

# Timeless Freedom in Kant:

## Transcendental Freedom and Things-in-Themselves<sup>1</sup>

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Transcendental freedom lies at the heart of Kant's critical philosophy. One peculiar feature of this is Kant's claim that it is, in some sense, timeless. Transcendental Idealism contends that appearances are not things-in-themselves. This helps Kant resolve the third antinomy, and establish that transcendental freedom and natural necessity do not necessarily conflict with each other. Appearances occur in time, and are determined by natural necessity, where things-in-themselves are not. This opens up a space for his practical philosophy, where our moral practices require us to be transcendently free.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I draw attention to two problems with Kant's claim that transcendental freedom is timeless. The problems are that this: 1) causes conceptual difficulties; and 2) fails to vindicate

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance A 448/B 476, where Kant makes clear that transcendental freedom is the ground of *imputability*. For a classic discussion of imputation in Kant, see Allison (1990: 40-1), and for a recent account of imputation and responsibility in Kant, see Blöser (2015: 184-8).

important parts of our moral practices.<sup>3</sup> The first problem concerns Kant's claim that transcendental freedom is "a faculty of absolutely beginning a state" (A445/B473), and the basic puzzle revolves around how something can *begin* outside of time. The second problem is that important parts of our moral practices occur in and over time, and that conceiving of transcendental freedom as timeless makes it very difficult to account for this. This problem is especially significant, as Kant is eager to secure a conception of freedom that will vindicate our moral practices.

Having laid out these two problems, I then put forward three ways in which we can respond to these charges on Kant's behalf. The first is to defend Kant's claim that transcendental freedom occurs outside of time. The second is to reject this claim, but try to maintain transcendental idealism. And the third is to reject both Kant's claim about the timelessness of freedom and also transcendental idealism itself. I say something about each of these options, and how they all come with a cost. I thus propose that Kant's claims about the timelessness of freedom present something of a trilemma to Kantians. In the end, I attempt to blunt the final option, looking to preserve transcendental freedom without transcendental idealism.

In doing this, I hope to advance discussions on an important, but difficult issue at the heart of Kant's claims about transcendental freedom and things-in-themselves. Despite its importance, this issue has received relatively little attention recently; notable exceptions include Freyenhagen (2008), Greenberg (2019), Herman (2018: 220-21), Insole (2011), Michel (2014), Walker (2017),

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<sup>3</sup> There is an additional problem that I do not discuss here, namely whether Kant's locating transcendental freedom outside of time allows for moral *change*. See Pereboom (2006: 556-7n33) for a succinct version of this challenge, and Indregard (2018) for a recent attempt to defend Kant on this. See also Insole (2013: 121-134) for an illuminating account of how Kant came to his position on this issue, and the relationship of Kant's views to the Augustinian tradition.

and Watkins (2005: 333-39). This also fits into a broader project, where I hope to defend transcendental freedom without transcendental idealism.

## 1. Transcendental Freedom, Time and Things-in-Themselves

I want to begin by laying out 10 basic claims that Kant makes about transcendental freedom, time and things-in-themselves. I should note that, despite the sequential numbering I am not presenting these claims as premises, or an argument. There are interesting inferential connections between these claims, but here I just want to lay out several distinct claims that Kant makes, leaving aside their inferential relations (for now). The first two claims are as follows:

- i. Transcendental freedom involves the ability to initiate causal chains
- ii. Practical philosophy requires transcendental freedom

Kant describes transcendental freedom “a faculty of absolutely beginning a state” (A445/B473), which involves the ability to initiate causal chains. And throughout his practical philosophy, Kant insists that morality requires this type of freedom: “[transcendental] freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other” (V. 29. 24-5).<sup>4</sup>

Here are three more claims that Kant makes:

- iii. Everything that occurs in time is causally determined
- iv. Appearances are in time
- v. Appearances are causally determined

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<sup>4</sup> For the classic treatment of this relationship, see Allison’s (1990: 201-213) discussion of – what he calls – The Reciprocity Thesis. The Thesis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Antinomy (A444-6/B472-4) suggests that theoretical philosophy also requires transcendental freedom.

Claims iii-v are also hopefully relatively straightforward. Kant claims that everything that occurs in time is causally determined, he also thinks there can be no appearances except as in time, and that all appearances are causally determined necessarily by the previous temporal state (for a relatively succinct statement of these claims, see V. 94. 22 – 95. 23). This leads us to claims vi-viii:

- vi. Time is only a form of intuition
- vii. Things-in-themselves are not in time
- viii. Things-in-themselves are not causally determined

While appearances are in time, and causally determined, time itself is only a form of intuition (A35/B51, A492/B520, A540/B568). Moreover, things-in-themselves are *not* in time (A32-6/B49-53, A539/B567), and are also *not* determined in accordance with the principle of causality or mechanism of nature (Bxxvii).<sup>5</sup>

Finally:

- ix. Transcendental freedom is a property of things-in-themselves
- x. Transcendental freedom is not in time

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<sup>5</sup> This passage states that things-in-themselves are not subject to the “principle of causality, and hence the mechanism of nature”. Here, Kant is claiming that things-in-themselves are not causally determined in this way, but this leaves open whether there might be other ways in which things-in-themselves are determined. For more on Kant’s theory of time, and how it relates to his theory of freedom, see Michel (2014).

This completes a basic sketch of some of Kant's views about transcendental freedom, time and things-in-themselves. As we have just seen, the upshot of this is that transcendental freedom is a property of things-in-themselves (A541/B569), and *not* in time.<sup>6</sup>

Insole (2013: 123-24) makes the case that:<sup>7</sup>

Whether we like it or not, it seems that we must concede that Kant resorts to the notion of atemporal first causation frequently and systematically, from the 1770s into the 1790s.

Watkins (2005: 333) also remarks that:

There is no doubt that Kant accepts the idea that our noumenal agency must be considered atemporal, and it is equally clear that this view is forced on him by his belief that temporality requires causal determination in such a way that temporal agency would be incompatible with the kind of spontaneous freedom he thinks is required for freedom and moral responsibility.

What are we to make of this? There is an immediate virtue to Kant's position, namely that transcendental idealism allows us to accept that appearances are causally determined by natural necessity, but nevertheless maintain that transcendental freedom is still possible. However, there is also a vice: transcendental freedom is outside of time. Why is this a vice? In what follows, I will argue that it creates (1) conceptual difficulties and (2) fails to vindicate important parts of our moral practices.

## 2. Two Problems

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance A539/B567, and R6343.

<sup>7</sup> In support of this, he cites: R 33298, R3988, R 4000, R 4225, R 5611 and R 5612 from the 1770s, A445-51/B559-86, IV:343-4 and V:85-102 from the 1780s, and VI: 31 and VI: 280n from the 1790s.

In this section, I want to sketch two problems with Kant's thinking that transcendental freedom is timeless, before going on to consider how we might respond to them in the next section.

### 1) **Conceptual difficulties:**

Transcendental freedom is "a faculty of absolutely beginning a state" (A445/B473). And right away, a puzzle appears, in that this seems to conflict with some of Kant's claims about things-in-themselves. For, in section IX of the antinomy of pure reason, Kant claims that:

[...] in reason itself nothing begins, [...] (A554/B582)

[...] insofar as it is a **noumenon**, nothing **happens**, [...] (A541/B569)

Nothing happens in the noumenal, and so how are we to think of transcendental freedom as absolutely beginning a state?

Let's turn to the text for more detail. Kant writes the following:

Pure reason, as a merely intelligible faculty, is not subject to the form of time, and hence not subject to the conditions of the temporal sequence. The causality of reason in the intelligible character **does not arise** or start working at a certain time in producing an effect. For then it would itself be subject to the natural law of appearances, to the extent that this law determines causal series in time, and its causality would then be nature and not freedom. (A551-2/B579-80).

[...] this acting subject, in its intelligible character, would not stand under any conditions of time, for time is only the condition of appearances, but not of things in themselves. In that subject no **action** would **arise** or **perish**, hence it would not be subject to the law of everything alterable in its time-determination that everything **that happens** must find its cause **in the appearances** (of the previous state). (A540/B568)

The line of thought in these passages is relatively clear: everything in time is determined, but the noumenal is not in time, and transcendental freedom is in the noumenal. But this still leaves us with our basic conceptual puzzle. How can something *begin* outside of time?<sup>8</sup>

One possible solution is that transcendental freedom does not involve a *temporal* beginning in the noumenal, but something like a *causal* beginning.<sup>9</sup> The noumenal thus remains timeless, but (in some causal sense) begins a state in the phenomenal world. And at times, Kant suggests something like this:

Of it one would say quite correctly that it begins its effects in the sensible world **from itself**, without its action beginning **in it** itself (A541/B569)

The suggestion seems to be that transcendental freedom begins a state *in the phenomenal world*.

Earlier, we saw Kant characterise transcendental freedom as “a faculty of absolutely beginning a state” (A445/B473). So conceived, a state of affairs in the world of experience begins, and is begun by transcendental freedom, but transcendental freedom itself does not begin. This seems to allow us to think of transcendental freedom as a timeless beginning. However, it is not clear that it resolves the puzzle at hand. It appears to merely shift the bump in the rug: The puzzle now changes from, how can something begin outside of time, to how can something outside of time begin something in time?

In the *Religion*, Kant offers a slightly different distinction, between a *temporal* and a *rational* origin (VI: 39.11-12), where a temporal origin concerns an occurrence from a preceding event, and a rational origin concerns something arising from reason rather than from a preceding event.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bennett (1984: 102).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Timmermann (2003: 88-91).

<sup>10</sup> See Bojanowski (2006: 268, 278) for further discussion of this distinction.

However, this runs into a similar issue. For the basic puzzle still remains, as to how something outside of time (reason) can begin something in time. It also raises additional issues about how reason could operate timelessly. I will return to consider some proposed solutions to these puzzles in the next section.

So far, all we have seen here is that there is something puzzling about Kant conceiving freedom as timeless. But why should we be troubled by these conceptual puzzles? After all, Kant himself was aware that there is an air of paradox to his claim that freedom is timeless. In the *Religion*, for instance, he writes that:

To look for the temporal origin of free actions as free (as though they were natural effects) is therefore a contradiction; and hence also a contradiction to look for the temporal origin of the moral constitution of the human being [...] (VI: 40. 1-4).

Moreover, as Insole (2013: 134) notes, this “element of incoherence might be expected and permitted by theologians working in a broadly Augustinian tradition.” So why worry about the air of paradox?

## **2) Failure to vindicate our practices:**

I contend that these puzzles are problematic because we are not just considering the abstract idea of a timeless cause, or thinking about God’s agency, but instead our own reason and freedom. And both our reason and freedom occur in – and over – time. We can best bring this out through considering a concrete example:

Jane is born in 1950. In 1968, she faces a dilemma over whether she should work for her father’s company, which supports the war in Vietnam. Jane deliberates for weeks over this, but ends up deciding that she should not work for this company, and decides to go to college instead. She goes to college, gets too many degrees, thinks too much, and ends up in academia. In 1980, she is hit by a car, and is comatose for 6 months. Thankfully, she recovers and lives on until today. In 2010, Jane is diagnosed with a degenerative condition, which limits her cognitive abilities. However, with daily medication, she is able to maintain her cognitive abilities, and Jane continues to live a fulfilling life.



What is going on here? It looks like Jane's freedom – and her ability to exercise it – comes and goes over time.

- Before 1950, Jane did not exist and had no freedom
- Between 1950 and (roughly<sup>11</sup>) 1968, Jane was a child, and not free
- As of (roughly) 1968, Jane has been an adult, and free
- In 1968, she spent several weeks seriously deliberating over a moral issue
- In 1980, Jane was in a coma and was unable to exercise her freedom for 6 months
- Since 2010, Jane is able to exercise her freedom only when she takes her daily medication

Kant's claim that freedom is timeless makes it hard to account for this, and important parts of our practices. For it is appropriate for us to treat Jane differently before and after (roughly) 1968; it is also appropriate for us to treat Jane differently after 2010, depending on whether or not she has taken her medication. It is crucial to parts of our current medical practices, for instance, that people are able to provide valid consent at some times and not at other times. More generally, it is appropriate for us to treat children differently than adults. Why? Because adults are typically free and children typically are not.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. A Trilemma

Where does this leave Kant's claim that transcendental freedom occurs outside of time? I think there are three options available to Kant. He could:

- 1) attempt to defend the claim that transcendental freedom is outside of time;

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, when *exactly* Jane became an adult, and whether there is a sharp (rather than fuzzy) boundary between children and adults is complicated. There is also an issue of when exactly Jane became free. But I hope to leave these complexities aside here.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion of the treatment of children in Kant's ethics, see Frierson (2018) and Saunders (2019)

- 2) accept that transcendental freedom is – or could be – in time, and in addition, claim the noumenal is – or at least, could be – in time;
- 3) accept that transcendental freedom is in time, and also give up on Transcendental Idealism.

In what follows, I consider each of these options in turn. I argue that each of them comes with a cost to Kant, and thus present something of a trilemma. I end by making the case for the final option, and do so for Kantian reasons.

### **3) Attempts to defend the claim that transcendental freedom is outside of time**

The first option for Kantians is to defend Kant's claim that transcendental freedom occurs outside of time. And there are a few routes available. I want to consider 4 here.

#### *a)* The deflationary route

A plausible starting point is to look to deflate Kant's claim that freedom is timeless. Barbara Herman, for instance, proposes that:<sup>13</sup>

In a sense, every course of reasoning is timeless (e.g. a contradiction is timelessly invalid). A course of reason may be manifest at a time, realized or recognized in time, but its correctness is not a function of any act of reasoning. (Herman 2018: 221-22)

This seems correct. But it also seems to sidestep the issue at hand. After all, this is not the sense of timelessness under consideration. As we have seen, Kant is clear that things-in-themselves are not in time, and that transcendental freedom is not in time either. Herman makes a more plausible claim, but we still have to deal with these two claims that Kant made and was

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<sup>13</sup> See also Bennett (1974: 229) and Bird (2006b: 711).

committed to. (Of course, one might want to deny Kant's claim that transcendental freedom is timeless, and we will turn to consider that with the next two options.)

Another deflationary strategy involves a non-metaphysical conception of things-in-themselves. One might adopt the view that things-in-themselves are not an ontological domain, but rather an *aspect* of things or a *standpoint*. Likewise, transcendental freedom is not a metaphysical property or capacity that we possess, but instead but instead an idea or presupposition that we must adopt from the practical standpoint.<sup>14</sup>

I do not think this resolves the issue at hand. For we occupy the practical standpoint in, and over, time. The practical standpoint is often associated with practical deliberation, and this often takes time – Jane took weeks to decide whether or not to join her father's company. Thus even if we accept that things-in-themselves are only a standpoint and transcendental freedom is an idea that we must adopt from this standpoint, a version of the original problem still remains. Locating transcendental freedom outside of time is problematic, whether or not we conceive this freedom as an ontological property or something that we must adopt from a standpoint.

b) Transcendental freedom *grounds* appearances

In a recent chapter, Walker (2017) invokes the concept of *grounding* to argue that Kant's claims about freedom being timeless are not so problematic. He writes:

[...] the words 'first', 'second', and 'until' must refer in reality to positions and relationships in the underlying order that is the ground of, but not to be equated with, time as we know it. (Walker 2017: 211)

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<sup>14</sup> For a brief defence of this position, see Allison (1990: 47-53). And for responses to Allison, see Ameriks (1992: 656-7) and Freyenhagen (2008).

The idea here is that there is some order to things-in-themselves, not a temporal order, but some other sort of order that underlies and grounds the temporal order that we find in experience.

With this in mind, Walker concludes:

So the problem about atemporal activity is not unsurmountable. All that is needed is to see that there must be an underlying order that serves the necessary purposes; something to which Kant is in any case firmly committed. (Walker 2017: 211)

I am sympathetic to the thought that things-in-themselves, including transcendental freedom, ground appearances.<sup>15</sup> And I can see how this might help overcome the conceptual puzzle sketched in the second section of this paper. On Walker's proposal, we have some other time-like ordering of things-in-themselves, and this helps us think about how things can begin in the noumenal.

However, I worry that this suggestion faces problems of its own, concerning just how substantive the claim about a time-like order is. On the one hand, this might be a relatively weak claim: speculation about the mere possibility of positing some time-like ordering in order to overcome the difficulty of thinking of things-in-themselves being timeless. But if that is the case, then the proposal seems to face the same difficulties as some of the initial suggestions we looked at in §1, namely that it merely shifts the bump in the rug, and we now face the puzzling questions of how some other ordering can begin – or relate to – a temporal ordering? On the other hand, Walker's solution could involve a more substantive claim about an actual time-like ordering that things-in-themselves have, which seems to move us to second horn of the trilemma, where we accept that things-in-themselves could be in time, or have a time-like ordering. This is not necessarily a problem, but it does move us to the position under consideration in the next

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<sup>15</sup> See Watkins (2005: 322-29) for further discussion.

section of this paper, which as we will see there, has strengths and weaknesses of its own. But for now, let us continue to think about ways in which we might insist that transcendental freedom is timeless and things-in-themselves are not.

c) Transcendental Freedom is a *capacity*

The third option is to emphasise that transcendental freedom is a *capacity*, and that we always have this capacity, even when we cannot exercise it.

This does not resolve the problems at hand. Once again, it just seems to shift the bump in the rug. For one, it appears that we can exercise this capacity over time. And secondly, both our possession of this capacity, and our ability to exercise it, seem to come and go over time. Recall Jane's life: Before 1950, she did not possess the capacity of transcendental freedom, and in 1980, she was unable to exercise this capacity for an extended period of time.

d) The *epistemic limits* of Transcendental Idealism

The final option here is to point to the epistemic limits of transcendental idealism and claim that while we can know that we are free, we cannot know how transcendental freedom works (see, for instance IV: 459. 4-15; V: 94. 2-7; VI: 138.19). Kant has systematic reasons for thinking that we cannot know things-in-themselves, and so this is not an entirely ad hoc move.<sup>16</sup> On this option, transcendental freedom is puzzling in various ways, and its being timeless does cause conceptual difficulties for us, but that is to be expected.

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<sup>16</sup> See Callanan (2014) for an account of the practical value of our noumenal ignorance when it comes to our transcendental freedom; see also Aylsworth (2020) for further recent discussion of significance of this ignorance.

Freyenhagen (2008: 67-8) considers this option, but finds it unsatisfactory. He writes the following:<sup>17</sup>

One might think that the talk of incomprehensibility just masks the contradictory nature of the idea of freedom. The appeal to the black box of the intelligible realm does not give us sufficient assurance that what looks like a contradiction is no such thing. Kantians have not made room for freedom, if they place a mystery at the heart of it. (Freyenhagen 2008: 68).

But *even if* we granted Kant this move, and so allowed ourselves to sidestep the conceptual difficulties involved with conceiving transcendental freedom as timeless, this would not help with the second problem I have raised, namely the vindication of our practices. For the more we insist upon the epistemic limits of transcendental idealism, the more we make transcendental freedom unknowable in experience and the harder it becomes to vindicate our everyday moral practices.<sup>18</sup> Think once more of Jane. It is appropriate to treat her differently at different times, in part due to the fact that her freedom – and the ability to exercise it – comes and goes over time. If we think that knowledge of her transcendental freedom is beyond us, we will struggle to vindicate these important aspects of our practices.

In response, one might argue that our practices require us to believe that others are transcendently free, or drawing upon the second-subsection of the third part of the *Groundwork* (IV. 447. 28 – 448. 28), that we must act under the idea that others are free. But once more, it is not clear this helps. One general issue is that just because it is necessary that we believe something, or act in a certain way, does not thereby justify it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Pereboom (2006: 556), who notes that “this sort of atemporalist line is at best insignificantly more credible than an over contradiction.”

<sup>18</sup> See Saunders (2016) for a general statement of this problem.

<sup>19</sup> For further discussion, see Stern (2015: 221) and Saunders (2018).

Alongside this on general worry, there is a specific problem with this proposal when thinking about the timelessness of our freedom. For the proposal suggests that we must believe that others are transcendently free. And that does not solve the issue at hand. Recall the different stages of Jane's life. If we must believe that she is transcendently free at all of these stages of her life, that causes problems. It is appropriate to treat Jane differently at different times, in part due to the fact that her freedom – and the ability to exercise it – comes and goes over time.

In sum then, we could maintain that transcendental freedom is outside of time, but then we face the problem of how we can vindicate our practical judgements involving freedom and time. Now maybe this is a price worth paying. As Wood once remarked:

In the end solving the free will problem may not be a matter of “saving common sense” [...] Rather the solution may be a matter of saving as much of it as we can [...] I believe Kant saw the situation this way, and I suggest we may assume that the temporality of our agency is the necessary ransom that must be paid to the free will problem if our high vocation as moral agents is to be preserved. (Wood 1984: 100-1)

This is the first horn of the trilemma. We could follow Wood in thinking that we need to conceive of transcendental freedom as timeless, but that comes at a price.

Let us now turn to the next option.

### **3.2 Accept that transcendental freedom is – or could be – in time, and in addition, claim the noumenal is – or at least, could be – in time**

What would this look like? Well, we would have to change several of the ten claims. If we now claim that (x) \*transcendental freedom *is – or could be –* in time, and still maintain that (ix) transcendental freedom is in the noumenal, then we also need to claim that: (vii) \*the noumenal *is – or could be –* in time; and thereby that (vi) \*time is *not only* a form of intuition; and that (iii) \**not* everything that happens in time is causally determined. This would result in the following picture (where a \* denotes an altered claim):

- i. Transcendental freedom involves the ability to initiate causal chains

- ii. Practical philosophy requires transcendental freedom
- iii. \*Not everything that occurs in time is causally determined
- iv. The phenomenal world is in time
- v. The phenomenal world is causally determined
- vi. \*Time is not only a form of intuition
- vii. \*The noumenal is – or could be – in time
- viii. The noumenal is not causally determined
- ix. Transcendental freedom is in the noumenal
- x. \*Transcendental freedom is – or could be – in time

Readers of the first *Critique* are often puzzled by Kant's claims that space and time *are not* features of the noumenal.<sup>20</sup> It often strikes readers that the epistemic limits of transcendental idealism would lead us to a different claim, namely that *we cannot know* whether or not space and time are features of the noumenal.<sup>21</sup> Why does Kant make the stronger claim?

I propose that one key reason for this, is because Kant thinks that everything in time (and space) is causally determined, and so, in his attempt to make transcendental freedom possible, argues that the noumenal is not in time (and space).<sup>22</sup> Recall, for instance, the following passage from the second *Critique*:

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<sup>20</sup> See A42/B59.

<sup>21</sup> See Bird (2006a) for further discussion.

<sup>22</sup> Insole (2011: 628-32) also thinks that Kant is committed to denying the possibility that things in themselves are in time or space, and that he does so to guarantee our transcendental freedom. Insole adds an account of the *theological* factors that lead Kant to this, focussing on a concern over how the divine mind relates to nature.



Of such great importance is the separation of time (as well as space) from the existence of things in themselves that was accomplished in the Critique of pure speculative reason (V: 102. 37 – 103. 2)

Kant also has some arguments for why he thinks everything in time is causally determined, but I contend that these are unconvincing. Time ends up being a bit of a red herring, as some of the arguments instead rely on Kant's conception of causality.

For instance, in the Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason, he writes the following:

Now, if one takes the determinations of the existence of things in time for determinations of things in themselves [...], then the necessity in the causal relation can in no way be united with freedom; [...] For, from the first it follows that every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time. Now, since time past is no longer within my control, every action that I perform must be necessary by determining grounds *that are not within my control*, that is, I am never free at the point of time in which I act. (V: 94. 25-36)

The key claim here is the following:

[...] every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time. (V: 94. 30-2)

But time is not doing the work here, the work here is being done by a certain conception of causality, where every action/event is *causally necessitated* by a preceding event. If we deny that, we can preserve freedom without having to claim that it occurs outside of time.

One potential worry with this proposed solution is that it might start to unravel transcendental idealism. On the current proposed solution, we have the following claims:

- iii. \*Not everything that occurs in time is causally determined
- vi. \*Time is not only a form of intuition
- viii. \*The noumenal is – or could be – in time
- xi. \*Transcendental freedom is – or could be – in time

On this picture, both the phenomenal and the noumenal might end up sharing some of the same structure (something that Walker's proposal we considered in the last section leaned towards). Both might be in time. Moreover, practical philosophy might give us reasons for thinking that the noumenal *is* in time; again, think of Jane – it appears she reasons over time, and that both her transcendental freedom and her capacity to exercise it change over time as well.

Holding that the noumenal is – or could be – in time allows us to overcome the problems associated with conceiving transcendental freedom as timeless, but it also involves a significant departure from Kant's views about things-in-themselves. This comes through in Freyenhagen's response to a suggestion from Allison that the act of reason itself might be temporal.

Freyenhagen writes:

The rejoinder gives up a central tenet of Kant's philosophy, namely, the claim that time is transcendently ideal. If time is nothing beyond its employment as a condition of possible experience, then this seems to be inconsistent with asserting that we can attribute it to intelligible agents. This is the case, even if the attribution in question is conceptual (rather than experiential) in nature. Moreover, given that the attribution of temporality to agency is conceptual and cannot involve intuition, it would also seem to conflict with Kant's idea that time is a form of intuition. Adopting the suggested response comes, thus, at considerable costs for a Kantian. (Freyenhagen 2008: 78-9)

Thus we have the second horn of the trilemma. We might give up the claim that transcendental freedom is timeless, but then we also have to give up Kant's claim that things-in-themselves are not in time. Of course, this is not necessarily a bad thing. And this takes me to my final option:

### **3.3 Beyond Transcendental Idealism**

If we deny x, we might look to move beyond transcendental idealism all together. After all, one of the things that Kant seems to think counts in favour of transcendental idealism is that it makes it possible to accept that everything in time is determined, but nevertheless maintain transcendental freedom. However, if we move away from that, we might also move away from

the whole edifice. This would look something like the following (where \*\* denoted another altered claim):

- i. Transcendental freedom involves the ability to initiate causal chains
- ii. Practical philosophy requires transcendental freedom
  
- iii. \*\*Not everything that occurs in time is causally determined
- iv. \*\*The world is in time
- v. \*\*The world is not entirely causally determined
- vi. \*\*Transcendental freedom is in the world

Where does this leave us?

The immediate virtue of this account is that transcendental freedom is in time. This overcomes the conceptual difficulties that we considered in §2, and also allows us to vindicate some key parts of our moral practices.

What are the vices of this account? One issue is that transcendental freedom is now hostage to the (empirical) world. With Kant's original picture, I noted that we could accept that the entire world of appearance is causally determined, but nevertheless maintain that transcendental freedom is still possible. However, on this new picture, we claim that the world of appearance is not entirely causally determined. Now this might be true, but the truth of this claim is obviously beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>23</sup> What I can say here though is that this option does make

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<sup>23</sup> For a promising defence of this position, see Steward (2012).

transcendental freedom hostage to the way the world happens to be;<sup>24</sup> it would remain an open question whether experience and transcendental freedom do not conflict, rather than something we could establish a priori.

Thus we have the final horn of the trilemma. For what it is worth, I am tempted by this option. I think that it allows for a better account of interaction between transcendental freedom and experience, as well as making knowledge of freedom in experience possible, but I will not make this case here. In this paper, I want to lay out the problems that arise from viewing freedom as timeless, and work through three ways in which Kantians might respond. In doing so, we have ended up with a trilemma concerning Kant's views on transcendental freedom, time and things-in-themselves.

One might wonder whether this final horn is an option *for a Kantian*, in that it involves giving up on transcendental idealism. I accept that this is a steep price to pay, but look to do so *for Kantian reasons*. Transcendental freedom is also a key part of Kant's critical philosophy, as is the thought that transcendental freedom is required for our moral practices. If I am right that viewing this freedom as timeless brings with it serious problems for our moral practices, then this gives us some Kantian reasons to jettison transcendental idealism. Of course, there are other important Kantian reasons to want to keep transcendental idealism, other reasons to want to get rid of it, and I cannot adjudicate between all of these here. Here, I hope to have shown out why viewing freedom as timeless is problematic, and to have laid out how 3 ways we could respond on Kant's behalf.

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<sup>24</sup> At one point, Frierson (2014: 169n6) remarks that: "transcendental idealism [...] insulates Kant from naïve empirical-scientific arguments *against* freedom." On the solution I am proposing here, we would lose this insulation.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, conceiving of transcendental freedom as timeless creates conceptual difficulties and fails to vindicate our practices. I have proposed three different ways to respond to this, but have noted that each option comes with its own downside. I thus present a trilemma. In the end, I suggest that we attempt to blunt the final horn of this, leaving aside transcendental idealism in order to preserve transcendental freedom and our moral practices.

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