Practical Grounds for Freedom:

Kant and James on Freedom, Experience, and an Open Future.

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(Penultimate draft. Final version available here).

1. Introduction

Neither Kant nor James were fans of what we now call compatibilism. They both complain that compatibilists employ sophisticated sematic moves to make freedom appear consistent with determinism, but in doing so, miss the real philosophical crux of the matter.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason,* Kant considers the compatibilist position that whilst we are 'subject to unavoidable natural necessity', we might nevertheless be free, because our actions are determined by our nature, desires, or character (V: 95-6). Kant is dismissive of this compatibilist stance, calling it a 'wretched subterfuge' and claiming that the freedom it affords us is 'nothing better than the freedom of a turnspit, which, when once it is wound up, also accomplishes its movements of itself' (V: 97). To call such internal determination "freedom", he thinks, is mere wordplay:

> Some still let themselves be put off by this subterfuge and so think they have solved, with a little quibbling about words, that difficult problem on the solution of which millennia have worked in vain and which can therefore hardly be found so completely on the surface. (V: 96)

Kant rejects the compatibilist account of freedom. He thinks that both theoretical and practical philosophy require a conception of freedom which involves a robust independence from natural necessity.

James too rejects compatibilism, and for similar reasons. In presenting his account of freedom, James coins the distinction between *hard* determinism and *soft* determinism. Whereas hard determinism is clear about the incompatibility between freedom and the strict necessity it takes determinism to involve, soft determinism utilizes the ambiguity of the word 'freedom' to hold that freedom is compatible with necessity. Like Kant, James thinks that this strategy is a 'quagmire of evasion under which the real issue of fact has been entirely smothered' (James, 1896, WB: 117).[i] "Freedom" used in the compatibilist sense can mean acting without external constraint, or acting in light of a necessary law, but this is not the sense of "freedom" which the libertarian about freedom thinks is at stake (ibid). James agrees with Kant in thinking that our practical and moral lives require a conception of freedom which is incompatible with determinism. In order to avoid quibbling over the word "freedom" (and, James admits, due to 'just a dash of perversity' – 1896, WB: 138), James leaves this word aside, in favour of the word "chance". In doing so, his analysis of what freedom means focuses on the possibility of an open future, in which future events are not fully determined by past events or necessary laws. As we shall see, James argues that this is required to make sense of our moral agency and moral lives more broadly.

In this chapter, we compare Kant and James' accounts of freedom. Despite both thinkers' rejecting compatibilism for the sake of practical reason, there are two striking differences in their stances. The first concerns whether or not freedom requires the possibility of an open future. James holds that morality hinges on the real possibility that the future can be affected by our actions. Kant, on the other hand, seems to maintain that we can still be free in the crucial sense, even if none of our actions can have any effect on the future. The second difference between them is related, and concerns the *location* of freedom. Kant views experience as determined by natural necessity, and

locates freedom outside of it, in things-in-themselves. James, on the other hand, has a richer conception of experience than Kant, and holds that we can locate our freedom within experience alone.

In what follows, we will briefly present Kant's position on freedom and determinism (§2), before presenting James' position (§3), and comparing them in light of these two differences (§4). In the end, we contend that James has a better account of how freedom relates to our experience, but this comes at a cost. For while Kant's account struggles with the relationship between freedom and experience, it has the advantage of insulating our freedom from potential empirical challenges.

2. Kant's "Compatibilism"

Despite what we said in our opening remarks, in his own way, Kant is a sort of compatibilist. Transcendental Idealism maintains that appearances are not things-in-themselves. Appearances are governed by natural necessity, whereas things-in-themselves are not. This allows Kant to maintain that natural necessity and transcendental freedom do not contradict each other. As Allen Wood famously remarks:

> [Kant] wants to show not only the compatibility of freedom and determinism, but also the compatibility of compatibilism and incompatibilism (1984: 74).

Transcendental Idealism allows Kant to accept that the thesis of determinism and an *incompatibilist* or *libertarian* conception of freedom are compatible; because the thesis of determinism applies only to appearances, not to things-in-themselves. Kant maintains the possibility of a conception of freedom which is independent of necessity, whilst holding that such a conception of freedom is compatible with determinism in appearances.

The key difference between Kant and standard compatibilists here concerns their conception of freedom. As we saw above, Kant is harshly dismissive of a compatibilist conception of freedom. He wants to show how *transcendental* freedom is compatible with natural necessity. Transcendental freedom is 'a faculty of absolutely beginning a state' (A445/B473), and the 'independence of […] reason itself (with regard to its causality for initiating a series of appearances) from all determining causes of the world of sense' (A803/B831). Kant thinks that this conception of freedom is required for both theoretical and practical philosophy.[ii]

Kant thinks that transcendental freedom is the real ground of imputation – that is, of regarding someone as the author of their actions (A 448/B 476).[iii] He also claims that, if we were not transcendentally free, morality would not apply to us.[iv] And if we think about Kant's practical philosophy, some possible connections emerge that help us understand this claim. For Kant, morality requires both the ability to refrain from acting on any particular sensible desire, and also to act for the sake of the moral law. Kant worries that if we were just determined by our sensible desires, we would only ever be able to act on hypothetical imperatives (at best),and would be unable to be motivated by the moral law itself.

This conception of freedom seems to be both libertarian, and to involves a two-way power, namely the ability to both act and refrain from acting on any particular sensible desire (where such refraining and acting are regarded as free in an incompatibilist or libertarian sense). However, we should note, that as with most things in Kant, this is contested. Pereboom (2006) argues that Kant is not a *leeway* incompatibilist, where freedom involves the ability to do otherwise, but instead a *source* incomptibilist, where what is key is that freedom is located outside of experience. We shall return to consider this in more detail in the final section (§4).

This ambition, to combine a libertarian conception of freedom with natural necessity, is part of what makes Kant's theory of freedom so compelling. There are many intriguing aspects to it, including Kant's claims about the timeless nature of freedom;[v] how we come to have knowledge

of freedom, given our general ignorance of things-in-themselves;[vi] and how freedom and appearances interact.[vii] In this chapter though, we want to focus on whether or not Kant thinks that freedom requires an open future.

For this, we turn to another key passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Here, Kant has discussed how Transcendental Idealism distinguishes between appearances and things-in-themselves, and that while appearances are determined by natural necessity (V: 94-9), things-in-themselves are not. He then claims the following:[viii]

> One can therefore grant that if […] we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse and could nevertheless maintain that the human being's conduct is free (V: 99. 12-9).

We think this passage is crucial. It reveals the ambition of Kant's theory of freedom. Appearances, and everything we experience, might be determined by natural necessity, and could be completely predictable. But even if that were the case, that only concerns appearances, and so we can still maintain that we are transcendentally free. This is a powerful position. It manages to insulate our freedom from the world of experience. No matter what science reports, or what psychologists discover, no matter how determined or predictable our behaviour might look, our transcendental freedom is secure.

There is much more to be said here. It might seem counter-intuitive to suggest that we can have a libertarian conception of freedom whilst at the same time accepting that all our actions are predictable. For this reason, some Kantians want to downplay this passage. They rightly note that Kant's claim here is hypothetical.[ix] Kant claims that *if* we could perfectly predict a human being's future behaviour, Transcendental Idealism means that human being could still be transcendentally free. In a forthcoming paper, Lucy Allais emphasises the hypothetical nature of this passage, and also argues that perfectly predicting human behaviour is not a real possibility given Transcendental Idealism. Allais argues as follows:

> I take [Kant] to be saying that if we could investigate the inner determinations of the subject down to their basis we could get this kind of prediction. However, getting down to the most fundamental level is not something that it is even in principle possible to do, because transcendental idealism denies that there is such a fundamental level in appearances. (Allais, forthcoming).

Allais acknowledges that this comes at a textual cost, in that she does 'not take Kant as actually asserting what he describes in these passages'. But making this move enables Allais to develop an original account of freedom in Kant which allows for an open future. By denying that 'there is a totality of facts and a totality of laws from which it follows that there is only one way the world in space and time could unfold', Allais holds that the future is open in the sense of not fully determined by past events or necessary laws.

There are also philosophical costs to this acceptance of an open future. Kant's claim seems to offer us some serious insulation. And if we distance ourselves from it, our freedom might be hostage to the way the world is. What if our best scientific theories or psychologists got back to us, and it looked like our behaviour *was* perfectly predictable because determined by natural necessity? It seems like then Allais might have to give up on transcendental idealism, and more generally, might have to give up on transcendental freedom, and with it, crucial parts of Kant's practical philosophy.

Allais presents Transcendental Idealism in such a way as it allows for a genuinely open future. In the end, we side with her in wanting to have a conception of freedom which allows for our agency and choices to have some effect on future events. A satisfactory account of freedom, we think, requires a world which is open to being changed by our actions. As noted above, however, this conception of the world conflicts with some key things that Kant says about freedom. Here we turn to William James, who provides an account of freedom which explicitly foregrounds the idea

of an open future. We explore this account in James (§3), before returning to contrast his position with Kant's (§4).

3. James, Chance, and an Open Future

James lays out his position on freedom most clearly in his paper 'The Dilemma of Determinism'. There are many aspects of this paper which deserve close attention: James' pragmatic analysis of the free-will debate; his idea that the choice between determinism and indeterminism is made on passional grounds, rather than through reason; and his argument that regret is only comprehensible in an indeterminist universe. In this section – though we will touch on these points – our primary focus will be on James' metaphysical claim that indeterminism means realism about chance, and his concomitant commitment to an open future which can be made better (or worse) through our actions.

One of the first things which James does in 'Dilemma' is to sidestep ambiguities about the word "freedom" – replacing it with the word "chance". This allows him to focus on the meaning of determinism rather than freedom. Determinism, James claims, whether of a materialist or idealistic stripe, is a rejection of chance. Determinism holds that past and present events are compatible with only one future outcome, such that the 'future has no ambiguous possibilities'. Indeterminism, on the other hand, holds that possibilities are genuine parts of reality, such that '[o]f two alternative futures which we conceive, both may now be really possible; and the one become impossible only at the very moment when the other excludes it by becoming real itself'. Determinists, he claims, deny the reality of the possible, and hold that necessity and impossibility are the 'sole categories of the real' (1896, WB: 118).

When the debate is put this way, there is no middle ground for the compatibilist to occupy:

> The issue […] is a perfectly sharp one, which no eulogistic terminology can smear over or wipe out. The truth must lie with one side or the other, and its lying with one side makes the other false (1896, WB: 118).

In Jamesian language, this means that the decision is *forced*, which is on of the four criteria by which he identifies a will-to-believe choice. The other criteria are also met by the free-will debate: the debate is *live* (we find each option plausible and available for our belief), *momentous* (it makes a large practical difference to our lives whether or not we believe ourselves to be free); and it is *undecided* by existing empirical evidence or intellectual argument. In fact, James claims that the decision between determinism and indeterminism is (currently) 'theoretically insoluble' (1896, WB: 124).[x] As such, our decision to be determinists or indeterminists is a choice made on passional or temperamental grounds, rather than on strictly rational ones (1896, WB: 119).[xi]

James returns to his discussion around freedom and chance in his *Pragmatism* lectures, where he does say something about the meaning of freedom. One of the core tenets of classical pragmatism is that to be meaningful, a concept must have practical effects.[xii] By analysing our concepts in light of the practical effects which would follow from them being true, we can get a better grasp at what is at stake in our philosophical discussions. When exploring what is practically at stake in the free-will debate, however, James makes the interesting claim that it is not moral responsibility. For both the determinist *and* the indeterminist accuse their opponents of being unable to account for moral responsibility. The determinist claims that the indeterminist must hold each free act to be a 'sheer novelty' which has arise '*ex nihilo*', unconnected with any past events. As such, they suggest that such an act cannot be connected to the agent's wider character and intentions in a way that would enable them to be praised or blamed for their actions. The indeterminist, on the other hand, claims that if our actions are entirely determined by past events and necessary laws, then we cannot be held responsible for them as agents. As such, the debate between the two sides stands at an impasse (1907, P: 59-60).

James, then, rejects the idea that moral responsibility is at the practical heart of the free-will debate, holding (as various compatibilists do) that a combination of '[i]nstinct and utility' can account for and ground our practices of attributing praise and blame (P: 60). The real pragmatic difference between determinism and indeterminism concerns whether or not *novelty* – and with it moral improvement – is possible:

> Free-will pragmatically means novelties in the world, the right to expect that in its deepest elements as well as in its surface phenomena, the future may not identically repeat and imitate the past. […] It holds up improvement as at least possible; whereas determinism assures us that our whole notion of possibility is born of human ignorance, and that necessity and impossibility between them rule the destinies of the world (1907, P: 60-61).

Pragmatically speaking then, the free-will debate once again hinges on realism about possibility. The indeterminist holds that possibilities are genuine features of reality, that some events are not entirely determined by past events but offer the potential for novel additions which may improve reality. In short, pragmatically understood, belief in freedom is essentially the belief that the future is *open* to being improved through our actions.

Although James wants to side-step the question of moral responsibility in relation to freedom, he does still tie freedom closely to moral agency. James suggests that freedom is required for moral agency in two ways. First, that determinism leads to practically debilitating pessimism and fatalism. And second, that meliorism – the attitude in which we can, through our own efforts, improve the world – requires the belief that the future can be improve by our actions. We will take each point in turn.

Determinism, as we have seen, involves a commitment to the idea that all events are determined by past events and necessary laws. When we consider the practical effects of such a commitment, thinks James, we are faced with a dilemma. Either the determinist must adopt a kind of pessimism,

or subjectivism. Consider any bad event – such as James' example of a particularly callous murder. When contemplating the murder, we feel a profound sense of regret. However, as (according to the determinist) such an event was causally determined by the rest of the universe. All the events and laws of the universe resulted in this murder, and no other outcome was ever really possible. For this reason, the only rational object of our sense of regret is the universe as a whole. As a result, determinism leads us to a practically debilitating pessimism about the universe as such (1896, WB: 125-126). To avoid this pessimism, the determinist might instead adopt a kind of subjectivism. According to this view, external events – such as this particularly callous murder – are not in themselves important, but instead enable us to have experiences and make judgements about them (1896, WB: 129-130). Understood in this way, subjectivists adopt a kind of removed position, in which external events serve the role of data for our inquiring minds which allow us to develop moral judgements and theories. Though slightly less practically debilitating than pessimism, such subjectivism has the tendency to lead to indifference, fatalism, and moral licence (1896, WB: 132). Only by turning towards the external world an adopting the view that there are moral duties independent of our feelings, 'certain works to be done' and 'certain outward changes to be wrought or resisted' can we do justice to our moral phenomenology (1896, WB: 134).[xiii]

In short then, to avoid the pernicious effects of determinism, and do justice to our moral phenomenology, we have to adopt a view in which we have moral duties to effect change in the world. But this is to accept indeterminism, as effecting change in the world requires a belief that the future can be shaped by our actions. Our moral lives can only make sense within a fundamentally indeterministic universe, in which our actions can make a meaningful difference to the world around us:

> I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how we feel, without the belief that acts are really good and bad. I cannot understand the belief than an act is bad, without regret at its happening. I cannot understand regret without the admission of

> real, genuine possibilities in the world. Only then is it other than a mockery to feel, after we have failed to do our best, that an irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which we must forever after mourn (1896, WB: 135).

James contends that we need to be realist about chance (and about morality) in order to feel that we have moral duties which can be failed or met, and in order for our feelings of success or regret to be rational. He writes:

> *That* is what gives the palpitating reality to our moral life and makes it tingle […] with so strange and elaborate an excitement. This reality, this excitement, are what the determinists, hard and soft alike, supress by their denial that *anything* is decided here and now, and their dogma that all things were foredoomed and settled long ago (1896, WB: 140).

Indeterminism allows for this world, and our lives, to be improved, through our own actions. This is what gives any particular moral situation the sense of importance which determinism loses. Though indeterminism means an acceptance of chance and novelty, the chance in question is not random chance, but 'the chance that in moral respects that future may be other and better than the past has been' (1896, WB: 137). And the admission of this kind of chance is the only thing which makes sense of our efforts towards this improvement. James is not advocating an attitude of blind optimism in place of deterministic pessimism. Rather, James is suggesting that an indeterministic universe allows for the attitude in which we can, through our own efforts, improve the world (see 1896, WB: 84). This meliorism takes moral improvement to be a *real possibility*, and our acts as potentially participating in that possibility's actualisation (see 1907, P: 137-8).

So, like Kant, James holds that belief in free-will or indeterminism is necessary for moral agency. However, unlike Kant, James explicitly ties moral agency to the idea of an open future. James holds that the difference between determinism and indeterminism hinges on whether or not chance and novelty are real features of the universe. Though James officially holds that the decision between

these two positions is undecided by theoretical reasoning, and that it is up to individuals to adopt one or the other on passional grounds, he does his best to convince his audience of the plausibility of indeterminism. This is primarily because James thinks that indeterminism makes sense of the moral phenomenology which is central to human experience. Elsewhere, James argues that any philosophical worldview which does not give room to our 'active propensities' will give rise to a 'nameless *unheimlichkeit*' – a sense of horror that we live in a universe in which are most 'intimate powers' are given no place – and will as such be a less satisfying philosophical theory (1896, WB: 71-72). We can see that determinism has this defect for James. By denying the idea that our actions can contribute to the betterment of the world we live in, and that our creative agency can contribute anything novel to reality, determinism removes our motivation to moral action and leads us to fatalism and pessimism.

Having presented both Kant and James' position on freedom, as well as the connections their conceptions of freedom have to the notion of an open future, we turn now to comparing their views.

4. Kant, James, and the Location of Freedom

As we have seen, James connects his notion of freedom very clearly with realism about possibility. Without the possibility for our actions to alter the course of future events, freedom is (pragmatically) meaningless, and we lose motivation towards moral action. Thus, James' arguments for freedom are connected to the metaphysical pluralism and 'radical' empiricism which he presented in the last years of his philosophical career, in his *Radical Empiricism* papers (1903-4; later collected in 1912); his *Pragmatism* lectures (1907), and in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). James contrasted his pluralistic metaphysics with the post-Kantian idealistic traditions in Germany,

Britain, and America. Whereas James viewed monistic or Absolute Idealism as committed to the idea that the universe was necessarily one conceptual and causal whole, such that any part was determined by other parts of the universe, his own pluralism granted '*some* separation among things, some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty or chance' (1907, P: 78). Clearly then, James' pluralism presents the metaphysical foundation for his earlier work on freedom, understood in terms of chance and novelty. '[C]hance', James claims 'means pluralism and nothing more' (1896, WB: 137).

James' pluralistic metaphysics suggests that reality is fundamentally *experiential*. James' radical empiricism essays make this point explicitly. There, James argues that nothing is real unless it is directly experienceable; and that anything directly experienceable was by that fact real. Contrary to Humean empiricism, and the empiricism of the logical positivists, James' radical empiricism embraces a rich conception of experience, and holds that relations between objects are themselves parts of direct experience, and so by that fact real (see 1903, ERE: 6-7).[xiv] The important point for our purposes is that chance and novelty are directly experienced features of our lives, which gives us some reason to think they are real, according to James' pluralistic metaphysics:

> Pluralism […] taking perceptual experience at its face-value […] protests against working our ideas in a vacuum made of conceptual abstractions. […] We do in fact experience perceptual novelties all the while […] So the common-sense view of life, as something really dramatic, with work done, and things decided here and now, is acceptable to pluralism. 'Free-will' means nothing but real novelty; so pluralism accepts the notion of free-will' (1910, SPP: 73).

> New men and women, books, accidents, events, inventions, enterprises, burst unceasingly upon the world. […] Men of science and philosophy, the moment they forget their theoretic abstractions […] believe as naively [as anyone else] that fact even now is making, and that they themselves, by doing 'original work,' help to determine what the future shall become' (1910, SPP: 78).

James' point here is that the indeterministic and melioristic worldview is supported by human experience, and that – given radical empiricism – this is a reason for holding it to be real.[xv]

James presents himself in opposition to both Kant and Hume on this point. Radical empiricism rejects Hume's conception of immediate experience, in which all events and elements are discontinuous. James takes Kant and the post-Kantians to have inherited this conception: 'Kant and his successors all espoused Hume's opinion that the immediately given is a disconnected "manifold"' (1910, SPP: 101). Kant, according to James, attempts to overcome the disconnectedness of immediate experience by introducing the transcendental ego to introduce continuity (ibid; 1909, PU: 38). James, on the other hand, denies Hume's picture entirely, and holds that both continuities and discontinuities are part of our direct experience (see 1904, ERE: 22). Leaving aside whether or not James' interpretation of the manifold of experience and the transcendental unity of apperception is correct, there is an important contrast with Kant here. Kant conceives of experience as determined by natural necessity. Given this conception of experience, to argue that we are free in a libertarian sense, this freedom would have to be located *outside* of experience. James' has a richer conception of experience, and so can locate chance, novelty, and the possibility of an open future *within* experience.[xvi]

This is a crucial contrast. Kant accepts a conception of experience that seems to leave no room for (transcendental) freedom, but then finds a way to still allow for this, through locating freedom outside of experience. And, as noted at the outset of this paper, this has at least one real advantage. It allows Kant to maintain that we are free *no matter* what we encounter in experience. If scientific developments suggest that we are determined by natural necessity, Kant can accept these scientific findings to be true of appearances, whilst maintaining that we are transcendentally free. By locating freedom within our experience of chance and novelty, James does not have as much insulation. Though he recognises the fallibilism of scientific theorising, if empirical evidence and the best

scientific models consistently provided evidence that we were determined by natural necessity, this would seriously count against the hypothesis of indeterminism.

While James does not directly address this possibility, he is more comfortable with this lack of certainty or security in general. He frequently connects the idea of chance with the idea of a gift – a gift being something which we cannot guarantee.[xvii] In fact, he tells us that "the idea of chance is, at bottom, exactly the same thing as the idea of a gift' in the sense that both are names for 'anything on which we have no effective *claim*' (1896, WB: 123; see 120). By accepting chance and novelty into our ontology, we have to accept that the future is, to some degree, out of our control. James is quite clear about this. Any person who:

> uses [chance] instead of "freedom" squarely and resolutely gives up all pretence to control the things he says are free […] [A]ny other word permits of quibbling, and lets us, after the fashion of the soft determinists, make a pretence of restoring the caged bird to liberty with one hand, whilst with the other we anxiously tie a string to its leg to make sure it does not get beyond our sight (1896, WB: 138)

Of course, James' meliorism holds that our agency can have real impacts on future events – but these impacts will not be perfectly predictable. Indeterminism requires, for James, the surrender of any claims to *complete* conceptual or practical control over reality.

Kant, on the other hand, is unwilling to surrender control – at least over freedom and morality. He looks to secure these features of our lives, regardless of what happens in experience. This is understandable – if science were to show that we were entirely determined by natural necessity, and we did not have the insulation which Transcendental Idealism provides, we would have to give up on the possibility of being transcendentally free. In turn, this would rob us both of our moral agency, as Kant conceives this as involving the ability to act independently of any sensible desires and for the sake of the moral law, but also our distinctive moral status as ends-in-ourselves, which is connected to our freedom. Kant's strategy also threaten to leave a gulf between freedom

and experience in several respects. For one, it creates epistemic issues, as it is not clear how other people's freedom could be part of our experience. And it also creates metaphysical issues, concerning how freedom and experience interact. Our focus here will be on one metaphysical issue: namely, whether our free action can change the future.

We have already seen that, for James, making sense of our moral agency and moral phenomenology requires an admission that future events are not wholly determined by past events, and the acceptance that our agency can contribute to the betterment of reality. Does Kant, then, also need an open future to make sense of moral agency? If we understand him as a leeway compatibilist, where transcendental freedom involves the ability to do otherwise, then it might. But it is not clear how this choice could show up in experience, which remains determined by natural necessity. As we have seen, Allais (forthcoming) offers an account of Kant's Transcendental Idealism which does allow for an open future. But perhaps Kant does not need this. As noted earlier, Pereboom (2006), draws on certain passages (e.g., VI: 50n) to argue that Kant is a *source* rather than a *leeway* incompatibilist. This is to say that the 'key notion of freedom', for Kant, 'is not the ability to do otherwise, but rather being the undetermined source of one's actions' (Pereboom, 2006: 542). What matters for the source incompatibilist is not that *experience* changes in response to our will, but that our noumenal self, our pure practical reason, and the moral law are the *source* or *grounds* of our actions.[xviii]

Such a view would, to James, miss the point. As we have seen, determinism leads to pessimism and fatalism because it detaches our moral agency from possible experiential effects, by denying that our actions can affect experienceable change. Kant's source incompatibilism would seem to have the same defect. But Kant would dispute this. After all, Kant's practical philosophy attempts to provide us with grounds for hope, even if experience is determined.

In a previous paper (Williams and Saunders, 2018), we explored Kant's conception of the highest good, and his account of the practical grounds for belief, again in contrast to James. We argued

that one of the benefits of Kant's account of religious belief, and his making belief in God a practical postulate, is that it is insulated from experience. To promote the highest good (happiness in proportion to virtue) is a duty (V: 125.25). Fulfilling this duty requires the possibility of progress towards holiness, and of happiness in exact proportion to virtue. While neither of these are found in experience, our duty to promote the highest good makes belief in them necessary, which gives us practical grounds to believe in both the immortality of the soul and the existence of God (V: 119 – 137). This is related to Kant's claim to have denied knowledge to make room for faith: theoretical reason left open whether or not there is a God or the soul is immortal, and practical reason shows that these are *a priori* practically necessary beliefs. We thus have practical ground to believe in God, and to hope for happiness in proportion to virtue. We can have this belief, and hope to progress towards being holy, even without this progress being observable within experience. As such, Kant could push back against James' claim that we need to experience the effects of our actions in order to avoid fatalism and pessimism.

Nonetheless, James would hold there were two things missing from such an answer. Firstly, as we argued in our previous paper, pragmatists hold that beliefs are habits of action which are revisable in light of appropriate experience. While James is allied with Kant in allowing us to adopt beliefs for practical reasons, he holds that such beliefs should remain responsive to experience in ways that Kant does not. Secondly, it remains mysterious *where* freedom and the possibility of moral progress we hope for is located, if not in experience. Kant locates hope – and freedom – outside of experience, and this does not help if what you want to do is change the world as we experience it for the better. For the pragmatist, any belief which has no practical or experienceable effects (broadly interpreted) is meaningless, and should as such be rejected from philosophical discourse – and the worry is that Kant's insulated conception of transcendental freedom seems to meet this description.

James' position is not without problems of its own though. So far, we have focused on the notion of an 'open future' in the sense of allowing that the future can be made better by our actions. But this is not the only way things can go. James accepts that realism about chance necessarily involves the possibility that the universe can be made *worse* by our actions, rather than better. The future is vulnerable:

> The indeterminism I defend, the free-will theory of popular sense based on the judgement of regret, represents that world as vulnerable, and liable to be injured by certain of its parts if they act wrong (1896, WB: 136).

Holding that the universe can be improved by our actions, and that the outcome of any given event in genuinely open, also implies that we might *fail* to improve it, or make it worse. This might give us a sense of uneasiness and insecurity about the future which Kant's position does not entail. This is another benefit of Kant's attempt to insulate freedom and morality. For Kant, no matter how dire things get in appearances, no matter if we've never once experienced an action done from pure duty, this does not call into question the correctness of morality (IV: 406.5 – 408.11). And no matter how bad experience looks, we still have practical grounds to believe in God, the correctness of morality, and the possibility of moral progress. James might think this is a benefit of Kant's account; Looking at the benefits of Absolute Idealism, he suggests that the capacity to take 'moral holidays' and feel like the moral outcome of the universe is in hands other than our own might be soothing for people of certain temperaments (1907, P: 42).

But, in fact, James holds that the possibility of failure is required for moral agents to feel as if their actions truly matter:

> What interest, zest, or excitement can there be in achieving the right way, unless we are enabled to feel that the wrong way is also a possible and a natural way – nay, more, a menacing and imminent way (1896, WB: 136)

Assurance that world is saved would have the same tendency to promote fatalism as determinism does. Both remove our agency from the actual practical and lived world of our experience. To give us the motive to act on our moral principles and ideas, we must feel that if we *don't* – if we *fail* to live up to our duty, that an 'irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which we must forever after mourn' (1896, WB: 135). Once again, then, whereas Kant privileges the security of freedom and our moral lives, James privileges our moral phenomenology: we have to feel as if the future hinges on our efforts, otherwise our moral lives will lose their sense of importance, and our moral agency will lose its motivation.

5. Conclusion

Both Kant and James reject compatibilism about freedom, thinking that this misses the point at stake in the free-will debate. Both hold libertarian conceptions of freedom, and argue that such a conception of freedom is required to make sense of our moral agency. However, we have pointed to two key differences between them: firstly, whether or not realism about possibility or an open future is required to make sense of freedom; and secondly, where freedom and moral progress is located.

For Kant, the possibility of an open future is not necessary for freedom. Libertarian freedom is compatible with experience being completely determined by natural necessity and predictable, because Kant locates freedom outside of this experience. Our freedom is, in one way or another, a property of things-in-themselves, and no amount of experience can tell against our having this kind of freedom. As such, Kant presents a position in which our freedom – and our moral agency – is insulated from any possible empirical discoveries. But for James, an open future is necessary for us to make sense of moral agency. Freedom, pragmatically analysed, *means* chance, novelty, and

the real possibility for us to effect change in our environment (preferably for the better). Without the capacity for our actions to make real changes within experience, our moral agency will lose motivation, and we will fall into pessimism or fatalism. James does not locate freedom anywhere other than experience. However, James has a rich enough conception of experience, so that chance, novelty, and connection can be found within it. By doing so, however, James opens himself up to the possibility that experience will, in the long run of scientific inquiry, show us to be determined and rob us of our freedom.

In short, James allows freedom to be connected to our capacity to alter future events, by making the world of experience richer than Kant's manifold of experience allows. However, this comes at the expense of insulating our freedom from the discoveries of science, as James has nowhere else to locate freedom than within experience. Kant privileges the security of our freedom and moral agency, by locating freedom in things-in-themselves, rather than the world of experience. As such, our freedom is insulated from any possible discoveries from empirical science. However, Kant pays for this insulation by making the relation between our transcendental freedom and our lived experience obscure.[xix]

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All Kant references are to the volume, page and line number of the "Akademie Ausgabe" of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter 1900-). Citations from the first *Critique* are given to the A and B editions, and translations from *the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* edited by Guyer and Wood (1995). One exception is that, for the *Groundwork*, we use the recent translation by Bennett, Saunders and Stern (2019).

All references to William James are to the *Works of William James*, Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (eds.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (19 volumes, 1975 – 1988). The following abbreviations are used:

ERE *Essays in Radical Empiricism*

P *Pragmatism*

PU *Pluralistic Universe*

SPP *Some Problems of Philosophy*

WB *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*

References to James' letters use the following abbreviation:

LWJ *The Letters of William James*, 2 vols, Henry James (ed) The Atlantic Monthly Press: Boston, 1920.

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[i] All references to William James are to the Harvard University Press editions. For abbreviations and full references, see bibliography.

[ii] The Thesis of the 3rd Antinomy (A444-6/B472-4) suggests that theoretical philosophy requires transcendental freedom. And at V. 29. 24-5, Kant claims that "[transcendental] freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other"; for the classic treatment of this relationship, see Allison's (1990: 201-213) discussion of – what he calls – The Reciprocity Thesis.

[iii] For an extended account of responsibility and imputation in Kant, see Blöser (2015: 184-8).

[iv] In the final section of the *Groundwork*, for instance, Kant remarks that (IV: 456. 29-33): 'It is […] not just left to the philosopher's discretion to remove the seeming conflict [between transcendental freedom and natural necessity], or leave it untouched. For if they opt for the latter, this leaves a no man's land which the fatalist is in their rights to occupy, and can then chase all morality out of its supposed property, which it would have no title to hold.'"

[v] For recent work on this topic, see: Freyenhagen (2008), Insole (2011) and Watkins (2005: 333-39).

[vi] See Saunders (2016) for an epistemic challenge to Kant's theory of freedom, where he suggests that transcendental idealism precludes knowledge *of other's transcendental freedom*.

[vii] See Watkins (2005: 301-61).

[viii] For discussion of a similar claim in Mill, see McLeod's chapter in this collection.

[ix] See Indregard (2018: 675-76), and Allais (forthcoming).

[x] We will say more about the practical effects of determinism shortly. During his late 20s, James himself suffered a depression which he partially attributed to determinism: 'I'm swamped in an empirical philosophy', he wrote to his friend Thomas Ward in 1869, 'I feel that we are Nature through and through, that we are wholly conditioned, that not a wiggle of our will happens save as a result of physical laws' (LWJ, I: 152-3). James found relief from the depressive influence of determinism through reading Charles Renouvier, and adopting his voluntarist conception of free will. In 1870, he wrote: 'My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will' (LWJ, I: 147). See Perry (1935, I, Chapters XIX and XLI) for on James' depression and recovery; and Dunham (2015) for more on the relationship between James and Renouvier. For a discussion of depression and freedom in Mill, see McLeod's chapter in this collection.

[xi] See James' 'The Will to Believe' (1896, WB: 13-33) for his account of the legitimacy of adopting certain beliefs on passional grounds when these criteria are met. See Stern (2015) for a presentation of James' position on free-will as being a will-to-believe choice; and Williams and Saunders (2018) and Willaschek (2010) for more detail on the epistemology of will-to-believe choices and another contrast with Kant.

[xii] This broad commitment to philosophical concepts finding their meaning in practical effects is captured by the 'pragmatic maxim' endorsed by James, and first articulated by his fellow pragmatist Charles S. Peirce in 1878: 'consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object' (Peirce, CP5.402)This maxim is articulated and interpreted differently by different pragmatists, as well as by Peirce himself throughout his work (see, e.g. 1903, CP5.18; 1905, CP5.412), but a commitment to some broad form of it is constant.

[xiii] The idea that a belief in determinism has negative effects on our moral action receives some support from recent empirical work. Vohs and Schooler (2008), for instance, argue that encouraging belief in determinism increases

people's likelihood to cheat. And Baumeister, Masicampo, and DeWall (2009) suggest that believing that we do not have free will can increase aggression and reduce helpfulness.

[xiv] For a detailed examination of James' metaphysics of experience, see Lamberth (1999), and for its connection with a wider empiricist and analytic tradition, see Banks (2014). For James' metaphysics of relations, and their connection with a post-Kantian tradition, see Williams (forthcoming).

[xv] It might be worth making a distinction here between the earlier James of the *Will to Believe,* and the later James' more metaphysical work. James' concern in 'Dilemma' is with the requirement for us to believe in a libertarian conception of freedom – understood in terms of chance – in order to make sense of moral phenomena and agency. However, he did not at this stage have a metaphysical argument to the effect that we could *experience* chance and novelty, or that such direct experience of novelty was indicative of its reality. This metaphysical work occupied James' last years, from his radical empiricism papers of 1903 onwards, and was still substantially uncomplete by his death 1910. For a detailed exploration of how James' thought regarding the experience of agency developed over this period, see (Dunham, 2020).

[xvi] We should note that, while James thinks that we can discover necessary laws within our experience, he denies that such laws are all-encompassing. For James, all theories are human tools which abstract and simplify experience to enable us to better navigate reality. Nonetheless, '[s]omething always escapes' even our best attempts at theorising reality (1909, PU: 145). A realism about novelty in direct experience, and a recognition of the limitations of theorisation for grasping reality, is what allows for true novelty on James' picture.

[xvii] For further discussion of gifts, see Stern (2019: 66-84).

[xviii] See Timmermann (2007: 177) for a convincing case that freedom, for Kant, does not involve the libertarian capacity to do otherwise, but instead the capacity to act for the sake of the moral law.

[xix] We would like to thank Jeremy Dunham, Lucy Allais, Robert Stern, Martin Sticker and Alex Gesswein for their help with earlier drafts of this chapter.