice and action. In order to understand Kant's account of the limitations of practical by empirical thinking it

will be useful to explain and to examine the account contained in the first Critique of three closely related Kantian doctrines about the nature and function of the Kantian categorial schema. They are the doctrine of the uniqueness of the categorial schema, the doctrine of the unrestricted applicability of the relation of causality to phenomena, and the doctrine of the schema's transcendental ideality.

According to the first doctrine any and every method for differentiating the external world into individuals and attributes is associated with the Kantian categorial schema. The schema is claimed to admit of no alternatives and to constitute the permanent core of all empirical thinking. This thesis can be refuted both by external and by internal criticism. Externally, it is sufficient to point out that the scientific theory, which Kant had primarily in mind, has since his day been replaced—and thus shown to be replaceable—by others, which are not associated with his categorial schema: the individuating attributes of the special and general theory of relativity are radically different from the Kantian ones; and the same holds for the predictive category of orthodox quantum-mechanics which is not an empirical necessitation belonging to the Hume–Kant–Mill family of causal relations, but a wholly different relation of probability. A detailed internal criticism of the thesis would lead us too far afield, but one of its main points can be briefly indicated and illustrated by the example of the category of causality.

Consider the statement that the relation of causality is applicable to all objective phenomena—each being both a cause and an effect of others. The statement is synthetic since it logically implies the existential assumption that the relation is instantiated in external experience. And it is *a priori* in the limited sense of being compatible with any statement which expresses the applicability or inapplicability of attributes to external objects, *provided* that the concept of causality is constitutive of these objects. The statement is thus synthetic and *a priori* with respect to every method for differentiating the external world, which like the method used and examined by Kant, is associated with a categorial schema comprising the concept of causality as one of its constitutive concepts. It is relatively and not absolutely synthetic *a priori*; i.e. it is not synthetic *a priori* with respect to every method of differentiation. Kant's transcendental deduction of his categorial schema and of the propositions expressing the applicability of its individuating and of its constitutive

attributes, presupposes, but does not demonstrate, the impossibility of alternative categorial schemata. His confusion of relative with absolute synthetic *a priori* propositions is easily explained, and excused, by his ignorance of scientific theories which only came into existence long after his death.

The doctrine of the unrestricted applicability of the concept of causality to all objective phenomena is an obvious consequence of the thesis that the Kantian categorial schema is unique. For then the relation of causality is constitutive of all objective phenomena so that each of them necessarily causes, and is caused by, other such phenomena. And in restricting the applicability of the relation to some objective phenomena only, one would deny it the categorial status which *ex hypothesi* it possesses. With the refutation of the first thesis, that the Kantian categorial schema is unique, the second thesis, that the predicative category of causality is without restriction applicable to all external phenomena, loses its cogency. The possibility is not excluded of a way of thinking which did not employ the concept of causality at all, or in which its applicability were restricted to some objective phenomena only.

Any analysis of practical thinking and of freedom has severe limitations imposed upon it by the assumptions of the uniqueness of the Kantian categorial system and of the unrestricted applicability of the relation of causality to objective phenomena. In Kant's view, however, the severity of these limitations is mitigated by his doctrine of the transcendental ideality of space, time, and the categories—the doctrine that 'all objects of an experience which is possible to us' are nothing but 'mere presentations' which, be they 'extended entities or sequences of changes, have outside of our thoughts no independent existence in themselves' (*Pu. R. B.*, 338). The doctrine implies, or at least suggests, the 'limiting concept' of a noumenon, i.e. of a thing which can be thought without contradiction 'not as an object for the senses, but as a thing in itself' (*Pu. R. B.*, 211). The noumenon—or, as in the absence of any method of individuation or classification we may say with equal justice, the noumena or the noumenal world—is 'the wide and stormy ocean' which surrounds the island of possible objective experience. It is not only the 'seat of illusion, where many a fogbank and many a quickly melting layer of ice creates the false impression of new lands' (*Pu. R. B.*, 202), but also the only region where Kant can find a place for a concept of genuine freedom, which is not based on 'self-deception'.

The untenability of Kant's doctrine of the uniqueness of his categorial schema does not of itself refute the general doctrine of transcendental ideality. Even if we are not permanently imprisoned in Kant's categorial schema, it may still be true that any other categorial schema, or any other conceptual or linguistic structure through which we apprehend the world, shuts us off from apprehending it as it exists independently of our apprehension. In order to decide this question one would have to *compare* the apprehended with the unapprehended world, i.e. to apprehend the world without apprehending it. The impossibility of either proving or disproving the thesis, does not, however, rule it out as an admittedly rather desperate means of removing the predicament of those who today are convinced that the human will is free and tomorrow that the chain of natural events is unbreakable. This is in fact how Kant uses it to escape the dilemma in which he is placed on the one hand by his doctrine of the unrestricted applicability of the relation of causality to all objective phenomena and on the other hand by his conviction that human freedom is 'better than the freedom of a roasting-jack which, having once been wound up, executes its movements by itself' (*Pr. R.* 97).

(ii) *The Idea of freedom.* Freedom 'in the cosmological sense' is defined by Kant as the 'ability of spontaneously initiating a state of affairs' (*Pu. R. B.*, 363). Being spontaneous, it is not itself caused; and being an ability to initiate, it must be distinguished from the principle of natural causality, which connects temporally distinct phenomena in a regular manner. Moreover, any spontaneous initiation is, because incompatible with the principle of natural causality, excluded from sense-perception. It follows that the concept of freedom—unlike sensible qualities, such as yellowness or hardness—is not descriptive of sense-perception; that—unlike mathematical concepts, such as twoness or triangularity—it is not descriptive of the alleged intuitions of time and space; and that—unlike the categories—it is not constitutive of the objective phenomena revealed to sense-perception and thought. Such a concept Kant calls an Idea.

Freedom is, moreover, a transcendental Idea or concept of reason. A transcendental Idea refers to the totality of an infinite series of conditions. The totality itself is unconditioned, or absolute. That is to say, it is not conditioned by its members in the manner in which these members are conditioned by each other. Yet Kant conceives the unconditioned totality to be a condition of

its members (*Pu. R. B.*, 251). Although his meaning here is not wholly clear, it seems to be susceptible of illustration. Consider first the series of positive and negative integers including zero. Each member of the series is connected with every other by the condition that starting with one the other can be reached in a finite number of steps, each step consisting in the addition or subtraction of the number 1. The totality of the members is not so connected with any of them. Yet the existence of the totality is a sufficient, though not a necessary, condition of the existence of the members as connected by the iterated addition or subtractions of 1. Consider next an infinite series of temporally distinct, causally connected phenomena. Each member of the series is causally connected with every other, but the totality of all members is not causally connected with any of them. Yet the existence of the totality is a sufficient, though not a necessary, condition for the existence of the members as connected by the causal relation. This last illustration—that of a totality of an infinite series of causally related phenomena and causal conditions—is relevant to Kant's conception of freedom: for, although there can be no spontaneous initiation within the series, a spontaneous initiation of the series as a whole is—perhaps only just—conceivable. Kant does in fact conceive freedom as the initiation of a totality of causally connected phenomena and only indirectly, via this totality, as an initiation of its members.

The attempt to escape from the roasting-jack conception of freedom, as implied by the doctrine of unrestricted natural causality, has forced Kant far out into the ocean of the noumenal. Freedom transcends all sense-experience, in which 'there can be no object which would be adequate to the transcendental Idea' (*Pu. R. B.*, 254). In this respect Kant's Ideas are like Plato's, from whom he borrowed the term (*Pu. R. B.*, 246), divesting it of the ontological and partly of the epistemological connotation which it has for Plato. Kant saw clearly that even though a notion or expression cannot be applied or instantiated in sense-experience, its employment may be governed by discoverable rules, may have a purpose, and may be justifiable in accordance with some acceptable standard of rationality. After all, various *façons de parler*, syncategorematic terms, fictions, and auxiliary concepts are usefully employed in empirical and practical thinking and may, depending on their users' aims and ingenuity, even be indispensable to them. Kant's account of the function of the Ideas is, I think, not wholly consistent; it admits different mutually inconsistent interpretations.

The weakest claim for the transcendental Ideas is that made in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic of the first Critique. There they are characterized as merely regulative. An Idea in its regulative function is an imaginary focal point—‘*focus imaginarius*’ (*Pu. R. B.*, 428)—by reference to which an incompletable procedure, i.e. a *progressus ad infinitum* is given a direction, e.g. the procedure of forming the sequence of the natural numbers, of purifying substances towards the unreachable ideal of absolute purity, of a progressive systematization of knowledge towards absolute systematic unity, etc. This is the *ad infinitum* of potential infinity, the *ad infinitum* which cannot be split into a direction and an achievable completion of a procedure. A somewhat stronger claim is made in the *Transcendental Methodology of Pure Reason*, where the transcendental Ideas are defined as applicable to mere objects of thought, with respect to which as ‘heuristic fictions’ they form ‘the basis of regulative principles . . .’ (*Pu. R. B.*, 503). The rules of a *progressus ad infinitum* are supplemented by, and based on, the fiction of an infinite object. To employ an Idea as a heuristic fiction is not to ‘assume’ that it is applicable to an object but merely to think *as if* the Idea had an object. The absolute totality of an infinite sequence of conditions is empirically impossible, but it is for certain purposes permissible to think ‘*as if* the sequence in itself were infinite’ (*Pu. R. B.*, 451).

However, already in the first Critique Kant moves from the position that Ideas are inapplicable to any real objects to the position that they do have an application to objects of the will. And such objects he regards at times not only as ‘real’ objects, but as the truly real objects. Indeed one might by a suitable selection of passages support the exegetic conjecture that starting with the doctrine of the purely regulative function of the transcendental Ideas, which is the very antithesis of Plato’s theory of Ideas, Kant gradually came to accept a pure Platonism, according to which only the Ideas, in particular the Idea of freedom, are truly real (*ὄντως ὄντα*). A note, made probably around May 1797, about seven years after the appearance of the *Critique of Judgement*, might be quoted as expressing an extreme Platonic position (vol. 18, no. 6343): ‘The reality of the concept of freedom unavoidably implies the doctrine of the *ideality* of things *qua* objects of perception in space and time. Unless these perceptions were nothing but subjective forms of sensibility, rather than of things in themselves, their practical use, i.e. actions, would be wholly dependent on the mechanism of

nature, and freedom together with morality (its consequence) would be annihilated.'

The arrangement of these different conceptions in order of a seemingly increasing Platonism may well reflect the main development of Kant's theory of Ideas. The impression of an actual tendency towards Platonism is, however, misleading. It arises from a neglect of Kant's wholly unplatonic and non-ontological analysis of objectivity. True, he often says or implies that 'all illusion consists in the subjective ground of a judgement being taken for objective' (*Prol.* 328). But objectivity is for him a special kind of intersubjectivity—a common and indispensable feature of perceiving, thinking, or acting, which is characteristic of all subjects or of the subject 'as such'. The transcendental Analytic of the first Critique is called 'a mere analytic of the pure understanding' for which the 'proud name of an ontology' is rejected as both unsuitable and arrogant (*Pu. R. B.*, 207).

The Analytic of the second Critique is also not an ontology. In trying to establish the practical objectivity of freedom as a special kind of practical intersubjectivity Kant adopts a strategy which is analogous to that which he adopted in the first Critique in order to establish the theoretical objectivity of the categories. The analogy is quite close. In order to demonstrate the objectivity, of, say, the category of substance, it was sufficient to exhibit a proposition which logically implies that the concept is not theoretically empty and to demonstrate that this proposition is (absolutely) synthetic and *a priori*. In order to demonstrate the practical objectivity of the Idea of freedom it similarly suffices to exhibit a proposition which implies that the Idea of freedom is not practically empty and to demonstrate that this proposition is (absolutely) synthetic and *a priori*.

According to Kant, man as a practical being has not only desires and interests but also the capacity to 'design maxims of the will' (*Pr. R.* 29), i.e. subjective rules to be observed by him in a course of action. Some of these maxims are, moreover, objective, that is to say, 'recognized as valid for the will of every rational being' (*Pr. R.* 19). The criterion by which the merely subjective maxims can in general be distinguished from objective ones, which express a person's concrete moral duty, is the moral law: 'Act in such a manner that the maxim of your will could at any time also be valid as a principle of a universal legislation' (*Pr. R.* 30). The moral law of which 'we become immediately aware' when designing maxims of the will is presented to us 'by reason as a ground for the determination of

the will' which 'is incapable of being outweighed by any empirical (*sinnlich*) conditions and is wholly independent of them' (*Pr. R.* 29). The determination is not empirical and thus not subject to the principle of natural causality. Kant's analysis of practical thinking leads to the practical thesis that our will, in so far as it is determined by objective maxims, is determined by the moral law.

It is this practical thesis which Kant regards as the required absolute, synthetic *a priori* proposition which implies the existence of freedom. The thesis is indeed synthetic since it implies that something is as a matter of fact determined by the moral law. But it is *a priori* only in a very limited sense; namely, relative to Kant's own distinction between merely subjective and objective maxims. (Since to be determined by the moral law is a constitutive attribute of his objective maxims, no statement about these maxims can be incompatible with the thesis.)

The moral law, in Kant's formulation, is at best only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for the distinction between objective or moral and merely subjective maxims. It is not inconceivable that mutually incompatible maxims could be willed to be principles of a universal legislation. Nor is it inconceivable that a moral law should determine the will without any prior designing of maxims. These criticisms have often been made. Instead of rehearsing them once again, I content myself with pointing out that in his analysis of practical thinking, as in his analysis of empirical thinking, Kant implicitly assumes the doctrine of the uniqueness of the constitutive concepts which he finds in his own thinking—a doctrine which results both in the first and in the second Critique, in his conflation of absolute with relative synthetic *a priori* propositions.

Kant's proof of the existence of freedom (*Pr. R.* 42 ff.) rests on a theoretical and a practical premiss. The former states that if there exists a determination of natural phenomena, which is not subject to the principle of unrestricted natural causality, then the Idea of freedom is not empty. The latter states that the moral law is such a determination. It follows that the Idea of freedom, as defined in the first Critique, is from the practical point of view, as defined in the second Critique, not empty. I have argued earlier that the theoretical premiss might be considerably weakened since it rests on the mistaken assumption of the unrestricted principle of natural causality. The practical premiss might also be weakened since it too rests on a mistaken uniqueness doctrine, namely, that the categorical imperative

determines everybody's concrete duties in a wholly univocal manner. The conclusion would still follow if there existed a non-causal determination of the will not by one and only one moral law, but by one out of a plurality of moral laws, e.g. such as are internally consistent universalizations of incompatible maxims.

The conclusion would—especially if the unrestricted principle of natural causality is modified—even follow, if there existed a non-causal determination by non-moral rules or principles. The mere awareness of a capacity deliberately to accept or reject rules or principles and to obey or contravene accepted ones could also be construed as the '*ratio cognoscendi*' of freedom, which in turn would be the '*ratio essendi*' of this capacity. (*Pr. R.* 4, footnote). The thought occurred to Kant himself some time during the years 1776–8, when he made a note to the effect that transcendental freedom 'is the necessary hypothesis of all rules, and consequently of any employment of the understanding' and that it is 'the property of beings in whom consciousness of a rule is the ground of their actions' (vol. 18, no. 4904). Indeed the mere awareness of being determined in some of one's choices by a non-temporal entity—e.g. a proposition which need not be a rule—might in an argument for the practical existence of freedom play the part which, according to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, only the awareness of the moral law can play. Perhaps Kant's view that only the awareness of an absolute moral law could guarantee the non-emptiness of freedom is connected with his conception of freedom as an Idea and thus as having no application to phenomena. Perhaps he thought that only if the strongest possible moral assumption is true, can it be shown that the Idea of freedom is not yet another fog-bank which creates a false impression of new lands on the wide and stormy ocean of the noumenal.

(iii) *The applicability of the concept of freedom in particular cases.* Kant's 'deduction' in the second Critique is intended to show that the 'inscrutable faculty' of freedom is not only possible, but real 'for all beings who acknowledge the moral law as binding upon them' (*Pr. R.* 47). Like an existence-proof in mathematics, which establishes the non-emptiness of a concept without providing examples of its application, the claim that the concept of freedom is not empty needs to be supplemented by the exhibition of instances to which it is applicable.

Before examining this problem, an ambiguity must be cleared away by distinguishing between morally relevant and morally irrelevant freedom. The former is the freedom to perform or not

to perform an action which is a duty. The latter is the freedom to perform or not to perform an action when neither its performance nor its non-performance is morally obligatory. The freedom of a traveller to take the left rather than the right turning may be either: he may be a Heracles at the cross-roads or simply taking a walk. It is not quite clear whether Kant thinks that a being who acknowledges the moral law is free only in his morally relevant actions or also in some that are morally irrelevant. But he seems on the whole to regard only morally relevant actions as free. Even though my choice between taking the left or the right turning was morally irrelevant, I might, of course, have employed my inscrutable faculty of freedom, by somehow having chosen the whole chain of events of which my turning to the left was a member. But again I may not have employed it to so trivial a purpose. In any case if, as Kant certainly admits, some of my morally irrelevant choices are apparently free, then I have no criterion for deciding which of them, if any, are really free: whatever the subject and object of a free choice may be, the criterion that it is a free choice involves the recognition of a person's duty.

As regards morally relevant freedom Kant holds that every man, even though he may not be confident that he always will do his duty, for example, if doing it will lead to his 'condemnation to instant death', will yet 'concede without qualification' that it is always possible for him to do it (*Pr. R.* 30). He recognizes his duty and *ipso facto* his freedom to do it because 'reason in the form of a practical law determines the will immediately, and not through any mediation of an intervening feeling of pleasure or displeasure' (*Pr. R.* 25). Yet even if all morally relevant choices are free, the recognition of this freedom reveals the nature neither of the chooser, nor of the alternatives which are open to him, nor of the manner in which the choice is determined by the moral law. Kant's way of dealing with each of these problems leads to difficulties which are, I believe, not so much exegetic as philosophical.

The person, as subject to the moral law, is not an empirical person, who is aware of himself as located in time; as having desires and motives which are aspects of spatio-temporally limited situations and causally related to other such situations; and as acting as, or by means of, a body, which as an objective phenomenon is a spatio-temporally located instance of the Kantian categorical schema, in particular the category of natural causality. The doctrine of the unrestricted applicability of the

concept of natural causality to the empirical world makes it impossible for the chooser to be part of it. If he is to be anything at all, he can—consistently with the doctrine of the transcendental ideality of the categorial schema—only be a noumenon, or, as Kant also says, a thing in itself or an intelligible object. Man—he asserts—‘is for himself’ not only a phenomenon, but also an ‘intelligible object’ since he knows himself also through ‘mere apperception’, namely, ‘in actions and inner determinations which he cannot count among the impressions of sense’ (*Pu. R. B.*, 371).

The nature of this non-empirical apperception is not explained in any detail. It is not the ‘pure’ or ‘original’ apperception which ‘produces the presentation of the *I think*’ by which separate, subjective impressions are organized into unified, intersubjective objects of experience (*Pu. R. B.*, 108 ff.). It involves the recognition of the moral law, but not the recognition of the noumenon. For Kant insists that although the concept of a noumenon is internally consistent and even indispensable, the knowledge of an instance of the concept would imply an understanding which apprehends its objects ‘not discursively by categories, but intuitively in a non-sensuous perception’. And of such an understanding we ‘cannot in the least conceive even the possibility’ (*Pu. R. B.*, 212). It follows that ‘man is a noumenon for himself’ only in the sense that he knows *that* he is a noumenon, and not in the sense that he knows any particular noumenon, including himself. I may indeed without contradiction assume that some aspects of myself are unknowable to me, but not that I can know these unknowable aspects.

Since in view of the doctrine of the transcendental ideality of space and time and the categories the noumenal is not differentiated by the categorial schema into particulars and attributes, it is not even possible to assert whether the noumenal world is an undifferentiated whole or a plurality of individuals. The knowledge of the moral law, of the existence of freedom together with the inscrutability of freedom is compatible with either possibility. The absolute unity and wholeness of the noumenal has indeed been asserted by philosophers who accepted Kant’s transcendental idealism or anticipated some of its features. ‘If *space* and *time* are alien to the thing in itself’, says Schopenhauer, ‘then so is plurality . . .’ (*Preisschrift über die Grundlage der Moral*, § 22). A similar position can be found in the Eleatic philosophers; and in the Vedanta Sutras, in particular as interpreted by Sankara.

Even if the noumenal world contains a plurality of individuals, it is not at all clear in what sense their existence is assumed. One difficulty which stands in the way of a clarification is Kant's ambiguous analysis of the Ideas. 'The moral law' he says, 'puts us in accordance with the Idea (*der Idee nach*) in a nature in which reason, if it were endowed with appropriate powers, would produce the highest good . . .' (*Pr. R.* 43); and 'when we think of ourselves as free', i.e. as instantiating the Idea of freedom in our noumenal aspect, we 'put ourselves as members into the intelligible world . . .' (*Met. Mor.* 453). But this location in the noumenal world in accordance with the Idea is sometimes (e.g. *Met. Mor.* 462) regarded as no more than a matter of 'rational faith' or a useful fiction, while at other times it is considered to be a matter of knowledge. Hans Vaihinger, who has carved his *Philosophie des Als-ob*,<sup>1</sup> from the Kantian *opus*, has collected the passages which support these contradictory interpretations and has saved others the labour of collecting them again.

Just as the subject of a free choice is not an empirical individual, so the object of this choice is also not empirical. A traveller's impression that he has at a certain time freely chosen to take the left rather than the right turning is mistaken. For just as the noumenal chooser is extra-temporal so are the alternatives that are open to him. He does not choose within any temporal sequence of events, since any part of the sequence is wholly subject to natural causality, but he chooses outside time between different total sequences. Only so, Kant holds, can he be regarded as responsible for his actions. The point is also made by distinguishing between a man's empirical and his intelligible character (*Pu. R. B.*, 373 ff.). As a phenomenon man has an empirical character which, in so far as it determines his actions, is itself wholly subject to natural causality. But as a noumenon he has an intelligible character which is not causally determined. The causal determination of his empirical character cannot, therefore, excuse any immoral action, since such an action 'with all its past belongs to an unique phenomenon of his character which he himself provides for himself' (*Pr. R.* 98), namely, his intelligible character for which he is responsible.

Kant here appears to revive, whether as a heuristic fiction or as a practical truth, the myth of Er the Pamphylian, which Plato tells in the tenth book of the Republic. According to this myth every soul chooses a life to which it will be bound by

<sup>1</sup> Berlin, 1913.

necessity and any choice of a life inevitably determines a different character. Yet whereas Plato notes that the choice made by one soul may be restricted by the choices of others and is thus not wholly free, Kant does not discuss this question—perhaps because in the last analysis he regarded the plurality of noumenal individuals as a mere analogy which, if it is to be useful, must not be pushed too far. He admits very frequently that in order to apprehend supernatural attributes 'we always need a certain analogy with natural entities' (compare, e.g., *Rel.* 65).

A person's freedom to conform to the moral law implies on Kant's assumptions not only a noumenal individual's choosing between noumenal alternatives, but also the individual's being determined by the moral law in choosing as he does. The determination is intersubjective, not necessitating, intellectual, and not reciprocal. Its intersubjective nature follows from the alleged absolute synthetic and *a priori* character of the proposition that man is subject to the moral law as conceived by Kant. That the moral law does not necessitate a choice follows from the possibility of its being disobeyed. That the resistible 'compulsion' is 'intellectual' (*Pr. R.* 32) follows from Kant's analysis of respect for the law (*Pr. R.* 71 ff.), according to which the moral law compels by being apprehended. It is not reciprocal in the sense that the moral law 'determines without being determinable' (*Pu. R. B.* 376). Indeed if the moral law is a proposition which exists independently of being apprehended, then the apprehension of the law by a chooser may affect the chooser but not the law.

Consider now a noumenal individual's extra-temporal choice of a sequence of phenomena which contains his life from birth to death and all its morally relevant actions. The choice is spontaneous, since it is not necessitated by a natural law and since to be subject to the moral law does not imply an irresistible compulsion. *Prima facie* it may be construed in one of two ways. On the one hand, one might assume that the noumenon is an individual independently of his choice, i.e. that the individual happens to make one choice, while he could also make another. On the other hand, one might assume that the noumenon, unless it chooses as it does, is not the particular noumenon which it is; that the choice constitutes and individuates the noumenon; that 'being a noumenal individual' and 'being a spontaneous chooser of a life' logically imply each other—in a very strong sense of logical implication.

The second conception, which makes the spontaneous noumenal choice an individuating attribute, is Kant's own. That this is so follows clearly from his doctrine that man is for himself both phenomenal and noumenal and that the phenomenal and noumenal are aspects of the same total entity. Since a man's spatio-temporal path from cradle to grave is his *principium individuationis* and since his empirical individuality is inseparable from his noumenal individuality, the noumenon's choice of a life is not logically separable from the noumenon's individuality. The noumenon therefore exists as a chooser of itself. This doctrine which is implicit in the first Critique fits in well with the doctrine of moral autonomy, according to which an individual is free only if the laws which it chooses to obey or disobey are given by himself to himself. It is explicitly asserted in the introduction to the third Critique (*Ju.* 175) where the theoretical legislation of the understanding and the practical legislation of reason are said to 'coexist in the same subject'.

The 'seeming experience of liberty' which according to Hume is wholly spurious is even according to Kant partly an illusion. A phenomenological description of a situation in which a person is under the impression of freely choosing would have to contain a temporal delimitation. One believes that one is free to choose in some situations, i.e. at some time, and not in others. According to Kant free choice is extra-temporal, because it is a faculty of individuals *qua* noumena. What forces Kant to replace, as it were, the phenomenology of practical and moral experience by a 'noumenology', is his thesis of the unrestricted applicability of natural causation. What, I suggest, makes his noumenology not too difficult to grasp is simply that one can bring it back to earth by noting that whatever according to Kant is true of noumenal choice could be true of ordinary phenomenal choice if the applicability of the principle of causality were limited to some external phenomena only. In that case something like Kant's account of noumenal free choice might *mutatis mutandis* well serve as an account of free choice by empirical men in nature.

In a derived and imprecise sense we might, of course, say that man acts freely at any time at which he is performing his duty. But even here we lack on Kant's account—and, as I believe, on any other—wholly reliable criteria. This is so because Kant's noumenon in choosing its life, its character, and itself, chooses a chain of events which may also include choices which are only apparently free. 'Our ascriptions of moral responsibility', he

admits, (*Pu. R. B.*, 373 footnote), 'can only be related to our empirical character. How much of it, however, is a pure effect of freedom, how much of mere nature . . . nobody can ascertain, from which it follows that nobody can judge with complete justice.' The criterion for the applicability of the concept of freedom to do one's duty in concrete situations is no sharper in Kant's philosophy than the criterion of a conscientious judge of other people's actions who does his best to judge with justice. This seems to me a point in favour of Kant's philosophy of freedom.

(iv) *The harmony of nature and freedom.* To resolve the antinomy which arises from the assumption of the unrestricted applicability of the principle of natural causality on the one hand and the assumption of man's freedom to do his duties on the other, is one of the main problems of the transcendental philosophy. Its solution rests on the assumption of the transcendental ideality of the Kantian categorial schema and its ramifications, such as the distinction between categories and Ideas, understanding and reason, pure reason and practical reason. It is first expounded in the second principal section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and frequently summarized in Kant's other works. Space, time, and the categories of the understanding are constitutive of, and individuating for, objective empirical phenomena only: freedom as an Idea has no application to phenomena, but is from the practical point of view applicable to noumena. The statements that a phenomenon is causally related to another phenomenon and that a noumenon is free are compatible. Both the strategy and the execution of Kant's consistency proof have had fruitful repercussions within philosophy and even outside it, e.g. in David Hilbert's conception of metamathematics and proof-theory. They have also inspired some rather dreary fallacies of the kind that one may both eat one's cake and have it, since, after all, 'eating a cake' and 'having a cake' are different 'sorts of things'.

Transcendental idealism, in the narrow sense which implies the absolute indispensability of the Kantian categorial schema to any empirical and scientific thinking, stands refuted by the actual adoption of alternative schemata in physics. But pointing to the emergence of alternative categorial schemata does not refute transcendental idealism in the wider sense which implies the indispensability to empirical thinking of *some* categorial schema and allows the distinction between phenomena under some categorial schema and noumena conceived as subject to

none. While I can see no way of refuting the wider doctrine of transcendental idealism or indeed the need for doing so, the assumption of its truth does not seem the only way of proving the consistency of man's subjection to the laws of nature and his freedom to choose between genuine alternatives.

For this purpose it would, however, not be enough to argue, as I have done earlier, that Kant's predictive category of causality is replaceable, and has in orthodox quantum mechanics been replaced, by an altogether different predictive category. The replacement of the concepts of causal necessitation and of corresponding causal laws by a concept of 'probabilification' and of corresponding probabilistic laws does not make room for effective freedom. I am as little the chooser between genuine alternatives if all my choices are probabilified, as I am if they are necessitated. My choice is just as spurious if it is nothing but a causally necessitated event, as it is if it is nothing but a more or less probable one. The only way of making room for man's freedom *in* nature is not to replace one predictive category by another, but to restrict the range of its applicability with respect to natural phenomena. This point was, for example, clear to Peirce who<sup>1</sup> by explaining the facts of observational error as having their ground not in an imprecise observation of nature, but in nature itself, could locate at least spontaneity, if not human freedom, in the phenomenal world. Without such a restriction of the range within which one's predictive categories—whatever they may be—are applicable in nature, effective freedom can only be saved in Kantian fashion by being located in the noumenal world. The reasons why Kant had to adopt this position include his analysis of the logical structure of pure mathematics and theoretical physics and of their function in empirical thinking. According to this account the concepts of (Euclidean) geometry and the causal relation are instantiated in every objective sense-experience: the concepts of geometry, because the Transcendental Aesthetic is supposed to have shown that they 'determine the properties of space synthetically and yet *a priori*' (*Pu. R. B.*, 54); the causal relation, because the Transcendental Analytic is supposed to have shown that, since it is a category or 'concept of an object as such', its applicability to sense-experience is 'an *a priori* condition of any objective experience' (*Pu. R. B.*, 104 ff.). Kant nowhere examines, and thus gives no reason for rejecting, an altogether

<sup>1</sup> 'The Doctrine of Necessity Re-examined' in *Collected Papers* (Harvard, 1931-5), vol. v.

different account of geometry and theoretical physics, which in my view is not only possible, but true. For my present purpose it is sufficient to show its possibility.

The alternative is briefly that the concepts of geometry and the causal relation are not only not instantiated in every objective sense-experience, but that they are not instantiated in experience at all. They are ideal concepts, i.e. concepts which, though themselves inapplicable to sense experience, may within limited contexts and for limited purposes be identified with concepts which are so applicable. Their reference to the objects of sense-experience consists in their limited identifiability with empirical concepts. Thus empirical triangles are neither Euclidean nor non-Euclidean, since, as already Gauss knew, there is no empirical test for deciding whether the sum of their angles deviates, however slightly, from 180 degrees. But there may be good reasons for identifying a triangle formed by three fences with an Euclidean and a triangle formed by three light-rays with a non-Euclidean one. Again, regular empirical sequences are neither causal nor non-causal since there is no empirical test for deciding whether a sequence which appears to be completely regular does not, however slightly, deviate from complete regularity. But there may be good reason for treating apparently regular empirical sequences as causal in one context and as non-causal in another.

Kant's account of the concepts of geometry and of the causal relation as instantiated in every objective sense-experience is intimately connected with his doctrine of the uniqueness of his categorial schema. Indeed his analysis of the logical status and function of these concepts is, among other things, offered as the answer to the illegitimate question why, though non-empirical, they are nevertheless indispensable in every system of physics. The analysis of these concepts as ideal, on the other hand, answers the legitimate question, why, though non-empirical and dispensable in physics, they are nevertheless extremely useful in some systems of physics. This is another reason for rejecting the Kantian analysis in favour of the alternative which I have briefly outlined.

A world described in terms of ideal concepts is itself only an ideal world. It is not the world of experience, however useful it may be as an idealization of it. Moreover, if the structure of this ideal world leaves no room for effective choices between genuine alternatives, it does not follow that no such choices exist in the world of experience. Indeed Newtonian physics, which for Kant

is the ultimate science of nature, deliberately excludes all human choice and action from the ideal world which it constructs for limited identification with the world of sense-experience. Its ideal situations are meant to idealize, and to be identified with, a limited class of empirical situations all of which are free from human choice and interference. The absence of effective choice from a limited class of ideal situations is, however, no reason at all for inferring its absence from the class of all empirical situations.

What I have called an 'ideal concept' is like a Kantian Idea in that 'no corresponding object can be given to it in sense-experience', but it is unlike a Kantian Idea by not being 'a necessary concept of reason' (*Pu. R. B.*, 254) and by not involving any reference to an infinite totality. The Kantian Ideas are thus ideal concepts, whereas not all ideal concepts are Kantian Ideas. For Kant the legitimate (non-regulative) use of ideal concepts is wholly confined to practical thinking, whereas the domain of empirical thinking is the domain of *a priori* concepts, which describe the structure of space and time; of *a priori* concepts, which are characteristic of the occupants of space and time *qua* 'objects as such'; and of *a posteriori* concepts, each of which applies to some of these objects. I have argued that it is at least reasonable to assume that ideal concepts have a legitimate, non-regulative use both in practical and in empirical thinking. And if the balance between idealization and description is readjusted, the obstacle in the way of assuming a restricted applicability to natural phenomena of the causal relation, or of any other predictive category, reveals itself as spurious. Consequently if freedom—because of the moral law or for some other reason—must be assumed to exist, the assumption of its existence within the world of phenomena can no longer be regarded as incompatible with the structure or content of empirical science or empirical thought in general.

Kant's proof of a logically possible co-existence of freedom and unrestricted natural causality in the same world and even in the same person raises a difficult logico-metaphysical problem. Since freedom exists in the practical sense of the word 'existence' only in the noumenal world, and since causality exists in the empirical sense of the word only in temporal experience, the question arises in which sense of the word 'existence' freedom and unrestricted natural causality co-exist. The nature of the problem becomes clearer by considering, as it were, a mild form of it: numbers and men both exist and thus in

some sense co-exist, although apparently numbers exist extra-temporally and men exist in time. In asserting their co-existence metaphysicians have on the whole adopted three types of approach. Some of them have absorbed the existence of numbers (as *entia rationis*, as subsistent entities, etc.) into the existence of men, by holding that any assertion about the existence of numbers is incomplete and derives its significance from an assertion about men thinking of numbers. Other metaphysicians have absorbed the existence of men (as a mere illusion, a mode of extra-temporal being, etc.) into the existence of an extra-temporal world by holding that any assertion about the existence of men derives its significance only as part of an assertion about a non-temporal reality which includes the reality of numbers. Lastly, the co-existence of numbers and men has been asserted on the ground that, as Aristotle held, 'existence' is not a genus with different species. (See, e.g., *Metaph.* B. III, 998b, 22-27.)

In many passages of his works (e.g. *Met. Mor.* 462) Kant holds that the existence of freedom, unlike the existence of nature, is wholly a mental construction, while in others (e.g. *Pr. R.* 105) he asserts the existence of freedom to be known. This vacillation is, as I have pointed out, connected with a similar vacillation as regards the ontological status of the Ideas and, one may add, of practical and empirical existence. The problem of the co-existence of freedom, which exists practically, and of natural causality, which exists empirically, is fully faced only in the *Critique of Judgement*.

The objective co-existence of freedom and causality would be their existence in the same object. Such an object is, however, inaccessible to theoretical reason because the 'concept of nature' (which includes the concept of natural causality) is applicable only 'to objects as mere appearances'. And it is inaccessible to practical reason because the 'concept of freedom' is applicable only 'to a thing in itself which is not presented in intuition'. The application of neither concept can 'provide knowledge of an object (and even of the thinking subject) as a thing in itself, which would be the supernatural' (*Ju.* 175). Yet even though the co-existence of freedom and nature is not characterized by any objective concept, Kant finds their subjective unity expressed by an *a priori* concept of purposiveness, 'which allows the transition of thought in accordance with principles governing one of them to thought in accordance with principles of the other' (*Ju.* 176). This concept of purposiveness which has its source in

the faculty of judgement is, like the categories of theoretical and the Ideas of practical reason, *a priori* and thus intersubjective and indispensable to thinking. But, unlike the categories and the Ideas, it is not constitutive of any objects, whether phenomenal or noumenal. It is 'a subjective principle of reason . . . which being regulative (not constitutive) has the same necessary validity for our *human power of judgement* as if it were an objective principle' (*Ju.* 404).

It is, Kant tells us, merely subjectively and yet *a priori* necessary to conceive an ultimate moral purpose, i.e. the connexion of 'general happiness with conduct that most conforms to the moral law' (*Ju.* 453); to conceive of an ultimate purpose 'of the world itself as regards its existence' (*loc. cit.*); to conceive 'an intelligent and moral being as the creator of the world' so that the ultimate purpose of the world's existence is 'the ultimate moral purpose' (*Ju.* 455). The notion of a merely subjective necessary or *a priori* principle is, if not self-contradictory, at least obscure. A large claim made by calling a principle '*a priori*' seems to be virtually withdrawn by also calling it 'merely subjective'. However this may be, it is clear that the very assumptions which make it so easy for Kant to demonstrate the consistency of freedom and natural causality make it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand their co-existence in the same individual.

(v) *Supernatural and natural freedom.* If one eliminates from Kant's philosophy of freedom those doctrines which do not stand up to internal or external criticism, one is by no means left empty-handed. The doctrines which remain are not only consistent with an intelligible alternative account of freedom which removes it from the noumenal world and places it firmly into nature, but they also contain many important hints for developing such an alternative philosophical position. Let me briefly outline my own version of it.

As I have argued already, freedom can have a place in nature only if the category or categories used in empirical, especially scientific prediction, are not unrestrictedly applicable to natural phenomena. Their merely restricted applicability would follow if the concepts of mathematics and the predictive empirical, especially scientific, categories are ideal concepts which are only within limited contexts and for limited purposes identifiable with empirical concepts. As I have defended this analysis at length elsewhere, it was here sufficient to indicate its barest outlines and to show that it is a possible alternative to Kant's analysis of empirical and scientific thinking.

Once the dogma of the unrestricted applicability of any predictive category is dropped, an intelligible account of free choices made by men in nature is no longer out of the question. Such an account might derive a great deal from Kant's analysis of noumenal choice. Thus a person, who shares Kant's moral convictions, could then within the limits in which his conduct is not—causally, probabilistically or otherwise—determined by nature, still be determined by the apprehension of his duty. This determination would, moreover, be a resistible compulsion. It would be intellectual, since it would consist in the apprehension of a non-temporal moral principle; and not reciprocal since the apprehension of a principle by a person may affect the person but not the principle. We might further, transposing our interpretation of Kant's account of noumenal choice into the natural world, argue that an individual's being what he is logically implies, and is logically implied by, his choosing as he does. This is to say that an individual's choices are not only among his most characteristic traits but constitute his personality. That this might be so occurred to Kant already in an early phase of his philosophical thought. 'The question, whether freedom is possible', he says in a note found in his manuscripts (vol. 17, no. 4225), 'is perhaps identical with the question whether man is a true person and whether the Self (*das Ich*) is possible in an externally determined being.'

An account on these lines of the possibility of effective choices in nature is not bound up with the uniqueness claim which Kant makes in his moral philosophy. Moral determination through the apprehension of a moral principle would remain intelligible even if one were to hold, as I think one must, that Kant's moral law is not a necessary and a sufficient criterion of concrete moral duties and even if one accepted that there is not one morality only, but a plurality of moral systems. Indeed such an account could be extended from morally relevant to morally irrelevant choices in which a planner might within limits be resistibly determined by the apprehension of non-moral principles. In this connexion it is of some interest to note that Frege explains the influence of thoughts, conceived by him as extra-temporal entities existing independently of being apprehended, in terms of a non-causal determination.<sup>1</sup>

This account of freedom, as freedom in nature, does justice to the Kantian requirements for effective choice, namely, that

<sup>1</sup> 'Der Gedanke' in *Beiträge zur Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*, vol. i, 2 (1918).

the chooser should choose between genuine alternatives, none of which should be incompatible with the laws of nature; and that the choice should not be wholly determined by the chooser's past in conjunction with these laws. The account is, moreover, self-consistent and consistent with the structure and content of empirical thinking as well as with our experience of at least seemingly free choices. But these features are just as insufficient to show that intra-phenomenal freedom exists as is Kant's transcendental deduction of the existence of noumenal freedom. Yet even here we can derive help from Kant. His theory of Ideas provides at least a pragmatic justification for assuming their existence and for acting as if the concept of freedom were not empty. Acting on the assumption that I am free will, if I am free, not deprive me of possibilities of which acting on the assumption that I am not free might deprive me. If I am in fact not free, then neither assumption will make any difference to my actions. This pragmatic argument in favour of the assumption of freedom is implicit especially in Kant's remarks on the regulative and heuristic function of the transcendental Ideas in general and of the Idea of freedom in particular.

Again, our alternative account provides no criterion for recognizing a particular choice as free. However, when it is empirically undecidable whether a choice is free or not, acting on the assumption that it is free can be pragmatically justified in the same fashion as acting on the assumption that the concept of free choice is not empty. Such a pragmatic justification includes, or is at least compatible with, the Kantian principle that one is always free to do one's duty—whether or not one's duty is as clearly recognizable as Kant thought.

A traveller who has arrived at a cross-road and is under the impression that his choice of the left rather than the right turning is not wholly determined by his past and by nature, may find some reassurance in this account of freedom which has still much in common with Kant's. He may rest assured that science has not disproved his freedom and that, though the question of the emptiness or otherwise of the concept is empirically undecidable, he is justified in assuming that he is free. In the absence of any empirical proof to the contrary, he is moreover justified in assuming that he is free to take one turning rather than the other. If, as is unlikely, he has not been touched by unsound popularizations of science or by a determinist metaphysics, he might tell the philosopher that he has known this all along. This in turn would reassure the philosopher. If the

traveller is an—oriental or occidental—transcendental idealist he might rightly insist that the general position of transcendental idealism has not been refuted. It is still available as an explanation of inscrutable and even of transparent features of human existence. But it is not needed for an intelligible analysis of freedom and its co-existence with natural determination.