

Modern Philosophy: Short (7 page) writing assignment #2.

Due Mon., Apr. 29

Write a 7-page paper on the following topic. The paper is due on Monday, April 29.

Read Kant's discussion of transcendental freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The excerpts in question are available online at:

<https://colemitchell.github.io/PHIL2220/paper2.html>

In these passages, Kant argues that transcendental freedom is required for the moral law to apply to us. If we were not transcendently free, and if the origins of our actions were exhaustively deterministic, then in cases in which we act wrongly we were *incapable* of acting rightly. And since ought implies can,—and thus if we are *incapable* of doing something it follows that it's not the case that we *ought* to do it—we'd be stuck with the result that we never ought to have acted rightly in cases in which we act wrongly. Furthermore, he argues, transcendental freedom is required for moral responsibility: the malicious liar would not be blameworthy if he were not transcendently free and instead the origins of his actions were exhaustively deterministic.

Critically discuss these two passages, focusing on the following questions: Why in Kant's conception does the nature of the empirical world, that is, the world of appearance, give rise to a problem for freedom? What reasons does Kant give for thinking that if we were purely natural or empirical beings then we would not be free? How does Kant define 'transcendental freedom,' that is, 'freedom in the cosmological sense of the term'? Why does Kant think our having transcendental freedom does not conflict with the nature of the world of experience, despite that world's being deterministic? Does Kant claim that we can show that we are transcendently free, or that it is really possible that we are transcendently free?

On p. 220 of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant raises the following difficulty for his position:

It nonetheless seems that as soon as one assumes that God as universal original being is the cause also of the existence of substance (a proposition that can never be given up without simultaneously also giving up the concept of God as the being of all beings and therewith his all-sufficiency, on which everything in theology hinges), one must then also concede that a human being's actions have their determining basis in what is entirely beyond his control, viz., in the causality of a supreme being which is distinct from him and on which the human being's existence and the entire determination of his causality depends utterly. Indeed, if a human being's actions, as far as they belong to his determinations in time, were determinations of him not merely as appearance but as a thing in itself, then freedom could not be rescued.

He then, on p. 221, tells us that "The difficulty mentioned above is resolved briefly and plausibly in the following manner..." What is Kant's proposal for a resolution, and does it really work? More generally, what is your critical assessment of Kant's position on determinism and transcendental freedom?