PESSIMISM IN KANT'S ETHICS AND RATIONAL RELIGION

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Dedicated with immense gratitude
to all those who have kept me standing,
when I had to lie down.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

ANTH	Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (1798)
GSE	Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen (1764)
GMS	Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten (1785)
IaG	Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht (1784)
KpV	Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (1788)
KRV	Kritik der Reinen Vernuft (A: 1781 / B: 1787)
KU	Kritik der Urteilskraft (1790)
MAM	Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte (1786)
MS	Die Metaphysik der Sitten (1797)
OP	Opus Postuum
Prol	Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können (1783)
RGV	Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft (1793)
SF	Der Streit der Fakultäten (1798)
UD	Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und Moral (1763)
VT	Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie (1796)
VBO	Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus (1759)
WDO	Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren? (1786)
ZeF	Zum ewigen Friede (1795)

Acknowledgments

This book is the product of a sustained interest in the turn to more existential concerns throughout nineteenth-century philosophy. Though my interest was initially in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, I felt that I could not comprehend entirely their thought without looking at one of their most lasting influences, Immanuel Kant. I had come to Kant initially with the expectation of finding the philosophical antipode of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, a philosopher who would sing the praise of optimism, reason, and hope. But through exploring Kant's ethics and philosophy of religion, I found that many of the ideas of later pessimists were already embryonically developing in Kant's philosophy. This view was certainly not commonplace in Kant studies, and I was fortunate enough to have an immense amount of conversation partners on Kantian philosophy, not least because of my association with the yearly Leuven Kant Conference. Here and at so many other conferences, I have been in discussion with so many devotees of Kantian thought to whom I owe gratitude—even if they had made my life incredibly difficult at times through their opposition (all in good academic spirit surely). I do want to single out the invaluable guidance that I received from William Desmond, Stephen Palmquist, Karin de Boer, and Martin Moors, who have—each in their particular way—shaped my engagement with philosophy and Kant studies. I was happy to find Lexington Books interested in this manuscript. Jana Hodges-Kluck and Rachel Weydert have navigated me through the process with such ease and competence that I recommend wholeheartedly Lexington Books to any author in philosophy. Many thanks as well to Maria Desmond for helping me with correcting my language—any mistakes that remain are on me, obviously.

While the argument in this book was developed over a prolonged amount of time, and the actual writing must have spanned at least half a decade, the

final work on this manuscript was completed under trying circumstances. On the one hand, after a fairly serious knee injury, I was put through surgery and recovering from that would take anywhere between six and nine months; on the other hand, some developments in my personal life introduced some tumultuousness that made it difficult to bring this manuscript to completion. Some might speculate that the pessimism I detect throughout Kant's philosophy was my own projection while I was going through these physical, mental, and emotional pains. On the contrary, I experienced such immense care, love, and compassion from those around me that I found my faith in humanity increased. This book is dedicated with gratitude to those who carried me when I could not carry myself.

Introduction

Echoing the views of his initial philosophical mentor Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche approvingly referred to what he understood to be the wisdom of Silenus in his earliest publication, *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> An ancient legend recounts how King Midas hunted long in the forest for the wise *Silenus*, companion of Dionysus, but failed to catch him. When Silenus has finally fallen into his hands, the King asks what is the best and most excellent thing for human beings. Stiff and unmoving, the daemon remains silent until, forced by the King to speak, he finally breaks out in shrill laughter and says: "Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon."[1]

This mythological story perhaps sums up the most debated philosophical issue in the newly united German state of the second half of the nineteenth century: Is life worth living? Reading Schopenhauer's philosophy had made the young Nietzsche believe it to be a fact that human life is replete with suffering to such an extent that nonexistence is preferable to existence. This even became far more than a mere academic debate. The German poet and philosopher Philipp Mainländer—seriously influenced by Schopenhauer, and a serious influence on Nietzsche—wrote and published his *The Philosophy of Redemption* (1876) in which he argued for that life was futile and death a sweet release. Theatrically, he purchased a stack of copies of his own book, climbed atop of it, and hung himself. Clearly, something was very much at stake here.[2]

Schopenhauer's analysis owed some of its appeals to its congeniality with the basic insight of many religions. Even Schopenhauer had been vocal that

many religions—especially his beloved Brahmanism and Buddhism, but also Christianity—had come to the conclusion that life is rife with suffering and evil, and yet these religions had sought to make life bearable in the face of overwhelming suffering. At the earliest point in his philosophical development, Nietzsche would point out how pre-Socratic Greek culture managed to cope with this profound realization of the undesirability of individualized existence through Apolline semblance (*Schein*): Schopenhauer's Dionysiac insight into the nullity of existence can be made bearable (not obscured!) by Apolline beautification. The Greek pantheon then serves as a powerful redemption of human existence through art.[3] This insight into the nullity of human existence came to Nietzsche from Schopenhauer through Wagner.

Schopenhauer made his philosophical breakthrough into every sphere of cultural life after the publication of his *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851). Clearly enjoying the fame for which he had yearned for so long, Schopenhauer would become a living embodiment for a turn toward more existential, rather than systematic, concerns in philosophy.[4] Although he hardly ever calls himself a pessimist, Schopenhauer unmistakably views life as something that should better not have been, and therefore best abandoned as soon as possible. A quick glance at some one-liners from his main work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818/19; second edition 1844), makes as much unmistakably clear: "Suffering is [essential] to all life"; "The life of every individual is in fact always a tragedy"; "A priori [. . .] human life is dispositionally incapable of true happiness"; "Human beings are on the whole worthless"; "We are fundamentally something that should not be"; "A person is a being whose existence is a punishment and a penance."[5] In Schopenhauer's view, to act in accordance with our essence, namely will to life, means to trap ourselves in a circuity of suffering, brief satisfaction, boredom which then leads to new desire and suffering. Even though certain momentary revelations of life-denial, such as compassion, art, and pessimistic religion, might briefly release us from that circuity, the only true redemption from the will comes in ascetic denial where intuitive knowledge of the meaninglessness of existence silences the will.

In large part because of Schopenhauer's compelling analysis, the theme of pessimism became a central point of contention in a lot of post-Kantian and post-Hegelian German philosophy. Much of Schopenhauer's writing is concerned with justifying and edifying a philosophy of pessimism, which inspired numerous philosophers and artists of the later nineteenth century (e.g., Richard Wagner, Herman Melville, Paul Deussen, Eduard von Hartmann) and early twentieth century (e.g., André Gide, Martin Heidegger). In response to his disillusionment with Richard Wagner and Arthur Schopenhauer both, Nietzsche would take upon himself the very personal quest

to combat and overcome (Christian-inspired) pessimism which according to him had crystallized philosophically in Schopenhauerian resignation.[6]

Taking all of this as a given, it might come as a surprise that Schopenhauer thought of himself as Immanuel Kant's true heir in philosophy, even believing that his more idealistically minded contemporaries (Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel) flatly denied Kant's great innovations in philosophical thought—most importantly, the radical separation of the real and the ideal. No sane scholar could possibly deny the powerful influence Kant exerted upon Schopenhauer's philosophy, but fingers point in different directions so as to find the inspiration for Schopenhauer's pessimism. Some might say this was part of Schopenhauer's temperament, which famously disconcerted his mother; some might point to Schopenhauer's brief tutelage under Goethe, who might have made him appreciative of the excesses of human desire; others think of the general air of Romanticism that breathed its mighty influence on Schopenhauer's thought; others see in this the implicit influence of a lingering Christianity in Schopenhauer; and, perhaps most popularly, many point to Schopenhauer's voracious devouring of Indian lore as the source of his pessimistic appraisal of (human) existence. At one point in his life, Schopenhauer would say that the epiphany of pessimism came to him very early, when he was seventeen, and still without any philosophical training:

> When I was seventeen and without any learned education, I was so taken by the *misery of life*, like Buddha who in his youth saw illness, old age, pain and death. The truth that spoke loudly and clearly from the world soon overcame the Jewish dogma's impressed also upon me. And the result was that this world could not be the work of an all-good being, but that of a devil who had called into being creatures so as to revel in their anguish. This was what the findings pointed towards and the belief that this was true won the upper hand.[7]

Perhaps it bears mentioning that Schopenhauer's father, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer, died presumably of suicide when Schopenhauer was seventeen years old.

In a previous study, I have systematically unfolded the way in which Schopenhauer's sense of pessimism develops from a Kantian foundation.[8] Schopenhauer, indeed, thought of Kant mainly as a pessimist with a few lingering rationalist delusions that Schopenhauer's own philosophy was meant to correct. In that work, the discussion of Kant's views of ethics and religion lacked the detail and finesse that they deserve and so, at present, a systematic investigation of Kant's ethics and philosophy of religion will be pursued in order to bring to light some of the pessimistic focal points of Kant's philosophy that enthused Schopenhauer. Some might think that such an investigation is dead on arrival since the later nineteenth-century engagements with pessimism

appear to be at a remarkable distance from the concerns of classical German idealism, where the topics under discussion where more properly metaphysical, moral, and epistemological rather than existential. Indeed, to suggest that this obsession with pessimism has an honest Kantian pedigree seems absurd, and many Kant scholars of note have sighed ostensibly when I spoke of such a thing at conferences. In matter of fact, Kant is most often read in the polar opposite direction, as the philosophical flag-bearer of the ideals of progress and emancipation through reason of the Age of Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). By deliberately setting out to free human beings from bondage to archaic systems of traditional politics, ethics, metaphysics, and scholastics, Kant created the philosophical framework for a progressive, rational, and even self-critical frame of thought. Any suggestion of pessimism in the great and amazing Kant (adjectives frequently used by Schopenhauer) is scandalous and unfit for polite conversation. But Kant did teach us too that working through scandals can be a way forward in philosophy (for instance, in dealing with the "scandal" of reason's self-contradiction in an antinomy). Instead then of avoiding the topic of a Kantian pessimism, we would do well to disarm those ready-made textbook stereotypes that portray Kant uniquely as a philosopher of optimism by mining the topics and elements of his thought that narrate, espouse, or oppose a sense of often implicit, sometimes explicit, pessimism.[9]

The essence of Kantian pessimism differs significantly from the more outspoken pessimists of the later nineteenth century. Specifically, I would define Kantian pessimism as concerning *the lack of any capacity for human nature to be or navigate toward moral goodness, which means that human nature requires a radical revolution through means exceeding that nature.* In Kant's philosophy, there is categorically no means by which human nature can be of itself conducive to moral goodness. This thesis can be derived from, on the one hand, Kant's deduction of the ground of moral duty and, on the other hand, his complex system of moral motivation (which are discussed respectively in chapters 2 and 3). The poverty of the natural capacity for moral goodness (systematically conceptualized in chapter 4) is a vital reading guide for Kant's project of a rational religion, which does not provide the means for moral transformation per se but cultivates the rational incentive to counter our "vice-breeding inclinations" (MS 6:376). Kant's philosophy of religion then serves to cultivate a frame of mind that, this pessimism notwithstanding, is valiant in day to day moral struggles (discussed in chapter 5). It will express doubts as to whether historical faith can achieve this pedagogic function after Kant's invasive reforms of religion (discussed in chapter 6). This means that Kant's philosophy must balance two seemingly contradictory aspects (something Gordon Michalson has famously called one of the "wobbles" of Kant's philosophy[10]), namely, a radical interpretation of human limitation and the rational hope for moral progress through human effort.

This depreciative attitude toward human nature provides the flesh and bone to what I call Kantian pessimism. Kant never explicitly formulates this pessimism and neither does he appear to justify it satisfyingly. Every now and again, Kant does hint explicitly at something of a pessimism. A few examples: In *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (hereafter, *Groundwork*), Kant justifies the need for a metaphysics of morals by pointing out how "the human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty" (GMS 4:405). In his otherwise rather optimistic reflection on the potential for the progressive development of humanity in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, Kant admits:

> One cannot resist feeling a certain indignation when one sees [the human being's] doings and refrainings on the great stage of the world and finds that despite the wisdom appearing now and then in individual cases, everything in the large is woven together out of folly, childish vanity, often also out of childish malice and the rage to destruction. (IaG 8:18)

Kant sums up his findings in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (hereafter, *Anthropology*) by drawing the overall conclusion that the human species gives cause for "not mere good-natured laughter at it but contempt for what constitutes its character, and the admission that this race of terrestrial rational beings deserves no honorable place among the (to us unknown) other rational beings" (Anth 7:332–333). But Kant puts it most emphatically in his *Religion within the Boundaries of Bare Reason* (hereafter, *Religion*), where he overtly argues that "the human being is by nature evil" (RGV 6:32) and that "everything [. . .], even the most sublime object [i.e. the moral law] is diminished under the hands of human beings whenever they apply its idea to their use" (RGV 6:7–8). Even in his historical and political philosophy, one often notes Kant espousing a rather optimistic potential future for the human race such as a "perpetual peace [, which] is no empty idea but a task that, gradually solved, comes steadily closer to its goal" (ZeF 8:386), but then quickly tempers that optimism by pointing out how "the individual is never going to will what is required in order to realize that end leading towards perpetual peace" (ZeF 8:371). Obviously, any cursory, quasi-aphoristic selection of some of Kant's references to certain limitations of human nature or ill adjustments to moral progress does not constitute an argument for an underlying sense of pessimism in his moral philosophy. In fact, one could easily locate some far more optimistic sections throughout Kant's oeuvre. In order then to argue for a Kantian pessimism, we ought to turn systematically toward Kant's moral and religious philosophy and show how its specific form and content can be comprehensively understood only in the light of his negative appraisal of the aptitude of human nature for moral

goodness. Kant's pessimism is not in a part of his philosophy, but in the whole of his philosophy.

The pessimism in Kant's philosophy can be summed up in terms of three related theses. First, Kant believes that human nature or natural processes as a whole do by themselves not facilitate moral goodness. Nature itself does not provide guidance to what is morally good, but traps human beings in a state of depravity, and moreover seductively lures them back whenever they seek refuge elsewhere. The problem that emerges for moral agency is then that there is something profoundly amiss with human nature, which buttresses the need to explore devices and resources that transcend nature which may deliver human agents from their natural state of depravity (*Bösartigkeit*). To Kant, this implies an invocation of the transformative powers of practical rationality which, at best, can remodel the "vice-breeding inclinations" in such a way that the human agent is properly oriented toward the good. Second, since human nature is lacking in a natural incentive to morality, the way toward goodness must include a radical change rather than gradual progress. Human nature is not something that must be molded, trained, or reformed but altered from the ground up. This will become most apparent in Kant's thesis of radical evil, which suggests that human nature is corrupted to its "roots" (from the Latin *radix*). We are primarily in need of revolution, not reform (although some reforms of habit can be conducive to moral revolution). Kant does suggest that such a "revolution" should be understood as the restoration of a more originally good predisposition, but this originally good state is a necessary rational postulate to grant rational credibility to the possibility of a moral revolution rather than a recognition of original goodness (this will be developed further in chapter 4). Morality requires a radical break with the natural way of behaving, not merely the training or exercise of our natural talents. Third, Kant remains cautiously skeptical about the actual possibility of reaching the (highest) good. Whether or not someone can actually believe him or herself to be morally good remains perennially ambiguous. Yet, Kant does want to safeguard this at the very least as a possibility and so he finds himself compelled rationally to postulate several elements that warrant the hope for the highest moral end (e.g., the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and a properly circumspect religion).[11]

Nietzsche hit his mark well when, reflecting upon his early work *Daybreak* in 1886, he wrote that Kant

> in the face of nature and history, in the face of the thorough *immorality* of nature and history, Kant was, like every good German of the old stamp, a pessimist; he believed in morality, not because it is demonstrated in nature and history, but in spite of the fact that nature and history continually contradict it.[12]

Kant believed in morality despite the fact that morality was constantly contradicted by human nature and history. But Nietzsche adds one more observation to this, one that we would do well to take seriously:

> To understand this "in spite of", one might perhaps recall something similar in Luther, that other great pessimist who, with all the audacity native to him, once admonished his friends: "if we could grasp by reason how the God who shows so much wrath and malice can be just and merciful, what need would we have of *faith*?"[13]

Nietzsche was right to see the similarities between Kant and Luther in their views of human nature. In fact, the three abovementioned elements central to Kantian pessimism are reminiscent of some central elements of Protestant soteriology when thrown into a mix with Halle Pietism and German Rationalism. Not coincidentally, this was Kant's own religious and educational background, and an exploration of Kant's moral and religious philosophy cannot do without ascertaining the premises, tacitly inherited from his own background, that influenced Kant's philosophy. In Lutheran soteriology, there is an outspoken distrust or even disdain for the natural condition of the human agent. Indeed, Luther did not mince words when he described the extent of humanity's sinfulness and, what is more, the means by which human beings are capable of transcending this wretched state are never part of human nature but come in the form of unsolicited and undeserved grace. These two elements—which will be explored in great detail in chapter 1—are akin to Kant's recognition that human nature is without moral potential and that moral change comes not from human nature but from something exceeding nature, namely, the transformative potential of practical rationality.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22–23.

2. For discussion of Mainländer's philosophy: Frederick Beiser, *Weltschmerz. Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 201–228.

3. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 36–40.

4. For recent discussion of Schopenhauer's influence on the later nineteenth century: Beiser 2016; Stephan Atzert, *Im Schatten Schopenhauers. Nietzsche, Deussen und Freud* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2015).

5. Respectively: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume 1*. Edited by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 337, 348, 349, 378; Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation. Volume Two.* Translated by David Carus and Robert Aquila (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2011), 566, 645.

6. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

7. "In meinem 17ten Jahre, ohne alle gelehrte Schulbildung, wurde ich vom *Jammer des Lebens* so ergriffen, wie Buddha in seiner Jugend, als er Krankheit, Alter, Schmerz und Tod erblickte. Die Wahrheit, welche laut und deutlich aus der Welt sprach, überwandet bald die auch mir eingeprägten Jüdischen Dogmen, und mein Resultat war, dass diese Welt kein Werk eines allgütigen Wesens sein könnte, wohl aber das eines Teufels, der Geschöpfe ins Dasein gerufen, um am Anblick ihrer Qual sich zu weiden: darauf deuteten die Data, und der Glaube, dass es so sei, gewann die Oberhand" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Philosophischen Notizen aus dem Nachlass.* Edited by Ernst Ziegler unter Mitarbeit von Anke Brumloop, Clemens Müller und Manfred Wagner (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2017), 77–78 [89.2–90.1]—my translation).

8. See: Dennis Vanden Auweele, *The Kantian Foundation of Schopenhauer's Pessimism* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

9. One might note that Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche's attraction to pessimism does not seem to be in line with the general ideals of the Enlightenment. At least, it does not appear to be very rationalist, emancipatory, or progressive to espouse forms of pessimism which recognize how the reach of human ability is limited. However, the fact that all three philosophers were German may not be merely coincidental, and so I have investigated the German dialogue with Lutheran/Pietist religion (see chapter 2), even though Nietzsche himself felt that pessimism (and Schopenhauer's pessimism in particular) was not German, but Christian: "A fourth question would be whether Schopenhauer, too, with his pessimism—that is, the problem of the value of existence—had to be precisely a German. I believe not. The event after which this problem was to be expected with certainty, so that an astronomer of the soul could have calculated the very day and hour for it—the decline of faith in the Christian god, the triumph of scientific atheism—is a pan-European event in which all races had their share and for which all deserve credit and honour" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 218 [357]).

10. Gordon Michalson, *Fallen Freedom. Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

11. Some might object early on to my thesis in that, were Kant not optimistic, his constant allusion to hope would make no sense. How can one hope for a better future if one is not convinced that such a future is possible? The kind of pessimism that I discuss here does not cancel out the possibility of a better future, but warns against the belief that natural processes by themselves navigate toward that end. Progress is hard and difficult, not inevitable. I find a similar point expressed in (although his discussion of Kant could be more robust): Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*. Edited by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter; Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3 [§3].

13. *Ibid.*, 3–4 [§3].

Chapter 1

Pessimism, Theodicy, and the Protestant Factor

Modern philosophy as a whole is no stranger to pessimism, although this is something that does not emerge often in general discussion. In the textbook version of the history of modern philosophy, over the course of the sixteenth-century, philosophers broke with the Christian and moralizing perspective on reality in favor of a more secularized and amoral point of view. This was done in order to create a foundation for a new, critical, and rational exploration of reality, one that is free from bondage to archaic systems of thought. Rather than to look outside of the human subject for guidance, modern philosophy begins with a powerful move inward, into the subjectivity of the *cogito*, where truth and morality are determined with respect to the subject, not this or that tradition or supernatural revelation.[1] J. B. Schneewind has systematically unfolded how modern philosophy gradually developed this philosophical insight, which found its structural, theoretical, and moral apotheosis in Kant's transcendental philosophy, where the very notion of modern autonomy developed against the backdrop of a certain philosophical tradition that smeared human autonomy.[2]

The aspiration for a full-fledged sense of autonomy in modern philosophy emerged then from an existential consideration.[3] That existential consideration seems to be that whatever is naturally afforded to human beings tends to impede their self-cultivation. This is something that emerged powerfully in Kant's and Schopenhauer's philosophies, namely that freedom cannot mean to follow one's passions. This would be as if trading one master for another. But this insight seems to have been slumbering in a whole host of modern philosophers, especially those of a rationalist bend, where one sees how autonomy emerges in opposition to human nature, rather than from human nature: the human agent retreats upon himself because of a hermeneutics of suspicion toward the given.[4] For instance, do the *passions* of the human being

generally assist the human agent's philosophical life according to Descartes? Are these neutral in the sense of being neither helpful nor harmful? While there is a good, active passion of *generosité*, this is of a totally different kind than the bulk of passions. The rationalist project for autonomy as such reveals a striking pessimistic point of view with regard to human nature because those given aspects of natural being are to be met with serious distrust as just another form of distraction (Pascal uses the term *divertissement*). In order to clarify what exactly is at stake in this rationalist reformulation of distrust of the natural, we will make a start at the modern problem of evil and theodicy afterward to show how the philosophical discussion outlined can be mirrored by juxtaposing two theological perspectives on nature and grace, namely those of Erasmus and Luther.

EARLY OPTIMISM, HUMAN NATURE, AND THEODICY

When Ludwig Borowski, a former pupil of Kant, reflected back on Kant's life in 1804, we get a front row view at some of the now famous trivia about Kant's customs and temperament. Among these, one that arouses interest is Kant's attitude toward a short essay he wrote in 1759, entitled "Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus" (1759). Borowski reports, namely, that Kant would curse this work in his old age.[5] There might be many reasons for Kant's discomfort with this work, but one obvious candidate is that Kant was embarrassed about his naïve allegiance to Leibnizian optimism.

Kant's essay on optimism arose at the time in which a philosophical debate emerged, inspired in no small part by the Lisbon Earthquake (1755), between optimists and anti-optimists (which are not necessarily pessimists). On the side of optimism, one should think of Leibniz and his monumental *Theodicée* (1710) and on the opposing side we find the philosophical satire of Voltaire, notably in his *Candide* (1759). Voltaire's book was published in January of 1759 and aroused a remarkable stir in philosophical circles, especially among those who were attracted to rationalism. Kant's essay is to be read as a defense of Leibnizian optimism against the charges made by its opponents. The argument of the essay is basically made in two claims: (1) It is philosophically plausible to think of a best possible world; and (2) God would necessarily choose to create this best possible world.

In *Theodicée*, Leibniz had argued that God has complete oversight of all possible worlds and necessarily chooses among these the one that is best, which means the one that has the highest possible level of reality. One objection voiced by opponents of Leibniz is that it is impossible to think of a world as the best possible. This was a two-step argument. First, if one defines the best in terms of the highest quantity and quality of predicates, this means that

the best possible world necessarily has a number of contradicting qualities. For instance, this would have to be a world with the most possible good and the most possible evil. Kant dismantles this objection by pointing out—a view that will not easily fit his mature philosophy—that negative magnitudes such as evil are not a reality in itself. These are merely the negation of a certain quality and, as such, the best possible world does not have conflicting qualities, but simply the highest possible degree of positive qualities: "Negations can never be numbered among the qualities of a reality" (VBO 2:31). Second, opponents of Leibniz's argument would argue that one cannot say of a world that it is the best possible, since a better one would always be conceivable. For instance, Mount Everest is (with a height of 8,848 meters) the highest mountain on land in actuality, but it would be perfectly conceivable to think of a higher mountain. Therefore, Mount Everest might be the highest actual mountain but it is by no means the highest possible mountain. One could make the same argument about numbers: "The opponents of optimism maintain that the concept of the most perfect of all worlds is, like that of the greatest of all numbers, a self-contradictory concept" (VBO 2:32). In response, Kant points out an important distinction between mathematics and reality; where it is indeed impossible to think of the greatest number possible, it is possible to imagine the greatest reality, namely, in God: "No greatest number is possible at all, but a greatest degree of reality is possible, and it is to be found in God" (VBO 2:32). But since the world is different from God, and therefore below absolute perfection, there is in fact a most perfect possible world because infinite perfection is not possible for worldly things (else, they would be God):

> This present case is not like that of mathematical infinity, where the finite is connected, in accordance with the law of continuity, with the infinite by means of a constantly continued and ever possible augmentation. In this present case, the disparity between infinite reality and finite reality is fixed by means of a determinate magnitude, which constitutes their difference. The world, which finds itself at that point on the scale of beings which marks the start of the chasm containing the measureless degrees of perfection which elevate the Eternal Being above every creature—this world, I repeat, is, of all which is finite, the most perfect. (VBO 2:33)

If we accept Kant's argument, then it is feasible to consider the possibility that a world could rightly be called the best possible. But, how would we know that our world is the best of all possible worlds? Kant's recourse is to a theological argument, namely, that God is the creator of this world and God could only choose the best possible creation: "Since God chose this world and this world alone of all the possible worlds of which He had cognition, He must

for that very reason, have regarded it as the best. And since God's judgment never errs, it follows that this world is also in fact the best" (VBO 2:34). One reason that some would object to this argument is that it strips all freedom from God and that it forces God to choose a certain world because it is the best possible. Indeed, Kant does not have a convincing counterargument to this claim but offers his readers a dilemma in return: an emphasis on the absolute freedom of God merely gives God the possibility to choose in favor of a worse than the best possible world, which means embracing a freedom to choose for evil. Not a very noble cause:

> Thanks for the freedom which banishes into eternal nothingness the best which it was possible to create, merely in order to command evil so that it should be something, in spite of all pronouncements of wisdom. If I am positively to choose between errors, then I prefer to praise the benevolent necessity, which is so favorable to us, and from which there can arise nothing but the best. (VBO 2:34)

This final argument is obviously not particularly convincing since it is supported by nothing more than a calculus based on what seems to be the most desirable outcome. Be of this what may, it seems that Kant was initially allied to a fairly optimistic point of view with regard to this world being the best of all possible worlds. But did this point of view remain consistent throughout his career? Kant was uncomfortable with this early essay for some part because it builds on certain rather dogmatic ideas concerning God and reality. In his critical period, Kant would refrain from theologically dogmatic arguments of the sort outlined above, which builds on the idea that one cannot know determinatively that which is beyond possible experience. Whether this world then is the best possible world, will remain a question that cannot be settled through philosophical argument. This will return as a topic when we engage Kant's reflections on theodicy, but at this point we can already conclude that Kant abandons any naïve optimism of the sort espoused by his precritical, dogmatic Leibnizianism.

The impossibility to settle whether or not this world is the best possible does not imply, however, an absolutely pessimistic point of view. This would be the same error from the opposite side. And yet, there does seem to be some validity to the claim that Kant entertained serious pessimism, not relating to a general worldview, but with regard to the moral potential of human nature. For these reasons, the more interesting investigation would be how the critical Kant relates human nature to moral goodness. One could call this an investigation in Kant's transcendental (not empirical) anthropology, that is, the science that seeks to delineate the universally necessary nature of humanity and its rapport toward the moral law. It is in this area that we shall find

Kant to be pessimistic, namely, that he holds human nature to lack the tools to navigate toward moral goodness and instead requires the intervention of reason that radically remodels nature.

At this point, it could be interjected that Kant does not separate radically human nature and reason, not being as much of a body/soul or sensation/reason dualist as most people would read in the modern rationalists. I hesitate whether Kant has really made steps away from this dualism with the exception of his well-known argument that knowledge requires sensible intuitions and rational concepts both. In practical (i.e., moral) affairs, there remains a pervasive tendency to view human nature as a problem to be solved by rationality, which is something that exceeds (perhaps even transcends) nature as such. At least from his Critical period onward, Kant opposes the idea that human nature has a natural incentive toward goodness, which was a view that, in Kant's day, was known as moral sentimentalism and championed by David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith. Kant was most intimately aware of Hutcheson's moral sentimentalism, which suggests that human beings have in analogue to their external senses also a set of internal senses. Among these internal senses, there is a moral sense which is aroused in a positive way when we witness acts of moral goodness and in a negative way when we witness acts of moral evil. This means that human beings are equipped with a natural inner sense that not only differentiates moral good and evil but equally provides incentives to goodness because of our natural attraction to goodness.[6] This natural attraction to moral goodness can be overpowered by other interests since other forms of agreeableness are aroused from other positive sensations (through, for example, self-love). As such, the moral incentive is one possible, natural incentive among a great variety of other incentives that ought to be cultivated.

From *Groundwork* on, Kant will vehemently oppose the idea that there is a natural incentive for morality. Throughout his precritical period, and not long after writing his essay on optimism in fact, Kant expresses sympathies, however, for moral sentimentalism mainly in two essays published close to one another: "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1763–1764) and the Prize Essay entitled "Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality" (1764). In *Observations*, Kant detects there to be both a sublimity (respect) and beauty (attraction) to morality: we *respect* formal, moral principles but and we are *attracted* to specific acts of moral goodness. While the formal principles are central for morality, Kant does not dismiss the importance of our attraction to specific acts of goodness. For the precritical Kant, there is an inner, natural attraction to sublime morality: "Being touched by either [the sublime or the beautiful] is agreeable, but in very different ways" (GSE 2:208). While the bulk of this essay is concerned with distinguishing attraction from respect—for example,

friendship is sublime, while sexual love is beautiful (GSE 2:211)—it is noteworthy that Kant does here not utterly deprive human agents of natural affection for the moral law.

Kant makes some similar remarks at the close of *Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality.* Here, Kant seeks to reconcile the moral systems of Wolffian perfectionism with moral sentimentalism. According to Wolff, moral agency is born from the rational consideration that we ought to strive for the perfection of our own being; according to moral sentimentalism, the motivation for being moral is an immediate affection upon our moral sense. Standing in between perfectionalism and moral sentimentalism, Kant argues, on the one hand, that "the supreme rule of all obligation must be absolutely indemonstrable [*schlechterdings unerweislich*]" (UD 2:299), but, on the other hand, morality as a whole navigates the human agent into expressing its essence in the most perfect way possible: "Perform [*Thue*] the most perfect action in your power (. . .) Abstain (*Unterlasse*] from doing that which will hinder the realization of the greatest possible perfection" (*Ibid.*). This principle of self-perfection is a purely formal principle incapable of conveying insight into what the exact content is of moral actions. Most pertinently, this formal obligation does not let us know what the specific content is of perfection. This would remain an issue even in Kant's later reflections on perfectionalism:

> Now, if ends must first be given to us, in relation to which alone the concept of perfection [. . .] can be the determining ground of the will; and if an end as an object which must precede the determination of the will by a practical rule and contain the ground of the possibility of such a determination [it] is always empirical. (KpV 5:41)[7]

As such, Kant distances himself from moral perfectionism, and in doing so approaches moral sentimentalism, in arguing that the content of the goodness is not derived from purely abstract rational considerations on formal principles; rather, it is an immediate affection on the faculty of feeling. Reason provides only the formal nature of moral duty, the content however of the "unanalyzable [*unauflösliches*] concept of the good" (UD 2:299) is provided by the faculty of feeling. Accordingly, Kant takes the content of morality (universal rational duty to self-perfection) from Wolff, but the origin (the faculty of feeling) from Hutcheson. Interestingly, this essay concludes with a call to investigate further the practical aspect of human reasoning to which "Hutcheson provided us, under the name of moral feeling, with a starting point from which to develop some excellent observations" (UD 2:300).

While never an unequivocal supporter of moral sentimentalism, the precritical Kant clearly valued the moral insights of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury.

According to these thinkers, human nature is not solely selfishly interested in its own happiness but is equally predisposed toward moral goodness. From *Groundwork* onward, Kant decisively abandons this early appreciation of moral sentimentalism, which does not imply that Kant refuses any and all moral feeling. Moral feeling remains an important factor of his moral philosophy, but no longer as the natural foundation of morality; instead, morality is founded on the self-legislated apodictic authority of the moral law that becomes self-imposed upon the moral agent. Moral feeling becomes the effect of exposure to the moral law, which engenders a necessary feeling of respect for the moral law. This rather dramatic shift of perspective is evidence that Kant has abandoned not only Leibnizian optimism, but also any too syrupy optimism that human nature by itself would navigate toward moral goodness. But this shift is not without its own difficulties, as Kant will experience incessant difficulty in accounting for the conditions and motives (or "interest") that enable finite, rational agents to incorporate autonomously the moral law into their maxim. This became an issue since if human nature is not redolent of natural goodness as deprived of a natural incentive toward morality, then the moral incentive must be born from something beyond human nature. What enables this something beyond human nature to reframe, remodel, and reshape the natural aspiration of the human being? What would interest a being naturally devoid of incentive toward morality to be moral?

This change of perspective from optimism to pessimism is perhaps most emphatically signaled by Kant's critical dealings with theodicy. This is prefaced by a long development in thinking about evil in modern thought: reflections on evil tended to gradually think of evil more radical and real, which resulted in a loss of faith in traditional theodicy. In fact, Leibniz's theodicy is a last violent convulsion of a body that has long lost the struggle for continued existence. It became more and more obvious that the argumentative schemes of theodicy simply did not do the trick anymore. What is theodicy exactly? The main reason that philosophy and theology have traditionally reflected on the nature of evil is that it tends to upset a metaphysical, especially a theistic, view of the world. As soon as philosophy or theology started to posit either a harmonious, rational universe or an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing divine agent, the question of evil arose with a particular prominence. Namely, if the universe is a well-versed and harmonious whole, then why is there disorder and disarray? If God is good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, then why is there evil? *Si deus est, unde malum?* The various answers given to these questions in the past have served to deepen the sense of cosmic balance or divine agency, but more recently the contemporary "new atheists" use the problem of evil as an argument against the existence of God, hence the "argument from evil."[8] This shift in dealing with evil betrays a shift in perspective: no longer do we assume an idea of God to which we

have to adjust our experience of evil; now we assume the experience of evil and we accommodate God in accordance with it.

If God is real, then evil cannot be real; but if evil is felt to be so dramatically real, then what does that mean with regard to God? Generally, we can distinguish between two distinct modes of the problem of evil, namely logical and evidential. The logical problem of evil suggests that the occurrence of evil is logically irreconcilable with the existence of God; the evidential problem of evil claims, however, that while evil as such can be reconciled with the existence of God, the amount or severity of it cannot.[9] Both versions of the problem suggest that the occurrence of (excessive) evil is incompatible with an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God. Two recourses could be entertained: one could either downplay the nature of evil or re-interpret the nature of God. Theology and (modern) philosophy have decidedly opted for mitigating the reality of evil in favor of their God-concept (with the interesting exception of the Kantian-inspired essay of Schelling "Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Human Freedom"), most overtly in argumentative schemes that have become known as theodicy after Leibniz's *Theodicée*. While he reserves the term "theodicy" for a specific form of understanding evil, Andrew Flescher very helpfully differentiates between four ways of understanding evil that could broadly be categorized as some form of theodicy: evil as the radical other to goodness (Manicheism); evil as the "good in disguise" (theodicy in a strict sense); evil as a subjective, historical perspective (perspectivism); and evil as the absence (privation) of goodness.[10] Since all these perspectives in some way distance God's goodness from the evil in the world, they can all be understood as theodicy in a broad sense.

The term theodicy derives from the Greek words *Theos* (God) and *Diké* (justice): nothing, not even evil, is in opposition to God's justice and we ought to justify God's goodness in the face of evil. Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man" expresses the often somewhat too simplistic argumentation of theodicy:

> Safe in the hand of one disposing Pow'r,
> Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.
> All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
> All chance, direction, which thou canst not see
> All discord, harmony not understood,
> All partial evil, universal good:
> And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
> One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.[11]

This line of argumentation was, literally and figuratively, shocked by the Great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 which functioned, in many ways, throughout the eighteenth century as the Holocaust functions in philosophical reflection on evil today: this was something that no good God could condone,

especially since the disaster occurred on All Saints Day.[12] The philosophical importance of this event is demonstrated by the number of prominent minds who deemed it necessary to respond extensively: Voltaire refers to the earthquake in *Candide* to level Leibniz best-of-all-possible-worlds-argument; Rousseau thought of the earthquake as a metaphor for the destructive force of civil society, one whose severity would have been far less if human beings lived in a more natural (dispersed) way; the then still relatively young Kant wrote no fewer than three papers on the nature of earthquakes, mainly emphasizing these are impossible in Prussia; and even Goethe, only six years old at the time, reflected in his diary that "by treating the just and the unjust in the same way, God had not behaved in the fatherly manner that I had been attributing to him in my catechism."[13] Needless to say, an evil of this magnitude was very difficult to reconcile with a God who had created the best possible world, which furthered the idea that evil is an issue to be taken more seriously, not merely as a problem to be dismissed by theological rhetoric on the mysterious nature of God.

Kant was one of the first philosophers to conceptualize convincingly the topic of evil in such a way that any theology-based theodicy became impossible. This is a sign that, for Kant, evil could not ultimately be explained by means of a ground in something rational—instead, evil is its own ground or root; it is *radical*. Kant's interventions were, however, still hesitant and perhaps even unwitting as to their longevity.[14] In "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy," Kant makes short work of all philosophical attempts (*Versuch*) of Leibnizian theodicy. Following the metaphor of the "trial," Kant suggests that God could be judged as deficient because of counterpurposiveness (*Zweckwidrigkeit*) with regard to three issues: His holiness, His goodness, and His justice (MpVT 8:257). God's holiness is in question because of the evil that disfigures the world; God's goodness is in question because of quasi-omnipresent suffering and pain; God's justice is in question because of the disproportion between good/happiness and evil/unhappiness. Instead of trying to solve these issues by means of a transcendental deduction of the enabling conditions of evil, suffering, or proportion, Kant admits that human reason is basically at a loss when it attempts to reconcile these three forms of counterpurposiveness with God's alleged holiness, goodness, and justice. By this, he means that good rational arguments can be made for perceiving evil as a part of divine goodness/holiness/justice and, at the same time, for perceiving evil as not being a part of divine goodness/holiness/justice (which is what is also called an "antinomy"). Accordingly Kant concludes that

> every previous theodicy has not performed what it promised, namely the vindication of the moral wisdom of the world-government [*die moralische Weisheit in der Weltregierung*] against the doubts raised against it on the basis of what

> the experience of the world teaches—although, to be sure, as objections, so far as our reason's inherent insight regarding them goes, neither can these doubts prove the contrary. (MpVT 8:263)

More interesting than the remainder of the argument are Kant's overt hesitations with regard to theodicy: he doubts whether any rational insight could vindicate God's justice in the face of the evil in the world. By contrast, Leibniz also recognized the limitations of the human intellect, but he retained the belief that scientific progress would ultimately show that evil is to be understood as part of God's justice. This shift in perspective is likely not due to Kant doubting God's justice, holiness, or goodness, but to his more radical (or more pessimistic) view of evil as an intricate part of (human) nature (see chapter 3). The reason why we are not capable of justifying God in the face of evil lies not with God or reason, but with the nature of evil. Kant himself notes in this respect that the failure of any doctrinal theodicy is due to the limitations of human reason which is "absolutely incapable of insight into the relationship in which any world as we may ever become acquainted with through experience stands with respect to the highest wisdom" (*Ibid.*). In other words, human reason is incapable of finding a way to reconcile the reality of evil with the goodness of God.

In his reflections on theodicy, Kant does retain an ambiguous form of optimism by distinguishing between a doctrinal (*doktrinal*) and an authentic (*authentisch*) theodicy: while a doctrinal theodicy attempts to provide a philosophical framework in which God's will and empirical reality are reconciled, an authentic theodicy does not claim to know the will of God, but believes evil to be comprehensible and just from God's point of view. In other words, a doctrinal theodicy *knows* that evil is a part of divine justice, while an authentic theodicy has practically based *faith* that evil is a part of divine justice. This distinction between knowledge and faith will return numerous times in Kant's philosophy: transcendental idealism eschews making statements on God's nature (or any other practical postulates) while allowing for the possibility of moral or rational faith to postulate that evil will ultimately be redeemed through God's wisdom and justice. As will become clear below, this more optimistic aspect of Kant's philosophy serves as a regulative idea focusing human beings in such a way that any overly univocal focus on the radical nature of evil will not paralyze their moral resolve.

THE PROTESTANT REFORM, PIETISM, AND HUMAN NATURE

The kind of pessimism Kant espouses can be further clarified by examining the general theological discords of his time between the more optimistic and

more pessimistic views of human nature. Since Kant was weaned on a more pessimistic view, he would have been naturally attracted to hold this as a philosophical position. He was raised in a fairly strict Pietist household under the guidance of a mother who took her moral duties to heart and lavished care on the delicate Kant.[15] After her death, Kant entered the Collegium Fridericianum, where he was exposed to a worldlier form of religiosity expressed in terms of obedience to certain quasi-monastic rules of conduct. Early on, this must have imbued Kant with a dualistic understanding of religion: a moral religion (mother) and a religion seeking God's favor (Collegium). He must have felt uneasy with his life in the Collegium since the outward observation of certain religious rites hypocritically contradicted the general turn inward of Pietism, which was supposed to be a "religion of the heart," not a "religion of outward practices." Kant wholeheartedly sided with a moral religion of inwardness and therefore found it necessary to turn away from the religion of the Collegium, which he felt to be a religion of rogation (*Gunstbewerbung*).[16] We would do well, however, not to be blinded by Kant's rhetoric here; there are in fact hidden premises, unconsciously inherited from Pietism, which underlie Kant's philosophy. As William J. Abraham puts it, Kant is "a Pietist of a higher philosophical order."[17] Of course, one should not overemphasize the importance of this theological background in fleshing out Kant's moral and religious philosophy, but a clear grasp of Protestant and Pietist soteriology can illuminate his views of moral agency. In particular, Protestant pessimism regarding the inherent value of nature and the need for a transformation of the "depraved flesh," combined with the Pietist zeal for a nondogmatic search for holiness, seems to resonate with Kant's philosophy.

Contrary to earlier scholarship on the issue,[18] Pietism is now regarded as an important movement within the Reformation, maybe even "one of the most influential Protestant Reform movements since the Reformation itself."[19] Michel Godfroid would even suggest that "to write the history of Pietism is to write the history of modern Protestantism"[20] and Kierkegaard was even bolder when he claimed that "Pietism [. . .] is the one and only consequence of Christianity."[21] Given then its centrality in the history of the Reformation, any presentation of Pietism would not be complete without a brief overview of the general discord between the initial Reformation and the Catholic Church, and in particular of Catholic and Lutheran differences regarding salvation. These differences are highlighted in the debate between Erasmus[22] and Luther on free will and the value of worldly works (1520–1528), an examination of which will also point to the direction in which Pietism took Lutheran pessimism.[23] Despite the historical context and idealistic sympathy Kant shared with Pietism, Kant scholarship tends to align his philosophy of human nature closer to Catholic optimism than Lutheran pessimism.[24] However, throughout this study, I will argue that

Kant in fact was closer to the kind of pessimism one finds in Lutheran Pietism than to Humanist or Catholic optimism.

Erasmus defines freedom of the will as "the power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads unto eternal salvation."[25] For him, human agents have an inherent quality that inclines them to the good and to evil. Moral freedom then means that human agents are free and responsible for (not) aspiring to their own salvation. Erasmus justifies this point of view by subscribing to the traditional scholastic threefold division of the human being into body (flesh), spirit, and intellect.[26] According to this distinction, only the body or flesh is corrupted through the Fall and the rejection of the good or of God means giving in to the depraved flesh, not a positive commitment to evil. Even more dispositional or intellectual vices (such as pride or jealousy) are to be attributed somehow to the body's influence on the intellect. Because of the Fall, human beings have a natural tendency to venture astray, and therefore are prone to succumb to sensuous desires that might conflict with their religious vocation: "The will capable of turning here and there is generally called a free will, despite its more ready assent to evil than to good, because of our remaining inclination to sin."[27] Human agents are supposed to develop that which within themselves is attuned to the good; this, according to Erasmus, is not solely the work of revelation (as Luther will have it), but also includes study and wisdom: "Jesus Christ is the author of wisdom and indeed wisdom itself, the true light that alone scatters the night of worldly stupidity, the reflection of the Glory of the Father."[28] So, Erasmus asserts that human beings are able to fulfill autonomously some of the basic requirements that will work toward their salvation since their capacities, other than the flesh (i.e., spirit and soul), are not tainted by the Fall: corruption has not destroyed their potency for the good (they are still graced by God), merely weakened their resolve. Nature then is still redolent of an aura of goodness that no amount of corruption can ever extinguish, that is, if nature is properly approached of course:

> If we are on the road to piety, we should continue to improve eagerly and forget what lies behind us; if we have become involved in sin, we should make every effort to extricate ourselves, to accept the remedy of penance and solicit the mercy of the lord.[29]

This is what is generally considered to be the doctrine of "concurrence": God does not merely create all creatures (deism), but also acts in and through all forms of agency, even free agency. One could call this a prior gracing of existence before merit or grace, which then precedes any form of merit and some objects in reality are particularly blessed with such gracefulness.[30]

As a consequence of this, some worldly objects or institutions can assist human beings in meriting the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church, for example, can mediate between God and humanity in order to put the latter on the right path to salvation. In Erasmus's opinion, the Church had strayed from its proper end and has to be reformed; specifically, what was needed was a religion that returned *ad fontes* and did not indulge in theological hairsplitting. To this end, Erasmus went to great pains to draw up a *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* (1518) with no fewer than twenty-two rules of conduct for a Christian soldier, "so that, equipped with it, you might attain to a state of mind worthy of Christ."[31] This guidebook is imbued with the military metaphor that Erasmus uses to describe the true Christian (soldier), who is called to vigilance because the Christian is "ceaselessly under attack by the armor-clad forces of vice."[32] Such an enemy is to be found not only outside of the human being (temptation), but also within (vice). In this battle, the Christian soldier must be properly equipped with the armor of prayer and wisdom.[33] Although Erasmus gives priority to prayer over wisdom—"prayer is the more effective of the two, since it is a conversation with God"—he grants that wisdom is "no less necessary."[34] His emphasis on wisdom can largely be attributed to his conviction that all truth, whether theological or philosophical, leads to Christ: "For there is no doubt that Pallas Minerva also has her armor, which is not at all to be despised. In any case, no matter where you find truth, attribute it to Christ."[35] Regrettably, Erasmus always remained unclear (perhaps also uncertain) about the extent to which the human will and its worldly aids suffice for salvation, although he does seem to suggest that, for the most part, salvation should be attributed to the grace of God. However, this does not entail a negligible role for human agency; in fact, certain aspects of human agency are already graced, thereby enabling humanity to do great things: "Man is able to accomplish all things, if God's grace aids him."[36] In good Christian humility, Erasmus calls grace the "principal cause" of salvation, and the will only the "secondary cause" because "free will itself comes from divine grace."[37] Human agents have some good within that can assist in reaching salvation, and they should therefore work toward this end with all of their powers, however limited. Despite the confidence Erasmus has in human capacities (not for nothing was he called "Prince of the Humanists"), as well as his de-radicalization of original sin, his sense of humanism in general remains self-consciously Christian due to his emphasis on the necessity of faith.

Luther disagrees with Erasmus, claiming his Christianity "is without Christ, without the Spirit, and chillier than ice."[38] Central to Luther's disagreement is a different interpretation of the Fall from goodness, which, for Luther, is a radical happening that cannot be reversed by any human endeavor. Only transcendent, divine agency can somehow atone for the radical sinfulness the

human being has contracted. Scholastic theology has, according to Luther, downplayed the severity of man's sinfulness—a theme he especially develops in Attack on Latomus (1521)—and he considers Erasmus to be guilty of the same in his discussion of free will. The direct cause of Erasmus's "On the freedom of the will"—which in turn prompted Luther's "On the Bondage of the Will"—were Luther's assertions, mainly in *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518). There and elsewhere, he discerned between a "Theology of Glory" and a "Theology of the Cross": the former attempts to comprehend God in His own being while the latter speaks of God only in the more narrow sense of manifestation, namely His immediate revelation. In Luther's view, a "Theology of Glory" was impossible because of human depravity and weakness. God is not to be found in any works, neither in God's workings such as immanent creation (rationalism) nor in humanity's workings such as moral agency (moralism)—not the marvel of creation nor the occasional kindness of humanity. This makes folly of all rational theology since even exalted reason is under the sway of the devil.[39] Luther does not refuse all natural knowledge of God, however, as, in his "Theology of the Cross," he allows for the rational and natural certainty that God exists, that He is good, that He is all-powerful and that He is all-knowing. This "left-handed" knowledge of God can be supplemented by "right-handed" knowledge of God, which comes from Scripture or revelation. The error common to both Paganism and Pelagianism is putting too much trust and emphasis on left-handed knowledge of God, thereby downplaying the more essential right-handed knowledge.

The result of Luther's assertions here was, according to Erasmus, that Luther denied freedom of the will. Indeed, Luther himself emphasized that because of the Fall all natural or rational possibility for knowing and adhering to the good is removed.[40] The problem created by the Fall is not that we are sensually tempted by the pleasures of the flesh, but that we are nothing but flesh. Should we lack any and all revelation and grace, we would be unable to fulfill any of the requirements for becoming good. Luther's pessimism with regard to human abilities necessitates something beyond nature to assist the struggling moral agent. The only remaining grain of goodness that is left in humanity is its passive ability to have faith which Luther, at times, calls "the Holy Spirit in us." Charitable works and sacramental service are good only insofar as they are accompanied by a spirit of grace and complete surrender to God. This leads Luther to the extreme position that there is nothing inherent in human nature (anymore) that points toward the good and finally to his admission that "we must deny free will altogether and ascribe everything to God."[41]

The decisive difference with Erasmus lies in Luther's denial of the possibility to direct oneself autonomously toward the good. Since, for Luther, everything is up to God, we have to reject the possibility of any kind of

mediation—such as Church, prayer, or charity—between the immanent world and the transcendent if these are not first inspired by grace. Moreover, human agents cannot ever know whether they are about to merit salvation or not, as all the immanent signs of a character pleasing to God are contestable. While Luther most definitely did not reject the possibility of salvation through grace, the human agent cannot do anything to merit this salvation. Both Luther and Erasmus claimed that some form of moral regeneration is needed and that the original, prelapsarian goodness of being must be restored. Erasmus believes, contrary to Luther, that this is partly within the reach of human autonomy while for Luther, moving beyond the Fall is impossible without the grace of God, which no human agent can ever merit but is given inscrutably. A proper Humanist then, Erasmus is usually associated with a significantly greater degree of optimism than is Luther. However, Erasmus emphasizes that this world (fallen as it is) cannot ever provide the salvation the human being so direly needs: for comparison, see his *De Contemptu Mundi*.[42] Nevertheless, he emphasizes that a proper discipline and moderation in earthly things can work beneficially for human salvation, something that is consistently denied by Luther.[43]

This characterization of Luther's view of human nature is, admittedly, extreme and Kant does certainly not side with Luther's revelatory fideism or anti-rationalism. Nevertheless, Kant recycles a similar pessimistic point of view on human nature, while holding a different view on the possible merit of "earthly" works. This shift also has a parallel in theology, namely in the Pietist reform of the seventeenth century. Luther's death in 1546 left a vast number of theological issues at best unclear or, at worst, entirely unresolved. While most of these were settled in the Formula of Concord (1577), the general history of Luther's Protestantism became a battlefield between two different interpretations of Luther's teaching, Orthodoxy and Scholasticism. The former focused on developing a Christian lifestyle within the contours of Luther's teaching, while the latter mainly aspired to formulate the proper theology. From within the Orthodox, a number of similarly minded individuals (e.g., Johann Arndt and Philipp Spener) came to the fore who increasingly downplayed Luther's theological teachings, focusing instead on the inner attitude of repentance ("piety") that could serve as a preparation for salvation. In the traditional or so-called constructivist understanding of Pietism,[44] the Pietist movement can be said to have started as late as the seventeenth century with Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705), although recently, several scholars have pointed out the earlier influence of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), and Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471).[45] While the constructivist theory has the advantage of narrowing Pietism down to a specific movement in a specific place at a specific time, it does overstress the novelty and influence of Spener, who merely wished to

return *ad fontes* and leave behind the hairsplitting of theology in favor of a quest for piety (not something unusual for religious reformers).

Whether his Pietism is original or not is merely academic, since it is ubiquitously accepted that Spener dramatically altered Protestant soteriology by arguing for a number of novel perspectives on theology to be taken up in Protestant soteriology. The central of these was the active involvement in the practice of piety. In other words, Spener believed that within Protestant soteriology, earthly works had some measure of importance for salvation, not as valuable in themselves, but as conducive to faith. This is how Kant will regard the moral benefit of nonmoral practices, namely as potentially conducive to morality. In his *Pia Desideria* (1675), Spener emphasized in particular that everyone should preach to everyone (universal), for theological chiliasm (among Protestants at least) and for an end to scholastic discussions as they served increasingly to pit believers against each other, rather than to facilitate true piety (agnosticism with regard to doctrines). While first perhaps seeming somewhat trivial, his arguments signaled a shift in perspective on Protestant soteriology. Not only were faith, the reading of Scripture, and holding the correct theological beliefs of importance for salvation, so also was the proper worldly and emotional response to these three. For this reason, Spener emphatically objected to the overly theoretical ambitions of the so-called scholastic Protestants. For him, being religious was not first and foremost about having a proper set of propositions on the nature of God and universe, but about developing a purity of heart. This, of course, jeopardized the elitist attitude of many Protestant priests and professors of theology since purity of heart could also be found, often more easily even, among simple people. Spener accordingly preferred a "religion of the heart" over a "religion of the mind." This proved to be a valuable tool in furthering chiliasm since he was convinced that everyone (even the most ignorant pagan) knows God is close. As a proper Lutheran, however, he still emphasized the reading of the one true Scripture and his ecumenical views did not reach beyond Christianity. So, non-Christians such as Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims should be targeted by missionary activities that would spread the word of God without relying too heavily on any specific set of theological propositions, at least in the beginning. Spener was not opposed to leaving numerous aspects of the Christian faith shrouded in mystery, rather than risking new theological disputes over proposing a specific interpretation of the Trinity, Creation, the Resurrection, and so on.[46]

Spener then urged the incorporation of two seemingly inappropriate elements in Lutheran theology, namely an emphasis, on the one hand, on the emotional aspects of religious life and, on the other hand, on developing piety through earthly works (monastic or charitable). With regard to developing piety, one must keep clearly in mind that his emphasis on

earthly works was still of a Protestant nature, not Catholic or Pelagian. For him earthly works cannot merit salvation as there is no way to bridge the gap between human bondage and divine transcendence. His theology emphasized that religious believers ought to develop a proper emotional and practical response to Scripture and (the Lutheran interpretation of) human fallenness. This response was primarily focused on the need for a rebirth in Christ which confronted the believer with an "inner struggle" (*Busskampf*), which destroyed the self-complacent evil, depraved will of the human being, and prepared the way for the self-realization of one's depravity. Emotionally, this often (but not always) took the shape of self-chastisement (even self-flagellation), pain being a necessary aspect of penitence; to be hurt was a sign that the old self was dying and giving way to the "New Man." This penitential rebirth has three important elements that are remarkably akin to relatively similar points in Kant's moral philosophy. First, the natural agency of a human agent is not in itself good and cannot in any way be molded to be good. Second, as a consequence of this, the human agent must destroy the natural mode of behavior, quite a painful process at first. Finally, the destruction of the natural mode of behavior is made possible through being confronted with something that is radically different from that mode of behavior: for Pietism, this is the reading of Scripture, and for Kant, it is the practical reason and the moral law. Important difference: for Kant, all human beings have access to the moral law through legislative reason; for Pietism, Scripture and revelation are historically contingent, even though Spener emphasized that everyone intimately experiences God as close.

After Spener, the Pietist movement generally split into two directions, the Radical and the Church Pietists, a split that occurred in large part because Spener had refused to take issue unequivocally with Jakob Böhme's mystical theosophism. Several of Spener's enthusiasts were ill at ease with mystical practices as a route to piety and preferred a monastic life whereas the Radical Pietists valued mysticism as the proper means to attain piety, an approach that facilitated their ecumenical outreach beyond the borders of Protestantism to Catholicism. The most influential of these Radical Pietists included Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) and the Moravian Pietists under Count Zinzendorf (1700–1760), who were also called Herrnhutists. When Kant mentions Pietism in his writings, he seems to be thinking mainly of the Moravians. By contrast, the Church Pietists were generally less appreciative of mysticism and as a consequence less inclined to ecumenical practices. The more influential currents here included the Württemberg Pietism of Johann Bengel (1687–1752) and Friedrich Oetinger (1702–1782), and the Halle Pietism of August Francke (1663–1727). What nevertheless united these different forms of Pietism was their admiration for Spener, their active interest in attaining

piety, whether through mysticism or monasticism, and their emphasis on rebirth and renewal.

August Francke, in particular, became a fervent defender and admirer of Spener after meeting the master in 1688. He was subsequently discharged by the university authorities at Leipzig for defending Pietism and, after trying his luck at the University of Erfurt, took up a position at the University of Halle. There he acted both as a university professor and community pastor, and erected the Halle orphanage which housed over a hundred children. Most of his publications consist of sermons delivered to his parishioners. Kant's personal introduction to Pietism came via Francke since his parents were devout Pietists who were acquainted with Francke's version of Pietism. Moreover, many of Kant's friends and colleagues at the University of Königsberg had studied or taught at Halle, and the atmosphere in Königsberg generally was somewhere between Halle Pietism and Wolffian rationalism. Francke's specific take on Pietism and the way works are to be appreciated as conducive to faith (while opposing mysticism) are in many ways Kant's primary acquaintance with religion. In his *Autobiography*, Francke often confesses that earthly existence did not provide him with solace, even when he had attained fame and standing: "A peace within the world was not able to bring any rest to my heart."[47] More specifically, he felt that his unrest was due to something dreadfully wrong with the human condition. The first step then to finding solace was "to acknowledge more deeply [his] wretched state."[48] By doing this, he could already feel the first signs of God's grace that inaugurated a radical difference between his restless state and the peace he found in God: "No one can tell me what a difference there is between the natural life of a natural man and the life which is from God"; and, even more explicitly, he says that "all the world with all its joy and glory could not awaken such sweetness in the human heart as the sweetness I had."[49] While Francke definitely agreed with Spener on the priority of piety over theological propositions, he did emphasize the necessity of some theoretical truths for the development of such piety. In his "On Christian Perfection," he argues (in a rather scholastic style) that one is justified "by faith without merit,"[50] that justification perfected human agents without removing strife from their lives (Points 5–10) and that perfection does not mean holiness (Points 10–15). In summary, this implies that even the justified believer is beset by temptation. Reading Scripture, in other words, makes the human agent a disciple of Christ, not Christ.

Francke then developed within the Lutheran view of existence and soteriology a theoretical framework for a morality based upon penitence and the aspiration toward piety. Only by surrendering to God and accepting depravity can the human agent heroically strive to become good: the moral struggle is one the human agent cannot win. Pietist morality is therefore a tragic quest that is bound to fail but must be undertaken nevertheless. The Pietist has

to carry out moral duties that yet do not in any way merit the inscrutable and undeserved grace given to the human agent. The ultimate highest good remains elusive and one can only have faith that it will one day come to be. Markus Matthias points out that, among the Pietists, Francke was the one who emphasized at great length the penitential struggle (*Busskampf*) that precedes the rebirth and continues afterward.[51] This emphasis on penance even had a rather awkward tendency to turn Spener's emphasis on rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*) around to the human side of agency rather than to God's infusing love.[52] As a result, Francke foresaw the need, as Gawthrop and Barnett point out,[53] for an institutionalized version of Pietism that would facilitate the human agent's endeavors to achieve full piety. In other words, Francke seemingly abandoned Spener's assumption that earthly improvement is ultimately dependent on God for the idea of divine grace giving more and more responsibility for piety to the individual agent. This accounts for Francke's apparently un-Lutheran worldly activities such as his collegia, his orphanage, and his university lectures. However, by accepting the ultimate vanity of all earthly labor and the necessity for transformation and justification by grace through faith (instilled by revelation), Francke's Pietism always remained self-consciously Lutheran. Moreover, the highest good (holiness) remains out of reach because of our ultimately depraved nature that is devoid of any divine or natural goodness.

Anyone familiar with Kant's moral and religious philosophy will find many of these elements suspiciously Kantian: the emphasis on personal responsibility, the institutionalization of faith and morality, the hope for and impossibility of holiness. Be that as it may, Francke and Spener, with their view of the immanent search for holiness together with their acknowledgement that such holiness is beyond our reach by immanent means alone, introduced a form of heroism into morality. Several of these intuitions return, albeit transformed by a more secular outlook on moral agency, in Kant's moral philosophy. Without taking too seriously their theological origin, Kant did feel that the overall view of human nature in Pietism was generally sound: the human agent is deprived of a natural inclination to goodness, needs the revelation of something beyond nature, ought to incorporate that revelation in his or her maxim in which he or she can be assisted in this by an institute that promulgates morality.

KANTIAN PESSIMISM

The thesis of a Kantian pessimism might need some further elucidation. At one point, Schopenhauer called Fichte's ethics an "enlarging mirror" for the problems and demerits of Kant's ethical philosophy.[54] It could be

argued, which I have tried to accomplish elsewhere,[55] that Schopenhauer's more out-and-out pessimism is an enlarging mirror for one aspect of Kant's philosophy without thereby denying that there are other, more optimistic, aspects of Kant's philosophy. The present monograph is an exploration of the back and forth between pessimism and optimism in Kant's philosophy, with a more explicit focus on uncovering the elements suggestive of a pessimism as, I believe, the optimistic elements are given elaborate, perhaps even excessive, attention in most studies of Kant's ethics and philosophy of religion. In this section, I will outline what I take to be Kantian pessimism and how it interacts with optimism—the rest of this monograph will serve so as to substantiate this view.

As mentioned in the introduction, I take Kantian pessimism to mean that Kant is committed to the view that human nature does not navigate toward the good, that (the ideal of) autonomy has but a relatively meager hold over human behavior, and that, because of these, human beings—finite, fragile, and disposed toward evil as they are—are in dire need of a moral education that cultivates and augments their rational interest in moral behavior. If anyone disagrees with calling this pessimism, then one should feel free to replace this term with another (I prefer to engage in philosophical rather than terminological debate). In my understanding, pessimism relates mostly to one's given capacities and how these can navigate toward a desired end. An optimist focuses on an ideal end that he believes himself capable of attaining (whether or not with a little help); a pessimist similarly recognizes a potentially uplifting end, but, given the vast distance between his point of departure and the final end, he admits the unlikeliness of attaining that end.[56] When I read Kant's ethics and philosophy of religion, I am constantly confronted with the temperament of a person who is skeptical of our possibility to reach our desired end. Such skepticism has to do, primarily, with the impoverished point of departure of human being (or, human nature).

If there is to be hope for human beings, human nature requires a radical and complete turnover before it could possibly be aligned to moral goodness, a turnover that could never be supported by means of human nature: the evil tree cannot bear good fruits. Since such a turnover—Kant calls it a "revolution in our *Gesinnung*"—is of such a radical nature, Kant represents it as a lifetime project that can never be seen as come to completion. Human life must remain a perennial struggle with the evil principle: human beings can take up a *Gesinnung* to oppose that evil principle, but they remain unable to uproot their propensity to evil. At best, this is something that can be hoped for, not something that can ever be seen as have occurred.

My strong claim that human nature, or even any natural processes as such, does not navigate toward moral goodness can give rise to some controversy. Many Kant scholars have interjected that Kant does not entertain a strong

dualism between human nature and rationality, but that rationality—or at the very least our potential receptivity to rationality—is a constitutive part of our nature. I am not arguing, as such, that human beings lack a receptivity to the moral law, but that such a receptivity emerges in the moment of confrontation with the moral law: the receptivity is rational, not natural. There are three reasons why I would insist upon a stronger dualism between nature and reason in Kant's philosophy than, so I assume, most scholars would be comfortable with intuitively. First, Kant famously argues in *Religion* that "human nature is evil" (RGV 6:32), but very explicitly qualifies this statement in that neither legislative (our capacity to formulate the moral law) nor executive (our capacity to take up the moral law in our maxim) reason are touched by that corruption. If reason was part of human nature, would it not imply that reason would be equally corrupted by radical evil? If reason would be univocally part of human nature, I fail to see how this would not too be corrupted by *radical evil*, which goes to the very foundation of human nature. If reason is not corrupted, then it cannot be part of human nature. This does not mean that human beings totally lack an incentive toward moral goodness, only that this incentive cannot be borne from human nature but must emerge from the confrontation with the moral law: it is a rational, rather than a natural incentive. Second, in the aftermath of Kant's philosophy, most philosophers—among which even some of Kant's staunchest defenders—felt that the main infelicity of transcendental philosophy was that it accounted insufficiently for the interplay between (human) nature, reason, and absolute being (God). Certainly, this was one of the main challenges of philosophy between Kant and Hegel, the latter of which had supposedly offered a cogent solution to this difficulty. At the very least, the philosophical systems of Fichte, Schelling, even Schopenhauer sought to provide a more dynamic, dialectical view of the interplay between the in-itself (reason, will, or God) and reality as given to human beings (nature, representation). There must be something to the dualism these authors detected, especially since all of these great thinkers sensed that Kant retained some sense of a dualism between reason and nature (even though he sought to overcome this in the *third Critique*). Third, this does not mean that Kant continues an antagonism—allegedly held by many rationalist philosophers—between "evil nature" and "good reason." Instead, Kant suggests that it is our composure to nature and reason that determines our moral worth. But this seems merely to shift the old antagonism: at moments of moral consideration, it is our choice for reason or nature that determines our moral worth.

Clearly, Kant believes there to be something amiss with human nature. This problem will not go away by itself. Like an alcoholic in need of an intervention (Kant himself compares our immersion in evil with alcoholism at RGV 6:28n), human beings are in need of something from the outside to

release them from their immersion into evil. In a diary fragment written when reminiscing about the death of his wife, F. W. J. Schelling similarly expresses that human beings are in need of something external to release them from self-obsession: "In order to master one's passions, man often needs something external that shakes him up, keeps him busy, tenses him up."[57] Radical evil requires a release of self, something that we cannot accomplish for ourselves—despite what Kant's emphasis on autonomy would make us suspect. The same Schelling—when overtly engaging Kant's view of radical evil and conversion, to boot!—writes that "some aid man always needs" for moral reconversion.[58] I wonder whether the premises of Kant's practical philosophy do allow for such aid to come to be accepted.

If autonomy and the moral law are to stand any chance to redirect, release, or even redeem human nature, they are to be taken as in excess to human nature. In the hope for such a release through morality, Kant surely gives expression to optimism, at times perhaps even naively so. Nature is a mess that rationality can potentially set right. But we can only hope for rationality to set things right insofar as we make a clean break with nature. This would be the reason that Kantian pessimism—smoldering underneath the text—has been obscured in much of the literature: the rationally justified hope for a future in which humanity is set right shines so powerfully that one is blinded to the darkness it is supposed to cover up. We will give special attention to how rational religion plays a part in cultivating the hope for a better future. When Kant is a pessimist, he is thinking of the potential of human nature to become good by itself; if Kant is an optimist, he is considering the transformative potential of self-activating reason, necessarily assisted by tools that appeal to finite human beings.

The argument follows this trajectory. Kant sets a ground for morality in respect for the moral law, which he calls virtue, as the intention by which behavior becomes morally praiseworthy. This is what he has called, very confusingly, "autonomy" as the capacity to be self-legislative to the extent of being absolutely free from sensuous inclinations. But that autonomous legislation happens in accordance with a universalized sense of rationality, one that demands that we have the maxims we adopt be universally applicable. It is hard to recognize autonomy in such a thing as, quite clearly, the ground of morality cannot lie in human nature but in something that reformats human nature (chapter 2). After having established the ground of morality in duty toward the moral law, we will investigate how Kant believes that human beings can be motivated to take up this code of conduct: what interests human beings to be moral? His answer: the confrontation with the moral law gives rise to a feeling of respect, and human beings are motivated by this respect, certainly not by prudential considerations (chapter 3). Autonomy is then clearly not something that human beings naturally pursue, but something

in which we might become interested through (self-)exposure to the moral law. In the first part of *Religion*, Kant comes to a view of the necessary constitution of human nature as originally and potentially good, but radically corrupted through our own fault. As I will argue there, such an original predisposition to the good is not a sudden turn-around where Kant confesses to syrupy optimism about the fundamentals of human nature. Instead, the logical priority of a good predisposition fulfills two aims: first, it makes sure we are fully accountable for our depravity as we have decided to adopt evil by our own volition; second, it creates the hope that we might be able—through continuous progress and effort—to restore such original goodness. This does not change anything about Kant's depreciation of our natural capacity to progress toward goodness (chapter 4). Because of the limited capacity of self-activating reason to sway human beings toward virtue, there arises a need for the cultivation of this moral interest through practices that are, strictly speaking, not morally good but can be conducive to a good will. In this, we will focus on the pedagogic potential of a properly reformed moral faith that provides moral examples and a moral community (chapter 5). The adoption of such a religion is ambiguous: one can recognize the prudential benefit, even absolute necessity, of moral reinforcement that can be offered through sincere belief in the tenets and rituals of a moral faith. Indeed, honest belief in a religion can ideally strengthen human beings in their moral struggles, but not if the adoption of such a religion is based upon the calculation that a moral faith is beneficial for us. One cannot bootstrap one's way into believing a religion simply because one thinks it would be swell to be religious. In this, William James admonishment toward Pascal's Wager-argument applies to Kant without reserve:

> In Pascal's *Thoughts* there is a celebrated passage known in literature as Pascal's wager. In it he tries to force us into Christianity by reasoning as if our concern with truth resembled our concern with the stakes in a game of chance. [. . .]. We feel that a faith in masses and holy water adopted willfully after such a mechanical calculation would lack the inner soul of faith's reality.[59]

If Kant were alive now, I would recommend to him the reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, with a special note to focus on the mental breakdown of poor Ivan while struggling with his guilt, and his incapacity to have faith so as to find this guilt redeemed (chapter 6).

A final note before plunging into the precarious matter of an interpretation of Kant: this book does not claim to be the final, definite, and comprehensive account of Kant's moral and religious philosophy. There is always more to be said, more perspectives to be taken into account, and more scholarship to be engaged. The main goal is thus not to be the most detailed exegesis with

the most fine-tuned conceptual apparatus. There are enough Kant scholars who have developed such a thing, some deserving of the highest praise for clarifying and engaging the Königsberg philosopher with unrivalled precision and clarity. Other scholars rival Kant's own neurotic tendencies in devising a systematic reconstruction of Kant's text, a text that they at times revere as Scripture. I do not think that Kant would have approved of this, as he himself kept searching, recognized the infelicities of his past positions, and aimed to engage critically with his own views. Seldom do I see Kant referring to his previous work as if the matter was already settled there. When reflecting on Kant's potential views on current ethical debates David Cummiskey insightfully writes that **"**we should also be aware that Kant himself might have changed his thinking and developed it further if he were a living participant in our current debates. After all, great philosophers do not finish; they die."[60] Therefore, I prefer to perform an engagement with the text that might not amount to the most charitable reconstruction of it. I am sure there will be plenty of very pious Kantians who can point out a section somewhere in some essay, perhaps even a footnote or an almost illegible note scribbled on an unpublished page, where Kant declares that life is good. Triumphantly, they might then shout out: "See, not a pessimist!" I let them be.

NOTES

1. Kant is clear that he does not deny the possibility of divine revelation (e.g., WDO 8:142; RGV 6:169). But, Kant is equally clear that if such a thing as divine revelation was to occur, human beings would not be able to recognize it as such (e.g., SF 7:63). When it then comes to matters of personal orientation—whether practical or pragmatic—he suggests to follow autonomous reason rather than any alleged divine revelation.

2. Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

3. I take my argument to be consonant with Bernard Freydberg's recent study of how modern thought is dependent upon a "dark, Delphic region accessible by nonrational means alone," a region which Modern thought sought to suppress but "suppression, however, does not and cannot mean elimination, cancellation, and can never mean *Aufhebung*, Hegel's term that includes negating, overcoming and surpassing. The dark origin of modern philosophy roils everywhere beneath its rational surface, giving modern philosophy life even as its progeny seeks to deny this darkness" (Bernard Freydberg, *A Dark History of Modern Philosophy* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017], 1).

4. For discussion of this topic: William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995); William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell publishing, 2008).

5. Ludwig Borowski, Reinhold Jachmann, and Ehregott Wasianski, *Immanuel Kant. Sein Leben in Darstellungen von Zeitgenossen*. Edited by Felix Gross (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 29. Similar things have been observed by Jean-Louis Bruch, *La philosophie religieuse de Kant* (Aubier: Éditions Montaigne, 1968), 49.

6. For more detail on moral sentimentalism: William Frankena, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory." In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1955): 356–375; Dieter Henrich, "Kant und Hutcheson." *Kant-Studien* 49 (1957/58): 49–69; William Blackstone, *Francis Hutcheson and Contemporary Ethical Theory* (Athens: University of Georgia Monographs, 1965); Henning Jensen, *Motivation and the Moral Sense in Francis Hutcheson's Ethical Theory* (The Hague: International Archives of the History of Ideas, 1971).

7. Ironically, the critical Kant distanced himself from Wolffian perfectionism because perfection was overly based on content, not form. Such material principles could not secure the universal normativity of the moral law, which can only be set in a formal rational principle. In the *second Critique*, Kant enumerates Wolffian perfectionism among the internal objective *material* principles of morality (KpV 5:40).

8. I think a lot of the New Atheists' treatment of evil totally misunderstands the matter at hand. I have a more in-depth discussion of this elsewhere: Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Atheism, Radical Evil, and Kant." In: *Philosophy and Theology* 22 (2010): 155–176.

9. See also: Stewart Goetz, "The Argument from Evil." In: *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. Edited by William Lane Craig (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 449–497.

10. Andrew Flescher, *Moral Evil* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013). The reason these are all, in my view, a form of theodicy is because they all have a tendency to define the reality of evil in such a way that God is exempt of responsibility for it: Manicheism puts evil in an agent outside of God; Leibniz claims that evil is a failure of understanding; perspectivism claims that there is no such thing as evil, only perspectives; virtue ethics turns evil into the absence of goodness.

11. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man.* Epistle 1, X. Available online at: http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/essay-man-epistle-i

12. Cf. Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1–14.

13. Source: http://erickoch.ca/2011/03/15/lisbon-earthquake/

14. Hannah Arendt applauds Kant for coining the term "radical evil" as he "must have suspected the existence of this evil," yet she ultimately called his philosophical attempt to think this "evil" a failure as he "immediately rationalized it in the concept of a 'perverted ill will', that could be explained by comprehensible motives" (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [New York: Harcourt, 1973], 459). Kant's concept of "radical evil" is stretched between Lutheran pessimism and rationalist Enlightenment optimism and thus fails to appease either postmodern thinkers who emphasize the radical nature of evil or Enlightenment optimists who attempt to understand and incorporate evil within a larger rational scheme of goodness. For more extensive discussion: Dennis Vanden Auweele, "The Enduring Relevance of Kant's

Analysis of (Radical) Evil." In: *Bijdragen: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 73 (2012): 121–142.

15. Kant loved his parents and especially his mother dearly. They gave him the name "Emanuel" which means "God is with him," most likely because five of their nine children had died. Later on, he changed his name to Immanuel, which he considered to be a more faithful rendering of the original sentiment. Although Kant was rather proud of his name, his mother frequently nicknamed her son *Manelchen* (little man). He spoke in glowing terms of his parents: "My two parents (from the class of tradesmen) were perfectly honest, morally decent, and orderly. They did not leave me a fortune (but neither did they leave me any debts). Moreover, they gave me an education that could not have been better when considered from the moral point of view. Every time I think of this I am touched by feelings of the highest gratitude" and "I will never forget my mother, for she implanted and nurtured in me the first germ of goodness; she opened my heart to the impressions of nature; she awakened and furthered my concepts, and her doctrines have had a continual and beneficial influence in my life" (Quoted in Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 31). After his father's death, young Emanuel, only 22, wrote in the family Bible: "On the 24th of March my dear father was taken away by a happy death . . . May God, who did not grant him many joys in this life, permit him to share in the eternal joy" (*Ibid.*).

16. I stick with the term "rogation"—even though it is somewhat archaic—since this is the translation used in the Cambridge Edition of Kant's Works. A slightly more modern translation would be "a religion of currying favor" or "a religion of favor-seeking."

17. William J. Abraham, "Divine Agency and Divine Action in Immanuel Kant." In: *Kant and the Question of Theology*. Edited by Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs and James Joiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 142.

18. Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, likely influenced by Albert Ritschl, developed a thoroughly negative outlook on Pietism and its influence in Western intellectual history (Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought from Rousseau to Ritschl*. Translated by Brian Cozens (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 3–17; Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*. Translated by Carl Braaten (London: SCM, 1967), 9–24; Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichte der Pietismus* (Berlin: Verlag de Gruyter, 1966). Contrary to these, Ernest Stoeffler argues that Pietism thoroughly changed the Protestant outlook on worldly affairs, such as the calling of the pastor, the conviction that morals not theology should be the subject of sermons, and the Protestant missiology of John Wesley and others (Ernest Stoeffler, "Introduction." In: *Pietists. Selected Writings*. Edited by Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), ix–xiii).

19. *Ibid.*, ix.

20. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2.

21. Sören Kierkegaard, *Sören Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Volume 3*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978), 3318.

22. One could easily, and perhaps rightly, take issue with my choice to have Erasmus as to represent the Catholic outlook on salvation over and against Luther's views.

Erasmus refused to take sides with either the Reformation or the Catholic Church and incorporated a serious number of humanistic elements in his reflections on ethics and soteriology. Catholicism is, in itself, a fairly multifaceted phenomenon but from an early stage, there remained a consistent, albeit equivocal, emphasis on the necessary, though in itself insufficient, requirement of worldly/earthly labor and institutions for personal salvation. Accordingly, Rome should be placed between Pelagius and Luther in its view of good works as the path to grace. While the term "Catholic" refers only to "universal" in its etymology, its use has, since its inception (Ignatius of Antioch, in a letter written early in the second century, is supposedly the first to have used the term "Catholic" to refer to those Christians who had disavowed Jesus's materiality and suffering) emphasized the materiality and suffering of Christ over and against any univocal emphasis on His transcendence. So, just as Jesus is both human and divine, grace is also both a human labor and a divine gift. Erasmus defends this point of view over and against Luther's depreciation of all the immanent workings of autonomy by emphasizing grace as the sole operative element in salvation.

23. For the translation of Erasmus and Luther's correspondence, see *Erasmus—Luther. Discourse on Free Will*. Edited and Translated by Ernst Winter (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1972).

24. On this, see *ibid.*, xi; Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 75; Elizabeth Galbraith, *Kant and Theology: Was Kant a Closet Theologian?* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1996), 116; Henry Staten, "Radical Evil Revived: Hitler, Kant, Luther, Neo-Lacanians." In: *Modernity and the Problem of Evil.* Edited by Alan Schrift (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 17. Recently, there has been some interest in tracing the Pietist influence throughout Kant's philosophy: Stephen Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016); Jonathan Head, "Scripture and Moral Examples in Pietism and Kant's *Religion*." In: *Irish Theological Quarterly* forthcoming. For my own take on the influence of Pietism on Kant's postulation for the existence of God: "The Pietist Premise of Kant's Postulation of God." In: *Jahrbuch fur Religionsphilosophie* 12 (2013): 162–188.

25. *Erasmus—Luther*, 20.

26. On this, see Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus in 86 Volumes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–1993), Volume 66, 51–54.

27. *Erasmus—Luther*, 65.

28. Erasmus, *Collected Works*, Volume 66, 38.

29. *Erasmus—Luther*, 9.

30. Cf. Christopher Insole, *Kant and the Creation of Freedom. A Theological Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 192–202.

31. Erasmus, *Collected Works*, Volume 66, 24.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 30–33.

34. *Ibid.*, 30.

35. *Ibid.*, 36.

36. *Erasmus—Luther*, 78.

37. *Ibid.*, 86.

38. *Ibid.*, 105.

39. This is Luther's twenty-fourth thesis. He does not take such a harsh stance on all forms of rationality, however, as he sings the praises of rationality in the service of humanity. He praises scientific progress and especially the printing press, for example. However, he did believe that reason lacked all possibility to think or capture God, as she is the "whore" or "prostitute" of the devil. Erasmus believed that wisdom and "proper" philosophy had a significant part to play in a human being's salvation. This is not to say that he was not disgruntled with many a philosopher's perversion of the real truth; in his *Annotations to Romans*, he points out time and again that the Ancient Greek philosophers twisted the truth and should be set right by Revelation (Erasmus, *Collected Work*, Volume 56, 38–39, 46–47, 51–52). This does not mean, however, that reason, properly used, cannot lead to proper wisdom: all truth comes from Christ (unity of truth).

40. For a more elaborate treatment of these so-called noetic effects of sin see Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 111–127; Stephen Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of how Sin Affects our Thinking* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000).

41. *Erasmus—Luther*, 133.

42. Erasmus, *Collected Work,* Volume 66, 135–150.

43. Cf. A. G. Dickens and Whitney Jones, *Erasmus the Reformer* (London: Methuen, 1994), 115–193.

44. For a seminal account, see Johannes Wallman, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

45. cf. Martin Brecht, "Introduction." In: *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Edited by Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); Carter Lindberg, "Introduction." In: *The Pietist Theologians*. Edited byCarter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 1–21; Christopher Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 3–35.

46. For an overview of Spener's theology: K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Auckland: Covenent Press, 1986).

47. August Francke, "Autobiography." In: Erb, 1983, 100.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, 105.

50. August Frankce, "On Christian Perfection." In: Erb, 1983, 114.

51. Markus Matthias, "August Hermann Francke (1663–1727)." In: *The Pietist Theologians*. Edited by Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 100–115.

52. Robert Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth Century Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 140.

53. *Ibid.*, 146; Barnett, 2011, 19.

54. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. Edited by Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 179–184.

55. Vanden Auweele, 2017.

56. This is roughly along the lines of what Roger Scruton identifies as a useful pessimism that counters the dangers of false hope: *The Uses of Pessimism: And the Danger of False Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The central theme of this book is not some fundamental incapacity in human nature, but those boundaries and restraints that impede moral progress and the forming of meaningful communities.

57. "Um seiner Leidenschaften Meister zu werden, bedarf der Mensch oft etwas äußerliches, das ihn erschüttert, beschäftigt, spannt" (F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1809–1813. Philosophie der Freiheit und der Weltalter.* Uitgegeven door Lothar Knatz, Hans Jörg Sandkühler en Martin Schraven [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994], 45).

58. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*. Translated by James Gutmann (La Salle: Open Court, 1936), 67 [389].

59. William James, *The Will to Believe. And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 5.

60. David Cummiskey, *Kantian Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15.

Chapter 2

Grounding Morality in Duty and Autonomy

Autonomy is the final ground of Kant's moral philosophy, which might intuitively seem to be an optimistic moral ideal. Current day ethical theory is replete with appeals to autonomy (often with reference to Kant), where autonomous choice is a central component of the justification of decisions, particularly evident in discussions in bio-ethics (euthanasia, abortion, etc.). To us, an autonomous individual is an informed, self-conscious, self-critical individual who seeks to navigate his myriad of interests in such a way as to cultivate the wholeness of his or her person.[1] Kant's way of thinking about autonomy is quite different, however; while he does leave noteworthy aspects of autonomy shrouded in noumenal mystery, Kant is clear that autonomy is first and foremost the negative capacity (*Vermögen*) not to be immediately determined by sensuous interests. This means that we are free to weigh indifferently our various interests and can decide upon an interest that might be less powerful, such as skipping desert in order to lose a few pounds. But this negative concept of freedom immediately transitions into a positive concept, since Kant believes that freedom from immediate determination through sensuous interests expresses itself most potently in self-determination through rationality. For Kant, moral autonomy is not reducible to free, arbitrary choice, but it is the capacity to incorporate self-legislated, rational laws. In turn, this leads to a dual perspective on autonomy: from a negative angle, freedom implies that human agents have "absolute spontaneity," meaning that they are not determined save through free incorporation; from a positive angle, freedom implies that a human agent is subject to immutable, universal laws. Ironically, this rational law of autonomy will turn out to be of little interest to individual human beings, who instead prefer to squander their freedom of choice on lesser goods. In the term autonomy, Kant's focus is more on the "nomos" (law) than on the "autos" (self). The moral law is self-law,

but the self that legislates the moral law is distinct from the self that ought to incorporate that law.

This connects to Kant's emphasis on the universality of the moral law: while legislated autonomously, the moral law is germane to all rational agents. This is an aspect of Kant's ethics that will return in his discussion of the propensity to evil (*Hang zum Böse*): something dependent on responsible, particular choice is also universal to a group of beings. How can I autonomously legislate a moral law that is universally valid? Some authors would point rightly to the influence of Rousseau's claim that "the people subject to the laws should be their author,"[2] indicating that whatever faculty legislates the autonomous moral law must in some way differ from the faculty that adopts or incorporates that law. The legislating faculty is universal; the subjected faculty is particular. But this analogy with Rousseau is too easy: human beings themselves legislate the law that they have to incorporate in dutiful adherence to rationality. In other words, human beings are both the legislator and the unwilling subject of the moral law. As I will point out near the end of the current chapter, such autonomous moral duty "smells" of cruel subjection—to borrow Nietzsche's phrase[3]—rather than of free self-determination. Autonomy, in Kant's understanding, is lacking in appeal to the fleshed and finite rational agent, which makes the moral law, though self-legislated, in no way in line with the natural desires of the human being, and only very equivocally in line with some form of rational interest. Accordingly, Kant's moral law has an ambiguous relationship to the human agent: it must be born from the human will and must transcend it at the same time.

KANT'S THEORETICAL ACCOUNT OF AUTONOMY

The *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter, *first Critique*) is not usually read as explicitly dealing with—or even providing the basis for—ethical or political discussions, but rather as a fairly independent reflection on epistemology and metaphysics. Nevertheless, the *first Critique* already offers a number of vital insights relevant for ethical reflection and in many ways prepares the way for *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (hereafter, the *second Critique*).[4] Specifically, Kant argues here that autonomy—the ground of morality—is a problematic concept, that is, a concept not in opposition to the laws of nature even though it cannot be verified by empirical evidence. As such, there is a necessary distance between natural, empirical reality, and rational autonomy.

The general objective of the *first Critique* is first and foremost rationally to set up limits to rational speculation so as to make possible a priori claims about empirical reality, which is as Kant calls it an "auto-critique" of reason

(not a "hetero-critique" as for instance in Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Marx, and Freud). Kant limits the reach of speculative reason by pointing out how knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) requires empirical input which subsequently limits the reach of possible knowledge to what can be experienced. Nevertheless, experience alone is also insufficient; it is "blind" because in need of cognitive input: "Thoughts without content are empty; representations without concepts are blind" (Prol 4:48). The pure intuitions of time (B 46–53 / A 30–36) and space (B 37–45 / A 22–30), as well as certain concepts or categories of the understanding (*Verstandsbegriffen*), make up this cognitive input to unreflective experience (*Anschaaung*). Time and space particularly are, to Kant, neither self-subsisting absolute entities (Newton) or mere relative predicates (Leibniz), but pure intuitions of a transcendental subject. Kant will later identify this thesis as the core of Transcendental idealism, that is, that spatiotemporal predicates belong only to what is experienced and not to the thing-in-itself:

> We have sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic that everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself. This doctrine I call Transcendental Idealism. (B 518–519 / A 490–491)

To know something means that that sensory receptivity cooperates with pure intuition and that the understanding categorizes these observations under concepts. As a consequence, Kant reckons that it is of the utmost importance to subsume all representations under the appropriate categories of the understanding (otherwise they are "blind") as well as to make all ideas capable of being represented in time and space (otherwise they are "empty").

Kant's transcendental idealism is understood to warrant the possibility of positive science after David Hume's criticism of inductive reasoning, especially with regard to causality. According to Hume, causal inferences are based on custom and habit only, and therefore there is no ground for the reliability of natural science. By grounding causality in the concepts of the understanding, Kant manages to save natural science since its claims relate only to the world of appearances or representations, not to the world outside which must remain unknown. But just by limiting the scope of possible knowledge to what can be verified empirically, Kant refuses the possibility of a theoretical or speculative metaphysics that inquires into what reality is in itself, not as a representation.

This might appear strikingly negative and Kant is indeed highly pessimistic with regard to the potential of human reaching to pierce through

representations to the in itself of reality (something that post-Kantians such as Schopenhauer, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel will contest). However, in the preface to the second edition of the *first Critique*, Kant explains that this critical limitation of the range of reason serves a higher purpose, namely to "deny [*aufheben*] knowledge [*Wissen*] in order to make room for faith [*Glaube*]" (B XXX). Here, Kant clarifies that his purpose of limiting theoretical reason to one area of reality, namely the sensible, gives another sense of reason, that is, practical reason and rational faith, the room to deal with the non-sensible area of reality. As such, Kant is not entirely agnostic of reality in itself as he allows certain practical postulations (to be discussed below) to determine positively noumenal reality. The *first Critique* then only appears negative since it serves to restrict speculative reason, but ultimately is propaedeutic to a different approach to reality:

> Hence a critique that limits the speculative use of reason is, to be sure, to that extent *negative*, but because it simultaneously removes an obstacle that limits or even threatens to wipe out the practical use of reason, this critique is also in fact of positive and very important utility [*in der That von positivem und sehr wichtigem Nutzen*], as soon as we have convinced ourselves that there is an absolutely necessary practical use of pure reason (the moral use), in which reason unavoidably extends itself beyond the boundaries of sensibility. (B XXV)

By limiting empirical inquiry to one area of cognition, Kant bars it from having any input in practical matters. One consequence of this—in tune with what we will discuss as Kantian pessimism—is that empirical reality does not serve to constitute or validate anything on the level of practical philosophy. Karl Ameriks expresses this point eloquently by pointing out that "purity" is treated very differently by the first two *Critiques*:

> The general critical lesson seems to be that theoretical reason can and should "get dirty", that is, restrict its determinate a priori claims to the domain of our sensibility, whereas practical reason can and should "stay clean", that is, insist on a priori claims that are not limited to the domain of sensibility.[5]

It is then worth noting that Kant provides in the first *Critique* a purely speculative argument completely in line with the kind of pessimism that is central to his practical philosophy, that is, that nothing given in empirical reality has any moral relevance or resonance. While Kant thus emphasizes the absolute necessity of empirical mediation when it comes to empirical knowledge, moral philosophy is not served—but even inhibited—by such empirical insights and interests. This does not mean, however, that such "purity" implies there are no real consequences to moral agency. By emphasizing the

purity of practical reason, Kant stresses that the moral law's validation does not derive from empirical information. How the moral law is applied in the real world, will be a matter of discussion for chapter 5.

With this in mind, we can now focus on the chapter "The antinomy of reason" where Kant most elaborately deals with the topic of autonomy. In a letter written in 1798 to Christian Garve, Kant emphasizes the centrality of this antinomy to his critical project in words reminiscent of his remark in *Prolegomena* that David Hume had awoken him from his dogmatic slumber (Prol 4:260):

> It was not the research into the existence of God, nor on the immortality of the soul etc. that was my point of departure, but rather the antinomy of pure reason: the world has a beginning; it has no beginning etc. up until the fourth: there is freedom, over and against: there is no freedom, everything is determined by natural necessity. It was this that first awoke me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason, so as to resolve the scandal of the apparent contradiction of reason with itself. (12:257)

Moreover, if this antinomy were to remain unresolved, it would, says Kant, result in nothing less than the "euthanasia of pure reason" (B 434 / A 407).[6] The "*Antinomy of Pure Reason*" is part of the "*Transcendental Dialectic*" where Kant exposes those dialectical illusions that human beings are prone to fall into because of "the unnoticed influence of sensibility on understanding" (B 350 / A 294). The subjects of these illusions are the "I," the "world," and "God." With regard to "world," Kant formulates these illusions in terms of an antinomy,[7] that is, a conflict of reason derived from the viability of two propositions that require, for their own validity, that the other proposition be logically rejected.[8] To resolve this problem, Kant will either show how both positions are wrong (mathematical antinomy) or that both positions are correct if applied to their proper domain (dynamical antinomy). The notion of an antinomy is germane to all three *Critiques* as well as to *Religion*, *Metaphysics of Morals*, and *Prolegomena.*[9] Despite obvious differences, there are certain important similarities between these antinomies; one similarity, as Victoria Wike shows, is how they all deal with a transcendental illusion originating in a dialectic inference from subjective necessity to objective necessity:

> All the antinomies in the three Critiques are characterized by dialectical illusion. This means that they involve confusion between what is subjective and what is objective (. . .) Antinomy, as Kant uses it, involves dialectical illusion and the consequent dichotomies between subjective and objective, and between the sensible realm and the supersensible realm.[10]

The antinomy in the *first Critique* then confuses the subjective use of totality with its objective use with regard to four issues: whether the world has a beginning or is infinite; whether the world does or does not consist of singular parts; whether there is a causality from freedom or not; and whether there exists a being that is necessarily unrelated to this world or not. What exactly happens is that reason (*Vernunft*) generates certain concepts of "world" (*Weltbegriffe*), that is, ways to think the unconditioned (*Unbedingte*) from the conditioned (*Bedingte*). Reason makes a natural and dialectical inference from something conditioned toward something unconditioned: from certain subjective states to an "I," from certain objective states to a "world," and from certain absolute states to a "God." This inference is governed by the following principle "If the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given, through which alone the conditioned is possible" (B 436 / A 409). Reason makes a regressive inference from the given conditioned toward the unconditioned, which is assumed to be given in the conditioned.[11] These regressive syntheses can be applied to the concepts of time, space, causality, and necessity. The different positions on either side of the conflict are indebted to two possible ways of understanding the "unconditioned," that is, either as "subsisting merely in the whole series of conditions" or as "a part of the series, to which the remaining members are subordinated but that itself is under no condition" (B 445 / A 417). In the first case, the unconditioned is the sum total of all conditions (Spinoza, Leibniz) and in the second case, the unconditioned is the limit of conditions (Clarke, Descartes). More precisely, time, space, causality, and necessity become, in the second case, the beginning (time), spatial boundary (space), self-activating *causa sui* (causality), and absolute necessity (necessity), respectively.

With regard to theoretical speculation on autonomy, reason finds itself in the following antinomy for which each side is supported by an a contrario argument. On the one hand, the thesis states that causality of freedom next to a causality of nature is necessary since otherwise we would fall into an infinite regress with regard to the relative causality of an occurrence (B 472–478 / A 444–450). Natural causality requires "that nothing takes place without a cause sufficiently determined a priori" (B 474 / A 446). Since everything has to be sufficiently determined, there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. While this does not directly argue for a "causality from freedom" (since it only negatively settles that a never-ending natural causality alone is insufficient), Kant concludes that there ought to be a different form of causality than mere empirical determination. On the other hand, the antithesis asserts that there is no such thing as a causality in accordance with freedom (B 473–479 / A 445–451). If there were, the unity of experience would be jeopardized since we would have to assume a cause that is itself uncaused. According

to the antithesis, transcendental freedom opposes the laws of experience and can therefore "not be found in reality and is only an empty thought entity [*ein leeres Gedankending*]" (B 475 / A 447). Henry Allison rightly notes that the key to the resolution of the conflict lies in the different argumentative structure of these two a contrario arguments: while asserting that there is no causality from freedom appears, from the point of view of the thesis, self-contradictory, the assertion that there is causality from freedom, from the point of view of the antithesis, merely contradicts the laws of experience, not the laws of thought.[12] Kant's subsequent solution could then be taken as a testament of his allegiance to rationality—although more modest than in Leibniz[13]—over experience because of his distrust of experience.

Kant resolves these conflicts by showing how world concepts have transcendental, and nonempirical, reality—or better, *ideality*. Since he has shown that spatial-temporal predicates are only empirically valid (and do not belong to the in-itself), the two mathematical conflicts become a nonissue since these apply spatiotemporal predicates to the noumenal. The two dynamical conflicts require a different solution, however. Focusing now on the third conflict on the nature of autonomy, Kant tackles this by first drawing two cautionary notes. First, one need only grasp the rational necessity of transcendental freedom and not exhaustively comprehend its inner workings (B 476–478 / A 448–450), an insight that will become vital and central in the *Groundwork*. Second and more importantly here, one ought to locate freedom outside the phenomenal realm, not in it (B 477–479 / A 449–551). Accordingly, transcendental freedom necessarily becomes an unintelligible, noumenal aspect with a transcendental rather than an empirical reality. Noumenal and empirical causalities have a different intellectual domain, much like empirical and moral reason. As such, Kant can argue that objects have an empirical (natural) and an intelligible (rational) causality. The latter is not found in empirical reality, but is a necessary rational precondition for empirical causality. By assigning different forms of causalities to different domains of reality, Kant allows for a sense of autonomy that does not operate in conflict with determinism. Accordingly, Kant believes that both determinism and autonomy are true from different perspectives—which is what Allen Wood calls the "compatibilism of compatibilism and incompatibilism."[14] As such, reality and nature itself "[do] not conflict with causality through freedom" (B 586 / A 558). However, this causality through freedom can, by definition, not be ascertained in natural, empirical reality. Accordingly, autonomy is a necessary rational idea so as to architectonically render empirical reality comprehensible.

Kant's discussion of autonomy in the *first Critique* is a first step in understanding the role autonomy plays in practical philosophy, which in turns provides the grounds for understanding and engaging Kantian pessimism. In his

theoretical philosophy, Kant makes it clear that autonomy is not in conflict with determinism or the unity of reason, but in order to do so he must make autonomy into the other to nature. If autonomy is and remains the other to nature, and autonomy is the moral ideal, then this establishes that moral goodness remains at a distance from natural being. Nature can never become good, even though Kant nuances this view when engaging historical faith as the vehicle for the progressing development of goodness in nature. Before we can attend to that, we have to come to more clarity as to what role of relevance autonomy plays in Kant's foundational works of ethics of the 1780s.

UNIVERSAL DUTY

This section deals specifically with Kant's ground of morality and the way in which that ground is constructed in response to Kantian pessimism, that is, the incapacity of natural processes to navigate toward goodness.[15] What renders Kant's sense of pessimism unique in the history of philosophy is that it becomes a major and constitutive building block of his philosophy. In other words, for Kant human limitations and ill adjustments to moral progress are not something that can be overcome, but something with which we have to learn how to live. Kristi Sweet expresses a similar view:

> Kant's starting point is not that we are fallen from some purer state, but rather, his starting point is our finitude itself and nature's mediating role in practical life; he does not begin with any infinite or transcendent aspect of human existence, but rather begins with that which imposes a limit, and therefore also a horizon, upon us.[16]

Sweet's otherwise gripping analysis of Kant's account of practical life does not fully consider what exactly these limitations entail and how Kant would model his practical and religious philosophy in response to these limitations—this is what this manuscript attempts to accomplish. With this in mind, let us explore Kant's deduction of the ground of morality.[17]

In the *first Critique*, Kant has cleared the way to think a theoretically possible but problematic concept of autonomy, which means that autonomy does not conflict with the laws of nature but cannot be verified either by empirical processes. Autonomy is not theoretically but, at best, practically real: an ideal of reason that is grounded upon the apodictic normativity of the moral law. The practical reality of autonomy is supported by the confrontation not with an empirical but with a rational fact (*Faktum der Vernunft*), namely universal moral duty. Some readers of his ethics might think that Kant simply assumes autonomy as the highest moral good, but his argument throughout

Groundwork and *second Critique* is more complex. Especially through *Groundwork*, Kant explores what is the content of the highest good, how it is valid for rational agents, and whether or not it ever is operative.

Kant proceeds in *Groundwork* by following an idea that originates likely in Mendelssohn's philosophy of common sense (*gesunder Menschenverstand*), that is, a "moral compass" or "common sense" (GMS 4:404). This moral compass suggests that the unconditional good of morality is the good will: a good will sanctifies any action.[18] *Groundwork* I opens with the well-known statement that "it is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation [*ohne Einschränkung*] except a good will" (GMS 4:393). This one sentence and the pages that follow have engendered so much philosophical and exegetical debate that Allen Wood has with good cause called these "some of the most discussed pages in the history of ethics."[19] Not until *Groundwork* III does Kant connect this good will to autonomy where it becomes apparent that a good will is a will that acts upon self-legislated moral principles simply out of respect for the duty to do so. In the final analysis then, a good will is *free from* determination by external influence and at the same time *free to* determine itself through rational self-legislation alone.[20]

The good or free will is the basis of Kantian morality, a will that is autonomous is good and a will that is not autonomous is evil. As such, Kantian morality would simply have to ascertain whether or not someone acts upon the intention to be good/autonomous, which would make that intention moral. There is a difficulty, however, which bears mentioning at this point: motivational agnosticism. One of the nonnegotiable premises of Kant's moral psychology is that human beings have a lack of introspective insight into the real motivators of their behavior.[21] Joel Madore notes two pressing difficulties with regard in Kant's denial of introspection: we have become unable to verify and authenticate any moral transformation or regeneration and our moral diagnoses are very often flawed.[22] More importantly however, we are simply incapable of verifying whether or not autonomy is ever the operative motive of our actions. Kant's hesitations with regard to introspection might have been a reaction to certain practices in his childhood religion (Lutheran Pietism), where in the Collegium Kant was supposed to engage in self-screening. This means that students were to scan their soul so as to find out whether or not they were in fact pious. Kant was particularly perturbed about the custom that ministers would judge whether a student had been truthful in his or her self-screening, as if the minister would know the depths of the heart of the student more intimately than the student. In denying the clarity of introspection, Kant could be read as criticizing his childhood moral educators in their prideful capacity to detect true piety and humility. In fact, Kant frequently points out that practices of self-screening and other mandatory

religious rites more often lead to self-depreciating groveling before God (or can even be forms of self-aggrandizement) rather than to any moral religiosity (e.g., RGV 6:172; 6:184n).

This makes it clear that human beings are incapable of verifying whether respect for duty is ever the determining motive of their behavior. This will prove to be an obstacle in Kant's deduction of the highest good. Let us now attend to Kant's deduction of the ground of morality, namely, moral duty and the good will. By pinpointing the moral incentive in the good will, Kant excludes other potential highest goods such as happiness, God, or material talents (e.g., 4:393–394). First, Kant claims that happiness is only a good if it is deserved—possibly a slightly snide remark at the address of utilitarianists such as Jeremy Bentham who take happiness to be in itself good. Moreover, even deserved happiness is, in Kant's view, not an absolute good since it cannot be invariably pursued: one cannot claim to be virtuous because one desires happiness, one is virtuous because one respects the moral law. Therefore, any happiness that might follow from respecting the moral law, while deserved, is not good in itself but can at best be conducive to strengthening moral resolve (cf. MS 6:391). Second, Kant excludes talents, temperament, or good fortune from being absolutely good because these are similarly valuable in a moral sense only insofar as they are brought under a moral condition. Only a good will enables skillful actions to be morally praiseworthy: "Without the basic principles of a good will they can become extremely evil, and the coolness of a scoundrel makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes than we would have taken him to be without it" (GMS 4:394). The moral worth of an action is neither decreased when ineffective nor increased when more effective. Last, God is not the highest good since his goodness similarly depends on his good will. If human beings worship God, this would occur on the basis of God's goodness, and his capacity to serve as a means toward moral improvement. Kant sees no reason to worship a nonmoral or nonrational God (we return to this in Kant's philosophy of religion).

Kant's argument for the good will to be the highest good is developed in five consecutive steps throughout *Groundwork* I, each of which can be understood as a reaction to the Kantian pessimism that we are trying to uncover. Kant's first step is to suggest that human beings have a worthier and loftier purpose in life than the mere pursuit of happiness. Rather strongly, Kant claims that humanity's primary interest is not the achievement of happiness or contentment, but the actualization of some otherworldly purpose. This is a central aspect of Kant's deduction of morality, and quite contestable as well: modern Europe was slowly coming to terms with the idea that human beings are motivated solely out of self-interest and the pursuit of happiness. Especially in English philosophy did this become a noncontroversial premise,

which Jeremy Bentham put provocatively: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*."[23] Nietzsche responds with his customary snide and wit: "If you have your own 'why?' in life, you can get along with almost any 'how?'. People don't strive for happiness, only the English do."[24] For Nietzsche and Kant, reducing the interests of human beings to merely the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain is terribly simplistic: human beings gladly suffer profoundly for those things they take to be of absolute importance.

For Kant, in particular, human beings cannot be merely destined to seek out happiness and contentment. This assumption is explained best by pointing out how Kant preliminarily deprives natural being and especially human nature of any pertinent moral guidance, which accounts for how happiness (as a signpost to this-worldly success) cannot function as a proper guide to a meaningful life. At certain points (though definitely not always), Kant appears to be hinting that one ought to be suspicious of one's inclinations and so also of the desire for happiness (I will return to this point). Humanity's highest goal is then nonutilitarian and non-hedonist, a goal which, according to Kant, is exemplified rather convincingly by the human being's possession of understanding and reason: if humans existed solely to fulfill their sensuous caprices, nature would have equipped them with a far more efficient tool, such as instinct. In fact, Kant believes that practical reason and technical understanding often hinder the pursuit and attainment of happiness, and these then indicate that a human agent has another, loftier purpose in life beyond self-indulgence (GMS 4:395). Nature has implanted in mankind a means by which they can oppose their natural inclinations; in other words, nature has given mankind a reason to be suspicious of nature.

A different reason for happiness not being humanity's chief end is that reason has the impressive power to become "practical," that is, it can direct human actions in ways that do not necessarily refer to happiness and pleasure, even ways that might oppose happiness and self-love: "And, in fact, we find that the more a cultivated reason [*eine cultivirte Vernunft*] occupies itself with the enjoyment of life and with happiness, so much the further does one get away from true satisfaction" (GMS 4:395).[25] This argument has been called out widely for being problematic for two reasons. First, the argument seems to depend upon an undefended and unspoken premise, namely a teleological conception of nature where human beings are presumed to be equipped with the most efficient means for the accomplishment of their nature. Accordingly, the argument presupposes that nature is benevolent in offering human agents all the means, and the most efficient ones, they need to survive and accomplish their goals. This is certainly not something that can be taken for granted anymore—and seems awkward even in Kant's day, for instance given the high infant mortality rate (five of Kant's siblings died very early). In *Religion*,

Kant explicitly gives voice to this assumption—here assuming the soundness of the human being in body and soul:

> Since we must assume that the human being is sound of body by nature (i.e., in the way he is usually born), there is no cause not to assume that he is equally sound and good of soul by nature as well. Nature itself would then be promoting the cultivation in us of this ethical predisposition towards goodness. (RGV 20)

Kant's assumption here only relates to the soundness of humanity *in principle* but not *in act*. This means that human beings are principally well-disposed and sound, the execution of their abilities is always morally problematic.

A second reason why Kant's teleological argument is problematic is the implication of true satisfaction; this would imply, namely, that reason might not be so opposed to a different kind of happiness. In what is to come, Kant will explicitly define this highest destiny in terms of a lack of sensuous interest. Therefore, any argument promising higher satisfaction, whatever this might entail, whenever the moral law is pursued seems to be contradicting the assertion that morality has in principle no intrinsic connection to happiness. In defense of Kant, one could argue that he never explicitly states that reason guides humanity to satisfaction. His claim is more moderate, namely that humanity is *removed from true satisfaction* insofar as it pursues sensuous desires. Accordingly, Kant could be read as suggesting that it is simply not the goal of reason to involve itself in any way with sensuous desire and if this desire were to become reason's end, misery would only be increased. The sheer possession of reason, however, points the rational agent toward a more highly estimable purpose than the pursuit of happiness:

> [The worth of reason] has as its covert basis the idea of another and far worthier purpose of one's existence, to which therefore, and not to happiness, reason is properly destined, and to which, as supreme condition, the private purpose [*oberster Bedingung die Privatabsicht*] of the human being must for the most part defer. (GMS 4:396)

What bears repeating is that Kantian pessimism does not relate to the recognition of a higher, uplifting purpose in human nature. Kant is pessimistic only about humanity's natural capacities to be responsive toward this uplifting potential. As such, Kant is mediating between the rational possibility of a higher purpose but the incapacity of nature to support such elevation.

The second step in Kant's argumentation serves to understand this worthier purpose in more detail by linking it to moral duty. Human beings are supposed to pursue the highest good: they ought to be moral beings. This means that one cannot plead indifference to the higher purpose in life to which all

human beings ought to direct their attention. So Kant suggests that the highest purpose is not to be attained through happiness and natural efforts, but that every rational agent has the moral duty not to pursue happiness as if it were their only goal in life. Accordingly, Kant is not just pessimistic about the potential goodness of moral inclinations, he is even somewhat hostile toward agents who opt to remain in a state where happiness is the highest good. This moral duty to aspire to a higher purpose, so says Kant, requires not "so much to be taught as only to be clarified" (GMS 4:397). Accordingly, rational agents are perfectly aware that they are normatively bound to aspire to the good will. This has repercussions for thinking about immoral behavior, which can only be spelled out comprehensively below, namely, that if everyone is perfectly aware of their moral duties, human beings cannot eliminate the call of morality from their moral conscience: even the most depraved cannot "help coming to himself or waking up from time to time; and when he does, he hears at once its fearful voice. He can at most, in extreme depravity, bring himself to heed it no longer, but he still cannot help hearing it" (MS 6:438). Such conscience is not acquired, but original: "Every human being, as a moral being, has a conscience within him originally" (MS: AA 6.400).

Now, this notion of a moral duty might strike the reader as odd: if by virtue of its powers of reason, humanity has a higher destiny above happiness which is in line with its normatively grounded moral end, then why should this higher destiny be a duty? Why should human beings not just go on and fulfill their destiny naturally? What Kant makes abundantly clear is that human agents are naturally rather poorly inclined to pursue their proper moral end, even to such an extent that human beings are disinclined to bring their actions into accord with what reason requires (if anything is ever pessimistic, it is this). For this reason, it will become paramount for Kant to somehow justify that, on the one hand, morality is the highest good for human beings and, on the other, that humans have a rational interest in the moral law. This interest cannot be derived from natural inclinations since Kant has deprived these of moral and soteriological promise, as he explains in his *Lectures on Ethics*:

> The principle of morality is not pathological, it would be so if it were derived from subjective grounds, from our inclinations and feelings. Morality has no pathological principle, for it contains objective laws of what we ought to do, and not of what we want to do. It is not a species of inclination, but a caution against all inclination. (AA 27:275)

Since Kant opposes aligning morality with natural inclinations, he warns against putting what is morally good on a continuum with natural desires. Morality in fact supersedes nature and redirects the inclinations in such a way that reason ought to be understood as a "caution against all inclination." This

brings Kant's pessimism to its kernel: the natural inclinations of any human being do not lead to moral fulfillment and the more agents become involved in pursuing these "baser" inclinations, the more they are removed from "true satisfaction." Morality is a rational duty, not a natural desire.

In order to clarify further his notion of moral duty, Kant draws a sharp distinction between acting dutifully (*pflichtmäßig*) and acting because of duty (*aus Pflicht*). A dutiful action is outwardly in accordance with duty, such as a person who speaks the truth; an action because of duty is motivated solely because of duty (whether the intention is successful is moot). If this action is merely dutiful, it is motivated as to appear trustworthy. Merely dutiful behavior is not morally good since it is not in consequence of a good will that acts solely out of respect for moral duty. Only those actions that are pursued solely because of duty are moral actions and all other agency is at best amoral, at worst immoral. Some of this might appear intuitively problematic: would someone who acts in accordance with duty but not because of duty really be immoral? Is respect for duty the only motivator which can bestow moral value upon a maxim? This would install a very strong sense of rigorist dualism in Kant's ethics. Allen Wood warns that such a rigorist reading of these paragraphs in *Groundwork* is not what Kant intended. In his view, Kant's moral law holds no such intricate connection to moral duties, citing Kant's statement that "the concept of duty [. . .] contains that of a good will though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances" (GMS 4:397). Accordingly, the good will is necessarily more than just acting because of duty. Wood provides two examples: on the one hand, the holy will does not act out of duty but is still good and, on the other hand, certain actions are morally irrelevant.[26] While I would concede the latter point (even though I think Kant inserted this only in the *Metaphysics of Morals*[27]), I would emphasize that the holy will is not a virtuous will, strictly speaking. Kant namely describes morality in terms of a military struggle where opposition is required, which is lacking in a holy will:

> The very concept of duty is already the concept of a necessitation (constraint) of free choice through the law. [. . .] Such constraint, therefore, does not apply to rational beings as such (there could also be holy ones) but rather to human beings, rational natural beings, who are unholy enough that pleasure can induce them to break the moral law, even though they recognize its authority; and even when they do obey the law, they do it reluctantly (in the face of opposition from their inclinations), and it is in this that such constraint properly consists. (MS 6:379)

Therefore, the moral good for human beings necessarily implies an opponent or a struggle, and since the holy will lacks such strife, it is strictly speaking

not a morally virtuous will.[28] In the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, Kant puts is plainly that "thus the human being can *never* be *holy, but of course* he can be *virtuous*. For virtue consists precisely in *self-overcoming*" (28:1075). Therefore, there is a rigorist bifurcation in Kant's moral philosophy between moral agency that acts in accordance with duty and immoral agency that acts counter to duty. Whenever duty does not apply, there is obviously no morality involved.

When Kant discusses the morality of actions, his foremost focus is on the intention motivating the action, not the action itself or its consequences. To clarify, a brief example: Peter and Paul visit their sick friend Jack in the hospital. Peter is motivated by respect for his rational duty to do so and Paul is motivated by his friendship and sympathy for Jack. While the outward agency of Peter and Paul is the same, Kant seems to argue that Peter is morally good and Paul is not morally praiseworthy (which might not imply that Paul is evil), and in fact enumerates a number of examples supporting this point: those people who are naturally inclined to spread happiness while taking pleasure in the joy they bring to others are not morally good persons, because their beneficence is only in accordance with duty and not because of duty; a bon vivant is hardly a good person, but a miser who does not commit suicide because of respect for the moral law is a good person; a shop keeper who does not cheat his customer for the sake of his good name is not a good person. Why can emotions and sentiments that lead to similar good legal consequences not be morally praiseworthy as well? This can be explained by one of the central and nonnegotiable concerns of Kant's moral theory, namely the universality of morality, that is, all rational agents are determined *by the same principles to submit to the same duties*. Pathological sensuous desires and emotions lack such universality since these are always subjectively determined by contingent and inessential factors, and are specific to certain agents. Morality is to the contrary universal and can therefore only be motivated by a motive that has a claim to universality, namely objective rationality.

This does not imply that Kant does away with any form of feeling or sentiment in his moral theory. Something to which we will return more extensively below must already be mentioned as this point, namely moral sentimentalism. Despite the fact that Kant expressed a certain level of approval of moral sense-theory (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson) in some of his earlier essays (*Observations* and the *Prize-Essay*), he is highly skeptical about a universal, natural and antecedent feeling that would attune humanity to morality.[29] Sensuous motivation can never warrant the necessary universality for moral agency. Nevertheless, Kant will introduce a moral feeling as a necessary component of his theory of moral motivation. Moral feeling, accordingly, does only play a role in Kant's theory of moral motivation, and not in the establishment of the ground of morality.

Another issue with Kant's distinction between dutiful and out of duty is the following: sensuous inclinations can supervene upon a moral action without playing any significant part in motivating that action (this is usually called motivational overdetermination[30]). To illustrate: someone is requested to reveal the source of a bright insight he or she has just finished explaining. Since he or she is a moral person and holds to the moral value of truthfulness, he or she truthfully states that the insight is his or her own (motivated solely by the duty to speak truthfully). In addition to his or her moral duty, however, the person in question has a similarly strong inclination to boast about his or her accomplishments. However, the action's morality is determined by the prevailing motive in speaking the truth, not by the sensuous pleasure possibly generated. When Kant then remains motivationally agnostic in that we have no substantial insight into our motivations and can therefore never know whether we are moral or not, we are unable to discern whether we have acted out of respect for the moral or out of inclination. In Kantian spirit, it would then be safer not to have any sensuous inclinations toward moral agency as they might interfere with pure moral motivation. For Kant, morality is only concerned with universal, a priori principles that command without simultaneous sensuous inclinations and moreover over and against competing sensuous inclinations. Morality for Kant always retains a sense of achieving victory over a sensuous inclination that might lead one astray.

The third step in Kant's argument for the good will as the higher destiny of human being introduces what he calls the second proposition with regard to duty (the first proposition is never mentioned, but one assumes it to be the distinction between "because of duty" and "in accordance with duty"), namely the formal nature of moral duty. Morality is not made up of a variety of different material duties, but of one formal duty. The moral value of an action is then established not by virtue of the goal or the content of the action, but solely on the basis of the formal principle that is employed to necessitate that action. Kant calls such principles maxims, which are practical propositions that express volitional and subjective attitude toward something that the agent might be interested in. Kant defines a maxim as "the subjective principle of volition; the objective principle [. . .] is the practical law" (GMS 4:400). The maxim is the subjective side of the principle of volition; it stands over and against a "practical law," since such a law is objectively valid for every rational being. A maxim then is not a once-off intention of the human agent and neither is it a universally valid practical or prudential law. A maxim is a rule for a course of action that a human agent takes as a principle of his or her will. For instance, a once-off moral intention would be: "I will not lie at this time because of respect for the moral law"; the related practical law is: "you shall not lie"; the moral maxim would finally be: "I will never lie because of respect for the moral law." Accordingly, if human agents model their maxims

in accordance with practical laws because of respect for the moral law, those agents are morally good.

This formal nature of duty similarly is to be seen as deriving from Kant's pessimism since material duties are too narrowly connected to certain specific patterns of action. If certain patterns of actions were considered to be good in themselves, they would in themselves constitute a this-worldly good. In contrast, Kant emphasizes that only through a certain rational input that (re)formats these maxims do these actions accrue moral worth. In this way, the necessary distance between natural agency and moral good remains.

The fourth step in Kant's argument introduces the third proposition with regard to duty: "Duty is the necessity of an action from respect of the law" (GMS 4:400). In other words, the motive for acting out of duty is respect (*Achtung*) for the moral law. Kant elaborates more extensively on this subject in the *second Critique*, largely because it belongs to the motivation not the ground of morality. In the *second Critique*, Kant argues that beholding the moral law has a twofold effect on a human being, the tempering of self-conceit and the awakening of respect: "If something represented as a determining ground of our will humiliates us in our self-consciousness, it awakens respect for itself insofar as it is positive and a determining ground" (KV 5:74). What renders this ambiguous is that throughout the *Groundwork*, Kant will describe the practical law as lacking in any form of incentive (see GMS 4:425: *welches schlechterdings und ohne alle Triebfedern für sich gebietet*). So while Kant establishes that there is no incentive to morality in *Groundwork*, he holds *Achtung* to be the ground of the observance of morality. Here, Kant appears to be smuggling a material principle into his transcendental deduction of the moral law that threatens to undo the universal normativity of that law. In the *second Critique*, Kant will clarify his position, the ambiguity of which, in my view, can largely be attributed to a slightly careless use of terminology. In *Groundwork*, Kant states that the categorical imperative commands "without incentive" (*ohne Triebfeder*), while what he should have said was "without sensuous motive" (*ohne Neigung*). The difference between *Groundwork* and the *second Critique* is more a matter of terminology than an actual change in Kant's position—something that he hints at in a footnote in *Groundwork* (GMS 4:414n).[31] Accordingly, the *second Critique* will clarify that morality in fact has an incentive, namely respect for the moral law; this incentive, however, is not sensuous, but practical.

The final step in the deduction of the highest principle of morality is by far the most controversial. Prior to this last step, Kant stated that morality is a formal duty placed upon maxims, namely that human agents have to format their maxims in accordance with the moral law solely because of respect for the moral law. Now, what exactly is this formal duty that rational agents have to exact upon their maxims? To Kant, this can only be "the conformity

of actions as such with universal law" which means "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law" (GMS 4:402). Intuitively, this means that one acts morally if one could affirm that one's agency could logically and volitionally be extended to all other agents.[32] There does seem to be something deeply problematic about this aspect of this deduction. This problem is usually called "the gap in the deduction of the highest principle of morality."[33] Basically, the problem can be put in the form of a question: Why is the formal duty to have one's actions be universally applicable considered to be the only formal principle that accords to the aforementioned requirements? At this point, there seems to be absolutely no reason why any other formal demand that could be exacted upon maxims should be excluded: no valid reason has been given to move from duty as respect for the law to providing any positive content to that law as the universalizability of one's maxim. Moreover, even the most sinister counterpart of Kant's categorical imperative, Marquis de Sade's perversion of the categorical imperative, seems to meet the set demands. Sade claimed that it is every human being's highest duty to follow his or her whims, even the most idiosyncratic and harmful, to their utmost limit, and thereby ruthlessly reduce all fellow humans to instruments of his or her pleasure.[34] At this point of the argument, there is no valid reason to claim that this potential formulation of the categorical imperative does not meet the set standards.[35] In my view, the gap in the deduction can be filled by the second formulation of the categorical imperative. I will return extensively to this issue below as it will provide a vital reading guide to Kant's pessimism.

In conclusion, the ground of morality is a universal duty to format one's maxims in such a way that they are universally applicable, with the sole motivation being respect for the duty to do so. Most (especially early) readers of Kant's moral philosophy have a noteworthy tendency to identify Kant's ethics exhaustively with this formal, first formulation of the categorical imperative. Even Kant's contemporaries have, for example Hegel, had a tendency to overlook or downplay the other two formulations of the categorical imperative. This could largely explain Hegel's objection to Kant's morality as "an empty formalism."[36] In current scholarship, Kant's ethical philosophy is increasingly being interpreted as focusing more on the second and third formulations of the categorical imperative. Two remarks before continuing.

First, at the outset of *Groundwork* I, Kant separates in principle the good will from the pursuit of sensuous pleasure: morality and pleasure have nothing to do with one another. However, throughout *Groundwork* II and III, Kant mitigates this point of view and points to a more dynamic relationship between morality and happiness—a relationship that is more fully explored in the *second Critique*. This, however, does not belong to the "ground," but the "motivation" for morality, to be discussed at more length later (see chapter 3).

Nevertheless, Kant states at the beginning of *Groundwork* I that a "good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy" (GMS 4:393). Somehow, happiness that emanates from sensuous origins is undeserved; to be worthy of happiness, one is in need of a good will. As long as happiness comes naturally, it is worthless; but, when this happiness is somehow the result of moral agency, it can assume moral significance.

Second, at the end of *Groundwork* I, Kant states that he has gone as far as common sense morality can take him. If, however, Kant's moral philosophy is in tune with common sense, why then is it necessary to provide a rational deduction of the ground of morality? Moreover, why would there need to be ethics at all if everyone is endowed with such a fine moral compass? Interestingly, Kant finds that "the human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight [*ein mächtiges Gegengewicht*] to all the commandments of duty, which reason represents to him as so deserving of the highest respect—the counterweight of his needs and inclinations" (GMS 4:405). Because of this counterweight there arises a "natural dialectics, that is, a propensity to rationalize [*vernünfteln*] against those strict laws (. . .) to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations" (*Ibid.*). Pure practical philosophy does not become necessary because of any deficiency in the deduction of the supreme principle of morality, but practical philosophy is absolutely essential because of a natural tendency in man's nature to disregard the harsh call of duty. This could already be read as a preamble to an important theme in *Religion*, which Kant will similarly describe, namely *Hang zum Böse*. Accordingly, the anthropological insights that Kant espouses in his 1790s reflections are already implicitly and pertinently at work in his 1780s ethical reflections.

PRACTICAL AUTONOMY

Moral agency is motivated because of respect for moral duty alone, which means that we act out of respect for the law that requires us to format our maxims in accordance with practical laws. Before addressing in some more detail the content of the moral law, let us focus on what such practical laws are and how they relate to autonomy. Practical autonomy follows moral laws, which are a priori, not abstracted from empirical data but pure concepts, and serve as principles of morality because they have universal, practical weight (e.g., GMS 4:411). Kant's emphasis on the claim that practical laws can in no way be deduced, abstracted, verified, or falsified by whatever set of empirical data is telling, especially given that he becomes at times strident when emphasizing the purity of morality: "Here philosophy is to manifest its purity as sustainer of its own laws, not as herald of laws than an implanted *sense of who knows what tutelary nature whispers to it*" and that the commanding

authority of the moral law "*expect nothing from the inclination of human beings* but everything from the supremacy of the law and the respect owed to it (GMS 4:426; my emphasis). The point is simple: whatever "is" has no practical influence on what "ought" to be. This point was already intimated in the Preface of *Groundwork*, where Kant argues that moral laws "differ essentially from all the rest, in which there is something empirical, but all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part" (GMS 4:390). Even in the *first Critique*, Kant had already emphasized that "pure morality [*die reine Moral*] is not grounded in any anthropology (no empirical condition)" (B 869–870 / A 841–842).

By emphasizing the necessary purity of moral laws, Kant provides fodder to those who call his ethics an "empty formalism" (e.g., Fichte and Hegel). These critics namely interpreted Kant's ethics as saying that the nature, content, and application of the moral law are all nonempirical. This was not Kant's intent, who clearly argues—predominantly in his later ethical works, however—that the moral law ought to be applied in empirical reality. To put it concisely, while the nature or content of the law is not empirically determined, the law nevertheless has to be empirically applied. This means that while practical ethics does not have an impure deduction, it does have an impure application (in human relations, in social institutions, etc.). Henry Allison helpfully clarifies Kant's analysis of purity: "What Kant wanted to say [. . .] is that morality does not have a non-pure (empirical) part, but it does have a non-pure (applied) part, namely, moral anthropology, which he insists must be subordinate to the pure part."[37] The empirical application of the moral law opens the way for, what Robert Louden calls, Kant's impure ethics,[38] which are all social, political, and religious practices that apply the abstract law in concrete situations.

Though then that practical reason is applied empirically, the deduction of morality ought then to be pure, which means two things: the validity of the law does not derive from empirical conditions and no empirical condition can amount to appropriate motivation for moral agency. Let us focus on the first claim, which immediately presents a dilemma: if there is no way of using empirical data to ground or verify the actuality of morality, how can one test whether morality is more than just a figment of the imagination? This is the topic under investigation throughout *Groundwork* II: while *Groundwork* I assessed and established the content of morality, Kant must demonstrate in *Groundwork* II that morality is valid for or applicable to rational beings. By validity is meant that human agents necessarily find themselves under the constraints of the moral law. Finally, *Groundwork* III will be an investigation into what could be called the operativity of morality, that is whether or not anyone ever (can) act(s) in accordance with the moral law.

Rather than facing this difficulty head on, Kant detours with a long and convoluted reflection on the nature of human rationality and lawful determination. The premise is as follows: everything that happens must necessarily happen in accordance with certain laws that exhaustively determine whatever happens (determinism). There are, however, two possible modes of determination of the will: determination through foreign causes (principles of heteronomy) and determination through autonomous causes (principle of autonomy). The latter principle, of autonomy, is identified with reason, namely that the will is autonomous if and only if reason fully determines itself (GMS 4:412–413). Two things ought to be born in mind in order to understand the pertinence of this for Kant's deduction of the highest good.

First, Kant consistently maintains a distinction between the human and the holy will.[39] According to him, the holy will "stands equally under objective laws (of the good)" even though it is not "necessitated to actions in conformity with law," since it "can be determined only through the representation of the good" (GMS 4:414). In other words, the holy will, unlike the virtuous will, is not co-determined through sensuality and thus is fully determined through the lawful principle alone; the human will, however, is co-determined through the principle of sensuality and the lawful principle. This means that human beings are subject to principles of heteronomy and autonomy both, which explains why they necessarily experience a sense of dutiful obligation whenever confronted with the moral law. The moral law namely categorically states that human agents must give priority to the moral law over their sensuous inclinations, something which they are loath to do: "The cultivation of reason [. . .] limits in many ways—at least in this life the attainment of [. . .] happiness, which is always conditional" (GMS 4:396). The highest moral good is not holiness, but virtue; this means that Kantian morality does not seek to uproot the principle of heteronomy, which is impossible to accomplish, but rather aspires to subordinate this to a moral hierarchy. As such, moral autonomy cannot mean the self-determination of a purely autonomous will, but that a faculty of free choice opts to elevate the moral law over sensuous determination, both of which are necessary, constitutive aspects of human reason.

Second, Kant has been alleged to suggest that autonomy and morality are identical: if autonomy signifies necessitation through rational principles alone and morality is the same, this means that one is only autonomous when one is moral. Some would assume from this a contrario that autonomy would somehow be lost or forfeited whenever the human being acts in an immoral fashion. At the very least, Kant hints to this in *Groundwork* III: "A free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same" (GMS 4:447). This conflicts with the foregoing, which assumes that a faculty of free choice must always opt in favor of the hierarchical subordination or elevation of the moral law over

sensuous interests. In *Groundwork*, Kant remains ambiguous on this issue—whether one remains autonomous in acting non-morally—but the solution becomes most apparent in *Religion*: "The freedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim [*in seine Maxime aufgenommen hat*]" (RGV 6:23–24). This results in the view that Kant entertains two senses of autonomy, one descriptive and one normative: the former is the given spontaneity of the faculty of choice; the latter is the rational norm to act upon those maxims which accord with morality. By accepting two forms of autonomy (descriptive and normative), he can suggest that human beings are always negatively free and under certain rational constraints, but they can fail to incorporate positively these rational constraints in their maxims (normative autonomy). They do not lose their freedom when acting immorally, but simply make poor and immoral use of that freedom.

This twofold sense of autonomy makes Kant's moral philosophy differ from more contemporary moral theories that emphasize the moral relevance of autonomy. This is the case because Kant, on the one hand, ascribes no particular moral worth to negative freedom and positive self-determination as long as this does not cohere with rationality and, on the other hand, assigns particular importance to the essential idea of law in rational autonomy, whereas contemporary moral theories tend to appreciate positive self-determination as a good in itself.[40] Free choice is a given; autonomy is an ideal. While Kant had a more comprehensive understanding of autonomy than common in contemporary debates, he is often praised by ethical theorists for his insistence that no amount of physical, emotional, or social pressure can ever liberate or excuse the human agent for acting in an immoral fashion. There is definitely an innate tendency in any agent to "paint some unlawful conduct he remembers as an unintentional fault [. . .] and to declare himself innocent of it" (KpV 5.98). Nevertheless, Kant's emphasis on autonomy will not accept any moral casuistry that would relieve human beings from their guilt; in fact, Kant believes that moral conscience already awakens human beings from their self-deceived innocence: "The advocate who speaks in his favor can by no means reduce to silence the prosecutor within him" (*Ibid.*).

Some have taken up the two abovementioned issues to show that a long-standing objection to Kant's moral philosophy is mistaken. The objection claims that Kant introduces a strong, rationalist dualism or even antagonism between rationality and nature, which renders his rational agent an unnatural and unrecognizable machine. Indeed, these two issues signal together that, on the one hand, the uprooting of natural interests is impossible and unwanted and, on the other hand, that rational free deliberation happens even when human beings opt for natural desires. The relevant moral decision is then not

between morality and natural desires per se, but between the moral subordination of natural interests to morality or the immoral subordination of morality to natural interests.[41] The choice for the latter is still a free choice. While I will return to this issue below, it is worthwhile to signal already here that Kant seems to be merely shifting the traditional antagonism: while immoral agents are not evil because they are determined by sensuality, it is sensuality that provides the possibility and allure for immorality. The ground of immorality lies in freedom, its content lies in natural inclinations.

Moral conduct is the type of behavior to which we freely commit ourselves out of a normative duty to do so. As such, this means that if morality is to be valid for human beings, they ought to be *dutifully* and *normatively* bound to practical autonomy. This implies that our relationship toward autonomy is both negative, that is, reluctant duty because of our codetermination through sensuality, and positive, that is, normative duty because of our codetermination through rationality. Accordingly, Kant can warrant the validity of the rational law for human agents only if he can show that we are potentially rational beings (as under rational laws) that ought to be actual rational beings (as incorporating these laws). In other words, the human agent ought to have a capacity for and a duty to be rational. In more Kantian language, this means that rational agents have the possibility of acting "in accordance with the representation of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a will [*Wille*]" (GMS: 4.412). Kant must show then that, on the one hand, human beings have the *negative capacity* to act in accordance with morality (negative freedom as absolute spontaneity) and, on the other hand, human beings have the *positive duty* to act in accordance with morality (positive freedom as rational self-determination). While both aspects need to be conceptually differentiated, Kant will describe both capacities as "will." For the sake of terminological clarity, I will use a different term, one also frequented by Kant, to denote the first capacity namely "power of choice" (*Willkür*).[42] The power of choice is the capacity not to be immediately determined to any course of action by the relative strength of a certain physical, emotional, or psychological motive, but by the free choice to give priority to any of these interests.

In order to understand the remainder of Kant's argument in *Groundwork* II, it is helpful to outline the broad lines of Kant's theory of action (we will go into more depth in the next chapter). Kant basically stipulates that human beings have three faculties, namely volition, desire and cognition. The power of choice can incorporate an object of the will (and then act upon it) if its representation is accompanied by an interest. Accordingly, all beings can only act upon an object insofar as it interests them. Therefore, animal beings, who lack the power of cognition, are fully determined by what Kant calls in the *second Critique* the lower faculty of desire, and so are fully determined by the quantitative strength of a sensuous interest. Human beings, however,

also have a so-called higher faculty of desire that evokes nonsensuous, rational interests which enables human beings not to be immediately determined by but only sensitive to interests. Therefore, sensuous interests do not immediately determine the human will but work as an incentive upon that will (interests incline, but do not determine). The human power of choice can freely choose which of a variety of incentives to incorporate into its maxim. For Kant, incentives can only determine the will insofar as they are incorporated (by a faculty of absolute spontaneity). This brief sketch of Kant's theory of action is by and large in accordance with what Henry Allison calls the "incorporation thesis" of Kant's theory of action. He defines this as follows:

> The intentional actions of a rational agent are never "merely" the causal consequences of the agent's antecedent psychological state [. . .] but require, as necessary condition, an act of spontaneity. The claim that this spontaneity is an ineliminable component in rational agency is what [. . .] I call Kant's "Incorporation Thesis."[43]

While Allison builds his argumentation on a limited number of paragraphs in Kant's oeuvre, I find it generally convincing and believe that it can be transposed to the entirety of Kant's work.

Before continuing, it needs to be mentioned that it is unclear whether or not Kant had already settled on this theory of action in *Groundwork*. Perhaps, Kant did indeed equate morality with autonomy and because of this was unable to account for a robust sense of responsibility for immoral agency. The distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür* in the post-*Groundwork* writings explicitly in order to deal with this objection, an objection that was prompted to Kant by some of his interlocutors. This view indeed explains Kant's diffuse and confusing—even at times apparently interchangeable—use of the terms *Wille* and *Willkür* throughout *Groundwork*.[44] Let us for now disregard the matter whether this theory of action is an a posteriori clarification or not and continue Kant's argument. Kant's next step builds upon something which I will call the *ultra posse nemo obligatur* principle (discussed by Kant at ZeF 8:370): if human beings find themselves under the moral constraint of the categorical imperative, they must possess the capacities to accord themselves to this imperative. More broadly, this means that if is it shown that something is rationally or morally necessary, then its enabling conditions are practically real. In *Religion*, he phrases it succinctly when discussing the archetype of moral perfection: "We *ought* to conform to it, therefore we must *be able* to" (RGV 6:62). This principle is vital in establishing the practical reality of autonomy (negative and positive), the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. By this, Kant admits—rather optimistically—that practical morality has a normative hold

over reality. While Kant has shown in his destruction of the ontological argument that speculative thought cannot establish the reality of a concept, he argues that practical necessity can bequeath necessary, practical reality to a theoretically, problematic concept.

According to this principle then, if Kant can show it to be a fact that human beings find themselves under the apodictive, normative constraint of the moral law, then this is grounds for assuming that human beings are descriptively and normatively autonomous. The problem with this argument is fairly apparent: autonomy is not only the a priori condition of moral law, it is also that which signals that human beings find themselves under moral constraints. This would mean that to ground autonomy would require the reality of autonomy. So either autonomy is denied and human beings are free from moral constraints or autonomy is affirmed and human beings are under moral constraints. Kant seems to believe to be justified in assuming the practical reality of autonomy because of the moral fact that human beings are exposed to moral duty.

Schopenhauer would not mince words when discussing this Kantian assumption of a moral fact: Kant went on "relaxed confidence of incomprehension" to appeal to a "moral law that allegedly dwells in our reason" without wondering whether "such a comfortable moral code, really stands inscribed in our head, breast or heart."[45] Schopenhauer has a point since Kant's argument appears circular: human beings are under a moral constraint because they are autonomous, but at the same time they are aware and assured only of their autonomy insofar as they experience the moral law as a law of duty. Some might argue that Kant introduces the idea of morality as a "fact of reason" in the *second Critique* in order to escape this circle. But, a close reading of the "Preface" of the *second Critique*, clarifies an important distinction to avoid this difficulty. Kant argues namely that being autonomous is the essence of morality and the moral law is the evidence that we are in fact free:

> Freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For, had not the moral law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in assuming such a thing as freedom (even though it is not self-contradictory). But were there no freedom, the moral law would not be encountered at all in ourselves. (KpV 5:4n)

Bringing now to mind Kant's purpose in the *first Critique*, namely to set up limits (*Schranke*) beyond which speculative reflection may not pass, but without considering these limits to be boundaries (*Grenze*). This means that the self-limitation of speculative reason does not exclude the possibility for

there to be "something" beyond these limits, particularly since the confrontation with the moral law allows for an extension of practical cognition beyond the limits of speculative reason. Rational agents find themselves under the spell of morality and are accordingly forced to postulate some form of positive determination of the noumenal realm, as the simple lawful character of the noumenal realm necessitated solely through universal a priori laws alone. In Kant's words:

> The moral law, even though it gives no prospect, nevertheless provides a fact absolutely inexplicable [*unerklärliches Factum*] from any data of the sensible world and from the whole compass of our theoretical use of reason, a fact that points to a pure world of the understanding [*eine reine Verstandeswelt*] and, indeed, even determines it positively and lets us cognize something of it, namely a law. (KpV 5:43)

Nothing within the phenomenal realm can be used as a springboard toward the noumenal realm, but the moral fact of reason propels speculation beyond the safe confines of the phenomenal realm so as not only to assume a noumenal realm, but to determine it positively as being ruled by universally valid a priori laws. This extension remains merely practical, not theoretical: "Speculative reason does not gain anything with respect to its insight but it still gains something only with respect to the security of its problematic concept of freedom, which is here afforded an objective and, though only practical, undoubted reality" (KpV 5:49). Morality can then be clearly read as the normative imprint of the noumenal realm on the human being: humanity too should be ruled by universally valid a priori laws.

Kant has argued that the moral law is valid for human beings, that is, that they are practically autonomous, because of the moral fact of the confrontation with the moral law. Accordingly, morality postulates that human agents are free since they are under a moral obligation. Kant still has to tackle an issue that remained surprisingly untouched up to the end of *Groundwork* II, namely whether or not autonomy is operative at any point or whether a human agent is ever governed through a priori rational principles alone. This is the central question of practical reason in many ways akin to the central problem of theoretical reason. Both of these wonder whether something a priori can enter into something phenomenal.[46] Kant puts the central issues that pure reason has to tackle thus: "How, on the one side, pure reason can cognize objects a priori and how, on the other side, it can be an immediate determining ground of the will" (KpV 5:44–45). This question is the central query of *Groundwork* III and of practical reason in general: can a will be determined through a priori principles alone?

ENDS AND ENDS IN THEMSELVES

Before investigating the motivation for morality, we have yet to examine the specific content of practical reason in order to better understand why this is a duty and not an inclination. Since the nature, purpose, and content of the categorical imperative have already been the subject of many studies, I will limit myself here to a number of remarks that provide the necessary lines of interpretation for reading Kant's morality as responding to pessimism. Kant clarifies the moral law in three formulations of what he calls a categorical imperative. The first formulation stipulates that we ought to make our actions universally applicable, or in Kant's words: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law" (GMS 4:421). The second formulation reads: "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (GMS 4:429).

In Kant's view, all goods (moral or otherwise) are not good in themselves (intellectualism), but only in relationship to the power of choice (voluntarism). For Kant, however, this does not mean that just about anything to which the power of choice is inclined, is necessarily a moral good. Kant adds namely that something could then still be good in itself, namely an object of will which is universally attractive and does not derive its value from contingent or particular considerations (such as happiness). Kant assigns such immediate and universal value to the rational-legislative faculty, or, rational self-legislation is universally valuable. This argument leads Kant from the first to the second formulation of the categorical imperative in *Groundwork*. Kant had first established that the primary moral code is to be rational, that is, only act upon those maxims which you can also will to be universal laws. The second formulation adds to this that being rational is good in itself, that is, humanity (which is the capacity for being rational) is an end in itself, not merely a means. When combining these two elements, the categorical imperative would read in full that human beings ought to be rational because rationality is good in itself; the motive for doing so should be the recognition that rationality is good in itself (and not some sensuous caprice). In other words, Kant signals that the capacity to be the originator of rational value is valuable in itself:

> The human being and in general every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end. (GMS 4:428)

The second formulation of the categorical imperative therefore postulates the infinite, absolute value of the possibility to create rational value. By adding this second formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant comes to a decisive moment in his establishment of the ground of morality.

A first reason why adding the second to the first formulation is paramount has to do with the problem signaled above, namely that Kant's deduction of the first formulation of the categorical imperative seemed to lack a vital premise (the alleged "gap in its deduction"). The first formulation stipulates that human agents have the obligation to be rational, but Kant's argument lacks a valid reason (with the possible exception of an appeal to common sense) for excluding any other formal law from being the first formulation of the categorical imperative. Put otherwise: Kant did not provide a reason why being rational was morally good. At that point, the normative demand to be rational appeared self-grounding: human beings should be rational, without qualification. However, when the second formulation of the categorical imperative is added to the first, this explains that human beings *ought* to be rational (apply universally valid maxims) because they *are* rational (they originate value) and because rationality *is* in itself valuable. The second formulation of the categorical imperative fills ex post facto the gap in the deduction of the categorical imperative by providing an ontological ground for the moral imperative: humans ought to be rational, because they are rational.

A second reason why the second formulation adds something invaluable has to with providing some body to the categorical imperative. While the first formulation is a guide to what is permissible, the second formulation offers an incentive to pursue this course of action. Early commentators on Kant's moral philosophy (e.g., Hegel, Fichte) missed the pivotal contribution of the second formulation of the categorical imperative when they called Kant's ethics an empty formalism. Indeed, Kant's ethics has often been characterized as deontological in a rigoristic sense and is considered to hold that ethical agency has no end in mind whatsoever and, at the same time bases moral judgment on intentions, not consequences. The former blatantly contradicts numerous arguments of Kant that stress how all human actions, including ethical actions, have a goal: "Every action, therefore, has its end" (MS 6:384). Needless to say, the goal-directedness (or teleology) of morality is of a special kind. A human agent takes a direct or immediate interest in morality, and this interest is generated by the simple fact that human beings have, besides an interest in sensuality, an interest in rationality. Moral behavior is then not utterly disinterested, but has a qualitatively distinct type of interest. The rational-legislative faculty does then not only legislate moral laws but at the same time, in the act of legislation, arouses interest in moral laws. Roger Sullivan puts this as follows: "The central thesis of Kant's moral philosophy is that the higher faculty of desire has both a cognitive and conative function."[47]

This means that the central thesis of Kant's morality is the normative duty of pure reason to become practical, that is, reason should guide action. Therefore, moral action is "not acting without an end in mind, but rather acting on objective ends."[48]

The first formulation is then but an intermediary step to arrive at a more fleshed notion of the moral in combination with the second formulation. It is important to see that the first and the second formula complement each other, and not argue that either the first or the second formulation would be the preferred formula for the ethical. Allen Wood assigns priority, however, to the second formulation since the majority of the sixteen ethical duties in the *Metaphysics of Morals* are based upon this: eleven are based on the formula of humanity, one (beneficence) on the formula of the universal law and the remaining four on the second or third formulation.[49] While more specific duties can be deduced from the first or second (or third) formulation, the central point of Kant's grounding of morality consists in the recognition that rational behavior is valuable because rational lawgiving is itself the source of value—this not to say that the second formulation more smoothly allows for the deduction of certain more specific moral duties. In *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant divides all rational duties into "duties toward oneself" and "duties toward others." The duties to oneself are further divided into formal/perfect and material/imperfect duties. The former are "limiting" in the sense that they forbid certain actions (they are concerned with "health"); the latter are "widening" in the sense that they promote certain ways of behaving (they are concerned with "wealth"). The perfect duties to oneself are in turn divided into animal (self-preservation, procreation, and nutrition) and moral (truthfulness, good self-management, and nobility) duties; imperfect duties aim at self-perfection and self-cultivation of mind, body, and soul. The duties toward others are divided into duties of love (benevolence, gratitude, and sympathy) and duties of respect (humility and just praise), which together form the supreme virtue of friendship (i.e., the perfect union of love and respect). This variety of different rational duties clearly demonstrates that Kant's ethical system moves well beyond "empty formalism" as a lively and vigorous moral system based upon a comprehensive reading of the categorical imperative (first *and* second formulation).

A third note of importance regarding the second formulation has to do with the denotation of the term humanity. In *Religion*, Kant distinguishes between three levels of the predisposition (*Anlage*) to good, namely to animality, humanity, and personality: animality comprises mainly our animal desires (self-preservation, procreation, social community), humanity comprises mainly social desires (e.g., ambition and worth in the face of others) and personality entails moral interests (RGV 6:26–28). This is mentioned because Kant stipulates in *Groundwork* that humanity, and not personality,

is the ground of morality, which could be taken to imply that a substantial amount of moral respect ought to be directed toward various human expressions that are not strictly speaking rational, such as emotions or the pursuit of standing in society.[50] However, neither in *Groundwork* nor in the *second Critique* does Kant explicitly draw this distinction (or any remotely similar one) between animality, humanity, and personality. He definitely does not mention emotions and feelings when he argues for the infinite worth of the value-conferring ability of humanity. On the contrary, Kant attributes unconditional value only to the power of choice when it operates purely rationally. This is clear from how Kant continues, namely that the inclinations "are so far from having absolute worth (...) that it must instead be the universal wish of every rational being to be altogether free from them" (GMS 4:428). He then continues that "rational beings are called *persons* because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself, that is, as something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence so far limits all choice (and is an object of respect)" (*Ibid.*). Kant's reference to rational beings as person clarifies that human beings as end in themselves only applies to ends that are pursued in a justified fashion (universally). Feeling and emotions lack this important component of justification and accordingly there is good reason not to identify Kant's concept of humanity in *Groundwork* (and *second Critique*) with the concept of humanity in *Religion*.

A final issue with the second formulation has to do with the dignity of humanity. Some would argue that Kant is simply ad hoc in attributing special moral worth to humanity. Among others, Arthur Schopenhauer would contest in what way Kant attributes a special type of dignity to humanity, and how this illegitimately morally elevates human beings over animals: "The concept of *dignity* seems to me to apply only ironically to a creature as sinful in willing, as limited in intellect, and as vulnerable and frail in body as the human being."[51] Schopenhauer's remark misses the point, however. Dignity is not attributed to human beings per se but to humanity, which is the capacity to originate rational values. If human beings then possess some kind of special, moral value, this would derive from them partaking in what Kant calls humanity. This point has two important consequences with relation to, on the one hand, the moral worth of those with differing grades of rationality and, on the other hand, the moral worth of those where rationality is absent.

A first consequence is that this could be read as suggesting that the amount of respect a human being deserves could or should be determined in accordance with his or her level of rationality. In fact, Oliver Sensen notes that Kant reads dignity as an "elevation" over something else. This has a fourfold of consequences: (1) dignity is a relational property (x is higher than y); (2) dignity can be realized or wasted; (3) dignity involves duties, not rights;

(4) dignity is primarily attributed to oneself, rather than to others. Throughout the 111 times Kant uses the term dignity (*Würde*), Sensen notes a relational, not some non-relational, property.[52] Similarly, Paul Guyer suggests that in Kant's philosophy, autonomy is a task to be completed and is not necessarily a given. For Kant, autonomy is the most essential condition of being moral, but this autonomy is not readily achieved from the outset.[53] According to that line of thought, an immoral (and then somehow less rational) person would be less dignified than a moral person. This can become problematic if one takes into consideration some of Kant's anthropological views. In *Anthropology* and in "Of the Different Races of Humans" (1775), Kant draws several distinctions between different races and genders, and their respective likelihood to act rationally. According to Kant, Caucasian males are most likely to be rational and Indian females least likely. Does this mean that the humanity of the former ought to be more respected than the latter? If dignity is really a relational quality, this does seem to the case. A counterargument against this way of thinking about dignity emerges in the essay "On a Supposed Right to lie out of Philanthropy" (1797). Here, Kant suggests a relevant ethical thought-experiment: is it morally permissible to lie to someone who we assume will murder another human being, if the truth is spoken? The would-be murderer is obviously immoral and arguably, therefore, not deserving of respect. Kant is, however, very clear in his answer that one does not have a right to lie in the abovementioned case: "Truthfulness in statements that one cannot avoid is a human being's duty to everyone, however great the disadvantage to him or to another that may result from it" (8:426). Gradually differing levels of rationality do not prompt Kant to assign relatively lower moral value to Indian females or would-be murderers since, in his view, rationality is a qualitative rather than a quantitative quality: either one is (and ought to be) rational, or one is not. While some races and genders might have a stronger affinity to rationality, everyone has the univocal duty to be rational, and therefore the potentiality to be a good moral person, even if they are extraordinary disinclined to rationality. Accordingly, a human being with even the slightest trace of rationality is deserving of infinite respect.

A second consequence that follows from this is that nonrational beings that do not, at all, yet or anymore, partake in humanity such as plants, animals, small children, and mentally sick people would not deserve respect; they could in fact then be seen purely as a means, not as ends in themselves. Kant refers to this, specifically with regard to animals, in *Anthropology*:

> The fact that the human being can have the representation "I" raises him infinitely above all the other beings on earth. By this he is a person [. . .] that is, a being altogether different in rank and dignity from things, such as irrational animals, with which one may deal and dispose at one's discretion. (Anth 7:127)

In Kant's defense, one could argue that it would be fairly irrational, even immoral, to use plants, animals, small children, and mentally sick people merely as a means. The continuing and often cruel exploitation of animals and plants, for instance, can seriously harm the human environment and would, ultimately, damage the rationality and potential for virtuous behavior in the human agent. Kant makes such a claim in the *Lectures on Ethics*:

> If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind. If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. (27:459)

The problematic consequence of this argument is that any human being so disposed would not be respecting plants or animals because of any intrinsic value in themselves, but only insofar as they can benefit the rational self-legislation of the human agent. If disrespecting animals or plants or small children or mentally ill people were rational, there would be nothing to hold people back from doing so. At least, this seems to be the consequence of Kant's proposed second formulation of the categorical imperative.

A similar argument could be made regarding a seemingly unrelated issue, namely Kant's objection to suicide. Kant's final argument against suicide is that it violates the human person's dignity by using himself or herself instrumentally. The integrity of the person is being flaunted because of a desire to avoid pain: "To annihilate the subject of morality in one's own person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world, as far as one can, even though morality is an end in itself" (MS 6:423). This implies, however, that suicide could be morally tolerable, perhaps at times morally preferable to continuing to live, if the act of suicide is not born from a desire that prefers sensuous desires over rationality.[54] For instance, Cato could have been morally justified in taking his own life since he could not rationally justify serving under the tyrant Caesar.[55] Disrespecting the dignity of nonrational beings or even of oneself can be perfectly in tune with rationality, and even our own personal moral self-legislation, insofar the proper moral hierarchy is respected.

The above considerations notwithstanding, Kant is clear that the unconditional value of humanity is grounded in its self-legislating rationality or positive autonomy. But by formatting morality as a rational duty, is Kant not at risk of violating his own second formulation of the categorical imperative? Are human beings not being used instrumentally by rationality in being rational? This leads Kant to the third formulation of the categorical imperative:

since human beings may never be used merely as a means, they must relate to the moral law also as authors and not merely as subjects. This means they are subjected to the categorical imperative while at the same time each of them stands on an equal footing in relation to it; put otherwise, human beings subject themselves to the categorical imperative, and so paradoxically subject themselves to their own legislation. Kant puts this as follows: "A rational being must always regard himself as lawgiving in a kingdom of ends possible through freedom of the will, whether as a member or as a sovereign" (GMS 4:434). The moral law is a law that human beings legislate to themselves.

Such self-legislation is probably the most intellectually confounding aspect of Kant's morality. How can one obligate oneself? Is this a case of ontological schizophrenia? Kant is clearly not simply referring to a unitary concept of a physical self, because then the lawgiver and the subject would be one and the same. In such a case, "the one imposing obligation (*auctor obligationis*) could always release the one put under obligation (*subiectum obligationis*)" (MS 6:417). Accordingly, there ought to be two distinct faculties, that is, one obligating and the other obligated, since morality cannot depend on the self-legislation of the empirical subject. In such a case, morality would be relegated to empirical self-conditioning, not universal, rational self-legislation. Wood notes that the notion of "autonomy" is prone to vacillate between two undesirable options: either the "self" of "self-law" is emphasized and autonomy is reduced to mere self-willing, or, the "law" of "self-law" is emphasized and autonomy is reduced to bondage to the canon of rationality.[56] Many have therefore pointed out that Kant's account of self-legislation is hopelessly inconsistent, even deceptive.[57]

While Kant does not acknowledge the problematic character of such self-legislation in *Groundwork* or in the *second Critique*, he does discuss it in some detail in *Metaphysics of Morals* (MM 6:379–385; 6:417–419). At the beginning of the "Ethical Doctrine of Elements," Kant discusses an apparent antinomy (*scheinbaren Antinomie*) with respect to self-legislation. The word "apparent" suggests that this is not a real antinomy such as the antinomy of theoretical and practical reason. The antinomy is resolved, however, in a similar fashion as the dynamical antinomy of theoretical reason. The thesis suggests that a duty implies that a human being is passively necessitated toward some end. The antithesis suggests, however, that moral duties necessarily proceed from practical reason, and must therefore be self-legislated duties of autonomy. The antinomy is resolved by an appeal to Kant's default distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, which we have already touched upon in resolving the antinomy of pure reason. When an agent is conscious of a duty, he or she necessarily perceives him or herself as both a sensuous being (subject) and a purely rational being (legislator).

Accordingly, the sensuous part of the human agent is being obligated by the rational part. Self-legislation is then a form of rational prescription to a being that is both sensuous as well as rational, obligating as well as obligated. Obviously, Kant's solution does leave some questions unresolved, specifically with regard to how to understand this metaphysical self and how the singular human being relates to it. If this singular self is so distinct from the empirical self (legislating regardless of personal inclinations), why would Kant still call it a self? Is this a case of what Peter Strawson calls "panicky metaphysics"?[58]

Kant's appeal to self-legislation can be further clarified and corroborated by returning to the third formulation of the categorical imperative in *Groundwork*: human beings must act as if they are both a member (subject) and a ruler (legislator) in the kingdom of ends.[59] According to Kant, the kingdom of ends is an ideal of reason in which all human intentions are fully in accordance with moral duty. This "as if" aspect of moral legislation can then explain the obligating aspect of Kant's moral law. Human beings ought to internalize the rational law in such a way that they are even able to experience themselves as the authors of this law. An author who plagiarizes for a prolonged period of time gradually fails to distinguish between his or her own work and the original. Similarly, Kant will emphasize that human beings ought to work toward a similar identification of their own nature with morality. Because human beings are naturally unwilling to incorporate morality, they have to be gradually reconstituted in such a way that their nature completely changes.

A similar strategy emerges, though more overtly, in *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784). Here, Kant wants to draw a plan for a reading of history that supports the moral-political purposes of cosmopolitanism. Pablo Muchnik rightly notes that this essay provides "the *theoretical* foundations for a synoptic account of history in its absolute completeness," which has an important "*therapeutic* function" as it prevents "the formation of morally pernicious feelings—feelings of despair, alienation, and resentment toward the operations of providence."[60] In other words, Kant is providing an idea of the history of the nature and the human race wherein human beings can act as if this history is conducive to their own moral destiny. The development of history then becomes aligned with our own moral development as something that sustains and nurtures it. We work toward an identification of our own purpose in life with the purpose of nature: we act like the plan of nature is our own plan, much like we act as if the moral law is our own self-legislation. All of this primarily serves a pedagogic (Muchnik calls it "therapeutic") function, namely, to cultivate further the resilience and resolve in the agent to act virtuously. This subject will be further explored below under the heading "moral education" as "moral ascetics/gymnastics."

GROUNDING MORALITY AND PESSIMISM

The maxims of human agents attain moral value only if they are motivated by respect for the moral law. Throughout *Groundwork*, Kant establishes that the moral law is intricately interwoven with autonomy as, on the one hand, the conditio sine qua non to be moral (negative freedom) and, on the other, the content of being moral (autonomous universal choice). Kant summarizes the twofold role of autonomy at the outset of *Groundwork* III: negative freedom is the property of a will so "that it can be efficient independently of alien causes determining it" and positive freedom is the property of a will "in accordance with immutable laws of a special kind" (GMS 4:446). Accordingly, freedom is not "lawlessness"—which to Kant, is "an absurdity" (*Ibid.*)—but is rather the ability to act upon maxims that are, on the one hand, universally valid and, on the other hand, respect the infinite worth of the human agent. In the present section, we will show how some of the issues discussed above as pertaining to Kant's proposed ground of morality can be linked to Kantian pessimism—the more robust sense of pessimism comes out in Kant's discussion of the motivation for morality.

Kantian pessimism is the view that human nature lacks an incentive to morality as such, and that it ought to be radically sculpted in terms of a rational standard by means of a complete overhaul of its normal, natural way of behaving. While Kant is cautiously skeptical of such a thing actually occurring, he does not deny its possibility but he remains consistently in denial that (human) nature provides the ground for such a revolution. By itself, nature does not lead to moral goodness; human beings are not naturally attracted to autonomy, only rationally so. The first sign of this view at work arises in Kant's emphasis on the dutiful character of moral virtue, which many commentators have found to be an unattractive aspect of his ethical theory. For Kant, human actions should be necessitated by the feeling of respect for duty only, and should not be reinforced through any other means. Even in the case of another motive (overdetermination), Kant would be wary of what he later calls "impure motivation" (RGV 6:30). This ultimately means that if anyone is motivated, either sufficiently or necessarily, to act in a morally good fashion by a sensuous inclination, he or she would at best not be virtuous, at worst be even immoral. This rigorist conclusion seems to follow logically from Kant's three examples in *Groundwork* I: the shopkeeper, the sympathetic man and the suicidal man (GMS 4:397–399). In ways, a sympathetic human being would, morally not legally speaking, be no better off than the most despicable villain. This seems to be an objection to Kant's morality from a common sense point of view (which Kant is supposed to be in allegiance with), since most people would not identify morally a sympathetic person and a villain. Friedrich

von Schiller articulates this objection in his *Xenien*, published jointly with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:

> Scruples of Conscience / I like to serve my friends, but unfortunately I do it by inclination / And so often I am bothered by the thought that I am not virtuous / Decision / There is no other way but this! You must seek to despise them / And do with repugnance what duty bids you.[61]

Univocal emphasis on this unattractive aspect of Kant's moral theory initially led to the rejection of Kant's ground and motivation for moral agency by many of his contemporaries (e.g., Hegel, Jacobi, Schopenhauer, etc.). Obviously, Schiller overreaches in his polemic since any action undertaken with "repugnance" (*verachten*) would imply an equivocal form of resentment of morality and Kant repeatedly reiterates that the moral law ought to be kept in the highest esteem.

Schiller's objection could be further mitigated by a number of rejoinders by Kant. Kant's early reflections on ethics (*Groundwork* and *second Critique*) ought to be read in light of his later reflections (e.g., *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Anthropology*, *Religion*) which provide valuable insights into his own views on objections like Schiller's. The works of the 1790s are in fact a posteriori clarifications of Kant's ethical theory. As such, Allen Wood notes that Kant's primary interest in his early works on ethics is twofold, namely to respond to moral sense-theory and to secure the universality of morality. Obviously, both interests are conjoined since Kant believed that to ground morality in feelings would necessarily introduce arbitrariness into morality.[62] Accordingly, dutiful behavior ought then to be identified with behavior motivated by solid universal interests, and not by contingent caprices. However, this does not negate entirely the potential role of sensuality in moral agency since Kant emphasizes, particularly in *Metaphysics of Morals*, that humanity ought to cultivate its feeling for morality in order to be more prone to act rationally.[63] One should note that this cultivation does not consist in developing a natural or sensuous feeling of approval for the moral law, but in enlivening the intellectual interest in moral agency. Accordingly, Kant's ground and motivation for morality remain unaided by sensuous nature.

Kant's illustrations in *Groundwork* I might indeed be misleading and Schiller's objection is too strong. Kant's rather harsh stance vis-à-vis inclination with regard to moral motivation ought not to be watered down too radically, however. In the end, the simple fact remains that maxims only attain moral worth when they are sufficiently motivated by duty alone; this means that the natural inclinations are in themselves deprived of moral potential. While Kant does allow for certain natural goods to be conducive to attaining a good will (e.g., talents, prudence), they themselves lack moral worth directly. Although

Wood and others are to be commended for their attempts to downplay the unattractiveness of the dutiful character of Kant's moral law, the fact remains that Kant entertained a very rigorist position with regard to moral attribution that allows for moral worth to emanate only from purely intellectually motivated maxims. I stress this point because it is useful in delineating Kant's pessimism and the human agent's natural disinclination toward the moral law: no natural or prudential practices can ever acquire moral worth, only the dutiful disciplining of our "vice breeding" inclinations.

Kant's moral philosophy of the 1780s was profoundly (and mainly negatively) influenced by moral sentimentalism, most notably Francis Hutcheson. Hutcheson argued that there is a natural inclination toward morality in human nature that, when acted upon, provides a unique form of moral pleasure. This means that human nature not only motivates but also grounds morality. From *Groundwork* on, Kant rejects Hutcheson's views with regard to morality—as is hinted by Kant's few references to moral sentimentalism in the *Groundwork* (GMS 4:410; 4:425; 4:442, 4:460). In his critical philosophy, Kant is inhospitable toward an inclination or ground in human nature to morality. Does this, however, mean that Kant turns his back on any form of moral feeling in *Groundwork* along with Hutcheson's moral sentimentalism? *Groundwork* was written in accordance with a self-imposed restriction, namely to solely establish the content and validity of the supreme principle of morality and accordingly bracket all elements of philosophical anthropology (GMS 4:388). Kant does not therefore deny a feeling side to morality, but he restricts his inquiry in *Groundwork* in such a way that this question does not come into play as a constitutive element. The a priori deduction of morality cannot include a feeling as feelings are, in Kant's view, necessarily subjective. He restricts his inquiry, in *Groundwork*, to the purely objective side of morality, or, the "ground of morality," although he does allow for something of a "moral feeling," albeit very differently construed: "Moral feeling, which some have falsely given out as the standard of our moral appraisal whereas it must rather be regarded as the subjective effect that the law exercises on the will" (GMS 4:460). In the *second Critique* (and beyond) Kant will discuss at length the possibility that "moral feeling" accounts for moral motivation, but not for morality's ground.

Kant's rejection of holiness as a viable ideal in *Groundwork* could similarly be read as part of Kant's existential pessimism: the natural disposition of the human agent is so lacking in resources that holiness is a delusional ideal. A virtuous will implies overcoming obstacles (else it would not be bound by duty), while the holy will does not have to overcome obstacles and naturally pursues morality. If holiness were an option for human agents, then this could mitigate the unwontedness or, to use Schiller's term, repugnance of pleasure in morality. One often gets the feeling that Kant believes human beings ought

to feel displeasure in acting morally so as to know that they are virtuous. Should morality be instead based on the holy will, duty would not need to be emphasized at such length because then the highest good for human beings would not be found in the good will (that constantly struggles), but in the holy will that is perfectly adjusted to morality. Kant's pessimism blocks such an option, however, because in holiness the nature of the human agent is aligned with morality. Similarly as in how he rejects Hutcheson's moral sentimentalism, human nature can never house an inclination toward morality. Nature is always an obstacle and tempts the human being into immorality, rather than morality. The holy will is not a possibility for Kant. H. J. Paton argues, more charitably, that Kant did not want to base morality on this because it would invite us to moral enthusiasm (love of morality) and *Schwärmerei*, which easily leads

> to vanity, self-complacency, and arrogance; and although at first it may attract the young, it tends to produce a violent reaction. Our moral teaching should be manly, and not melting or sentimental or flattering or grandiose. We are not volunteers but conscripts in the moral struggle, and our state of mind therein is at the best virtue and not holiness.[64]

While there is a lot of merit in Paton's assessment of Kant, the rationale for Kant's preference for virtue over holiness could more cogently be found in his pessimistic appreciation of the human species that, according to him, will never be able to attain holiness because it is radically bound to sensuality rather than to morality. The good will then is the highest possibility a human agent can achieve since the radical nature of Kant's notion of depravity excludes any natural adherence to morality.

NOTES

1. For discussion of how such an aspect is connected to authenticity: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Translated and edited by John Scott (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 189. See Andrews Reath, *Agency and Autonomy in Kant's Moral Theory*. *Selected Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 92–121.

3. "The categorical imperative smells of cruelty" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 45).

4. Several authors have similarly appreciated Kant's works of the 1780s (including the *first Critique*) as a preparation for a more comprehensive ethical and even political project. Onora O'Neill points out that "the *first Critique* is not only deeply

antirationalist but profoundly political" (Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reasons: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 4). Otfried Höffe similarly stresses that Kant's reiteration of political terms throughout the *first Critique* invites a "cosmo-political reading"; however, he does admit that these remarks in themselves are somewhat too few to mount a convincing argument (Otfried Höffe, *Kant's Cosmopolitan Theory of Law and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 205). From a different perspective, Theodor Adorno notes that Kant's Copernican Revolution—making the human being the subject and not the object of the world—implies the "social and political emancipation of the human subject that ceased to act out a submissive role towards the world" (Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 135). Finally, James DiCenso points out that Kant's use of terms such as "despotic" and "anarchy" in the A preface suggests a political preoccupation, and that the *first Critique* was not uniquely objecting against purely rationalist truth claims and empiricist skepticism, but also to despotic and unjust forms of government (James DiCenso, *Kant, Religion, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 34–40). Ironically, Kant did dedicate his *first Critique* to "Königl. Staatsminister Freiherrn von Zedlitz"—a political despot.

5. Karl Ameriks, "Reality, Reason, and Religion in the Development of Kant's Ethics." In: *Kant's Moral Metaphysics. God, Freedom, and Immortality*. Edited by Benjamin Lipscomb and James Krueger (New York: Walter De Gruyter Verlag, 2010), 25–26.

6. The four conflicts in the antinomy most likely have their historical origin in the Leibniz-Clarke debate between 1715 and 1716. Clarke would defend the theses and Leibniz the antitheses (cf. Sadik Al-Azm, *The Origins of Kant's Arguments in the Antinomies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972)). Already in the *Amphiboly of the Principles of Reflection*, Kant makes short work of the Leibnizian fallacy to confuse the empirical and transcendental use of the understanding, and Kant argues that the Leibnizian understanding of the unconditioned only applies to the empirical and cannot be transposed to the transcendental (B 316–349 / A 260–292).

7. The closest Kant comes to a definition is the following: "A sophistical inference applied in general to the transcendental concept of absolute totality in the series of conditions for a given appearance" (B 398 / A 340) or: "A wholly natural antithetic, for which one does not need to ponder or to lay artificial snares, but rather into which reason falls of itself and even unavoidably" (B 434 / A 407). Obviously, these definitions are too general to specify what exactly an antinomy is and how this definition applies to all different antinomies.

8. Eric Watkins relates the notion of antinomy more intimately to transcendental realism, that is, the proposition that our representations directly relate to the objective thing-in-itself. Through espousing transcendental realism, philosophers will necessarily find themselves in unresolvable conflict and the only way out of this is to reject transcendental realism in favor of transcendental idealism (Eric Watkins, "The Antinomy of Practical Reason: Reason, The Unconditioned, and The Highest Good." In: *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason. A Critical Guide*. Edited by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145–167).

9. Cf. B 432–595 / A 405–567; KpV 5:113–129; KU 5:337–346; Prol 4:338–348; RGV 6:115–124; MS 6:417–418.

10. Victoria Wike, *Kant's Antinomies of Reason. Their Origin and their Resolution* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 13.

11. Kant's general presentation of this one "principle of reason" that guides rational inferences into dialectical deception is, in the words of Schopenhauer, "murky and obscure: he is unclear, indeterminate and cuts it up in pieces" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume 1*, 510 [571]). Kant's sketchy style might be attributed to a variety of factors. First, he was keen to criticize Christian Wolff, but likely felt that he had to deal with Leibniz first. Wolff had argued in his *Cosmologia Generalis* (1737) for a principle of reason remarkably similar to Kant's proposed principle—although Wolff obviously espoused this principle as truthful rather than fallacious. While Kant ventures to discredit Leibnizian philosophemes first in the *Amphiboly*, he keeps the Wolffian sophism as his last victim. Accordingly, Kant's rhetorical decision forces him to present the general principle of reason piecemeal and relatively late, after he had dealt with the more basic Leibnizian errors. Second, Kant appears rather unhappy with big parts of the *Dialectic of Pure Reason* and proposed considerable changes in the B edition which, though beneficial in intent, could have obscured the bigger picture.

12. Allison, 1990, 20 ff.

13. Cf. Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

14. Allen Wood, "Kant's Compatibilism." In: *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*. Edited by Allen Wood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 73–101.

15. Philosophers widely disagree on what should form the ground of morality, but there appears to be remarkable consensus regarding which specific actions are generally called virtuous and which vicious. Schopenhauer once summarized the different possible "grounds" of morality known to him: God and religion (Crusius), rational duty (Kant), moral world order (Fichte), propositional logic (Wollaston), moral sense (Hutcheson), social contract (Smith, Hobbes), self-perfection (Wolff), and, his own, compassion (Schopenhauer, 2009, 220 [231–232]).

16. Kristi Sweet, *Kant on Practical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49.

17. The major resource for this deduction is obviously *Groundwork*. For our current purposes, it is of minor importance to give a comprehensive overview of all the various arguments in this work. For excellent discussion and numerous enlightening insights: Jens Timmerman, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Samuel Kerstein, *Kant's Search for the Supreme Principle of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

18. Univocal emphasis on the intention or will-based character of Kant's moral philosophy continues to mistakenly peg it as anti-teleological or even not goal-oriented. Then, Kant would be a deontological rigorist to whom consequences would be utterly morally irrelevant, as he himself would hint: "Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add anything to this [moral] worth nor take anything away from

it" (GMS 4:394). Obviously, such rigorism has to be further qualified and Thomas Auxter has seminally pointed out numerous teleological arguments throughout Kant's moral philosophy, especially in the three formulations of the categorical imperative (Thomas Auxter, *Kant's Moral Teleology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982)). However, these teleological arguments do not qualify Kant's deontological premises. For instance, Auxter suggests that the "volition" test of the categorical imperative is a typically teleological argument, a suggestion Onora O'Neill counters by pointing out that even this is a logical test that does not take consequences into consideration (Onora O'Neill, "Consistency in Action." In: *Immanuel Kant. Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals.* Edited by Lawrence Pasternack (London: Routledge, 2002), 155 ff.). O'Neill might have a strong case since Kant's litmus-test for assessing whether something can be volitionally universalized is based on the principle of noncontradiction, rather than on any goal-oriented future preferences of the agent. Obviously, this one case ought not to be final proof that teleology plays no part at all in Kant's moral philosophy. Teleological interests gradually become more commonplace in the ethical works of the 1790s where Kant moves toward a more material ethics beyond the formalism of *Groundwork* and the *second Critique*. For a comprehensive and cogent account of the rational necessity of teleological interests in Kant's deontological moral system, see Katerina Deligiorgi, *The Scope of Autonomy. Kant and the Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

19. Allen Wood, "The Good without Limitation." In: *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals.* Edited by Christoph Horn and Dieter Schonecker (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

20. Cf. Ameriks, 2003, 193–212; Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 207–231.

21. For example: "The depths of the human heart are unfathomable [*unergründlich*]. Who knows himself well enough to say, when he feels the incentive to fulfill his duty, whether it proceeds entirely from the representation of the law or whether there are not many other sensible impulses contributing to it that look to one's advantage (or to avoiding what is detrimental) and that, in other circumstances, could just as well serve vice?" (MS 6:447) or in *Religion* as: "For the depths of his own heart (the subjective first ground of his maxims) are to him inscrutable" (RGV 6:51); "Indeed, even a human being's inner experience of himself does not allow him so to fathom the depths of his heart as to be able to attain, through self-observation, an entirely reliable cognition of the basis of the maxims which he professes, and of their purity and stability" (RGV 6:63).

22. Joel Madore, *Difficult Freedom and Radical Evil in Kant. Deceiving Reason* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2011) 122. On a side note, Kant does not use the term introspection, and so this is an anachronistic imposition upon his text. In the *first Critique*, Kant uses the term "attention" (*Aufmerksamkeit*) to discuss self-affection and inner sense (B156–157n), where this term points toward the way that we synthesize our manifold of inner intuitions. I do not use introspection in this sense, but as the process of scrutinizing the drives and motives of moral behavior.

23. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 4.

24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols. And Other Writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 157.

25. In this, Kant finds another unlikely ally, namely in John Stuart Mill. Mill argued that while having higher faculties of desire might make the human agent more vulnerable to different forms of dissatisfaction, no intelligent human being would abandon their intellect simply because this would make them happy: "No intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus . . . . It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" (Cited in Alison Hills, "Happiness in the *Groundwork*." In: *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. A Critical Guide*. Edited by Jens Timmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33.

26. Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 26–30.

27. "But that the human being can be called fantastically virtuous who allows nothing to be morally indifferent (*adiaphora*) and strews all his steps with duties, as with mantraps; it is not indifferent to him whether I eat meat or fish, drink beer or wine, supposing that both agree with me. Fantastical virtue is a concern with petty details which, were it admitted into the doctrine of virtue, would turn the government of virtue into tyranny" (MS 6:409).

28. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant draws a distinction between an infinite and a finite holy being. He claims that for "finite holy beings [. . .] there would be no doctrine of virtue but only a doctrine of morals, since the latter is autonomy of practical reason whereas the former is also autocracy of practical reason" (MS 6:383). Arguably, an infinite holy agent would not even have a doctrine of morals since his/her agency would be purely rational. Here Kant is probably thinking of how a finite holy agent still possesses sensuous inclinations and can still be tempted by these (e.g., Jesus Christ), but that agent will never give in to that temptation and therefore needs no resort to continence. Anne Margaret Baxley explains: "The divine or infinite holy will is wholly immune to the very possibility of temptation, a finite holy will is constitutionally incapable of succumbing to temptation" (Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue. The Value of Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56). In either the case of finite or infinite holy will, there is no sense of duty or good will since the will lacks the necessary evil propensity to challenge it.

29. For a seminal account of Kant's dialogue with Moral Sentimentalism: Dieter Henrich, "Kant und Hutcheson." *Kant-Studien* 49 (1957/58): 49–69.

30. Richard Henson, "What Kant might have said: Moral Worth and Overdetermination of Dutiful Actions." *Philosophical Studies* 51 (1979): 39–54.

31. Kant defines an incentive (*Triebfeder*) in the *second Critique* as follows: "The subjective determining ground of the will of a being whose reason does not by its nature necessarily conform with the objective law" (KpV 5:72). As such, an incentive is an inner source of action and not an outer object upon which one would react. In *Groundwork*, Kant already distinguishes in a number of footnotes between moral and sensuous incentives (GMS 4:413n and 4:460n). On a number of occasions,

Kant claims that the moral law commands without incentive (Cf. GMS 4:425) while in the *second Critique*, he devotes a whole chapter to the incentives (*Triebfeder*) of pure practical reason (KpV 5:71–89). The problem might be artificially resolved by assuming that Kant changed the denotation of *Triebfeder*: while he called *Triebfeder* a purely sensuous interest in *Groundwork*, *Triebfeder* means any form of incentive (sensuous or practical) in the *second Critique*. A purely sensuous incentive will, in the *second Critique*, begets the term *Neigung*. For discussion: Gerhard Nessler, *Das oberste Princip der Moralität in Kants kritischer Ethik unter den Aspekten des Begriffes, des Inhalts, und der Funktion* (Bonn: Rheinische F. Wilhelms, 1971) 200; Alexander Broadie and Elisabeth Pybus, "Kant's Concept of 'Respect.'" In: *Kant-Studien* 66 (1975): 58–64.

32. Christine Korsgaard helpfully distinguishes between three ways in which to interpret the possible contradiction in "universalizing maxims," namely, the "logical," "teleological," and "practical." A logical contradiction implies that it would be rationally inconceivable that the maxim is universalized; a teleological contradiction means that the universalized maxim would be inconsistent with a systematic harmony of purposes, or, that one could not will the maxim to be universalized; and, finally, a practical contradiction means that the universalized maxim would be practically unsuited for its purpose (Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77–102).

33. For discussion, see Bruce Aune, *Kant's Theory of Morals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 30; Kerstein, 2002, 8 ff.

34. Sade's categorical imperative is derived by Jacques Lacan in his *Kant avec Sade* (1966). Slavoj Zizek has a very good discussion of Lacan's position in his "Kant and Sade. The ideal couple." See: http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/kant-and-sade-the-ideal-couple.

35. Although the majority of scholars take Kant to be utterly inconsistent and to be employing weak rational deduction in *Groundwork* I, some do claim that Kant is being consistent, in one way or another. To my knowledge, Bruce Aune first elaborated the view that Kant was inconsistent and was later joined by, among others, Henry Allison and David Cummiskey (Aune, 1979, 34–43; Henry Allison, *Idealism and Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 143–154; Cummiskey, *Kantian Consequentialism,* 57). Recently, some authors are trying to defend that Kant is in fact consistent, such as Christine Korsgaard, Berys Gaut, and Samuel Kerstein, and Tom Bailey (Korsgaard, 1996, 73–77; Berys Gaut and Samuel Kerstein, "The Derivation without the Gap: Rethinking Groundwork I." *Kantian Review* 3 (1999): 18–41; Tom Bailey, "Analyzing the Good Will: Kant's Argument in the First Section of the Groundwork." In: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18 (2010): 635–662). Similarly as Korsgaard, I believe that the gap can be filled ex post facto by the second formulation of the categorical imperative.

36. See §140 (d) in the *Philosophy of Right* for Hegel's critique of Kantian morality. It could be that Hegel does not explicitly envision Kant in his section, but rather, as one translator notes, the romantic revision (Schiller) of Kant's system of morals (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right.* Translated and Edited by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) 96–98).

37. Henry Allison, *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals. A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19.

38. Robert Louden, *Kant's Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

39. In a number of reflections over his "silent decade," Kant elaborated upon what he would mean by a "holy will." Around the time he was abandoning his rationalist dogmatic project (1770–1772), he defined holiness as "innocence and wisdom [. . .] blissful well-being" (REFL6611 19:109). After a few years (around 1774–1775), he incorporated "sanctity" and "purity" of the moral law as the archetype (*Urbild*) of holiness into his definitions (REFL6769 19:156), which, early on, were linked to the worthiness of being happy (REFL6836 19:175–176). Around 1780, Kant increasingly included the second formulation of the categorical imperative in his definition of holiness (REF7308 19:308), which he finds exemplified in Christian theological morality as the purity of will (REFL7312 19:309).

40. For discussion of these two aspects: Oliver Sensen, "The Moral Importance of Autonomy." In: *Kant on Moral Autonomy*. Edited by Oliver Sensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 262–281; cf. Onora O'Neill, "Postscript: Heteronomy as the Clue to Kantian Autonomy." In: *Kant on Moral Autonomy*. Edited by Oliver Sensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 282–288).

41. For this point: Paton, 1967, 83.

42. For a seminal form of this problem, see Bernard Carnois, *The Coherence of Kant's Doctrine of Freedom*. Translated by David Booth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 84.

43. Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For a more recent defense of this view: Thomas Hill Jr., "Kant's Theory of Practical Reason." In: *Immanuel Kant. Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals.* Edited by Lawrence Pasternack (London: Routledge, 2002), 99–105).

44. For this point: Cf. John Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion." In: *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Edited by Theodore Greene and Hoyd Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), lxxix–cxxxvii; Gerold Prauss, *Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983). Henry Allison, to the contrary, stresses that the *Wille*/*Willkür* is present in *Groundwork* II, more specifically in Kant's account of rational agency (Allison, 1990, 96).

45. Schopenhauer, 2009, 122 (115–116).

46. I have not discussed Kant's treatment of the central problem of speculative reason, that is, whether synthetic a priori judgments are possible. According to Kant, these are possible since the human cognitive faculty attributes the relevant universal necessity to these judgments on the basis of the a priori intuitions of time and space, and the concepts of the understanding (the categories). Nietzsche found Kant's answer, to both the theoretical and practical problem, wanting since Kant merely ascertained that synthetic a priori judgments are possible because the human agent would have a faculty for such judgments: "How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? Kant asked himself, - and what really was his answer? By virtue of a faculty, which is to say: enabled by an ability [*Vermöge eines Vermögens*]" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Edited Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12). Nietzsche belittles Kant's suggestion by comparing it to Molière's doctor's famous and rather uninformative statement in *Le Malade imaginaire*: "Because there is a dormative virtue in it / whose nature is to put the senses to sleep" (*quia est in eo virtus dormitiva / cujus est natura sensus assoupire*)" (*Ibid.*). The regrettable aftereffect of Kant's argument was, according to Nietzsche, that German philosophy took this argumentative trend of Transcendental Philosophy to heart: "The honeymoon of German philosophy had arrived; all the young theologians of the Tübingen seminary ran off into the bushes—they were all looking for 'faculties'" (*Ibid.*, 13). Schopenhauer similarly derides the use of the immediate faculties of cognition that would warrant a special form of knowledge: "The name of reason, however, was assigned to a completely imaginary, or in plain language, a made-up faculty, in which one had something like a little window that opened upon the superlunary, or indeed the supernatural world, a window through which could be received, fully finished and prepared, all the truths that old-fashioned, honest, reflective, and deliberative reason had previously troubled itself with and struggled over in vain for centuries" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Other Writings*. Edited and Translated by David Cartwright, Edward Erdmann and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 116 [123]).

47. Roger Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

48. *Ibid.*, 63–64.

49. Wood, 1999, 139–150.

50. In fact, Allen Wood makes this claim so as to show that Kant is not at all opposed to emotions (Wood, 1999, 120–122). See also: Korsgaard, 1996.

51. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena. Volume 2*. Edited and Translated by Adrian Del Caro and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 184 [215].

52. Oliver Sensen, "Kant's Conception of Human Dignity." In: *Kant-Studien* 100 (2009): 309–331. More recently, Sensen made a similar, more comprehensive argument in his *Kant on Human Dignity* (Berlin: Verlag de Grutyer, 2011).

53. Paul Guyer, "Kant on the Theory and Practice of Autonomy." In: *Social Philosophy and Policy* 20 (2003): 70–98.

54. Jennifer Uleman rejects this inference: "As far as I can tell, suicide will never be the right course for Kant" (Jennifer Uleman, "No King and No Torture: Kant on Suicide and Law." In: *Kantian Review* 21 (2016), 95). While Kant's argument is received usually with disagreement—for both ethical considerations and reasons of consistency—Uleman believes that Kant's argument is, at least, philosophically sound (*Ibid.*, 82–95).

55. For a more detailed treatment of this subject: Michael Cholbi, "Kant and the Irrationality of Suicide." In: *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17 (2000): 159–176.

56. Schneewind, 1998, 3 ff.; Wood, 1999, 156.

57. For a strong case for this, see O'Neill, 2013, 282–288.

58. Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment." In *Free Will*. Edited Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72–93.

59. The exact third formulation of the categorical imperative is either of the following: "The idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law" (GMS 4:431) which is usually called the formula of autonomy; or, "act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends" (GMS 4:439) which is usually called the formula of the realm of ends.

60. Pablo Muchnik, "The Birth of God and the Problem of History." In: *Kant and the Question of Theology*. Edited by Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs and James Joiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 35–36.

61. "*Gewissensskrupel / Gerne dien' ich den Freunden, doch thu' ich es leider mit Neigung / Und so wurmt es mir oft, daß ich nicht tugendhaft bin / Decisum / Da ist kein andrer Rat, du mußt suchen, sie zu verachten / Und mit Abscheu alsdann thun, wie die Pflicht dir gebeut*" (http://www.digbib.org/Friedrich_von_Schiller_1759/Xenien). English translation: Wood, 1999, 28. H.J. Paton calls this "poor poetry and worse criticism" (Paton, 1967, 48). Paton argues that Kant never holds that taking pleasure in moral agency would immediately strip that action of its moral worth. In his view, the moral worth of a maxim is determined by it being pursued "from duty," and should pleasure coincide with duty, all the better. Paton, however, overlooks Kant's strenuous arguments that morality remains a "duty" (not an inclination), because it necessarily implies the overcoming of inclinations. A human agent who preserves his/her life according to his/her inclination is not an agent worth of moral praise, but a suicidal person who preserves his/her life despite his/her inclination (because of moral duty) is an agent worthy of moral praise. A maxim gains a moral designation only if it overcomes a counter-moral inclination.

62. David Hume was, however, aware of this issue and argued that moral sense-theory did not necessarily introduce arbitrariness and relativity into moral issues. Hume argued that "practical reason" is a self-contradictory concept, or that "reason is perfectly inert," since reason always remains the "slave of the passions" (Hume, 1978, 458). Accordingly, "since morals [. . .] have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason" (*Ibid.*, 457). From this follows in turn that the ground of morality is to be found in sentiment (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1938), 4–5). This sentiment is, however, universal and appropriately belongs to human nature; the perfect expression of this universal moral feeling is benevolence (*Ibid.*, 8–10).

63. Wood, 1999, 26–49.

64. Paton, 1967, 53.

Chapter 3

Motivating Morality by Respect

Having established where Kant's ground of morality lies, we now turn to what enables finite, rational agents to take up the moral law into their code of conduct. This is what is commonly known as "moral motivation," a domain in which Kant's position has been alleged to be deeply inconsistent since he seems to migrate positions between the *Lectures on Ethics*, the "Canon" of *first Critique*, *Groundwork*, the *second Critique*, *Religion*, and *Metaphysics of Morals*. The role of (the idea of a) rewarding or punishing deity is a particularly telling example of such ambiguity, which has been noted seminally by Max Küenberg. According to him, Kant has a fluctuating position (*schwankender Standpunkt*) on the issue of moral motivation when he oscillates between incorporating and ostracizing the idea of God from ethics between his different works on practical reason.[1] These charges of inconsistency have been very common in the reception of Kant's moral philosophy. Another early witness of this was Schopenhauer who initially applauds Kant for opposing theological ethics and eudaemonism, but regrets that Kant failed to stay true to his own principles. According to Schopenhauer, Kant used the backdoor of the doctrine of the highest good to reintroduce eudaemonism and God into ethics:

> Even Kant would have banished eudaemonism from ethics more in appearance than in reality. For he still leaves open a secret connection between virtue and happiness, in his doctrine of the highest good, where they come together in a dark, out of the way chapter, while in the open virtue treats happiness as a stranger.[2]

A whole business of scholarship has emerged that in response attempts to vindicate Kant's moral philosophy from these charges.[3] Kant's writings

are certainly not particularly helpful for this business, since he does remain ambiguous on the role of religion and God for moral philosophy. But ambiguity is certainly not the only hindrance, as Kant is at times very clear on this matter, as for instance in the "Canon" of the *first Critique* where he writes unequivocally as follows:

> Thus without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined a priori and necessarily through the very same pure reason. (B 841 / A 813)

To reconcile such statements with the rigor of *Groundwork* is no mean feat. This has only given fodder to arguments from Schopenhauer and others regarding some glaring inconsistencies within Kant's moral theory.

Rather than launching into a new attempt to save all of Kant's writings on moral motivation, I will present a charitable interpretation of Kant's system. I make no claims as to whether this interpretation is consistent with every little footnote that Kant might have ever written on ethics. What is of more interest for our present undertaking is the spirit of Kant's system of moral motivation that seeks to dislodge it entirely from God, religion, and happiness, but is ultimately lured back to these issues because of the apparent weakness of purely practical reason, which fails to move the human being by itself. This weakness is what we are calling a Kantian pessimism, one which sees the natural, moral capacities of the human being as insufficient. For this reason, Kant will be on the lookout for certain ways of reinforcing moral resolve in the face of temptation; but first, in this chapter, we will discuss what an ideal form of pure moral motivation (unassisted by religion) looks like.

MOTIVATION, INTEREST, AND FEELING

How is one motivated to act morally? Does insight into the moral law as such provide motivation to act morally or do human beings require something more, such as an emergent feeling of respect for the law? In the early 1990s, Richard McCarty discussed the textual evidence for the motivational import of rational insights and the feeling of respect in Kant's moral philosophy.[4] In doing so, he helpfully distinguishes between two possible interpretations of the relevance of moral feeling in Kant's theory of moral motivation, namely intellectualism and affectivism:

> Intellectualists hold that respect for the moral law is, or arises from, a purely intellectual recognition of the supreme authority of the moral law, *and* that this intellectual recognition is sufficient to generate moral action independently of any special motivating feelings or affections (. . .) Affectivists (. . .) maintain that [moral motivation] also depends on a peculiar moral feeling of respect for law.[5]

This issue is pertinent to Kant's theory of moral motivation because it provides the contours of his views on the motivational import of feelings and interests for moral agency. An illustration of the difficulty can be found in Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*:

> The moral feeling is a capacity for being affected by a moral judgment. When I judge by understanding that the action is morally good, I am still very far from doing this action of which I have so judged. But if this judgment moves me to do the action, that is the moral feeling. Nobody can or ever will comprehend how the understanding should have motivating power; it can admittedly judge, but to give this judgment power so that it becomes a motive able to impel the will to performance of an action—to understand this is the philosophers' stone! (27:1428)

The question is then what exactly renders the moral law of interest (or into a motive) to the human agent and thus facilitates incorporating morality into one's maxim. Is the moral law in itself enough (intellectualism)? Or does a moral motivation require something more (affectivism)?

The dilemma between these two approaches derives traditionally from an emphasis on either *Groundwork* or the *second Critique*: the intellectualist position is usually defended by means of reference to *Groundwork*, the affectivist position is defended by reference to the *second Critique*. Obviously, these two works do not run fully parallel in their account of moral motivation and the easiest explanation of the scholarly debate could be that Kant simply altered his theory of moral motivation in the *second Critique* so as to accommodate criticism from his contemporaries. Kant would then have included a discussion of moral feeling in the *second Critique* in order to ameliorate a flawed ethical theory of *Groundwork*. However, the principle of charitable reading would encourage a reading of the *Groundwork* as prefiguring and preparing the *second Critique*, and not merely as an unfortunately immature ethical theory. *Groundwork* in fact already proposes an equivocal form of moral feeling as the motivating side of morality: human beings do really "take an interest in [moral laws], the foundation of which in us we call moral feeling [*das moralische Gefühl*], which [. . .] must rather be regarded as the subjective effect that the law exercises on the will, to which reason alone

deliver the objective grounds" (GMS 4:459–460). As will become clear, the relevant difference between *Groundwork* and the *second Critique* consists in *Groundwork*'s assumption that we cannot make intelligible how a thought can elicit an interest (while it must be acknowledged that it does so), while the *second Critique* investigates in great detail how the moral law elicits interest.

In the quotation above from the *Lectures*, Kant appears to be univocally allying himself to the position that McCarty calls affectivism: while the understanding (*Verstand*) is able to judge whether an action is morally right or wrong, reason (*Vernunft*) itself is unable to motivate by itself the human agent to choose the right course of action. The situation is, however, more complex since it is exactly reason that must motivate moral agency: it then seems that reason *should* but *cannot* motivate moral agency. This problem can be resolved by pointing out how Kantian moral motivation needs something from both "intellectualism" and "affectivism," and because of that seeks a third way between affectivism and intellectualism. Throughout his writings on ethics, Kant progressively expands on this affective side of morality. Whether this was prompted to him by his contemporaries or part of his own systematic development of morals (from a grounding (GMS) to a critique (KpV) toward a metaphysics (MS)) is not ultimately of decisive importance. One interlocutor that might have awakened Kant to the necessity of introducing an aesthetic dimension into his moral philosophy would be Friedrich von Schiller. Although Kant and Schiller had many prior exchanges on this subject, Schiller makes it clear in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (*Über die aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen*) that moral life requires a sense of aesthetic sensitivity. Referring to another work of Schiller, that is *On Gracefulness and Dignity* (*Über Anmut und Würde*), Kant largely concedes to Schiller that a certain graceful feeling of sublimity must necessarily accompany the confrontation with the moral law (RGV 6:23n).[6]

I think Christine Korsgaard sums this up well when she suggests that, for Kant, rational insights are, by themselves, motivationally inert (affectivism), but are able to motivate nonetheless because they are self-legislated (intellectualism).[7] Kant draws a distinction, which I have already discussed, between the rational will (*Wille*) and the power of choice (*Willkür*). While the rational will provides the rational insight into the proper moral course of action, the power of choice must still incorporate this course of action, but can only do so if presented with an interest in the moral law.[8] For human beings to want to incorporate the moral law into their maxim, morality requires an "interest," which Kant in *Groundwork* defines as "that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., becomes a cause determining the will" (GMS 4:459n). In the *second Critique*, Kant clarifies this by distinguishing between mediate (empirical) and immediate (rational) interests. Even when it comes to morality, Kant holds that agents still require an interest in moral actions. This interest cannot

be mediate, but must be immediate as originating in the confrontation with the moral law.

While this reading appears intuitively accurate, there emerges a difficulty because the qualitative difference between the human interest in sensuality and morality appears to disappear. Kant emphasizes that human agents' interest in morality is universal and categorical, while their interest in happiness is contingent and hypothetical. But this difference appears to dwindle down to mere "interest," that is, it is quantitatively distinct only, not qualitatively: one can acquire more interest or even lose interest in the moral law. This is an issue that troubled Kant: while from the transcendental perspective the moral law is of a wholly different order than sensuous interests, from an empirical or psychological perspective it is at best quantitatively distinct from sensuous interest. Since human beings are finite and embodied, their power of choice is more inclined toward (but not determined to) an interest that is stronger. The power of choice ought, however, to recognize the categorical nature of moral duties, but it is often compelled by the relative quantitative strength of our interests. For this reason specifically, Kant will time and again emphasize that we ought to cultivate our moral feeling and accordingly strengthen our interest in morality. Since the power of choice is more inclined toward a certain course of action if the interest in that course of action is more substantial, Kant will argue that human beings ought to increase their interest in moral agency. This explains why interest in the moral law is presented as being of a totally different order than sensuality while at the same time being in opposition to morality. Human agents have a tendency to level the playing field between rationality and sensuality. Since human agents cannot be holy (i.e., undo their interest in sensuality and act in a purely rational way), their attraction to rationality can best be enhanced by what I will call "moral education," which Kant discusses most extensively in *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Religion*. There, he emphasizes, human beings have a wide duty to cultivate their feeling for morality—or educate themselves morally—so as to become more interested in morality (e.g., MS 6:399–400). This becomes particularly pertinent given the absence in human nature of a way to naturally strengthen moral resolve and moreover the radically evil tendency to prioritize happiness over the moral law.

Kant's theory of moral motivation then in sum takes a middle way between thinking of human behavior in such strong terms as determinism and absolute freedom. On the one hand, Kant acknowledges that human agents require an interest as otherwise a certain course of action is impossible: nothing happens without a sufficient cause (determinism). On the other hand, Kant notes that phenomenal causes are never the full story and a causality from freedom is required as a transcendental assumption. Any interest still has to be taken up by the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice. What is interesting is

that Kant's position fits neatly within the intellectual evolution of modernity. Following the initial attraction to the Stoic ideal of reason suppressing the passions in early modernity, a different attitude gradually dawned—the seeds of which were already evident in Descartes and Spinoza—that would enlist the passions in the pursuit of moral excellence. In a manner of speaking, the enemy was converted to the cause: Descartes believed that the passions fulfill the vital function of assisting the will (*volonté*) in executing reason's commands,[9] and Spinoza similarly had a positive use for the passions, which could be turned into active powers rather than passive afflictions. The motivational inertness of reason becomes a general premise throughout modernity, and philosophers felt that "without passions humans possess no strong motive for acting: some jolt of emotion needs to shake their indolence."[10] Kant is similarly attempting to get to work with feeling in a way that might be conducive to moral excellence, namely by introducing a rational moral feeling that induces interest in the moral law.

PRUDENCE AND RATIONALITY

One of Kant's major regulating principles in establishing the ground of morality was that it should warrant the universality of morality. Because of this requirement, Kant rejects prudence as a ground and motivation for moral agency. In Kant's view, prudence is a rational mediation between our current situation and a desired end (happiness). Kant's own concept of *prudentia* or *phronèsis* does not really do justice to its rich signification for the Ancient Greeks,[11] but, according to Kant, prudence introduces a level of contingency in moral determination and motivation. Kant's attack on prudence ought not to be seen as directed against Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas, who both held a far more complex understanding of prudence as leading to *Eudaimonia* or flourishing, but toward more consequentialists views of ethics that align the moral good with the promotion of happiness and general well-being.

In *Groundwork*, Kant distinguishes between two ways in which an imperative can necessitate an action (or, how a compulsion on the will can be thought): hypothetically or categorically (GMS 4:414–416). A hypothetical imperative necessitates a certain action because it leads to a certain desired end and ultimately to happiness. Kant further differentiates the hypothetical imperatives into imperatives of artfulness and imperatives of prudence. The former aim at technical ends: for example, to be able to calculate the circumference of a circle, one has to multiply the radius by two times π. The imperatives of prudence are more complex since these formulate rules and counsels so as to achieve happiness. The categorical imperative is of a different order yet again since it commands apodictically: an action is necessitated

for itself, without projecting any further goals or purposes. Accordingly, there is a different sense of obligation that applies to these three imperatives: the first is "technical [rules], the second pragmatic [counsels], the third moral [commandments]" (GMS 4:416–417). Kant argues at length that prudential or pragmatic counsels in no way constitute a ground for moral agency and cannot (co)determine the moral law.

A similar but somewhat more transparent distinction returns in the *second Critique* between subjective and objective grounds of determination of the will (KpV 5:19–29). The subjective grounds of determination are called material principles (KpV: 5:21) which are governed by the principle of egoism or self-love (KpV 5:22) and are situated in the lower faculty of desire (*Ibid.*). Every maxim that, in one way or another, incorporates objects of (sensuous) pleasure is necessarily material. Accordingly, hypothetical imperatives (artfulness and prudence) are material principles located in the lower faculty of desire, which is propelled toward the pursuit of happiness. The lower faculty of desire of an agent is determined by "the feeling of agreeableness or disagreeableness that he expects from some cause" (KpV 5.23). Accordingly, the lower faculty of desire is governed (if operating properly) by prudence, which is concerned only with obtaining the most stable and highest amount of pleasure (and avoiding displeasure). From this perspective, Kant will applaud the cultivation of prudence since it can structure and order an agent's life, which could in turn facilitate moral agency. Prudence then can definitely be conducive to a good will even though it "has no inner unconditional worth" (GMS 4:393–394). In other words, while prudence cannot serve as either ground or motivation for moral agency (GMS 4:417–419; KpV AA 5:19–26; ZeF 8:375–378), it can indirectly assist moral agency by cultivating interest in the moral law and facilitating its pursuance (see especially: RGV 6:58). The counsels of prudence never do necessitate an action apodictically, since prudence necessitates certain actions for the sake of happiness, and not for their own sake:

> The principle of one's own happiness, however much understanding and reason may be used in it, still contains no determining ground for the will other than such as is suitable to the lower faculty of desire; and thus either there is no higher faculty of desire at all or else pure reason must be practical of itself and alone. (KpV 5:24)

The question then is whether Kant is opposed or not to prudence. From one angle, Kant is clearly opposed to introducing prudential reasoning in matters of ethics as they tend to dilute pure moral motivation. Some authors have regrettably taken this to be the whole story.[12] More recently, many authors have pointed out—as I have done above—that Kant supports prudence and

the pursuit of happiness as an indirect assistant to moral behavior in the ethical, political, and even religious realm.[13] In itself, however, prudence is without moral value and the merits of living a happy, wholesome life is only morally good insofar as it assists moral behavior: a happy villain is at least as villainous as an unhappy one. Kant's harsh opposition toward prudence in his foundational works on ethics is, according to Rex Stevens, influenced by David Hume's misology. In Hume's view, satisfying answers to important questions can often not be found by mere contemplation, and we would do better to simply follow the prudential guidance of our pragmatic reason and follow the currents of nature. Accordingly, the human agent would do well, according to Hume, to let go of all contemplation: "[To] be delivered from the tortures of reflection [all we have to do] is to yield to nature's current."[14] As in his theoretical philosophy, Kant's moral philosophy could then be read as an attempt to defend the supremacy of (theoretical) reason over against the skeptical attacks of Hume.

Moral motivation is constructed best on objective grounds of determination that universally necessitate the maxims of the human will a priori, not on subjective grounds that contingently necessitate the will. The distinction that Kant consistently draws between pure practical reason and prudence seems central to his ethical philosophy: morality and happiness are parallel lines that do not intersect. This appears largely counterintuitive from a common sense point of view since most human beings entertain the intuition that in some way morality must be related to some sense of happiness; otherwise it would become very difficult (maybe even impossible) to explain why human agents should pursue morality. In ways, Kant's philosophy of religion attempts to assuage this difficulty by cultivating the hope for a convergence of nature and happiness (I return to this in chapter five). For empirical human beings, prudence cannot occupy the place of practical reason since empirical being is not ever in accordance with pure rationality. The problem with prudence specifically for Kant is that it remains overly immersed in a world of contingencies, rather than in a universal realm of stability. This is why, according to William Desmond, Kant's disconnection of happiness from morality should be understood against the backdrop of the nihilism of modernity, which strips away intrinsic value from the world in itself. In Desmond's view, modern philosophy perceives the world as devaluated or disenchanted and, because of this, it looks for a new source of value now located in the autonomous will of the human agent. In Kant's philosophy, this faculty is able to attribute universal and unchangeable value to certain objects. By pinpointing transcendental reason as the only source of universal value, Kant is counteracting a more prudential and fleshed evaluation of life. In Desmond's view, Kant's ethics is powered by somewhat of an ascetic denial of the potential overabundant and incalculable bounty of sensuous life; accordingly, Kant's ethics becomes

"another anorexia of life's fullness, presenting itself as the most healthful, because the most protected from life's vagaries—vagaries that offer us life's surprise and unasked opportunity."[15]

Desmond's point seems valid: there are not only serious hesitations in Kant's ethics toward the moral potential of human nature, but equally a moral check is put on natural inclinations. Desmond continues that such suppression might invite rebellion from a more fleshed point of view on ethics. In his words, we will soon experience a subterranean rumbling that "sensing the anemic condition of pure reason above rebels with vital life."[16] Put in the terms of the concepts used in this study, modern philosophy has a prevailing tendency to be pessimistic about the possible value of existence as such. While this premise remains largely tacit throughout Kant's philosophy, it begets full articulation in, for instance, Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's philosophies. I stress, however, that this point of view is furtively slumbering underneath Kant's critical ethics in his emphasis on the need for the agent to imprint value upon an otherwise valueless world (cf. A 546–547 / B 574–575; MAM 8:115–116). In doing so, Kantian moral agents ought to close off from any possible constitutive influence from other sources of heteronomy. Obviously, prudence is not an effective tool toward this end because it remains immersed in the empirical realm: prudence must listen to nature before speaking. In other words, prudence is too empirical, sensual, and physical.

Among the many interesting points to be gathered from Kant's devaluation of prudence, one of the most important points is that he objects to there being a natural feeling of approval for morality or, in other words, that there is a natural incentive to act morally. If morality was namely a natural inclination of human beings, they could prudentially navigate the myriad of their desires toward their natural, moral destiny. This is what prudence actually meant to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas as they recognized that human beings naturally aspired toward the good. Kant does not oppose human beings having an interest in morality, but to him this interest cannot be natural, and so cannot be sustained by prudence. In *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant puts this succinctly:

> The very concept of virtue already implies that virtue must be taught (that it is not innate); one need not appeal to anthropological knowledge based on experience to see this. For a human being's moral capacity would not be virtue were it not produced by the strength of his resolution in conflict with powerful opposing inclinations. (MS 4:477)

Kant's transcendental suspicion toward aligning morality with human nature can easily lead to preposterous dimensions and has been a rich soil for satire and ridicule. Since Kant anchors morality in an intention that dislodges from

prudential mediation, human agents are morally good when they act with the intention of respecting moral duty. While obviously somewhat exaggerated (and partially remedied by Kant's ethical works of the 1790s), such unyielding and prudentially blind emphasis on self-imposed duty can easily lead to tragicomic dimensions. A somewhat anachronistic caricature of Kantian morality could be read into Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, for instance in how the noble knight with the sorrowful countenance (*Caballero de la Triste Figura*), frees some condemned prisoners from their chains because the knight believes that freedom is the highest good.[17] Don Quixote lacks prudence and fails to see that these prisoners might not have lofty ideals in mind when they twist words to trick the noble knight. More to the heart of Kant's philosophy, the same can be gathered from his rejection of morally wronging someone else per se, since the moral law is based upon the rational, subjective faculty of the particular agent. Even the so-called "duties to others" in *Metaphysics of Morals* (MS 6:448–474) are necessitated because the individual agent is a rational agent. While the object of the duty is outside the agent, the compulsion is wholly internal. Accordingly, when doing wrong, immoral agents trespass against the rationality in themselves. Even when I treat the other merely as a "means," and not also an "end in him/herself," I am not really disrespecting the other per se, but degrading the moral law within myself since that moral law commands us to hold the other in the highest possible moral esteem.

Kantian morality is not simply not built or sustained by prudence, often seems even to be in open rebellion against personal ambitions and desires: "[The moral law] excludes altogether the influence of self-love on the supreme practical principle and infringes without end upon self-conceit, which prescribes as laws the subjective conditions of self-love" (KpV 5:73). While this does not necessarily imply that the moral law is met with "repugnance" (Schiller), it nevertheless suggests that self-love may never assist in motivating moral agency. Some scholars have given argument that Kant allows for a more charitable reading of the natural powers of the human agent (and so also prudence) in *Metaphysics of Morals*.[18] In the "Preface" of "The Doctrine of Virtue," Kant suggests that the moral system he had thus far developed (throughout the 1780s) would not be an appropriate tool for the moral education of the "masses"—as he also points out in *Religion* (RGV 6:6–8) and in *Conflict of the Faculties* (SF 7:5–11). Kant's moral philosophy of the 1780s provided morality with a pure transcendental ground. However, such a pure and transcendental system of ethics proves to be inappropriate when applied to the moral education of the "masses":

> For what sort of concept can be made of the force and the herculean strength needed to subdue the vice breeding inclinations if virtue is to borrow its weapons from the arsenal of metaphysics, a speculative subject that few know how to

> handle? Hence all doctrine of virtue, in lecture halls, from pulpits, or in popular books, also becomes ridiculous if it is decked out in scraps of metaphysics. (MS 6:375)

Kant's acknowledgment that his transcendental investigation in morality is insufficient can, in my view, mean either that he revokes and reworks what he has defended on moral agency in his 1780s writings, or that he adds to his moral philosophy something that was always present but could only be directly mentioned in a book he had been preparing for over three decades after all the "metaphysics" that had to precede it had been dealt with (cf. GMS 4:390–391). The second option is obviously the more likely.

Kant explicitly notes that his general project in the *Metaphysical Doctrine of Virtue* is moral education (MS 6:376–377). As I will detail more fully below, moral education involves the cultivation of the human agent's rational interest in morality through practices that are not, strictly speaking, rational. Kant is then giving moral recourse to those who are naturally overly interested in sensuality by offering the tools to strengthen their feeling of respect for the moral. What is important to note, however, is that practicing one's feeling for morality does not imply that the human agent becomes in any way naturally inclined to the moral law. A natural inclination to adhere to moral duty is a contradiction in terms. Moral agency depends, even in *Metaphysics of Morals*, on the motivating function of the confrontation with the moral law as a fact of reason. This motivating power (or interest) can be reinforced and enhanced, but cannot ever be backed up by human nature. Human nature remains, in Kant's philosophy, strictly removed from moral goodness. While I believe that the *Metaphysics of Morals* shines an illuminating and helpful light on the earlier works, it does not, in any way, transform the general outlook Kant developed on morality and moral agency in his earlier works—as his concise summary of moral agency in the *Introduction* already suggests (MS 6:214–228).

Kant's deprecation of prudence is connected to the emphasis he places on the dutiful character of the human agent's relationship to the moral law; moral duty excludes any possible natural or sensuous approval for morality. While the likes of Aristotle could still hold that the good wholesome life is to be found in the prudentially wise execution of the natural inclinations of humanity, Kant emphasizes that morality and happiness ought to be separated in principle. In my view, moral agency becomes strained and confused if the most difficult issue the human agent faces is the simple question: "Why should I be interested in morality?" If morality unequivocally divorces itself from the natural desires and ambitions of the individual human agent by imposing a fairly unworldly standard (albeit called "autonomy"), it stands to reason that human nature would rebel against this cruelty with devices galore.

Perhaps Nietzsche was right to sniff out cruelty in Kant's categorical imperative? While Kant later on definitely tones down his initial radical divorce of morality from happiness, there remains a wedge between our natural disposition and morality.

RESPECT AS THE MORAL INTEREST

In *Groundwork*, Kant admits that he cannot render comprehensible the interest that attaches to morality even though he finds himself forced to assume that there is such a thing (GMS 4:448–463). Although hinting in several footnotes (GMS 4:414n; 4:459n) at the solution offered in the *second Critique* (KpV 5:71–110), he ultimately claims that we can at best "comprehend the incomprehensibility" of the moral imperative (GMS 4:463). The solution proposed in the *second Critique* postulates a moral feeling of respect for the law that provides the necessary incentive for the human agent to incorporate the moral law.

While autonomy is a necessary precondition for morality, it is not, in its positive sense, a given since this requires human agents to format their maxims in such a way that they are universally applicable. A rational duty to do so is necessarily accompanied by some measure of discomfort. So, one would not be completely unreasonable in questioning why the human agent would desire to be rational at all if to be so initially appears devoid of natural, sensuous interest and moreover if accompanied by some form of pain. Kant proposes a number of responses to this problem, but is only able to fully formulate a cogent solution in the *second Critique*. In *Groundwork*, Kant hints that a first equivocal form of interest in the moral law might be that it makes human beings worthy of happiness: "A good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy" (GMS 4:393). Accordingly, while not leading to happiness as such, morality does provide the worthiness to be happy which could potentially provide the human agent with an interest in being moral: "That mere worthiness [*Würdigkeit*] to be happy, even without the motive of participating in this happiness, can interest us of itself" (GMS 4:450). This is the same solution that Kant offered in the *first Critique*, specifically the *Canon of Pure Reason*, where Kant argued the following: "That which is such that it has no other motive than the worthiness to be happy I call moral (moral law)" (A 806 / B 834). In *Groundwork*, Kant acknowledges that this is a rather weak argument because it already presupposes that the human agent acknowledges the moral law as commanding categorically. The more basic question then becomes: why would human beings be content with being "worthy of happiness," if they can actually be happy through pursuing sensuous interests (even the countermoral ones)?

A different solution also proposed in *Groundwork* returns to the distinction between the empirical and the intelligible: although human agents might be empirically determined by causal laws, on a rational level they are subject to the rational lawgiving of the *Wille*. The categorical compulsion of the *Wille* is thus rational legislation upon the *Willkür*. While this explains wherefrom the moral law derives, that is, the self-legislation of the will, this does not offer a reason to take up rational self-legislation in the power of choice. Why would an abstract, self-formulated law of reason be of any interest to us? What causes inert rationality to be an incentive for agency? Autonomy is for Kant an altogether different kind of determination of the will and not simple self-expression. What coaxes rational beings to prefer rational determination over sensuous determination? In *Groundwork*, Kant admits defeat and simply asserts that human beings take an interest in positive autonomy without being able to render this comprehensible:

> The subjective impossibility of explaining the freedom of the will is the same as the impossibility of discovering and making comprehensible an interest which the human being can take in moral laws; and yet he does really take an interest in them, the foundation of which in us we call moral feeling. (GMS 4:459–460)

Because of Kant's inability to explain the operativity of freedom of the will, Paul Guyer suggests that for the Kant of *Groundwork* freedom is a self-normative concept that is to be thought of as having appeal in itself.[19] A different solution would be that the strictures of his investigation in *Groundwork* deny the necessary insight into the kind of concepts that would explain the interest in morality. Such an investigation cannot ever be pursued a priori: "But it is quite impossible to see, that is, *to make intelligible a priori*, how a mere thought which itself contains nothing sensible produces a feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (GMS 4:460—my emphasis). The failure to render this comprehensible obviously does not injure the validity of the categorical imperative, only its comprehensibility for the human subject. There is, in other words, nothing wrong with (the deduction of) the categorical imperative; rather, human agents are limited in their vision and fail to make morality fully intelligible. Even though we cannot understand how a categorical compulsion on the will is possible, we must rationally accept that it is possible because the moral law requires this (we *must* therefore we *can*). Kant concludes:

> It is therefore no censure [*Tadel*] of our deduction of the supreme principle of morality, but a reproach [*Vorwurf*] that must be brought against human reason in general, that it cannot make comprehensible as regards its absolute necessity an unconditional practical law (. . .); for, that it is unwilling to do this through a condition—namely by means of some interest laid down as a basis—cannot

> be held against it, since then it would not be the moral law (. . .) We do not comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, but we nevertheless comprehend its incomprehensibility [*wir begreifen aber doch seine Unbegreiflichkeit*]; and this is all that can fairly be required of a philosophy that strives in its principles to the very boundary [*Grenze*] of human reason. (GMS 4:464)

Kant returns to this topic, with fresh resolve, in the *second Critique* and presents a resolution to this problem that likely became apparent to him while reworking his *first Critique.* According to his correspondence, Kant intended the *second Critique* to be a part of the second edition of the *first Critique*, thereby establishing a strong sense of continuity between the B-edition of the *first Critique* and the *second Critique.*[20] It is then not really surprising that several elements that make this second edition distinct from the first edition could be seen as propaedeutic to the *second Critique*. More precisely, the pertinent qualification of transcendental philosophy in the preface to the B-edition paves the way for the *second Critique*'s argument for the comprehensibility (albeit limited) of the human being's interest in the moral law. In this preface, Kant states that the purpose of transcendental idealism is to "deny [*aufheben*] knowledge [*Wissen*] in order to make room for faith [*Glaube*]" (B XXX). What this means remains ambiguous and has given cause for vastly different interpretations. Helpful to understand this statement is the *Doctrine of Method* of the *first Critique* where Kant draws a distinction between knowledge, belief and opinion where faith could be aligned with belief:

> Having an opinion is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient and is at that same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient is called knowing. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone). (B 850 / A 822)

The main difference between "belief" and "knowing" would be objective sufficiency, which is present in the latter and lacking in the former. Kant's suggestion that objective sufficiency is identical to "certainty for everyone" is fairly unhelpful, and he does not elaborate further on these concepts as they are, to him, "readily grasped" (B 850 / A 822). To clarify Kant's usage of these terms, it is helpful to transpose Kant's definition of knowledge in the *Analytic of Pure Reason* to the distinction between "belief" and "knowledge": while knowledge requires an experiential contribution that would render belief universally and objectively valid, some concepts are beyond such

experiential contribution (such as God, soul, world). In other words, the concepts of God, soul, and world can never be objects of "knowledge" but at best of "belief" since they are beyond any possible experience. If these notions nevertheless present themselves through some form of rational deduction, they ought to be appreciated as a dogma of rational faith rather than as an article of knowledge.

Having now argued that several transcendental objects ought to be approached from the perspective of faith, Kant adds that for these a certain transgression of the limits of transcendental idealism can be justified. In my view, this argument ought to be taken as a consequence of the ultimate argument of *Groundwork* III, where Kant could not allow rational inquiry into the noumenal motivation for moral agency since this is beyond possible experience. Nevertheless, to account for the cogency of the moral law, Kant must allow for a transgression into the noumenal. While transcendental idealism at first limits the reach of human reason, it afterward allows for an extension through the practical use of reason:

> A critique that limits the speculative use of reason is, to be sure, to that extent negative, but because it simultaneously removes an obstacle that limits or even threatens to wipe out the practical use of reason, this critique is also in fact of positive and very important utility, as soon as we have convinced ourselves that there is an absolutely necessary practical use of pure reason (the moral use), in which reason unavoidably extends itself beyond the boundaries of sensibility. (B XXV)

These considerations allow Kant in the *second Critique* to remedy the opaqueness of the noumenal realm through confrontation with moral duty and the necessary feelings that confrontation with the moral law elicits. Specifically, in the chapter "Of the motives [*Triebfeder*] of pure practical reason," Kant returns to the central issue of *Groundwork* III, namely the interest in the moral law. Kant details three feelings that necessarily correlate with the confrontation and incorporation of the moral law: pain, respect, and self-approbation. He can, at this point, make such an argument since the phenomenal consequences of the categorical imperative can now be approached from the perspective of practical faith.

Kant's claim that the moral law necessitates agency a priori—or, "pursuit for its sake alone" (*aus Pflicht*)—also means that the motivation for the moral law is pure or unadulterated by sensuous interests. The willful submission of one's maxims to immutable rational laws is then to be seen as detrimental to the human agent's sensuous nature: the human being's self-love and self-conceit are hurt. Sensuous pain is therefore the first necessary feeling that accompanies the moral law. In Kant's words, autonomy "infringes [*thut Abbruch*] upon self-love, inasmuch as it only

restricts it, as natural and active in us even prior to the moral law, to the condition of agreement with this law, and then it is called rational self-love [. . .]"; however, the moral law "strikes down [*schlägt sie gar nieder*] self-conceit altogether, since all claims to esteem for oneself that precede accord with the moral law are null and quite unwarranted [*nichtig und ohne alle Befugniß sind*]" (KpV 5:73). This first effect of the moral law is called pathological since it emerges through a decrease of self-love and self-conceit which are sensuous or pathological feelings. Obviously, this initial feeling of pain makes morality relatively undesirable. In these paragraphs, Kant remains unclear as to what "restricting in accordance with the moral law" means. In *Religion*, he makes clear that morality requires the subordination of the interests of self-love to the moral law (RGV 6:36), or that one acts morally when self-love takes a back seat whenever the moral law is in play. Additionally, the moral law "strikes down self-conceit": the human agent cannot appeal to "esteem" (*Selbstschätzung*) outside of acting in accordance with the moral law. In consequence of these claims, human agents cannot claim value that is not derived from their moral uprightness, which means that athletic, intellectual, prudential, or emotional achievements are without value as long as they do not in some way heighten moral resolve.

From this first feeling that accompanies the moral law, morality appears unwanted. Obviously, this does not help to explain why the moral law interests human beings, to the contrary. On several occasions, Kant proposes to mitigate the rigor of a univocal emphasis on the sensuous pain in morality. For instance, he argues that virtue and happiness ought not to be locked in antagonism because the human being ought only to forfeit any appeal to happiness *when confronted with duty*:

> This distinction of the principle of happiness from that of morality is not, for this reason, at once an opposition between them, and pure practical reason does not require that one should renounce claims to happiness but only that as soon as duty is in question one should take no account of them. (KV 5:93)

This concession does not imply that human agents act morally well if pursuing their happiness when duty does not present itself. Moreover, when presented with duty, we ought to abandon all claims to self-love that could possibly conflict with the moral law. Ultimately, this means that personal aspirations are a peril to morality.

While pain appears to be the dominant affect when confronted with the moral law, the fact that the law can pain human agents from a sensuous point of view can only occur if that law is demanding of respect from an intellectual point of view:

> Now, what in our own judgment infringes upon our self-conceit humiliates. Hence the moral law unavoidably humiliates every human being when he compares with it the sensible propensity of his nature. If something represented as a determining ground of our will humiliates us in our self-consciousness, it awakens respect for itself [*erweckt für sich Achtung*] insofar as it is positive and a determining ground. (KPV 5:74)

A necessary companion of the negative, pathological feeling of pain is the practical feeling of respect. This positive moral sentiment of respect is a product of the confrontation with the moral law, and Kant does not here advocate an antecedent feeling for morality rooted in human nature that would direct human action in a certain way. The rational practicality of moral feeling is emphasized because Kant denies the existence of a natural feeling for morality (moral sentimentalism). So, while introducing a moral feeling in his moral philosophy, this moral feeling differs from moral sentimentalism on two counts: the moral feeling is generated through confrontation with the moral law and this feeling is practical, not natural.

Kant is categorical in his argument that there is a "feeling of respect for the moral law, (. . .) a moral feeling" (KPV 5:75). But if this feeling of respect for the law is complicit in motivating moral agency, does this then not adulterate the aspired purity of the moral incentive? No. Respect for the moral law is a practical feeling that does not refer back to sensuous interest. In fact, one could rightly say that respect for the moral law is the subjective side of the objective moral law: respect (*Achtung*) is morality itself. Accordingly, when human beings pursue the moral law because of respect for the moral law, they are immediately and purely motivated toward the moral law. Respect is then the necessary rational interest all human beings take in moral agency—an avenue that remained largely unexplored throughout *Groundwork*.

Is the introduction of the moral feeling of respect a distinctive difference between *Groundwork* and the *second Critique* with regard to Kant's discussion of moral feeling? In *Groundwork*, he claimed that respect for the moral law is the only appropriate motive for moral agency, while in the *second Critique*, he added that the feeling of respect is a necessary correlate of the confrontation with the moral law. Respect for moral duty emerges, regardless of whether the agent acts upon this respect of not. A strong statement from *Groundwork* seems inconsistent with the above: "It is quite impossible to see, that is to make comprehensible a priori, how a mere thought which itself contains nothing sensible produces a feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (GMS 4:460). Obviously, Kant no longer holds that it is "impossible" to "make comprehensible a priori" how a thought produces a feeling, since he elaborates on the two abovementioned feelings that necessarily correlate with the moral law. This shift could possibly be explained by Kant's downplaying

the notion of purity between *Groundwork* and the *second Critique*. *Groundwork* III moves toward a "Critique of Pure Practical Reason" while the *second Critique* just is a "Critique of Practical Reason." The preface to the B-edition of the *first Critique* is instrumental in accounting for the possibility of a different approach to purity in practical reason since practical faith gives credibility to certain transcendental objects beyond the scope of possible experience. Although the possibility of a "thought bringing forth a feeling" was not dismissed in *Groundwork*, this venture was beyond the reach of transcendental philosophy. Kant did not investigate the feeling side to morality in *Groundwork* because he had limited his inquiry to providing the ground (or principle) of morality, but ultimately he found himself forced to introduce the notion of a rational feeling of respect so as to understand the interest in moral agency. The ultimate argument of *Groundwork* is concisely summarized in a brief reflection Kant wrote somewhere between 1776 and 1783: "We cannot have any concept of how a mere form of actions could have the power of an incentive. Yet this must be if morality is to obtain, and experience confirms it" (REFL6860 19:183).

MORAL PLEASURE

According to the above exegesis, morality is first and foremost a negative affliction upon self-love and self-conceit, causing pain, a negativity out of which a positive feeling of respect for the moral law arises.[21] Human beings respect the purity and eminence of the moral law that irresistibly enforces itself upon them. This respect is the key motive in moral agency, that is, respect for the moral law in its grandeur ought to become the sole motive of moral agency. Thus, respect for the eminence of the moral law provides the immediate interest human beings take in acting morally. When positively free, in the sense of being determined through universal principles alone, human agents participate in the exuberance of the moral law. This very aspect of humanity, its potentiality to participate in morality, is what makes humankind worthy of infinite respect.

Kant then has accomplished in the *second Critique* what he set out to achieve in *Groundwork*, namely to account for the content, validity, and operativity of morality. Accounting for operativity appeared to be the most difficult task since Kant was required to attach an interest in moral agency that did not refer back to anything something other than reason, morality, or autonomy. In many ways, Kant allied himself to a principle that could suggestively be called *ni dieu, ni plaisir*: neither God nor sensuous pleasure can properly ground or motivate moral agency; only the practical feeling of respect for the moral law accomplishes the set goals. At this

point, any potential pessimism in Kant's moral philosophy appears to be disarmed since he has accomplished his goal, to ground morality purely in a priori reason and to conceptualize an interest in incorporating the moral law into the agent's maxim. Kant will, however, admit that agents experience serious difficulty when attempting this because their sensuous nature recoils from rationality.

Before conceptualizing the human agent's poor disposition toward morality, a final clarification of Kant's theory of moral motivation is necessary. The agent can make some progress on the path to virtue and accordingly become aware of such progress. This awareness is accompanied by a positive sensation of self-approbation or self-approval. Acting on the moral feeling of respect generates a sensation which, for most intents and purposes, is akin to pleasure. At first, Kant calls this pleasure "self-approbation [*Selbstbilligung*]" (KPV 5:81), later on "contentment with oneself [*Selbstzufriedenheit*]" (KPV 5:117) and finally "moral pleasure [*moralische Lust*]" (MS 6:378). For present purposes, these three forms of intellectual pleasure derived from perceiving oneself as acting morally can be identified with one another. Kant's most sustained treatment of "moral pleasure" occurs in *Metaphysics of Morals* where he draws a pivotal distinction between pathological and moral pleasure. Failure to see the distinction between both would in Kant's own view reduce his theory of morals to eudaemonism and result in "the euthanasia (easy death [*der sanfte Tod*]) of all morals" (MS 6:378). Moral pleasure is experienced whenever the human agent is moved by respect for duty alone; accordingly, it would obviously be self-contradictory to act in a moral fashion so as to procure moral pleasure because morality's sole motive is respect for the moral law alone. The human agent who aspires to obtain moral pleasure must necessarily fail. Moral agency can then be its own reward. In Kant's words, autonomy can be a source of "unchangeable contentment, necessary combined with it and resting on no special feeling, and this can be called intellectual contentment" (KpV 5:117–118). Such intellectual contentment is not a sensuous emotion or a physical feeling, but an intellectual joy or complacency on the grounds of being free from hindrances and capable of overcoming sensuous obstacles. Such moral pleasure differs quantitatively and qualitatively from sensuous pleasure; if it weren't, Kant's system of morals would be eudaemonist and morally sentimental.

The obvious difference between sensuous and moral pleasures is to be located in their intentionality. Unlike moral pleasure, sensuous pleasure is actively pursued by the human agent, whereas intellectual pleasure is not implicated as a motive in human agency:

> Pleasure that must precede one's observance of the law in order for one to act in conformity with the law is pathological and one's conduct follows the order

> of nature; but pleasure that must be preceded by the law in order to be felt is in the moral order. (MS 6:378)

Nevertheless, this difference in origin does not necessarily provide a qualitative criterion to distinguish one pleasure from the other since the actual feeling might still be the same. Accordingly, what would be the qualitative difference between the experience of intellectual and that of sensuous pleasure? If such a qualitative criterion could not be provided, this would mean that moral and sensuous pleasures differ only in their respective origins without being phenomenally discernible. This seems to be Kant's own conclusion: "Respect as consciousness of direct necessitation of the will by the law is hardly an analogue of the feeling of pleasure, although in relation to the faculty of desire it does the same thing but from different sources" (KPV 5:117). A human agent easily confuses, and thereby falls prey to an optical illusion, moral and sensuous pleasure. Kant then warns against conflating "what one does" with "what one feels": the motivation for acting morally is still the moral law, even though adherence to it is necessarily accompanied by a feeling of pleasure: "There is always present here the ground of an error of subreption [*einem Fehler des Erschleichens*] (*vitium subreptionis*) and, as it were, of an optical illusion in the self-consciousness of what one does as distinguished from what one feels" (KpV 5:116).

Kant separates his way of thinking about moral pleasure from that of moral sentimentalism. What, then, are the important distinguishing features between, on the one hand, Kant's account of moral feeling and pleasure and, on the other hand, the moral sentimentalist approach? First, Kant argues that the confrontation with the moral law elicits, on the sensuous level, a pathological feeling of displeasure or pain and that human sensuous nature in no way harbors attraction to the good. According to moral sentimentalism, human nature has a universal moral feeling that physically attracts the human agent to morality. Second, Kant's moral feeling of respect, which provides the necessary interest in morality, is generated through confrontation with the moral law and does not precede it, as the moral sentimentalist would have it. Kant explicitly rejects an antecedent feeling for morality that would temporarily precede the confrontation with the moral law. Third, the intellectual moral feeling for Kant is phenomenally only quantitatively distinguishable from sensuous pleasure, but can be qualitatively distinguished by means of its origin. The moral sentimentalist holds that moral and sensuous pleasures are in no way qualitatively distinct, only quantitatively so (e.g., duration, intensity, elevation).

Moral agency is affectively motivated by respect for the moral law and is accompanied by a positive feeling of intellectual satisfaction. Despite this fairly optimistic account of the ground and motivation for morality, Kant

equally accepts a propensity to evil that rebels against rationality itself in such a way that human beings almost become incapable of moral agency. Reason itself might be too weak to overcome evil and human beings need the motivating power of religion to help fulfill this goal. Or, as Joel Madore puts it:

> It is true that ethical obligation gives meaning to my life, that is it brings with it elevation of the soul and a certain reserved contentment with oneself. Still, one may very well concede all this and yet prefer the warm comfort of a life of happiness, avoiding the hardships that morality brings with it.[22]

Kant thus concedes that he must search for a way to enliven interest in morality because the grandeur and eminence of the moral law are often found to be insufficient.

NOTES

1. Max Küenberg, *Ethische Grundfragen in der jüngst veröffentlichen Ethikvorlesung Kants* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1925), 62.

2. Schopenhauer, 2009, 123 [118].

3. Most of the authors in this field are very well-known, and will be engaged in the pages the come. One often overlooked contribution comes from Susanne Weiper who believes to show that Kant's theory of moral motivation exhibits a "very comprehensive unity [. . .] even though it is very complex and multifaceted" (Susanne Weiper, *Triebfeder und höchstes Gut. Untersuchungen zum Problem der sittlichen Motivation bei Kant, Schopenhauer und Scheler* (Würzburg: Konigshausen und Neumann, 2000), 94–95; my translation).

4. He refined his position in a more recent work: Richard McCarty, *Kant's Theory of Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

5. McCarty, 1993, 423.

6. For a sustained presentation of Schiller's discussion with Kant on this esthetical dimension, see Gaël Cloitre, *Schiller. Esthétique et dualism* (Dijon: Centre Georges Chevrier, 2012). Reed Winegar argues, however, that "Kant's response to Schiller relies *primarily* on the sublime feeling that we experience when we *contemplate* the moral law as the product of our reason, rather than on the pleasure that we feel when we successfully *act* on the moral law" (Reed Winegar, "An Unfamiliar and Positive Law: On Kant and Schiller." In: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 95 (2013): 275–297).

7. Korsgaard, 1996, 43–76; see also: McCarty, 1993; Larry Herrera, "Kant on the Moral *Triebfeder*." *Kant-Studien* 91 (2000): 395–410.

8. Other scholars have made similar claims: Dieter Henrich, "Das Problem der Grundlegung der Ethik bei Kant und im spekulativen Idealismus." In: *Sein und Ethos*. Edited Paulus Engelhardt (Mainz: Matthias Grünenwald, 1963), 350–387); Karl Ameriks, "Kant and Motivational Externalism." In: *Moralische Motivation. Kant und*

die Alternativen. Edited by Heiner Klemme et al. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006).

9. See throughout: René Descartes, *On the Passions of the Soul.* Translated by Stephen H. Voss (London: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989). For Spinoza, see his *Ethics*. Edited by Matthew Kisner and Translated by Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For discussion: Denis Kambouchner, *L'homme des passions* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014); Jean-luc Marion, *La pensée passive de Descartes* (Paris: PUF, 2012); Pierre Guenancia, *L'intelligence du sensible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

10. Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment & the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 56.

11. For a sustained treatment of this claim, see William Desmond, "Phronesis and the Categorical Imperative." In: *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1980): 7–15. For a similar issue: Paton, 1967, 40–41.

12. One classical example of this is: William Davie, "Being Prudent and Acting Prudently." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973): 57–60.

13. Respective examples are Thomas E. Hill, "Happiness and Human Flourishing in Kant's Ethics." In: *Human Flourishing*. Edited by Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller and Jeffrey Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 143–75; Katrin Flikschuh, "Hope as Prudence: Practical Faith in Kant's Political Thinking." In: *Reading Onora O'Neill*. Edited by David Archard, Monique Deveaux, Neil Manson, and Daniel Weinstock (New York: Routledge, 2013), 55–76; Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Prudential Theory of Religion: The Necessity of Historical Faith for Moral Empowerment." *Con-textos Kantianos* 1 (2015): 57–76.

14. Rex Stevens, *Kant on Moral Practice. A Study of Moral Success and Failure* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981), 35.

15. Desmond, 2001, 100.

16. *Ibid.*, 101.

17. Miguel Cervantes, *The History of that Ingenious Gentleman Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Translated by Burton Raffel (New York and London: Norton and Company, 1995) 120–127.

18. For example, Wood, 1999; Korsgaard, 1996.

19. Guyer, 2000, 172–206.

20. According to Heiner Klemme, Kant twice hints that he desired to incorporate the *second Critique* in the *first Critique*. First, Friedrich Gottlob Born wrote to Kant in November 1786 that he was looking forward to the "important addition of a critique of practical reason to embellish your splendid work" (10:471). Second, at the end of the same month, Kant refers to a 'Critique of Pure Practical Reason' to be added to the *first Critique* so as to refute the objections raised against his *Groundwork* (Heiner Klemme, "The Origin and Aim of Kant's Critique of Practical Reason." In: *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason. A Critical Guide*. Edited by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12–13; cf. *Rezensionen zur Kantischen Philosophie*. *Volume 1.* Edited by Albert Landau (Bebra: Albert Landau Verlag, 1990), 471–472). Moreover, Kant discloses the reason for writing the *second Critique* in a letter to Carl Leonhard, accompanying a copy of the book: "In

this book a lot of contradictions which the supporters of the old have wagered against my Critique are refuted to a considerable level, and the contradictions in which they inevitably find themselves when they are unwilling to give up their old patchwork are presented clearly enough" (10:514).

21. This dual nature of moral feeling has often drawn scholars to discern detect considerable similarity with the experience of the sublime in the *third Critique*. In a similar way, the sublime causes pain as well as arouses awe and amazement. Robert Clewis lists the following similarities and differences between the moral feeling and the feeling of the sublime. They both (1) have a similar negative/positive, painful/pleasant and downward/upward structure; (2) have a ground in a priori ideas of reason; (3) require some form of concreteness—objects or situations—so as to manifest themselves; (4) have a tendency to give rise to subreption (the reduction to sheer immanence); and (5) require cultivation. They differ in that (1) the aesthetic sublime, contrary to moral feeling, does not produce interest (motive for action); (2) moral feeling is necessary to be able to feel sublimity; (3) moral feeling is based on the determinate idea of the moral law while the aesthetic sublime is based on an indeterminate idea; (4) moral feeling plays a significant role in Kantian ethics while the aesthetical sublime does not; and (5) subreption means something different: the subreption of moral feeling still allows the moral law its transcendence, while the subreption of aesthetic sublime reduces the sublime to an empirical object. Robert Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126–135). According to Clewis, Kant scholarship has gone back and forth between focusing on the similarities or the differences. Accordingly, some scholars have had a tendency to moralize the sublime and others have had a tendency to aestheticize the moral law. The correct interpretation obviously lies somewhere between the above extremes, as Clewis notes: "The Kantian sublime remains an aesthetic judgment, but it has its ground (*Grundlage*) in human nature (i.e., human freedom) and is based on a moral predisposition (*Anlage*)" (*Ibid.*, 135).

22. Madore, 2011, 39.

Chapter 4

Natural (In)Aptitude for Morality

Kant's view of the nature of human being is the final aspect in discussion of Kant's theory of moral obligation. Since human beings lack a natural feeling for morality, or a natural inclination to act morally, the moral law remains a rational duty that must be motivated solely by something beyond sensuous nature. Despite this emphasis on duty, Kant argues that the only reasonable perspective to hold with regard to human beings is that their nature is originally and logically predisposed to the good, which means that they are logically constituted so that they would appropriately order their interests: potentially, human beings are good. To account for the human agent's constant opposition to the moral order, Kant submits that human beings have radically fallen from such originally goodness by having acquired a corruption that taints their power of choice to its roots (and become *radically* evil): that is, naturally corrupted, not necessarily corrupted. This is what Kant means by radical evil, that is, that there is a rebellious element to human freedom that opposes adherence to the good in such a way that autonomous moral motivation becomes highly laborious. The radical propensity to evil is a crystallization of Kant's existential pessimism and could be taken to account for his emphasis on the dutiful character of the moral disposition, the postulation of the necessary existence of God for moral justice and the necessity of moral religion for the human agent's moral disposition.

MORAL RIGORISM

In order to understand human nature's natural disposition toward morality, Kant starts the first part of *Religion*—where he most clearly discusses this topic from a transcendental point of view—by distinguishing between

two ways of thinking about moral progress in history, one pessimistic and the other optimistic: if the pessimistic is true, than human nature is evil; if the optimistic is true, than human nature is good. The key to understanding Kant's bifurcation of human nature into either good or evil lies in his moral rigorism.

Kant associates the pessimistic point of view with "the oldest of all fictions, the religion of the priests" (RGV 6:19) which posits that human history moves from a blissful state of innocence (good) toward a moral fall. According to this approach, one finds moral goodness only at the origin of history or, as it is sometimes claims, in a prehistorical state where history itself is the fall from prehistorical goodness. The optimistic approach Kant associates with "moral heroism"—predominant "only among philosophers and, in our days, especially among the pedagogues" (*Ibid.*)—suggesting that human history slowly moves from an objectionable toward a morally better state. Given Kant's reference to "pedagogues," it stands to reason that he is considering Rousseau as a proponent of this point of view, who claimed that human nature is rudimentary good at the outset but has to be cultivated appropriately through education in a properly constituted civil society. Obviously, one could object that these two views need not be mutually exclusive as it is perfectly tenable to think of history as starting in a blissful state of innocence, then moving through a moral fall and back to renewed goodness. In fact, this is usually thought of as the standard approach to Christian eschatology and the position most people think Kant entertains in the remainder of *Religion*. The sharp distinction drawn by Kant is probably based on what could be called a method of isolation, namely, to distinguish sharply, even isolating, two perspectives on human morality in radical opposition only to show that both have some measure of validity and, as such, leads toward a third way between these extremes. As such, Kant navigates between these two extreme positions by providing a third way that can fully validate both points of view, a point of view for all intents and purposes already prepared in Kant's earlier *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786). There, he writes that "the history of nature thus begins from good, for that is the work of God; the history of freedom from evil, for it is the work of the human being" (MAM 8:115). But despite the fact that Kant will make way for an approach that allows human beings to move from good to evil and back again, he does not seem to allow for the possibility that human nature is co-determined by good and evil: human nature must be, at some point, either good or evil. What is meant by human nature then, will be clarified below.

In 1809, Schelling published an essay called *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Freedom* wherein he engages Kant's *Religion* and leads Kant's perspective on human nature, evil, and freedom, in his view at least, to their proper conclusion. That proper conclusion, according to Schelling, is

that human beings are both good and evil and that their nature is of such a form that they have "been placed on that summit where [they] contain within [themselves] the source of self-impulsion towards good and evil in equal measure."[1] Some would call this a philosophical recuperation of Manicheism. Kant does not seem to give any attention to such an option, which is to say the least odd since Kant's most enthusiastic follower Arthur Schopenhauer would claim that Schelling's position in this essay is nothing but a repetition of Kant's views of freedom:

> Meanwhile I ought not to mention this without making the charge—in honor of truth and *Kant*—that here, when [Schelling] is expounding one of the most important and admirable, and indeed, in my estimation, the most profoundly significant of all Kantian doctrines, *Schelling* does not clearly state that what he is currently presenting, as far as its content is concerned, belongs to Kant.[2]

If we are to believe Schopenhauer in that Kant's and Schelling's views are remarkably similar, how come Kant does not give due attention to the view held by Schelling that there are two constitutive principles in human nature, one of them is evil, the other good. Answer: Kant's moral rigorism excludes such moral equivocity: if a human being were equidistant from good and evil, that would imply human nature is both good and evil (syncretism) or neither good nor evil (indifferentism). As a consequence of his rigorist analysis of the concepts of good and evil, Kant must choose between them while still finding a way to exalt the good over evil (which, as we will see, becomes very difficult).

We ought to clarify then what is sometimes called Kant's Copernican revolution in moral philosophy so as to understand properly Kant's rejection of the intermediate position. In his epistemology and metaphysics, Kant is renowned for suggesting an innovative perspective on the relationship between subject and object where the cognitive perception of the object largely depends on a prior subjective condition. Not as well-known but at least equally as important, Kant made a similar revolution in his ethical theory when he argues that the moral good is determined relative to the human will or the moral good is that toward which a rational will is immediately inclined. As a consequence of this shift of perspective, moral good and evil are subjective predicates that do not have any objective reality independent of the rational will. John Silber shows how Kant's Copernican revolution in ethics results actually from the potential pitfalls of prioritizing a concept of the good over the volitional process:

> Thus Kant has succeeded in showing that when the good is defined prior to the moral law as the object of the will, the good is either (1) in an indifferent relation

> to the will, or (2) is related to the will contingently through a decision of the will that is based on the subjective conditions of desire, or (3) determines the will and thereby destroys its moral significance.[3]

Since all three options are unacceptable for Kant for various reasons, on the one hand, the good must be determined formally by the moral law and, on the other hand, the moral law is not deduced from a more original idea of goodness. This also entails, however, that moral goodness must be determined in a strictly exclusive or rigorist fashion: a maxim is only good if it is determined through and because of rationality alone while a maxim that opposes this immediate determination by rationality is necessarily evil. Accordingly, the predicates good and evil are mutually exclusive (moral rigorism) and the distinction between a morally good and a morally evil inclination is one of quality, not quantity.[4]

Does this analysis of Kant's moral rigorism exclude moral conflict? By moral conflict, I mean a situation where the proper moral course of action is unknown because two specific duties conflict with one another. If this were the case, then to pursue one course of action would be good from the perspective of one duty but evil from the perspective of the other duty. At one point, Kant addresses this issue, where he defines a conflict of duties as "a relation between them in which one of them would cancel the other (wholly or in part)" (MS 6:224). This is a rather strange way to define a conflict of duties: would a true conflict of duties not be a relationship in which both duties are legitimate but mutually exclusive? Jens Timmermann clarifies that Kant's use of language can be explained by reading this paragraph in relationship to Baumgarten's *Initia Philosophiae Practicae* (1760), which is one of the texts Kant used in his lecture on ethics. Baumgarten makes a distinction between major and minor obligations, where the major obligation can cancel out the minor obligation.[5] According to Kant, however, any obligation has normative necessity so there can be no gradual distinction between different senses of obligation:

> Since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain actions and two rules opposed to each other cannot be necessary at the same time, if it is a duty to act in accordance with one rule, to act in accordance with the opposite rule is not a duty but even contrary to duty; so a collision of duties and obligations is inconceivable. (*ibid.*)

Nevertheless, Kant recognizes differing grounds of obligation and, when a conflict arises, practical philosophy states "not that the stronger obligation takes precedence (*fortior obligation vincit*) but that the stronger ground of obligation prevails (*fortior obligandi ratio vincit*)" (*ibid.*). Kant is likely here

considering his distinction between narrow and wide duties, where the narrow duties have a more direct ground of obligation than the wide duties. So while Kant acknowledges that the formal, categorical imperative might give rise to conflicting moral duties, practical reason provides a tool to assess which should take precedence.

If a maxim must be good or evil, so must human nature be either good or evil. This means specifically that Kant must determine whether human nature is inclined to act out of respect for the moral law when confronted with the moral law or whether human nature is stalwart in the pursuit of self-love, even when moral duty is in play.

ORIGINAL GOODNESS

The human being has an original predisposition (*Anlage*) to the good. Despite what some would make of Kant, he is not bitterly in revolt against bodily nature and our animal drives. Even though these are often a distraction or even a counterforce to morality, our (bodily) nature is to be thought of as originally predisposed to goodness. One cannot deny that Kant did look down and condemn in strong terms the (moral) value of bodily lust, for instance, in his crusade against masturbation (MS 6:424–425), but in the initial paragraphs of *Religion* (RGV 6:26–28), he seems to suggest, and repeats later on, that our natural inclinations are "in themselves [. . .] good" (RGV 6:58).

One way to make sense of Kant's assertions here is to take Kant as saying that we cannot do other but assume logically that human nature is meant for the good—if not, then the idea of a human vocation (*Bestimmung*) for goodness would make little to no sense. However, Kant does add quickly that these inclinations originally predisposed to lead toward goodness are easily corrupted and their originally good purpose turned against itself—even to the point of acknowledging such a thing as diabolical vices. This will put the goodness of human nature into question, once again. Let us therefore cut to the chase and make a point that might give rise to some controversy: the Kantian assumption of original moral goodness is paramount for Kant's argument in *Religion* because—and only for this reason—he thinks of overcoming evil in terms of restoring goodness; one can only regenerate from or recover a good disposition if human beings are originally good. The result of this claim is that Kant's recognition of an originally good predisposition is not a recuperation of a more original sense of goodness in human nature but a necessary rational postulation to provide credibility to moral regeneration.

Despite what some overly sharp lines of his practical philosophy might suggest, Kant does not subscribe to the Stoic ideal of silencing the inclinations but he postulates that inclinations are an original and necessary aspect of

human nature, and that evil arises because of a freely chosen, but illegitimate, prioritizing of the inclinations over the moral law. Accordingly, Kant does not seek to destroy the inclinations—since these are "in themselves good"—but searches for a way to revolutionize our natural demeanor toward them. Evil happens when self-love and happiness are prioritized over the moral law. Accordingly, human agents are good when they order their maxims properly, not when they disregard happiness as such. Or, in Alexander Pope's words:

Two principles in human nature reign;
Self-love to urge, and reason, to restrain;
Nor this a good, nor that a bad we call,
Each works its end, to move or govern all
And to their proper operation still,
Ascribe all good; to their improper, ill.[6]

Some might believe that Kant's charitable view toward the inclinations in *Religion* is short-lived and that he return to a more strident view afterward, for instance, when he writes in the "Introduction" to "The Doctrine of Virtue" of the *Metaphysics of Morals* that "a doctrine of morals […] is also autocracy of practical reason, that is, it involves consciousness of the capacity to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the law" (MS 6:383). Rather than revolutionizing our attitude toward our inclinations, we now appear to have to control and master these. This would then make Kant's charitable view in *Religion* an aberration.[7] This view misunderstands Kant's point in *Religion*, since there he never held that human nature would naturally evolve toward moral goodness if only we would model appropriately our inclinations. Even there, he believes that a moral education should master and remodel the inclinations and the reason for his appearing more well disposed toward the original constitution of human nature is that he wants to add credibility to a moral restoration.

This point can be developed best from closely scrutinizing the trajectory of Kant's argument in *Religion* I. There, he argues that the human agent is on the level of "animality" predisposed to "physical" and "mechanical self-love" in three distinct aspects, which are "self-preservation," "propagation of the species," and "community with other human beings" (RGV 6:26). As an original predisposition, these instinctive drives are in principle good but Kant is quick to add, however, that this original good predisposition to animality can easily become corrupted and certain vices can be grafted on to this predisposition, namely those of the savagery of nature, the "bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wild lawlessness" (RGV 6:27). On the level of "humanity," the human agent is predisposed to "self-love which is physical and yet involves comparison" (RGV 6:27). As a "human" being, rational

agents desire the approval of others and measure themselves in part through the eyes of others. Originally, this level of the predisposition aims to attain "equal worth [. . .] not allowing anyone superiority over oneself" (*Ibid.*). This level can similarly be corrupted into the "vices of culture," namely, "jealousy" and "rivalry" (*Ibid.*). In their most extreme form, these vices are no longer directed at self-interest and become "diabolical"—a view that seems inconsistent with Kant's statement that the human is "not a devilish [*teuflischen*] being" (RGV 6:27; 6:35).[8] For Kant, human beings are not devilish or demonic, that is, they never pursue evil for the sake of evil, but always for the sake of sensuous pleasure—"instead of following this law absolutely as sufficient [*hinreichender*] incentive [. . .], the human being looked about for yet other incentives" (RGV 6:42). In fact, Kant defines evil not as the repudiation of the moral law, but as making our compliance with the moral law conditional upon certain interests of self-love. What then is of interest is how Kant noted a hint of devilishness in jealousy and envy that can, in extreme forms, completely break away from any aspiration to happiness and be pursued for its sake alone. On the last level, of personality, the human agent is inclined to "make the moral law a sufficient incentive to the power of choice" (RGV 6:27). This level of personality renders the individual human agent into a cosmopolitan rational agent. In the more common use of the term, personality is usually associated with individuality, that is, those personal characteristics that constitute the individual person. These individual differences are not taken up by Kant in his concept of personality. Nicolai Hartmann argues that the main tenet of being a person for Kant, namely, to be enabled to act rationally,

> is [. . .] evidently something which in principle man as a personality cannot will. Rather must he at the same time will that over and above all universal applicability there should be in his conduct something of his own, which no other in his position ought to do or need do. If he neglects this, he is a mere numeral in the crowd and could be replaced by anyone else; his personal existence is futile and meaningless.[9]

Hartmann objects to defining personality in such a way that it positions the human agent neatly within the universality of reason. For Kant, personality is only the predisposition to be susceptible to the moral law, which he also calls moral feeling. Accordingly, the original and logical nature of the human power of choice is attuned toward the good by being susceptible to the authority of the moral law. There is no vice that could be grafted upon the predisposition to personality since no amount of pursuing the "good will" could ever lead toward vice (in the words of the *Groundwork*, it is good "without limitation").

These three levels of the predisposition tend to be read as empirical generalizations, that is, Kant's inductive generalization of the properties of human nature through empirical observation.[10] Such a reading, however, does not support the transcendental necessity of the predisposition as empirical observation does not confer universality or necessity; Kant calls the predisposition "original and necessary" (RGV 6:28). He appears then to be overstepping the boundaries of transcendental idealism in characterizing human nature as logically and necessarily predisposed toward the good. As detailed above, however, such a "transgression" might become necessary from the practical point of view if the moral law requires this for its possibility. Reason is then legitimated in postulating practically and thus legitimizing practical faith in certain objects beyond the reach of possible experience. The consequence of this is that Kant's moral philosophy in fact requires the human being to be originally predisposed to the good (and is therefore legitimated in making this postulation) because, as will become clear below, moral regeneration and restoration would make no sense if there were no original state to be restored. The rational necessity of an originally good state then has to do with what I have called the *ultra posse nemo obligatur*-principle: since the moral law demands that a conversion from evil to good be a restoration, logically the human being must necessarily be good prior to being evil. Or else, there is no hope, as Paul Ricoeur notes:

> If humankind became evil through seduction, then it was not basically corrupt. In releasing humankind from the full weight of the origin of evil, the theme of seduction indicates the point where the culmination of radical evil coincides with the first glimmer of hope. "For man, therefore, who despite a corrupted heart yet possesses a good will, there remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed" [(RGV 6:39)]. This "despite" is the "despite" of hope. And the concept of radical evil becomes the initial element of a *justified* hope.[11]

The repercussion is that if Kant's main interest in *Religion* is to discuss moral regeneration or conversion, as well as to provide hope for such a thing, then such an original good state is a logically necessary first step. Logically necessary does not mean real, however, and such a first step is lacking in any syrupy optimism pertaining to human nature, which, as we will find out soon enough, is evil.

PROPENSITY TO EVIL

The vices of animal nature and human culture are testament to the general occurrence of evil in the world (RGV 6:32–34). This alludes to that fact that

the human animal is by nature not immediately directed toward the good, but has somehow acquired a propensity to evil, which has radically taken root in the human agent's power of choice. Kant's mentioning such radical evil seems so strikingly Christian that many of his contemporaries were dismayed. For instance, Goethe suggested that Kant "had criminally smeared his philosopher's cloak with the shameful stain of radical evil, after it had taken him a long human life to cleanse it from many a dirty prejudice, so that Christians too might yet be enticed to kiss its hem."[12] Next to the seeming inappropriateness of a doctrine of radical, original evil, Kant's (attempt at a transcendental) deduction of such a propensity appears confused at best, perhaps even inconsistent. First, he notes that "we can spare ourselves the formal proof that there must be such a corrupt propensity" (RGV 6:32), then appears to simply assume the existence of such a propensity to account for "multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human deeds parades before us" (RGV 6:33) and finally claims to have proven its rational necessity (RGV 6:39). A proper understanding of this propensity to evil is paramount because it will provide the contours of Kant's pessimism and also it models and shapes his philosophy of religion.

Kant postulates a propensity (*Hang*) to evil in human nature. A propensity is the "subjective basis of the possibility of an inclination insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general" (RGV 6:28). This definition serves specifically to differentiate a propensity from a predisposition (*Anlage*): a propensity is acquired, while a predisposition is necessary and logical. This means that it would be logically inconsistent to try to imagine a human being as not being predisposed to an animal, human, and personal being, but there is no such inconsistency in imagining a human being as not having a propensity to evil. Human beings naturally but not necessarily have a propensity to evil, which allows for the possibility to overcome their evil state. While this makes sense within Kant's moral philosophy, the next argument complicates things. The propensity to evil could be called an anthropological idea of a transcendental nature, meaning it applies universally to human beings but is contingent to their nature. Basically, Kant's philosophy proposes that there exists in the power of choice (*Willkür*) an acquired drive to disregard actively the claim of morality in favor of sensuous desires.[13] Then, human agents are actively choosing to be evil, while deluding themselves about their moral uprightness: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know."[14] But if this propensity to evil is, according to Kant, a universal aspect of humanity as a species that is acquired by every single human being, even the best, how can it be activated through a free act of a species as a whole? There seems to be some tension between the universal and contingent, or natural and free, nature of the propensity. To explain this paradox, we follow Kant's exegesis in the hopes of arriving at clarification.

Kant elaborates first on the material nature of the propensity to evil by discerning three grades of evil. First, there is the frailty (*Gebrechlichkeit*) of human nature: while the moral law is, objectively speaking, a sufficient cause to determine the will, subjectively speaking it is insufficient. Second is the impurity (*Unlauterkeit*) of the human heart: the moral law is taken up in the maxim, but is not sufficient to determine the will. Third, there is the depravity (*Bösartigkeit*) of the human heart: the propensity of the power of choice (*Willkür*) to "subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others" (RGV 6:30). These three grades of the propensity to evil do not serve to differentiate the various quantitative forms of evil: a frail human being is just as evil as an impure human being. Instead, this distinction serves merely to illuminate different forms of evil that all stem from the same root, namely, the acquired disposition of giving priority to sensuous inclinations over the moral law.

Earlier attempts to think about evil had, according to Kant, a tendency to absolve immoral human beings from responsibility for the evil they have committed. Traditional rational philosophy asserted most often that to act in an evil fashion was to follow vicious, natural inclinations rather than rational deliberation. But when sensuous inclinations overwhelm rational deliberation, the freedom to act otherwise (and responsibility with it) appears lost. To this line of thought, Kant puts the following question: if something does not follow from freedom, how are agents to be held accountable for it? Responsibility for evil implies that the choice for evil is as positive and free as the choice for goodness.

Kant might have felt obligated to emphasize this aspect of his analysis of evil because of the implied account of evil in *Groundwork* and the *second Critique*. When Kant equates autonomy and morality, the consequence seems to be that immorality implies the loss of autonomy. Sam Duncan helpfully notes how this evolution was inspired by the work of Carl Christian Erhard Schmid, who around 1790 sought to popularize Kant's moral philosophy and drew up a moral system that would effectively reduce Kant's analysis of evil agency to a privative account.[15] To some extent, Schmid's position is understandable (even plausible) since Kant, in *Groundwork*, states that a free will and a will under moral laws are the same; this implies a contrario that a will not under universal moral laws is not free. In the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (given throughout the 1780s), Kant sides with a privative account of evil as well: "Thus evil in the world can be regarded as *incompleteness in the development of the germ toward the good.* Evil has *no special* germ; for it is *mere negation* and consists only in the *limitation of the good*" (28:1078). In *Religion*, Kant clearly abandons this theory but a charitable interpretation, as suggested above, understands Kant's point in *Groundwork* as pointing to two senses of autonomy. Freedom when being

evil is not lost, but is simply used poorly. Or, as John Silber eloquently puts it: "Such individuals freely choose to act just the way they would act if they had no such freedom at all."[16] This very way of reading evil agency by Schmid inclined Kant to claim that all possible philosophical trials in theodicy were moot. Schmid pointed out that if theodicy was to work at all, committing evil would be a necessary aspect of being free. Accordingly, Kant disavowed any link with theodicy and clarified what he meant by evil agency in *Religion*.

In order to make due on his great innovation to think of evil as a fully autonomous choice, there must be a root for choosing evil in the free decision-making of the human agent. In other words, there must be a ground in human nature from which all evil agency, whether frailty, impurity, or depravity, springs, which is what Kant calls the propensity to evil (*Hang zum Böse*). This propensity actualizes into an evil disposition (*Gesinnung*), where human nature becomes so inclined that they by default prioritize self-love over the moral law. Singular acts of evil are addictive to particular human beings which then become something more than merely singular acts, but evil becomes the very nature of the human being. (As we will discuss later, we move from unintentional guilt in frailty and impurity to intentional vice in depravity.) Human nature becomes disposed toward evil. This evil disposition is something that can be removed from human nature, which is what Kant calls overcoming evil; the propensity to evil, however, cannot be extirpated from our nature. This is why Kant calls the propensity to evil also "radical evil" because it "corrupts the ground of all maxims" and, on the other hand, "cannot be extirpated through human forces" (RGV 6:37). Radical is here not meant as a particularly egregious form of evil, but it is supposed to signify that the human propensity to evil goes to the root of free choice. This has two impressive consequences.

First, Kant rejects the possibility of actualizing eternal moral peace: "Philosophical chiliasm, which hopes for a state of perpetual peace based on a federation of nations united in a world republic, as much as theological chiliasm, which awaits for the completed moral improvement of the human race, is universally derided as sheer fantasy [*als Schwärmerei allgemein verlacht wird*]" (RGV 6:34). Kant therefore primarily understands the radical nature of evil in terms of its ineradicability or at least of the inextricability of the propensity to evil in humanity. His entire project in *Religion* ought then to be assessed with this in mind, and at times, Kant reminds his reader of this: "The battle that every morally well-disposed human being must withstand in this life [. . .] can procure him [. . .] no greater advantage than freedom from the dominion of evil [. . .]. He still remains not any the less exposed to the assaults of the evil principle" (RGV 6:93). There is categorically no possibility to extirpate the propensity to evil. Whenever Kant does allude to such a thing, he has in mind something like a "focus imaginarius": "A point from

which the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience—nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension [*die größte Einheit neben der größten Ausbreitung*]" (B 672 / A 644). In other words, the ideal Kingdom of God, where the propensity to evil might be eradicated, is a regulative idea that provides coherence to the moral struggle, but is never an object of experience. This does not mean that human beings cannot adopt a good disposition in which they resolve to counter the influence of the propensity to evil.

Joel Madore formulates this Kantian intuition elegantly: "Morality is not the glitter of military victory over the unfurling armies of darkness, but the patient effort to nurture a good disposition within us, so as to remain vigilant before an evil principle more elusive and ambiguous than not."[17] Morality's plight then is not the absence of the temptation to evil, but the courage to cultivate the moral disposition despite the allure of evil. Kant will add, however, that the morally well-disposed human agent may have rational faith that he or she is able to overcome the propensity to evil. This means that, on the one hand, the human agent remains perennially vigilant against evil while, on the other hand, having the hope of being somehow able to keep evil in check. The presence of evil might even be thought of as adding to the glory of the conquest of the righteous. In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), William James makes the following enlightening note on this subject:

> In the Louvre there is a picture, by Guido Reni, of St. Michael with his foot on Satan's neck. The richness of the picture is in large part due to the fiend's figure being there. The richness of its allegorical meaning also is due to his being there—that is, the world is all the richer for having a devil in it, so long as we keep our foot upon his neck.[18]

Second, so as to fully account for the radical responsibility human agents have for their evil agency, the propensity to evil cannot touch either the negative freedom of the power of choice or the positive freedom of the will. In other words, the ground of the propensity to evil is not to be sought in either sensuality or legislative reason (*Wille*), but in the power of choice (*Willkür*). If the propensity to evil lay in sensuality, then rational agents would not be accountable for their evil actions since negative freedom would be lost. However, the propensity to evil cannot be found in legislative reason either, because otherwise reason itself would be corrupted and positive freedom lost. While it is helpful to distinguish conceptually these notions of freedom, it must be kept in mind that they are both co-constitutive for Kant's notion of autonomy: a human agent is only truly autonomous if no heteronomous influences are allowed to determine maxim-making, which can only be positively

achieved through rational agency motivated by respect for the moral law. So as to retain this strong sense of moral autonomy, the corruption wrought upon human beings only deprives them of any natural inclination toward the good, but does not extinguish the light of reason to be able to know the good or have the very ability to incorporate the good. Through committing evil, neither negative nor positive freedom is lost. Kant puts this as follows:

> Sensuous nature therefore contains too little to provide a ground of moral evil in the human being, for, to the extent that it eliminates the incentives originating in freedom, it makes of the human a purely animal being, a reason exonerated from the moral law, an evil reason as it were (an absolutely evil will), would on the contrary contain too much, because resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to incentive (. . .), and so the subject would be made a diabolical being.—Neither of these two is however applicable to the human being. (RGV 6:35)

Evil ought then to be found in the common area between the noumenal and sensuous aspect of the human agent, or, between reason and sensuality. The human being is always confronted with incentives from reason and sensuality; the mere presence of an inclination cannot therefore be the ground of evil. The moral value of a maxim is instead determined via "subordination [. . .] which of the two he makes the condition of the other" (RGV 6:36). Now, since the human being has a tendency to invert the moral order by allowing sensuous inclinations to have priority over the moral law, it must logically be assumed that a propensity to evil exists as a necessary correlate of freedom.

What kind of argument can prove the existence of such a propensity to evil? Empirical observation? Transcendental deduction? One would think intuitively that such an impressive claim of a universal propensity to evil in human nature requires a transcendental ground. But Kant does not (or at least not clearly) provide an a priori deduction of this propensity to evil. The propensity to evil is its own ground, it is not grounded in something else (or, it is its own "root"). The lack of a transcendental argument for the propensity to evil has occasioned two different sets of answers in the literature: either to provide a deduction in Kant's stead (or to suggest that there is an implicit deduction in the text) or to argue that such a deduction is impossible. In the first camp, Stephen Palmquist suggests that Kant has a quasi-transcendental proof for a universal and necessary propensity to evil since evil agency can only occur given a transcendental ground for that evil agency.[19] This strategy is similar to the one of Henry Allison, Seirol Morgan, and Gordon Michalson, the latter of which writes that "Kant is simply deducing moral evil transcendentally, since his theory of freedom clearly serves as the necessary condition of its possibility."[20] The other answer, famously given by Allen

Wood, is to say that a transcendental argument is simply impossible as, in his reflections on evil, Kant is moving away from purely transcendental reflections. According to Wood, Kant's propensity to evil is identical to an unsocial sociability, that is, the typically human opposition to fully comply with certain social rules. Consequently, Kant cannot give a transcendental deduction of the propensity to evil simply because this propensity is not transcendental or universal, but social.[21] Wood emphasizes the social dimension of radical evil by tracing it back to Kant's discussion of "unsociable sociability" in his "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784). In this essay, Kant claims to detect an antagonism in human history, namely, the unsociable sociability (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) of humanity: "[The] propensity to enter into society which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society" (IaG 8:20). Human beings are, on the one hand, propelled to participate in a cosmopolitan society (*vergesellschaften*) by renouncing their claims as an individual but, on the other hand, experience a powerful drive that propels them to live as an individual (*vereinzelnen*) and pursue their individual desires and ambitions.[22] While attractive, this social approach to evil seems to be untenable in Kant's philosophy. Jeanine Grenberg is right to object to such a reading on the ground that Kant establishes that the propensity to evil is already at work in any individual without mediation from society.[23]

It seems to be more than a socially and historically contingent matter that human nature is evil. Therefore, there must be something like a transcendental ground for evil, which can be inferred from the general occurrence of evil. The argument then roughly goes that the empirical occurrence of evil requires a ground in human freedom, which justifies the idea that human nature has a propensity to evil. Because evil is actual, it must also be possible. Something deeply problematic about this argument is that it cannot be squared with Kant's moral intentionalism. In *Groundwork*, Kant clearly establishes that practical reason is unable to extrapolate a good intention from any amount of empirical data: "It is absolutely impossible by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of action, otherwise in conformity with duty, rested simply on moral grounds and on the representation of one's duty" (GMS 4:407). Obviously, this is to be attributed to Kant's emphasis on morality being based on intention, his suspicion of any natural morality and motivational agnosticism. For some unexplained reason, Kant does seem convinced that evil agency is easier to detect; morally evil agency seems somehow easier to distinguish from illegal actions because all over the world, throughout history and in all different forms of society, we have a "multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human deeds parades before us" (RGV 6:33). Next to this, even having outlined his moral intentionalism in *Religion* I, Kant repeatedly predicates

(im)moral value upon 'deeds", mostly throughout *Religion* II (RGV 6:66–78). How does this moral intentionalism relate to Kant's argument that there is a radical propensity to evil in human nature, which apparently can be detected from immoral agency? Kant's exact statement is that since maxims cannot be observed, "the judgment that an agent is an evil human being cannot reliably be based on experience" (RGV 6:20). So, the very next suggestion is odd: to judge a "human being evil," we must "infer [*aufschliessen*] a priori from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one, an underlying evil maxim" *(Ibid.*). The problem at hand can be put as follows: if moral evil is a product of a free intention, should not moral evil then be (like the good) inscrutable to the finite observer? No matter the amount of empirical data, there is no exhaustive proof that any action is morally good or evil. At best, Kant is here assuming that an action that appears evil likely has an evil maxim as its source. James DiCenso remarks that this "indirect, slightly uncertain correlation between maxims and actions is entirely in keeping with arguments formulated in the first *Critique* showing an inferential relationship between our intelligible and empirical characters."[24] In the first *Critique* (B 566–570 / A 538–542), Kant suggests that one is able to infer from empirical character toward noumenal character on the basis of causality. However, this seems woefully insufficient to support the claim that the human race is naturally evil!

An example might help clarify this problem. In a certain situation, we observe that John is lying and Jack is speaking the truth. According to *Groundwork*, Jack cannot be said to have a morally good predicate since we are unable to discern whether or not his speaking of the truth is motivated by respect for the moral law. However, Kant seems to suggest in *Religion* that John must be morally evil since his outward action is contrary to the law. In *Groundwork*, Kant makes the same inference: "I pass over all actions that are already recognized as contrary to duty, even though they may be useful for this or that purpose; for in their case the question whether they might have been done from duty never arises, since they even conflict with it" (GMS 4:397). How can Kant be certain that actions that appear contrary to the law are not born out of respect for duty or simply be morally irrelevant?[25] Kant appears to be making an illegitimate leap of judgment here since we cannot know that John is intentionally lying. If the only object that deserves a moral predicate is the intention behind the action, then in order to attribute the predicate evil the intention must oppose the moral law. John, however, could truly hold that what he claims to be true is actually true, and he could be proclaiming it because he believes it is his duty to be truthful. The fruitlessness of his action is not to the demerit of his good will (cf. GMS 4:394). Kant fails to acknowledge this possibility and simply infers from the fact that there are unlawful actions to the existence of an unlawful or "evil will" in the

human being. Kant might be inclined to counter this objection by referring to the vast dimensions evil takes such as in "the scenes of unprovoked cruelty in the ritual murders of Tofoa, New Zealand, and the Navigator Islands [etc.]" (RGV 6:33). While this might lend credibility to the statement that human beings at times pursue unlawful actions, it is hardly an a priori proof for a corrupt propensity to evil in the human being. Such an a priori deduction ought to be made without reference to empirical evidence because empirical evidence is useless in matters of ethics (e.g., GMS 4:411). One cannot help but think that Kant's ready assumption of such a propensity to evil could be linked to his pessimism: while he only hesitantly and provisionally accepts some form of good in humanity, he hastens to ascribe a radical propensity to evil that ultimately corrupts all maxim-making.

A strong transcendental deduction of the propensity to evil seems problematic simply because of Kant's emphasis on the contingency of that propensity—a full-out transcendental deduction would make the propensity a priori. But if Kant assumes that for the good to be possible, a "counterweight [*Gegengewicht*]" (GMS 4:405) or a "crossroads [*Scheidewege*]" (GMS 4:400) is necessary (which we must assume is evil), then why not simply make the propensity to evil an a priori, necessary aspect of human nature?[26] Short answer: one must allow the hope to overcome evil. Indeed, this emphasis on the contingency of the *Hang zum Böse* is one of the more perplexing features of Kant's account of evil, especially since he also points out that it has to be perceived as universally adopted. For such a strange hybrid concept to work, there has to be a universal cause germane to the whole of the human species. Kant rightly maintains a measure of transcendental mystery around this very concept by suggesting that "the rational origin [. . .] of this propensity to evil remains inexplicable to us, for, since it must itself be imputed to us, this supreme ground of all maxims must in turn require the adoption of an evil maxim" (RGV 6:43). In this statement, two elements conjoin rather awkwardly: on the one hand, (the propensity to) evil must be an active positive choice of the human agent and, on the other, (the propensity to) evil is a universal characteristic of the human race. Similarly, Kant must simultaneously plead ignorance and have some basic knowledge about the characteristics of evil. Evil is the illegitimate subversion of the moral world order of which the rational ground remains unknown. So as to better clarify this, Kant distinguishes between two types of causes: a rational/logical (*Grund*) and a temporal (*Ursprung*) cause. While a temporal cause for free actions cannot be provided, the cause of the propensity to evil must be investigated purely rationally (a priori). He finds that as soon as the human beings are free, they are irrevocably attached to sensuality and therefore their nature is evil. In a letter to Jacobi, Kant clarifies a similar point with regard to the idea of a "Son of God": what is most important is the universal, ahistorical idea of Christ,

while the evangelical or historical account—or even the historical origin of that idea—is a side issue (*Nebensache*) of little relevance (11:76). This explains Kant's focus on providing a ground for evil, without considering in too much detail the origin of this notion.

This is further illustrated by Kant's discussion of the story of the Fall in *Genesis*. In an early account of this, he mocks the specifics of this story (MAM 8:110–111), but was nevertheless intent on using the "holy document as map" for his conjectured account of the early history of humanity (MAM 8:109). He argues that the story is a powerful metaphor for the creation of unnatural desires through the acquisition of reason. In other words, he identifies the human expulsion from Eden with the "transition from the crudity [*Rohigkeit*] of a merely animal creature into humanity, from the go-cart [*Gängelwagen*] of instinct to the guidance of reason" (MAM 8:115). While Kant agrees with the philosophical message and spirit of the biblical story, he warns against absorbing its literal message too enthusiastically (MAM 8:109–110). Again, his main interest is in the rational ground of these ideas, not their historical origins. In *Religion*, Kant acknowledges a logical connection between freedom and evil which seems largely in tune with his interpretation of *Genesis* (RGV 6:39–44). While he notes that the "most inappropriate [way of representing evil's spread and propagation] is surely to imagine it as having come to us by way of inheritance from our first parents" (RGV 6:40), he believes that "the mode of representation which the Scriptures use to depict the origin of evil, as having a beginning in human nature, well agrees with the foregoing" (RGV 6:41). By "the foregoing" Kant means his philosophical account of (radical) evil in human nature. So while the way Christendom has tended to understand the adoption of evil (as an "inherited sin") is inappropriate, the actual presentation of it in the Scriptures as an original deception wrought upon human agents by themselves (as an "original sin") is in tune with Kant's philosophical approach. Although the first human being might have been untainted by evil, his freedom still allowed him to sin. In that way, the possibility for evil was already present in the first human being. Ultimately, the rational cause of evil remains inscrutable (it has always been there), but it must be presupposed in any use of freedom, an argument that perhaps betrays Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influence on Kant.[27] Rousseau believed in the *bon sauvage* who was corrupted by the power of culture. Culture introduces envy and jealousy to humanity, making it prone to moral evil. In Richard Velkley's words: "Rousseau argues that the Enlightenment's expectation of universal well-being arising from unlimited progress in the arts and sciences (or 'luxury') is a deluded vision, since such progress involves primary enslavement to artificial desires and passions."[28] Similarly, Kant does not believe that human beings are necessarily evil, but that their (second) nature is evil because they have freely adopted a propensity to evil.

In other words, as soon as human beings are free, they are potentially evil. Rousseau believed that this tendency to evil can be overcome by education (pedagogy) which can engender artificial virtue. Kant similarly believed that the human being is in dire need of moral education in order to be able to cultivate rational freedom from artificial and evil desires (see chapter five).

What is especially illuminating about linking Kant's account of the propensity to evil to Adam's temptation in *Genesis* is the subject of self-deception.[29] Even prior to addressing the story of the Fall, Kant notes that the original adoption of the propensity to evil is to be attributed to the human agent as on a scale leading from frailty, to impurity, to deliberate guilt:

> This innate guilt [. . .] can be judged in its first two stages (those of frailty and impurity) to be unintentional guilt (*culpa*); in the third, however, as deliberate guilt (*dolus*), and is characterized by certain *perfidy* [*eine gewisse Tücke*] on the part of the human heart (*dolus malus*) in deceiving itself as regards its own good or evil disposition and, provided that its actions do not result in evil [. . .], in not troubling itself on account of its disposition but rather considering itself justified before the law. (RGV 6:38)

Accordingly, a double perspective on the human agent's propensity to evil can be developed. While empirically, the behavior of the human being develops from frailty through impurity to deliberate guilt, transcendentally the human agent has always had a propensity to evil insofar as he is a moral agent. Similarly, the biblical story of the Fall illustrates the enigma of a human being, who though created for the good, nevertheless fell into evil by being deceived that his evil agency was actually justified and lawful: "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Such a fall from goodness is only possible given the unconscious practice of deceiving oneself about the goodness of one's evil agency; habitual evil agency becomes so much of a "second nature" to the human agent, that he or she naturally prefers sensuous inclinations over the moral law.

From one perspective, Kant emphasizes that each individual is responsible for his or her evil nature and the choices he or she makes. Therefore, the propensity to evil cannot be reduced to a natural, non-chosen quality of the species as this might excuse the individual agent from the evil they might commit. From another perspective, the propensity to evil is a genuine characteristic of the human species whenever it engages in cultural activities: as soon as the human being is free from natural necessity, they find themselves at a crossroads forced to choose between good and evil knowing all too well that they should opt for the moral law, yet strongly tempted to evil. Accordingly, the propensity is at once universal and the achievement of the

individual agent. Pablo Muchnik summarizes the problem posed by synthesizing these two aspects:

> Their positions [Wood's and Allison's] can be symptomatic of an unfortunate dilemma Kant poses to the interpreter: either to emphasize the widespread social/empirical dimensions of evil at the expense of its noumenal origin (Wood), or to stress its noumenal origin at the expense of its social/empirical dimension (Allison).[30] (Muchnik, 2009, p. 56)

How can something common to a species be imputed to an individual being if to do so requires the individual to be free?

Kant does at one crucial point in the text suggest that evil should be perceived as a "deed" in a twofold sense: empirical and intelligible (RGV 6:31). The propensity itself is a purely intelligible and extra-temporal deed while simultaneously to be identified with the various temporal evil actions. One could question Kant's philosophical judgment for refusing to let go of either aspect of his understanding of radical evil: either the human being is in principle evil by nature and the propensity to evil has corrupted the predisposition to the good; or the human being is in principle good and the propensity to evil can be overcome (and is thus privative) by the cultivation of freedom and culture. In my view, Kant provides an honest account of evil—even in its radical dimension—while yet subscribing to the strong normative appeal of the good. Richard Bernstein notes similarly that "many of the tensions and problems in Kant's conception of radical evil can be traced back to his attempt to reconcile the claim that human beings are, by their very nature, evil with the claim that, despite this propensity to evil, human beings [. . .] can become morally good."[31]

NOTES

1. Schelling, 1936, 50 [374].
2. Schopenhauer, 2009, 97 [83].
3. Silber, 2012, 54.
4. In contemporary reflections on ethical rigorism in connection with the nature of evil, Kant is often applauded and attacked at the same time. Applauded, because of his unwavering insistence on the inexcusable responsibility of every human agent for the evils she commits (cf. Arendt, 1973, 459; Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil. A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cornwall: Polity, 2002), 43; Staten, 2005, 12–27); and attacked, because he fails to fully capture the radical nature of evil that is at play when one knowingly and willingly commits to evil. This ultimately renders Kant's conceptualization of evil an *explicatio non grata* for two seemingly contradictory reasons. Some tend to call it too radical (e.g., Hegel, 1952, 92–94, §139–141) while others tend to call it too rational (e.g., Levinas, 1988, 156–167).

5. Jens Timmermann, "Kantian Dilemmas? Moral Conflict in Kant's Ethical Theory." In: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 95 (2013): 36–64.

6. Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man", Epistle II, II.

7. Anne Baxley, "Autocracy and Autonomy." In: *Kant-Studien* 94 (2003): 1–23.

8. Because Kant rejects the possibility of a devilish will by always including sensuous interest in the choice for evil, some commentators are hesitant about ascribing full positivity to the choice for evil in Kant's philosophy: the human agent would then be choosing sensuality, not evil. See, for instance, Martin Matustik, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope. Postsecular Meditations* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 90; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973), 459.

9. Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*. Translated by Stanton Coit (New York: Macmillan, 1932) 357.

10. Cf. James DiCenso, *Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46–50.

11. Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1995), 81.

12. Quoted in Barth, *Protestant Thought from Rousseau to Ritschl*, 178. Jean-Louis Bruch argues similarly that a (secularized) theory of original sin was highly untimely in the philosophy of religion of the Age of Enlightenment. All philosophical treatments of religion—whether rationalized Christianity (Locke, Clarke or Toland), liberal theology (Abbadie), or natural religion (Wollaston, Rousseau)—were at that time based on a humanist optimism rather than existential pessimism. Therefore, Bruch claims that "no [philosophical] precedent could incite Kant to put forward a theory of radical evil" (Bruch, *La philosophie religieuse de Kant*, 45, my translation). To the contrary, Pablo Muchnik points out that the idea of a "propensity to evil"—only fully conceptualized in *Religion*—is already slumbering in *Groundwork* because of Kant's rhetoric on a natural dialectic to suppress the call of morality (Pablo Muchnik, *Kant's Theory of Evil: An Essay on the Dangers of Self-love and the Aprioricity of History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 32–34). In *Groundwork*, however, this propensity is a natural propensity of humanity, while *Religion* at the same time emphasizes the contingency of the propensity to evil by describing it as an acquired act of freedom. Muchnik is correct in arguing that Kant's theory of a propensity to evil is not, as Goethe opined, an oddity in Kant's philosophy of the 1890s, but a dormant thought that reached full conceptual maturity only in *Religion*. For instance, the topic of societal evil already turns up extensively in the *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784) and in *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* (1791). Indeed, the issue of "evil" implicitly pervades most of Kant's ethical writings well before *Religion*, even though he remained mainly focused on analyzing its moral counterpart, namely the (supreme) good. Kant was arguably set on strongly attesting to the reality and validity of the moral good in the 1780s because he was very well aware of the radical proportions that evil takes.

13. Claudia Card helpfully identifies Kant's theory of evil with six theses (Claudia Card, "Kant's Moral Excluded Middle." In: *Kant's Anatomy of Evil*. Edited by Susan Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

2010), 74–92). First, Kant denies that there is anything between a good and an evil will (excluded middle). Second, human beings choose the "good" for the sake of the "good," but not "evil" for the sake of "evil" (asymmetry thesis). Third, self-love is the worst principled form of evil in human beings (priority thesis). Fourth, human beings remain ignorant whether they actually act "good" or "evil" (inscrutability thesis). Fifth, while responsible for the propensity to evil, human beings cannot pride themselves on the predisposition to good as this is a given (imputability thesis). Sixth, the propensity to evil cannot be rooted out (inextirpability thesis).

14. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*: Act 1, Scene vii. Available at: http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/macbeth.1.7.html

15. Sam Duncan, "Moral Evil, Freedom and the Goodness of God: Why Kant abandoned Theodicy." In: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2012): 973–991.

16. Silber, 2012, 73.

17. Madore, 2011, 106.

18. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

19. Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Quasi-Transcendental Argument for a Necessary and Universal Evil Propensity in Human Nature." *Southern Journal for Philosophy* 46 (2008): 261–297.

20. Michalson, 1990, 31; Seirol Morgan, "The Missing Proof of Humanity's Radical Evil in Kant's Religion." In: *The Philosophical Review* 114 (2005): 63–114; Allison, 1990, 146–162.

21. Wood, 1999, 283–291. This approach is echoed in: Christoph Schulte, *Radikal Böse. Die Karriere des Bösen von Kant bis Nietzsche* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1988), 78–88; Robert Louden, "Evil Everywhere: The Ordinariness of Kantian Radical Evil." In: *Kant's Anatomy of Evil.* Edited by Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 93–115.

22. A more exegetical objection one could venture to Wood's analysis of radical evil in its social form is that Kant, in the essay, claims that unsociable sociability ultimately works to the benefit of humanity, since without it all of man's capacities would be 'asleep." There is, in *Religion*, no mention of the *Hang zum Böse* being a "good" from a cosmopolitan point of view (if so, then Kant would have effectively given a theodicy). In Wood's defense, the propensity to evil is nonetheless a central facet of moral merit: human beings are "good" if and only if they overcome a propensity to be evil. However, to suggest a far-going symmetry between unsociable sociability and the propensity to evil seems a bridge too far: the propensity to evil is wider than mere unsociable sociability.

23. Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 36–42.

24. DiCenso, 2012, 41.

25. For similar hesitations, see Kerstein, 2002, 119–121.

26. In an early work called *Negative Magnitudes*, Kant discerns between two types of opposition: logical (non A / A) and real opposition (−A / +A), which return in *Religion* (RGV 6:22n). Evil must necessarily always be thought of as an opposition

to the good since the good is a rational incentive of the rational agent. Evil is thus not the mere lack of good (non A), but the opposition to the good (−A): "The lack of the agreement of the power of choice with [the good] is possible only as the consequence of a real and opposite determination of the power of choice, i.e. of a resistance on its part, =−A; or again, it is only possible through an evil power of choice" (RGV 6:23n).

27. Interestingly, Kant admits in one of his most famous essays, entitled *Observations on the Feeling of Beautiful and the Sublime*, that Rousseau played a significant role in his self-critical evolution. Indeed, it was Rousseau's emphasis on the sovereignty of a people that instigated Kant's dramatic turn from scholarly contempt for the "rabble" towards his often reiterated emphasis on human rights and worthiness: "Rousseau brought me around. This blinding superiority disappeared, I learned to honor human beings, and I would find myself far more useless than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impart to all others a value in establishing the rights of humanity" (20:44). This reflection dates to somewhere in the middle of the 1760s and could, therefore, be a significant aspect of Kant's critical turn and, moreover, an early clue that this very critical turn has morality and politics in mind, rather than metaphysics and epistemology. James DiCenso notes that Kant's preoccupation with first formalizing the "ethical" in the *Groundwork* and *second Critique* before giving a more material account of it might have originated in the far-reaching unjust political states of the 1700s, such as the French *Ancien Régime* and Prussian serfdom: these needed to be exposed for the immoral systems they were, so as to be able to start anew from the ground up (DiCenso, 2011, 24–31). For a more elaborate account of Rousseau's influence on Kant's critical turn, see Richard Velkley, "Transcending Nature, Unifying Reason: On Kant's Debt to Rousseau." In: *Kant on Moral Autonomy*. Edited by Oliver Sensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89–107.

28. *Ibid.*, 93.

29. For a more sustained treatment of this subject: Madore, 2011, 72–81; DiCenso, 2012, 65.

30. Muchnik, 2009, 56.

31. Bernstein, 2002, 20.

Interlude

The Problem of Moral Motivation

Through acknowledging the nature of a propensity to evil, Kant's moral philosophy comes to be in a bind. On the one hand, Kant affirms a radical propensity in human nature to prefer freely self-love over the moral law, a feat of honesty in opposition to some more naïve rationalist philosophers before him when it comes to thinking about evil; on the other hand, the universally acquired and radical nature of humanity's connection to such evil deprives human beings not only of a natural incentive to goodness, but is at danger of drowning out our rational interest in being morally good. Come to the close of his purely moral philosophy, Kant remains troubled by a fairly simple question: because of only having a fairly meager, purely rational interest in moral behavior, why would human beings want to aspire to being a good person? We know now what grounds the pursuit of morality, but what supports our resolve to do so?

If human nature is rudimentarily well-disposed toward morality, there would be no difficulty in accounting for humanity's aspiration to goodness. In fact, Aristotle and Plato were troubled by a very different conundrum: why do human beings at time oppose the good, or, why is the human will at times weak (*akrasia*)? If read in isolation from the rest of his more applied philosophy, Kant's pure practical reason is at risk of being paralyzed by this very issue, and properly resolving it will be central to his philosophy of religion. In Kant's view, all explicitly natural agency—for example, inclinations, prudence, emotions—cannot ever amount to moral goodness, which creates some distance between normal and moral behavior. Some readers, such as Sebastian Raedler, have mounted an argument to claim that Kant is more optimistic about natural processes to navigate toward moral goodness, especially when one considers Kant's more politically oriented works.[1] But even these works are premised on the idea that nature by itself does not

navigate to moral goodness, but must be redirected through rationality. Paul Guyer points out accurately that even in the essays on history (e.g., *Towards Perpetual Peace* and *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*) "Kant's argument [. . .] represents a definite rejection of any claim than natural processes alone can bring about moral progress."[2] Guyer continues, however, to argue that nature can, through mediation with reason, be so reconstituted that virtue and perpetual peace become an option:

> Virtue is never an inevitability but always a possibility for human beings with inscrutable freedom of the will, and [. . .] that the possibility of freedom must be not only accessible to human reason through the consciousness of the moral law but also palpable to human sensibility through the experience of nature, artistic genius, and human history.[3]

While I am generally in agreement with Guyer's overall claims, from a purely transcendental perspective this means that the rationalization of nature is a reconstitution of nature to such an extent that it dramatically, even radically, changes so that one should not call it (the same) nature anymore—at the very best, one could call it a dramatically changed second nature. Applied to human beings, this means that agents who succeed in being moral through adhering to the laws of reason are of a totally different character than their natural state. This more radical reading of Kant's pessimistic attitude toward (human) nature does not imply that human beings totally lack an ambiguous desire to break with their evil nature and aspire to a different fulfillment. The implication is, however, that moral goodness is to be seen as revolt against evil, rather than understanding evil as a rebellion against the good.

A closer look at Kant's various interests in establishing his system of moral agency can be helpful so as to clarify why Kant's account of moral agency becomes deeply problematic because of the deprivation of nature of potential goodness. Kant's moral philosophy could be understood as an attempt to accomplish two ends that, taken together, are paradoxical: to give an honest account of the radical dimensions of the drive toward evil in the cultured human agent while nevertheless attempting to secure a system of autonomous moral motivation. To put this more concisely, Kant attempts to combine the radical nature of evil in human nature with the autonomous claims of moral goodness. Evil needs to be radical for the human agent to be fully responsible for immoral agency and the good needs to be a self-prescribed normative end of humanity because of autonomy. The problem becomes difficult when this turns into a quasi-dualist view of the choice of the human agent for depraved nature or rational autonomy, a choice that allows for no mediation between these two essences. Given Kant's moral rigorism, however, the balance will necessarily tilt to one side of the good/evil scale, and he admits that the

radical nature of evil seriously impedes moral agency to the point of utter despair (and that is where religion comes in).

If human nature itself is not redolent of some natural goodness, the quest for goodness lacks any substantial backing from human nature and the human agent is bereft of a reason to pursue morality. Kant's attempts to create an autonomous system of moral motivation are then at risk of foundering on humanity's radical depravity. While for Kant the predisposition to personality still logically precedes the propensity to evil, its original goodness is completely overtaken (to its root) by the *Hang zum Böse* and seems more like a necessary architectonic concession to make transcendental sense of moral regeneration rather than any actual sense of original, ontological goodness. By nature, the human being is then evil; only through rebelling against this extra-temporal, self-chosen evil character can original goodness be restored. In other words, human nature is not situated equidistant between good and evil: evil is close to his or her nature and the good infinitely removed.

The energy that fuels the return to goodness is the respect for, or appeal of, autonomy. The human agent would not feel at home in a depraved, morally backward world and seeks a higher purpose. Regrettably, the only appropriate motivator for moral agency turns out to be a rather weak force. Kantian autonomy is not intimately accompanied by quasi-divine appeal (or the angelic blare of trumpets), but turns out, for the most part, to be a formal duty that promises little or nothing in compensation. In its Kantian configuration, the appeal of autonomy turns out to be scant in comparison to the real, fleshed happiness obtained by prioritizing self-love. Nevertheless, autonomy raises human agents beyond their base state of being by directing them to a more appropriate end (GMS 4:394–396). However, when such elevation is not backed up from the ground, it can easily collapse. In other words, if autonomy implies a complete and radical break with the natural condition, how can the natural condition provide the necessary tools and resources to accomplish such a radical revolution? Nature itself does not provide the solid base upon which a rational life can be constructed and if human nature is radically evil, what incentives toward the good really remain?

Kant still insists that the moral law projects its own irresistible rational appeal, but is not this appeal mitigated by his admission that rationality encounters continuous opposition when wresting its way into the human being's will? It is not difficult to imagine how this conclusion might have shocked many of Kant's contemporaries. Not only had Kant subverted their contention that societal evolution could lead humanity to its betterment, he had also suggested that the problem lies within freedom itself—the watchword of the revolution. Peter Dews remarks on this:

> Kant's disturbing—and, to many, unacceptable—thought was not simply that human beings are psychologically or even morally divided against themselves,

> but that human freedom is divided against itself. Kant seemed to be implying that his own great discovery, the realization that the human self is freedom, rather than merely possessing "free will" as a capacity, was precisely what opened up the possibility of this inner diremption.[4]

The situation is even further exacerbated by the very laws that autonomy/rationality enforces upon the human agent: autonomy demands a complete and radical change in the human agent. Autonomy requires the transformation of the world into a good in accordance with its strict tenets. Kant's rational philosophy suggests that autonomy is the only proper means to bestow unconditional, moral value upon a world that is itself deprived of such value. So, both the human agent and the world require remodeling in accordance with the powers of autonomy. Human beings must radically change their natural appreciation of self-love over morality; the world must be moralized and its institutions and general development must be guided by the code of rational autonomy.

To remedy these pressing difficulties in his moral system, Kant repeatedly turns to religion; his views on it are developed from within the perspective of the system of moral agency such as has been discussed earlier. From that perspective, religious concepts seem to make little or no sense since Kant bases morality on human autonomy and personal responsibility. If the human agent can only be redeemed by autonomy but if even personal negative autonomy is radically tempted by evil, what realistic possibility is there for goodness, even salvation? For Kant, autonomy must be the operative principle in the redemption of existence, yet this very autonomy is weak, maybe even impotent. Kant's philosophy is in this dramatic position because of its axiomatic depreciative view of the natural abilities of the human agent and its celebration of human autonomy. Therefore, only a certain operative principle beyond human nature can possibly deliver human nature—for Kant, these principles are autonomy and rationality. He remained, perhaps naively, cautiously optimistic that, at some point, the human agent will have evolved to such an extent that we will be actually delivered. This ideal state remains, however, a focus of reason, not an actual state of existence.

In a manner of speaking, Kant is trapped between rationalist optimism and Romantic pessimism: the son of Leibniz, he is father to Schopenhauer. Whatever optimism Kant might have endorsed prior to his critical period, such as in the previously discussed *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus* (1759), was later slowly abandoned for a more sober view. Even in his critical period, Kant would still defend the appeal of the good over and against the depravity of being, but time and again he lets the despair of impotence shimmer through as evil befouls any pure motivation. The conclusion is obvious: reason requires assistance. This assistance is offered by means of

what Kant calls moral education, which is mostly afforded through a specific interpretation of religion.[5] As I will discuss below, Kant's turn to religion must similarly be seen as highly problematic in providing this assistance since even the very best religion does not ontologically change morality's precarious position. Taking up religion might, ideally, strengthen the human being's moral resolve, but the fruits of such an exploit can only be harvested if the human being sincerely believes in the creeds of a certain religion. And Kant does seem to lack the tools for honest belief in religious concepts and moral religion only fictionally assists moral agency (see chapter six).

NOTES

1. Sebastian Raedler, *Kant and the Interests of Reason* (Berlin: Verlag de Gruyter, 2015), 222–225.
2. Guyer, 2000, 409.
3. *Ibid.*, 434.
4. Peter Dews, *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 22.
5. A very similar argument could be made about Kant's project in the *third Critique*. There, Kant argues for a teleological perspective on nature that could provide a similar moral education; also, he points out how the work of art can be an incarnation of the moral law that works to make morality more palpable to human beings. Due to restrictions of space, I have to limit my discussion to Kant's engagement with religion.

Chapter 5

Religious Assistance through Moral Education

Kant's most famous discussion of the moral potential of religion is in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793).[1] This work sets the stage for a conflict regarding various understandings of what religion is and how it should be philosophically, morally, and politically appreciated. But not only is *Religion* about conflicting views with regard to religion, its publication was similarly immersed in conflict. Around 1786, shortly after the death of the progressive king Frederick the Great, the new king, Friedrich Wilhelm II, appointed the Freemason and Rosicrucian Johann Wöllner to regulate affairs of culture and education. After some time, Wöllner would issue an edict that was supposed to regulate the publication of dangerous ideas (mostly from, what he called, the *Aufklärer*, who had played a significant role in the French Revolution of 1789) that potentially threatened state-ordained traditional religion. Accordingly, any publication that discussed or evaluated religion had to be subjected to theological censorship. Kant intended to publish four separate journal pieces in the *Berliner Monatschrift* but though the first piece passed the theological censor, Kant's second piece was rejected for reasons of doctrinal inaccuracy. According to Susan Shell, Wöllner's edict threatened Kant's philosophical project on four distinct fronts: first, theology candidates were required to make a formal profession of faith which "threatened to make the principal teachers [. . .] of the people into tools of spiritual and moral despotism."[2] Second, Kant was at the height of his fame and challenged the edict by proceeding with the publication of *Religion*, even after the second journal piece was rejected by the theological censor. Kant's moral conscience was threatened particularly with regard to his own rejection of civil disobedience (cf. TP 8:297–305). This incited the anger of Wöllner who threatened Kant with severe reprisals if he ever dared to publish on religion again. Kant agreed that he would refrain from speaking

or writing on religion.[3] After the King's death, Kant felt released from his oath and published and lectured on the subject of religion once more (SF: 7:210n). Third, Wöllner's edict proposed a philosophical challenge to Kant's rational system of ethics: personal conscience and autonomy might not be sufficient motivation for moral agency and the people's conscience needed to be augmented by certain religious teachings (a position that does not differ all that much from what Kant defends in *Religion*). Lastly, Wöllner challenged a potentially progressive view of humankind's general uprightness and even its ability to progress intellectually.[4] On its publication, *Religion* was greeted with considerable dislike by the theological authorities, and since then the book has remained controversial. Kant allowed theology some leeway in this book that ought not to be available to it within the strictures of transcendental idealism, that is, the practical rebuilding of theology and the rational postulating of a moral religion after the *first Critique*'s critical limitation of the potential reach of knowledge. In this respect, Mark Lilla and others have argued that Kant re-legitimated political theology after the "Great Separation" (i.e., Hobbes) of politics and religion. As such, Kant's philosophy of religion allows political powers to make use of religions, and as such does seem to conflict with the antiauthoritarian spirit of critical philosophy: "Though Kant's political philosophy respected the principles of the Great Separation, his religious thought opened the intellectual possibility of bridging it in some way."[5] This view has been a mainstay in the reception of this book; an early French commentator, Jean-Louis Bruch, similarly noted how *Religion* is not in continuity with the rest of Kant's practical project.[6] More recently, Stephen Palmquist's perspectival approach to Kant's transcendental idealism suggests the *Religion* is not to be read as an integral part of Kant's practical philosophy, but rather as an attempt—after Kant's *third Critique*—to offer a cogent account of the interplay between theoretical and practical reasons.[7] Many authors have thus cautioned against subsuming *Religion* under critical philosophy as such. Two pieces of textual evidence do seem to suggest something of the sort: in *The Conflict of Faculties*, for one, Kant points out that *Religion* is meant to encourage scholarly debate among academics, and not be a worry for the many (SF 7:5–11), and, in *Religion* itself, Kant emphasizes that one ought only to know common morality, not the morality he developed in the 1780s, which is a response to one critic, identified as the critic from Greifswald: "Only common morality [*der gemeinen Moral*] is needed to understand the essentials of this text, without venturing into the critique of practical reason, still less into that of theoretical reason" (RGV 6:14).

Contrary to these views that dislodge *Religion* from Kant's critical project, I will argue that Kant's philosophy of religion is indeed an integral

part of practical philosophy by making religion into a tool for cultivating moral resolve. Kant's purpose is to enlist historical religion within the moral struggle between the moral law and our propensity to abuse our freedom. This means that *Religion* picks up where the *second Critique* and *Groundwork* got stuck, namely on the unresolved issue of moral motivation.[8] After *Groundwork* had settled that moral agency is autonomously motivated, it is paramount to separate moral agency from heteronomous feeling or the supernatural: morality is grounded in and pursued for itself alone. In the *second Critique*, Kant adds that autonomous morality is, from the inside, supplemented with some equivocal form of noumenal pleasure, namely self-approbation. Moreover, the human agent can rationally expect and reasonably hope to receive happiness in proportion to virtue because of the rationally grounded postulate of the existence of God. The former adds a feeling side to morality that explains our interest in morality, while the latter guarantees the subjective coherence of morality. Obviously, these two elements are not adequate to reinforce moral motivation; while they render morality objectively sound, they provide little or no incentive for any human agent to adhere to morality. Human agents are, in other words, in need of an additional interest to adjust their maxims to the moral law.

Religion then argues that the human being, who was originally predisposed to the good, somehow got attached to evil (*Hang zum Böse*). Finite human beings are, by their very nature, not well disposed toward morality or rationality, but rather are prone to prefer happiness over the law. Since morality is rationality, however, it cannot in the end be irrational to be moral; or, there must be some way—even if only imaginary—to overcome humanity's evil nature and restore the original predisposition to the good. While there surely are plenty of philosophers and theologians of the old and new that believe that religion (properly understood) offers the necessary and sufficient means for humanity to overcome its evil nature and become good, I take Kant's suggestion that the human being is radically evil more seriously. Religion serves, according to my reading, as a counterweight through "moral education [*moralische Bildung*]" against the propensity to evil in a properly constituted moral religion that, although it wears the "clothes" of a "historical religion," ultimately aims at enforcing itself "nakedly" (RGV 6:48). The radical propensity to evil is the premise that grounds and models religion, not the problem that religion overcomes. Specifically, religion will then serve so as to counter moral dismay by enlivening faith in the necessary ideas to solidify moral agency—although, most likely, these attempts will ultimately fall short of the highest good.

POSTULATING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

A necessary preparation for understanding the argument in *Religion* is in the dialectic of the *second Critique*, that is, the postulation of the existence of God. Kant postulates the existence of God in order to warrant the hope for the consummation of happiness and virtue. Kant acknowledges there to be an ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) in the term "highest good." In *Groundwork* and the *Analytic* of the *second Critique*, Kant consistently argues that the highest good is an immediate good, that is, to be pursued for its sake alone. To this, he occasionally adds that such virtue is the condition of being worthy of happiness. His remark about the ambiguity of the highest good can then best be understood as establishing a link between being worthy of happiness and being happy. Moreover, he readily acknowledges that happiness is also a good for the finite human agent and, accordingly, not to have virtue and happiness meeting would be a step down from a more comprehensive sense of the highest good. From this consideration, the two forms of the highest good logically follow: the supreme (*oberste*) good as virtue in terms of the potential worthiness of being happy (*supremum*) and the complete (*vollendete*) good as the consummation of virtue with happiness (c*onsummatum*). While the supreme good is highest in the sense of not being conditioned by any higher norm, the complete good is highest in the sense of no longer being part of a greater whole. Within the conceptualization of the complete good, there appears then an antinomy since reason requires the possibility of its actuality, but experience contradicts this.

Andrew Ward puts the dilemma of the antinomy as follows: "Our reason demands that we achieve the highest good, the *summum bonum,* and yet our reason shows us that we are incapable of meeting the demand."[9] For the complete good to be possible, there ought to be a connection between virtue and happiness, a connection that can be analytic or synthetic. In the former case, virtue would be identical with happiness; in the latter case, virtue would produce happiness. Kant initially blocks either form of connection:

> The first is absolutely impossible because (as was proved in the Analytic) maxims that put the determining ground of the will in the desire for one's happiness are not moral at all and can be the ground of no virtue. But the second is also impossible because any practical connection of causes and effects in the world, as a result of the determination of the will, does not depend upon the moral dispositions of the will but upon knowledge of the laws of nature and the physical ability to use them for one's purposes. (KpV 5:114)

What is of interest in this quote is how Kant suggests that the first, analytic connection is absolutely impossible (*schlechterdings unmöglich*) while the

second, synthetic connection is only impossible (*unmöglich*)—if making a distinction between two types of impossibilities makes sense at all. This hints that Kant will ultimately accept a very specific synthetic connection between moral virtue and happiness, which is suggested by the feeling of moral pleasure which accompanies being moved by reason alone. This intellectual form of self-satisfaction already suggests, namely, that there is a qualitatively higher form of satisfaction to be obtained from being rational rather than from succumbing to the fleeting pleasures procured from fulfilling one's caprices: "In practical principles a natural and necessary connection between the consciousness of morality and the expectation of a happiness proportionate to it as its result can at least be thought as possible (though certainly not, on this account, cognized and understood)" (KpV 5:119).

Such intellectual self-satisfaction does then show there to be an equivocal connection between virtue and happiness, if happiness is interpreted as no more than intellectual self-satisfaction. But is this enough? According to Kant's definition, the happiness offered in proportion to virtue needs to be at least partially sensuous: "The state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will [*alles nach Wunsch und Willen geht*]"(KPV 5:124).[10] Kant remains sketchy about the nature of the happiness that ought to be consummated in proportion to virtue. Is this happiness fully to be identified with intellectual self-satisfaction, or with sensuous happiness, or with a combination of these? This question is largely academic since the intellectual and sensuous forms of pleasure are phenomenally indistinguishable. Kant will instead implicitly distinguish between two aspects of the happiness consummated with virtue, namely the absence of sensuous dissatisfaction and the positive presence of well-being.

One aspect of Kant's argument here has been met with scholarly disagreement: if virtuous morality requires us to pursue the moral law as if it is our sole end, why must we also strive to actualize the complete good which proportions merit with happiness?[11] Does this not hopelessly adulterate Kant's ethics?[12] A better reading of Kant's argument is that human beings ought to pursue virtue as if it is their only end and then they are rationally legitimated in hoping that their effort is compensated with happiness. In a similar vein, Lawrence Pasternack suggests that the highest good is not a duty to which we must aspire, but rather an ideal of reason.[13] The resolution of this interpretative problem hinges on one's interpretation of Kant's line: "The promotion [*Beförderung*] of the highest good, which contains this connection in its concept, is an a priori object of our will and inseparably bound up with the moral law" (KpV 5:114). Kant speaks here, very clearly, of the promotion of the highest good as inseparably bound up with the moral law, but he does not allude that such promotion should be the work of the singular moral agent. Instead, he argues that the hope that the promotion of the highest

good develops over time is bound up with being under the moral law: the consummation of happiness and morality should be feasible, not something that human beings bring out by themselves.[14]

Since the complete good is rationally postulated as being possible, Kant must establish the a priori necessary grounds that warrant a connection between virtue and happiness. Accordingly, he can assume *that* there is a connection between virtue and happiness (since this is rationally necessary) and must consequently show *how* this is possible. In his words, "we shall try to set forth the grounds of that possibility" (KpV 5:119). In Kant's view, these grounds consist of two postulates, namely the immortality of the soul and the existence of God which, together, account for what some call Kant's "moral theology"[15]. Kant defines a postulate in contrast with knowledge: "[A postulate is] a theoretical proposition, though one not demonstrable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid practical law" (KpV 5:122). A postulate then logically and rationally follows from certain practical laws, but cannot be given as an object of experience. Such postulates are to be taken on practical faith while, at the same time they safeguard the coherence and architectonic unity of the whole of practical lawgiving.

The first ground of a connection between virtue and happiness is the immortality of the soul, which allows for the "endless progress toward complete conformity [of inclination with virtue]" (KpV 5:122). While holiness is not a viable ideal for finite, human agents, this is nevertheless postulated as a *focus imaginarius* that functions as a regulative idea guiding humanity's moral efforts. Holiness is a state of being in which human agents are free from counter-moral determinations by the evil principle. To allow for the possibility of the absence of sensuous dissatisfaction with moral virtue, Kant postulates the possibility of infinite progress toward holiness or to "endless progress towards that complete conformity" of the human will with the moral law (KpV 5:122). Obviously, endless progress is only possible given the assumption of the potential infinite nature of the existence of the human being. Accordingly, the human agent ought to be in possession of an immortal soul that warrants the possibility for such infinite progress. This is then the first step in connecting happiness to virtue, namely in allowing for the possibility of the absence of dissatisfaction with virtue in a state of moral holiness.

Numerous commentators have observed that Kant's argument is flawed.[16] The problem with this argument is, namely, that the immortality of the soul can only warrant the possibility of *infinite progress* for the human being, not the *actual realization* of the holy will. This problem can be rephrased as the following paradox: Kant suggests, on the one hand, that there are innate limits to human powers with regard to practical agency (finitude, propensity to evil) which, on the other hand, can be overcome given an infinite amount of time. If however these limits are radical and innate, why would an infinite

amount of time enable more to be accomplished than a lifetime? To understand Kant's thinking, it might be helpful to approach things mathematically: two parallel lines are logically postulated to intersect and conjoin in infinity. If the two lines of human inclination and moral virtue are thought to run parallel, Euclidian geometry postulates that these conjoin *in infinitum*. Some might read this argument as suggesting, rather optimistically, that humanity's shortcomings can be overcome *in infinitum*. Kant's argument is more subtle than this, however, as any optimism here lies only in the potential that rationality can reformat human nature, not in human nature itself. Accordingly, Kant remains cautiously skeptical about the possibility of human nature itself ever being attuned to goodness, although he does allow for the hope that human nature will be overtaken by rationality and thus become in line with moral goodness. This makes his postulating the immortality of the soul an apt example of Kant's specific blend of moral pessimism and rational optimism: while all is potentially well in a rationally postulated future, this future is not directly in line with natural moral abilities and will always be an *ideal*, not a *real*, future.

The second necessary ground of a connection between virtue and happiness is the postulate of the existence of God. Next to the possibility of the absence of sensuous dissatisfaction, there ought to be the possibility for a positive sense of well-being. There is no immediate connection between virtue and happiness: "The moral law of itself does not promise happiness" (KpV 5:128). While there is no such connection in the moral law itself, there can be a separate entity that synthetically aligns the moral law with happiness. This would be a being that has "causality in keeping with the moral disposition" (KpV 5:125). This being acts as a moral judicator to proportionate merit with happiness, the specifics how this works are left remarkably obscure by Kant. What is clear, however, that next to being merely worthy of happiness, God as a divine judicator allows us the hope of one day participating in the happiness we are worthy of: "Only if religion is added to [morals] does there also enter the hope of someday participating in happiness to the degree that we have been intent upon not being unworthy of it [*ihrer nicht unwürdig zu sein*]" (KpV 5:130).

These two rational postulates are part of a complex moral theology. These are necessary objects of moral faith that warrant the possibility of combining the two main ends of human existence, namely happiness and virtue. While Kant consistently emphasizes that morality should take priority over the pursuit of happiness, he does believe that a human life cannot completely forego from happiness. It is then an essential part of practical faith that happiness is guaranteed in exact proportion to virtue. But is all of this not very close to wishful thinking? Since virtue is the absolute end of human existence, we do wish for some kind of compensation for our toils

and labors. This objection was voiced to Kant by Thomas Wizenmann, who argues that this way of thinking would allow to postulate the necessary existence for anything that one experiences a need. A man in love, so Wizenmann claims, could fool himself about an idea of beauty which he then concludes exists in reality. Kant responds by distinguishing between a need (*Bedürfniß*) that is based upon inclination (*Neigung*) and a need of reason (*Vernunftbedürfniß*) that is based upon the moral law, which applies universally to everyone. As such, the postulation of the existence of an object is valid only when it is based upon an objective determining ground of the will, not a subjective ground (see KpV 5:143n). It is in that same vein that Susan Neiman suggests that Kant's reasons for "thinking that the idea of this world as the best one is not a childish wish. It is rather, he believes, a requirement of human reason."[17] In her view, human agents need to be reassured in their hope that the best possible world is at least possible and can be rationally expected. This is perhaps the crucial difference between Kant and Leibniz: Leibniz believes that the progress of science would explain why this is the best possible world; for Kant, such an explanation is impossible in principle and must consistently be an aspect of rational faith, not knowledge. Accordingly, reason necessitates postulating something that will warrant the possibility for the approbation of happiness to virtue. In Kant's words, "The highest good in the world is possible only insofar as a supreme cause of nature having a causality in keeping with the moral disposition is assumed" (KpV 5:125). This rationally forces the human being to assume the existence of a strictly moral God.

That these postulations are only subjectively and not objectively necessary is important to keep in mind. This means that if one's system of thought is to be coherent, the existence of God ought to be postulated. The predicate subjective is then not to be understood pejoratively—as a personal opinion—especially since Kant calls this "rational faith," and the most "reasonable opinion [*allervernünftigsten Meinung*] for us human beings [to hold]" (KPV 5:142): there are some very good reasons of a practical nature for assuming the existence of God. Rational faith, nevertheless, differs from both knowledge and opinion: knowledge requires both objective (experience) and subjective (cognitive) grounds, while opinion requires neither objective nor subjective grounds. There are, however, proper and improper "beliefs" and Kant is in need of certain appropriate standards to discern good from bad beliefs, particularly so since experience cannot be the arbiter. What makes belief in the existence of God a reasonable opinion for us human beings to hold and, for instance, belief in goblins irrational?[18] The only arbiter that remains to differentiate good from bad beliefs would be the regulative influence of practical reason, namely whether these beliefs are buoyed by rational considerations derived from moral duty.

In the *third Critique*, Kant reiterates with greater clarity that his purpose in postulating the existence of God is not so as to provide a proof of the existence of God, but if a rational agent's "moral thinking is to be consistent [*moralisch consequent denken will*], he must include the assumption of this proposition among the maxims of his practical reason" (KU 5:450n). This clarification emphasizes that a notion of God is not at all necessary for moral agency in itself, but that human reason is nevertheless propelled toward such a notion so as to render rational deduction consistent. Accordingly, the postulate of the existence of God is a subjective argument dependent upon the architectonic of practical reason, rather than an objective proof for the existence of God. Some commentators have mistakenly taken the postulate of the existence of God as a theoretical proof for the existence of God.[19] This strategy is highly problematic as Kant, on the one hand, did not treat the postulate of the existence of God as a theoretical proof for the existence of God, and, on the other hand, refused to include a "moral argument" in the only three possible proofs (*beweisarten*) of God's existence: the ontological, the physico-teleological, and the cosmological. Unlike a proof, the postulate of the existence of God does not provide any objective or speculative knowledge on God, but warrants the rational hope that the complete good is possible. The value of the postulate is thus primarily practical, not theoretical.

This brings us to the obvious dissimilarity between the consequences of the antinomy of practical reason and those of the antinomy of speculative reason. The antinomy of speculative reason was supposed to limit speculative reason stepping beyond its justified limits into dialectical deception (especially the mathematical antinomy); the antinomy of practical reason, on the contrary, justifies an extension beyond the limits of experience regulated by the necessary possibility of the highest good, both as supreme as well as complete good. Needless to say, this could lead Kant to being accused of logical inconsistency, especially in light of his insistence on the unity of reason: how can one limit the scope of theoretical reason while the other flagrantly steps beyond these strictures? Kant likely foresaw this objection and assigned priority to practical reason when a conflict arises between practical and theoretical reasons, as long as practical reason is based on a priori laws of consciousness. This has the following implications with regard to the existence of God. Theoretical reason claims that God is a limit concept: there is no way of speculatively proving the existence of God, yet theoretical reason is attracted to thinking toward (and sometimes beyond) this ultimate. Practical reason is to transcend possible experience in virtue of the a priori necessity of the highest good to be possible. Accordingly, rational considerations surrounding God are modeled on the principle of practical reason. Beyond the reaches of practical reason, there is no legitimate knowledge about God. Through ethical agency, the human agent is propelled to think about God and

religion as the "recognition of all duties as divine commandments" (KpV 5:129; RGV 6:230). Kant's point will, however, be more nuanced in *Religion* (see the following sections).

Does this discussion of the subjectively necessary postulation of the existence of God have any repercussions for the issue of moral motivation? It would appear awkward at first to read Kant's discussion of the existence of God in terms of moral motivation. Kant's argument would then be that the moral law itself provides insufficient motivation for moral agency since it requires to be reinforced through the subjective postulating of a rewarding and perhaps even punishing God. Does this then not hopelessly adulterate pure, moral motivation? In this spirit, Lewis White Beck had formulated the following dilemma: God is either dangerous or obsolete for moral agency, but either way has no place in Kant's ethics.[20] The postulation of the existence of God can be dangerous because it could render motivation impure: virtue would be aspired for the sake of a reward. But the postulation of the existence of God could also be superfluous if this is nothing but an architectonic argument that systematically, but only ideally, aligns certain concepts. In this case, the postulated existence of God would have no real consequences. Because of this dichotomy, Beck expresses serious hesitations about the postulation, and the highest good (as complete good) should not be a concern, certainly not a task, for the human agent. It is not the job of "a laborer in the vineyard to apportion happiness to the virtuous."[21] A way out of this dilemma would be that Kant's moral theology is an assistance to moral agency, and not a real aspect of moral motivation.

THE RATIONAL NECESSITY OF RELIGION

Kant admits that the relative force of the moral law ought to be augmented by something else because the appeal of autonomy (and the eminence of the moral law) is insufficient for finite human beings to elevate generally the moral law over their inclinations. In *Religion*, this will take the determinate shape of beneficial ideas and practices designed purposely so as to keep the human being on the track of morality. Martin Moors has called this "religious fictionalism":

> Some of the religious interpretations Kant stages in his moral philosophy can be interpreted as "good fictions." Fictitious representations are esteemed to be good either in the functional way according to their engagement as necessary *momenta* in the will's imperative moral dynamics, or in the postulatory way when they are treated according to a standard of being true, in their necessary relation to what is defined to be practically true *kath'exochen.*[22]

Certain religious notions function as morally beneficial ideas in the way they help the human will navigate toward moral goodness. Kant's postulating the existence of God is then a first logical step in developing a philosophy of religion that overtly aims at reinforcing moral interest. As will be developed in more detail in the sections below, the drawback of assigning this specific purpose to religion is that practical reason becomes the censor of theological reason in such a way that morality chastises any more robust sense of divinity and faith. Whether or not historical religion can then still serve its motivational function will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rational and Historical Religion

To illustrate how religion becomes necessary for human agents in their attempts to be moral beings, it is helpful to turn to the first preface of *Religion*. Here, Kant sets the stage in claiming that morality as such does not require religion for either legislation or motivation: "Morality (. . .) is in need neither of the idea of another being above him in order that he recognize his duty, nor, that he observe it, of an incentive other than the law itself" (RGV 6:3). Nevertheless, morality seems inevitably to extend toward religion because the "complete good" (consummation of virtue and happiness) must be possible and because of several human limitations, "Even the most sublime object is diminished under the hands of the human being whenever they apply its idea to their use" (RGV 6:7–8). Next to a *philosophy of God* in the *second Critique*, Kant elaborates a *philosophy of religion* in *Religion* that must remain in keeping with practical reason. This is so because of the empirical and fragile constitution of human agents who require a kind of assistance in their moral quest. From a transcendental (purely rational) perspective, morality does not require any other (either as ground or end), but from an empirical perspective human agents are pushed to answer the question, "What is then the result of this right conduct of ours" (RGV 6:5). Since religions almost naturally exert impressive influence on morality and politics, Kant might have inferred that this influence could best be put to good use. Kant will, however, not be as explicit in these arguments, which at times has occasioned very diverse interpretations.[23]

Since morality extends toward religion as the recognition of all moral obligations as if divine commands (e.g., KpV 5:129; RGV 6:230), philosophy has found a new and legitimate way to speak of concepts such as religion and God. In his theoretical philosophy, Kant had destroyed the traditional ways of approaching these topics (natural or rational theology) which subsequently makes practical reason the new ground and transcendental condition of all discourse regarding the supersensible. Obviously, the promulgations of theology could conflict with practical reason and the questions could then be asked

which discourse takes epistemological precedence. Kant is very clear on this: historical faiths have to face the tribunal of (practical) reason and therefore should be purified of all superstitions and a(nti)moral elements. Kant's philosophy then not only posits a specific outlook on God, but also on religion and when a historical religion conflicts with this outlook, it should submit to the higher truth of transcendental philosophy. In *Conflict of Faculties*, Kant states that a proper division of labor is instrumental in facilitating progress in the various sciences. Therefore, he welcomes the distinction in the universities between the three higher faculties (theology, law, and medicine) and the lower faculty (philosophy). While the higher faculties are each in their own way based upon authority (SF 7:23), the lower faculty answers to no fundamental authority besides reason (SF 7:27). In his view, this warrants the claim that the lower faculty must censor the higher (SF 7:31–33) as this is the only way for progress in these sciences (SF 7:33–36).

Thus far, we have seen that Kant argues, on the one hand, for the rational necessity of entertaining a concept of God and a religion because of human finitude and, on the other hand, that such a concept of God and a religion are only justified from the viewpoint of practical reason. Obviously, historical religion did not always give expression primarily to moral concerns, but this does not mean that historical religion is to be discarded as a whole. A historical religion can have gone astray throughout history but yet have the proper, moral essence. With regard to Christianity, Kant would argue that this religious faith consists of two elements, namely "the canon of religion and [. . .] its organon or vehicle" (SF 7:36). The former is "pure religious faith" and the latter is "ecclesiastical faith" (SF 7:37). Proper religious faith is essentially rational, an extension of morality and, therefore, particular historical beliefs are not "an essential part of religious faith" (*Ibid.*). Pure religious faith is then the ahistorical, a priori kernel of a moral religion. Kant first details the essentials of such pure religious faith in which he abstracts from all possible empirical data and details the essential, abstract features of how morality rationally extends toward religion. After having done so, Kant sets out to test whether a specific historical religion is in accordance with this bare essence:

> To start from some alleged revelation or other and, abstracting from the pure religion of reason (so far as it constitutes a system on its own), to hold fragments of this revelation, as a historical system, up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to the same pure rational system of religion. (RGV 6:12)

Traditionally, this twofold project throughout *Religion* were called Kant's two experiments (*Versuch*) and gave rise to discussion as to where exactly each experiment occurs.[24] Lawrence Pasternack has pointed out recently that this discussion is misguided, since Kant's claims to make a "second

experiment" (*zweites Versuch*) happen in the second preface to *Religion*. As such, he merely suggests to make a second attempt (in the second edition of *Religion*) so as to detect whether Christianity leads back toward pure rational religion.[25] Obviously, Pasternack's point is only terminological and does not change in what way *Religion* is to be read. In the next section (section three), we will discuss the rational essence of pure religious faith; afterward (in section four), we will discuss the way Kant seems to believe how Christianity blends nicely with pure religious faith—if reformed properly.

This first brief characterization of Kant's twofold project in *Religion* already hints that Kant is not hostile toward historical religion. In fact, he finds that historical faith and beliefs are essential for the propagation of pure religious faith since these serve as its vehicle. Historical beliefs are the clothing for the otherwise naked message of pure religion. Kant does not then object to clothing rational religious ideas in historical garments in as long these are interpreted philosophically, that is by using "principles of interpretation [that are] philosophical" (SF 7:38). This primarily implies that any and all statements or practices found in historical religion that contradict practical reason must, at times forcefully (cf. RGV 6:110), be interpreted so as to serve the interests of practical reason (any statements that merely transcend reason without contradicting it do not have to but may be interpreted in accordance with practical reason). This interrelationship between rational and historical religion is further illustrated, by Kant, by means of drawing two "concentric circles" (RGV 6:12). The inner circle is pure rational religion or rational faith which is the core of authentic religion. The outer circle is the necessary historical garment of pure rational religion. Accordingly, the first thing Kant always investigates throughout the four parts of *Religion* is the way in which a pure rational religion posits a number of moral concepts (pure religious faith). The first part treats the notion of radical evil; the second part discusses how one combats this evil individually; the third part discusses how one combats this evil communally; the fourth part discusses the authentic and counterfeit service to God in a moral religion. Kant consistently follows up this first undertaking with the second one: testing whether a certain historical religion (i.e., Christianity[26]) lives up to the rigorous standards of purely rational religion. The core of any authentic religion is morality and its historical contingent aspects are the necessary clothing for its rational core.

Clearly distinguishing between these two projects is a vital reading guide for Kant's philosophy of religion, one which has often been missed by interpreters. Two seminal studies of *Religion*, by Jean-Louis Bruch and Josef Bohatec, largely miss the difference between these: Bruch only remembers Kant's insistence that one should not be familiar with his ethical writings from the second preface[27] and in his discussion of the second preface, Bohatec focuses solely on Kant's suggested unity between Christianity and

rational religion.[28] Even more recent commentators like Keith Ward have a tendency to believe that Kant's chief concern in *Religion* is to translate Christian concepts into concepts that may be beneficial for morality and Kant has, therefore, little or no interest in traditional and historical Christianity.[29] Similarly, Giovanni Sala argues that Kant's religion is "a critical revision of one positive, historical religion: Christianity"[30] and Stephen Crites believes that *Religion*'s "four parts offer strictly moral interpretations of original sin, Christology, the coming Kingdom of God [. . .], and a doctrine of the church."[31] Allen Wood, however, aptly summarizes Kant's purpose in *Religion* as showing that "[historical religion] is to come to an understanding of itself as a vehicle for pure religious faith, so better to serve the pure faith which is its essence."[32]

Religion's Purpose to Moral Revolution

Kant turns toward God and religion in the *second Critique*, and initially in the Preface of *Religion* as well, in order to facilitate something that could be called supernatural justice, that is, aligning merit with happiness. Religion appears from this angle to be a rationally necessary part of moral motivation because the world and the human being are not what they ought to be, and the powers of autonomy to rectify this situation are insufficient. God and religion are then needed, from this angle, to provide a sort of coherence to moral life. In terms more familiar in Kantian studies, moral theology has predominantly an architectonic function. This does not exhaust the function of religion for Kant's moral philosophy; especially in *Religion*, Kant aligns the purpose of proper religion with buoying a moral revolution in the disposition of human beings.

Kant explores in *Religion* how historical faiths can accommodate the moral struggle. Specifically, he wants to reform historical religion in such a way that it provides, what I call below, moral education, which aims to augment the incentive to revolutionize the natural disposition of human beings toward the moral law. Such a revolution cannot be accomplished by human beings by themselves, which signals that it is not mere whim that Kant repeatedly looks to a proper understanding of the human being's relation to divine grace as the primal aspect of any authentic religion. Kant's primary interest in a moral religion is then to provide a morally beneficent concept of religious grace (in a very broad sense) as a useful notion that would augment the human agent's moral resolve.[33]

Kant argues throughout *Religion* I that human beings are depraved, this means that they naturally have a positive inclination toward evil which, in turn, means that they naturally prioritize their happiness over the moral law. This tendency is radical because it cannot be eradicated by the agent's own

workings. This is, in a nutshell, Kant's brand of pessimism: human beings have a natural, ineradicable proclivity toward egoist happiness over the moral law that can never be molded into a good. Unlike Hobbes, Kant does believe that human beings have a higher destiny and that this pessimism ought to be countered with a sense of rationalist optimism. This latter viewpoint suggests that this natural depravity cannot be the final stage of humanity since the architectonic nature of rationality necessitates a rational ideal in which such a propensity can be rooted out. As such, we have a *natural* depravity which we ought to be capable to *rationally* overcome. As mentioned above, the overcoming of depravity is a *focus imaginarius*, a rational ideal that harmonizes moral effort, even though it will never be a real state of being.

Realizing that depravity can only be rationally and not empirically overcome can invite moral despair. Accordingly, there ought to be something that fuels the struggle against the evil principle and allows the possibility of the idea of a victory over that principle. For this, Kant turns toward religion as a moral educator, the purpose of which is to augment the passion of naturally depraved human beings to endeavor a profound and dramatic moral transformation. Kant was very well aware of the difficulty of the moral undertaking: "How can "an evil tree bear good fruit?" (RGV 6:45), or how can we "expect to construct something completely straight [*völlig Gerades*] from such crooked wood [*krummem Holze*]?" (RGV 6:100). In a manner of speaking, the evil tree can only bear good fruit if the metaphorical roots are realigned and not by trimming the branches. Such a radical change is called, by Kant, "moral regeneration," "moral restoration," or "moral revolution." The first step in accommodating such a rebirth is for human agents to undergo a change of heart (*conversio cordis*) or a change of disposition (*Gesinnung*). This means that human beings take up the firm resolution to progress continuously in bringing about this revolution.

In religious language, this change of heart is a conversion from the natural preference of sensuous interests over the moral law to having a good disposition. This rebirth into moral goodness is best understood, so Kant argues, as the inscrutable workings of divine grace after the human agent has exhausted all his or her possible means. Kant is obviously here making use of Christian language, and by focusing too strongly on their literal meaning as stemming from Christian theology, Kant has occasioned serious misinterpretations of his philosophy of religion. One of these misunderstandings is that Kant's would allow for some form of grace that effectively subverts natural depravity—which would be a sense of justification in the traditional, Christian sense. Patrick Frierson, for instance, rightly reads *Religion* as a response to moral despair awakened through the acknowledgment of moral pessimism but adds that, through grace, conscience, rational hope, and communal living, the human agent is enabled to move beyond its evil nature.[34] While I agree

that Kant tackles moral despair in his philosophy of religion, his specific sense of pessimism remains intact because these religious tools are better read as pedagogical instruments that instill moral interest and augment resolve rather than facilitate an overcoming of evil. A vast number of fairly essential aspects of Kant's moral philosophy remain obscure even after detailed analysis: autonomy, the highest good, radical evil, and moral regeneration are all rationally assumed, but not determinatively known. Kant emphasizes time and again that the human agent must venture as far as he or she can and then hope to be "receptive to a higher assistance inscrutable to him/her" (RGV 6:45).

The rational basis for postulating a moral religion is that this religion would cultivate the human aspiration for a "change of heart": "The upper hand [our maxims] gain over the senses in time, the change is to be regarded only as an ever-continuing striving for the better, hence as a gradual reformation [*allmählige Reform*] of the propensity to evil, of the perverted attitude of the mind" (RGV 6:48). Gordon Michalson considers this change of heart to be abrupt in Kant's moral philosophy. Kant first elaborates upon this concept from a Pauline perspective on the "New Man" and a Johannine idea of a "rebirth." While Kant's theory of radical evil might already have been prepared in *Groundwork* and the *second Critique* and is in that way not at first glance extracted from Christian rhetoric on original sin, the concept of a "change of heart" is, as Michalson rightly notes, ad hoc in Kant's philosophy and takes its determinate shape and content from biblical ideas since reason would understand moral progress as gradual, not revolutionary.[35] In my view, the only cogent explanation of this is to point to an underlying sense of existential pessimism where Kant has come to recognize the extent of humanity's ill disposition toward morality. By itself, education, law, and politics are incapable of realigning human nature since they only challenge specific manifestations of vice, while this should be attacked at its root. This explains why Kant does not offer prudential advice against specific vices (e.g., gluttony, insincerity, avarice), but favors a radical and complete turn in human ethical agency. Prudence, for example, would reform and harmonize the natural inclinations—which are, in themselves, good (e.g., RGV 6:58). The moral problem then does not directly lie with our sensuous inclinations, but with our composure toward these. In other words, it is our mode of appreciating and thinking that ought to be changed and then our ways of acting will change as a result (not the other way around).

The nature of this change is very illuminating in clarifying Kant's pessimism since the change is of a radical nature, not a prudential (re-)ordering of our maxims. This is why Kant emphasizes that religion does not aim at

the moral augmentation of human beings, but at their moral reconstitution: "The end of religious instruction must be to make us other human beings and not merely better human beings" (SF 7:54). So instead of being agents naturally disposed to giving preference to their sensuous inclinations over the moral law, human beings are ideally turned by religion into an agent with the resources to give preference to the moral law over their inclinations. This could be rephrased as an attempt to offer a solution to the problem established at the end of the previous chapter: how can an agent who is by nature thoroughly disinclined to be moral nevertheless increase his or her interest in the moral law? Kant's philosophy of religion answers this question by providing certain tools that would augment the moral agent's attempts to change his or her nature. When these tools have then been exhausted, Kant consistently turns to a philosophy of grace in trying to assuage any possible despair that might follow from the human agents' recognition of their inability to truly overcome evil.

Kant admits that sheer respect for the eminence of the moral law, while logically sufficient, is from a human being's point of view unable to accomplish such a rebirth since the appeal of rationality is weak compared to the allure of happiness. Accordingly, Kant clearly points out that religion is a rational necessity for human agents so that they receive proper guidance and education in their moral struggle. What remains unclear throughout Kant's argument is the content of the effective change a human agent undergoes through confrontation with religion and grace, and the extent to which the change of heart is within the powers of human autonomy. While Kant emphasizes that whatever a human being does in a moral sense is always "an effect of his free power of choice," he or she might be in need of "some supernatural cooperation" (RGV 6:44). This presents a paradox in Kant's philosophy of religion. On the one hand, the human being ought to combat the evil propensity and must accordingly be able to do so (*nemo obligatur ultra posse*) but, on the other hand, the propensity to evil is radical, that is, the human agent lacks resources to combat the evil principle. Here then, the original good predisposition comes into play: through postulating that the human agent is originally well disposed toward the moral law, some credence is lent to the possibility of reviving this condition. The good predisposition is then a necessary idea to provide a basis for moral regeneration. Kant certainly remains consistently pessimistic as to whether any final victory over the evil principle is possible for the human agent, even though it rationally must be possible. To assuage any despair that might follow from this, Kant takes recourse in a gracious judge who forgives our demerits and judges only the honesty of our attempts, not our failure to achieve the highest good.

RELIGION AND MORAL EDUCATION

Kant distinguishes two ways in which religion can morally educate, that is, instilling the moral courage to oppose the propensity to evil, namely through a moral example or a "Son of God" (*Religion* II) and moral community or a "People of God" (*Religion* III). What unites these two is that they both are practices that cultivate practical respect for the eminence of the moral law. Kant explicitly uses the term "moral education" (*moralische Bildung*) when discussing how the human agent can hope to overcome the propensity to evil (RGV 6:48).[36]

In the *second Critique*, Kant argues that every human agent experiences a rational feeling of respect whenever confronted with the moral law, and thus is capable of admiring it. Because of their personality, human beings are not indifferent to virtue, but respect and admire the moral law as rational beings. However, because their sensuous nature is totally and utterly lacking in any affinity with the moral law, Kant believes it to be morally beneficial for a human being to cultivate this rational affinity for the moral law through certain embodied means that may not be good in themselves, but can be conducive to that which is good. Already in the *second Critique*, Kant looked for ways "in which one can provide the laws of pure practical reason with access to the human mind and influence on its maxims, that is, the way in which one can make objectively practical reason subjectively practical as well" (KpV 5:151). He felt that the human agent ought to be educated to cling to duty whenever guided astray by "all the deceptive allurements of enjoyment and, in general, everything that may be counted as happiness" (*Ibid.*).

Kant's discussion in the *second Critique* of human beings' "prepatory guidance [*Anleitungen*]" (KpV 5:152) for being moral is somewhat brief and meandrous compared to the discussion of the same subject in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (MS 6:477–485). Cultivating affinity for the moral law is one aspect of what Kant includes in the *Metaphysics of Morals* under the heading "moral education." Since this education can take various forms, I will here limit myself to the religious tools that can properly facilitate moral motivation (Kant, for instance, assigns a similar function to the beautiful in art and the cultivation of civic virtue).

Teaching Morality or Moral Pedagogy

Human beings benefit from moral education since they lack a natural inclination to what is good. Moral education leads human beings away (*ex-ducere*) from their normal inclination to put self-love over the moral law, just as small children are taught to share their toys and not monopolize them. One should

note, however, that such education (for Kant) does not in any way change the natural constitution of the human being, instead, it cultivates a desire to struggle against the natural inclination for evil. Kant outlines certain principles to assist human beings in making the proper moral decisions.

For Kant to have a philosophy of moral education at all seems to be rather awkward. If morality is based upon a noumenal fact of reason (i.e., confrontation with the moral law) to which the human agent ought to adhere, freely and solely out of respect for the law, how then can one ever teach free, moral behavior?[37] This and other awkward aspects of a Kantian form of moral education have caused some commentators to dismiss the *Lectures on Pedagogy* as not belonging to the *Akademie Ausgabe*—not least, because they were edited and published not by Kant, but by Friedrich Theodor Rink.[38] However, Kant develops his pedagogical views not only in these *Lectures* but also in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (and snippets can be found elsewhere as well). A more charitable interpretation would therefore attempt to reconcile his notion of moral pedagogy with his views of moral agency. This can be done by clearly separating the cognitive and the conative aspect of moral education, respectively called a "moral catechism" and "moral ascetics" (MS 6:477–485).

The very nature of Kant's formulation of the proper moral incentive, as a virtuous disposition, implies that morality requires some level of education. Of itself, virtue suggests that someone acts counter to his or her natural impulses:

> The very concept of virtue already implies that virtue must be taught (that it is not innate); one need not appeal to anthropological knowledge based on experience to see this. For a human being's moral capacity would not be virtue were it not produced by the strength of his resolution in conflict with powerful opposing inclinations [*mächtigen entgegenstehenden Neigungen*]. (MS 6:477)

According to *Metaphysics of Morals*, such education is a twofold process, involving a moral catechism (MS 6:478–484) and ethical gymnastics (MS 6:484–485). The former provides pupils with the necessary moral concepts as derived from common understanding, while the latter instills the proper disposition toward the moral law. The method of Kant's moral catechism is fairly similar to instruction in religious catechism: through teaching pupils standardized answers to certain questions, they will be awakened cognitively to those moral insights already present in their own minds. Through continuous repetition of this practice, students will become accustomed to the correct account of moral agency without having to deduce it on their own (or going through the pains of studying *Groundwork*, the *second Critique*, and *Metaphysics of Morals*). While the process of a moral catechism is fairly

similar to Luther's catechism, Kant emphasizes that "it is most important in this education not to present the moral catechism mixed with the religious one (to combine them into one) or, what is worse yet, to have it follow upon the religious catechism" (MS 4:484; cf. MS 4:478). A moral catechism should be taught independently of any specific confessional point of view or any religion. However, Kant does not here exclude the possibility of this secular moral education being reinforced by certain religious notions so as to make the human agent even more favorably disposed to the moral law. These do not, however, belong to a moral catechism, but rather to moral gymnastics or ascetics.

Moral education as moral catechism accordingly provides the necessary cognitive elements for the human agent to be in the very best position to behave virtuously. Nevertheless, a certain paradox arises: how can one cultivate an interior disposition through repeated exterior practices? How can the rote learning of certain answers to certain questions create an inner disposition to behave virtuously? Kant can cleverly sidestep this problem by first focusing moral education on theoretical instruction in a catechism using a simulacrum of the Socratic method, and then habituating the student to this theoretical instruction through certain conative practices ("ascetics" or "gymnastics"). Accordingly, moral education does not merely provide theoretical concepts (Stoicism), nor does it merely habituate virtues (Aristotle), but rather combines the best of Stoic and Aristotelian moral education: it teaches something the student already can know (a priori) and then erects the necessary ethical gymnastics so the student can approach this virtue with "a frame of mind that is both valiant and cheerful in fulfilling its duties" (MS 6:484).

This is one aspect of what Robert Louden has called Kant's impure ethics, namely the empirical side of pure ethics.[39] Louden notes a similar duality in Kant's views on education: "Kantian moral education of course aims to teach children 'the duties that they have to fulfill,' but, more important, it also strives to foster a number of interconnected attitudes and dispositions that are preliminary to but essential for morality as Kant understands it."[40] While Louden believes that these impure aspects of Kant's ethics can seriously assist pure ethics, he remains cautiously skeptical as to whether Kant's ethics is ever "saved by impurity."[41] His main reason for this is that Kant's investigations into art, politics, religion, and history are "fraught with tension, ambiguity, and unclarity."[42] My final argument will be similar to Louden's but on different grounds: the assistance of religion fails to save Kant's pure ethics, not because it is equivocal, but because it cannot appropriately bridge the distance between natural inclinations and the good—it can only cultivate courage for the moral struggle. Kant remains frustratingly sketchy in *Metaphysics of Morals* about the content and process of moral gymnastics. One possible reason for this is that pure reason lacks the fleshed or impure

practices necessary for moral gymnastics. Accordingly, moral education is best conducted within a certain historical framework where certain traditional practices have been molded so as to effectively provide such education. It is then not mere happenstance that Kant turns to religion in *Metaphysics of Morals* right after his discussion of moral pedagogy (MS 6:486–488).

Son of God as a Moral Example

Religion II explicitly deals with the first aspect of religious, moral gymnastics, that is emulating the highest moral example of the "Son of God." Through positing something seemingly akin to a Christology,[43] Kant is mainly interested in investigating the extent to which an experiential example of a finite holy being could help cultivate interest in morality. He is then not primarily interested in either interpreting the Bible or in providing an apology for orthodox Christology. Instead, he argues that the moral benefit of such a moral example consists in increasing the attractiveness of our "universal human duty to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection" (RGV 6:61).

This moral ideal resides a priori in the human imagination as an "archetype" (*Urbild*).[44] This means that everyone can represent to themselves what perfect virtue would be like. Such an archetype is a product of the imagination that provides a comprehensive view of moral duties. This idea "resides in our morally-legislative reason," which means that it does not depend upon experience or education (RGV 6:62). Kant argues further even that there is "no need [. . .] of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason" (*ibid.*). In the *first Critique*, Kant similarly warns against imagining "the ideal in an example, that is, in appearance, as, for instance to depict the wise man in a novel" (A 570/ B 598). The reason for this has to do with human limitations which incessantly do "violence to the completeness of the idea" (*ibid.*).

Every human being, through his or her reason, can and "should furnish in his own self an example of this idea," mainly because "outer experience yields no example adequate to the idea" (RGV 6:63). Through experience, one can at best observe human beings who occasionally behave virtuously, which could never provide an example of moral perfection. Human beings are simply too fallible and morally weak to give rise to an example of moral exemplary behavior (which is essentially what we have called Kantian pessimism). And yet, historical faiths tend to provide an example (*Vorbild*) of a perfect, actual, historical, and palpable human being who displays consistent virtue. This example does not teach people how to act morally, but allows the human being the "hope to become pleasing to God . . . [such a human being is enabled to] believe and self-assuredly trust that he . . . [will] follow

this [archetype's] example in loyal emulation" (RGV 6:62). In less Kantian terminology, by picturing the Son of God as an actual human being, human beings' hope of being able to live up to this ideal becomes rationally justified. This is why Kant emphasizes that the prime function of moral examples is to bolster the rational hope of living up to the idea of perfection, and not so much to judge or disgrace those who fail to do so: "A good example (exemplary conduct) should not serve as a model but only as a proof that it is really possible to act in conformity with duty" (MS 6:480).

These pages have caused some scholarly dissensus, especially with regard to the ground and cause of the archetype of perfection in human reason. Kant states that the archetype is a practical, a priori idea that "resides in our morally-legislative reason" (RGV 6:62). By this, Kant means that human beings do not require (religious) education so as to have a notion of moral perfection. Yet, this notion nevertheless appears alien to human consciousness because there is a remarkable (perhaps infinite) distance between human nature and moral perfection which makes the archetype of perfection look otherworldly: "It is better to say that [the archetype] has come down to us from heaven" (RGV 6:61). Because of the alien nature of the archetype of perfection, numerous commentators therefore regard it as having been caused by God (as a "work of grace") to make moral behavior possible. Stephen Palmquist writes that "the archetype is an unmerited gift of grace that must be present in a human being before any conversion from evil to good can begin."[45] This statement is echoed by Firestone and Jacobs who write that "Kantian grace is first and foremost the willful descent of the [archetype] which restores to our species moral freedom and the possibility of genuine moral goodness."[46]

This seems to be an overly literal and hasty conclusion. Kant's explicit reason for suggesting the divine origin of the archetype is not the tremendous nature of the archetype but our incomprehension of how "human nature could be receptive of the idea" (RGV 6:61). In other words, the moral composure of the archetype so exceeds human nature—transcends it, if you will—that human agents could not have conjured it up themselves: the alleged divinity of the archetype derives from human limitation and the impoverished state of the natural capacities for conceptualizing and acting in accordance with moral virtue. The archetype appears divine because human beings are remarkably fallible and morally weak by nature, which is not tantamount to saying that the archetype is divine. Actually, Kant's argument at this point is not dissimilar from Descartes's a posteriori argument for the existence of God where the rational excess in the idea of the infinite throws human beings beyond themselves to assume a divine cause of this idea. Kant is not a dogmatic rationalist like Descartes, however. The excess of the idea of an archetype does project reason beyond immanent finitude, but, as Kant's *first Critique* clearly argues, such a dialectical inference can, at best, have a

regulative function. This means that one cannot make a speculative claim on the reality of such an idea, but we can assume the ideality of this idea for the architectonic wholeness of human reason. When entering the domain of the practical, the *Metaphysics of Morals* clarifies that what potentially has a theoretical regulative function, could have an "as if" function in the practical sphere (MS 6:486–488). Therefore, the divine descent of the archetype of perfection is an "as if" statement that regulates and support moral behavior by providing the necessary ideas and notions for moral behavior, which are necessary not for the sake of morality as such but because of the fallibility and finitude of human beings.

To have the archetype as an "unmerited gift of grace," as the abovementioned commentators allege, would disturb the transcendental autonomy of practical reason since morality would then essentially be made dependent on divine grace: if moral behavior is grounded in a gracious gift, then Kant's whole construction of autonomous ethics falls to pieces. As such, Kant's language here ought to be interpreted as regulative rather than literal. Kant is saying that because of the vast distance between the human agent and the archetype of perfection, the human agent can act *as if* the archetype is a divine gift. The archetype is clothed in divine appeal so as to further enhance its remarkable status, but this does not imply that it has a divine origin. Kant is even wary of the divinity of the archetype, as in that case "the consequent distance from the natural human being would then again become so infinitely great that the divine human being could no longer be held forth to the natural human being as *example*" (RGV 6:64). Obviously, individual believers will act under the assumption that the archetype is a divine gift—and they are practically allowed to do so—but Kant's critical philosophy does not allow for such a thing to be an actual divine gift.

The archetype is the a priori personification of what Kant calls "the good principle" (as opposed to the evil principle). The human agent can recognize the archetype in a particular human agent who then serves as an example of moral perfection. The example does not in any way constitute or shape the content of the archetype, but the a priori nature of the archetype can be recognized in the example. This example is then the empirical personification of the good principle as a virtuous human agent who brings his or her maxim in line with the moral law out of respect for that law. Such an example of perfection encourages the human agent to take up the good principle or, in other words, the Son of God inspires emulation in human beings. A human agent who takes up that good principle in emulation of the Son of God has acquired a good disposition (*Gesinnung*), which is a disposition that is properly in tune with the moral law. Kant argues that such a disposition is an aspect of the noumenal character of the human agent (and is thus inscrutable). As a result, human agents cannot ever be certain that they have a good disposition.

They are morally obligated, however, to cultivate a frame of mind that acts as if they had such a good disposition, and this is what Kant calls "moral gymnastics," which is to be "both valiant and cheerful in fulfilling its duties" (MS 6:484) by "combatting natural impulses sufficiently to be able to master them when a situation comes up in which they threaten morality" (MS 6:485). In other words, assuming the good disposition is to decide definitively, "all at once and completely" (MS 6:477), to take up the proper stance toward the hierarchy between self-love and the moral law. Moral gymnastics then assists such a change of heart by arming the agent to combat counter-moral inclinations.

The archetype of humanity has a rational ground since it enables practical faith that the good disposition is a possibility for human beings. Belief in the example of moral perfection then is a part of moral gymnastics since it assists human agents to be righteous and walk the path of arduous morality despite occasional opposition. Applied to the Christian religion, this would mean that Jesus Christ paves the way for believers to be confident about walking a path similar to him. It is mainly from that perspective that Kant believes that the personification of such a righteous human being would be thoroughly ineffective if the example (*Vorbild*) were to remain utterly unchallenged by the evil principle: "The elevation of such a Holy One above every frailty of human nature would rather, from all that we can see, stand in the way of the practical adoption of the idea of such a being for our imitation" (RGV 6:64). For human beings, morality takes place in the midst of strife and adversity—"and even when they do obey the law, they do it reluctantly (in the face of opposition from their inclinations)" (MS 6:379)—and if the example of moral perfection is freed from such strife, it will be too transcendent for human beings to serve as an example to be emulated. Kant therefore stresses the immanent humanity of a "Son of God," rather than his transcendence.[47] He nevertheless claims that the Christian "Son of God" is adequate to this purpose (despite several strong strands of Christianity that largely identify Jesus with God) and several biblical passages support this claim: Jesus Christ is repeatedly tempted to evil by the Devil (Matt. 4:1-11, Mk 1:12-13, Lk. 4:1-13) and, at times, shows signs of fear and weakness (Matt. 26:39: "May this cup be taken from me"), but ultimately remains morally upright (Matt. 4:10: "Away from me, Satan!"), abstains from vengeance (Lk. 6: 28) and remains true to the good principle despite utter despair (Matt. 27: 46; Mk 15:34: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me"). Such moral heroism can inspire the human agent to have "practical faith in this Son of God" and can justify the hope of becoming "pleasing to God" (RGV 6.62). While Kant does believe that we do not require the model of an "example from experience to make the idea of a human being pleasing to God," the motivating function of the moral ideal is greatly facilitated by a "fleshed" version (*Ibid.*). Such a fleshed

version justifies the hope that we might one day become like the fleshed version of the moral ideal, although our efforts will likely remain inadequate.

One additional issue that makes Kant's celebration of moral examples slightly strange (in both *Religion* and *Metaphysics of Morals*) is that he vehemently dismisses empirical, moral examples in *Groundwork* II where he argues that "one could give no worse advice to morality than by wanting to derive it from example" (GMS 4:408). Kant's celebration of examples in *Religion* II appears then to be yet one more paradox.[48] The paradox disappears, however, if the larger project of *Groundwork* is taken into account. *Groundwork* focuses on setting a ground for morality which cannot be successfully pursued by use of empirical examples, but must be achieved a priori. Ethical gymnastics, however, follows on a moral catechism that has clearly provided the necessary moral concepts and therefore uses examples not so that one might "know" the moral law, but so as to have a clear example that the moral disposition is possible: these examples strengthen the rational hope that we too can act morally. More generally, ethical gymnastics does not instruct the human agent on which actions are worthwhile (for this they know already), but instills the discipline in the human agent to be well disposed toward the moral law. Obviously, this does not mean that the human agent will ever become naturally favorably disposed toward the moral law (because our nature is perennially evil). Instead, ethical gymnastics cultivates the moral feeling and enforces the interest in acting morally.

The moral example of perfection thus serves as a practical notion that invigorates moral resolve and is not an active agent that somehow stands in for moral virtue. It is out of place, therefore, to emphasize any historical part played by the example of moral perfection in the human agent's justification over and beyond the individual agent's own part. In *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant explains that a moral example must complement the agent's own agency in struggling for moral goodness, and not suggest "an external, higher cause by whose activity the human being is passively healed" (SF 7:43). Accordingly, Kant's version of a Christology serves not to heal passively human beings, but to strengthen their moral resolve. If there is a dimension of grace to such a Christology, it resides primarily in "the hope that good will develop in us—a hope awakened by belief in our original moral predisposition to good and by the example of humanity as pleasing to God in his son" (*Ibid.*). Kant will recycle a practical function to vicarious atonement—or a "grace beyond merit"—in resolving several difficulties that might arise from adopting the good disposition. Nevertheless, the moral example serves principally to bring human agents to give the moral struggle their all, but equally lessens their demerits by means of a practical notion of religious grace.

The pedagogic function of the fleshed, moral ideal could encounter three difficulties which, though primarily originating in traditional theology, are yet

used by Kant in a thoroughly philosophical way. These difficulties roughly correspond to the theological issues of sanctification, eternal security and justification. The solution to all three lies in God's justice and grace. Stephen Palmquist points out that these three problems are all concerned with countering moral laziness, which could be induced, on the one hand, by too much dependence on God's grace since the human agent could attribute all relevant moral actions to God or, on the other hand, by overconfidence in human abilities since this could impede the recognition of our demerits and the extent of our duties. By positing inscrutable grace, Kant would then be able to counteract both problems relating to laziness since he neither assures the human agent of being graced nor removes its possibility; in other words, grace is a part of rational faith, not knowledge.[49] My view is similar but with a different emphasis: instead of emphasizing Kant countering moral laziness, the solution to these difficulties serves to provide a notion of divine grace that can counteract the despair that arises from acknowledging that the nature of human obligation often seems in excess of human, natural ability. Grace is thus a pedagogic tool to assuage despair that might follow from pessimism, but remains a practically postulated ideal, never a reality.

In considering the first difficulty of sanctification, Kant argues that since human agents are depraved, they can only progress toward the holiness of the ideal of the Son of God, but remain at any particular point "defective" in their deeds (RGV 6:67). This means that though human beings may have adopted a good disposition, their deeds are not thereby necessarily pure. The human agent has adopted only the aspiration toward purity, not purity itself. To solve this problem, Kant asserts that God "scrutinizes the heart," a heart that might have set the human agent on a continuous and infinite path toward the good will (RGV 6:67). Accordingly, the human agent can, "notwithstanding his permanent deficiency," still hope to be "generally well-pleasing to God" (*Ibid.*). In other words, the moral deficiency and failure of the human agent can be remedied by the grace of God: by judging only the heart and not the deficient deeds, God will carry humanity the rest of the way to sanctification. Kant had already offered the same solution—although presented somewhat more clearly—in a footnote to the *second Critique*: "Sanctification [is] the firm resolution and with it consciousness of steadfastness in moral progress [*im Fortschritte zum Bessern*]. [One may have] comforting hope, though not certitude, that even in an existence continuing beyond this life, he will persevere in these [good] principles" (KpV 5:123n).

Even if human beings adopt the disposition to the good, they are faced with the second difficulty of insecurity and cannot be certain of their continuous progress toward the good, or, as Kant puts it, lack "assurance of the reality and constancy of a disposition that always advances in goodness" (RGV 6:67). From Kant's perspective however, such assurance could work

counterproductively: if one were, at some point, certain about one's disposition, then one could very well stop striving for self-improvement. And, since one is "never more easily deceived than in what promotes a good opinion of oneself" (RGV 6:68), it is highly likely that human beings can become easily assured of the goodness of their incentives. Nevertheless, if the human agent completely lacked "confidence in the disposition once acquired, perseverance would hardly be possible" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, Kant argues that the human being is in need of something between knowledge (certainty) and complete ignorance (uncertainty), something that seems largely similar to what he calls rational faith in the *first Critique*: subjective, though not objective, certainty. Similarly, he holds that it is reasonable to believe that once a good disposition has been acquired, human beings can steadfastly progress toward identification with the moral ideal.

Finally there is the problem of justification. Since the human agent will necessarily have started out with an evil disposition, the conversion to the good disposition and endless progress toward holiness cannot cancel out the evil that has been committed prior to conversion. Kant is quite rigorist about punishing this evil and suggests that the punishment be "executed in the situation of conversion itself" so as to render "satisfaction to Supreme Justice" (RGV 6:112). In the act of conversion itself, the human agent is penalized for his or her past sins. Similarly as with the first difficulty, the disposition stands in for the demerit of the moral deeds. Kant even calls this a form of vicarious atonement: "And this disposition which he has incorporated in all its purity—or [. . .] this very Son of God—bears as vicarious substitute the debt of sin for him, and also for all who believe (practically) in him" (RGV 6:74). We will return to this at length in chapter six.

Kant believes that the first part of moral education, namely the cultivation of moral interest through confrontation with a moral ideal, can instill a disposition to the good in the human agent. This disposition, however, does not root out the propensity to evil; it only provides ammunition to combat radical evil. The archetype of humanity—an idea apparently alien to human nature—is instrumental here for providing resolve to combat the propensity to evil, a function which is assisted greatly by incarnating this into a historical example. The archetype of humanity provides hope despite the impoverished state of human capacity, a hope which would not need to be sustained if human beings were naturally predisposed toward the moral law. If Kant held to a more optimistic view of human nature, we would not need personal assistance from a historical faith and a Son of God in order to resolve toward moral goodness. The archetype is an opponent to the despair that follows from Kant's pessimism. How does the story continue? In *Groundwork* and the *second Critique*, morality seemed mainly as the individual's struggle with the natural human propensity to prioritize self-love over the moral law. This

struggle can take inspiration from the moral example of the Son of God. Furthermore, three difficulties that can complicate the struggle can be remedied by a form of grace, that is the evil committed prior to and after conversion can be atoned for by adopting a disposition to the good. In addition to the archetype of perfection that assists singular human beings in their personal struggle with evil, Kant suggests a communitarian remedy to counter the possible interpersonal corrupting influence of human agents (even those disposed to the good), namely moral religion under a divine judge.

The People of God as an Ethical Community

Kant's views of political communities have been the subject of wide interest. While most readings of Kant's moral philosophy in *Groundwork* and the *second Critique* almost naturally assume that morality is a personal, individualistic practice that does not involve community (political or otherwise), especially *Metaphysics of Morals* introduces a political dimension to moral life. What is interesting, however, is that until very recently most accounts of Kantian political community hardly ever seriously engaged *Religion* III, where Kant details the invisible church that underlies a cosmopolitan state. For instance, Kate Moran and Kristi Sweet develop largely positive views of Kant's account of moral community. Moran takes issue with the caricature of Kant's moral philosophy as rigorously individualistic (both in moral cognition and moral agency) and while she is absolutely correct in singling out these textbook stereotypes, she develops Kant's view of community mostly against the backdrop of the achievement of the highest, complete good and the rational necessity of moral progress.[50] This is regrettable because it misses some of the constitutive elements, most importantly a pessimistic view of natural abilities, of Kant's sense of a moral community. Like Moran, Kristi Sweet argues that "the moral law demands not only that we act out of our own freedom consistently but also that we do so in an effort to bring about a certain kind of world; the moral law requires both that we act from duty and that we adopt certain ends."[51] Sweet's teleological interpretation of Kant's communitarian ethics does not arise from anything intrinsic to moral duty itself; rather it is to be seen as bound up with the fact that the "demands of moral life are remarkably steep. They are so steep, in fact, that Kant believes that they exceed what each of us can do on our own, and even insofar as we join with others in their pursuit, they require the long arc of history to be achieved."[52] Both Moran and Sweet are insightful in pointing out the communitarian side to Kant's moral philosophy, but do not link these views to their enabling origin, namely his moral pessimism. While Sweet is more sensitive to Kant's moral pessimism (e.g., she notes how the "ideals of reason" are "ideal" and that his moral philosophy is built on human finitude), she downplays the

extent of this pessimism by turning to a moral community that, given "the long arc of historical progress," will be able to overcome this pessimism. This "focus of reason" is, however, a necessary idea to counter the possible perfidy of the moral law in so far as it sets a seemingly impossible standard—a point that Kant brings across most explicitly in *Religion* III.

Moran's and Sweet's recent interpretations take seriously Kant's communitarianism, but seem to gloss over the more original and essential perspective of Kant's moral pessimism that provides a limit to his views of moral progress. I will therefore specifically address the question of how an ethical community cultivates moral agency as a counterweight to moral pessimism by focusing on Kant's argument in *Religion* III that a moral community can be highly beneficial, perhaps even necessary, for human agents to be morally well disposed. Kant distinguishes between two types of religion: those that seek the favor of G(g)od(s) through religious practices (religions of rogation) and those that seek to be pleasing to God through moral agency (moral religion): "All religions [. . .] can be divided into religion of rogation (of mere cult) and moral religion, that is, the religion of good-life conduct" (RGV 6:51). What is striking here is that he divides faiths according to their inner configuration and not their outward appearance, such as polytheism, monotheism, atheism. Only a moral faith is proper, authentic religion which has an ahistorical kernel of moral strengthening. While a historical faith might have such a moral religion as its ahistorical kernel, certain contingent factors could be added to this religion that stray from this essential purpose. Only authentic, moral faiths can be reformed in a beneficial way so that they can morally educate human agents. Those faiths which are set on seeking favor (*Gunstbewerbung*) instead of moral strengthening are inauthentic, meaning that they cannot be reformed to provide moral education since their core is constituted wrongfully. What makes a religion rational and moral is primarily a timeless, a priori constitution: Christianity is a moral religion, Judaism is not (RGV 6:125).

This explains Kant's central purpose in *Religion* III, namely to propose certain means of reformation for moral faiths that have strayed throughout history so that they can return to their moral kernel. His broader concern, however, is still to propose certain practices and institutions that cultivate the moral disposition and, specifically applied to "church," that unite human agents in a universal church encouraging cooperation, rather than adversity. Kant does then not object to the fact that religions have an outward appearance: this is a necessary aspect of any historically formed systems. What is important, however, is that the outward form be appropriately attuned to the inner, moral message of a moral religion. What thus distinguishes an authentic faith from a religion of rogation is that it has at its core a moral project and that it "wears" the historical elements solely as "garments" for its otherwise

"naked" message. Only authentic, moral religion can properly combat evil by cultivating respect for morality and thereby instilling the communal passion to combat the evil principle.

Kant's discussion of moral community arises from, and is thus necessarily chastised by, his moral pessimism. Even human agents positively disposed to the good (those who have had a "change of heart" by emulating the "Son of God") are not freed from their propensity to evil: "He still remains not any less exposed to the assaults [*Angriffen*] of the evil principle" (RGV 6:93). Kant explains that exposure to and emulation of the moral ideal (Son of God) does not free the human agent from temptation to evil as such or root out the propensity to evil. The title of *Religion* II, "Concerning the battle of the good against the evil principle," suggests the heroism implicit in the never-ending war against the evil principle. The title of *Religion* III, "The victory (*Sieg*) of the good principle over the evil principle, and the founding of a kingdom of God on earth," suggests, however, that the Kingdom of God might achieve something that exposure to the moral example cannot. By being part of the "Kingdom of God," the human being would then not only be educated morally, but would be empowered to weed out the propensity to evil and unite in a heavenly society. However, Kant's claim of victory over evil is tempered by his belief that the ethical community—which is for human beings already "impossible"—is not the Kingdom of God. While it is perfectly possible that in the Kingdom of God, the propensity to evil is overcome, this does not happen fully in the ethical community, which remains a "virtuous," rather than a "holy" community.

First, Kant claims that the ethical community is a "never fully attainable" ideal because a "whole of this kind is greatly restricted under the conditions of sensuous human nature" (RGV 6:100). As a result, the ethical community remains an ideal of reason and never becomes an empirical reality for human agents (presumably because of their embodiment and/or propensity to evil). One could object that such a ready admission that the ethical community is never fully attainable contradicts the inscrutable grace and practical faith that Kant proposes with regard to the good disposition in *Religion* II. Human agents, then, must create a community with the assumption of being able to make moral progress, while at the same time requiring a sense of divine grace (see below).

Second, this ethical community is itself not the "Kingdom of God [. . .] but what preparations must [be made] in order [for this]" (RGV 6:101). While it would stand to reason that in the "Kingdom of God" the propensity to evil would be rooted out, the ethical community is merely a "preparation" for this Kingdom and therefore incomplete, although it is the furthest the human race can advance by its own powers toward establishing the Kingdom of God. Again, they must have faith that the flaws in the holy community will ultimately be graced by God (again, see below).

Third, Kant concludes his transcendental reflection on the ethical community by stating that the work of the good principle is to advance continuously in "erecting a power and a kingdom for itself within the human race, in the form of a community according to the laws of virtue that proclaims victory over evil and, under its dominion, assures the world of an eternal peace" (RGV 6:124). While this statement could at first glance be read as implying a final victory ("eternal peace") over the evil principle, Kant's use of words must be carefully examined here. A community according to the laws of virtue is not free from temptation since virtue requires an adversary. A final victory over the evil principle would establish a holy community and, moreover, the word "dominion" (*Herrschaft*) refers the reader back to the initial paragraph of *Religion* III where Kant univocally states that someone who is free from the dominion of evil is still open to attacks from the evil principle. The victory over evil might then be represented as an ideal of reason in an infinite beyond, but in itself the ethical community does not constitute any ultimate victory over evil. Therefore, the establishment of an ethical community prepares for a victory over the evil principle that is fully realized only in the Kingdom of God; its practices then are virtually identical to the moral ideal of the Son of God, in that they are a means to cultivate moral interest. Moral religion, however, does not, as the moral ideal, aim at morally strengthening the particular human agent, but the human race in its entirety.

Having now clarified that Kant's views regarding moral community aim at not the removal of evil, but the cultivation of moral strength, we can now investigate in what way specifically a moral community accomplishes this project. According to Kant, even human agents disposed to the good are prone to corrupt one another whenever they experience each other's presence: "It suffices that they are there, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and they will mutually corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another evil" (RGV 6:94). The problem Kant is dealing with is that human beings, even those with the best of intentions, instead of facilitating the moral quest germane to humanity, are prone to seduce or even corrupt other human beings, and make the struggle for morality more difficult. Accordingly, Kant believes that in order to cancel out the corrupting potentiality of human beings it is necessary to erect a "society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue" (*Ibid.*). Three issues with regard to this assertion need to be investigated more closely: why is a society necessary, what kind of society will *not* be acceptable and, finally, what kind of society will?

Kant states that to prevent the mutual corruption of human agents it is necessary to unite them. This seems paradoxical since if human agents corrupt one another when they are in each other's company, why then would one want to put them in each other's company at all? Would it not make more

sense to disperse humankind and therefore safeguard the particular human being from societal corruption? For instance, why is the monastic ideal of individual piety, or a secularized version of it, not an option for Kant? Similar solutions have been suggested by Nietzsche who implores his followers to flee from "the flies of the market place [. . .] Flee, my friend, into your solitude" and by Rousseau who argued for a return to a more natural, solitary way of life.[53] While Kant can be excused for neglecting the former option (after all, Nietzsche would not be born for another half century), his adulation of Rousseau would lead one to expect that he would have taken that suggestion seriously. In defense of Kant, he did suggest that the human race is no better off in its primitive than in its cultured form (RGV 6:32–34). Still, he does presuppose some kind of rudimentary society in the primitive state and, therefore, does not seem to give full consideration to the possible efficacy of withdrawal from societal living as a solution to the problem of societal corruption. Very likely, Kant was here taking into consideration the seemingly irreversible sociocultural fact that human beings do live in a community of some sort. He is primarily interested then in turning this community to positive moral use rather than in departing on the dangerous quest to abolish the notion of community as a whole. A different reason that a community is necessary relates to Kant's argument in *Metaphysics of Morals* (MS 6:264) that drawing up a civil constitution is necessary because only this can guarantee a full empirical and rational title to the acquisition of a piece of property. He believes it to be a rational duty to enter into a civil society insofar as this moderates the acquisition and possession of property. A final reason why a community is necessary regards Kant's argument in *Idea* that the development of the predispositions of human nature can only take place "in the species [. . .] but not in the individual" (IaG 8:18), which restricts morally any tendency human beings might have to self-isolate.

Second, any society or community in its political character will at first appear ineffective in promoting the end Kant envisions because such a society, by its very definition, promotes not virtue but legality. When Kant then notes in *Towards Perpetual Peace* that a state constitution can also provide a sense of moral education, he is thinking of civic virtue (respect for the legal law) rather than moral virtue (respect for the moral law): "The good moral education (*Bildung*) is to be expected from a good state constitution" (ZeF 8:366). When a people leave the state of nature, the need for public legislation arises. Public legislation, however, can never achieve moral ends for two specific reasons. First, a community with a public legislation establishes material laws to regulate conduct. The laws of morality, however, are self-legislated internal laws of autonomy obeyed out of respect for the moral law, and not because of external coercion. Morality cannot and may not depend on any external instances either for legislation or execution. Second,

the highest authority of such a community can judge only external actions, not the internal disposition of the human agent, and so is unfit to determine whether a human agent is or is not moral. A political community is therefore unfit to serve as an ethical community in combating the corrupting influence of human agents because it can only establish legal laws, not laws of virtue.

Third, although not formulated in this way, this problem can be viewed as an antinomy remarkably similar to the antinomy of practical reason. On the one hand, reason requires the establishment of a community that empowers virtuous agency and, on the other hand, experience teaches that human agents are unfit to establish any such community because of their finite limitations. The resolution of the antinomy lies in the establishment of an ethical community, the erection of which is a "duty sui generis [*eine Pflicht von ihrer eignen Art*] [. . .] of the human race towards itself" (RGV 6:97). Since this is a community, its legislation should be public and it should have an external legislator; however, since this is an ethical community, the legislation may not proceed from the sum total of the people—this would be legality (generality), not morality (universality). Accordingly, someone other is required, different from the people, to be the lawgiver of this community. This lawgiver must be able to legislate moral laws as if they were his commands and must be able to scan the hearts of human beings, "but this is the concept of God as a moral ruler of the world [*moralischen Weltherrscher*]" (RGV 6:99).[54] So, an ethical community can only be appropriately formed insofar as a deity is perceived as the originator and adjudicator of such a society—humanity is too flawed to erect or regulate such a community on its own. Human beings ought then to be united in a church of a people of God, rather than in a political community that is intrinsically prone to pit human agents over and against each other, both internally and externally. This does not mean, however, that Kant is excluding a certain political, legal structure that can be conducive to the morality of a society insofar as it can promote civic virtue. What is more important, nevertheless, is that human agents are globally united in a universal, cosmopolitan church. In this moral church, God is viewed as the lawgiver and ruler of the ethical behavior of human agents.

In arguing thus, Kant is reiterating in greater detail his statement in the *second Critique* that human agents need to act as if all moral duties were divine commands. By establishing such an ethical community and by perceiving the moral law as if it were a divine command, human beings are further empowered to act morally. They are allowed to perceive their moral agency as established, sanctioned, and ordained by a transcendent, moral agent. Additionally, by emphasizing the universality of such a moral community, Kant is counteracting the schismatic and elitist tendencies of a lot of political, sectarian, and/or ideological communities that would mistreat outsiders. The appeal of the moral law is then enhanced by establishing an ethical community ruled by a

mighty moral lawgiver. Different religious practices in such a moral church ought to be introduced so as to assist moral agency. Kant definitely believes that Christianity, in principle, is particularly suitable for erecting such a moral community since it is at its core a moral religion of ethical conduct.

In order to serve as a source of moral education, a historical religion therefore has to adhere to the tenets of practical reason. This will involve numerous reforms since the unity between practical reason and historical religion is not present ab initio, but is "a task [for] the philosophical researcher of religion" (RGV 6:13). A moral, historical religion must then advance in such a way that its outward, visible appearance is aligned to its inner, invisible message. This implies that certain outward practices of religion, if properly directed toward the moral kernel of that religion, must not be avoided, but are necessary aspects of any religion. However, Kant does emphasize that a moral religion must progress in such a way that at some point the empirical character of religion could become obsolete: "Not that [empirical religion] will cease [. . .] but that it can cease" (RGV 6:135n). In fact, his never to be attained ideal is to have only a purely invisible church. His views are evidenced in annotations he made in his personal Bible. After the line, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20: 29), Kant wrote the words "The Resurrection" (19:654). While the biblical story obviously revolves around Jesus's resurrection, it is noteworthy that Kant attached great importance to believing something *without* having empirical proof, or to having an invisible church without a visible one. He expressed a similar view in another annotation on verses from St. Luke's Gospel: "Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Lk. 17: 20-21). Kant notes that the Kingdom of God will not *visibly* come (19:653) and he crossed out the word "will" in "nor will people say" and replaced it with "can" (*Ibid.*). All these suggest that Kant was more appreciative of an invisible church than a visible one, and that he longed for the day when the visible church would conform entirely to the invisible one. What Kant consistently and unambiguously opposes, however, is the way in which an inauthentic faith would give priority to the clothing of its faith. For instance, someone should not baptize a child simply in the belief that the child will thereby become good or be saved. In a moral religion, baptism is perceived as a means of strengthening moral resolve, not as something that stands in for moral agency (see RGV 6:199). Kant expresses little or no respect for religious rituals as such—he discusses mainly praying, churchgoing, baptism, and communion (RGV 6:194–200)—since, in his view, they can easily impede moral resolve by being taken as a substitute for moral

agency; but, insofar as these rituals enliven and cultivate moral conviction, they do beget Kant's praise as a means for moral education.

The visible religion must be so reformed that it would approximate the invisible religion. This should be done in accordance with four basic principles. First, this church should be universal in the sense of being inclusive and must endeavor to unite all rational agents: "[The church's] essential purpose is founded on principles that necessarily lead it to universal union in a single church" (RGV 6:101). A universal church opposes the elitist tendencies in certain religions that do not aspire to gather together all of humanity. The specific purpose of an ethical community is to unite humanity in a cosmopolitan, moral community that encourages moral cooperation. Second, the church that Kant envisions should be guided by pure morality, "cleansed of the nonsense of superstition and the madness of enthusiasm [*Blödsinn des Aberglaubens und dem Wahnsinn der Schwärmerei*]" (RGV 6:101). While all historical religions (even the moral ones) are tainted by superstitions in one way or another, these should be incorporated within the framework of the pure moral religion so that even they can work to the benefit of morality. Basically, Kant is arguing here that the comprehensive socio-ethical system—including the state, religion, community—should be reorganized so that it can facilitate rather than oppose moral agency. Obviously, this does not mean that specific parts of this more comprehensive system might not have a unique role to play; however, this role is secondary to their primary function which is to assist moral agency. Third, the flock of such a moral church should be made up of free members. Considering the first principle of universality, such freedom might appear slightly counterproductive: does freedom not provide the very possibility of opposing universality? Kant seems to be proposing a proselyte religion that yet encourages the freedom of its members. However, his assertions here are to be read in accordance with his twofold understanding of freedom. Human agents are free in the negative sense (also with regard to religion), that is, they are not forced by any natural or social pressure to join any religion. Nevertheless, they are at the same time autonomous in the sense of recognizing the universal duty to conform to the moral law. Accordingly, the rational agent has a rational duty to freely join a universal, pure religion because this will help them actualize the moral law (if they require such assistance). In other words, while no one can be compelled within the universal ethical community (negative), nevertheless, everyone has a moral duty to enter such a church in order to further the highest good (positive). Fourth, the visible moral church ought to have an unchangeable constitution, that is, a pure moral faith. Obviously some historical and contingent issues must be arranged with ad hoc prescriptions and legislation, but the leaders of the religion are to see these as contingent and historical aspects of religion.

The basic constitution should be essentially set in stone, as a record of the progressive and universal aspiration of reaching a pure moral religion.

For any historical religion to progress toward a purely moral religion, Kant suggests a number of steps. First, a specific method for scriptural hermeneutics, that is a moral interpretation of Scripture, is necessary. While Kant does not explicitly negate or dismiss the merits of a theological interpretation of Scripture, he does insist that practical reason ought to be the ultimate guide for a pure, moral religion, and therefore also for the interpretation of Scripture. Since moral faith derives from empirical faith, we "require an interpretation of the revelation we happen to have" (RGV 6:110). This interpretation can adopt three possible forms of scriptural exegesis: literal, moral, and feeling (RGV 6:109–114). A literal interpretation, also called an empirical interpretation, takes the text at face value to suggest an actual state of affairs that took place at an actual historical time. "If the text can at all bear it, [a moral interpretation] must be preferred to a literal interpretation" (*Ibid.).* A moral interpretation interprets the given Scripture in such a way that its message is consistent with the tenets of practical reason; a literal interpretation could "even work counter to [morality's] incentives" (*Ibid.*). Kant illustrates the danger of a literal interpretation by engaging a contemporary of his, J. Michaelis (1717–1791). Michaelis argues that one should not "have a holier morality than the Bible" (RGV 6:110n); if the Bible sanctions some form of seeming immorality, this immorality is justified on the basis of the divine inspiration of the Bible. Kant, however, holds that the Bible should be interpreted in accordance with morality, not the other way around: "I pause here at this statement and ask whether morality must be interpreted in accordance with the Bible, or the Bible, on the contrary, in accordance with morality" (*Ibid.*). Holy books should be interpreted in accordance with the moral law and if this proves impossible, they should be purified. Holy books can strengthen the human being's resolve in acting morally and even today, they are powerful motivators for human agency. Another possible form of exegesis, which Kant does not endorse, is based on inner feeling (*inneres Gefühl*). Probably thinking of Rousseau, Kant believes that feeling is an exceedingly subjective basis for interpretation and lacks the universality that a moral interpretation can have, whereas Holy Scripture has pure moral faith as its supreme interpreter. As a side note, Kant remarks that he does not object to academic scriptural exegesis as this seems "[required] to preserve the authority of a church" (RGV 6:112). By presenting Scripture as a comprehensive whole, the believer will be more likely to obey it. Kant will later differentiate between a doctrinal and an authentic interpretation of Scripture, terms already used in his *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*. The doctrinal interpretation may obviously depend on an empirical or literal reading of the text (but this is only an issue for scholars of theology).

A second step in reforming religion is based on the four principles characterizing a moral church: universality, purity, freedom, and unchangeableness. Moral service in a moral religion must be so construed and reformed that it is in accordance with these principles. Moral service within a properly construed religion means "[recognizing] all our duties as divine commands" (RGV 6:153); counterfeit service is merely acting upon statutory faith, that is, "ordinances held to be divine, though to our purely moral judgment they are arbitrary and contingent" (RGV 6:168). In paragraphs I–IV of the second part of *Religion* IV, Kant shows how moral service is in accordance with his four suggested principles and how counterfeit service contradicts these principles. With regard to universality, counterfeit service would make the mistake of anthropomorphism, namely "[making] a God for ourselves" (RGV 6:168). A God that we make for ourselves is, by definition, contingent (not universal) in the sense that His commands would only speak to a select group. A true church postulates a God who speaks as a moral legislator to every finite rational agent universally. With regard to purity, counterfeit service adulterates the authentic moral service in a religion with anti-moral forms of service. God is authentically served, according to Kant, only by ethical conduct and not by particular acts intended to gain his favor. With regard to freedom, counterfeit service undoes the (negative and positive) freedom of finite rational agents by making their conscience dependent upon certain venerated individuals (priests, bishops, popes, etc.). Kant had earlier compared the form of government in a moral religion to a "household," not a "democracy," "monarchy," or "aristocracy" (RGV 6:.102). Finally, with regard to unchangeableness, moral religion allows the human moral conscience to be the guiding thread (*Leitfade*) in all moral decision-making. Accordingly, Kant suggests universality/purity as an antidote to impurity, and moral conscience as an antidote to bondage to priesthood.

A properly constituted and reformed historical religion serves then as a second form of moral education that strengthens moral courage by uniting human agents in their moral struggle. Kant's quest is to reform religion, not to destroy it (as some earlier commentators alleged). He conceives such "reform" even as a "restoration," or a return to the true spirit, of Christianity:

> [Christianity's] best and most lasting eulogy is its harmony [. . .] with the purest moral belief of religion, since it is by this, and not by historical scholarship, that Christianity, so often debased, has always been restored; and only by this can it again be restored when, in the future, it continues to meet a similar fate. (RGV 6:9)

Most reformations in Christianity have got their momentum from a desire to return *ad fontes*, to the moral, inclusive, and generous teachings of Jesus

Christ, rather than dwelling on the immoral exclusivity of some particular Christian creeds. Kant suggests that he is doing such a thing, namely returning to the bare essence of Christianity. He claims that in the Gospel story of Christ, we "have a complete religion, which can be proposed to all human beings comprehensibly and convincingly through their own reason" (RGV 6:162). In the following chapter, I will investigate what the ramifications are of Kant's supposed return to the source of Christianity. As I will argue, Christianity is more than the moral teachings of one Galilean, namely the historical doings of a living, historical body. There can thus be a reformation so invasive that it amounts to the very destruction of Christianity.

NOTES

1. Kant's work on religion was not initially intended to become a book, rather four different journal pieces; this is why Kant calls each chapter a piece (*Stück*). After he decided to publish these four pieces as a whole, Kant chose the title *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Blossen Vernunft*. The earliest English translation rendered this title fairly literally as "Religion within the Boundaries of Naked Reason" (John Richardson, 1799). The translation of the terms "*Grenzen"* and "*Blossen"* has aroused particular controversy ever since. Since the term "boundary" was reserved for Kant's use of the German "*Schrank*," Greene and Hudson translated the title as "Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone" (1934). This did lose the extra meaning of the German "*Blos"* as undressed or naked. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni decided upon "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason" (1998). More recently, Werner Pluhar rendered the title, perhaps most accurately, as "Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason" (2009).

2. Susan Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 25.

3. Kuehn, 2001, 362–366.

4. Shell, 2009, 186–188.

5. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 58. James DiCenso argues, to the contrary, that rather than "[fostering] the return of something rightly purged by secular political thought, i.e., political theology, Kant is working with a social and political fact. In Kant's cultural context, the Christian tradition continued to exert widespread influence in education, ethical mores, and in subtending political legitimacy" (DiCenso, 2011, 220). Kant's critical philosophy served then specifically to legitimize a critique of Kant's contemporary social, political, and theological institutions. *Groundwork* and the three *Critiques* served to warrant a standard of knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics that is, on the one hand, universal in order to obviate the claims of cultural relativism and empiricist perspectivism and, on the other hand, critical in order to obviate the claims of despotic dogmatism (whether political or metaphysical).

6. Bruch, 1968, 21–23.

7. Stephen Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion. Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Cf. Silber, 2012, 114–115.

8. An exegetical clue to this is in Kant's "third question" of metaphysics: "What may I hope?" He ties this question to religion in a number of places (B 833 / A 805). In the well-known letter to Carl Stäudlin (1793), Kant explicitly links the question "What may I hope?" to religion (11:429–430). There, he adds there a fourth question, namely "What is man?" which he intends to answer in his *Anthropology.* Limitations of space prohibit an in-depth investigation of Kant's *Anthropology*. For excellent discussion: Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

9. Andrew Ward, *Kant. The Three Critiques* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 168.

10. Kant's definition of happiness in the *second Critique* differs only slightly from that in *Groundwork*, which is "complete well-being and satisfaction with one's condition" (GMS 4:393). What is worth noting, however, is that *Groundwork* does not discuss the possibility of intellectual self-satisfaction or moral pleasure, inclining one to assume that the happiness discussed in *Groundwork* is wholly sensuous. Already in *Groundwork*, Kant repeatedly states that virtue makes one worthy of happiness (e.g., GMS 4:393). In the *second Critique*, Kant argues that a certain form of "pleasure," namely, self-satisfaction, accompanies a virtuous disposition, and the happiness that is awarded for a virtuous disposition must therefore be, for the most part, sensuous.

11. See, for example, Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 18 ff.

12. See, for example, Peter Byrne, *Kant on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 93–94.

13. Lawrence Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42 ff.

14. For in-depth discussion of this issue: James Joiner, "The Kantian *Summum Bonum* and the Requirements of Reason." In: *Kant and the Question of Theology.* Edited by Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs and James Joiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 57–78.

15. Cf. Marie Scutt, "Kant's Moral Theology." In: *British Journal for the Philosophy of History* 18 (2010): 611–633.

16. Wood, 1970, 118; Allison, 1990, 172–173; Madore, 2011, 29–30.

17. Neiman, 2002, 66–67.

18. Kant uses the term "opinion" here rather than "belief." Is this deliberate or just careless use of terminology? If deliberate, it would imply that belief in God lacks subjective certainty. A charitable reading, however, would suggest that the term "opinion" is used here in a nontechnical sense, and would be equal to "belief" in the technical sense. Kant's inconsistency in his use of terminology is, especially in these issues, especially vexing (cf. Leslie Stevenson, *Inspirations from Kant. Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78–94).

19. W. H. Walsh, "Kant and Metaphysics." In: *Kant-Studien* 67 (1967): 372–384; Philip Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 266 ff.

20. Beck, 1960, 275.

21. *Ibid.*, 245.

22. Martin Moors, "Religious Fictionalism in Kant's Ethics of Autonomy." In: *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy.* Edited by Stephen Palmquist (New York: Verlag de Gruyter, 2010), 476.

23. These alternative implications will be engaged below. One, which I will not engage in depth, is put forward by John Hare, who prefers a more robust interpretation of the necessity of religion for morality. Although it is possible for atheists to be moral, Kant presents four moral arguments against atheism: (1) atheism makes moral life harder as it removes the ground for belief in the real possibility of being good; (2) atheists are deprived of incentives to morality; (3) atheism easily leads to moral despair about the possibility of the highest good; and (4) atheism corrupts the human agent's moral character (John Hare, "Kant and the Rational Instability of Atheism." In: *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Chris Firestone and Stephen Palmquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 62–78).

24. There has been a long debate on where exactly the two experiments occur. Traditionally, philosophers thought that Kant's practical philosophy was the first experiment and *Religion* was the second experiment: Bernard Reardon, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988); John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and Divine Assistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). After some time, it was reckoned that the two experiments appear throughout *Religion*: Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion,* 128–135; Gordon Michalson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*: *The Role of History in Kant's Religious Thought* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 56–57; Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 114–119.

25. Lawrence Pasternack, "The 'Two Experiments' of Kant's *Religion*: Dismantling the Conundrum." *Kantian Review* 22 (2017): 107–131.

26. Kant's reason for testing Christianity could be either (or a combination) of the following three reasons. First, Christianity is the religion that is closest at hand and with which Kant is most familiar. Second, discussing Christianity as a historical religion would have the best chance to resonate well with Kant's readers, most importantly the theological censor. Last, Kant argues throughout *Religion* that Christianity is the most genuine or authentic religion as morality clearly constitutes its core.

27. Bruch, 1968, 21–22.

28. Bohatec, 1966, 34–35.

29. Keith Ward, *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1972), 150–170.

30. Giovanni Sala, *Die Christologie in Kants "Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft"* (Weilheim-Bierbronnen: Gustav-Siewerth-Akademie, 2000) 9; my translation.

31. Stephen Crites, "Three Types of Speculative Religion." In: *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century (1790–1870)*. Edited by Allen Wood and Songsuk Hahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 550.

32. Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 196.

33. Kant's definition of grace is telling in this respect: "To supplement the deficiency of all his moral capacity [*den Mangel alles seines moralischen Vermögens*]" (RGV 6:174). He employs a very similar definition in *Conflict of the Faculties*: "If the human being's own deeds are not sufficient to justify him before his conscience (as it judges him strictly), reason is entitled to adopt on faith a supernatural supplement to fill what is lacking to his justification (though not specifically in what this consists" (SF 7:43–44). For an in-depth discussion of Kant on grace: Byrne, 2007, 139–153; Madore, 2011, 128–140; Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance." In: *The Journal of Religion* 90 (2010): 530–553; Dennis Vanden Auweele, "For the Love of God: Kant on Grace." In: *International Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2014): 175–190. I will return to this topic at length below.

34. Patrick Frierson, "Kantian Moral Pessimism." In: *Kant's Anatomy of Evil*. Edited by Susan Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33–57.

35. Gordon Michalson, "Kant, the Bible, and the Recovery from Radical Evil." In: *Kant's Anatomy of Evil.* Edited by Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 57–74.

36. James DiCenso suggests a similar point of view with regard to Kant's preoccupations in *Religion*. He focusses more explicitly on the social and political functions of religion, however: DiCenso, 2012, 90–130.

37. R. S. Peters formulated this paradox independently of any comprehensive moral system: Richard Stanley Peters, *Moral Development and Moral Education* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981) 45–60). For a full discussion of the paradox of moral education and its resolution in Kant's moral philosophy, see: Kate Moran, "Can Kant Have an Account of Moral Education?" In: *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43 (2009): 471–484; Chris Surprenant, "Kant's Contribution to Moral Education: The Relevance of Catechistics." In: *Journal of Moral Education* 39 (2010): 165–174; *Id*., "Kant's Contribution to Moral Education." In: *Kant and Education. Interpretations and Commentary.* Edited by Klas Roth and Chris Surprenant (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–11; Johannes Giesinger, "Kant's Account of Moral Education." In: *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44 (2012): 775–786; Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Kant on Religious Moral Education." In: *Kantian Review* 20 (2015): 373–394.

38. For a seminal argument for this position: Traugott Weisskopf, *Immanuel Kant und die Pädagogik* (Zürich: EVZ, 1970).

39. Louden, 2000, 3–32.

40. Robert Louden, *Kant's Human Being. Essays on his Theory of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148.

41. Louden, 2000, 167–182.

42. *Ibid.*, 182.

43. What is going on exactly in this paragraph is a matter of some debate. Some, like Stephen Palmquist, argue that here is a full-fledged sense of Christology in process, while others, such as Firestone and Jacobs, take Kant's discussion more in terms of looking for a Platonic ideal of moral perfection (Stephen Palmquist, "Could Kant's Jesus be God?" In: *International Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2012): 421–437;

Firestone and Jacobs, 2008, chapter six). Like my own discussion in the main text (even though I do not use these terms), Christopher Insole reads Kant as mediating between Plato and Christianity, a Christianized Platonism as he calls it (Christopher Insole, *The Intolerable God. Kant's Theological Journey* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016).

44. The Cambridge edition translates Kant's "*Urbild"* as "prototype"; I prefer to translate it as "archetype," while "prototype" or "example" would probably be a better translation of "*Vorbild*." This translation has philosophical implications. While a prototype would have to be an actual empirically given example that we have to mimic, an archetype, in itself, does not suggest any empirical givenness. The archetype (much as Kant's "Son of God") is a pure idea of reason, not an example that we find in everyday life. The "*Vorbild"* is, however, an actual empirical manifestation of the archetype of perfection. For discussion of Kant's usage of *Urbild*: James DiCenso, "The Concept of Urbild in Kant's Philosophy of Religion." In: *Kant-Studien* 104 (2013): 100–132.

45. Palmquist, 2000, 289; cf. Jacqueline Mariña, "Kant on Grace: A Reply to His Critics." In: *Religious Studies* 33 (1997): 379–400.

46. Firestone and Jacobs, 2008, 167.

47. Hypothetically, Kant suggests that "if a human being of such a truly divine disposition had descended," which is a human being who is "well-pleasing to God" and an example that causes "incalculably great moral good," there is no reason to assume that this being has a divine origin (RGV 6:63). There is no reason to identify the example of humanity with a transcendent being; in fact, there are good reasons not to do so: this would make the example less palpable to human beings. Whether this means that Kant's is entirely opposed to identifying Jesus with God can be disputed: see Palmquist 2012.

48. For an overview of the problem and a full account of Kant's resolution: Paul Guyer, "Examples of Moral Possibility." In: *Kant and Education. Interpretations and Commentary.* Edited by Klas Roth and Chris Surprenant (London: Routledge, 2012), 124–138.

49. Palmquist, 2010, 540–553.

50. Kate Moran, *Community and Progress in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 25–97; 98–167.

51. Sweet, 2013, 207.

52. *Ibid.*, 208.

53. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36.

54. For further discussion of this argument for the assumption of the existence of God: Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God—The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance." *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009): 3–22.

Chapter 6

Kantian Christianity, Sincerity, and Pessimism

In the previous chapter, the grounds of rational religion and the tools by which historical religion can be reformed so as to become attuned to its rational essence were under discussion. The reason for the reform of historical faith concerns moral motivation, namely that human beings are naturally so ill disposed toward the moral law that they require the moral education of a properly circumspect historical faith. In the present chapter, we will discuss what the ramifications of Kant's proposed reforms are for Christianity in order to find out whether Christianity can still serve its educational goals when reformed in this way. There will be numerous problems in this respect, but ultimately the major issue will be related to sincerity. While Christian doctrines might have the motivational potential that Kant seeks to mine for a Kantian-styled Christianity, its specific setup makes it remarkably difficult for honest and sincere faith in Christianity's doctrines.

Readers have often felt uncomfortable with Kant's philosophy of religion for a myriad of reasons. Difficulties that were signaled initially range from claiming that Kant's philosophy at best leads to an empty form of deism, that Kant woefully misinterprets Christianity, that a rational religion is a contradiction in terms, or even that Kant deals with philosophy on the basis of a principle of immanence that leads more or less directly to atheism.[1] The traditional, dominantly negative evaluation of Kant's philosophy of religion became challenged recently by a number of scholars that set out to look beyond the debunking strategy of the *first Critique* in order to appreciate the richness of Kant's text on religion on its own grounds.[2] They argue that scholars generally do not allow Kant's claims in *Religion* to stand on their own, but appreciate the text only through the strictures of the *first Critique*. In response, these authors argue that Kant's philosophy of religion could be rehabilitated as more amenable to traditional religion and a fortiori authentic

Christianity if it is emphasized that Kant wanted to reform religion, not destroy it. That much is true, indeed, but one could pursue a reform of religion so radical, that one will be unable to recognize religion after the reform. The Kantian reforms of historical religion do not reduce religion to morality but do aim to enlist religion entirely within the pursuit of moral excellence. Religion aims to further moral ends, and is itself not an end *simpliciter*.

What bears repetition before engaging this topic is that Kant's project throughout *Religion* is multilayered, that is, that there are three perspectives on religious ideas: there is a transcendental perspective (pure or rational religion), an empirical perspective focused on Christianity (the historical clothing of religion) and a third perspective, ambiguously located between the a priori and the empirical namely the four *parerga*[3] (which are Christian in nature, but "touch upon" purely rational religion). The bulk of *Religion* consists of the first perspective with the discussion of Christianity usually following upon this and the *parerga* are usually found in a "Remark" at the end of each part. Throughout the first perspective, Kant is exploring the rational core of religion as such and elaborating upon how this works beneficially for moral agency in cultivating the human agent's interest in morality. In other words, this first perspective in no way interprets or evaluates Christianity but argues how a rational religion provides moral education. Only the second perspective is an overt test of Christianity as such a rational religion, where Kant repeatedly suggests that the kernel or spirit of Christianity is rational and moral, while historical Christianity has gone astray. Such a dual point of view with regard to Christianity explains, on the one hand, Kant's at time harsh reproaches at the address of Christianity and, on the other hand, his insistence that Christianity is a rational religion. Let us now consider some of the more relevant criticism that Kant directs toward historical Christianity.

KANT ON RELIGION AND THE TASK OF THEOLOGY

The ground of historical faith is the rational need to clothe certain aspects of pure rational religion in a language that appeals to human beings. The exact nature and ground of religion can be the subject of a lifetime of study, but one thing that everyone will readily admit is that it has been a typically human phenomenon to live in a community (with a shared language and history) that shares a system of values which are attached to religious beliefs and are given expression in all sorts of rites and rituals. Whether or not this phenomenon can be rationally justified is something that requires careful consideration. According to Kant, historical faiths not only have their rational justification in morality, but they also emerge from the deeply felt rational need to mediate between the universal moral law and our particular historical condition.

It is defensible to argue that historical religion generally achieve five functions for human beings: (1) to inform human beings about certain physical or theoretical ideas (the origin of the universe, the origin of the human being, etc.); (2) to inform human beings about the nature and content of their (moral) obligations; (3) to provide incentives to adhere to these (moral) obligations (e.g., divine punishment and reward); (4) to cultivate a sense of community among human beings in which the worth of the individual is not merely dependent upon his or her own merit; (5) to provide ideas and practices which might close the gap between the transcendent other and the human agent via certain practices (praying, mysticism). Which one of these functions is given preference tends to depend upon one's own background. For instance, religious studies has for a long time taken for granted the definition of religion provided by Clifford Geert, who defined religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[4] Given that religious studies was a predominantly Christian (even Protestant) field of study, this definition remained unchallenged. In the 1990s, a number of scholars—with Talal Asad as vanguard—pointed out that this definition is overly cognitive and risks diminishing or even dismissing the ritualistic aspects of religion.[5] Especially since then, there is a whole business dedicated to pointing out how so-called universal definitions of religions tend to favor a particular perspective, often a white, male, Protestant, Eurocentric perspective.[6]

One thing to take from this discussion is that one should not needlessly reduce religion to one part of its functional identity as this would likely be detrimental to its comprehensive function. In fact, it was one of the worries of post-Kantian and post-Hegelian theology that religion was reduced to simply an expression of rationality, which does not leave it an identity of its own (Schelling's later philosophy is a good example). Kant's philosophy of religion does not overtly reject any of the above listed functions of religion, but it argues that any function of religion is subordinate to its potency to enhance the moral incentive. This means that he subordinates all possible functions of religion to its moral function, most clearly expressed in his view that there is only one religion, but many faiths: "There is only *one* (true) *religion*" (RGV 6:10). This one religion is properly systematically constituted and whatever faiths that do not share in this universal religion cannot properly be called religion. For this reason, Kant refuses to label Judaism and Islam a religion proper, simply because they are not concerned (in his view at least) with cultivating a moral incentive. Concerning Judaism, Kant writes that "taken in its purity, [it] entails absolutely no religious faith" (RGV 6:126) and therefore it can "strictly speaking [not be] a religion at all but simply a union of a number

of individuals" (RGV 6:125). The immediate consequence of Kant's definition of religion is that certain things generally thought of as religious faith ought to be excluded from the denomination religion. Kant's claims are to be taken in their rigor: a religion is not just functionally ordered in such a way that the moral function takes precedence over all other functions, it is more importantly systematically constituted in such a way that the moral function is the kernel of religion.

Can Kant's definition of religion as the practice of cultivating moral resolve be maintained? From an empirical perspective, it will be noticed that only a select number of religious believers of a select number religions could be called Kantian religious believers. Most religious people get religion very wrong. One could therefore argue that Kant's definition of religion is evidentially false. But Kant would object to using empirical data to (dis)prove his definition of religion since human agents have, because of their embodiment and propensity to evil, a deliberate tendency not to do what has to be (morally) done. In other words, human beings are almost fated to misunderstand religion, and the fact that this happens does not touch the validity of Kant's definition: religion is about cultivating moral resolve, even if no one uses it (uniquely) to cultivate moral resolve; this is similar to how morality, for Kant, is about respect for the moral law even if no one ever acts in accordance with the moral law. Kant accounts for the human proclivity to venture astray in matters of religion in the closing paragraphs of *Religion*. Here, he laments that human beings easily deceive themselves because a moral religion is a difficult venture: "It is arduous to be a good servant (here one always hears only talk of duties); hence the human being would rather be a favorite" (RGV 6:200). Human agents stray and take their specific faith in a direction of rogation (*Gunstbewerbung*) rather than morality. Accordingly, the empirical observation that the vast majority of historical religions (and their believers) do not live up to the systematic subordination of morality to its other practices does not seem to be an objection to Kant's theory of rational religion. One could argue, however, that such a deliberate eschewal of input from empirical reality is a symptom that Kant's transcendental account of religion is a response to a basic suspicion about the impotency of natural processes to form an authentic religion. If Kant is truly pessimistic about human nature, then it stands to reason that our natural composure to religion is immediately suspect. Kant's cautioning against most of empirical religion is then similar to his emphasis in his moral philosophy that moral duty cannot be verified or falsified by empirical data, since empirical data itself is suspect.

But is Kant's transcendental argument that disregards any and all empirical data a fair argument? Hegel's philosophy of religion—mostly conceived in his lectures throughout the 1820s—argues convincingly that the truth of religion is in the whole of religion: its concept, manifestation, and history.[7]

For Hegel, then, an understanding of religion that ignores input from the empirical manifestation and historical development of religion is a step down from a holistic understanding of religion. For any philosopher to so callously brush aside most historical versions of religion, such as natural religion, paganism, Judaism, Hinduism, most of Islam, a lot of branches of Christianity, and most of Buddhism is a destruction that probably even Nietzsche—the suspicious philosopher with the hammer—would find lacking in finesse. For Kant, certain things are religion proper and others are not. While there likely is no serious problem with identifying the core of religion with morality from a Kantian vantage point, there could be good reason to nevertheless object to this from an empirical point of view. How much of religion is one willing to chop off on the Kantian bed of Procrustes in order to validate this theory?

A similar difficulty arises when one investigates the relationship between philosophy and theology in Kant's philosophy. According to Kant, speculative and practical reason are the censor of all knowledge, which means that any and all knowledge of God and religious topics is modeled in accordance with and mediated by practical reason. Theology is therefore censored by practical reason—in Kant's day, the reverse was the case. Should one take one's cues from the *first Critique*, most readers would almost naturally assume that Kant leaves room, in the words of Nicholas Wolterstorff, "exclusively [for] negative theology."[8] The transcendental dialectic of Kant's *first Critique* judged the idea of God to lie beyond possible experience, which results in that one cannot say anything determinatively on its subject. Wolterstorff's view would likely even result in dismissing the dialectic of the *second Critique* since Kant already here discusses the nature and agency of God, which is something that progressively expands in *Religion*. As a result of closer attention to Kant's later texts, numerous scholars would argue that Kant does leave room for a more positive theology, since he himself evidently engages in such a thing. For instance, Jeffrey Privette argues that Kant allows for noumenal reality to shimmer through phenomenal reality, which provides the basis to determine positively noumenal reality through phenomenal reality. In his view, our experience of the noumenon can be mediated through the phenomenon, with as example par excellence "the Incarnation [as] God conditioned by time and space."[9] This means that the historical example of moral perfection is the incarnation of the transcendental moral law, which mediates some knowledge of God and can therefore serve as the foundation stone for a Kantian positive theology.

The positions of Wolterstroff and Privette appear to be at opposite sides of the spectrum, one allowing for negative theology at best and the other for a full-fledged positive theology. As there is often little truth in extremes, Kant's position ought to be located somewhere in between these two

extremes. One example of such an approach is offered by Nathan Jacobs, who argues that Kant leaves room for theology, albeit reformed through the tenets of transcendental idealism in the second part of *Religion.*[10] As discussed above, Kant argues that one's knowledge of the moral ideal or archetype of perfection can be mediated (though not established) through its incarnation in a historical person (*Vorbild*). To put things in less Kantian terminology, Jesus Christ reveals something about God that was not entirely clear before this revelation. According to Jacobs, Kant achieves two goals by doing this: on the one hand, Kant defends the moral ideal from subreption with empirical data (as the archetype resides in a priori reason); on the other hand, Kant allows for "the [archetypal] ideal [to retain] validity regardless of empirical verification."[11] Knowledge of the archetype is not formed by means of an historical example, but rather the historical example is recognized as such because it corresponds to the archetype. Jacobs continues to suggest that this concession "gives us a clear avenue within Kant's philosophy for meaningful theological discourse" since "this [archetypal] theology tells us something positive about the divine [archetype] that is more than mere talk."[12] In other words, Jacobs argues that the archetype can be incarnated in an example which allows for a theology to be erected upon an archetypal Christology, which would give more than negative theology (Wolterstorff), but less than a full-fledged empirical experience of the noumenal (Privette).[13]

Arguments such as the one offered by Jacobs (and others) tend to have a similar flaw, namely that they fail to provide a positive definition of meaningful theology. For instance, Jacobs implicitly accepts that any theology different from negative theology is a meaningful theology. This does not seem to be what most would recognize as meaningful theology, since for Kant any theology would only be able to enter the scene after practical philosophy has prepared the way, which means that whatever theological propositions one makes are necessary formatted to practical reason. Theology or religion cannot transcend or conflict with reason, but then, ultimately, revelation is of no interest to human beings. In his later lectures on positive philosophy, Schelling would become adamant—most likely having Kant in mind—that "revelation must contain something that transcends reason."[14] Otherwise, reason would become a system that is self-enclosed and unable to develop in any way: "[Negative philosophy] is an entirely self-enclosed science that has arrived at an unchanging conclusion, and is, thus, in *this* sense a *system*; in contrast, the positive philosophy cannot in the same sense be called a system precisely because it is never absolutely closed."[15] Kant's philosophy does not allow such a thing: it should be abundantly clear to anyone who has worked through Kant's moral and religious philosophy that he does not submit to purely negative theology (even though this seems like the natural outcome in

after the *first Critique*) since he holds consistently from the *second Critique* on that God is one, all-powerful, all-seeing, and has a "causality in keeping with the moral law" (KpV 5:130–132 and 5:137–141). But this knowledge of God is not mediated through revelation or metaphysics, it is based entirely on (practical) reason.

To, then, construct a theology on the practical usefulness of moral faith seems much ado about nothing. In fact, what really remains for theology after practical reason has laid down its laws? Kant implicitly addresses this issue and more or less brushes aside any really meaningful theology in a footnote to *Religion* II (RGV 6:80n). Here, Kant undertakes a lengthy discussion on the subject of the moral benefit of conceiving of a person free from innate evil, symbolically portrayed as a virgin birth. He discusses a possible pseudo-scientific manner in which one could biologically and theologically make sense of such a virgin birth, and how it would deliver a person from a propensity to evil. He admits, however, that theology has long quibbled over how to make sense of all of this and ends the footnote by the following very illuminating statement with regard to the merit of theological debates: "But what is the use of all this theorizing pro or contra, when it suffices for practical purposes to hold the idea itself before us as a model, as symbol of humankind raising itself above temptation to evil (and withstanding it victoriously)" (RGV 6:80n). Kant clearly acknowledges the merit of perceiving a human being untainted by evil, but he is hastily dismissive of theology to try and make sense of such a thing: what possible "use of all this theorizing" if all we need is "a model" for "practical purposes"? The only possible merit that could be assigned to these theological discussions is that they can provide a more well-rounded and holistic view of religion to make it more persuasive for the average believer.

Kant recognizes that religion is capable of moving the hearts and minds of human beings in ways of which sheer rationality was simply incapable. And, since morality is affectively motivated, a human agent does not act solely upon intellectual insights but requires a motivation or interest which makes religion a prime candidate to offer the affective motivation, or the embodiment, for human agents to actually, visibly, and empirically incorporate the moral law within their maxims. Kant's turn toward religion is actually a necessary aspect of his moral psychology (but not much more) seeing that it offers a much-needed mediation between theory and practice—a venture Kant probably already tried to undertake in the *third Critique* (KU 5:176–179 and 5:351–354). Kant's charity toward Christianity would come at a price: while religion is necessary for practical religion, any specific faith is not. It just happens to be that Christianity is the most rational religion known to us and that, if Kant could have perceived of a more efficient means to provide the embodiment of his moral theory, religion itself might become obsolete.

In *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant calls the Bible the "most adequate means [*taugliche Leitmittel*] of public instruction" which is "that is truly conducive to the soul's improvement" (SF 7:9)—an adequate means of instruction.

KANT'S CHRISTOLOGY

In *Religion* II, Kant comes up with something that most would intuitively recognize as a Christology: a philosophical description of the nature and function of the Son of God. But Kant does not start from Christ in his Christology, rather he first details the enabling grounds for something to be an example of moral perfection, namely the rational archetype of a Son of God, which human beings are supposed to follow "in loyal emulation" (RGV 6:62). Christ would then not reveal something in excess of the archetype, but is recognized as the Son of God by virtue of His accord with this a priori idea of reason. But Kant's Christology does not only not begin from Jesus Christ, Kant makes great effort in avoiding the name of Christ—even when discussing Christianity's Christology in his test of Christianity as a rational religion. His phrasing even becomes very clumsy in attempting to circumvent the name "Jesus Christ," using formula such as "human being, alone pleasing to God," "God's only-begotten Son," "the *Word*" (RGV 6:60, Kant's emphasis), "Son of God" (RGV 6:61), "the Master" (RGV 6:81), "the *wise teacher*" (RGV 6:84, Kant's emphasis), "the teacher of the Gospel" (RGV: 6:128 and 6:133), and in one paragraph "Christ" (RGV 6:141; here Kant uses Christ because he quotes literally from the Bible).

What is the relevance of Kant's elaborate attempts to circumvent the name "Jesus Christ"? One could think of a number of reasons for this: (1) a show of respect for Jesus Christ, similar to how Orthodox Jews use the tetragrammaton "YHVH" instead of Jawheh (although such a thing is not common practice in Christianity, to the contrary!); (2) an ecumenical charity toward non-Christian religions who similarly express the idea of a "Son of God" (even though Kant is generally low in appreciation for most other religions than Christianity); (3) an insistence on a rationalized version of Christianity freed from historical superstition and fanatical faith in a singular human agent professing divine descent while performing miracles. This latter option would mean that the person of Christ, likely the only thing that all Christian denominations take as pivotal to their religion, is only of consequence insofar as he can serve the purpose of a moral example, and therefore might require rather invasive reform in order to fulfill this purpose most efficiently.

Most of the literature has come down pretty hard on Kant for his Christology. Some have argued, like John Hare and Vincent McCarthy, that Kant's Christology is merely symbolic, that is, it translates transcendental practical

philosophy in symbolic, religious language.[16] This means that, as Lawrence Pasternack has stressed cogently, Kant's Christology is in deviation of Anselmian Christological tradition, which sees Christ's vicarious atonement as our redemption for original sin. While Kant similarly argues that after humanity has incurred infinite guilt (radical evil) it is to turn toward Christ for deliverance from sin, the moral example merely sets an example to emulate and does not actively participate in this atonement.[17] Similar conclusions are drawn by Peter Byrne, who writes very emphatically that "it does not appear as if Kant can allow any substantive truth to the claim that 'Jesus saves'. Hence, his system is antithetic to Christianity."[18] The soteriological function of the archetype is then restricted to being a moral example that enlivens practical faith, and not a historical person involved in humanity's salvation or a moral teacher.

Christianity's Christology is not something that was set in stone for all of eternity at its inception, and to date there remain vibrant discussions and opposing views (some of which might blend with Kant's view). There has been a long tradition of theological reflection on the possible soteriological function of Jesus Christ. One charitable way to read Kant's Christology is then to see it as an attempt to recast and revamp traditional Christology, and not as defect merely because it conflicts with the tradition. One of the most debated issues in this tradition regards the nature of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the consensus was reached that Jesus is a singular being (part of but independent of the Trinity) with two distinct natures, namely, human on the one hand, because his martyr-death on the cross ought to be a true sacrifice if it is to serve for human redemption and divine, on the other hand, because only God is capable of justifying humanity. Christ had this dual nature at birth (and was not "adopted," as some would speculate, by God) in order to justify the worship of Mother Mary as the mother of God (*Theotokos*). In Western Christian thought, the two natures of Christ are seen as unmixed (like water and oil); in Eastern Christian thought, these are seen as mixed (like water and wine).

After Anselm's seminal account of Christology, there were no major changes to Christology until the eighteenth century. At that time, Anselm's perspective on Christology was challenged by historical science which provided perspectives on Jesus Christ that conflicted the traditional view (e.g., the New Testament Apocrypha and scientific examination of religious artifacts). Particularly, historical science methodologically examined the life of Christ on purely naturalist and historical terms (this becomes most evident in the work of David Strauss and Ernst Renan). By dislodging, even if only methodologically, Jesus Christ from any supposed divine heritage, this project leads toward a more critical point of view regarding the nature and salvific function of Jesus Christ.[19] The early Nietzsche believed that

a historicization, and therefore demythologization, is how religion end up becoming unbelievable:

> For this is usually how religions die. It happens when the mythical presuppositions of a religion become systematized as a finished sum of historical events under the severe, intellectual gaze of orthodox dogmatism, and people begin to defend anxiously the credibility of the myths while resisting every natural tendency within them to go on living and to throw out new shoots—in other words, when the feeling for myth dies and is replaced by the claim of religion to have historical foundations.[20]

Kant's innovations in Christology ought to be read in line with the emergence of this historical science which Kant feared—and Nietzsche would agree—was at risk of invalidating completely any and all belief in and reliance on Christ. In response, Kant secures the rational validity of faith in Jesus Christ in a priori reason as the example of the archetype of perfection: belief in Christ ought no longer to be warranted historically since it is now justified on universally, rational grounds. But the further consequence of this strategy is that Christology ought be entirely in line with rationality; Jesus Christ cannot be thought of as revealing anything in excess of rational thought. While Christ is a symbol of moral perfection, he is also a replaceable symbol whose function could be taken up by any other personification of the moral ideal. Kant has fairly little interest in the historical Jesus, to the extent that Keith Ward is correct to highlight "whether Jesus ever existed or not is beside the point."[21] Kant made no secret of his views, which he spells out rather openly in a letter to Jacobi where he clarifies that what is most important in the idea of a Son of God is the universal, ahistorical idea of Christ, while the Evangelical or historical account—or even the historical origin of that idea—is a side issue (*Nebensache*) of little relevance (11:76).

For Kant, Christianity requires Christ for the exemplification of the moral ideal but rational religion could be content with any other example of perfect morality. Some aspects of the traditional worship of Jesus Christ do conflict with Kant's Christology, and ought therefore to be reformed for a Kantian Christianity. Let us discuss two of these. First, in the general remark after Kant details his Christology, it is rather telling that he turns his attention to miracles. Traditionally, many Christians might have felt justified in their reliance on Christ because Christ's divine descent was exemplified by the miracles he performed which were, in turn, codified by Christian faith. In continuation of David Hume's skeptical attack on miracles, Kant believes that miracles are no basis of religious faith and a rational religion must "render faith in miracles in general dispensable" (RGV 6:84). Kant is mainly concerned here that miracles can become the ground of reliance on Christ, instead

of the moral perfection that was exemplified by him. Kant does not suggest to cleanse miracles from the Christian holy book, but he suggests that these are to become somewhat of a *fait divers*, a quaint peculiarity belonging to a dim and distant past. This means that in Christian moral doctrine, the miracles of Christ are to be relegated to narrative elements while Christ's moral uprightness should take center stage. Obviously, given the abundance of miracles, this would be a particularly laborious process. A moral example should focus our attention on his or her moral resolve throughout potential hardship, and not distract us by means of miracles, worldly wealth, or power—temptations that Jesus declined in the Gospels (Matt. 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13).

A second issue of concern for a Kantian Christology regards Kant's central belief that a moral religion ought to be universal, that is, that it could work potentially for everyone (rational) and leads toward "universal union in a single church (hence, no sectarian schisms)" (RGV 6:101). Ironically, Christianity is probably the most schismatic and intrinsically divided among the world religions and then so as to become a universal religion, Christianity must not only become one with itself, but find a way to become acceptable to agents of different faiths. Obviously, any all-too-historically based faith in and adulation of Jesus Christ as the highest moral example and Messiah would probably sit uneasy with many non-Christians. The unique importance assigned to Christ as God's *only* begotten son would work counterproductively for the purposes of a universal religion. Many peoples who have not been included in the long history of Christianity might not easily usurp the unicity of Christ.

The consequences of Kantian Christology are therefore that Christ must be seen as a nonunique moral example of perfection in which we might have faith, not because of miracles or divine descent, but because of his moral stalwartness. Some Christians might be happy to make such a concession, others might not. Kant's ideas ought not convince every single Christian believer, but convince the moral educators of humanity—he recommends *Religion* as course material for students of theology, who often become priests or preachers (RGV 6:10)—so that Christianity might evolve in this direction. Whether this evolution is too invasive for Christianity is hard to tell.

Some scholars, such as Firestone and Jacobs, believe that Kant's archetype serves as "transcendental grounds for belief in Jesus."[22] Kant's recognition of the practical necessity of a "Son of God" in a moral religion gives practical faith in Jesus a transcendental ground, making it thus objectively necessary and justified. However, the transcendental ground for practical faith in Jesus necessarily transforms the outlook one may be allowed to entertain regarding Jesus, and this might no longer be the Jesus most Christians would generally worship. In Gordon Michalson's words: "Kant's treatment of Jesus is geared, not to establishing the historical accuracy of the biblical account, but towards molding the biblical account such that it blends smoothly with the mandates

of practical reason."[23] Through Kant's Christology, we are given objective justification to have practical faith in a reformed version of Christ, not Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The historical embedding of the life and message of Jesus Christ is then to be relegated to "mere clothing": Jesus who came in a country burdened by Roman occupancy, as prophesized in the Old Testament and promising eternal peace to come is not central to a Kantian Christianity. These events are, however, for most Christians enlisted in a certain eschatological history. A Kantian Christianity would have to mitigate the unique nature and importance of these events.

KANT AND THE BIBLE

Kant's Christology is invasive. What about his views of the Bible? For traditional Christianity, the Bible is a unique document written by authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, which recounts a divine history that leads toward humanity's redemption. As one can guess, Kant deals with the Bible in a way similar to how he deals with Jesus: there is a transcendental ground that justifies faith in a holy book, but this holy book is to regard itself as one replaceable means of cultivating moral resolve. Like Christ, the Bible is no longer unique and should bear a rather invasive and elaborate hermeneutics.

According to Kant, historical faith is the "vehicle for the pure faith of religion" (RGV 6:118 and 6:115–116). While pure faith is universal and timeless, the vehicle that is historical faith is to be founded at a certain time, a certain place, and in a certain way. Kant is convinced that religion is founded most efficiently "on a Holy Scripture" (RGV 6:102). For Christianity, this Holy Scripture is the Bible, but how ought one to approach the Bible in a Kantian Christianity? As mentioned numerous times already, the prime concern of Kant in a properly reformed Christianity is its universality and purity. Only pure religious faith is, properly speaking, universal whereas historical faith can "extend its influence no further than the tidings relevant to a judgment on its credibility can reach" (RGV 6:103). Still, any human agent needs to know (at a certain time and place) how God "wills to be honored (and obeyed)" (RGV 6:104) and accordingly human beings have a tendency to mimic God's commands to human ones: we please God the way "every great lord of this world" (RGV 6:103) desires to be pleased, namely through statutory acts of praise and a(nti-)moral service. Accordingly, human agents have set certain codes and practices in a Holy Book that determine how to please God. According to Kant, these codes and practices are usually and most appropriately provided through Scripture (not tradition), since Scripture "commands the greatest respect" (RGV 6:107). Highly fortunate it would be if such a Holy Scripture (i.e., the Bible) "contains complete, besides its

statutes legislating faith, also the purest moral doctrine of religion, and this doctrine can be brought into the strictest harmony with those statutes" (*Ibid.*). Although Kant does seem to remain under the caution of the hypothetical here, he does allude to a very bold claim: not only does the Christian Bible contain the purest moral doctrine of religion, its statutory laws are also in the strictest harmony with the latter. This means that the Christian Bible is, at its core, modeled and directed toward Kant's opined relationship between morality and religious practices.

Do note that while, according to Kant, Christianity might have nothing but universal moral religious faith at its core, Christendom has evolved in such a way that it often conflicts with this original germ of pure religious faith. Therefore, Kant believes that a process of purification is necessary: ecclesiastical faith needs the "pure faith of religion for its supreme interpreter" (RGV 6:109). This means that the Bible ought always to have been interpreted in accordance with pure moral faith, but this has not always been the case. An interpretation in accordance with pure faith of religion is "practical," not "theoretical or literal" or "via feeling" (RGV 6:110–114). The Bible is therefore to be interpreted as a treatise on morality, more specifically, how its stories and parables can work so to "morally educate" (RGV 6:48). Therefore "if the text can at all bear it" (RGV 6:110), the Bible must be interpreted as cultivating the rational incentive toward moral agency. In these seemingly innocent passages, Kant makes two bold claims that could be unacceptable for some Christians, namely that every single bit of Christian Scripture is, on the one hand, open for correction and, on the other hand, to be interpreted in accordance with a moral interpretation (if the text can at all bear it). Out of these two theses, two problems arise pertaining to two distinct parts of Scripture, namely, amoral and anti-moral parts.

Many biblical texts do not obviously relate to moral issues. Some of these might be interpreted in such a way that they nevertheless cultivate a rational incentive for morality, but how should one deal with a text that presumably cannot be interpreted in such a way? Kant does not address this topic extensively, but briefly discusses the merits of a certain form of scholarship that provides a doctrinal interpretation of Scripture. Such a doctrinal interpretation has the benefit of transforming "the ecclesiastical faith for a given people at a given time into a definite and self-maintaining system" (RGV 6:114). In other words, doctrinal theology consists mainly of those amoral aspects of ecclesiastical faith and brings these into a well-rounded and persuasive whole, one to which human beings will be more prone to respond positively. As such, Kant does have a healthy dose of respect for theological exegesis, a point emphasized by Stephen Palmquist who claims that Kant is not at all hostile toward the authority of biblical texts, but Kant "offers a new, more *moderate* explanation of their validity."[24] Palmquist continues that Kant "stresses that

some text is necessary, and that *this* text (i.e., the Bible) has proven its value by repeatedly serving as a vehicle for awakening people to true religion."[25]

Doctrinal theology has, for Kant, no constitutive import when it comes to the central topics of rational religion, but it can serve to augment the wholeness of Scripture. This goal is not to be accomplished, however, at the expense of the moral aims of rational religion. In *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant stresses that any theoretical teaching that transcends rational concepts may (but does not have to be) interpreted "in the interest of practical reason" (SF 7:38). The reason for this is that even amoral propositions can arouse animosity when they are interpreted differently by different believers. His main example of this is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (SF 7:39–40). In itself, this doctrine has no immediate moral relevance: "The doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has no practical relevance at all, even if we think we understand it [. . .]. Whether we are to worship three or ten persons in the Deity makes no difference" (SF 7:39). Nevertheless, doctrinal theology is to come to a universally persuasive account of the Trinity because debates on these issues can pit believers against each other and so even amoral practices ought to be strictly guarded and not given too much importance.

Kant's way of dealing with amoral aspects of Scripture does not appear to give rise to controversy, even though he does appear often rather dismissive of their relevance. But how should one approach a biblical text that could provide incentives counter to morality? These texts are in dire need of a moral interpretation, but what when such an interpretation might be simply impossible? At one point, Kant suggests this as a possibility,

> if something is represented as commanded by God in a direct manifestation of him yet is directly in conflict with morality, it cannot be a divine miracle despite every appearance of being one (e.g. if a father were ordered to kill his son who, so far as he knows, is totally innocent. (RGV 6:87)

Kant is obviously considering the biblical story of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac to God (Gen. 22: 1-19), a narrative to which Kant returns twice: elsewhere in *Religion*, Kant notes that one is most likely erroneous in believing that a "command to slaughter [one's] own son like a sheep" has actually come from God (RGV 6:187) and in *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant notes something similar with more detail (SF 7:62–67), that is, one does not know whether God is speaking in such a command and therefore it would be more prudent to follow the moral law than a voice presumably from the Heavens. It would be safer to assume that such a voice is a devil rather than God, since God would not ask such a thing. Maybe unbeknownst to Kant, Abraham did have many prior conversations with God in the Bible, so he would be aware to some extent of God. For Kant, however, the blind faith propagated in

Genesis 22 (but elsewhere as well) is a morally dangerous text since it can incline one to elevate obedience to statutory duties over rational, moral consideration. Such a text, as Kant stresses in *Conflict of the Faculties*, "must be interpreted in the interest of practical reason" (SF 7:38), but he admits that it

> seems to violate outright the highest rule of exegesis that reason feels entitled to interpret the text in a way it finds consistent with its own principles, even when it is confronted with a text where no other meaning can be ascribed to the sacred author, as what he actually intended by his words, than one which contradicts reason. (SF 7:40–41)

Quite clearly, the text does not bear a message that could be conducive to Kantian ethics. One is therefore violating the text, but such an interpretation "what has always happened, with the approval of the most eminent theologians" (SF 7:41).

What are the practical consequences of Kant's dealings with such a text? Is it a text that remains in the Bible, but never addressed? Is it a page that is better torn from the Bible? Kant does not seem to provide an answer. But any of these strategies would likely be hard to stomach for a Christian believer. Generally, one thinks of theology as an attempt to mediate between the transcendence of God and the believer by interpreting the word (*logos*) of God (*theos*). If God is truly transcendent, it would be hard to believe that he acts in accordance with rational and moral laws that apply to humanity. Kant seems to believe that—while acknowledging the distinctness between human and divine rationality—God must be a moral being, else we have no ground for worship. Really? Theology has the difficult task of coming to a proper rapport with its past and interpreting items that might appear morally awkward as instead providing insight into the mysterious nature of God—and not interpret away that part from the Bible simply because it is considered dangerous. Schopenhauer, a clear admirer of Kant, called such a strategy problematic as it would interpret away anything really interesting from Christian doctrine. Speaking about rationalists in matters of religion, he writes that these

> try to interpret out [*hinauszuexegesiren*] everything truly Christian, which leaves them with a remainder that is true in neither a literal nor an allegorical sense, but rather mere platitude, practically Judaism, or at most a shallow Pelagianism, or worst of all a vile optimism that is utterly foreign to genuine Christianity.[26]

When religions are emptied of their supernatural and irrational elements, they can no longer achieve their particular function. In his excellent discussion of the emergence of a longing for myth in nineteenth-century Germany,

George Williamson shows that the attempts to construct a typically German mythology—a significant factor contributing to the emergence of national socialism—came in response to the rationalizing of Christianity.[27] Kant's attempt then to safeguard Christianity by providing a rational ground for Christianity in practical reason could then be seen as one more step in the direction of Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God.

KANT AND THE AGAPE OF GOD

Up to this point, two reforms have been discussed for Kantian Christianity: the Bible and Jesus Christ are to be regarded as historically contingent affairs in need of interpretation, perhaps even purification, in order to serve the purposes of pure moral faith. Throughout history, Christianity has been given a new impetus by similar ecumenical interests, even Kant's own Pietist-Lutheranism had a strong, even doctrinal inclination to universality. Still, there might be a violence undeserved in demanding a reformation that would undo the uniqueness of a certain faith. Perhaps, Kant's new views of the task of theology, the nature of Christology and the purposes of the Bible could be acceptable to some who call themselves Christians. There is, however, one reform suggested by Kant's rational religion that would hit Christianity in its very heart, namely the idea of God's unconditional love and grace.

From the *second Critique* onwards, it becomes very clear that Kant's view of God is uniquely in terms of a moral and just being that loves moral behavior only and proportions virtue with merit. According to Kant, this is even the only way reason could ever think of God, namely as a being in line with morality. In the *second Critique*, Kant argued that reason is moved to postulate the existence of God on moral grounds, a God that is "a mighty moral lawgiver" (RGV 6:6). This is the most reasonable perspective on the nature of God and any religion would do well to embrace this because "a religion that rashly declares war on reason will not long endure against it" (RGV 6:10). Accordingly, any religion that does not intrinsically relate their God-notion to the moral law in the sense of a just judicator is irrational, and therefore not a universal, pure religion. This emphasis on the justice of God returns numerous times throughout *Religion* (RGV 6:44–51, 6:86–87, 6:98–102, 6:115–119, 6:145–147, and 6:157–163).

This emphasis on justice makes its most notable appearance throughout the previously mentioned three difficulties pertaining to the moral ideal (RGV 6:66–78). The third difficulty (the problem of justification after conversion)—noted by Kant as "the greatest difficulty" (RGV 6:71)—deals with the problem of pre-conversion evil after a human being converts to a good disposition. Classical Christology allows for pre-conversion evil (and original

sin) to be atoned for in the act of conversion through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. According to Kant, there is nothing a human agent can do to erase the debt he or she has incurred prior to conversion. Additionally, Kant univocally holds that this debt "cannot be erased by somebody else" (RGV 6:72). The resolution to this difficulty lies in a "judicial verdict of one who knows the heart of the accused" (*Ibid.*). As "satisfaction must be rendered to Supreme Justice" (RGV 6:73), human beings must be punished for their pre-conversion evil, which cannot take place before the conversion (because the evil is only fully consummated at the conversion) or after the conversion (here the human agent is good and does not deserve punishment). Therefore, the punishment "must be thought [of] as adequately executed in the situation of conversion itself" (RGV 6:73). Consequently, Kantian conversion should be perceived as a painful punishment wrought upon human beings who have decided to improve upon their wicked ways where the *Gesinnung* stands in as vicarious atonement for past sins: "And this disposition which he has incorporated in all its purity, like unto the purity of the Son of God—or (if we personify this idea) this very Son of God—bears as vicarious substitute the debt of sin for him" (RGV 6:74). Nicholas Wolterstorff and Philip Quinn are rightly baffled by Kant's concept of grace in these difficulties: If Kant's morality entails that a human agent must autonomously bear his or her own responsibility, such a saving grace that expunges past sins is inappropriate.[28] Nevertheless, this saving grace is still conditioned by the human agent actually taking up the *Gesinnung* and living through a life of moral struggle. Kant's God is therefore just and proportions merit to happiness, as well as punishes in exact proportion to vice—in the past, present, and future. The agency of Kant's God is fully and univocally in line with the moral law. Obviously, this reduces certain central Christian themes such as unconditional love and divine freedom.

In reading the Christian Bible, one thing any reader will readily admit is that God does not accord to human measures. While in the Old Testament, God's anger and fury seems to be rather excessive, in the New Testament (upon which most Christians would base their views of God) God's forgiveness and love appear to be excessive. For instance, in the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son (the analogy of conversion par excellence), the Father does not demand justice for injuries suffered but rejoices at the return of a lost sheep to the flock. The older brother in the story, however, responds in a Kantian fashion, namely to beg justice from his father. However, the Christian God's love exceeds any reductive sense of justice.[29] To reform toward Kantian Christianity, the Christian believer would have to forfeit the intuition of God's personal and unconditional love for everyone. At the end of the third *parergon* (mysteries), Kant briefly discusses the "highest goal of moral perfection of finite creatures [. . .] love of the law" (RGV 6:.145). While for

humans such a love is "never completely attainable" (*Ibid.*) and their attitude toward the law remains virtue (not holiness), in God there is absolute and unconditional love for the law. Accordingly, God only unconditionally loves the moral law, and human beings are loved insofar they incorporate the moral law. Kant does separate at one point God's love and God's justice, but only in effect, not in criterion (RGV 6:145n–146n). A Kantian Christian would only beget God's love as long as he or she is worthy of this love; God's love is conditioned by His moral judgment.[30] Kant categorically calls "a generous judge [. . .] a contradiction" (RGV 6:146n). This would basically imply that there is no divine agape, that is, a love unconditioned by merit. Needless to say, such a God appears more like the figment of Kant's practical reason, not something that resides in the rich theological tradition. Gordon Michalson rightly calls this "diminishing the divine."[31] Specifically related to God's agape, to model the Christian God in accordance with Kantian hermeneutical principles would effectively undo God's infinite love toward all of creation which will definitely be a concession Christians will be unwilling to make.

A love beyond merit is what is commonly known as grace, which is a gift given unconditionally regardless of what one deserves. Kant first turns to grace (*Gnade*) in the "General Remark" of *Religion* I. At the outset, his views appear to be Pelagian (aligning grace with good works): "The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil" (RGV 6:44). If some supernatural cooperation comes into play, this will assuage only the failure of outward, external behavior, not the inner disposition. This means that God is rationally postulated to remedy the demerits of goodly disposed human agents in their failure to live up to the highest good. This kind of grace is, however, equally merited because of the good disposition that human agents take upon themselves. A growing body of commentators is nevertheless trying to counter this intuitive point of view by arguing that Kant's account of divine grace is further removed from Pelagianism than first appearances might suggest. For instance, according to Jacqueline Mariña, Kant entertains an understanding of grace in these initial (and ensuing) paragraphs that is "authentically Christian" (whatever this might mean), and is also leaving room for "unmerited grace."[32] To counter the charge of Pelagianism in Kant's views of soteriology, Mariña holds that, for Kant, "it is not our adoption of a good disposition that is the condition of *God's action upon us*, that is, his graciousness towards us, but that rather, our adoption of such a disposition is the condition *of our ability to be receptive of and to recognize God's grace.*"[33]

I wonder whether Mariña fully captures Kant's rhetoric on grace within the larger structure of *Religion*. In support of her argument, she refers to Kant's *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion.*[34] I have discussed this argument in detail elsewhere.[35] Suffice to say, Kant commences the

paragraphs in the relevant chapters of the *Theology Lectures* with the words "the author" (e.g., 28:1084 and 28:1089), clearly indicating, he is paraphrasing Alexander Baumgarten. One should give preference to Kant's own, published views on the matter (especially since many views in the lectures—for example, the privative account of evil—clearly conflict with *Religion*). For example, in the *second Critique*, Kant explicitly writes that "all possible happiness in the judgment of a wise and all-powerful distributor of it has no restriction other than rational beings' lack of conformity with their duty" (KPV 5:128). Conformity with moral duties makes the human agent "worthy of happiness" (KPV 5:130); when religion is added to a doctrine of morals, "there [enters] the hope of someday participating in happiness" (*Ibid.*). So, postulating the existence of God allows the rational hope that God will proportionately reward merit (virtue) with happiness. Kant explicitly reiterates this argument in the first preface of *Religion* (RGV 6:3–7), and implicitly refers to it on several other occasions (RGV 6:44–51, 6:86–87, 6:98–102, 6:115–119, 6:145–147, and 6:157–163); all this suggests that Kant's notion of God's grace is coherent with practical reason's postulated divine justice.

Grace is then a useful notion that counters moral despair, not a constitutive aspect of human morality.[36] But this does not mean that grace is superfluous to Kant's theory. Palmquist makes an excellent point with regard to the real, rational necessity of grace in Kant's general system of morality and soteriology:

> No matter how good we are, we cannot be good enough to please God (i.e., to fulfill the moral law) in every one of our actions. "What we are able to do is in itself inadequate"! Then what is the importance of morality at all? Kant says that by acting morally we render ourselves *susceptible* of "higher and, for us [i.e., for bare reason] inscrutable assistance." Another (more conventionally religious) way of saying the same thing is that *grace is a necessary condition of becoming good.*[37]

My emphasis would differ from Palmquist in that Kant's turn to religion and grace is a two-part response to some form of pessimism inherent in his view of human aptitude for the moral law: not only is human nature defective, so too is the human will that should guide nature.[38] Throughout history, grace has proven to be, as DiCenso suggests, an effective tool for, "reinforcing our motivation, courage, and capacity for self-reflection [. . .] There are no supernatural entities corresponding to these ideas; yet, these representational forms might have the practical effect of helping us reflect upon and modify our attitudes and maxims."[39] Kant is fleshing out the potential merits (and demerits) of grace for a rational religion. The elements that would impede moral responsibility are eliminated from it—in his own words, this is his general

strategy for erecting a rational, ethical community, "cleansed of the nonsense [*Blödsinn*] of superstition [*Aberglaubens*] and the madness [*Wahnsinn*] of enthusiasm [*Schwärmerei*]" (RGV 6:101). The possible merit of grace is its potency to counterweigh the pessimism that might ensue from an all-too-clear recognition of human fallibility.

What is particularly baffling about Kant's version of pessimism is that he is forced to turn to something such as grace, within a morality based on autonomy, in order to rescue the finite, fallible human agent. Nevertheless, he strenuously maintains that grace works only in the agent who is already moving autonomously toward goodness, and is not operative at the onset of the moral struggle. The first step needs to be taken by the autonomous subject alone; however, if we take the radical nature of human depravity seriously, this is like asking a cripple to get out of his or her wheelchair and walk. Joel Madore puts the problem thus:

> As such, divine succor shoulders the agent that is already progressing towards moral perfection, however tottering and impaired his commitment to righteousness may have been ([RGV 6:75]). Pascal well understood the contradiction behind such a position: health is made the condition of recovery. [. . .] Difficult to see how a constitution so critically weakened by deceit can muster the strength to do so; in a word, how the subject can regenerate of itself, and without any exterior catalyst.[40]

IS SINCERE BELIEF POSSIBLE?

Kant's practical philosophy enlists religion as a means to provide inspiration and motivation because human nature is not particularly prone to respond to the respect it necessarily feels for the moral law. Is a Kantian Christianity up to this task? Already at the end of the *second Critique*, Kant turned toward religion because of the apparent failure of pure practical philosophy to answer a fairly simple and unambiguous question: why would human beings desire to be moral beings? In Kant's ethics, human beings lack the natural resources to convince the moral unbeliever that the moral law is ultimately the appropriate code of conduct. Kant himself clearly formulated this difficulty in his formulation of a radical (i.e., positive and ineradicable) tendency to prefer sensuous inclinations over the moral law. In order to combat such a propensity, the human agent is in need of moral education provided through a Christology and an Ecclesiology. Historical religion ought then to be reformed in accordance with the tenets of rational religion so that it could function as a means to empower the heroism to combat the radical attachment to sensuality by offering extra normative appeal to moral laws through the cultivation of the

rational interest in morality. Accordingly, such a rationalized religion could cradle the failure of autonomous moral motivation and raise moral beings to a level wherein they might be more hopeful of becoming the pure, moral agent they are supposed to be.

Rational religion serves then at its best as a veil for the difficulty of the moral law. If my argument is accurate, then Kant might have thought of historical faith as somewhat of a paternalistic illusion for human agents that cannot be swayed by rationality alone. Since morality is very difficult for human beings, most of us will be served by religious notions that cultivate our moral courage. But what if we find out that our faith is just a means to further our courage? This is the spirit of what Hegel suggested about the end of religion: if and when we come to the end-process of history where we become conscious of religion being a vehicle for the symbolic representation of the absolute, then religion must come to its end. Consciousness of the function of religion means the end of religion. From a more practical point of view, would we not find it difficult to be true believers if we realize that religion functions to augment our moral resolve? As such, it would not be particularly prudent to acquaint every human being invariably with the dim truth of being, namely that the human agent is ill formatted to achieve the good and religion serves to overcome moral hesitation. While Kant never openly espouses this as an opinion, a Kantian Christianity would work at its best when it is taught to human beings without knowing at the same time that it serves to further moral courage. In consequence, Kant's rational religion is then not unlike the Christianity propagated by Dostoevsky's Grand-Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. According to this narrative, the moral leaders of humanity (i.e., the Catholic Church) have worked to undo Christ's work, which made every single individual responsible for freely submitting to God's command. This is a difficult feat, and the masses cannot deal with such responsibility. The Catholic Church, so says the Grand-Inquisitor, decided to suffer responsibility so as to allow the masses peace of mind by providing them with a more determinate way to heaven through sacraments, miracles, and penance.[41]

In some places (but, admittedly, the evidence is scant), Kant defends a paternalism between the philosophical few with the vulgar many (e.g., SF 5:11).[42] Kant's *Religion* especially could then be read as a scholarly work designed and written for a select number of academics and political/religious leaders, not the masses; Kant himself recommends this book as instruction (*Leitfade*) for students of theology (RGV 6:10). This would mean that Kant offers a rational religion as a noble and comforting lie to those that would find themselves petrified by the impossible demands of reason. It was probably in this light that Heinrich Heine suggested that the postulation of the existence of God was a comfort to "Old Lampe" (1834). Heine suggested that Kant

drew up the postulation out of affection for his manservant Lampe whose faith in God was shattered after the *first Critique*:

> [Kant] thinks, and half with goodwill and half with irony, he speaks: "Old Lampe has to have a God, otherwise the poor man cannot be happy—people, however, should be happy in this world—that is what practical reason says—what, what do I know?—maybe we can let practical reason vouch for the existence of God?[43]

Kant would then recognize the need for faith because pure rationality invites dismay. Kant himself even confessed that he subscribes to Christianity and the Bible as tools for public instruction. They are the "most adequate means [*das beste vorhandene*] of public instruction available for establishing and maintaining indefinitely a state religion [*einer wahrhaftig seelenbessernden Landesreligion*] that is truly conducive to the soul's improvement" (SF 7:9).

The problem with this paternalist and deceptive goal of religion is that it might invalidate honest, sincere faith in religious notions (should religion's true nature come to light). Religions can only achieve its function, that is, to cultivate moral resolve, if they are taken to be true, not if they are adopted because it is prudent to adopt a religion. One believes in Christianity because one thinks Christianity is true, not because one thinks Christianity would be prudent to believe in (this would make for a hypocritical believer). Ultimately, Kant approaches religion instrumentally, namely in the sense that religion ought to assuage the possible despair that could follow from all-too-readily recognizing human finitude. In other words, Kant believes that human beings are in desperate need to have hope in salvation and to find something to have faith in; or, in Joel Madore's words,

> faith must leap over the subject's permanent deficiency, the gap left by a natural, inextirpable and radical evil, as well as the abyss of the mystery of grace. I hardly see how any form of secular or political hope, one that remains "this-wordly," could ever fulfill this mandate. In this case, one type of hope is indeed required to the exclusion of all others: religious faith.[44]

Kant is correct in assessing that religions are generally able to provide such hope and faith, but on remarkably different grounds than Kant suggests in *Religion*, Madore gives then voice to a valid objection to Kant's dealings with religion: "It is not the necessity of faith that saves us from moral despair, but its sincerity."[45] For Kant, faith is rationally necessary, not necessarily true. Kant does not invite readers to believe in God and Christian religion because of a deep truth, rather because he believes this will fill a gap in his moral theory and that human agents would be well off to have a moral religion since

this assists moral agency. Supposedly, if something else could fill this gap in his moral theory more efficiently, then religion would become obsolete.

Instrumental belief is not real belief. If my analysis is correct in ascribing central importance to entertaining a doctrine of religion that provides morally beneficial ideas (grace, Christology, ethical community, etc.), then sincere belief in these ideas is dangerously at risk. To have sincere belief in a certain idea, it does not appear to be sufficient that one perceives the practical usefulness of that idea, but must somehow be rigorously convinced of its reality. Accordingly, something stronger than merely practical faith is necessary for moral agency: simply being practically assured of being allowed the hope for grace is fairly meager. This would namely entail a level of deception regarding the reality of these practical ideas. Either the individual agent self-deceives him or herself regarding the objective validity of his or her religious notions or a sufficiently paternalistic state introduces several noble lies that enable the masses to be morally upright. All of this is difficult to square with the central importance Kant ascribes to sincerity as the "foundation of conscience" near the closing pages of *Religion* (RGV 6:190n). Religious notions are in the end beneficial fictitious notions, albeit grounded in practical reason, that the believer either adopts him or herself or is confronted by through a higher political power. Therefore, Kant's moral religion mainly aims at overcoming moral hesitations, not sincere religious faith.

The turn to religion in Kant's philosophy is a prudential calculus of the (morally) most profitable outcome and not a wise decision based upon insight into the hyperbolic dimensions of reality. Accordingly, as Allen Wood has pointed out, moral faith is a lot like Pascal's wager since it does not "try to show that Christianity is true, but that Christian belief would be advantageous to have."[46] Pascal himself was aware of this and thought of the wager as mostly an intellectual exercise that ought to be augmented with a set of practices (*coutumes*) that would bend the human will toward God: prayer, mass, confession, and so on. Pascal hoped that the repeated exercise of these practices would work similarly as Aristotle's habituated virtues: constant outward repetition somehow turns into an inner disposition. Reason can bring human beings to acknowledge religion rationally, but only God can bring it into their mode of conduct. As Pascal phrases it, in a way too eloquent to translate: "La conduite de Dieu, qui dispose de toutes choses avec douceur, est de mettre la religion dans l'esprit par les raisons, et dans le coeur par la grâce."[47] Kant regrettably lashes out at such outward practices, and their potential moral value, as long as they are not already accompanied by the spirit of moral respect. Therefore, Kant's approach to religion (and everything surrounding religion such as theology) ultimately collapses into being an assistant to practical reason. A prudential person would adopt religion since this can take the sting out of the possible dismay at the bottom of Kant's assessment of the human existential condition as mired in depravity.

NOTES

1. For example, Matthew Alun Ray, *Subjectivity and Irreligion: Atheism and Agnosticism in Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003); Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Gordon Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

2. Ronald Green, *Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Palmquist, 2000 and 2018; Hare, 1996; Firestone and Jacobs, 2008; *Kant and the Question of Theology.* Edited by Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs and James Joiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

3. These *parerga* are similar to the "ornaments (*parerga*)" in the *third Critique*, which Kant defines as "that which is not internal to the entire presentation of the object as constituent, but only belongs to it externally as an addendum and augments the satisfaction of taste" (KU 5:226).

4. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System." In: *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

5. See particularly: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

6. One recent discussion of the role of race in philosophy of religion (that discusses Kant's philosophy at some length): Theodore Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

7. See especially the introduction to the Lectures of 1827: G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. One-Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827.* Edited by Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 73–110. For further discussion: Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Reconciliation, Incarnation, and Headless Hegelianism." In: *Faith and Philosophy* 34 (2017): 201–222.

8. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God. Selected Essays, Volume 1*. Edited by Terrence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 35–56.

9. Jeffrey Privette, "Must Theology Re-Kant?" In: *Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999): 166–183.

10. Nathan Jacobs, "Kant's Prototypical Theology: Transcendental Incarnation as a Religious Foundation for God-Talk." In: *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion.* Chris Firestone and Stephen Palmquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 124–140.

11. *Ibid.*, 135.

12. *Ibid.*, 136.

13. An argument similar to Jacobs can be found here: Chris Firestone, "Making Sense out of Tradition: Theology and Conflict in Kant's Philosophy of Religion." In: *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Chris Firestone and Stephen Palmquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 141–157.

14. "Die Offenbarung muss etwas über die Vernunft hinausgehendes enthalten" (F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/1842.* Edited by Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016), 98.

15. F. W. J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy. The Berlin Lectures*. Translated by Bruce Matthews (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 182–183.

16. Hare, 1996, 191 ff. Vincent McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling* (Macon: Mercer University, 1986), 72–109.

17. Lawrence Pasternack, "Kant on the Debt of Sin." In: *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012): 30–52.

18. Byrne, 2007, 158.

19. Christianity's hesitations with regard to historical science continue until today. When Roger Haight published his *Jesus, Symbol of God*, it was almost immediately condemned by Vatican authorities for "grave doctrinal errors" since he develops his Christology as in line with historical science (Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999]). Nevertheless, Ann Christie points out that the majority of Christians subscribe to a critical point of view of Christology, which is dislodged from the strong ontological claims of orthodoxy: Ann Christie, *Ordinary Christology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

20. Nietzsche, 1999, 53.

21. Ward, 1972, 151.

22. Firestone and Jacobs, 2008, 152–172.

23. Michalson, 1979, 86.

24. Palmquist, 2000, 135.

25. *Ibid.*, 137.

26. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume 2*. Edited by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 177 [184].

27. George Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany. Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

28. Wolsterstorff, 2010, 56–68; Philip Quinn, "Saving Faith from Kant's Remarkable Antinomy." *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 418–34.

29. For a development of this intuition: William Desmond, "Dream Monologues of Autonomy." In: *Ethical Perspectives* 5 (1998): 305–321; Desmond, 2001, 133–142; Desmond, 2008, 145–148.

30. Kant is not overtly discussing "grace" and "love" in the Dialectic of Practical Reason. Stephen Palmquist argues, accordingly, that Kant's notion of grace in the three difficulties "is distinct from (and does not necessarily entail) the distribution of happiness in proportion to virtue that plays such a crucial role in the *second Critique*" (Palqmuist, 2000, 533). However, Kant has clearly demonstrated in the *second Critique* and explicitly reiterates this argument in the first preface of the *Religion* (RGV 6:4–6) that rationality suggests a God-notion modeled to practical justice. Accordingly, Kant's rhetoric on grace throughout the *Religion* must necessarily be conditioned by his practical theology: God is justice supreme.

31. Michalson, 1999, 41–57; cf. Michalson, 1990, 125–143.

32. Mariña, 1997, 380, 382. See also: Palmquist, 2010.

33. Mariña, 383.

34. One might question the usefulness of these lectures as a doorway into Kant's views with regard to religion for three reasons. Kant based these lectures on three sources: Alexander Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, Johann Eberhard's *Vorbereitung zur natürlichen Theologie*, and Christoph Meiners's *Historia doctrinae de uno vero Deo*. It is therefore not always fully clear whether Kant is paraphrasing one of these authors or professing his own point of view. Moreover, Kant was very well aware that he had to adjust his statements to his audience and therefore his thoughts could be somewhat constrained throughout these lectures by concerns for his public (cf. RGV 6:13–14). Last, these lectures postdate the *first Critique*, but likely predate the *second Critique* and almost certainly predate *Religion*; Kant could very well have changed his point of view in the latter—that is, if he had ever subscribed at all to the *Theology Lectures*' point of view. Peter Byrne rightly observes: "There is nothing to be done, in my opinion, with the *Lectures Theology* discussion of God as having understanding other than set it down as an aberration. Kant is, after all, not expounding the Critical doctrine of God in this passage but rather working through a textbook in rationalist metaphysics with his students. We must give decisive weight to Kant's words when he is expounding the Critical elements in the Critical account of God" (Byrne, 2007, 73).

35. Vanden Auweele, 2014, 175–190.

36. Christopher Insole argues similarly that Christian Orthodoxy prefers to understand the relationship between human and divine agency as a matter of concurrence, rather than occasionalism or mere conservation. Concurrence implies that "God not only creates and sustains every creature, but acts directly in every action of every creature, including free human action" (Insole, 2012, 193). More recently, Insole did attempt to merge more charitably Christianity and Kant (through Platonism): Insole, 2016.

37. Palmquist, 2000, 128.

38. Cf. Madore, 2011, 25–44.

39. DiCenso, 2012, 72–73; cf. DiCenso, 2011, 241.

40. Madore, 2011, 121.

41. For further discussion on the difficult issue of the will to believe in Dostoevsky's thought: Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Existential Struggles in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*." In: *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 80 (2016): 279–296.

42. See also: Bohatec, 1966, 25n.

43. Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany. And other Writings*. Edited by Terry Pinkard and Translated by Howard Pollack-Milgate (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87.

44. Madore, 2011, 129–130.

45. *Ibid.*, 132.

46. Wood, 1970, 160–161.

47. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*. Edited by Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1962), 21.

Conclusion

Where Does a Kantian Pessimism Lead?

The Kantian moral law appears to be a highly difficult standard for human beings, the difficulty of which is best covered up by certain religious fictions that build up moral resilience. This pessimism arises mainly from Kant's dreary perspective on human nature, which he demonstrates emphatically in a later work:

> [My analysis of human nature] would then result in a caricature of our species that would warrant not mere good-natured laughter at it but contempt for what constitutes its character, and the admission that this race of terrestrial rational beings deserves no honorable place among the (to us unknown) other rational beings. (Anth 7:332–333)

The explanation for Kant's pessimism relates to human nature and moral obligation both: human beings are dreadfully inadequate to make moral progress and the demands of morality are tremendously steep.

And yet, Kant's pessimism is not readily recognized in most of the literature. This has to do with a bipolarity in Kant's moral and religious philosophy where he, on the one hand, emphasizes the dramatic proportion of human depravity but, on the other hand, provides a rational justification for moral regeneration. The reader is then naturally drawn to focus on one side or other of the equation, namely on either the radical nature of depravity or on the necessity of the possibility of regeneration. Gordon Michalson's analysis of this subject remains particularly interesting since he realizes the nature of the dilemma and the way it renders Kant's philosophy of religion "wobbly." In his view, Kant's account of depravity "appears to force him in an Augustinian direction, while his conception of grace or divine aid reintroduces an obviously Pelagian element based on human effort and merit. The resulting

position [. . .] is not so much incoherent as it is unstable."[1] Nevertheless, Michalson ultimately focuses more on the rationalist side that allows, somehow, for salvation and therefore underestimates the radical nature of Kant's notion of depravity: "Kant's position is similar to that of Erasmus in his celebrated debate with Luther over the freedom of the will."[2] What does seem to be uncannily Lutheran about Kant's account of depravity are the following. First, depravity ensures it is impossible for human beings to move naturally toward the good; second, evil cannot be merely understood in terms of the absence of goodness; third, the true motivation—and subsequent morality/piety—of the agent is obscure; fourth, prudence or practical wisdom lacks any intrinsic moral value; fifth, there is no natural feeling for morality.[3]

Human nature is in no way a host to a natural feeling for morality, which precedes being faced with the moral law through the higher faculty of desire. So when Kant emphasizes that "there is still a germ of goodness left in its entire purity," he is referring to the potential regenerative function of rationality to "recover the purity of the law," not any natural aptitude for goodness (RGV: 6:45–46). Goodness must, in Kantian philosophy, be superimposed, and cannot be built from nature up: the feeling of respect is forced upon the negatively free power of choice and is not in any way derived from it. As Kant puts it in *Religion*: "The restoration of the original predisposition to good in us is not therefore the acquisition [*Erwerbung*] of a lost incentive for the good" (RGV 6:46). The human agent is able to become good through a revolution, not a reform, a change of heart rather than a strengthening of natural moral resolve. So Kant emphasizes in *Conflict of the Faculties* that "the end of religious instruction must be to make us other human beings and not merely better human beings" (SF 7:54).

Faced with such moral difficulty, the human might despair of his potential to be moral and leave behind moral duty altogether. In order then to secure humanity's resolution for moral effort, something akin to a grace beyond the merit of works seems necessary. Kant's account of such grace is far from traditionally Christian as it serves to provide the necessary imaginative ideas that bolster moral resolve in the face of human limitation. In the realm of morality, the three most important limitations are as follows. First, human beings lack the aptitude to attain holiness, that is, the complete accord of one's incentives with the moral law (GMS 4:414 and 4.439; KPV 5:32 and 5.84; RGV 6:145; MS 6:383); second, human beings cannot extirpate the propensity to evil, which is "ineradicable [*unvertilgbar*]" (RGV 6:37), an attachment of "the moral faculty of choice" (RGV 6:31) and Kant derides the hope for "theological chiliasm [i.e.] the completed moral improvement of the human race" (RGV 6:34); third, human beings are incapable of erecting an ethical community (RGV 151). For a rationalist philosopher, all of these limitations are somewhat scandalous, a scandal that ought to be assuaged by certain ideas

that warrant the hope for overcoming these limitations: the inability to attain human holiness is assuaged by the possibility of infinite progress toward the good because of the postulated immortality of the soul (KpV 5:122–123); the inability to root out the propensity to evil is redeemed through the grace of God who judges the disposition (*Gesinnung*) rather than the individual incentives (RGV 6:66–78); the inability to erect an ethical community is remedied by the positing of a "Kingdom of God" as an ideal, a kingdom that is ruled by a purely moral lawgiver (RGV 6:100–102; 6:115–124).

There is something heroic about Kant's moral philosophy: recognizing the dramatic limitations of human ability and yet emphasizing the categorical duty to aspire toward perfect morality. This is a problem that emerged in Pietist theology as well: how can a radically depraved human agent still be interested in piety? He or she must, in one way or another, be confronted and inspired by a transcendent power, be it God or the moral law—both of which are found in the human heart, rather than above it. Interestingly, Kant in his *Opus Postumum* at times calls the moral law the *Deus in nobis* (God within us), a phrase that in a way mimics the etymological significance of his own name (Immanuel means, in Latin, God is with him). A few small scribbled words at the bottom of a page read: "Est Deus in Nobis" (OP 22:130). This thought remains undeveloped and the notion of a more immanent presence of God would surely disrupt most of the Kant we are familiar with.[4] We could, however, read this suggestion as an indication of the structural similarities between Luther's soteriology and Kant's views of human morality: Luther's God turns into Kant's rationality. By locating the anchor for salvation in the human heart, Pietism in particular put theological morality on a path toward self-emancipation since human beings need to look not beyond themselves, but within: "Pietism is an intermediate moment in the process of human consciousness towards its emancipation. The God of Pietism is the God that hides in the secret of the heart."[5]

If, for a Protestant theologian, God were to be taken out of the equation, then human existence would be tragic. Kant accepted the theological premise that human agents are radically fallen and in dire need of salvation, without being willing to allow any heteronomy to actually do the saving. Kant's notion of autonomy as self-law ironically appears as fairly transcendent, even heteronomous, to human desire. The moral law disrupts natural existence and forces the human being to remodel the natural way of approaching and evaluating in order for some supernatural good, namely rationality—a rationality not of this world but of a noumenal realm. Should one fully accept the pessimism that quietly sleeps beneath this disembodied Protestant analysis of human nature, then any moral or soteriological agency of the human agent alone should be rejected: the human agent is deprived of any and all means to be or become good or be saved. This did not stop the Pietists, however,

from emphasizing the need for an impossible quest toward piety. They introduced a sense of heroism into theological morality that far outlived the slow and painless demise of the Pietist movement in the middle of the nineteenth century. As I have detailed extensively above, Kant adopted the pessimism and heroic understanding of morality from the Pietists and conjoined it with the rational optimism of his own time, which postulated that the highest good must, somehow, be possible. Reason, not God, shall postulate, decree, and legitimate whatever it needs to accommodate this assumption.

Kant turns out in the final analysis to be more pessimistic than the Pietists, since they retained a belief in possible salvation by God. For Kant, however, God resembles a useful fiction, necessary postulated so that moral agency is not paralyzed by the realization that all its trials and tribulations might ultimately come to naught. Lest anarchy ensue from this realization, some deception may be needed, such as that offered by a universal cosmopolitan Church that gives moral education to the needy masses (remember Francke's emphasis on institutionalizing Pietist religion), in order to veil the pernicious nature of the moral quest. Or maybe the conclusion need not be so despotic? Maybe the rationality of the *Wille* can fix the mess created by the depraved *Willkür*? Above and beyond nature, rationality can function as our guide from darkness to the light. Or is it our *Ignis Fatuus*? Could rationality be the will-o'-the-wisp that leads unsuspecting, optimistic, tired travelers to their doom rather than to salvation? Maybe the rationality proclaimed to rule the real (noumenal) world is built upon a subterranean, amoral will? Why should chaos be merely appearance and rationality be real? Let us turn this around: the perceived world is my representation in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason (*Satz von Grunde*) and the world in itself is but a whim, a self-expressive and all-devouring chaos. It is not hard to see how Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy follows from these considerations. Rationality will postulate whatever is needed to meet its goals, but what if rationality is simply an all-too human expression of a desire to cope with the ultimate tragedy of existence? Such rationality went out of fashion in the century after Kant: Kant's emphasis on the postulatory power of the *Wille* to redeem the world paved the way for the idea that redemption was impossible. Kant's still latent pessimism could then be seen as a forerunner of the more out-and-out nineteenth-century atheist philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In fact, Schopenhauer can be read as thinking Kant's project through to its natural end. He heightens Kant's transcendental suspicion of nature to metaphysical proportions so that all of reality becomes suspect. He was particularly keen on acknowledging the tremendous influence Kant's philosophy exercised on him, and even though Kant resisted this pessimistic fate through his insistence on practical belief in God, they share a similar, more pessimistic viewpoint regarding reality and human existence. Schopenhauer could

then be read as magnifying Kant's underlying and often unspoken pessimistic presuppositions.

The Kantian pessimism that has been unfolded systematically throughout this study relates to the weakness and fragility of human nature; indeed, whatever decided to create human beings appears to have been frugal in bestowing moral resolve. We ought to expect little in and by itself from human nature, from traditional institutions, from historical faiths, or from our fellow human beings. However, if these could be inspired and revolutionized by reason, powerful self-activating reason, then there might yet be hope. For Kant was only pessimistic with regard to human nature, not with regard to the potential of reason to deliver us from nature. Who knows, if living today, Kant might be proponent of transhumanism? What could make Kant's pessimism damning, however, is that after Kant, philosophy had gradually come to terms with the idea that reason is not altogether distinct and opposed to human nature. In fact, human reason as an expression of human nature and—if we are consistent in Kant's depreciation of human nature—then reason is tainted by the same depravity as nature. This would undo all hope for moral conversion, if we remain faithful to Kant's moral system and its ethical rigorism. Mayhap, and I simply suggest this in closing, the human condition is not as depraved as Kant would have us believe. Indeed, this is a world rife with cruelty, intolerance and small-mindedness—at least, these are the things that make the news. But anyone with eyes not entirely dampened by cynicism would have to add that this world abounds with beauty, charity, compassion, and love as well. Of itself, human nature may not need reason's drastic revolutions but, if properly attuned to the *chiaroscuro* that is existence, may find a way to navigate and redeem in itself all that was, is and shall be.

NOTES

1. Michalson, 1990, 97.
2. *Ibid.,* 75.
3. I have discussed the Lutheran background of Kant's notion of depravity more extensively elsewhere: Dennis Vanden Auweele, "The Lutheran Influence on Kant's Depraved Will." In: *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 73 (2013): 117–134.
4. Cf. Desmond, 2008, 95.
5. Georges Gusdorf, *Dieu, la nature, l'homme au siècle des lumières* (Paris: Payot, 1972), 80; my translation.

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