

7-1-2009

Review of: Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy by Patrick R. Frierson.

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Citation

Tubert, Ariela. 2009. "Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy." *Ethics* 119(4): 768-773.

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CHICAGO JOURNALS

Patrick R. Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy*
Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy by Patrick R. Frierson,
Review by: Reviewed by Ariela Tubert
Ethics, Vol. 119, No. 4 (July 2009), pp. 768-773
Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

beings among others, but of contingencies concerning “us” human beings. He urges that the only way in which we can ultimately come to terms with such contingencies is through some kind of religious hope: hope “in a non-contingent structure that grounds our human existence, and underlies our moral aspirations” (38). For Williams, there is no such hope. Williams has an acute sense, as Cottingham reminds us, that humanity and the world are simply not made for each other (35).

Martha Nussbaum laments the way in which, as she sees it, Williams’s resultant pessimism leads both philosophically and personally to a cynical disengagement from the world and its contingencies; in particular, from those of the world’s contingencies which, though intolerable, are rectifiable. As far as the philosophical issue is concerned, I think that Nussbaum seriously underestimates Williams’s theoretical commitment to political activity. As far as the personal issue is concerned, I think that she seriously underestimates his practical commitment to it (see especially 239, n. 33). As Sharon Krause points out at the very end of her essay—despite having earlier voiced similar misgivings (281)—“[Williams] has given us valuable resources for correcting the present absence of political agency in political theory today” (282).

There is far more to be said about this than I can say here. But perhaps I can be excused the following rather cheap point against Nussbaum, which, for all its cheapness, does, I believe, get near to the heart of the matter: when Williams disparages “the tireless aim of moral philosophy to make the world safe for well-disposed people” (*The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006], 59), and when Nussbaum retorts by asking rhetorically, “What . . . is wrong with trying to ‘make the world safe for well-disposed people’—where this means, in concrete terms, trying to make sure that every child gets decent nutrition, . . . and so forth?” (220), she forgets the subject of Williams’s verb. He is making a point about philosophy. He is concerned with what Cottingham aptly dubs “those ‘limits of philosophy’ which are the implicit and explicit theme of so much of [his] work” (37). Certainly we must try to make sure that every child gets decent nutrition. What we must not try to do, as Williams rightly insists, is to use philosophy to justify their starving to death.

Williams’s admonishments against the pretensions of philosophy have always been complemented by a powerful sense of its potential and by the encouragement that he offers others to realize that potential. This is not least through the example of his own work. This volume is a wonderful reminder of that example.

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Frierson, Patrick R. *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. 211. \$76.00 (cloth).

Can the social sciences contribute to Kantian moral theory? Are Kantians committed to claiming that empirical findings—though interesting in other ways—

are not morally relevant? If they do take empirical findings to be morally relevant, are they then committed to rejecting Kant's view about a free self which is independent from empirical determination? These are in essence the important and timely questions that Frierson pursues in this work. They arise with special force for Kantians who are committed to a duality in human beings between how we appear and how we are independent of all experience. This duality is what allows for the Kantian view in which the natural world is determined by scientific laws, while human beings are free and morally responsible. Frierson notes that although these questions are especially pressing for Kantians, they also arise for any moral theory "that takes seriously a strong, nondeterministic conception of human freedom as a condition of moral responsibility while at the same time recognizing the obvious importance of helps and hindrances to moral development" (95). Frierson discusses recent Kantian attempts to deal with these issues—by Barbara Herman, Nancy Sherman, Felicitas Munzel, and Robert Lauden—but concludes that all of them fail because they sacrifice either the moral relevance of empirical influences or Kant's conception of freedom. Frierson's difficult project is to show that one need not choose between the two, that one can make sense of a Kantian view in which empirical findings are morally relevant while holding on to Kant's conception of freedom. Frierson's defense of the importance of the project is very compelling. However, I find his attempt to answer these questions less than fully successful.

Frierson's book has an elegant, familiar, structure: he presents three apparently inconsistent claims which all seem to be true, he argues that other philosophers concerned with these issues end up denying one of them, and he attempts to provide a way to reconcile them. This structure is familiar from, for example, Donald Davidson's "Mental Events" (in his *Essays on Actions and Events* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2001], 207–28) and Michael Smith's *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Part 1 of Frierson's book sets up the problem and discusses other solutions to it, while part 2 develops his own solution. At 166 pages of main text (not including notes and bibliography), the book is relatively short and straightforward; however, the argumentation is complex and substantial.

The problem occupying Frierson dates back to Schleiermacher's review of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. In his review, "Schleiermacher sarcastically suggests that Kant's *Anthropology* must have been intended as a 'negation of all anthropology' . . . because it blatantly conflicts with the rest of Kant's philosophy" (1). Following Schleiermacher, Frierson argues that, in the *Anthropology*, Kant takes anthropological insights to be both empirical and morally relevant. The question is, how can Kant take empirical findings to be morally relevant, given that one's moral status is supposed to be based on one's intelligible self, which is not determined by anything empirical? Frierson sets up the problem as "a conflict among three claims to which Kant seems committed": (i) "human beings are transcendently free, in the sense that empirical influences can have no effect on the moral status of a human being and in the sense that choice is fundamentally prior to natural determination"; (ii) "moral anthropology is an empirical science that studies empirical influences on human beings"; and (iii) "moral anthropology is morally relevant, in that it describes influences on moral development" (2). Each of the first three chapters of Frierson's book is devoted to defending one of these claims.

In the first chapter, Frierson argues for an asymmetry in Kant's view of freedom: free choices can affect the natural world but are themselves independent from empirical determination. In arguing for this interpretation, Frierson stays neutral on whether Kant's distinction between things in themselves and appearances is best interpreted as a distinction between two types of things, the two-object view, or as a distinction between two different ways of thinking about things, the two-perspective view. He discusses each of the views in turn and argues that Kant is committed to the asymmetry of the relationship on both readings. On the two-object view, the asymmetry is that "the free self can influence but cannot be influenced by the empirical world." On the two-perspective view, "one might say that the empirical perspective on the self cannot play a fundamental role within the practical perspective, whereas the practical perspective is necessary in order to complete the empirical one" (31). On either view, it is this asymmetry which allows for moral responsibility—we are responsible for our free choices, and our moral status depends on these free choices.

The next two chapters are focused on defending the next two claims: that Kant's moral anthropology is empirical and that Kant took some anthropological discoveries to be morally relevant in the sense that they can affect one's moral status. According to Frierson, Kant took anthropology to be empirical both in method and in subject matter. Kant's anthropology studies the empirical character of human beings, and it uses as sources one's inner experience, observations of others, and works of fiction. The aim is to make claims that apply to all human beings, making anthropological claims contingent but universal (if a certain claim is found not to be universal, it needs to be revised until one is found that applies more broadly). On Frierson's view, Kant's mature moral anthropology "deals specially with subjective conditions that spread and strengthen rather than merely specify, moral principles. That is, moral anthropology studies the influences that help or hinder one in adopting and acting on moral principles" (49). Although Frierson's book is not focused on giving an account of Kant's particular anthropological claims, he does discuss some examples of the kinds of claims that moral anthropology deals with: politeness and strength of character are helps to the development of a good will, while passions and affects are hindrances. Other helps that Frierson cites but does not discuss in detail are "education, a republican government, world peace, and the development of arts and sciences" (67). Frierson makes a *prima facie* convincing case that for Kant there is such a thing as moral anthropology, which brings out the central question of the book: how can Kant's views on moral anthropology be reconciled with his theory of freedom and moral responsibility?

Frierson discusses four other attempts to reconcile Kant's anthropological insights with the rest of his moral views. Each of these attempts assigns a different role to moral anthropology. First, empirical influences can play an epistemic role by helping to determine "the context, relevance, or proper application of the moral law in concrete situations." Second, empirical influences can play "an instrumental role in carrying out the demands of morality. That is, they can provide the resources that one can use to do more good deeds." Third, empirical influences can be constitutive of a good will "such that to have character, or to be polite, or to be part of a good community, is part of what it *is* to be good" (69). Fourth, empirical influences can be helpful or necessary propaedeutics

for having a good will—they could aid someone in becoming morally responsible or “they could serve as basic requirements for someone to be morally responsible at all, such that to lack such aids would preclude choosing good or evil” (79). With respect to the first three roles, he discusses the views of Barbara Herman (who argues for the first) and Nancy Sherman (whom Frierson interprets as holding either the second or third) and argues that although they succeed in allowing that empirical influences can play some role in Kantian ethics, they fail to show how empirical influences can be morally relevant. With respect to the last role, he discusses Robert Louden’s and Felicitas Munzel’s views and argues that although they allow that anthropology is morally relevant, they end up disregarding Kant’s views on freedom. He concludes that “recent attempts to make sense of those helps and hindrances either deny their full moral significance or sacrifice Kant’s strong conception of freedom” (95).

Frierson’s solution depends on his characterization of the relationship between one’s free will and one’s appearances in the world as one of expression: “changes in the empirical will are morally relevant as *expressions* of the moral status of the free will” (95; emphasis added). For Kant, one’s moral status depends on acting with respect for the moral law, and Frierson argues that “although neither one’s maxim nor one’s commitment to the moral law is itself an appearance, both are directed towards appearances” (98). Because the imperatives are directed toward appearances, “action *in appearance* that conforms to certain standards characterizes the good *free* will” (97). Thus, according to Frierson, “moral anthropology is morally relevant because it describes aspects of human life that are important expressions of a good human will” (96). Even though one’s moral status depends on the form of one’s maxims, in making decisions we are concerned with doing something, and what we do is part of our empirical self. For example, when we decide to keep a promise, we intend to act in a certain way, and how we act is part of how we appear and thus subject to empirical influences. So, one cares morally about one’s appearance in the world because “it is by being a certain sort of appearance that one shows oneself to be a certain sort of free agent” (98).

Unfortunately, it is not fully clear what this expression relationship is or how it helps to solve the problem that the book is concerned with. Before turning to what Frierson has to say about expression, let me pose an apparent dilemma that Frierson somehow needs to evade using his account of expression. Whatever the expression relationship is exactly, it would seem that either one’s moral status depends on successfully expressing oneself in the realm of appearances as a good person, in which case the empirical influences of helps and hindrances can affect one’s moral status by affecting one’s expression, or else one’s moral status is dependent solely on one’s free self outside the realm of appearances, in which case the empirical influences of helps and hindrances cannot affect one’s moral status. The first option is subject to Frierson’s critique of Herman and Sherman, while the second is subject to his critique of Louden and Munzel. So Frierson needs his expression relationship to do the serious work of opening up some third option here.

Given how central this is to his book, Frierson says surprisingly little about what the relationship is like. In the crucial passage, he writes,

It is important to note here that the term *expression* is used in the sense in which one expresses oneself through the clothes one wears, or the music to which one listens. This sort of self-expression is not the revealing of an already determined nature. One becomes the self one is through self-expression. In the moral case this is true as well. When one expresses one's goodness by refraining from false promising out of a sense of duty, one does not merely show a goodness that was "already there." Instead, having a good will is a matter of choosing in certain ways. Refraining from false promises, when this flows from respect for the moral law, is a choice of the morally praiseworthy sort. By choosing in this way, one expresses one's moral status in the sense that one chooses to be a morally good person. (99)

The language in this passage makes it sound like the relationship is such that one's empirical expression is (partially) constitutive of having a good will. But Frierson criticizes Sherman for precisely this view, so this cannot be what he intends. What he does intend I am not fully sure.

The issue is further complicated by Kant's claim that we don't have epistemic access to the free self, only to the empirical self, in which case any inference from the nature of the latter to the nature of the former seems problematic to say the least. This idea is familiar from the *Groundwork*, where Kant emphasizes the problem with trying to determine what the free self is like from appearances. How can we know what the "expression" relationship is like given that we don't have access to one of the relata?

In attempting to deal with some of these issues, Frierson turns to Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Ultimately his solution to the problem of the book seems to rely on some of Kant's most problematic claims. I won't go into Frierson's full argument here, as it is complex, but the general idea he pursues is that although we can't know much about the free self, we can know that we are evil. Frierson argues that on Kant's view, we could never know whether we are good (because even good actions may be grounded on evil motives and we are prone to self-deception), but we can know that we are not (because actions contrary to right can never be good). In addition, we have a propensity to evil (a potential to deviate from the moral law). "People are radically evil, such that they not only act on evil maxims but also establish in themselves a propensity to evil which ensures that future choices will be made against the moral law" (113). This propensity does not affect one's empirical self but rather one's free self. It is essential that a good will fight this propensity and find ways to change, but doing so requires that we know the ways in which we are affected by the empirical world. "Whereas one might have thought that one need only do good now to express a good will, one finds that one must act in such a way that one will combat the propensity to evil and promote good deeds in the future. One's deliberation is always about what to do now, but moral anthropology provides the means for extending the effects of deliberation beyond the present" (132). If I can make sense of Frierson's view at all, he is saying that we should be morally concerned with the results of moral anthropology because being a good person requires acting well in the world. Moral anthropology allows us to cultivate the kind of empirical will which will act well in the future. And yet appearances do not affect one's moral status at all, so

whether one actually succeeds in shaping one's empirical will is not something that is morally relevant.

Frierson's book promises to bring Kantian ethics together with empirical studies of human nature. This is a very interesting and promising project, and the book is recommended for the challenge it presents to Kantian ethics. However, that his proposed solution to the book's central problem involves Kant's notion of human beings as radically evil and grace as a way of overcoming evil figures to be unsatisfying to many readers. I have doubts that Frierson has succeeded in reconciling the moral relevance of empirical findings with Kant's theories of freedom and moral responsibility. But even if he had been successful, given that his attempt at reconciliation depends so crucially on such problematic aspects of Kant's view, I wonder whether Kantians are not better off either giving up the idea that empirical findings can be morally relevant or modifying Kant's theory of freedom.

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Haybron, Daniel M. *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 357. \$55.00 (cloth).

The Pursuit of Unhappiness is not your regular philosophy book. First, it is a passionate manifesto, not just for a new theory or a new approach but for a new field called "prudential psychology," which should, Daniel Haybron argues, become a central concern of academia. To inaugurate it, Haybron proposes original accounts of happiness and well-being and demonstrates their dramatic consequences for political philosophy, policy, and our view of human nature. Along with providing empirically informed and historically aware top-notch philosophy, the book takes the reader on an emotionally charged journey. Also remarkable is the scope of the discussion, which ranges from philosophical methodology and metaethics to social science and policy. Finally, the variety and wealth of sources Haybron marshals to develop and illustrate his claims are astonishing: newspaper quotes collected over many years, full of striking, subtle, and moving sketches of human life; poetry; novels; film; economics; psychology; anthropology; and, of course, the Stoics, Epicurus, Aristotle, and Mill.

The main source of inspiration and perspective is an actual small fishing island, which Haybron describes vividly but does not name. Life on this island, although not easy, was an example of a near-perfect fit between human nature and environment. By comparison to it, the life of most contemporary Americans—stressed, isolated, confined—comes across as "junk reality" (26). Haybron describes the two ways of life, with their dramatically different economic, environmental, and psychological costs, so powerfully that no additional motivation for his project is needed. What should happiness feel like? Would we be able to tell? Are we sensible people? Should anyone want to inherit our civilization? If these questions are at all pressing, this book is worth reading.

For a long time, philosophical discussions of happiness—a descriptive notion, rather than the evaluative 'well-being'—assumed that it is not very com-