

Kant and the unity of reason

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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Summary: Kant and the unity of reason

The achievement of Immanuel Kant lies in demonstrating the law-giving power of the human intellect in the metaphysical basis of human cognition and in defence of human freedom. The power of reason was his response to the mechanical view of nature and scepticism in morals, aesthetics and religion. While reason extended over theory and practice, it was, he insisted, one reason: a unity. I advocate the unity of reason as key to understanding Kant's philosophical project. Given his huge output, this is an inevitably incomplete ambition. After an introductory chapter (ch1), comes an explication of the key role of the maxim (ch2) followed by proposing a three-fold understanding of reason itself (ch3) with its ideas and postulates (ch4). These extend our theoretical and practical knowledge in reason's differing interests (ch5), albeit with conceptual difficulties in motivation and respect (ch6). Despite different faculties, theoretical and practical reason cannot conflict for there are not two reasons. One must have primacy which is shown to be the practical (ch7). The latter doctrine has implications for Kant's rational theology and his broader world view. Morality's supreme principle, a product of universalised reason, highlights the destiny of humankind and leads to a moral faith unique to humans. By virtue of reason, we have the will to realise our final end. The justification of reason's unity (ch8) leads to the regulative idea of a highest intelligence as a heuristic. Kant's moral philosophy culminates in the concept of the highest good as the final end of human life (ch9). I discuss its secular and religious interpretations before concluding that, for Kant, we belong not only in the world of nature but in a noumenal world in which God and a future life may be the hope of our finite reason.

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Finally, I pay tribute to my father, Albert Victor Charles Saunders (1912-1984), who valued learning but lacked the opportunity to pursue it.

Abbreviations

Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Kant are from *The Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors P Guyer, A Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1992-2016). References are to the work (or its abbreviation) followed by the volume and page number in the *Akademie Ausgabe* edition, except in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where page numbers of the A and B editions are stated.

Abbreviated titles are:

A	Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view
CPR	Critique of Pure Reason
CPJ	Critique of the Power of Judgement
CPractR	Critique of Practical Reason
FS	False Subtlety of the syllogisms
G	Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
JL	Jäsche Logic
LA	Lectures on Anthropology
OB	Remarks on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime
MM	Metaphysics of Morals
Prol	Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that Will be Able to Come Forward as a Science
R	Reflexionen (in ‘Notes and Fragments’)

Rel	Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason
SB	Speculative Beginning of Human History
TP	On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, But Is of No Practical Use
WOT	What does it mean to Orientate Oneself in Thinking?

ch	chapter
CUP	Cambridge University Press
ed	edited by
OUP	Oxford University Press
p	page
transl	translated by

Referencing

Senate regulations specify consistency, not a particular style. I have used a modified Vancouver style, almost universal in medicine and other sciences, avoiding the clutter of names in the text, with immediate access in the footnote. (See:

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/library/help/referencing/footnote>)

Preface

“Reason is the glory of human nature.”

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)¹

“He mentioned how much effort it had cost him to know what it was that he really wanted to establish when he first had the idea to write the *Critique of Pure Reason*.”

Student of Kant, 1792²

What is the origin, development, substance and end (telos, *Zweck*) of reason in Kant’s thinking? This question animates Kant’s thought and his interpretation of reason.

Reason and its interests will be the *leitmotif* running through this thesis. My claim is that pursuing the nature and interests of reason will lead through reason’s concepts of its ideas and postulates to its final end – indeed to the final end for humanity in a unity of theoretical and practical reason. In his life’s work, Kant demonstrated his own definition of enlightenment: “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity.” Its motto: “*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding!”³ The light of reason would show the truth.⁴

Even today, the city of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad)⁵ appears remote. That part of the European archipelago was sparsely populated, but the city had formerly been capital of Prussia and remained second in importance only to Berlin. Its port ensured access to the

¹ Isaac Watts, ‘Introduction’, *Logick 1724*. Quoted in: Roy Porter, *Enlightenment* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.48.

² Immanuel Kant, ‘Logic Dohna-Wundlacken,’ in Michael Young (ed.), *Lectures on Logic*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 24:783

³ Immanuel Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)’, in Ted Humphrey (transl) *Perpetual Peace and other essays*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983) 8.35

⁴ One contrasts the historian, Eric Hobsbawm’s remark that enlightenment could be “dismissed as anything from the superficial and intellectually naive to a conspiracy of dead white men in periwigs providing an intellectual foundation for Western imperialism.” (*On History* London: New Press. 1997 p.254).

⁵ Edward IJ Saunders, ‘*Imagining Königsberg 1945-2010*.’ PhD dissertation, Cambridge 2012.

wider world and there was sufficient traffic between German principalities to enable access to the main authors of the day.

Shortly before his *Enlightenment* essay, Kant had published his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Although he there acknowledged both Locke and Leibniz - and the lesser work of Reid, Oswald, Beattie and Priestley - it was David Hume that he said, "first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy."⁶ Hume's scepticism as to the possibility of metaphysics, to the concept of causation and to an objective morality, led to Kant's critical philosophy, beginning with the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 and ending in 1797-8 with the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the 1798 *Anthropology from a practical point of view* and shorter, unfinished writings, as he descended into the darkness of what was probably Alzheimer's disease.

In this thesis, I will examine some of the key ideas in Kant's philosophy, focussing on reason's unity, in the belief that Kant's practical reason remains alive today, relevant both to public policy and individuals in 21st century society. Despite its difficulties and obscurities,⁷ those who engage with his thought will find it richly rewarding.

⁶ Prol 4:260

⁷ A frequent sort of accusation made against Kant. See ch3.2. Probably initially amplified by conventions of late 18th century writing, new uses of familiar words and the challenges of a lengthy and radical treatise.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Kant's status in philosophy was established in his lifetime, both in the German lands and internationally. The beginnings of German idealism and of what would be known as post-Kantianism were recognisable well before his death in 1804. Editions of his works were translated into English before 1800. Although his reputation has subsequently undergone some vicissitudes, the importance of his thinking to western philosophy has never been doubted. Nevertheless those approaching his philosophy for the first time are often surprised by the sheer size and breadth of his writings. In both his pre-Critical and post-Critical periods, he addresses issues in natural sciences, morality, metaphysics, logic, epistemology, education, politics, anthropology, history, aesthetics, human destiny, theology and religion. In many of these fields the study of his writings remains of huge value today: for example, the opinions of a Kantian scholar like Onora O'Neill.

In this thesis, I have focused on his most important concept: that of reason. This is explicitly emphasised in his essay on enlightenment⁸ but is a central idea in all three *Critiques*, as well as shorter treatises such as the *Prolegomena*, the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and others. Faced with this huge corpus, scholarly endeavour is never ending. On the one hand, there is specialist emphasis on his philosophical relevance to physical sciences, to aesthetics, to ethics, or to arcane disputes in metaphysics; but on the other hand, there is a need for a broader exegetical approach to the literature. To use a metaphor, we need general practitioners as well as consultant electrophysiologists. The idea of reason permeates Kant and its unity is a theme that recurs across his writings from some of the earliest in the pre-critical period

⁸ Immanuel Kant. *An answer to the Question: -What is Enlightenment? (1784)*, Transl Ted Humphrey, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, (1982).

to the latest, even to the *Opus Postumum*.⁹ The publication of the comprehensive English translation by Cambridge University Press has made this a good time to analyse the Kantian corpus as a whole, identifying its fundamental philosophy and illustrating its importance with some specific current issues in Kant scholarship.

From the interplay of exegesis and interpretation, new insights emerge – as with other great works such as Shakespeare or the Bible. For example, I will address the structure of Kant’s ethics and, in particular, the key role of the maxim, against which moral intentions can be assessed; I will offer some novel thoughts in Kant’s moral theology such as the role of grace or the deeply puzzling issues that arise in discussing the highest good, where even Kant confesses that its possibility “still remains an unsolved problem.”¹⁰ More than this, I suggest that the unity of reason can be interpreted as highlighting a unity in his entire corpus of writing.

The distinction between Kant’s thinking and Kantian thinking is often unclear, the former as an exercise in history of philosophy, the latter in the contemporary relevance of Kant’s thought, to which has been added the insights of “Neo-Kantians.”¹¹ An excellent example and contrast is provided by the Kantian scholar, Allen Wood, with his exposition of Kant’s moral philosophy in his *Kant’s Ethical Thought*¹² and an exposition for today in *Kantian Ethics*.¹³ On specific issues, Kant’s views on race and sex, for example, are risible or abhorrent to modern thinkers. Today’s philosophers are not great systematisers but in this thesis I give an account of reason’s unity as the

⁹ Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Cambridge: CUP, Transl Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (1993)

¹⁰ CPractR 5:112

¹¹ Frederick C Beiser. *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism* (2014), Oxford: OUP

¹² Allen Wood. *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (1998), Cambridge: CUP

¹³ Allen Wood. *Kantian Ethics* (2008), Cambridge: CUP

fundamental idea of Kant's project, the key unifying factor in the construction of his system.

Returning to the stirring sentences in the *Prolegomena*, Kant was awoken by Hume from his "dogmatic slumber."¹⁴ His *Critique of Pure Reason* represents a response to the challenge of scepticism espoused by Hume, especially over causation, and a defence of metaphysics as set out by an earlier generation in rationalist and empiricist theoretical philosophy. That defence extended further to a defence of human freedom – and hence morality – in his moral and political philosophy. To these we can add both religion and aesthetics. It is true that Kant has little sympathy towards, shall we say, liturgical practice (of which he is scornful) or music (which he hardly mentions); but he still has a lot to say of more than historical relevance to religion and aesthetics. The influence of the pietism of his younger years seems to have contributed to a formidable understanding of Christian doctrine and, in part through his *Anthropology*, of other religious doctrine and practice.

What is this unity of reason at which I renew discussion? It is the harmonisation of intellectual discourse in scientific understanding and morality: the suggestion that there is only one reason, united as it considers the questions of our knowledge and conduct. It culminates in the biggest ambition of all: to give an account of the destiny of mankind, a final *telos* to human life. Considering modern scientific knowledge of the universe, this is astonishingly ambitious. It poses Kant's great question: what can we hope? This overall analysis of a systematic philosophy is offered without the claim to solve specific modern philosophical questions, but it should raise issues for contemporary readers. These will include whether he dispels the tensions between the moral, the scientific and

¹⁴ Prol 4:260

the theological; or adequately integrates the aesthetic. Inevitably this analysis will challenge interpretations based on details and not the whole. Without an emphasis on reason's unity, perspectives on specific areas of Kant's philosophy are likely to be distorted.

At its conclusion, Kant's enterprise in his moral (practical) philosophy is clear that practical reason has priority over theoretical (or speculative) reason. For that reason the present account starts (ch2) with an exposition of the maxim and its relationship to the supreme principle of practical reason, the categorical imperative.

The maxim is a short pithy statement, a principle, a rule of conduct, under which an individual wills or acts. It is primarily a *subjective* expression of the reasons for my action. An objective maxim is universalisable and is a principle under which a rational agent would *necessarily* act. The choice of ends involves maxims of actions to achieve those ends. Kinds of actions, ends of action and incentives for action express our moral character. Kant offers a hierarchy of maxims, exemplifying the systematicity that will feature in the final arguments for reason's systematicity and unity, linking the two ends of the thesis. The Categorical Imperative not only provides the test for maxims, but will be evident in later arguments for reason's unity. At the highest level, '*Gesinnung*', the permanence of maxims and their pedagogical value are addressed. Principled action i.e. by maxims combining duty and moral worthiness, may beneficently extend beyond duty. Moral worth marks a unity of motive and maxim content. These early links to reason's unity lead to the next chapter on reason itself.

Acknowledging the challenge of definition in Kant's writing, I attempt (ch3) to define reason itself. It is primarily a distinctive human faculty guarding against error and creating ideas that go beyond the empirical boundaries of our senses: what we can think

is further than we can know. Reason has theoretical and practical functions. The unity of these two faculties is introduced. Freedom is relevant to both in decision-making; it is in freedom that mankind will claim its destiny through reason's unity. I emphasise the distinction of reason from the understanding and how reason must organise the rules of the understanding under unconditioned principles to enable cognition. Reason in its logical function infers, seeking to bring the highest unity possible to the manifold of the understanding. In its real use, cognitive illusions can be prevented as well as science advanced from its ideas. Ideas of reason can be organised into systems and eventually into the final unity to which this thesis leads. Kant believes this unity belongs to nature itself: and "here nature does not beg but commands."¹⁵ Here I introduce freedom's dependence on transcendental idealism with its crucial role for morality and reason's causality. Reason's ideas (ch4) seek the unconditioned, using regulative ideas of teleology. They guide us, for example, in proposing a highest intelligence with a role in maintaining the greatest systematic unity in the empirical use of our reason. The power of reflecting judgement provides a bridge (*Übergang*) between concepts of nature and concepts of freedom, from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter.

Postulates (ch4) refer to statements acting as premises, yet without grounding in evidence. Kant thinks them essential to the concepts of deity and immortality. All three postulates (freedom, God and the immortal soul) necessarily have a practical reference and give objective reality to the idea of theoretical reason in general.

The differing interests of theoretical and practical reason are addressed in ch5, noting that interest signifies "an incentive of the will." Interest is linked to pleasure in the

¹⁵ A653/B681

Metaphysics. A key distinction is that between judgements of beauty and moral judgements, the former devoid of interests contrasting with the essential presence of interests in the latter. 'Interest' as it applies to practical reason and to theoretical reason turns out to be a broad concept that links the beautiful and the moral in the third *Critique*.

Earlier in his career Kant explored the role of moral feeling developed by the British 'sentimentalists'. I note the continued role for feeling (ch6) through the concept of 'respect.' Motive must be interpreted as the application of the moral law, yet associated with 'respect' as 'feeling.' Terminology sheds some light on this, but (ch6) I justify the mechanism by which practical reason produces moral feeling, exploring the concepts of self-love and self-conceit. The apogee of this analysis is reached in the debate between intellectualists, basing motivation entirely on rational grounds, and affectivists, who believe that respect (as feeling) has a real force in moral motivation. Kant is aware of the challenge, given the space he devotes to it in the second *Critique*'s Analytic. But the interpretation is controversial and I have argued for a compromise position.

The last three chapters bring these themes together. The primacy of practical reason (ch7) over theoretical reason reverses the priorities of Aristotle and emerges from a consideration of their interests. To avoid a permanent state of vacillation, one sort of reason must have primacy. The *primacy* doctrine, narrowly interpreted, is essential to justify the theological postulates and hence develop the highest good. Broadly the *primacy* doctrine concerns the unity, interest and teleology of reason as a whole, its status and meaning. It shows that what we do is more important than what we know. The intimate relationship between practical and theoretical reason leads to man's destiny as the master of creation in the combination of his nobility and finitude, a moral

faith that replaces the unrealisable pursuit of knowledge- an ultimate end of the practical. His moral faith defuses tension with religion.

From interpreting the *primacy* comes the exposition of how two sorts of reason with different interests can be united (ch8). This depends on the postulates, themselves theoretical propositions, but necessary for practical reason. Theoretical reason has clear boundaries that cannot be ‘opened’ without ingress of wild ideas. Theoretical reason cannot deny propositions that it cannot decide upon but could accept propositions postulated by practical reason (God, immortality, freedom) in a practical sense. Moral reasoning is independent of empirical conditions and is a more powerful faculty. In short, we can use concepts of reason and assert objects for them which are beyond the sphere of knowledge marked off for theoretical reason.

If the Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle of practical reason, then it should also be true that it is the supreme principle of all reason (unqualified). Reason does not proceed algorithmically but by judgements. There are communal, societal and political dimensions to these conclusions. Prioritising freedom is more important than prioritising welfare. In ch8 I note that finding “the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding by which its unity will be completed”¹⁶ is the proper principle of reason in general. The key to unity is systematicity, a regulative idea from an all-sufficient necessary cause leading “inexorably to the purposive unity of all things and uniting practical with theoretical reason.”¹⁷ One *ought* to endlessly search for the fundamental power that demands systematic unity, under the guidance of a heuristic

¹⁶ CPR A309/B365

¹⁷ CPR A815/B843

idea of a highest intelligence. I argue that the unity of reason is supported by a practical reading of the principle of reason as a categorical imperative. It is nature's purposiveness, stemming from divine design that unites theoretical and practical reason. Although we cannot know whether a fundamental power exists to unify reason when we try systematically to unify the powers of theoretical and practical reason, we should seek it *as if* it exists because our reason needs it in order to be systematic and achieve a unity of cognition.

The antinomy of practical reason leads to the concept of the highest good. The highest good demonstrates the unity of reason in combining the theoretical concept of happiness with the moral concept of virtue: a marriage of theoretical and practical components. Primacy of the practical supports the concept of immortality in which we can achieve virtue with proportionate happiness.

Regulative ideals are essential to completeness and systematicity. Human reason only satisfies itself in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions. Experience will never attain a systematic unity of all the appearances of inner sense. By contrast, reason can conceive of "the concept of a simple self-sufficient intelligence."

Kant repeatedly identifies the end of humanity as the highest good: fittingly the concern of the last part (ch9) of this thesis. There are inevitably debates about attainability of a holy will and therefore whether, on the basis of 'ought' implies 'can', we are obliged to seek it. The concept raises questions about its transcendent (religious, other-worldly) or immanent (secular, phenomenal, this-worldly) interpretation, whether it applies to individuals (salvation) or to societies (social welfare). Here Kant often resorts to the "inscrutable" concerning God and immortality, beyond the possibilities of our experience. Receptivity is the key concept to the undeserved beneficence of God's

grace, a concept ignored by many commentators. Grace imputes righteousness to us: through grace “what in our earthly life...is only ever a becoming should be reckoned to us as if we were already in full possession of it.”¹⁸ The hope of happiness is not a reward depending on God’s justice (- Kant is no Pelagian and brooks no heteronomy -) but aid given freely and inscrutably. The highest good is inseparably bound to the moral law. The thesis ends with hope: that our lives can be endowed by our unified reason with purpose and meaning. “Human reason defines for man a final end, a single highest purpose for his existence, an ideal inseparably related to his finite rationality itself.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Rel 6:75

¹⁹ Allen Wood. *Kant’s Moral Religion* p.250

Chapter 2: The maxim in Kant

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2.1 Introduction

The development of Kant's moral philosophy can be traced back through his 'pre-critical writings and through the work of many others, most notably the British 'sentimentalists', (such as Francis Hutcheson, 1694-1746), Pietists, (such as Christian August Crusius, 1715-1775) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). But most prominent among his predecessors, especially in the development of the maxim, a hallmark feature of his moral thinking, were figures in the pre-Kantian German enlightenment, such as Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), Christian Wolff (1679-1754), Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) and his own teacher in Königsberg, Martin Knutzen (1713-1751). From these predecessors he constructed his 'ethic of maxims.'²⁰ A consideration of Kant's mature moral theory requires a more detailed exploration of the maxim: its meaning, its structure, and its role as relating to ends - and hence on the moral worth of the subject - and to actions. I suggest a hierarchy subsuming the more specific under less specific maxims, leading to broad notions of individuals' values. Part of this hierarchy results from terminological inexactitude but I suggest that it is mainly a result of the specificity and level of intention with which the maxim is concerned. I conclude by considering the maxim in the widest context of '*Gesinnung*.'

2.2 Kant's definitions of the maxim

Given its featuring in all three *Critiques*, it is surprising that Kant's definition of the maxim is not more explicit. In ordinary English usage,²¹ a maxim is "a short, pithy statement expressing a general truth or rule of conduct." Synonymously, it could be an aphoristic expression of a rule. Here the term refers to *moral* maxims. Kant also refers

²⁰ This expression was introduced to emphasise the central concept of the maxim by Otfried Höffe in *Immanuel Kant*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp.145ff.

²¹ Oxford English Dictionary

to logical maxims²² or maxims of reason,²³ maxims of the aesthetic power of judgement,²⁴ or maxims in relation to teleological judgements.²⁵ I will not discuss these.

The first definition occurs in the CPR Doctrine of Method.²⁶ “Practical laws, insofar as they are at the same time subjective grounds of actions, i.e., subjective principles, are called maxims.” A maxim, then, is a subjective practical principle; but an agent can adopt an objectively valid law as a subjectively valid maxim. He emphasises their importance:

“The judgement of morality concerning its purity and consequences takes place (in).... the observance of its laws in accordance with maxims. It is necessary that our entire course of life be subordinated to moral maxims; but it would at the same time be impossible for this to happen if reason did not connect with the moral law, which is a mere idea, an efficient cause which determines for the conduct in accord with this law an outcome precisely corresponding to our highest ends, whether in this or in another life.”²⁷

Maxims on this definition are laws under certain conditions but also (and always) principles. Those conditions are that they are also subjective. The assertion that practical laws can be maxims does not mean, of course, that something else could not be a maxim as well. So while practical laws are maxims (under the stated conditions), the implication is that a subjective principle could also be objective in being a law. But it does not validate the law. Laws have an objective character and apply to all rational

²² CPR A649/B677

²³ CPR A666/B694 (where maxim of reason is defined), A667/B696; CPJ 5:294, 5:348, 5:247, 5:456, 5:411; *Determination of the concept of a human race* 8:96

²⁴ CPJ 5:182, 5:385-390, 5:398, 5:411

²⁵ CPJ 5:376, 5:379

²⁶ CPR A812/B840

²⁷ CPR A812/B840

beings; principles may be subjective and only apply to me. Maxims are always subjective (i.e. meaning ‘mine’), but sometimes may be objective too (i.e. valid for all rational beings). What may be subjective for me as an individual may be objective for me as part of a species of rational beings. In describing it as ‘subjective’, is meant that it is the maxim for *my* action. It is *material* insofar as it intends a particular end (that is, an *a posteriori* or empirical maxim): it is mine. Such a maxim is universalisable in the sense that it will or can (or, for consistency, should) be applied to different situations of a similar kind. But it is not universalisable in the sense that it is valid for all rational beings: it would lack the *form* of universality. That sort of maxim would be *a priori* only, lacking material properties and demonstrating only the form of its universality: valid without the qualification of an ‘if’. Most maxims are subjective only; and such a subjective maxim can be the principle of a wrong action because many of our actions result from self-love.

In the *Groundwork* (1785), the emphasis is slightly different:

“a maxim is the subjective principle of volition; the objective principle (i.e. that which would also serve subjectively as the practical principle for all rational beings if reason had complete control over the faculty of desire) is the practical law.”²⁸

Here the emphasis is on the maxim as a principle of **volition**, a relationship with the will in contrast with the earlier definition’s emphasis on the maxim as a ground of **action**.

This definition also suggests that fully rational agents would act according to objective

²⁸ G 4:402n

practical principles which could also be subjective, as in the definition from the first *Critique* above and that in the second *Critique* below.

A third definition later in the *Groundwork* is superficially similar but appears to exclude regarding objective practical principles as maxims:²⁹

“a maxim is the subjective principle of acting, and must be distinguished from the objective principle, namely the practical law. The former contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with³⁰ the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations), and therefore the principle in accordance with which the subject acts; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which he ought to act, i.e., an imperative.”³¹

The term “maxim” is reserved here for a type of practical principle that is subjective in a stronger sense in that it must accord with a particular condition of the subject (e.g. ignorance or inclination). The relationship of practical principle with conformity of the subject’s condition is closer or tighter than in previous definitions. In addition, it identifies an objective practical principle with an imperative. Imperatives or commands (Kant does not distinguish between these) are second order principles which dictate first order principles (maxims). We may command that a maxim is followed: it is an order. Categorical imperatives are counterparts of moral laws directed at agents who are tempted to follow impermissible subjective maxims of actions. It means that such a

²⁹ Henry E Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, (Cambridge: CUP 1990), p.87.

³⁰ Abbott (transl TK Abbott, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics*), London: Longmans 1946) translates this as “according to the conditions...” Paton (transl HJ Paton, *The Moral Law* London: Hutchinson 1948) and Guyer (transl P Guyer, *Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: a Reader’s Guide* London: Continuum 2007) both translate as “in accordance with the conditions...” Either of these seem clearer to me than the use of an adverb in Gregor’s translation as “conformably with the conditions...” in the Cambridge edition that I have used for consistency.

³¹ G 4:421n

principle, an imperative, cannot serve as the maxim itself. Imperatives are the wrong logical type to be a maxim. It follows that this definition (at G 4:421n) demonstrates a genuine difference with the definition that preceded it. The maxim features in the universal law formula of the Categorical Imperative: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”³² Although all three version of the Categorical Imperative are “formulae of the same law”, it is the formula of universal law with its central feature of the maxim that Kant puts as the basis of moral appraisal.³³ The Categorical Imperative tests whether an action is based on a universalisable principle and its moral status.

Like the first definition in the first *Critique*, in that above from the *Groundwork* the maxim relates to intentional action. On a superficial reading, it also makes a clear distinction between a maxim’s subjective status and the contrasting practical law as if they are entirely separate. However further consideration fails to exclude the possibility of a maxim also acting as a practical law. Indeed for a fully rational agent, a practical law would necessarily act as a (subjective) maxim, even though we can distinguish the two principles. Upon what other principle could a wholly rational agent act? But my making or selecting a practical law the maxim of my action does not validate that law as a maxim: my subjective maxim cannot validate a universal law.

In the second *Critique* (1788), Kant tells us that

“practical principles are propositions that contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or *maxims*, when the condition is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will; but

³² G 4:421

³³ G 4: 436

they are objective, or practical *laws*, when the condition is cognized as objective, that is, as holding for the will of every rational being.”³⁴

The condition will be the matter of the maxim if subjective; and will be duty when objective. If the phrase “general determination of the will” means a lasting policy on which an agent acts, then perhaps both first and second order subjective principles can be thought as first order principles on which an agent acts. This definition therefore appears more in line with the first *Groundwork* definition discussed above. Later he clarifies: “maxims are indeed principles but not imperatives”; and also “imperatives therefore, hold objectively and are quite distinct from maxims, which are subjective principles.”³⁵ Nevertheless the law/principle terminology recurs when he refers to a rational being who “is to think of his maxims as practical universal laws” when “he can think of them only as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not by their matter but only by their form.”³⁶ Under the Table of the categories of freedom with respect to the concepts of the good and evil, Kant tabulates of subjective quantity “in accordance with maxims (intentions of the will of the individual).”³⁷ A fully rational being will only consider action that accords with the moral law and is motivated by respect for that law. Such a being’s will is ‘holy’ and, as already noted, his maxims will be practical universal laws.

In the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), Kant’s definition is essentially similar to those already stated but does not solve the question of terminological inexactitude:

³⁴ CPractR 5:19

³⁵ CPractR 5:20

³⁶ CPractR 5:27

³⁷ CPractR 5:66

“A principle that makes certain actions duties is a practical law. A rule that the agent himself makes his principle on subjective grounds is called his maxim, hence different agents can have very different maxims with regard to the same law.....A maxim is a subjective principle of action , a principle which the subject himself makes his rule (how he wills to act)”³⁸

A Romantic Individualist would deny that there are any laws at all and all his principles would be (subjective) maxims. A principle that gets its validity from a subjective act of ours is always a maxim, never a law because it is only subjectively valid.³⁹ A law has universal validity and all maxims are subject to objective criteria. If the maxim involves some inclination or empirical interest of the subject, its universality is limited to those sharing those conditions. Maxims thus have an intimate relationship with *interests*. It will be discussed later to what degree maxims can be viewed in a hierarchy that may accommodate these different emphases.

Finally, Kant again defines the maxim in one of his late (1796) essays in writing that with regard to

“the principle which may serve as the touchstone of all legitimacy, act on a maxim on which you can simultaneously will that it becomes universal law and gives it a meaning that limits it to empirical conditions.”⁴⁰

This adds nothing more to the definitions previously discussed, except in emphasising the limits of the maxim which are previously implicit in the term ‘practical’.

³⁸ MM 6:225

³⁹ Allen Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p.108.

⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant, ‘Towards perpetual peace (1795)’, in Mary Gregor (transl), *Practical Philosophy*, (Cambridge:CUP, 1996). 8:420

To summarise, a maxim:

- is the principle under which an individual wills and acts. Since it is individual and belongs to the agent, it is subjective.
- under which all rational beings *could* act is consistent with the moral law. Since it is universal, it is objective. The moral law is a principle under which all rational beings ought to act and requires that all other maxims they act under are universalisable.
- may be a subjective principle of acting or of volition. (An action is what an agent does, for which rationality and intention apply; volition is the mental act of willing or an act of will preceding a physical movement.)

Paton⁴¹ expresses the maxim elegantly “as a purely personal principle, subjective... as it is a principle on which a rational agent *does* act,...objective...on which every rational agent *would necessarily* act.”

He highlights the distinction between the subjective maxim relating to what we actually do and the objective maxim, which states Kant, “we adopt as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not by their matter but only by their form”.⁴² The objective maxim remains whether I act on it or not. The subjective maxim may be good or bad, because I may act less than fully rationally; but the objective maxim must be good, for it applies to all rational beings: the principle according to which we ought to act.⁴³

⁴¹ Herbert J Paton, *The Moral Law: a study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), p.20.

⁴² CPractR 5:27

⁴³ Stefan Körner, *Kant*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), p.132. (also G 4:421)

2.3 Maxims of actions and maxims of ends

Kant appears to distinguish maxims of actions and maxims of ends where he asks the question, "What is a duty of virtue?"⁴⁴ In his early lectures on morality, Kant represents virtue as the greatest achievement of human reason. Virtue involves struggle, implying the possibility of failure. Thus we "can also ascribe *ethics* but not virtue (properly speaking) to the angels and to God, for in them there is assuredly holiness but not virtue."⁴⁵

The passage⁴⁶ that leads to his conclusion of maxims of actions and ends sees virtue as a strength that can overcome the natural inclinations that tempt us from our duty.⁴⁷ A virtuous person has a good and strong will. It is more than self-constraint, for it is possible to overcome an inclination with another stronger inclination. Rather, virtue is "a self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom".⁴⁸ That inner freedom describes what gives us choice between what we ought to do (our duty) and following our inclinations. It follows that virtue is a constraint "through the representation of one's duty in accordance with the moral law." Self-constraint is possible only by internal lawgiving for ethical duties, in contrast to (juridical) duties of right (*ius*). In the case of duties of right, one may be constrained by external forces, but this does not exclude being restrained by respect for the law *alone*. In that latter case, the action that results would be appropriately described as a virtuous action, even

⁴⁴ MM 6:395

⁴⁵ 'Herder's notes', in *Lectures on Ethics*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) 27:13

⁴⁶ MM 6:394-5

⁴⁷ Cf Guyer who offers two definitions as follows: 1. a particular form of moral excellence...any of certain moral qualities regarded as of particular worth or importance; and 2. conformity of life and conduct with moral principles; voluntary adherence to recognised laws or to standards of right conduct. In: Paul Guyer, *Virtues of Freedom: Selected Essays on Kant*. (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p.v

⁴⁸ MM 6:394

though being an action of right. From this it follows that a virtuous action may not always be a duty of virtue ("strictly speaking"). The distinction that Kant introduces at this point is that a duty of virtue is concerned with what is *material* in its maxim and not only with what is *formal*. The material is concerned with an end that is also a duty. An ethical obligation is wide because there may be numerous ends, because they are freely chosen by the moral agent, whereas obligations of (juridical) right are laid down by others. Thus

"with respect to the *end* of actions that is also a duty, that is, what one *ought* to make one's *end* (what is material), there can be several virtues; and since obligation to the maxim of such an end is called a duty of virtue, there are many duties of virtue."⁴⁹

Fulfilling one's duty is the act of a good will whose intentions are to follow the moral law and realise the ends that are implied or expressed by the maxim. This leads Kant to the "supreme principle of virtue: act in accordance with a maxim of *ends* that it can be a universal law for everyone to have."⁵⁰

A maxim of ends identifies the purpose of the maxim, the object to be achieved, but not how to achieve it. That object⁵¹ (end) must be a good one. By contrast, the maxim of actions specifies the way that the end is to be achieved. There may be several ways in which a maxim of ends could be achieved, so that several maxims of actions could

⁴⁹ MM 6:395

⁵⁰ MM 6:395

⁵¹ Lewis White Beck clarifies Kant's meaning of the word 'object'. "The word 'object' denotes two quite different things. It may mean an actual state of affairs, a physical thing and its psychological effects that can be brought into existence by action. The production of such an object requires empirical knowledge of its causes and skill in applying this knowledge. It is in this sense only that the word 'object' is to be used in analysing an empirical practical reason. But the word has another, quite unusual, meaning. It may refer to an internal setting of the will, to an act of decision itself without regard to the causality of will in bringing its object (in the first sense) into existence. This is the meaning that the word will have in the analysis of pure practical reason. (*A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* 1960, p.92)

relate to one maxim of ends. For a rational being, all actions must be purposive. A purposeless action is unworthy of a rational being. It follows that all maxims of actions imply or express an end. Where the end is explicitly stated, the maxim may be termed a maxim of ends; and where it is only implied, it may be termed a maxim of action.⁵² In brief, all moral maxims have a purposive element, but this may be irrelevant in some contexts and therefore suppressed; in others, the purposive content is expressed and these would be maxims of ends. Most of Kant's actual examples of maxims do not include an explicit account of the end of the action.⁵³ (All of Kant's examples of maxims contain descriptions of kinds of actions, but it is the choice of ends that determines the choice of actions, although several means or actions could of course be appropriate for a particular end.)

Kant had already set this out in his *Inquiry* of 1764 where he writes that

“...every ought expresses a necessity of the action and is capable of two meanings. To be specific: either I *ought* to do something (as a *means*) if I want something else (as an *end*), or I *ought* to do something else (as an *end*) and make it actual. The former may be called the necessity of the means and the latter the necessity of the ends.”⁵⁴

The ‘ought’ here expresses our obligations and it is the fulfilment of those obligations, with the actions described, that should be expressed in our maxims.

⁵² Onora O’Neill writes, “Following a usage Kant suggests but does not develop, I shall call maxims whose purposive component is suppressed *maxims of action*, and those whose purposive component is expressed...*maxims of ends*.” In: *Acting on Principle* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p.103.

⁵³ Nelson Potter, ‘Maxims in Kant’s Moral Philosophy’, in *Faculty Publications*. Department of Philosophy, (1994). <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/philosfacpub/13> Accessed 2/8/17.

⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, ‘Inquiry concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals’, in David Walford (transl), *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 2:298

The difference between the doctrines of right and virtue clarifies this. In law (*ius*) an end is set for us externally. We must then work out how to realise those ends. Having identified the possible actions required, their maxims can be assessed and the action willed, based on those maxims. These would therefore be maxims of action. But “ethics takes the other way.”⁵⁵ If we set ends for ourselves, we exhibit our freedom, but in doing so involve our inclinations. The maxim that describes such an end will be empirical. It cannot therefore be our duty:

“if maxims were to be adopted on the basis of those ends (all of which are self-seeking), one could not really speak of the concept of duty. Hence in ethics the concept of duty will lead to ends and will have to establish maxims with respect to ends we ought to set ourselves, grounding them in accordance with moral principles.”⁵⁶

Three different things are taken up into our maxim about which we can choose: our basic moral character, our basic ends of action and our actions themselves. To express this slightly differently, character, ends and the moral character of actions. Or, kinds of actions, ends of action and incentives for action as an expression of moral character.⁵⁷ Ends may be implied but will always be present. “The conformity of a maxim of an action with a law is the morality of the action.”⁵⁸

Kant only recognises two material ends that are our duty to promote: the happiness of others⁵⁹ and to be deserving of happiness ourselves, that is, to seek our own perfection.

The maxims for these ends will be, respectively, ‘the happiness of others is good’ and

⁵⁵ MM 6:382

⁵⁶ MM 6:382

⁵⁷ Potter ‘Maxims in Kant’s Moral Philosophy’, pp.64-5.

⁵⁸ MM 6: 225

⁵⁹ MM 6: 393; and 385

‘my self-perfection is good.’ Maxims of action will then be needed in order to realise these maxims of ends. To do so will require secondary ancillary maxims of ends. For example, promoting the happiness of others may involve learning the language of those around me, leading to a maxim of ‘learning the language of my neighbours improves the possibility of promoting others’ happiness.’ That will then require maxims of action: ‘doing a weekly language class is good’ or ‘enrolling in a distance learning programme is good’. How I achieve my stated moral end will depend on empirical factors: what suits my learning style, available local facilities and so on. This demonstrates a hierarchy in maxims: the two material maxims of ends that are our duty, with subsidiary maxims of ends, then maxims of actions that realise them in practice. Because man has a moral predisposition, rational man should adopt the moral law as a supreme maxim; but “he is, however also dependent on the incentives of his sensuous nature because of his equally innocent natural predisposition, and he incorporates them too into his maxim.”⁶⁰ Thus he adopts both the moral law and his sensuous nature into his maxim. Kant then asks which of these two maxims is supreme; or as he puts it “which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other...aware that they cannot remain on a par with each other.” Alas, man’s self-love is the incentive he often adopts: “There is in man a natural propensity to evil”.⁶¹

This propensity is radical because it corrupts the ground of all maxims and is inextirpable. It is intrinsic to us. Extirpation could only happen through good maxims, but this is not possible if the “subjective supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted.” Nevertheless it must be possible, if not to extirpate this propensity, then to overcome it as free beings with choice. This reversal of the ethical order in and

⁶⁰ Rel 6:36

⁶¹ Rel 6:37

through his maxims does not exclude action being in conformity with the moral law. The “depravity” of human nature is not malicious or the incentives of its maxims diabolical. Rather we demonstrate a “perversity” of the heart. Reason can use, he writes, “the unity of maxims in general, which is characteristic of the moral law, to introduce into the incentives of inclination, under the name of happiness, a unity of maxims they cannot otherwise have.”⁶² Empirical factors can help – which is good. Truthfulness is an example, the adoption of which spares us being ensnared in the “serpentine coils” of our lies. Part of the importance of the analysis of maxims of ends and of actions is the key it provides to the central role of maxims in Kant’s ethical theory. Good indwells with evil in man’s nature. “We call a man evil not because he performs actions that are evil (contrary to law) but because these are so constituted that they allow the inference of evil maxims in him.”⁶³ Our propensity to evil results in evil deeds from our weakness in complying with good maxims (“frailty”, *akrasia*); from the impurity of our reasoning in which the moral law alone is not a sufficient incentive; and from choosing maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (depravity, corruption or perversity of the human heart).⁶⁴

The distinction that Kant makes between duties of narrow and of wide obligation also points up the distinction between maxims of actions and of ends. Some obligations may be broad: an obligation to assist the needy, for example, does not define who are “the needy”, what assistance should be rendered, how, when etc. A maxim of ends can define that we should assist, but it will require maxims of action to set out for us,

⁶² Rel 6:36-37

⁶³ Rel 6:20

⁶⁴ Rel 6:29-30

individually (that is, subjectively) what we should do. I will set aside the overlap between duties that are of wide obligation, imperfect and of virtue. Kant tells us that

“a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another⁶⁵ (e.g. love of one’s neighbour in general by love of one’s parents)...the wider the duty, therefore, the more imperfect is it man’s obligation to action.”

In determining how there can be a law for the maxims of actions, the concept of an end that is also a duty is required. Law and the concept of duty are bound together (“in immediate relation”), as the Categorical Imperative demonstrates. In ethics we must think of this principle as the law of our own will (that is, as subjective maxims) but which could also be the will of others. For an action to be free, an agent must intend and choose an end. If there is an end that is also a duty, then maxims of actions are conditional on being possible to give universal law.⁶⁶ The wilfulness of an action is removed by a law, which distinguishes it from a recommendation, where knowing the means to an end is all that is needed.

There is a problem in deciding how to describe an act for a non-teleological theory, highlighted by part of Anscombe’s critique of Kant.⁶⁷ Any act has an infinity of circumstances and of remote or improbable consequences; acts are composite but without all falling under moral principles. One has only to consider the debates around informed consent to medical treatment to appreciate the importance of judgements involved. We can conceive of more benign examples: placing a bet on the greyhounds

⁶⁵ MM 6:390

⁶⁶ MM 6:389

⁶⁷ “His (=Kant’s) rule about maxims is useless without stipulation as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it.” GEM Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in R Crisp and M Slote (eds), *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: OUP 1997), pp.26-44.

may be aimed at winning money, but that isn't what I am doing in placing the bet. In fact, winning money is not the most likely outcome. An intentional description of the act would therefore be wrong. The intention with which the agent acts is not included in the intentional descriptions of the act.⁶⁸ Various components of an act may be relevant for moral assessment and we may be unable to isolate one act description. The context of the act may be important and the use of language may colour judgement. 'Assist dying' has a different ambience from 'killing.' There is no rigid rule for deciding the maxim's 'relevant act description' in assessing right action. Testing a maxim against the Formula of Universal Law version of the Categorical Imperative raises a problem without an apparent solution. Our actions can be described in many ways, at various levels of specificity, varying generality, with content that may describe intention and purpose variably and trying to determine whether we are searching for "the" maxim or the relevant one or what should be included. It is unlikely that any proposal will identify just the right maxim to test for each and every course of action; and troublesome conflicts of duties easily arise. There is no easy solution to determining what constitutes a relevant description of a maxim. No description seems likely to describe the right maxim for every course of action we might consider. Some act descriptions couldn't be willed or conceived as universal law, yet refer to morally neutral actions (e.g. "playing chess with a better player"). Contrariwise, some maxims could be conceived or universalised despite being morally wrong (e.g. "lying to redheads"). A second problem is that of an inability to resolve conflicts of duties, especially narrow, strict or perfect duties. Should I repay money that I owe when I know the person who loaned the money will use it to seriously harm another person? Kant addresses conflicts of duty by

⁶⁸ Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle: An Essay on Kantian Ethics*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p.271.

initially suggesting that since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain actions and since two opposing rules cannot be necessary at the same time, then “a collision of duties and obligations is inconceivable.”⁶⁹ Having articulated that apparently dismissive view, he then concedes that a subject may have, by a self-prescribed rule (which I interpret as a maxim), two grounds of obligation, neither of which is sufficient to put him under obligation and “the stronger ground of obligation prevails.” This fails to establish what should be done if the grounds of obligation are deemed equal, or if the obligating grounds are different, or what “moral residue” is left over by following one course (that is, are we also obliged to offer restitution for the dutiful action not discharged?). Wood raises the possibility that Kantian ethics can allow some limited truth to those doctrines that fall under the name of “cultural relativism”, citing Fichte’s advocacy of a system of ethical duties that comes to be defined by an account of a rational social order.⁷⁰ But Kantian ethics is not the same as Kant’s ethics and I will explore Fichte no further. Kant’s guidance on conflicts fails to give an adequate account of exactly how “grounds of obligation” might be best construed nor how to measure them in order to make comparisons. Complex cases lack simple solutions.

Galvin⁷¹ identifies a third problem in testing contradiction in the will. The Contradiction in the Will test means that nobody could will not to be open to the beneficence of others if needed or will to not develop one’s talents. This creates a contradiction in willing that leads to rejection of the maxim by the Categorical Imperative’s formula of universal law. The formula of universal law cannot test a maxim according to whether it would

⁶⁹ MM 6:224

⁷⁰ Allen W Wood. *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: CUP 2008), p.165.

⁷¹ Richard Galvin. ‘The Universal Law Formulas’, in Thomas E Hill (ed), *The Blackwell Guide to Kant’s Ethics*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.76

make us happy or is agreeable to us. But a very narrow criterion for rational willing in terms of consistency or coherence is unlikely to generate contradictions for all but a few of the most egregiously “unwillable” maxims. So, what could be rationally willed? One approach might be to test the maxim against the formula of humanity as an end in itself or the formula of autonomy and the Realm of Ends. For example, could we will the maxim if it treated humanity or any person as an end and never as a means? Such a proposal would transgress Kant’s view that the different formulae of the Categorical Imperative are independent of each other and equivalent, but the coherence of the formula of universal law would be maintained. Given that the formula of universal law gives no practical laws but only a test for maxims, using the formula of autonomy -that is the author of objective practical laws- makes good sense. In principle too, it might give a richer account of what we can rationally will, but I am unconvinced that this proposal from Galvin would work. Significantly, he provides no example.

2.4 What are maxims for?

In 2.3 above, having analysed what a maxim *is* and its relationship to practical laws, I now explore what it *does*: whether it only enables us to test the morality of our actions using the Categorical Imperative or whether it has other functions too, such as reflecting or determining our moral character and the goodness of our will. The Categorical Imperative itself does not tell us what actions to do; rather it is the maxim that is the Categorical Imperative’s object.

A maxim's primary role is to provide a way of morally assessing actions: it contributes to a theory of proper deliberation and does so directly by posing the question whether

we can will it as universal law; and indirectly by the question whether the proposed action treats anyone as mere means⁷²

The degree to which one follows certain maxims cannot distinguish between virtue and vice.⁷³ It is the relationship to the moral law that matters. In Aristotle's moral philosophy, the optimal expression of what ought to be done lies between two contrasting qualities – in Kant's own example, between prodigality and avarice. The *amount* to which one follows a maxim for either or both of these cannot define the right action. Kant expressly disagrees with Aristotle's doctrine of virtue as a mean between two qualities.⁷⁴ In Kant's example, he states that if good management consists in a mean between prodigality and avarice then it cannot be achieved by diminishing prodigality by saving, on the one hand, or increasing spending by the miser, on the other. The two qualities both have their own maxims, which contradict the other. Avarice is distinguished from thrift, not by simply going farther, but because it has an "entirely different" maxim. Their opposed maxims distinguish miserliness and prodigality, not a matter of degree.

"In the same way, the vice of prodigality is not to be sought in an excessive enjoyment of one's means but in the bad maxim which makes the use of one's means the sole end, without regard for preserving them."⁷⁵

The Categorical Imperative is presented as the supreme moral principle, a law, valid for all rational beings. Superficially, it appears straightforward: it commands no particular deeds; rather it expresses "the conditions under which alone a principle can have the

⁷² Talbot Brewer. 'Maxims and virtue', *Philosophical Review* 111, no.4 (2002), pp.539-72.

⁷³ MM 6:404

⁷⁴ MM 6:404, 405, 432

⁷⁵ MM6:404n

character of a categorical demand.”⁷⁶ It states: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law”;⁷⁷ or in its later formulation: “act only on that maxim that can also hold as a universal law.”⁷⁸ The consequences of this are spelled out:

“You must therefore first consider your actions in terms of their subjective principles; but you can know whether this principle also holds objectively only in this way: that when your reason subjects it to the test of conceiving yourself as also giving universal law through it, it qualifies for such a giving of universal law.”⁷⁹

The Categorical Imperative functions therefore as a test of maxims. It provides us with the supreme principle of the will telling us how to determine the maxims according to which we ought to act; the maxim is the principle on which we do act and whose validity is tested by the Imperative. On this basis, if we ask what maxims are for or ask what is their purpose, the answer is that they enable the morality of our actions to be determined. Since the good will and not the consequences of our actions determine the moral acceptability of any deed, maxims have often been construed as expressing something like intentions. The difference between mere behaviour and an action is that the latter proceeds from a maxim of the will. Thus, one commentator states,

⁷⁶ Julius Ebbinghaus, ‘Interpretation and misinterpretation of the categorical imperative’, *Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no.4,(1954), pp.97-108

⁷⁷ G 4:421

⁷⁸ MM 6:225

⁷⁹ MM 6:225

“Maxims simply articulate an agent’s intentions or disposition, that is, the rules a person adopts and on which a person actually acts, unless, of course, that person is acting non-rationally, say, absent mindedly or while delirious.”⁸⁰

For another, they are the “deeper intentions of all our conscious actions.”⁸¹ And for another, “I concluded...that they (maxims) are best thought of as agents’ intentions”; and she continues,

“In construing maxims as intentions I was saying nothing very new: the long tradition that reads Kant’s ethics as a ‘philosophy of the subject’ and the long running criticism that his ethics is too individualistic, both commonly construe maxims as intentions.”⁸²

It would be unfair not to add the subsequent gloss on this statement: that Kant uses ‘maxim’ “to cover both agents’ intentions in acting and their intentions for the future, both their intentions to do specified acts and their intentions to pursue specified ends or objectives.” This has been challenged; and challenged in a way that brings back into focus the intellectual origins of Kant’s maxims, with which I began in ch2. Albrecht⁸³ has argued that Kant’s ethics of maxims should be understood less in relation to Wolff or Baumgarten, but to Rousseau. In Rousseau’s use, this term (from the French ‘maxime’) is used to mean a relatively stable rule adopted for one’s own conduct. Albrecht argues from this that maxims in Kant are not principles on which we consciously base our conduct every day. Apart from anything else, just as we cannot

⁸⁰ Roger J Sullivan, *Kant’s Moral Theory*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p.28.

⁸¹ Jens Timmerman, ‘Kant’s Puzzling Ethics of Maxims’. *Harvard Review of Philosophy* 8 (2000) pp.39-52.

⁸² Onora O’Neill, ‘Acting on Principle’. 2nd edn., p.13.

⁸³ Michael Albrecht, ‘Kant’s justification of the Role of Maxims in Ethics’, in Karl Ameriks and Otfried Höffe (eds), *Kant’s Moral and Legal Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp.139-156

ever, “even by the most strenuous self-examination get *entirely* behind our covert incentives”,⁸⁴ so too “we cannot observe maxims...even within ourselves.”⁸⁵ Contrary to being part of our decision making about our daily conduct, says Albrecht, acting on maxims is rare:

"To have a character signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason. Although these principles may sometimes indeed be false and incorrect, nevertheless the formal element of the will in general, to act according to firm principles has something precious and admirable in it; for it is also something rare.”⁸⁶

But firstly, the Rousseau link would be, at best, circumstantial evidence upon which to reinterpret an orthodox interpretation of the maxim. Secondly, such a reinterpretation in the face of the definitions of a maxim given by Kant in his critical and post-critical moral philosophy requires strong evidence. I do not believe that can be adduced.

Albrecht also suggests that the maxim is understood differently in Kant’s anthropological writings. In the Bergk *Menschenkunde* lecture notes, he is said to have stated that

“there are in fact human beings who in respect to their actions and their intentions are not determined at all, and who do not act according to any maxims at all, thus they also have no character.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ G 4:407

⁸⁵ MM 6:20

⁸⁶ Immanuel Kant, ‘Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view’, in Gunter Zöllner and Robert B Loudon (eds), *Anthropology, History and Education*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) 7:292

⁸⁷ Immanuel Kant, ‘Lectures of the Winter Semester (1781-2) based on the transcriptions *Menschenkunde*, Petersburg’, Robert B Loudon (transl) in Allen Wood, Robert B Loudon (eds), *Lectures on Anthropology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 25:1169 (LA hereafter)

Having a character is something that is developed over time, not every day,

“like a kind of rebirth, a certain solemnity of making a vow to oneself...that which marks a resolution in the principles in the human being.”

The young, who must develop character must therefore learn to act on their own maxims. Kant emphasises the importance of maxims to character: “A human being of character has maxims in all things, in friendship, action and religion.”⁸⁸ Moreover,

“a noble character is he who does something meritorious; all of his maxims are principles where the private good is placed after the common good...our moral doctrines spoil character in this way because they are all based on sentimentality. For we can do what is good from love or from duty. Duty has its definite principles but love has its allurements that we can seldom explain and which do not last.”⁸⁹

Bergk’s notes were published long before most others, reflecting both Bergk’s devotion to Kant’s thought and their perceived value. The quotations above are compatible with Kant’s thought elsewhere, but the emphasis on character fails to establish that the maxim should be reinterpreted in the way Albrecht suggests.

Yet Albrecht’s view emphasises the maxim rather more than most commentators.

Maxims guide actions and that implies some intentional persistence: they should remain valid over a period of time. They are principles that we may wish to modify or to change but infrequently and in line with changing circumstances or fresh insights from rational reflection. The ethical demand of the Categorical Imperative validates the

⁸⁸ LA 25:1170

⁸⁹ LA 25:1171

subjective maxim, through which the subject wills to act. That demand means that we *ought* to make maxims for ourselves: that is the implication of subjectivity coupled with the demand of the moral law. Maxims are not about the way we act, but about the ends of our actions in terms of which our maxim is grounded. We bind ourselves in making maxims: the moral law is something that *we* give universally - for all rational beings.⁹⁰

Maxims of greater generality are likely to change with slower frequency than those of greater specificity. Thus a maxim that ‘it is good that I increase my knowledge of Kant’s philosophy’ can subsume a maxim that ‘reading a chapter of Kant’s writing daily would be good.’ However, if my vision fails, the more specific maxim must change, while the broader one remains. Whether it is therefore rare to act on a maxim does depend on its specificity. If the highest level of maxim, the *Gesinnung*, represents moral character, then Albrecht is surely right to maintain that it changes rarely. It also suggests that we always act on some maxim, if we concede, firstly, that the maxim may be of wide specificity and, secondly, there are cases where it may be difficult to distinguish acting upon a maxim from behaviour that is almost automatic. They may become overtly conscious when we are asked to justify our actions⁹¹ – yet another example of what maxims *do*.

In the second *Critique*’s definition, a maxim has under it “several practical rules”. What constitutes a “practical rule” is undefined and the distinction between such a rule and a maxim is not clear. All actions have maxims, yet not all actions have *moral* maxims: he actively condemns the pedant who would make the choice of fish or meat subject to morality.⁹² But practical rules would be as irrelevant here as maxims, if indeed we can

⁹⁰ G 4:438

⁹¹ Stefan Körner, *Kant*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), p.133.

⁹² MM 6:409

distinguish them. For it seems clear that practical rules in the sense of ‘how to do it’ may have moral consequences and hence indistinguishable from maxims. In summary then, Albrecht’s notion of the infrequent use of maxims and the emphasis on the ‘higher’ level of the maxim makes good sense.

In providing a subjective principle for action, the maxim offers a constructive step to objectively valid laws.⁹³ Objectively valid laws enable the agent to determine his/her will. Any act of willing must be based in something concrete and maxims relate to the concrete, to the object of the action. All actions of a rational being are willed.

2.5 The structure of maxims

Maxims, besides a sufficient indication of what act the reasons call for⁹⁴ have propositional form and structure which makes them apt for reasoning. The standards that they articulate can be used to shape action. This makes them useful for practical purposes.⁹⁵ In structure a maxim is expressed by a quantifier (- such as ‘all’, ‘some’ etc) plus an agent description, a verb and an act description.⁹⁶ For example: all adults should vote. Here ‘all’ is the quantifier; ‘adult’ is the agent description; ‘should’ is the verb; and ‘vote’ is the act description. The purpose here can be added: for example, “to change the government’ or ‘to demonstrate his civic duty’ and so on. This resembles Allison’s description:⁹⁷ “when in S-type situations, do A-type acts”, where S-type

⁹³ Rudiger Buber, ‘Another look at Maxims’, in Predrag Cicovacki (ed.), *Kant’s Legacy: Essays in Honor of Lewis White Beck*. (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), pp.245-59.

⁹⁴ Jerome B Schneewind. ‘Autonomy, obligation and virtue: an overview of Kant’s moral philosophy’, in Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p.318.

⁹⁵ Onora O’Neill, ‘Acting on Principle’, 2nd edn., p.13

⁹⁶ Onora O’Neill ‘Acting on Principle’, 2nd edn., p.47.

⁹⁷ Henry E Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp.85-94.

situations describes the circumstances and A-type acts the action. O'Neill suggests that a schematic structure could be:

Any (all, none, some) ought to (may, deserves to, etc) do/omit-----if.....

or it could be:

I (he, X) ought to (may, deserves to , etc.) do/omit-----if.....

where -----is an act description and is an agent.

The allocations of functions is similar: the act description (-----) in the example is 'vote' and the agent description (.....) 'if she is an adult'.

The relationship between different practical principles and between principles and instantiations of principles is complex.⁹⁸ Although principles are not particulars, when adopted by me as a maxim they are: an agent's maxim is a particular. Maxims are not fully determinate and their structure implies a multitude of actions. A maxim of 'I will write this thesis' could be acted on tomorrow, by candlelight, in the library etc in an infinity of different ways. If maxims are not fully determinate, questions arise as to how it is possible to test them.

To be acceptable against the Categorical Imperative, a maxim should not be capable of being shown incoherent in being universalised. A maxim fails this test of acceptability if the instrumental and consequential commitments contradict one another. For example, if I think of a world in which cheating is universal, then the maxim fails in its instrumental and consequential commitments because cheating would be impossible in such a world as there would be no underlying trust for it to happen. As conceived, the

⁹⁸ Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle*, 2nd edn, p.57.

structure of the maxim is contradictory: it demonstrates a contradiction in conception. In a parallel test,⁹⁹ a concept of contradiction of the will is proposed. It may be possible to conceive of a world without beneficence. But to conceive of such a world involves that agent ignoring the need for such beneficence for themselves. The instrumental conditions of action to promote my own happiness would be lacking. Indifference to the needs of others cannot be coherently adopted by all (i.e. universalised) in a world of finite agents. Such a maxim demonstrates volitional inconsistency (that is, inconsistency and contradiction of the will.)¹⁰⁰

2.6 Maxims in moral education

Maxims are important in moral education. Kant addresses this in the first section of the *Doctrine of the Methods of Ethics* in the *Metaphysics*. Vice is too tempting and Kant thinks that education in virtue should be taught systematically. He is sceptical of preaching; rather, he thinks that the teacher must engage in dialogue to enable his pupil to learn and develop his own maxims. Neither Socratic dialogue nor lecturing can engage the immature pupil. The maxims of others will not make a child virtuous.

"A maxim of virtue consists precisely in the subjective autonomy of each human being's practical reason and so implies that the law itself, not the conduct of other human beings, must serve as our incentive."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle*, 2nd edn, p.27.

¹⁰⁰ See also Galvin in 2.3 above; Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp.87 *et seq.*

¹⁰¹ MM 6:480

Nevertheless, example has its value: by the teacher, exemplary conduct helps to cultivate virtue, while bad behaviour offers cautionary examples in others. In this way patterns of behaviour - habits - and maxims of others may be learned. Such maxims are not sufficient.

"To form a habit is to establish a lasting inclination apart from any maxim, through repeated gratifications of that inclination; it is a mechanism of sense rather than a principle of thought."¹⁰²

He warns that habits are easy to acquire and harder to lose. Kant is optimistic that his programme will enable the development of practical reason which will offer the pupil something that will carry him through life: the ability to conquer all the forces of nature within, that may conflict with the pupil's moral principles. The pupil will be able to realise his autonomy.

A similar programme is outlined in his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, published in 1803 by Kant's younger colleague, Friedrich Theodor Rink, but dating to a series of lectures given on four occasions between 1776 and 1786. His remarks are entirely consistent with the *Metaphysics*. Kant claims that he is giving a systematic concept of the entire purpose of education and the means to attain it.¹⁰³ As regards moral education he writes:

“In this case it is based not on discipline but on maxims. Everything is spoiled if one tries to ground this culture on examples, threats, punishments, and so forth. Then it would be merely discipline. One must see to it that the pupil acts from his own maxims, not from habit, that he not only does the good, but that he does

¹⁰² MM 6:479

¹⁰³ Immanuel Kant, 'Lectures on Pedagogy', in Robert B Loudon, Gunter Zöller (ed and transl), *Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp.437-485.

it because it is good. For the entire moral value of actions consists in the maxims concerning the good. Physical education differs from moral education in that the former is passive for the pupil while the latter is active. He must at all times comprehend the ground of the action and its derivation from the concepts of duty.”¹⁰⁴

Later he writes,

“Moral culture must be based on maxims, not on discipline. The latter prevents bad habits, the former forms the way of thinking. One must see to it that the child accustoms itself to act according to maxims and not according to certain incentives. Discipline leaves us only with a habit, which, after all, fades away over the years. The child should learn to act according to maxims whose fairness it itself understands.”¹⁰⁵

He goes on to set out how character consists in the “aptitude of acting according to maxims” and that the grounding of character is the priority in moral education. Behind these recommendations is a progressive view that the developing child must understand the value of reason in making moral choices: that is, a child or youth should learn the way that maxims of actions relate to moral behaviour, and not merely build up a series of habits, based upon the dogmatic assertions of teachers, pastors or parents. Doing things by habit may have a value when very young, but more needs development. Kant is scathing about mere habit. If our actions only reflect habit, then we shall cease to act on maxims and are likely to fall prey to self-love. Yet isn’t habit indirectly what

¹⁰⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Pedagogy* 9:475

¹⁰⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Pedagogy* 9:480

Albrecht is commending: for what is the significance of moral character if not a consistency of behaviour in a situation of moral complexity?

2.7 Maxims and habit

Adoption of a maxim may not amount to a deliberate and premeditated process of thought. Many of our actions are seemingly spontaneous. Habits are developed by constant repetition and what was originally a well thought choice may become an unthought reflex.

"To form a habit is to establish a lasting inclination apart from any maxim, through frequently repeated gratifications of that inclination; it is a mechanism of sense rather than a principle of thought."¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the initiation of the act on the first occasion was conscious and, in some degree, considered. It remains my act and a result of my choice. And we may repeat actions in order to achieve different ends. I may drink a glass of wine in order to relax; I may drink another because I wish to savour its taste; a third to provide amusement for my friends at my behaviour; and another to feed my addiction.

Maxims are not necessarily permanent features of our moral life,¹⁰⁷ but then neither are habits. We may select different actions to achieve our ends or we may lose interest in a particular end (or achieve a long term goal) and pursue another one - perhaps even

¹⁰⁶ MM 6:479

¹⁰⁷ Manfred Kuehn offers a radical exposition in saying that something is only a maxim "if the person who formulated it is willing to live by it for the rest of his life. Constancy and firmness are required characteristics of maxims. Once accepted, they must not be revoked – ever." (Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*. Cambridge: CUP 2001, p146). This is surely wrong. Old maxims should be discarded; new ones should be adopted because new goals may arise and new means of achieving a goal discovered.

through the same action. Our intentions can alter. Maxims don't have to be held permanently. Nevertheless it would be inconsistent to act upon different maxims in similar circumstances unless previous experience had demonstrated sound reasons for change. And, as previously noted, consistency in moral behaviour – which is what is witnessed by appearing to act on the same maxim – is what constitutes moral character.¹⁰⁸ It is the agent that must self-apply the maxim, amend it, negate it and know it.

How extensively must an action be described? In writing a letter I pick up a pen, fill it with ink, make marks on paper etc. These individual actions are both habit and subsidiary to a greater purpose, which falls under a maxim of ends. Surely the individual component actions are best construed as part of a behaviour, that is, part of an *overall* action. "Maxims are those underlying principles or intentions by which we guide and control our more specific intentions."¹⁰⁹ Most of the component actions have no moral content – most habits don't and therefore not based on *moral* maxims. How I hold my pen or the style of my handwriting are not matters of morality.

If the end is the key defining feature of a maxim, then it might be thought that an action is often best understood as composite: numerous individual actions may be required to achieve a particular end, specified in the maxim. In the example above, all the subsidiary actions are part of one composite action that the maxim will refer to. Yet it might be argued that such subsidiary actions themselves serve subsidiary ends and therefore should relate to (subsidiary) maxims - to which an infinite regress beckons.

¹⁰⁸ "To have a character signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason...character has an inner worth and is beyond all price." *Lectures on Pedagogy* 7:292

¹⁰⁹ Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p.84.

Ends, actions and maxims can all be multiplied. Not *all* maxims have to be underlying or fundamental or overall principles or moral.

This creates an objection in assessing moral worth: “when moral worth is what is at issue, what counts is not actions, which one sees, but those inner principles of actions that one does not see.”¹¹⁰ The assessment of these may be further complicated by self-deception or mistaken beliefs. There may never have been a true friend.¹¹¹ This throws into question the value of the Categorical Imperative as a test of moral action, although it can be asserted that at least the action will not positively violate duty or be morally unworthy.¹¹²

2.8 Maxims and moral worthiness

Kant believes that in estimating the moral worth of our actions some good actions are done without inclination and therefore from duty. Yet our intentions are strictly unknowable. The maxims of our actions are sometimes opaque to ourselves and we infer the intentions of others from external behaviour. If we observe a masked man in a striped jersey climbing out of a window at midnight carrying a bag labelled ‘swag’, we assume a maxim of theft, not a collection of goods in fancy dress for a children’s charity, after no answer on ringing the house bell. The problem deepens when an action conforms with duty or fits a purpose that benefits the agent: the shopkeeper who does not overcharge the inexperienced customer.¹¹³ But principled action embraces both moral worthiness and duty in the way most of us think. O’Neill suggests that Kant’s primary concern is with moral worthiness:

¹¹⁰ G 4:407

¹¹¹ G 4:407

¹¹² Onora O’Neill, ‘*Constructions of Reason*’ (Cambridge: CUP 1989), p.86.

¹¹³ G 4:398

"It is quite usual for us to think of principled action as combining both duty and moral worthiness, which we regard as separate matters...or alternatively as revealing a moral worthiness that goes beyond all duty...Correspondingly, it is quite usual for us to think of unprincipled action as in any case morally unworthy but still, in some cases, within the bounds of duty...This is beyond the bounds of Kant's way of thinking which sees the central case of duty as that of action that has moral worth and regards as derivative that which accords merely in external respects with morally worthy action."¹¹⁴

Thus she thinks that a poisoner who inadvertently administers a life-saving drug has violated a duty by acting in a morally unworthy way. His underlying principle is repugnant, like the Nazi who shoots the innocent but claims a maxim of doing his job. The test against the Categorical Imperative is the underlying maxim. It is best applied by the agent, because only the agent can adopt or reject maxims, although sometimes an outsider can be capable of assessing an underlying intention - the maxim- better than the agent.

In the *Groundwork*, the man who preserves his life not from inclination but from duty without loving it, is said to have a maxim of "moral content."¹¹⁵ What gives moral worth is the maxim. Where we take joy in beneficent action, the action may conform with duty and be "amiable" but has no true moral worth being "on the same footing with other inclinations." The same analysis applies to the cold-hearted philanthropist. Kant's conclusion is that the moral worth of an action done from duty depends on the "maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon."¹¹⁶ It is not based on the outcome of the action but on the principle of its volition. Against this, in referring a maxim to the

¹¹⁴ Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, p.86.

¹¹⁵ G 4: 398

¹¹⁶ G 4: 399

Categorical Imperative (in its formulation of Universal Law), the maxim cannot have moral content since it is what is to be tested to determine the permissibility of the act, an action that would otherwise be pointless.

Kant believed that actions are morally good when determined by their maxim's representation of goodness *qua* a moral law: "maxims present actions as they are or are believed to be good."¹¹⁷ To the schema that I discussed above on the structure of the maxim, should also be added the moral law: whatever I should do in specified circumstances for whatever purpose, I am permitted to do because it conforms to moral law. This links to the concept of the good will and can give the maxim moral content. As Herman argues, "all action is for some end taken to be good....Maxims of action express what an agent wills: her action and intention as understood to be good and chosen because good."¹¹⁸ Moral worth isn't a kind of goodness originating from the motive of duty after an action's evaluation. Rather, duty motivated actions have moral worth and actions have moral worth when their maxims have moral content. As Herman expresses it, moral worth marks a unity of motive and maxim content.

Some actions are permissible but good (as in duties of wide obligation) but others are wholly indifferent.¹¹⁹ For these behaviours, there could be a maxim also: Kant still describes them as actions and an action must be capable of having a maxim. The maxim of Kant's person of "fantastically virtuous" character¹²⁰ (whom he condemns) perhaps should be: to eat fish or meat is something I can do according to my whim. 'To eat fish or meat' would describe the action; 'something I can do' says something about me as

¹¹⁷ Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.218.

¹¹⁸ Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, pp. 209, 217.

¹¹⁹ MM 6:409

¹²⁰ MM 6:409

agent (my circumstances); and 'according to my whim' refers to my purpose (or in this case, almost the lack of it).

2.9 Specificity of maxims

This leaves two problems. Firstly, if I do not know my intentions, how is it possible to have a maxim? Secondly, into how much detail must a maxim be broken to be accepted as a maxim or, *per contra*, if a broad brush generalisation, at what point does it cease to be a maxim and merely become a general principle?

Kant envisages not knowing my intentions in stating that a maxim contains a practical rule that may conform with "often (his) ignorance or also (his) inclinations".¹²¹ How is it possible to analyse my action if I do not know what end I am really aiming at and am therefore unable to formulate a maxim? Yet Kant tells us that all actions must have maxims. Is the maxim merely the policy that I should follow? But a policy is not an action and is little more than a broad idea of a 'direction of travel' in certain situations, potentially with many sub-clauses. A policy may comprise a consistent adoption of several consistent maxims: the policy is a collective term for (the purpose of?) a group of maxims. A policy will lack those fine details (because it is bound to lack details) that are essential for moral evaluation. If a maxim is a proposition that enables moral assessment to be made, then a policy may lack precisely those essential details. If maxims *are* policies, then they become remarkably open-ended. How close to a maxim-as-policy would an action have to be to count as falling under that maxim? To function, a maxim should be neither over-generalised nor over-particularised. If maxims are too particular they cannot be construed as principles and would be only capable of application to every single individual action. Moreover, if I am unable to be aware of

¹²¹ G 4:420n

my specific maxim, it is also possible that I am likely to have the same problem in being aware of my maxim-as-policy, even with reflection. Allison highlights this issue of awareness:

"Since our maxims are self imposed rules, one cannot make something one's maxim without in some sense being aware of it...This does not entail that we possess a 'Cartesian certainty' regarding our motivation, or that we must explicitly formulate our maxims to ourselves before acting...rather...I cannot act on a principle without an awareness of that principle, although I need not be explicitly aware of myself as acting on that principle." ¹²²

This raises the inevitable question of what "in some sense" actually means. What sense? If a maxim cannot be explicitly stated, does it exist? If I cannot state it, is it plausible to claim that I know it or reason about it? Although Allison does not say so, could it be that it is not awareness itself that counts but the possibility or ability or capacity of being or making myself aware of it that is important? But this is still troubling, for it remains the case that unless I make the effort to reflect on the possibility of a particular maxim and to articulate what it is to myself, it cannot exist. The unreflective person cannot be morally responsible, a conclusion that is unacceptable. Adopting a principle must involve knowing what it is. Maxims proceed from free choice.¹²³ We can't choose what we don't know. Choice implies knowing the alternatives between which we are deciding. If it is the possibility or ability to identify a maxim that is important, how do we go about doing this? If our action is impetuous or absent minded or reflex, does it follow that there can be no maxim and that we are not responsible for the action?

In the *Reflexionen* ¹²⁴, Kant states that an

¹²² Henry E Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p.90.

¹²³ MM 6:226

¹²⁴ R 6.24

"incentive can determine the will to an action only insofar as the individual has taken it up into his maxim (has made it into a general rule, according to which he will conduct himself)."

In the case of a will, according to what Wood¹²⁵ terms the 'incorporation thesis', desires produce actions only by the way they are incorporated into maxims or practical principles that serve the agent as subjectively adopted norms. A maxim must involve an end, which serves as its 'matter'.¹²⁶

Maxims cannot be empty platitudes: "do good deeds", "be kind". It may be that we cannot deduce specific duties from very general statements without such lengthy and complex deductive arguments that agreement would be hard to reach. Moral decisions are often difficult and diverging opinions are common. At the other extreme a maxim may be so specific that it could be universalised, yet seem morally repugnant. It would not be excluded by any test of contradiction in conception. Wood's example is often quoted: the maxim of making a false promise on Tuesday, August 21 to a person named Hildreth Milton Flitcraft.¹²⁷ Wood points out that this maxim, if made a universal law of nature, would not prevent him from gaining money by making false promises. If the Categorical Imperative is supposed to supply a rigorous test of the morality of maxims, it should work on rare, strange maxims as well as more common ones. And the greater the specificity of an agent's intentions, the more likely that immoral conduct will pass the test of contradiction in conception.

¹²⁵ Allen W Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p.51. This expression originates in Kant's *Religion* (6:24) and, in Allison's exposition, asserts that the adoptions of maxims are the primary acts of freedom, and that any aspect of ourselves for which we are responsible is something which has been "taken up" and "incorporated" into our maxim. See: Henry E Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp.118-123.

¹²⁶ G 4:436; CPractR 5:21

¹²⁷ Allen W Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p.102.

A way around some of these problems may be to consider maxims as something ascribed to agents.¹²⁸ Such as description would permit ignorance of maxims and a multiplicity of maxims, with a lesser emphasis on intention. But the objections to this interpretation appear formidable. Kant insists that maxims are determinations of the will; and an ascriptive view brings in a third party perspective to a subjective principle, removing the close link to practical reason and the focus on action. Adopting a maxim does imply accepting how we are going to act when the circumstances arise.

Perhaps it is not successful identification of the maxim that matters but the deliberative attempt to describe it. We may fail or we may get it wrong, but trying to identify the maxims of our actions may be the best that we can do. If the capacity of our minds, the extent of our reasoning skills, the distorting effects of our emotions, the modifying effects of exhaustion or illness result in a different conclusion, then we will, at least, have tried. What else, we ask rhetorically, could we have done? What is morality for anyway except to make the best of a limited job? Morality, in a Kantian view, generates a need for reasons to create maxims for and against actions. This requires "the emergence of rational beings of dispositions disinterestedly and without coercion to give due weight to such reason in appraising actions."¹²⁹ Maybe people actually can't reliably do that. They can, as a psychological fact, only achieve this occasionally. A rigid theory is impractical, including too specific an emphasis on what constitutes a maxim. If our emphasis in daily living is summed up by that aphorism of 'live and let live', perhaps we should place less emphasis on assessment of actions and of character. Living a reflective life may be part of virtue and the openness of such an approach may have much to commend it. But there is something desperate about such a proposal. We

¹²⁸ Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle*, 2nd edn., p.15.

¹²⁹ Geoffrey J Warnock, *The Object of Morality*, (London: Methuen, 1971), p.152.

cannot avoid such assessments and we do need to judge a large number of actions in order to live together. In short, we need maxims and need to understand what they are or imply.

2.10 A hierarchy of maxims?

Underlying the above discussion is an assumption that maxims are uniform: capable of a single definition with a place in explaining or justifying action, in moral evaluation or in relation to our inclinations and desires. But some difficulties might be resolved if maxims were considered at different levels. I want to support the idea that viewing maxims in a hierarchy will clarify some of the apparent contradictions that can arise if we opt for a rigid definition. At the most general level lies the concept of *Gesinnung*, a reflection of our overall values. At the level of basic actions, a maxim is, as explicitly defined by Kant¹³⁰, "the subjective principle of willing" or "the principle on which a person acts."¹³¹ As such the maxim describes or illuminates, rather than evaluates our freely chosen actions. Such a maxim does not tell us what we ought to do - it is not an imperative. This is a kind of belief (*Willensmeinung*).¹³²

At a higher level, a maxim may be a principle of volition and action, being the principle upon which maxims of the first kind are chosen. Timmerman argues that such a maxim is still expressive of one's actual will. Although not set out in Kant's earlier moral philosophy, this hierarchy is explicit in his later writings on anthropology and religion. Thus, for example: "the ground of all specific maxims that are morally evil, which is itself a maxim."¹³³ He concedes that the influence of higher order maxims on lower

¹³⁰ G 4:400

¹³¹ G 4:420n

¹³² CPractR:66 (see the table of categories)

¹³³ Rel 6:20

level ones is difficult to discern, but suggests this could happen by producing incentives such as types of inclinations. "Moral maxims ...strengthen the moral incentive of respect for the moral law."¹³⁴ These two levels of maxims are still, Timmermann asserts, 'thin' - they are not particularly robust or impose uniformity of behaviour. He proposes a third level of maxim that is a higher order subjective principle that is "particularly characteristic or vigorous". This is 'thick': a kind of life rule as in an example of Kant's: "I have made it my maxim to increase my wealth by all safe means".¹³⁵

This hierarchy reconciles maxim as a policy (at one level) with a maxim as the basis for an individual action at a more basic level. The end of a maxim may therefore vary according to the level of the maxim; and may change according to the circumstances at the lower levels. The highest level of maxim will serve as a guideline in the deliberative process that takes place at the lower levels of maxims - which may relate to several actions under this overall umbrella. In summary, one is adopted ideally after deliberation, one influences that deliberation by conditioning inclinations and one gives overall guidance in this process. This interpretation also helps with the objections concerning the knowledge or insight we have into our maxims. Mostly we do not reflect on our maxims before acting but we are likely to have broad 'life rules' of the higher order. It is these higher order maxims too that are more likely to be broken or to which exceptions may occur, although there should be no exception to well considered maxims. However, cultivating our 'life rules' is more likely to enable morally defensible maxims of a 'thinner' sort. Life rules will change infrequently. If these are termed 'thick' maxims, the position of Albrecht can be accommodated, with 'thinner' maxims for specific ends. It also accommodates the inability to know specific maxims but our 'life

¹³⁴ Jens Timmerman, 'Kant's Puzzling Ethics of Maxims', in *Harvard Review of Philosophy* 8, (2000) pp.39-52, (p.40).

¹³⁵ CPractR 5:27

rules' construed as maxims can be known to underlie our choices; and they need to be cultivated for they are basic to the other two levels of maxim in the hierarchy. Maxims as life rules link moral character and maxims and it becomes easy to understand why Kant suggests that we always act on some maxim, for our background life rules (i.e. values) inform all our decisions. Such values are crucial in our plans for the future. One further comment arises from the assertion that maxims are either good or bad, whereas actions are obligatory, permissible or forbidden. On this basis, Timmerman suggests that commands of morality do not admit of a more or a less and hence that there can be no room for supererogatory actions in Kant's ethics. "There is no such thing as an action that is 'good but not required'."¹³⁶ But this cannot be true because actions that result from maxims generated by imperfect duties give the agent a choice of actions, such that many actions may be good but not required – only that *some* action is required. I set aside discussion of supererogation here, while noting that two distinguished commentators explicitly oppose Timmerman's position.^{137,138}

Although this interpretation asserts an ambiguity in the term 'maxim', it is one that I endorse. There is a further confusion in that maxims are not only principles, but are also 'rules'. Kant's use of the term 'rule' is highly variable¹³⁹: "sometimes meaning "law", sometimes "imperative" and sometimes merely a precept or common maxim." In general, maxims state or imply ends; rules in the derivative sense imply the means we have to specify to realise our ends. Rules are instrumental and morally neutral. If my maxim is to maintain a healthy weight, it is an instrumental rule whether I increase my exercise or eat less or both. Kant's morality is concerned with rational ends not with the

¹³⁶ Jens Timmerman, 'Kant's Puzzling Ethics of Maxims', p.48.

¹³⁷ Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle*, p.195.

¹³⁸ Thomas E Hill, 'Kant on imperfect duty and supererogation', *Kant-Studien*. 62, nos 1-4, (1971): 55-76

¹³⁹ Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, p.79.

minutiae of how they are achieved. It may be more useful in applying Kant's moral theory in this respect to emphasise the difference between means and ends rather than the terminology of rules, maxims and principles.

2.11 Maxims for maxims? *Gesinnung* and meta-maxims

In the *Groundwork* Kant introduces the idea of *Gesinnung*:¹⁴⁰ often translated as 'disposition' or 'meta-maxim'. He fails to discuss this concept further until the *Religion*, in which it appears in his account of radical evil. Despite a variety of claims, the account is not entirely clear. *Gesinnung* is ultimately a choice between self-love or morality in our lives. Its description as a 'meta-maxim' places it at the head of the hierarchy of maxims. By this choice of dispositions, we become wholly good or evil.¹⁴¹ (Notoriously he claims that we are radically evil.)¹⁴²

Kant links action on the basis of maxims with freedom:

"(F)reedom 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 (has made it into a universal rule for himself according to which he wills to conduct himself); only in this way can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice (of freedom)."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ G4:406

¹⁴¹ Rel 6:22

¹⁴² It is worth pointing out at this point that Kant states that "'The human being is evil," cannot mean anything else than that he is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it." Rel 6:32

¹⁴³ Rel 6:24

We act on an incentive when we freely choose to incorporate it into a maxim.

Gesinnung complicates his account of action.

Gesinnung may be variously translated: disposition, sentiment(s), views, opinions, convictions, attitude, persuasion, character, mind, way of thinking.¹⁴⁴ Of these, 'disposition' appears the preferred term in standard translations of Kant. In assessing whether an action is moral, we are unable to observe its maxim. Indeed "we cannot unproblematically do so even within ourselves." It follows that we are unable to judge reliably if a human is evil on empirical grounds. Only by inferring *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions can we conclude "an underlying evil maxim, and, from this, the presence in the subject of a common ground, itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims."¹⁴⁵ This common ground (a maxim of maxims) is the disposition or *Gesinnung*. But evil must arise from choice or we could not be responsible for it.

"This subjective ground must...itself always be a deed of freedom....Hence the ground of evil cannot lie in any object *determining* (Kant's italics) the power of choice through inclination...but only in a rule that the power of choice itself produces for the exercise of its freedom, i.e. in a maxim."¹⁴⁶

Again, Kant considers this ground as a maxim. If we are tempted to wonder whether this maxim of maxims (or "meta-maxim" or super-maxim) in turn is grounded in a further maxim and so on *ad infinitum*, Kant argues, firstly, that only a maxim will serve as a ground; and, secondly, it is "inscrutable." In the first place, if the subjective ground were not a maxim, it would be "merely" a natural impulse. On this basis, the exercise of

¹⁴⁴ HT Betteridge (ed.), *Cassell's German Dictionary*. (London: Cassell, 1987)

¹⁴⁵ Rel 6:20

¹⁴⁶ Rel 6:21

freedom would be determined through natural causes, "which would contradict freedom." So it must be a maxim. Saying that a person is by nature evil means only that "he holds himself within a first ground (to us inscrutable) for the adoption of good or evil (unlawful) maxims, and that he holds this ground *qua* human, universally - in such a way, therefore, that by his maxims he expresses at the same time the character of his species."

In a footnote¹⁴⁷ Kant states, rather than argues, that the first subjective ground of the adoption of moral maxims is inscrutable because of its grounding in another maxim; and since no determining ground of the power of choice could be adduced, we would be endlessly referred without coming to a first ground.

Gesinnung may be chosen but it can be chosen at a variety of times (adopted through the free power of choice¹⁴⁸): "from the earliest youth as far back as birth."¹⁴⁹ (The latter appears an odd assertion for choice at birth is impossible.) And *Gesinnung* can change:

" the transformation of the disposition of an evil human being into the disposition of a good human being is to be posited in the change of the supreme inner ground of the adoption of all the human being's maxims in accordance with the ethical law, so far as this new ground (the new heart) is itself now unchangeable."¹⁵⁰ (A "rebirth".¹⁵¹)

A right action implies acting on a maxim that is a law for all, not only a subjective principle for myself. But to do the latter I must have reasons. The meta-maxim/disposition (*Gesinnung*) can provide the reasons for the choice of maxim. There must be a basis to one's choice. One's disposition to commit oneself to upholding the

¹⁴⁷ Rel :21n

¹⁴⁸ Rel 6:25

¹⁴⁹ Rel 6:22

¹⁵⁰ Rel 6:51

¹⁵¹ Rel 6:47

moral law or, alternatively, self-love is one's *Gesinnung*. As such, the meta-maxim reflects, or even is, our moral character. Character does not reflect a single deed or a single action for the wrong reasons.

Gesinnung is noumenal whereas causation is phenomenal. This suggests that the connection between our disposition and maxims is difficult to understand as causal. But if the meta-maxim is a maxim, then the reasoning process from meta-maxim to maxim should proceed as in any other reasoning. It makes sense to say that

"the meta-maxim is a kind of maxim, whose content is a commitment to take certain considerations as reasons for action (more precisely, to take morality and self-love to ground reasons for action, but to take moral considerations to have weight over self-interest, or vice-versa.)"¹⁵²

Kant's *Gesinnung* offers two meta-maxims that not only give an interpretation of the formation of first order maxims, but also offer a key factor in the make-up of character and of moral worth. Kantian maxims come in varying degrees of generality and in their hierarchy the more general may be seen as embedded in the more specific. In *Gesinnung*, the supreme maxim,¹⁵³ the ultimate subjective conceptual ground of the adoption of maxims is found.

¹⁵² Alison Hills, 'Gesinnung, responsibility, moral worth and character', in Gordon E Michalson (ed), *Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. A Critical Guide*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), p.93.

¹⁵³ Rel 6:31

Chapter 3: Reason

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3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the concept, complexity and importance of the maxim were explicated. A detailed explication of reason is now required. 'Reason' appears in both title and first sentence of the critical philosophy: "die menschliche Vernunft" ("human reason")¹⁵⁴. Yet a definition of the word 'reason' does not follow. Reason may be applied theoretically or practically, but even defining 'reason' is not entirely straightforward.

In this chapter, I begin with the act of defining itself and argue that definition can represent a conclusion rather than a starting point. I propose that 'reason' for Kant is best understood in three ways: a general one and two more specific senses, first detailed in the Dialectic. Reason has a unifying function which must be distinguished from the unity of reason itself: that there is one reason combining both theoretical and practical roles. Kant subjects reason to a "critique" but this must have positive outcomes or nihilism will result. He does tell us that "all our cognition ends with reason, beyond which there is nothing higher in us to work on the matter of intuition and bring it under the highest unity of thinking."¹⁵⁵ Its role appears supreme in our thinking. Reason in Kant's account has principles, a discipline and a public use (e.g. for legislation).

3.2 Defining Reason

The talent for lucid presentation, Kant wrote, was "something I am conscious of not having myself".¹⁵⁶ To this self-confession, one commentator, Norman Kemp Smith, adds,

"the *Critique* is not merely defective in clearness or popularity of expression...there is hardly a technical term which is not employed by him in a variety of different and conflicting senses. As a writer, he is the least exact of all the great thinkers."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ CPR Avii

¹⁵⁵ CPR A298/B355

¹⁵⁶ CPR Bxlili

¹⁵⁷ Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. (London: Macmillan, 1918), p. xx.

With respect to 'reason' as a 'technical term', Kemp Smith expresses the opinion that the "use of the term is an excellent example of the looseness and carelessness with which he employs even the most important and fundamental of his technical terms. Only the context can reveal the particular meaning to be assigned in each case."¹⁵⁸

This is a devastating criticism from a reputable scholar. Schopenhauer is almost equally critical: "unclear, indeterminate, inadequate...complex foreign expressions used incessantly."^{159,160} While Kant is not always consistent or clear, I hope it will become apparent that these criticisms are overstated.

Kant makes several comments in the pre-critical writings about defining and definitions. For example, if a concept is 'given' then its definition is analytic; but if the concept has been 'manufactured' the process is synthetic. Thus

"Through declaration a distinct concept is made. Through exposition a given concept is made distinct. Through definition a distinct concept is made complete and precise."¹⁶¹

Our minds construct many of the ('manufactured') concepts through which we think, but some others ('given') relate to objects *a priori*. Definition will accordingly depend on an empirical deduction or, for *a priori* concepts, a transcendental deduction.¹⁶² Either way, the act of definition is required for precision, to know exactly what we are thinking. Elsewhere Kant comments on defining in different circumstances:

"Concepts that originate from the understanding can all be defined, whether they originate arbitrarily or through the nature of the understanding. Definitions of names are possible for all objects...Real definitions, which contain the possibility of the thing itself are only to be found for concepts that are given through the understanding.... And here nominal and real definitions coincide; however, in the case of arbitrary concepts they are synthetically produced, in the case of the natural concepts of the understanding they are analytically produced;

¹⁵⁸ Norman Kemp Smith, 'A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason', p.2.

¹⁵⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Representation', Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, Christopher Janaway (transl and ed.), (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p.455.

¹⁶⁰ And others: see, for example, the populariser CEM Joad, 'Guide to Philosophy'. (London: Gollancz, 1936), p.359.

¹⁶¹ Immanuel Kant, *Notes and Fragments*, Paul Guyer (ed), C Bowman, P Guyer, F Rauscher (transl), (Cambridge: CUP, 2005). 16:578

¹⁶² CPR A85/B117

empirical concepts can only be nominally explicated. Fundamental concepts of the senses not at all.”¹⁶³

Here the distinction between defining ‘manufactured’ concepts and ‘given’ ones is maintained, characterised by the respective terms of ‘nominal’ and ‘real’, ‘arbitrary’ and ‘natural’. But at the end of the 1770s he thought that one could not start from definitions, except in mathematics: “Only in mathematics and in hypotheses can one begin with definitions.”¹⁶⁴ Evolution in meaning can be anticipated as Kant develops his thinking, so that definition emerges as an end point, not a starting point.

In the first *Critique*, Kant discusses the defining of categories and the principles that derive from them. Without seeing how they are used, we “cannot define anyone of them in any real fashion.”¹⁶⁵ But, even so, we can proceed by using the property of a concept, without needing to know all its properties. To have avoided the task of definition “was no evasion but an important prudential maxim.” Gold, for example, has a number of properties in weight, colour, valency, atomic mass etc. We do not need to know all these to use the concept ‘gold’. If this was required, we would be unable to use many everyday concepts. What matters is understanding enough to make distinctions between gold and, shall we say, iron pyrite (“fool’s gold”). The word ‘gold’ is best regarded as a designation rather than a concept. Examples make us confident enough in practice to know what we are talking about. Hence Kant states that he prefers to use the term “exposition, as being more guarded”.¹⁶⁶ Thus he returns to his assertions in the notes of the 1770s:

“A concept which I have invented, I can always define; for since it is not given to me either by the nature of understanding or by experience, but is such as I have myself deliberately made it to be, I must know what I have intended to think in using it.”¹⁶⁷

We cannot even be sure of defining that, because a true object to fit our concept may not exist. He concludes that the only concepts which allow of definition are those that contain an arbitrary synthesis “that admits of *a priori* construction... Consequently mathematics is the only science that has definitions.”¹⁶⁸ Rationalists may have based

¹⁶³ Immanuel Kant, *Notes and Fragments*. 16:607

¹⁶⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Notes and Fragments*. 16:586

¹⁶⁵ CPR A241/B300

¹⁶⁶ CPR A729/B757

¹⁶⁷ CPR A729/B757

¹⁶⁸ CPR A729/B757

their concepts of reason on mathematics but this is not acceptable to Kant. Their error was the belief that mathematics consisted of analytic propositions, not synthetic *a priori* ones. The pursuit of mathematical method leads to the belief that by defining we can “exhibit originally the exhaustive concept of a thing within its boundaries.”¹⁶⁹ There can be no error in mathematical definitions¹⁷⁰ because concepts originate in the definition. By contrast, reason will be defined in its use and we should not be surprised if Kant postpones an exhaustive definition of reason at the outset.

“In philosophy, we must not imitate mathematics by beginning with definitions...the incomplete exposition must precede the complete...and we can infer a good deal from a few characteristics, derived from an incomplete analysis...the definition in all its precision and clarity ought, in philosophy, to come rather at the end than at the beginning of our enquiries.”¹⁷¹

We can get along using some key features. Reason's detailed characteristics will become plain as we proceed. A more complete definition should then become possible.

One clarification: Kant uses the terms 'speculative reason' and 'theoretical reason' interchangeably (*spekulativ, theoretisch*). There is one exception.¹⁷² Rauscher thinks this makes "speculative reason, in a sense, a subset of theoretical reason; only the latter...is available for practical reason."¹⁷³ This isolated example is best ignored: Kant does not pursue it further in what follows at 5:136-7. The two terms are closely associated and treated identically without comment elsewhere.¹⁷⁴

Although for Kant, human beings exist in two worlds, the natural, phenomenal world and the intelligible, noumenal world, what differentiates us from other animals is reason. Following Kant's advice, I will define reason in some of its characteristics and functions.

¹⁶⁹ CPR A727/B755

¹⁷⁰ CPR A731/B759

¹⁷¹ CPR A731/B759

¹⁷² CPractR 5:13 In the second *Critique* Kant discusses "how is it possible to think of an extension of pure reason for practical purposes without thereby also extending its cognition as *speculative*?" He argues: an end of the will must be given that is practically necessary. In this case it is the highest good, a concept not derived from theoretical principles. The justification of the highest good demands three pure rational concepts i.e. ideas or concepts of reason without an empirical justification, "an increment to the *theoretical* (my italics) cognition of pure reason." Such concepts are merely thinkable for theoretical reason: possibilities, not objects of knowledge. He writes, "But this extension of theoretical reason is no extension of speculation, that is, no positive use can now be made of it for *theoretical purposes*." (Kant's italics.) So the theoretical and the speculative are not the same.

¹⁷³ F Rauscher, Kant's Two Priorities of Practical Reason. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 6, no.3 (1998), p.399.

¹⁷⁴ CPractR 5:50, 5:54-5, 5:89, 5:119-21

Reason is that general human faculty or capacity for truth-seeking and problem-solving, differentiated from intellect, imagination or faith in that its results are intellectually trustworthy: for most of us the defining characteristic of human beings.¹⁷⁵ However, a glance at a philosophical dictionary shows that it is a term that has been used in several different ways. Flew, for example, writes, "A word used in many, various often vague senses, with complex and sometimes obscure connections one with another." He continues,

"In one most important usage, contrasted with such hypostatized internal or external rivals as imagination, experience, passion or faith...These great issues are too often debated as if they concerned the powers and province of some super-person. Yet there is no access to any answers save through discovering what actions may or may not be commended as reasonable. We have no independent road to acquaintance with the Goddess Reason."¹⁷⁶

A very Kantian response, we may think. For Scruton¹⁷⁷, reason is the sole faculty to lead us to true knowledge. Not only is reason superior to the senses wherever it is in competition with them but, equally important, reason determines whether it is in competition with the senses. From this follows the rationalists' doctrine that since all beliefs from experience are about appearances, what is really real is known only to reason.

3.3 Kant's view of reason

Human thought is self-reflective. The possession of reason involves theoretical and practical roles, plus an awareness of this. Our thought is spontaneous: we think of ourselves as free, both in making judgements about what *is*, in the empirical world, and about what *should be* in the moral world. "Nothing is more reprehensible than to derive the laws prescribing what ought to be done from what is done."¹⁷⁸

And reason is discursive: it applies concepts and in thinking we judge whether a given concept applies to a given object. Here it relates the particular to the general. From chaos we create order. As one commentator rather lyrically expresses it, Kant

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Belsey, *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ted Honderich (ed), (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.791.

¹⁷⁶ *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. A Flew (ed). (London: Pan Books, 1979), p.278.

¹⁷⁷ Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy*, (London: Arrow books, 1994), p.30.

¹⁷⁸ CPR A319

"regarded reason as so transcending the rest of creation that it is uniquely worthy of awe and respect. Reason can discern what is true and good: the rest of creation simply *is*. Reason is the ground of intelligibility, necessity, and universality and thus also of harmony and peace."¹⁷⁹

We may contrast Hume's dismissal of practical reason: "Reason is wholly inactive and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals."¹⁸⁰

But for Kant, there is only one reason, not two:

"if pure reason itself can be and really is practical... it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles."¹⁸¹

Pure practical reason, writes Kant in the *Groundwork*, must 'be able... to present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application.'¹⁸² Or again, in the second *Critique*, he refers to the 'unity of the whole pure rational faculty (theoretical as well as practical)' with the aim of deriving 'everything from one principle –the undeniable need of human reason, which finds complete satisfaction only in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions'.¹⁸³ 'There can only be one human reason'.¹⁸⁴

At the start of his *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes defines reason as 'the power of judging well and of distinguishing truth from falsehood'.¹⁸⁵ This is 'good sense'. The enlightenment was the age of reason: reason revealing new insights into human understanding. Reason for Aristotle and for Aquinas was a property that distinguishes humans from animals. So too for Descartes:

¹⁷⁹ Roger J Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*, (Cambridge:CUP, 1989), p.95.

¹⁸⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature (1739)* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,1969), Book III, part 1, section 1, p.510.

¹⁸¹ CPractR 5:121

¹⁸² G 4:391

¹⁸³ CPractR 5:91

¹⁸⁴ MM 6:207

¹⁸⁵ Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*. Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Thomas Geach, (eds), (London: Nelson, 1954), p.7.

“I know of no other qualities that make for the perfection of the mind; for as regards reason or sense, inasmuch as it is the only thing that makes us men and distinguishes us from brutes.”¹⁸⁶

Believing something for reasons implies explanation and evidence: why it is true. We have reasons for actions too – motivations. Reason is therefore a term that is used in a variety of ways, contrasting with imagination, instinct, faith, passion or experience. Hume notoriously described reason as the ‘slave of the passions.’ But overall it is a faculty for problem solving linked to discovering the truth. At its broadest it represents human thought, the power to think, and in that regard the opposite of the instincts by which ‘beasts’ live. Reason, personified, asks questions and grants an ‘unfeigned respect’ only to that which ‘has been able to withstand its free and public examination.’¹⁸⁷ In pursuing his inquiry into reason, Kant aspires to find his answers by searching within. He is a thinking being, already using simple logic every day. Like Descartes, the answers to his examination of reason lie within himself: “I need not seek far beyond myself, because it is in myself that I encounter them, and common logic already also gives me an example of how the simple acts of reason may be fully and systematically enumerated.”¹⁸⁸ At the same time, he admits that he will need to use more than or other than, innate ideas: “only here the question is raised how much I may hope to settle with these simple acts if all the material and assistance of experience are taken away from me.”¹⁸⁹ In respect of theoretical reason, he emphasises that

“if common reason ventures to depart from laws of experience and perceptions of the senses it falls into sheer incomprehensibilities and self-contradictions, at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability.”¹⁹⁰

In any case, “the depths of the human heart are unfathomable.”¹⁹¹ Some commentators¹⁹² explicitly interpret Kant as therefore opting for a discursive starting point in his first *Critique*, rather than expounding a plain definition of reason. Even at

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*

¹⁸⁷ CPR Axi

¹⁸⁸ CPR Aiv

¹⁸⁹ CPR Aix

¹⁹⁰ G 4:404

¹⁹¹ MM 6:446

¹⁹² Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of reason* p.8.

the start of the Transcendental Logic, he fails to distinguish reason and the understanding.¹⁹³ And whereas mathematics has definitions, axioms, demonstrations and concepts which "come first",

"[N]one of these elements can be achieved or imitated by philosophy¹⁹⁴...in philosophy the definition as distinctness made precise, must conclude rather than begin the work."¹⁹⁵

What reason is must be open to criticism and would harm itself if such criticism is prohibited. "Reason has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens."¹⁹⁶ In a parallel line of thinking, Kant investigates the foundation of philosophic moral cognition from "common rational cognition".¹⁹⁷

3.4 Kant's three varieties of reason

The clearest way to understand what Kant means by 'reason' is threefold. The first is as a synonym for thought that is non-contradictory – a broad construal of what the mind does. This broad understanding of 'reason' extends sufficiently wide as to include all *a priori* elements of cognition. For example, early in the first *Critique*, he writes that insofar that reason exists in sciences, "something in them must be cognized *a priori*".¹⁹⁸

"In both the pure part, the part in which reason determines its object wholly *a priori*, must be expounded all by itself, however much or little it may contain, and that part that comes from other sources must not be mixed up with it."

He continues to state that "determining the object and its concept is the theoretical cognition of reason; and the making object actual is the practical cognition of reason".¹⁹⁹ In his pre-critical phase he was even prepared to bring understanding and reason together:

¹⁹³ CPR A68/B88

¹⁹⁴ CPR A726/B754

¹⁹⁵ CPR A731/B759

¹⁹⁶ CPR A738/B766

¹⁹⁷ G 4:404

¹⁹⁸ CPR Bix

¹⁹⁹ CPR Bx

"It is equally obvious that understanding and reason, that is to say, the faculty of cognising distinctly and the faculty of syllogistic reasoning, are not different fundamental faculties."²⁰⁰

This early equation of understanding and reason does not survive into the critical philosophy and syllogistic reasoning will become a second role for reason. But the broad role of reason may be instanced in his use of the term 'common human reason'. It is this meaning that he is appealing to when he writes of 'the voice of reason,'²⁰¹ or in saying that an "idea of personality.... is natural even to the most common human reason."²⁰² Again, it is common human reason that determines pure morality.²⁰³

3.5 Reason's logical functions

Reason is also a more specific faculty, to be contrasted with the understanding. It has "logical" functions on the one hand; but on the other hand, "transcendental reason" creates "ideas", unifying the understanding. These are the second and third varieties of reason.

Logic consists of the application of rules to thought, described in the *Groundwork* as formal philosophy, concerned with the universal rules of thinking.²⁰⁴ Logic can prove nothing because it abstracts from all objects of cognitions. This is why logic has been so successful: its limitations secure its success. For rationalists, logic formed part of reason's principles, providing axioms that constrain acceptable thinking.²⁰⁵ For Kant however, in one sense, logic contrasts with reason.²⁰⁶ The boundaries of logic are clear and unchanged since Aristotle, a complete science²⁰⁷ with nothing empirical. Classically, reason here is syllogistic, following a chain of propositions that lead from

²⁰⁰ Immanuel Kant, 'The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogisms', in David Walford (ed), *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, (Cambridge: CUP,1992) 2:59

²⁰¹ CPractR 5:35

²⁰² CPractR 5:85

²⁰³ CPractR 5:155

²⁰⁴ G 4:387

²⁰⁵ Onora O'Neill, 'Vindicating Reason', in Paul Guyer, (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p.281.

²⁰⁶ In the Lectures on Logic, Kant writes, "The special and fully appropriate name for logic is science of reason because this is its object. The many other *scientias rationales* should be called reason's sciences. Logic is called a science because its rules can be proved by themselves apart from all use, *a priori*." Immanuel Kant, 'Introduction to the doctrine of reason according to Professor Kant (*Blomberg Logic 1770s*)', JM Young, (ed). *Lectures on Logic*. (Cambridge:CUP, 1992) (para 25, p.12), 24:25

²⁰⁷ CPR Bxviii

initial premises descending to valid conclusions that must be true provided the initial premises are true. Logic is not so much to be contrasted with reason as to be seen as part of reason: that reason has formal and transcendental faculties.

In reason's logical use, Kant means syllogistic use: reason contains the origin of certain concepts and principles. These do not come from the understanding and inferences may be drawn mediately. Mediate inferences infer one proposition from another by means of a third. (Kant sets this out in his *Logic* §§ 60-1).²⁰⁸ The structure of syllogistic reasoning is set out in his explication of the logical use of reason.²⁰⁹

General logic corresponds with three "higher faculties of cognition: the understanding, the power of judgement and reason."²¹⁰ Pure general logic "has to do with strictly *a priori* principles and is a canon of the understanding and reason."²¹¹ Formal logic has no content of cognition and is concerned with the form of thinking only. It can therefore include in its analytical part the canon²¹² of reason,

"the form of which has its secure precept, into which there can be *a priori* insight through mere analysis of the action of reason into their moments, without taking into consideration the particular nature of the cognition about which it is employed."²¹³

That is to say that the application of logical rules (its "secure precept") can distinguish truth from falsehood without needing to examine a specific, particular cognition.

Reason engages in 'mediate', syllogistic inference. Kant sets this out in two ways: an ascending and a descending function. In the former, reason discovers the conditions under which objects are as they are and we make true judgements. To be sure of this we must 'ascend' to the ultimate end of conditions, that is, an unconditioned totality.²¹⁴ In searching for this unconditioned totality, reason is searching for the ultimate explanation of things. In the latter, reason has a narrow 'descending' function: 'all men

²⁰⁸ CPR p736, note 6. Inference is the derivation of one judgement from another; mediate inferences, or "inferences of reason", infer one proposition from another by means of a third.

²⁰⁹ CPR A303/B359

²¹⁰ CPR B169

²¹¹ CPR A53/B77

²¹² A canon is a set of principles for deciding between true and false judgements.

²¹³ CPR A131/B170

²¹⁴ CPR A332/B379

are mortal' provides the condition under which the mortality of any man X can be inferred from X being a man.

Reason's logical use (that is, traditional syllogistic reasoning) provides no insight into its nature as a transcendental faculty with a real, that is, metaphysical use.²¹⁵ Kant expresses some embarrassment as he embarks on giving a definition of this "supreme faculty" and its twofold description as a faculty of principles, distinct from the understanding as a faculty of rules.²¹⁶ This assertion does create a difficulty as to the distinction between principles and rules. A broad and a narrow sense of principles is made to clarify this. In the broad sense, a principle can be any universal proposition from which consequences can be deduced. Principles of the understanding are not cognitions from concepts alone but only in relation to intuitions. Principles in the strict sense²¹⁷ however would produce synthetic cognition from concepts alone and it is these principles that Kant links to the use of reason.²¹⁸ There is a paradox here. Kant, says Allison, is not claiming that reason can provide such cognition: it can't ("if not impossible, is at least very paradoxical in what it demands").²¹⁹ But,

"reason considered as distinct from the understanding, does involve such a demand in order to comprehend both how it gives rise to a natural and unavoidable illusion and how, liberated from the deceptiveness of this illusion, it yields regulative principles that are essential for the progress of the understanding within experience."²²⁰

Whereas rules are the means to unify appearances, reason unifies the rules of the understanding under principles. The understanding relates to intuitions (a first order function), reason to the products of the understanding (a second order function). The understanding is driven by the logic of explanation to increasingly comprehensive sets of rules.

The rules of the understanding then must be united under unconditioned principles. Reason is the "faculty which secures the unity of the rules of the understanding under

²¹⁵ Henry E Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.308.

²¹⁶ CPR A299/B356

²¹⁷ "The term "a principle" is ambiguous." It is not just a universal proposition. CPR A 300/B356

²¹⁸ CPR A301/B357-8

²¹⁹ CPR A302/B358

²²⁰ Henry E Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, p.309.

principles.”²²¹ It is a faculty of principles. Reason, in its logical function, infers. A syllogism is the inference that effects the conclusion from a ground (a ‘major’) via an intermediate conclusion (a minor) to a conclusion by a judgement.²²² “Reason in inferring, seeks to bring the greatest manifold of cognition of the understanding to the smallest number of principles (universal conditions) and thereby to effect the highest unity of that manifold.”²²³

3.6 Exploring reason in its ‘real’ use

After syllogistics, Kant asks whether reason merely organises cognitions in packets related logically or whether it can provide an independent source of knowledge: “a genuine source of concepts and judgements that arise solely from it and thereby refer it to objects”.²²⁴ This will be developed as the third understanding of reason, its ‘pure’ or ‘real use.’ In its real use, reason generates principles and concepts (ideas) that could not be encountered in experience (the world as a whole, the soul, God) and that stem alone from reason, yielding transcendent (*a priori*) ‘knowledge’. The alternative would be reason as “only a merely subordinate faculty that gives to given cognitions a certain form, called “logical form”, through which cognitions of the understanding are subordinated to one another, and lower rules are subordinated to higher ones...as far as this can be effected through comparing them.”²²⁵

‘All our cognition begins with experience’ begins the first *Critique*²²⁶, which is to say ‘from the senses’.²²⁷ It goes from sensation to the understanding and ends with reason – the highest unity of thinking and the supreme faculty of cognition. But having made these assertions and on the point of defining this faculty, Kant professes embarrassment: reason has not one but two faculties.²²⁸

²²¹ CPR A302/B359

²²² CPR A303/B360

²²³ CPR A305/B361

²²⁴ CPR A305/B362

²²⁵ CPR A305/B362

²²⁶ CPR A1/B1

²²⁷ CPR A298/B355

²²⁸ CPR A299/B355

It is embarrassing also that we confront an unavoidable and necessary capacity, which seduces us into the use of illusory rational principles.²²⁹ While reason's logical use presents no problems, its *real* use as a transcendental principle leads to ideas and concepts that cannot relate to the empirical world. Our highest faculty leads us to error. Purely rational principles may be illusory and cause metaphysical error, creating a scepticism about reason itself. Avoiding the misconstrual of the ideas of reason ("transcendental illusion") is Kant's urgent task in the Dialectic. He must expose the illusions that produce metaphysical error; and vindicate reason to prevent scepticism about it in all other respects. He will argue that reason can act as a transcendental faculty producing its own concepts and ideas, beyond experience. One might be justifiably forgiven for scepticism about reason if it produces antinomies, in particular, failing to distinguish between two alternatives.

Illusion arises from misuse of principles that should be applied to experience alone. Transcendental illusion is not to be confused with empirical illusion (a stick in the water that looks bent from a sensory deception) or logical illusion (rules of inference wrongly applied²³⁰). The problem arises because "experience never satisfies reason" so that we feel compelled "to look...beyond all concepts that one can justify through experience."²³¹ So we try to apply principles to the transcendent objects of God, the soul and the world-whole, about which we can know nothing because we can experience nothing. That is one of the consequences of possessing reason, motivating us to go beyond reason's limits. Kant draws an analogy with optical illusion saying that in both cases, we take "a subjective condition of thinking for the cognition of an object."²³² In the *Prolegomena* he expresses this more clearly:

"since all illusion consists in taking the subjective basis for a judgement to be objective, pure reason's knowledge of itself in its transcendent (over-reaching) use will be the only prevention against the errors into which reason falls if it misconstrues its vocation and, in transcendent fashion, refers to the object in

²²⁹ Michelle Grier, 'Reason, syllogisms, ideas, antinomies', in W Dudley, K Engelhard, *Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), p.65.

²³⁰ CPR A296/B353

²³¹ PrL 4:352

²³² CPR A396

itself that which concerns only its own subject and the guidance of that subject in every use that is immanent.”²³³

Categories cannot be applied if separated from sensibility, but their *a priori* status tempts us to think they can be applied beyond sensible objects.²³⁴ But perhaps it should be emphasised that transcendental illusion, having been recognised, cannot then be thought to deny the existence of God, soul and the world-whole: merely in acknowledging the illusion, to show that they are beyond our cognition.

Analysing the structure of a simple syllogism, Kant points out that the universal principle governing all inferences of reason may be expressed in the formula: “what stands under the condition of a rule also stands under the rule itself.” The syllogistic function (reason in its logical function) is the key to discovering the transcendental principle unique to reason. From the logical procedure of the syllogism, Kant argues that reason orders the data provided by the understanding in a series of prosyllogisms.²³⁵ He coins the “logical maxim” (“the proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use)”):

“Find the unconditioned for the conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed.”²³⁶

Because reason can draw mediate inferences in this way, the formal procedure of reason can be linked to the quest for even more general conditions: for the unconditioned. The latter is completeness as an epistemological ideal. This maxim becomes the principle of reason, an imperative, even if it lacks propositional form. But there is a clear parallel to the categorical imperative of practical reason and it has the same capacity to go beyond the bounds of sense. We can easily assume that it gives rise to knowledge, when we assume that “when the conditioned is given, so too is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is also given.”²³⁷ This principle, identified as the supreme principle of pure reason, is the source of subordinate principles, all of which are transcendent and thus able to give rise to those concepts unique to reason which Kant terms “transcendent ideas.” Our knowledge is limited to those objects that can be

²³³ PrL 4:328

²³⁴ CPR A248/B305

²³⁵ Henry E Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, p.311.

²³⁶ CPR A307/B364

²³⁷ CPR A307/B364

given to us in time and space. We can never reach the unconditioned. So the imperative (the principle of reason) cannot be realised. Reason can organise our knowledge that the understanding delivers into systems and its imperative remains aspirational for a complete whole of knowledge. Unfortunately, we slide from a subjective necessity of the connection of our concepts to a belief in the objective necessity in the determination of things in themselves.”²³⁸ We move from an epistemological recommendation to a metaphysical principle about reality. Rather we should strive for the greatest possible unity of experience with no guarantee of success.²³⁹ Although the unconditioned could never be given to us, Kant believes that the coherence or rationality of reason’s procedure has built into the necessary assumption that the unconditioned is given. This is necessary to “deploy the formal demand for systematicity in relation to the objective contents of the understanding.”²⁴⁰ It makes little sense to seek the unconditioned if we do not believe that it exists and Kant confirms this in writing: “...everyone presupposes that this unity of reason conforms to nature itself; and here reason does not beg but commands...”²⁴¹

Judging well or judging according to *a priori* principles: this defines reason as a fundamental faculty of judgement – and so Kant described it in his pre-critical writing (“the higher faculty of cognition rests absolutely and simply on the capacity to judge.”).²⁴² Wolff²⁴³ had distinguished between understanding and ‘reason’: that is, reason could be understood in both a broad sense and in a narrower sense of a faculty that unites the rules of the understanding under unconditioned principles. Kant, as we can see, adopted this view.²⁴⁴ But Kant didn’t only endorse: he also extended this Wolffian view of reason. Humans are not entirely at the mercy of sensation, they are not determined in what they do entirely by nature, they are able to choose their actions: that is, they have freedom which enables choice of actions that go beyond nature’s principles. This ability to choose enables humans to exceed the limits of the understanding, to think about things beyond experience. ‘Freedom can go beyond every

²³⁸ CPR A297/B353

²³⁹ Onora O’Neill, ‘Vindicating Reason’, in Paul Guyer (ed), *Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p.285.

²⁴⁰ Grier M. *Reason, syllogisms, ideas antinomies*, p.69.

²⁴¹ CPR A653/B681

²⁴² FS 2:59

²⁴³ Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.347.

²⁴⁴ CPR A302/B359

proposed boundary.²⁴⁵ The scope of what we know is less than the scope of what we can think. Reason, both theoretical reason in its real use and practical reason, can take us beyond what can be proved by experience, beyond what can be known, to belief in freedom, immortality and God. "Experience never satisfies reason.... (Reason) recognises limits but not boundaries: that is, it indeed recognizes that something lies beyond it to which it can never reach."²⁴⁶ Reason will go on asking questions, speculating about what lies beyond its boundaries because that is how we humans are constituted.

Ideas of reason are essential to order the understanding. They are a product of reason in its real sense, including freedom, which can never be encountered in possible experience; in the example of freedom, it is a thought that we bring to the conception of ourselves insofar as we conceive of ourselves as agents, not a fact we might discover by empirical inquiry or introspection. Reason's ideas function regulatively and express conceptual necessities. As set out at the start of the Transcendental Dialectic, reason is to be explicitly differentiated from understanding, a power distinct from the understanding.²⁴⁷ If understanding is the faculty of rules, as set out in the transcendental logic, then reason is the faculty of principles.²⁴⁸ This enables Kant to expand on the transcendent ideas (and illusions) of reason - ideas that we cannot avoid thinking but for which there is no empirical support: freedom, God, the world as a whole and immortality. To these Kant gives the term *transcendent* objects. (The wholes of experience are not themselves objects of possible experience.²⁴⁹) The apparently *a priori* knowledge of transcendent objects is an illusion consisting of subjective ideas. Reason has the task after subsuming the particular under the general, of then determining the particular through the general in order that principles may be determined.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ CPR A317/B374

²⁴⁶ PrL 4:351-2

²⁴⁷ The distinction between pure concepts of reason (ideas) from pure concepts of the understanding (categories), "as cognitions of a completely different type, origin and use, is so important....that without such a division, metaphysics is utterly impossible, or at best is a disorderly and bungling endeavour to patch together a house of cards." PrL 4:328

²⁴⁸ CPR A299/B356

²⁴⁹ Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.213.

²⁵⁰ CPJ 20:201

3.7 Ideas of reason

In his *Essay on Human Understanding* John Locke apologises for relying on the word *idea*, it “being the term that serves best for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks.” He continues,

“since the Things the Mind contemplates are none of them, besides itself present to the Understanding, ‘tis necessary that something else, as a Sign or Representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: And these are Ideas.”²⁵¹

Ideas are, for Locke, representations: the term that Kant used – *Vorstellungen*. Both Hume and Berkeley used ‘ideas’ in a more restrictive sense²⁵² and even Kant urges that those with the interests of philosophy at heart should be careful

“to preserve the expression ‘idea’ in its original meaning, that it may not become one of those expressions which are commonly used to indicate any and every species of representation, in a happy-go-lucky confusion to the consequent detriment of science.”²⁵³

And Kant proceeds to list a series of terms, concluding that “a concept formed from notions and transcending the possibility of experience is an *idea* or concept of reason.”²⁵⁴

Kant's description of ideas of reason originates from Plato. He comments that Plato noted that our power of cognition feels a higher need than that of merely spelling out appearances and that "our reason naturally exalts itself to cognitions that go much too far for any object that experience can give ever to be congruent." Such ideas are "by no means merely figments of the brain".²⁵⁵ These considerations take Kant into the realm of the practical. Plato's ideas were found mainly in the practical, which rests on freedom and Kant comments on how the idea of virtue, for example, is one that we need to make any judgement of moral worth - despite perfection of virtue not existing. Indeed Kant

²⁵¹ John Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, Roger Woolhouse (ed), (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 4.21.4

²⁵² Kenneth P Winkler, ‘Kant, the Empiricists and the Enterprise of Deduction’, in Paul Guyer (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, (Cambridge: CUP 2010), p.46.

²⁵³ CPR A319/B376

²⁵⁴ CPR A319/B376

²⁵⁵ CPR A314/B371

scoffs at the suggestion that it is 'ridiculous' to use such an idea under the "wretched and harmful pretext of its impracticability".²⁵⁶ On the contrary, the idea is necessary. Freedom underlies the idea of virtue and is such an idea of reason. So too are ideas of perfection that apply to the regular arrangements of plants or animals, indeed any aspect of nature - even if it is impossible for any individual animal or plant to demonstrate this. In the empirical world at least such ideas can cancel the validity of empirical principles, although Kant makes a strong warning about deriving moral laws from what is done to what I ought to do.²⁵⁷

Reason in its transcendental (and theoretical) use ultimately refers to the totality of conditions for conditioned objects: that is, to an unconditioned totality: "the transcendental concept of reason is none other than that of the totality of conditions to a given conditioned thing."²⁵⁸ As noted above, reason in its 'real' use sees no limits to discovery, there is always more to be discovered, explained and to know.

"The concern of reason is to ascend from the conditioned synthesis, to which the understanding always remains bound, toward the unconditioned, which the understanding can never reach."²⁵⁹

The ideas that reason creates are entirely distinct from the concepts or categories of the understanding. These ideas are concepts that are inferred, thought before experience and enabling comprehension in a parallel way that concepts of the understanding serve for understanding of perceptions. Kant calls them "transcendental ideas".²⁶⁰ These ideas of reason are, Kant emphasises, "only ideas". This does not mean that they are unimportant or can be disregarded. They can extend our thinking beyond the empirical and "perhaps make possible a transition from concepts of nature to the practical, and themselves generate support for the moral ideas and connection with the speculative cognitions of reason."²⁶¹ (Kant sets aside practical considerations at this point.) The ideas of reason form a system which will be brought under three classes. Since the ideas are concerned with the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general,

²⁵⁶ CPR A316/B373

²⁵⁷ CPR A319/B375

²⁵⁸ CPR A 322/B379

²⁵⁹ CPR A 333/B390

²⁶⁰ CPR A311/B368

²⁶¹ CPR A329/B386

"the thinking subject will be the object of psychology, the sum total of all appearances (the world) is the object of cosmology, and the thing that contains the supreme condition of the possibility of everything that can be thought (the being of all beings) is the object of theology."²⁶²

This particular trichotomy of transcendental ideas has been criticised as making an artificial connection between the forms of syllogisms or the categories of relation and the ideas of the soul, the world as a whole and God: the connection between this logic and the traditional topics of Leibniz-Wolffian special metaphysics is too tenuous and based on an inadequate architectonic and an outdated logic.²⁶³ However these are ideas and their objective deduction is not possible. They are not objects of the understanding and cannot fall under the categories. As already noted, we cannot assume the unconditioned to exist, but we use a principle unique to reason as a logical precept, telling us to always seek out further conditions.²⁶⁴ The principle Kant sets out states that "if the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given, through which alone the conditioned was possible."²⁶⁵ The principle is expressly synthetic: it concerns real existences, not just logical relations between concepts. It also transgresses the limits of experience and is therefore transcendent. As Gardner comments,²⁶⁶ transcendent metaphysics regards it as an objectively valid principle on a par with the transcendental principles of the understanding - but, as noted, Kant does not assume that implies the existence of the unconditioned, which may be a transcendental illusion. As he states earlier in the *Analytic*,

“reason ...in its endeavours to determine something *a priori* in regard to objects and so to extend knowledge beyond the limits of possible experience, is altogether dialectical. Its illusory assertions cannot find place in a canon such as the analytic is intended to contain.”²⁶⁷

He there describes the transcendental employment of reason as not objectively valid and as belonging to a “logic of illusion.”²⁶⁸

²⁶² CPR A334/B391

²⁶³ Michael Rohlf, ‘The Ideas of Pure Reason’ in: *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer (ed), (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p.205.

²⁶⁴ Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p.219.

²⁶⁵ CPR A409/B436

²⁶⁶ Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p.218/9.

²⁶⁷ CPR A132/B171

²⁶⁸ CPR A131-2/B170-1

This is a different idea of dialectic of that from Plato, for whom it was the method of inquiry that leads, as the highest level of philosophy, to knowledge, - not a logic of illusion. However, like Plato, Kant believes that many ideas of reason function as goals or standards, both theoretical and practical, even as he privileges the special status of the ideas of the soul, the world as a whole and God. The ideas of reason are an example of how reason functions – what it is – and for which Kant will develop its role in syllogistic logic, special metaphysics, science and morality: in short, the key to his entire philosophical system. The purpose of Reason, in its logical employment as inference, is to obtain the highest possible unity, through subsumption of all multiplicity under the smallest possible number of universals.

To sum up, I suggest that reason has at least three senses in Kant's philosophy: firstly, a general sense of what the human mind does, avoiding the contradictory and thinking, both in the abstract and the specific; secondly, a function in syllogistic logic; thirdly, by creating *ideas* that unify thought and order the objects of the understanding, reason is a faculty with a unifying, systematising and regulatory function, such that "all our cognition starts from the senses, goes from there to the understanding, and ends with reason".²⁶⁹ To express this differently, there is reason as the source of all *a priori* elements and a general faculty of the functioning mind; reason as a formal, logical faculty; and reason as a transcendental faculty, the source of ideas of reason.

It can be concluded that Kant's use of 'reason' varies even within the expression of reason as speculative/theoretical.

These three senses differ somewhat from the three of Kemp Smith. For him, the first sense is broadly similar, but as the source of all *a priori* elements, it includes those elements in sensibility as well as understanding. His second narrower sense is distinct from understanding, and closer to the transcendental faculty I have suggested.

"It signifies that faculty which renders the mind dissatisfied with its ordinary and scientific knowledge, and which leads it to demand a completeness and unconditionedness which can never be found in the empirical sphere. Reason generates metaphysic"²⁷⁰

and has its ideas, in contrast to the categories possessed by understanding. But thirdly, instead of reason as a logical faculty, he suggests that Kant frequently employs reason

²⁶⁹ CPR A298/B355

²⁷⁰ Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p.2.

and understanding as synonymous, thus "dividing the mind into only two faculties, sensibility and spontaneity." However, where he states that in A1-2 "understanding and reason are used promiscuously", those two words only appear three times making it difficult to accept this third sense. He also, of course, excludes reason as a formal, logical faculty for which there is clear support, as above.

As between theoretical and practical reason, Kant makes this distinction clear in many places. Theoretical reason is concerned with cognition, with what we know: with what is; practical reason is concerned with what we will and do: that is, with what ought to be.²⁷¹ Reason is the highest faculty of knowledge in the theoretical realm and the sole source of obligation and autonomy in the practical realm. "Reason as the faculty of principles determines all the interest of all the powers of the mind but itself determines its own."²⁷²

3.8 Reason's function

Although reason leads to illusion, it does not follow that by recognising this we free ourselves from illusion. By way of analogy, an astronomer still sees the moon as larger when it is rising even while appreciating that this is illusory.²⁷³ Similarly, "transcendental illusion does not cease even though it is uncovered and its nullity is clearly seen into by transcendental criticism." It will still tempt us to stray and transcendental dialectic is limited to alerting us to its fallacies. Our cognitive powers are limited: reason is a faculty that prevents error but is unable to judge objects. However Kant thinks that reason can have a necessary role in regulating or directing the understanding by its rules. Not only is reason not a principle of the possibility of experience or a constitutive principle for extending the world of sense beyond all possible experience, it can only function regulatively.²⁷⁴ Transcendental ideas do "have an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point, which although it is only an idea...nonetheless still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension."²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ CPractR 5:15

²⁷² CPractR 5:120

²⁷³ CPR A297/B354

²⁷⁴ CPR A509/B537

²⁷⁵ CPR A644/B672

It is not the idea but the use of the idea that can be transcendent or immanent. Reason is the function that orders concepts of objects and gives them a unity which they can have in relation to the totality of series. Whereas the understanding must give unity to appearances for the sake of a unity of apperception, it is not sufficient for knowledge itself to form a unity. For that our judgements must be inferentially interconnected. It is reason that gives unity to knowledge by working on the understanding's manifold of judgements to create the unity of a system.

Besides the function of ordering the understanding but not of adding to knowledge, reason has a defensive role: preventing error provided one is alert to such possibilities, acknowledging that they are often tempting. Thus reason never “relates directly to an object, but solely to the understanding.”²⁷⁶ The ideas of reason easily overstep the boundaries of experience creating illusion “which one can hardly resist even through the most acute criticism.”²⁷⁷ But reason is important in guiding judgements of the understanding. Reason does not employ concepts of the understanding; instead it regulates them. The “principle of reason is only a rule,”²⁷⁸ and not a constitutive principle for extending the concept of the world beyond experience. Rather, “it is a principle of the greatest possible continuation and extension of experience, in accordance with which no empirical boundary would hold as an absolute boundary” and hence Kant calls it a “regulative boundary.” He repeats this claim elsewhere:

“I assert: the transcendental ideas are never of constitutive use, so that that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given, and in case one so understands them, they are merely sophistical (dialectical) concepts. On the contrary, however, they have an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point.”²⁷⁹

The image of converging at one point is illustrated by an imaginary object lying outside the field of knowledge and therefore beyond empirical cognition as if that point were located like the objects seen behind the surface of a mirror: illusory, yet indispensable if one wants to see what lies in the background. To express this differently, reason is that

²⁷⁶ CPR A643/B671

²⁷⁷ CPR A642/B670

²⁷⁸ CPR A508/B536

²⁷⁹ CPR A644/B673

function that regulates the understanding, the “faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles.”²⁸⁰ In this respect it gives cognitions a logical form, through which one is subordinated to another, that is, regulated.²⁸¹ Reason creates systematic unity by rules that apply to the manifold of judgements. Instead of a mass of unconnected individual cognitions, reason can supply rules that will bring them together. This is essential for our scientific understanding – we can build up ideas of species and genera, develop hypotheses or form a research programme: identify a Linnaean classification, for example, or Mendeleev’s table of the elements. Such regulative ideas direct our understanding to further possibilities of experience that we may research and unify what we know into a whole of nature, where everything relates to everything else. Thus,

“reason...quite uniquely prescribes...the systematic in cognition i.e., its interconnection based on one principle...this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding’s cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws.”²⁸²

This is a *projected* unity which helps us to find a principle for the manifold and coherently connecting particular uses of the understanding. This unity is one of nature.

3.9 Reason and freedom

Reason then has the function of unifying the understanding securing the unity of the rules of the understanding under principles.”²⁸³ Reason itself is autonomous - no other faculty supervises or directs it. It can only act on the basis of its interests. To decide on this, reason must be free. Freedom extends from the moral realm in deciding what we do, to the theoretical realm in deciding what is. Thus in the Groundwork, we cannot act otherwise than under the idea of freedom, "as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself *and in theoretical philosophy*." ²⁸⁴ (my italics) Freedom,

²⁸⁰ CPR A302/B359

²⁸¹ CPR A305/B362

²⁸² CPR A645/B673

²⁸³ CPR A302/B359

²⁸⁴ G 4:448

“in the cosmological sense, ...[is] the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature. Freedom in this signification is a pure transcendental idea.”²⁸⁵

It follows that a concept of freedom is not descriptive of sense perception.

Kant conceives freedom as the expression of an undetermined causality in two senses. In a cosmological sense (i.e. in theoretical reason) freedom is best understood as freedom *from*. This means that we are independent in our judgements. It is a spontaneity: transcendental freedom is a given. In the *Groundwork* he introduces the idea of practical freedom by first asserting transcendental freedom:

"one cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from any other quarter with respect to its judgements, since the subject would then attribute the determination of his judgement not to his reason but to an impulse."

This is reason free and independent of "alien influences". If we need to think of ourselves as free in order to ascribe our theoretical judgements to ourselves, this implies that we would need to think of ourselves as free even in order to represent ourselves as judging for reasons that we lack freedom. This makes the denial of freedom self-refuting.²⁸⁶

Freedom is dependent on transcendental idealism. "If appearances are things in themselves, then freedom cannot be saved."²⁸⁷ We know ourselves to be subjects of apperception,²⁸⁸ which is not empirically conditioned, and to have faculties that give rise to pure concepts - our understanding and reason. Kant asserts that "this reason has causality, or...we can at least represent something of the sort in it."²⁸⁹ This brings us to the point that we can, at least, think that we have grounds for our faculty of reason

²⁸⁵ CPR A533/B561

²⁸⁶ Allen W Wood, *Kant*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.97.

²⁸⁷ CPR A536/B564

²⁸⁸ CPR A546/B574

²⁸⁹ CPR A547/B575

possessing transcendental freedom. It is "at least possible."²⁹⁰ Morality has a foundation in reason.

²⁹⁰ CPR A548/B576

Chapter 4 **Ideas and postulates**

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4.1 Introduction

I have discussed above (ch3) how reason orders the understanding without adding to knowledge. Reason creates ideas that extend our thinking beyond the bounds of sense and conceptualised by applying the categories by the understanding. Its ideas regulate the understanding. Ideas are "concepts of reason not derived from nature; on the contrary we interrogate nature in accordance with these ideas and consider our knowledge as defective, so long as it is not adequate to them."²⁹¹

I now explore reason's regulative function further, especially in science. Reason, with its ability to foster illusion, is easily considered negative and defensive. I will advocate that, *per contra*, it is positive, creative and, in particular, essential for new scientific knowledge.

Reason's ideas feature in the search for the unconditioned and man's place in the universe. Beyond experience, reason gives teleological ideas, crucial for our research to expand science. Ideas of the soul and God must also be considered. I then give an account of the postulates, firstly in theoretical reason, where they contribute to the use of modal categories; but secondly and especially in practical reason. The postulates are sometimes seen as some sort of parallel to the ideas of theoretical reason for practical reason. The postulates will be explicated as essential concepts for demonstrating the unity of theoretical and practical reason.

Having established the roots and structure of Kant's reason, my aim is to chart its trajectory to its final united end in the highest good.

²⁹¹ CPR A646-7/B673-4

4.2 Science and Reason's creative ideas

Today "science" connotes "natural science" and hence covers physics, chemistry, zoology etc. The 18th century German equivalent of *Wissenschaft* indicated any systematic body of knowledge. This implied an organisation around first principles from which the rest of knowledge might be derived. Euclid's geometry, for example, was a model of a "scientific" exposition of knowledge. A variety of disciplines - even theology or metaphysics - might be called "sciences".²⁹²

In its ideas, reason proposes unobservable entities leading to the construction of theories. The hypotheses it postulates come from a power to create experiments to find evidence for its ideas – it is an active power that interrogates nature searching for explanations beyond mere “accidental observations” - empirical groping in the dark.

Kant uses the metaphor of a law court:

“Reason, in order to be taught by nature, must approach nature with its principles in one hand, according to which alone the agreement among appearances can count as laws, and, in the other hand, the experiments thought out in accordance with these principles – yet in order to be instructed by nature not as a pupil....but like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer

²⁹² Gary Hatfield, 'Introduction' in Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Gary Hatfield (ed/transl) (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. xxiii. Consider/compare: "Dogmatics is a science...I propose that by science we understand an attempt at comprehension and exposition, at investigation and instruction, which is related to a definite object and sphere of activity...In every science an object is involved...The subject of dogmatics is the Christian Church." In Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, GT Thomson (transl). (London: SCM Press, 1949), p.9. (Barth was one of the most distinguished 20th century theologians.) Theology as science??

the question he puts to them... This is how natural science was first brought to the secure course of a science after groping about for so many centuries.”²⁹³

Kant was familiar with the writings of Francis Bacon for he quotes from the Preface of Bacon's *Great Instauration* as a motto at the start of his first *Critique*. Bacon's new scientific methodology was based on the investigator purging himself of prejudices in observing nature and rejecting the mediaeval interpretation of Aristotelian theory. (Belief in direct observation allegedly caused Bacon's death after stuffing a fowl with snow, said Hobbes). Kant emphasised, by contrast, the need for principles to guide observation and experiment.

The ideas of theoretical reason play a key role in science, just as the postulates do in morality. In showing that the Enlightenment's achievements in natural science were grounded in the same regulative principles that support our actions in morality, religion and philosophy, Kant could provide support for the latter (and against Hume). Natural science is not founded on the empiricist models of Bacon, Newton or Hume, but on a notion of reason fully applicable in less certain areas.²⁹⁴

The paradigm example of a science was mathematics, a product of pure reason according to both Aristotle and Plato. Mathematics appears certain and universal; and whether one emphasised or denied the importance of experience in human knowledge, they agreed that mathematics was the most characteristic product of reason (perhaps especially Euclid's geometry). Analytic truths do not form part of knowledge: rather they provide principles necessary for ordering and systematising knowledge derived elsewhere. Mathematical concepts must be constructed in intuition. This accounts for

²⁹³ CPR Bxiii - xiv

²⁹⁴ Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant*. (Oxford: OUP, 1994), especially chapter 2.

the objectivity of mathematical truths – an account consistent with Kant’s account of the objectivity of knowledge in general.²⁹⁵ Mathematical knowledge neither is nor can therefore be provided by pure reason. The continuous examination of reason’s principles by experience obviated a critique in empirical use and

“was likewise unnecessary in mathematics, whose concepts must immediately be exhibited *in concreto* in pure intuition, through which anything unfounded and arbitrary instantly becomes obvious.”²⁹⁶

Metaphysics is not to be modelled on mathematics for metaphysics has no empirical component. It is intuition that gives content and meaning to reason’s concepts and principles. Empirical and pure intuitions discipline reason but in its transcendental use a discipline is required against “an entire system of deceptions and delusions”.²⁹⁷ If mathematics only becomes knowledge by needing intuition and logic, then it fails in any attempt to imitate them within philosophy.

Kant’s philosophy of mathematics therefore has consequences for his notion of reason. Reason’s proper function is not the search for knowledge. Yet reason “in what are called “ideas” shows a spontaneity so pure that it goes far beyond anything sensibility can offer.”²⁹⁸ Sensibility is passive and only affected by things, while understanding can only produce concepts by its own activity, “whose sole service is to bring sensuous ideas under rules and so to unite them in one consciousness.” Concepts of the understanding require experience for any significance.²⁹⁹ When nature is interrogated in the way Kant pictures, explanations of experience are suggested by ideas that go beyond

²⁹⁵ Susan Neiman *The Unity of Reason* p.47.

²⁹⁶ CPR A711/B739

²⁹⁷ CPR A711/B739

²⁹⁸ G 4:452

²⁹⁹ Immanuel Kant, ‘The Conflict of the Faculties’, in Allen Wood, Georgio di Giovanni, (eds), Mary Gregor (transl). *Religion and Rational Theology* (CUP: Cambridge, 1996). 7:70

experience. Asking questions in that way carries the implication that it could have been otherwise or no question would be necessary. The understanding is able to know nothing beyond what is given at present nor to know the noumenal world:

“Without reason we would have no thoroughly coherent employment of the understanding, and in the absence of this no sufficient criterion of empirical truth. In order therefore, to secure an empirical criterion we have no option save to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary.”³⁰⁰

The notion of order itself gives meaning to the assumption of nature’s intelligibility. Reason enables us to know empirical reality.

We also need reason to set ends and purposes. Certain causal regularities must also be presupposed in order to apply the concept of causality. Without regulative principles of reason, understanding could not function ‘coherently’ because empirical laws cannot be derived from the categories, although they are subject to them.³⁰¹ Further we have to assume that the order of nature is intelligible or the notion of order would be meaningless. Kant is demonstrating the need for regulative principles of reason in every crucial aspect of our experience.³⁰² It is paradoxical that the regulative ideas that go beyond experience are essential to discover empirical laws.

4.3 Other roles for reason’s ideas?

³⁰⁰ CPR A651/B679

³⁰¹ CPR B165

³⁰² Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*, p.57.

In his essay "*Speculative Beginning of Human History*" of 1786,³⁰³ Kant interprets the beginning of human history with repeated references to the *Book of Genesis*. He suggests that ideas of reason are essential to plan the future:

"Reason's third step....was the reflective expectation of the future. This ability not merely to enjoy life's present moment but to make present to himself future, often very distant time, is the distinguishing characteristic of man's superiority, for in conformity with his vocation he is at the same time also the most inexhaustible source of cares and trouble, which the uncertain future arouses and from which all animals are exempt."³⁰⁴

Finally, he asserts a fourth and final role for reason's ideas. Reason "conceived himself ...to be the true end of nature, and in this regard nothing living on earth can compete with him." It is the possibility of reason and its ideas that leads Kant to claim man's equality with

"all other rational beings...especially in regard to his claim to be his own end...This step is at the same time also connected with man's release from nature's womb,"³⁰⁵

- and he relates it to the rejection from paradise after the Fall.³⁰⁶ Ideas of reason must be able to be applied to the understanding in various ways, so that scientific judgement is another expression of freedom. Principles that we need to create scientific knowledge,

³⁰³ Immanuel Kant, 'Speculative Beginning of Human History (1786)' in Ted Humphrey (transl), *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983) 8:107-123

³⁰⁴ SB 8:113-4

³⁰⁵ SB 8:114

³⁰⁶ Kant introduces the moral element at this point, although not relevantly to the present discussion. "From the moral side, the first step from this last state was a fall...The history of nature begins with good, for it is God's work; the history of freedom begins with badness, for it is man's work." He links his thinking with that of Rousseau; and offers examples "of the conflict between mankind's striving in regard to his moral vocation, on the one hand, and the unswerving observation of the laws for his raw and animal state that are laid down in his nature, on the other." SB 8:115-6, 6n

such as a principle of parsimony or Ockham's razor, are chosen ideas, not forced upon us by the understanding. Such regulative principles provide a motive to structure our experience and systematise it. This emphasises our dependence upon regulative principles and the constant temptations of transcendental illusions by treating regulative ideas as constitutive ones.

The Unconditioned is another idea of reason, another regulative principle, that Kant sees as essential to pursuing knowledge. In asking the conditions for something, one inevitably asks for the conditions of the conditions, and so on in an infinite regress. It is the unconditioned that drives us to go beyond all appearances and beyond the boundaries of experience.³⁰⁷ This unconditioned is the totality of all conditions; and, since we cannot experience a totality, it follows that the unconditioned must be beyond experience. Reason has to discover the conditions under which objects are as they are: that is, explanation must be pushed to its limits. If our cognition from experience conforms to the objects as things in themselves, then the unconditioned cannot be thought at all. But, he argues, "if these objects as appearances conform to our way of representing, then the contradiction disappears."³⁰⁸ If we have encountered the representation of something, - i.e. we have not (because we couldn't) encountered the thing in itself – then we can't have experienced the unconditioned. "The unconditioned must not be present in things insofar as we are acquainted with them."³⁰⁹

The concept of the unconditioned enables reason to speculate beyond the bounds of sense with its ideas which the understanding cannot do. Theoretical reason itself cannot

³⁰⁷ CPR Bxx

³⁰⁸ CPR Bxx

³⁰⁹ CPR Bxx

cross that boundary (and “advance in the field of the supersensible”). Practical reason can, so that the concept of the unconditioned links theoretical and practical reason:

"Now, after speculative reason has been denied all advance in this field of the supersensible, what still remains for us is to try whether there are not data in reason's unconditioned, in such a way as to reach beyond the boundaries of all possible experience, in accordance with the wishes of metaphysics, cognitions *a priori* that are possible, but only from a practical standpoint. By such procedures speculative reason has at least made room for such an extension even if it had to leave it empty; and we remain at liberty, indeed we are called upon by reason, to fill it if we can through *practical* (my italics) data of reason."³¹⁰

These ideas of the unconditioned give rise to: the concept of substance giving rise to the idea of the soul as the ultimate subject; the concept of causation giving rise to the idea of the world-whole as a completed series of conditions, and the concept of community giving rise to the idea of God as the common ground of all possibilities. The idea of the unconditioned therefore occupies a crucial role in Kant's philosophy.

"This unconditioned is always contained in the absolute totality of the series if one represents it in imagination. Yet this absolutely complete synthesis is once again only an idea; for with appearances one cannot know, at least not beforehand, whether such a synthesis is even possible...reason thus takes the path of proceeding from the idea of a totality."³¹¹

A full explanation demands an account of the conditions that led to the current state of affairs; it is an analytic proposition that once the conditioned is given, a regress in the

³¹⁰ CPR Bxxi-xxii and Bxxv

³¹¹ CPR A416/B444

series of its conditions is set as a task.³¹² It is “nothing but the logical requirement of assuming complete premises for a given conclusion.”³¹³ The point at which no further regress can be made, at which the given and hence necessary is reached, would be the unconditioned – which is actually an impossibility³¹⁴:

“within experience, every appearance is conditioned, always to progress from each member of the series, as a conditioned, to a still more remote member.”³¹⁵

The unconditioned is a goal to which we aim as we try to know more while realising that there is always more to know. By this idea of reason we interpret the world as intelligible, postulating systematic order in nature and claiming that empirical regularities are laws of nature and hence necessary. Science uncovers, rather than constructs nature’s systematicity. Science could not even start without the assumption that nature as a whole forms a system according to empirical laws.³¹⁶

4.4 Beyond the empirical

The systematisation of nature enables us to postulate objects beyond the empirical. We can theorise and provide explanations for the unobservable. For example, Kant proposes a theory of evolution:

“Certain water animals transform themselves into marsh animals and from these, after some generations into land animals.”³¹⁷

³¹² CPR A498/B526

³¹³ CPR A500/B536

³¹⁴ CPR A650/B384

³¹⁵ CPR A521/B549

³¹⁶ Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*, p.70.

³¹⁷ CPJ 5:419

Although the regulative use of reason can be wrong, we can use reason's ideas to create hypotheses. The concepts will not be what Kant terms as "properly constitutive". If a principle is assumed, we couldn't prove its universal validity. The reason is that we couldn't know all the possible consequences that would flow from it. Hence he concludes that:

"this use of reason is only regulative, bringing unity into particular cognitions as far as possible and thereby approximating the rule to universality. The hypothetical use of reason is therefore directed at the systematic unity of the understanding's cognitions, which, however, is the touchstone of truth for its rules."³¹⁸

Reason is constantly striving for a unity and a universality, not able to achieve one.

We can ascend to an interpretation of unity at one level ("the first law keeps us from resting satisfied with an excessive number of different original genera") and equally "distinguish sub-species within it" before applying a universal concept.³¹⁹ Wisely, I think, he does not specify when a particular approach should be applied: that is for the judgement of the investigating scientist.

4.5 Teleology as an idea of reason

Principles of teleology also exemplify ideas of reason. Kant explained nature in terms of its mechanisms, but believed that the universe must be considered as purposive and thus as the product of a wise and omnipotent deity. He was personally impressed with the

³¹⁸ CPR A647/B675

³¹⁹ CPR A660/B688

wonder and purposiveness of the world and hence sympathetic to teleological ideas and their role in the activities of reason:

"The present world discloses to us such an immeasurable showplace of manifoldness, order, purposiveness, and beauty.... so many and such unfathomable wondersthat our judgement upon the whole must resolve itself into a speechless, but nonetheless eloquent, astonishment."^{320,321}

He defines a principle for judging the internal purposiveness in organised beings as

"an organised product of nature...in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well. Nothing in it is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature."³²²

Bioscience cannot be conducted without teleological principles. However it does not follow that these principles of design demonstrate the existence of a designer. That would make the principle constitutive and not regulative. Kant contrasts two "quite different" statements. On the one hand, we could say that certain things in nature could only exist through a cause with intentions: that is, a deity, arguing that the observation of design implies the designer. But, on the other hand, it may be that I can only judge the possibility of those things because of the way my cognitive faculties are constituted, which demand an idea of intention. The former is about a fundamental objective principle; but the latter a subjective principle for the reflecting power of judgement, "hence a maxim that reason prescribes to it."³²³

³²⁰ CPR A622/B650

³²¹ Rel 6:89. This is a particularly lyrical account of his belief in the wonder of nature

³²² CPJ 5:376

³²³ CPJ 5:398

Although Kant addressed teleology from 1762 onwards, in the third *Critique* he systematically expounded a new principle linking aesthetic and teleological judgements. Common aesthetic judgements suggest similarities among human minds “without depending on determinate predicates of particular objects”.³²⁴ Teleology may also have suggested to Kant

“an *a priori* principle about the relation between the human mind and the nature that surrounds it, including other human minds that can give us confidence in the validity of our judgements without directly giving us new concepts of objects”.³²⁵

These types of judgements he called “reflecting judgements”, both in teleology and aesthetics. In a reflecting judgement³²⁶ we are not given a concept (as in a determining judgement) under which to subsume a particular. Instead we must find a concept or rule. A mediating concept between the concepts of nature and of freedom will enable a transition “from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a *purposiveness* of nature.” In that way we can come to know the possibility of a final end in nature.³²⁷

Guyer writes,

“Kant saw how he could take the existence of both natural and artistic beauty and our sense of the purposiveness in the organisation of nature as evidence that human beings as moral agents can nevertheless be at home in nature, and even as of value in preparing ourselves for the exercise of our moral agency”.³²⁸

³²⁴ CPJ xxi

³²⁵ CPJ xxi

³²⁶ Kant had distinguished regulative principles (for reflecting judgements) and constitutive ones (for determining judgements) in the *Transcendental Analytic* and *Transcendental Dialectic*. CPR B222, B537

³²⁷ CPJ 5:196

³²⁸ CPJ xxii

If we are only complex mechanisms, we can have no moral agency. Kant's science overtly acknowledges no purposes. The concepts of sensible nature and of supersensible freedom both have their domains. Between them is a gulf that cannot be bridged by theoretical reason. It is as if they exist in different worlds. Although nature can have no influence on freedom, it should be possible for freedom to be able to influence nature. Free choice impacts on the sensible world and the natural world is constructed in such a way that it can be influenced by freedom's choices:

“(T)he concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realised in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.”³²⁹

Kant's assertion of the impossibility of a transition from the concept of nature to that of freedom will be discussed further in ch7 as its complexity demands.³³⁰ In the third *Critique*, Kant explores “reason's own legitimate though problematic demand for complete systematic unity in explanation, including the explanation of nature.”³³¹

Teleological thinking is common, from Aristotle, for whom the mature organism is ‘that for the sake of which’³³² growth has occurred, to modern biology. Physiology, for example, has been described as “the technology of healthy achievements”³³³: good digestion, effective locomotion, accurate sensations etc. We ask: what are valves in the heart for, what do nerve fibres actually do, why have olfaction? The absence of

³²⁹ CPJ 5:176

³³⁰ CPR A329/B386

³³¹ Brian O'Connor and George Mohr, *German Idealism: an Anthology and Guide*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p.345.

³³² Aristotle. *Complete Works: Physics*. Jonathan Barnes (ed), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II.2.194a27

³³³ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p.334.

teleology in biology seemed absurd to Kant for whom merely mechanical principles cannot explain organised beings. Not even a genius equal to Isaac Newton, “could make comprehensible even the generation of a blade of grass according to natural laws that no intention has ordered.”³³⁴ The anatomists who investigate the structure of plants and animals assume that the structural intimacies have necessary purposes. Kant emphasises, “they could just as little dispense with this teleological principle as they could do without the universal physical principle.”³³⁵

Kant, an admirer of Newton, had to relate teleology and Newton’s mechanistic universe. Although all judgements involving purpose can be considered teleological, I focus on Kant’s concern about purposes in nature – not explanations of individual human desires or those that supposedly explain existence:

“Even an observer of nature finally comes to like objects... when he discovers in them the great purposiveness of their organization, so that this reason delights in contemplating them, and Leibniz spared an insect that he had carefully examined...”³³⁶

Teleological judgements in nature are material and objective³³⁷ in contrast to those in aesthetics (formal and subjective), mathematics (formal and objective) or human purposes (material and subjective). Further, no absolute teleological judgements are justified where there is advantageousness of one thing for another: withdrawal of sea for sandy strata, sand for pine trees and so on³³⁸ - this is relative and external purposiveness, the one is a means for another, not an end. A thing with natural ends has special characteristics, being: (1) an individual whose “parts... are possible only through

³³⁴ CPJ 5:400

³³⁵ CPJ 5:376

³³⁶ CPractR 5:160

³³⁷ CPJ 5:366

³³⁸ CPJ 5:367-9

their relation to the whole”³³⁹, (2) with parts “combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form”³⁴⁰ and (3) “generates itself”³⁴¹.

Kant justifies teleological explanation of natural causes. A natural end or purpose is not a constitutive concept of either the understanding or of reason. This does not obviate a role for such ends or purposes. The reflecting power of judgement can use the concept of teleology to guide research and thought in a similar way that we think analogically of our own causality in accordance with ends – “not, of course, for the sake of knowledge of nature.”³⁴² It provides explanation.

An idea of teleology may be useful in our thinking *regulatively* even if the relationship between the parts and whole of an organism is a mystery, like that of moral freedom. But the *a priori* ordering principles are *ours*, not nature’s. A teleological judgement can be imposed on a causal explanation enabling the unity of the realms of nature and of purpose into one system.³⁴³ I have already noted how Kant thought it could suggest evolution.³⁴⁴ Teleological explanation is, for Kant, a heuristic device, supersensible and subjectively valid, that doesn’t tell us what is really going on in nature.³⁴⁵ Thinking regulatively doesn’t determine what the truth is; rather, it is about method – the way we go about thinking in searching for a unity that we hope may exist. “Transcendental ideas express the peculiar vocation of reason” as “a principle of the systematic unity of the use of the understanding.”³⁴⁶ In determining the truth, we seek coherence between what we read into experience (space, time, categories) and what we sense (what we read from

³³⁹ CPJ 5:373

³⁴⁰ CPJ 5:373

³⁴¹ CPJ 5:371

³⁴² CPJ 5:375

³⁴³ Stefan Körner, *Kant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955) pp.204-5.

³⁴⁴ CPJ 5:419

³⁴⁵ Rolf-Peter Horstmann, ‘The early philosophy of Fichte and Schelling’ in Karl Ameriks (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*,(Cambridge:CUP, 2000), p.131.

³⁴⁶ Prol 4:350

it). Taking what is regulative to be constitutive “divides reason against itself.” It is constitutive principles that enable the application of concepts to objects and thus extend our cognition. Reason’s ideas are not constitutive and reason cannot be the source of knowledge on its own account.

Some suggest a less certain regulative element of Kant’s teleology. Walker writes, “those principles which were called constitutive of experience help to determine what is real; the regulative principles help to determine what is rational and so might themselves be called constitutive of rationality.”³⁴⁷ His suggestion is that regulative principles are essential for constitutive principles to be accepted as rational and therefore to function. To that degree, regulative principles have a small constitutive role: namely that of supporting the rationality of constitutive principles. But is Walker confusing Kant’s intention? Or is Kant confusing his readers? Against Walker, the distinction between constitutive and regulative ideas appears clear with, for example, the firm declaration that “transcendental ideas are never of constitutive use.”³⁴⁸ Yet Kant himself writes that “for the law of reason to seek unity is *necessary*, (my italics) since without it we would have no reason and, without that, no coherent use of the understanding.”³⁴⁹ Even for Kant, the “metaphysical idea of the organic had virtually become a necessary condition of experience itself,” says Beiser.³⁵⁰ And teleology is crucial in analysing the organic. Beiser, thinks that Kant was *not* clear and firm in his distinction between the constitutive and the regulative in the light of the latter quotations.³⁵¹ Proceeding *as if* nature is systematically ordered is not sufficient to

³⁴⁷ Paul Guyer and Ralph Walker, ‘Kant’s conception of empirical laws’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 64,(1990), pp.221-242.

³⁴⁸ CPR A644/B672

³⁴⁹ CPR A651/B679

³⁵⁰ Frederick C Beiser, *German Idealism*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.523.

³⁵¹ Frederick C Beiser, *German Idealism* p.522.

motivate inquiry: it must be so ordered. But this view is against most of Kant's writing: he returns to this issue in the third *Critique*, where he claims that the power of judgement attributes to nature a transcendental purposiveness on the grounds that we must make such an assumption for experience of nature and research into it.³⁵² Despite the suggestions of Walker and Beiser of Kant's so-called 'vacillations', the arguments requiring a constitutive role for the ideas of Kant's teleology remain unconvincing. Nothing is lost if our thinking proceeds on an *as if* basis, nor is Kant suggesting any gain by enlarging the constitutive role of reason's ideas.

Ideas of reason then are not facts about nature but demands upon it. I have spelt this out in the case of the transcendental idea of teleology; and have also discussed the special ideas of God, the world whole and the soul in the previous chapter and also below. But there are many ideas that function as goals or standards: for example, the practical idea of a just constitution³⁵³ or the theoretical ideas of "pure earth, pure water, pure air,"³⁵⁴ and a "fundamental power of the mind."³⁵⁵ These ideas open the way to explanation, theory, hypothesis, possibility and experiment. From this scientific truth may emerge. For practical ideas, they open the way to a state of affairs that ought to exist but does not and which our actions should aim to achieve.

4.6 Two further ideas of reason

Two further ideas of reason are given an exposition at the end of the Appendix.³⁵⁶ These are the ideas of the transcendental deduction of the soul and of God. A transcendental

³⁵² CPJ 5:185

³⁵³ CPR A316/B372

³⁵⁴ CPR A676/B674

³⁵⁵ CPR A649/B677

³⁵⁶ CPR A669-682/B697-710)

deduction, he reminds us, is required in order to use an *a priori* concept. With a hundred pages of the *Critique* still to go, he tells us that a deduction,³⁵⁷ (differing from that for the categories), for these entities must be possible to achieve "the completion of the critical business of pure reason."³⁵⁸ They are, moreover, preceded by a section³⁵⁹ described by Kemp Smith as extremely self-contradictory, wavering between a subjective and an objective interpretation of the ideas of reason. The probable explanation, he thinks, is that Kant is here recasting older material.³⁶⁰ Another commentator adds that the following deduction "is highly oblique."³⁶¹ This is a harsh judgement by Kemp Smith. The point seems clear that Kant is advocating an idea of reason that views the search for unity as the creation of a system. This idea comes from us and not only directs the understanding in its search but also claims objectivity. A transcendental principle has to be pre-supposed through which a systematic unity, as pertaining to the object itself, is assumed *a priori* to be necessary.³⁶² He continues rhetorically in asking how diversity in nature could be regarded if it is only a "concealed unity if we could regard that unity as contrary to the actual nature?" In such circumstances, "reason would proceed directly contrary to its vocation."³⁶³ Nevertheless, it does seem that we are proceeding on an *as if* basis. We can do this if we are prepared to conceive transcendent objects in analogical terms: that is, as analogues of real things, not in themselves as real things. This "hypothetical" use of reason is not constitutive but must be regulative.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁷ A deduction is an argument that aims to justify the use of a concept, one that demonstrates that the concept correctly applies to objects, not 'deduction' in the commoner logical sense of analysis.

³⁵⁸ CPR A670/B698

³⁵⁹ CPR A642-68/B670-96

³⁶⁰ Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p.547

³⁶¹ Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p.224.

³⁶² CPR A650/B678

³⁶³ CPR A651/B679

³⁶⁴ CPR A647/B675

Things are given to theoretical reason. If an object is given “absolutely”, my concepts will determine the object. But if something is given only as an object “in the idea”, there is really only a schema, not a specific object. The schema does however serve to represent other objects to us; and will do so in accordance with their systematic unity, by virtue of the relation of other objects to the object given in the idea. Kant draws a parallel in proposing that the concept of a highest intelligence is similarly a mere idea (i.e. it does not relate straightway to an object.)³⁶⁵ Again, it is "only a schema." My concepts cannot work on this either to produce a specific object. This “idea” has the role of maintaining the greatest systematic unity in the empirical use of our reason. Thus things must be considered *as if* (Kant's emphasis) their existence was due to a highest intelligence, not that it demonstrably actually *is*. The value of the idea is then heuristic and polemical, not ostensive. It doesn't show how the object is made up, but it does show that we ought to seek after its constitution and the connection of empirical objects. If we consider ideas that are psychological, cosmological or theological, we cannot refer them directly to any object corresponding to them. It is then a maxim of reason to proceed in accordance with such ideas.³⁶⁶ This deduction therefore yields no object and cannot be constitutive: rather the ideas are regulative. We must consider everything that might belong to possible experience *as if* this experience constituted an absolute unity, dependent and conditioned in the sensible world and *as if* the sum total of all appearances had a single supreme and all sufficient ground. This leads Kant to conclude that it is from us that the idea of a most wise cause comes, not from a highest intelligence (if such an intelligence exists).

³⁶⁵ CPR A670/B698

³⁶⁶ CPR A671/B699

Ideas of reason then are not items of knowledge but bearers of guidance.³⁶⁷ The unity of reason is the unity of a system. What is given to pure reason are not

"objects to be unified for the concept of experience but cognitions of understanding to be unified for the concept of reason, i.e., to be connected in one principle."³⁶⁸

The ideas function by providing motives for science and presuppositions necessary for its pursuit.³⁶⁹

4.7 The postulates

The term 'postulate' was familiar to Kant from Meier's *Logic* textbook, which he had both read and annotated. Meier used the German term '*Heischeurtheile*' meaning "a judgement on demand". This relates to the Latin '*postulatum*', a demand or request. Hence Kant's use of the term as meaning an unproven claim required by a particular context.

Kant discusses postulates at two notable points in his *Critiques*: as postulates of empirical knowledge and as postulates of pure practical reason. His derivation for the use of this term comes from the *Posterior Analytics* of Aristotle. 'Postulate' is a term that is used interchangeably with 'axiom': defined as "a statement for which no proof is required and which, thus, occurs as a premise of many arguments but as the conclusion of none."³⁷⁰ This status arises because its truth is self-evident, typically as in Euclid's geometry. Alternatively, it requires no proof because it constitutes an implicit definition

³⁶⁷ CPR A827/B855

³⁶⁸ CPR A680/B708

³⁶⁹ Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*, p.70.

³⁷⁰ Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Pan Books, 1979), p.33.

of the terms it contains or contributes, with other axioms, to such a definition. In the first *Critique*, the term 'postulate' appears as a "postulate of reason" to seek the unconditioned;³⁷¹ and as "postulates of empirical thinking in general" as a principle of the pure understanding.³⁷² (In mathematics, it is an assumption used as a basis for mathematical reasoning.) Postulates of empirical thinking have the function of synthesising the form of appearances (mere intuition), its matter (perception) and the relation of these perceptions (experience). They relate the appearances to the faculty of knowledge.³⁷³ Modal categories (possibility, actuality, necessity)³⁷⁴ are transformed by the postulates to become cognised by the subject. The categories of modality do not enlarge our knowledge: rather they are principles which explain the concepts of possibility, actuality and necessity in their empirical employment. Postulates of empirical thought are concerned with theoretical reason, the 'is'; postulates of pure practical reason with the 'ought'. They are therefore clearly distinguished in their roles.

A postulate of pure practical reason, then, is a rational belief without evidence (- in that respect a parallel to the concept of ideas discussed above -), theoretically undecidable but practically necessary. Kant clarifies this further in a footnote in his second *Critique* where he describes the confusion that could arise if postulates of pure practical reason are confused with postulates of pure mathematics. The postulates of pure mathematics possess apodictic certainty about an action previously theoretically cognised *a priori*. By contrast, the postulates of pure practical reason propose the possibility of objects: God and the immortality of the soul. These derive

³⁷¹ CPR A498/B526

³⁷² CPR A161/B200

³⁷³ CPR A219/B266

³⁷⁴ CPR A80/B106

“from apodictic practical laws, and therefore only on behalf of a practical reason, so that this certainty of the postulated possibility is not at all theoretical hence also not apodictic i.e. it is not a necessity cognised with respect to the object but is, instead, an assumption necessary with respect to the subject's observance of its objective but practical laws, hence merely a necessary hypothesis.”³⁷⁵

Before his first *Critique*, Kant does not distinguish between postulates, theoretical ideas and hypotheses.³⁷⁶ The term 'postulate' was used in a theoretical context.³⁷⁷ In a note in the late 1770s, he comments,

"a postulate is a practical immediately certain proposition. But one can also have theoretical postulates for the sake of practical reason, such as that of the existence of God, of freedom, and of another world."³⁷⁸

4.8 What is the role of the postulates?

Kant continued to use 'postulates' for theoretical and practical reason, as well as the interchangeable term 'hypothesis'. The postulate becomes construed as a concept essential for a functional role where the existence of the object corresponding to that object is not claimed. Thus the *concept* of 'God' may be essential to support the idea of a highest good, without necessitating the actual existence of God. Thus,

"the transcendental concept is necessary, not the transcendental proof...The necessity of the divine being as a necessary hypothesis either of pure concepts of

³⁷⁵ CPractR 5:11n

³⁷⁶ Frederick Rauscher, *Naturalism and Realism in Kant's Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), p.151.

³⁷⁷ Immanuel Kant. 'Inaugural Dissertation (1770)' in David Walford (ed), *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770.* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992). 2:402, 2:418

³⁷⁸ R3133, 16:673

possibility or of experience in this world, and the latter as hypothesis of morality. Absolute necessity cannot be proved."³⁷⁹

(In the current context, I am more concerned with the postulates of pure practical reason: freedom, God and the immortality of the soul).

The term 'hypothesis' becomes distinguished in the critical writing as concerning theoretical reason only. It is the role of hypotheses, as noted earlier in this chapter, to connect our experience with explanation, grounding a regulative principle (idea) of reason with heuristic intent. They arise to solve particular problems. Transcendental hypotheses do not represent objects of cognition. In function, Kemp Smith expresses the view that Kant's transcendental method "is really identical with the hypothetical method in physical sciences."³⁸⁰ We cannot, for example, have any insight *in concreto* into the soul, although this idea of reason makes it possible to think the unity of powers of mind. This use of an idea of reason is valuable. But a transcendental hypothesis can offer nothing, for it cannot concern itself with the empirical, the world of appearances. It has no direct explanatory power for anything empirical. Hypotheses cannot ground theoretical propositions but can defend them by frustrating the "opponent's illusory insights." Or as he puts it in a polemical phrase, "hypotheses are therefore allowed in the field of pure reason only as weapons of war."³⁸¹ An opponent may assert that sea mist is a wizard's magical poisonous vapour, but we can defend against the truth of this transcendent assertion in dealing with the necessity of a valid empirical basis. Hypotheses are valid "only relative to opposed transcendent pretensions."³⁸²

³⁷⁹ R4580, 17:600

³⁸⁰ Norman Kemp Smith *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p.xxxviii

³⁸¹ CPR A777/B805

³⁸² CPR A781/B809

Although in the first *Critique*, "postulate" does not refer to moral claims and "hypotheses" is limited to theoretical claims, towards the end of the entire *Critique* in the Canon,³⁸³ Kant offers the most detailed discussion of the comparison of the epistemological status of theoretical and practical reason before the *Groundwork*. Kant raises the claim that the concept of God may refer to an actual object. If "human reason....accomplishes nothing in its pure use" and the "greatest and perhaps only utility of all philosophy of pure reason is ...only negative", then what remains is the "unquenchable desire to find a firm footing beyond all bounds of experience"³⁸⁴ and leads to the hope that practical reason will guide us. As regards the objects of the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, the theoretical interest of reason is "very small".³⁸⁵ These objects lie chiefly within the purview of practical reason so that investigating nature will not help us. There can be no canon of theoretical reason because synthetic cognition of pure theoretical reason is impossible. Pure reason cannot create knowledge: that requires the use of the understanding to which reason will apply its rules. If a canon is a general law or rule or principle or criterion by which something is judged, then it cannot be applied to pure theoretical reason's claims because theoretical reason has only the modest function of protecting against falsehood or guarding against error. Only practical reason can have a canon where the practical concerns moral laws, which permit a canon. (Practical law creates its objects, by contrast with theoretical reason to which objects are given). As concepts or ideas of reason, God, freedom and immortality are permitted concepts due to their relationship to the moral law. "If these three cardinal propositions are not at all necessary for our knowing, and yet are insistently recommended to us by our reason,

³⁸³ A canon is set of principles for discriminating between true and false judgements.

³⁸⁴ CPR A 796/B824

³⁸⁵ CPR A798/B826

their importance must really concern only the practical."³⁸⁶ This leads to his famous three questions: what is to be done if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world?³⁸⁷ The plain interpretation here is not whether there is a *concept* that exists of God, but whether *God* exists. And the latter is a theoretical question that Kant has already addressed in the fourth antinomy of pure reason and elsewhere. What is added in the canon is the distinction between such belief as practical or "doctrinal"³⁸⁸ with Kant seemingly defending the latter on teleological grounds that he had previously dismissed when discussing *knowledge*, not belief in God.³⁸⁹

In claiming to cognise (- to know-) *a priori*, Kant asserts that we cannot be concerned with belief or opinion: we know. For example, mathematics is made up of synthetic *a priori* judgements. It follows that a mere opinion about mathematics is not allowed. "It is absurd to have an opinion in pure mathematics: one must know." On the other hand, in a practical relation for the absolutely necessary ends of morality, we can take something that is theoretically insufficient to be true as a belief.³⁹⁰ Moral belief differs. My duty is to fulfil the moral law whose ends are fixed for me. The condition of those ends, which brings them all together and validates them is the existence of God and a future world. On this view the postulates of God and a future world become essential to morality. Hence the assertion that "I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life."³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ CPR A799-800/B827-828

³⁸⁷ CPR A800/B828

³⁸⁸ Kant has described various levels of opinion, conviction, believing and knowing with an analogy with betting: how many advantages in life would you wager on this belief? "The outcome of my experiments...confirms the usefulness of this presupposition...but rather even in this theoretical relation, it can be said that I firmly believe in God: but in this case this belief must not strictly be called practical, but must be called a *doctrinal* (my italics) belief." CPR A816/B854 (It is not clear to me if "I" represents Kant personally or the utterance of an individual exemplar.)

³⁸⁹ CPR A826/B854

³⁹⁰ CPR A823/B851

³⁹¹ CPR A828/B856

However, these grounds are subjective, based on moral certainty, and it is therefore impossible on moral grounds to *know* there is a God. As it is "woven with my moral disposition", Kant cannot say "It is morally certain that there is a God," only "I am morally certain etc."³⁹² Kant's conception of belief in the canon is similar to the use of 'postulate' in the pre- critical and earlier writing in the first *Critique*: implicitly also a stronger hypothesis from practical reason.

Kant deals with the postulates in most detail in his second *Critique*. The frequent use of the term "exists" in connection with immortality and God suggests that Kant is using the postulates as an existence claim regarding transcendent entities. Against this, he does not claim to prove the existence of God through the postulates, although, in the words of one commentator,³⁹³ "Kant's failure to prove that such supersensible objects are real does not entail that he is committed to anti-realism about them, nor does the possibility of scepticism." That is to say, the inability to prove the existence of God or immortality by either theoretical or, through the doctrine of the postulates, by practical reason, does not mean that we can dismiss the possibility of their existence as real. Regardless of his actual stance, a realist may believe that the validity of the moral law involves a commitment to the reality of transcendental freedom, God or immortality on Kant's account i.e. the postulates.³⁹⁴

4.9 Justifying the postulates?

³⁹² CPR A829/B857

³⁹³ Patrick Kain, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Kant's Second Critique' *Philosophy Compass* 1, (2006), pp.449-65.

³⁹⁴ Patrick Kain, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Kant's Second Critique', p.461.

Postulates may result from a *need* of pure practical reason.³⁹⁵ The near contemporary opposition to this statement came from Winzenmann^{396,397}, who argued that where need is based on inclination one cannot postulate the existence of its object.³⁹⁸ Wishing something has no relevance as to its being the case. To the question as to whether rational belief always requires evidence in favour of its truth, Kant says 'no'. There may be occasions where the principle that rational belief always requires supporting evidence is not valid. In order that a belief may be warranted without evidence, two conditions must apply. Firstly, no evidence or *a priori* argument could decide or refute the belief: it is theoretically undecidable. Secondly, if one holds the moral law to be binding, one is subjectively necessitated to hold that belief. That is rational: one couldn't hold the moral law and reject belief in the postulate. It is 'practically necessary'. Here then is Kant's justification for the concept of the postulate. It "is a *theoretical* (my italics) proposition (i.e. a proposition aimed at capturing 'what is', aiming at being true) that is both theoretically undecidable and practically necessary."³⁹⁹

In arguing that this rational belief is not a command,⁴⁰⁰ Kant modifies his earlier assertion that exact conformity of happiness and moral worth is impossible to conceive by us - and hence the need for the postulate of God's existence. He now adds that it may be impossible for our reason to imagine such an exact relationship of proportionality

³⁹⁵ CPractR 5:142

³⁹⁶ T Winzenmann, 'An den Herrn Professor Kant von dem Verfasser der Resultate der Jacobischen und Mendelssohnschen Philosophie', *Deutsches Museum* [Leipzig] 1, (1787), 116-56

³⁹⁷ CPractR 5:143

³⁹⁸ Although Kant refers at 5:143 to "need based upon inclination", the implication is that this is not a true *need*. We may want or wish for many things and become psychologically dependent upon gaining them, but they wouldn't be true needs – we could live without them.

³⁹⁹ Marcus Willaschek, 'The primacy of practical reason and the idea of a practical postulate', in Andrews Reath and Jens Timmerman (eds), *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason. A Critical Guide*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp.168-196.

⁴⁰⁰ CPractR 5:144

between happiness and moral worth, but it cannot be proved impossible according to nature's universal laws.⁴⁰¹

The case for the postulate of God seems weaker, for Kant now appears to concede that proportionate happiness may be possible after all without God: reason cannot decide this objectively. But he adds that this necessity for God "can never fall into unbelief."⁴⁰²

Since subjectively we cannot disbelieve the need for such a link between morality and happiness, the implication is that belief in God remains Kant's position. Kant has already acknowledged the impossibility of proving God's existence from knowledge of the world⁴⁰³: there is only one way to arrive at "this cognition, namely, as pure reason to start from the supreme principle of its pure practical use...and determine its object."⁴⁰⁴

The concept of God belongs to morals, not physics.⁴⁰⁵

The function of God as a concept - or indeed as an actuality - is a postulate of practical reason in order to serve a function, namely that of justifying the highest good.

Theoretical reason, of course, has no role in the generation of the (moral) postulates. It has been suggested that "the practical extension of our *cognition* by the postulates does not concern the existence of God and immortality, but only the objective reality of our *concepts* of them."⁴⁰⁶ This follows from Kant's exposition of the requirement of practical reason for the postulates. Although theoretical cognition is justified in assuming the postulates, it doesn't expand their use for theoretical purposes; and the postulates are essential for practical reason to realise the highest good with the concept of God.⁴⁰⁷ It does not follow that actual existence is *excluded*. Kant thinks we have a

⁴⁰¹ CPractR 5:145

⁴⁰² CPractR 5:146

⁴⁰³ CPractR 5:138

⁴⁰⁴ CPractR 5:139

⁴⁰⁵ CPractR 5:140

⁴⁰⁶ Marcus Willaschek, 'The primacy of practical reason and the idea of a practical postulate', p.191.

⁴⁰⁷ CPractR 5:134

consciousness of a duty to God both for theoretical and practical purposes, but that this is an idea that proceeds from our own reason i.e. not from revealed religion.⁴⁰⁸ When Kant writes that the postulates receive "objective reality",⁴⁰⁹ he means that the content of these ideas is specific enough to refer to determinate objects. His argument is that an "apodictic practical law" makes necessary conditions of them in what it commands we have as an object. If the practical law commands a certain specific object (or 'end'), certain conditions, the postulates, are essential for the end - which here is the highest good. They are not cognitions but transcendent thoughts "in which there is nothing impossible."⁴¹⁰ Otherwise the postulates would be mere 'forms of thought' without 'sense and reference'. "All that is gained by the postulates for the purposes of theoretical cognition is that otherwise merely 'logically possible' and thus 'problematical' concepts now...have real possibility."⁴¹¹

Apart from the footnote below, I set aside the controversy interpreting Kant's *Opus Postumum*.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁸ MM 6:443-4

⁴⁰⁹ CPractR 5:135

⁴¹⁰ CPractR 5:135

⁴¹¹ Marcus Willaschek 'The primacy of practical reason and the idea of a practical postulate', p.191.

⁴¹² Erich Adickes in 1927 (*Kant und die Als-Ob-Philosophie*. Fr Frommans Verlag: Stuttgart. 1927) argued that denials of God as existing are arguments about the origin of the human idea of God; while more recently, Eckart Förster ('*Kant's Final Synthesis: An Essay on the Opus Postumum*.' (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000) interprets this final unpublished writing as indicating a denial by Kant of God as substance. Certainly, Kant appears sceptical: "To have religion, the concept of God is not required (still less the postulate: "There is a God" 21:81)." Interpretation of the *Opus Postumum* is problematic due to its scattered remarks and the need to relate them to the previous critical philosophy. The relevant section in the *Opus Postumum* is the last to be written, probably after 1801, and littered with irrelevant comments. It is the most disjointed part of the work. Certainly Kant makes an emphasis on the difference between the concept of God and God's existence: "There still seems to be the question as to whether this idea, the product of our own reason, has reality or whether it is a mere thought-object, and there remains to us nothing but the moral relationship to this object namely, God." He goes on to comment that there is a contradiction in wishing to prove the existence of such a being as there is no valid inference from possibility to existence. There is no consensus about this section's interpretation among scholars and it is unlikely that there will be one. I will avoid any further assessment of the work's significance.

One commentator suggests that the key concept in understanding the need for and role of the postulates of practical reason is that of the *reductio ad absurdam practicum*.⁴¹³ If an end is impossible of attainment, I am not obliged to pursue it. That impossibility implies logical impossibility rather than practical impossibility. For example, if I am going to participate in a 100 metre sprint race with Usain Bolt, it is a practical, but not a logical, impossibility that I will win. In the case of moral action, I cannot be required to attempt what is logically impossible to achieve: ought implies can. Kant exemplifies this rule in stating that if the highest good is impossible of attainment, then the moral law which promotes it is false: it is "fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends."⁴¹⁴ On this basis, defending the moral law means defending the (logical) possibility of the highest good. The *reductio ad absurdam practicum* arises because if God's existence or immortality is denied, the moral law must be denied; but this is absurd because the moral law is known to be valid, as shown in the Analytic of the second *Critique*. Kant appears to modify this viewpoint in the third *Critique* in writing,

"this proof....is not meant to say that it is just as necessary to assume the existence of God as it is to acknowledge the validity of the moral law, hence he that whoever cannot convince himself of the former can judge himself free of the latter. No!"⁴¹⁵

He goes on in this passage to explore its ramifications. The moral law is apodictic, independent of theoretical reason.⁴¹⁶ The Antinomy of practical reason⁴¹⁷ that Kant sets up concerns theoretical illusions, but about morality: and it is theoretical illusions that

⁴¹³ Allen W Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p.29.

⁴¹⁴ CPractR 5:114

⁴¹⁵ CJ 5:450

⁴¹⁶ CPractR 5:142

⁴¹⁷ CPractR 5:113

concern Kant in the first *Critique*.⁴¹⁸ I discuss the antinomy of practical reason in more detail in ch7 and ch9.

Kant's argument using the *ad absurdum practicum* applies also in considering the third postulate, that of freedom:

"The concept of freedom...constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason...freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law."⁴¹⁹

Indeed freedom and the moral law are equated at times or seen to imply each other.⁴²⁰

Kant views the moral law as the 'fact of reason'⁴²¹, at least in the second *Critique*.⁴²² The moral argument for freedom must rest on the way in which it "reciprocally implies" the moral law.⁴²³ First he asks where freedom comes from: where does our knowledge of the unconditionally practical start? He answers: "it cannot start from freedom". We have no immediate consciousness of freedom, nor can we derive it from experience. The former is impossible as our first concept of freedom is negative; and experience cannot give it to us either, because experience leads us to the law of appearances only. The answer is therefore the moral law of which we are conscious as soon as we draw up

⁴¹⁸ This line of argument distracts from the discussion of the postulates. I note Kant's view in the *Lectures on Philosophical Theology* that "our moral faith is a practical postulate, through which anyone who denies it can be brought *ad absurdum practicum*. An *absurdum logicum* is an inconsistency in judgements. There is an *absurdum practicum*, however, when it is shown that if I deny this or that I would have to be a scoundrel." A moral argument, Wood concludes, is then, a *reductio ad absurdum*. But it is not a *reductio ad absurdum logicum*, an argument leading to an unwelcome inconsistency in judgements. Rather it is a *reductio ad absurdum practicum*, an argument leading to an unwelcome conclusion about the person himself as a moral agent. (Allen W Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, p29.) (Wood's use of Latin terms does not aid clarity, when English would suffice!)

⁴¹⁹ CPractR 5:3-4

⁴²⁰ CPractR 5:29

⁴²¹ At CPJ 5:31, Kant remarks that he "extends the concept of a fact, as seems to me right, beyond the usual meaning of this word " and goes on to state that freedom "is the only one among all the ideas of pure reason whose object is a fact and which must be counted among the *scibilia* (things that can be known). On this basis freedom and the moral law are equated.

⁴²² Howard Caygill, (ed), *A Kant Dictionary*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995)

⁴²³ CPractR 5:29

maxims of the will for ourselves. If we ask how we become conscious of the moral law, it is similar to awareness of pure theoretical principles: by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes those principles to us and to setting aside all empirical conditions. In sum,

"one would never have ventured to introduce freedom into science had not the moral law, and with it practical reason, come in and forced this concept upon us.

But experience also confirms this order of concepts in us."⁴²⁴

The moral law commands us to will autonomously and determine our wills according to the legislative form of our maxims. Moral volition must therefore be by grounds that are not events in nature: that is, a free will. Wood states:

"Freedom is then the condition which must be assumed, presupposed, and believed of our own will if moral volition in general is to be conceived as a possibility for us."⁴²⁵

Freedom must be postulated for this kind of volition. Only a will that is free can realise the ideas of God and immortality by accepting and willing the highest good. Freedom must be postulated for this end in obedience to the moral law to be promoted.

Summarising: if my will is not free, I can consider denying autonomous willing; to obey the moral law I must will autonomously; denying a free will means denying that I obey the moral law; but, I am aware that I must observe the moral law unconditionally.

Hence I reach an *absurdum practicum*, an intolerable conclusion about myself as a moral agent.

⁴²⁴ CPractR 5:30

⁴²⁵ Allen W Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, p.36

The moral arguments for all three of the postulates of practical reason are thus essentially similar. All of them, says Kant, “proceed from a principle of morality.”⁴²⁶ The principle of morality, in its turn, is not a postulate; rather it is a law, the moral law, whose function is to determine the will and thus necessitate, with immediate effect, right conduct. All three postulates are presuppositions and all three have a practical reference necessarily. Moral conduct requires all three of the postulates as conditions of its realisation. When Kant writes that they give objective reality to the idea of theoretical reason in general, the suggestion appears to be that God and immortality gain their reality through their connection with freedom. None of these three extend theoretical cognition although all three give reality to ideas of theoretical reason in *general* (Kant’s italics). ‘Freedom’, ‘God’ and ‘immortality’ as postulates have objectivity as concepts – which is not the same as an ontological claim that freedom, God and immortality *exist*. Theoretical reason is unable to prove that. Considered as ideas of theoretical reason, all three are not cognitions but “transcendent thoughts in which there is nothing impossible.”⁴²⁷ Morally, all three are essential to moral conduct. All three postulates are essential to the concept of the highest good as I will argue in ch9 and on that basis the arguments for the three are essentially similar. Immortality “flows from” the necessity for time to fulfil the moral law’s requirements; freedom from the need to presuppose independence from the world of sense and to determine one’s will according to the intelligible world’s law; and God from the “necessity of the condition for such an intelligible world to be the highest good” – to assume that we must presuppose an independent good that is highest. And that is the existence of God.⁴²⁸ He concludes that “no sophistry will ever convince even the most common human being

⁴²⁶ CPractR 5:132

⁴²⁷ CPractR 5:135

⁴²⁸ CPractR 5:132

that they are not true concepts.”⁴²⁹ Transcendent thoughts assist in the pursuit of reason’s interests and it is to the latter concept that I now turn.

⁴²⁹ CPractR 5:134

Chapter 5: Interests

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5.1 What does Kant mean by 'interest'?

Reason has interests. As the faculty of principles, it is reason that determines the interests of all the powers of the mind including its own.⁴³⁰ a creative role extending the features of reason explicated in ch3 and ch4. Summarised in the second *Critique*, “(t)he interest of its speculative use consists in the cognition of the object up to the highest a priori principles.”⁴³¹ That is, theoretical reason’s interest lies in knowing things according to intuitions processed by the understanding in the categories. “That of its practical use consists in the determination of the will with respect to the final and complete end.”⁴³² That is, practical reason’s interest lies in determining ‘Willkür’ so that we do what we either want (pathological) or ought (moral) to do to realise an end (thus linking interest to inclination (pathological) or to practical reason (moral)). Three questions bring reason’s interests together. “What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope?”⁴³³ As I will argue in chapter seven, reason’s interest will be shown to be “complete in practical use alone.”⁴³⁴

In this chapter, I will further define ‘interests’ and claim that this concept may be used in different ways in theoretical reason. Those ways may be subjective and impossible to express in an exact rule. In practical reason, the concept must be different in some respects because it is possible to make a distinction between interests that are mediate and immediate. I will demonstrate this distinction. I will argue, practical reason has an interest in promoting theoretical reason. The concept of interests also plays a role in Kant’s aesthetic philosophy and its relation to the moral.

⁴³⁰ CPractR 5:119,120

⁴³¹ CPractR 5:120

⁴³² CPractR 5:120

⁴³³ CPR A805/B833

⁴³⁴ CPractR 5:121

5.2 What is the interest of theoretical reason?

After considering 'interest' in theoretical reason, its use in practical reason can be compared to ascertain the consistency of Kant's interpretation.

In the first *Critique*, Kant refers to two conflicting interests of reason:

“[R]eason shows two interests that conflict with each other: on the one side, an interest in the domain (universality) in regard to genera, on the other an interest in content (determinacy) in respect of the manifoldness of species; for in the first case the understanding thinks much under its concepts, while in the second it thinks all the more in them. This expresses itself in the very different ways of thinking among students of nature; some of whom (who are chiefly speculative) are hostile to differences in kind, while others (chiefly empirical minds) constantly seek to split nature into so much manifoldness that one would almost have to give up the hope of judging its appearances according to general principles.⁴³⁵

Reason's interests in genera and species differ. Variety and agreement are in tension.

On the one hand are those whose orientation in thinking is to seek unanimity in nature: that is, to seek common features and then group entities together. Kant instances the old scholastic rule: one should not multiply principles without necessity. On the other hand, such unity may not be a true unity or unanimity of features but a "concealed unity": that is, a convenient regulatory way of interpreting nature but not belonging to its essence. Thus "reason is free to admit that it is just as possible that all powers are different in kind and that its derivation of them from a systematic unity is not in conformity with

⁴³⁵ CPR A654/B682

nature."⁴³⁶ On the one hand, we can presuppose a systematic unity of substances' many powers⁴³⁷ in species, genera and families or, on other hand, we can abandon the search for unity (an idea that "has been pursued so eagerly in all ages") and use the principle of species which requires "manifoldness and variety in things".⁴³⁸ We can, in the jargon of medicine (and other disciplines), be lumpers or splitters.

This terminology is traditionally attributed to Charles Darwin from a letter to the botanist JD Hooker of August 1, 1857 in which he wrote, "It is good to have hair splitters and lumpers", in the context of the classification of species and genera in plants. The same approach has been used in literary studies: for example, in classifying Shakespeare plays, the splitter will insist on the authority of one correct text, the lumper on all texts with certain common features.⁴³⁹ A microbiologist comments, as another example, that

"bases for differences involve choices of characters and of ideas applied, the narrowness of expertise of workers in the field, the amount of utilizable [reliable] data available, and the degree of recognition of balance relative to groups at the same or nearby levels... Neither lumping nor splitting...is necessarily "bad," and different situations may justify one or the other action. This raises the more than merely philosophical question for drawing conclusions of the taxonomic closeness or separateness of any groups of organisms." ⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ CPR A651/B679

⁴³⁷ CPR A650/B678

⁴³⁸ CPR A654/B682

⁴³⁹ AH Astington, 'Lumpers and Splitters', in D. McInnis and M Steggle, *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.84-102.

⁴⁴⁰ JO Corliss, 'On lumpers and splitters of higher taxa in ciliate systematics', *Trans Am Microbiol Soc* 95, (1976) pp.430-442.

The same issue arises in other fields. These include economics,⁴⁴¹ history,⁴⁴² languages,⁴⁴³ and even liturgical studies.⁴⁴⁴ Lumpers and splitters are, then, opposing factions in any discipline that has to place individual examples into rigidly defined categories. To return to our example of medicine, it may suit us – that is, satisfy our reason's interest - to discuss 'connective tissue disease' or to discuss sub-species of rheumatoid, polyarteritis, lupus, scleroderma and so on. How we classify will fulfil the interests of our reason in different ways. Kant even suggests a second principle to contrast with the parsimonious one of the scholastics: namely, the varieties of entities are not to be diminished rashly. Our conclusion (or acknowledgement of the search for both theoretical unity and also the attractions of empirical differentiation) is that interest is signifying a pre-commitment to a way of thought about how things are. That way of thought is not rationally founded - we could, rationally, consider nature either way and have an interest in so doing. Our interest here cannot be determined by reason itself. In this context however, interest as a concept belongs to theoretical and not to practical reason.

Kemp Smith⁴⁴⁵ suggests that the examples that Kant uses to illustrate his argument are best ignored. I concur. His psychological, chemical, and astronomical examples hinder rather than help in the light of modern science. Citing the concepts of “pure earth, pure water, pure air”⁴⁴⁶ as being “concepts of Reason” is especially bewildering. They are empirical hypotheses, formulated for the purposes of purely physical explanation, not universal, regulative principles.

⁴⁴¹ CP Kindleburger, ‘Lumpers and Splitters in Economics’, *The American Economist* 44 (2000) pp.88-92

⁴⁴² B Chase, ‘Upstart Antichrist’, *History Workshop Journal* 60 (2005), pp.202–206.

⁴⁴³ [http://www.nostratic.ru/books/\(137\)ruhlen12.pdf](http://www.nostratic.ru/books/(137)ruhlen12.pdf) Merritt Ruhlen: Is Algonquian Amerind? (accessed December 2, 2016)

⁴⁴⁴ PF Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*. (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. ix.

⁴⁴⁵ Norman Kemp Smith, *A commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* p.551.

⁴⁴⁶ CPR A646/B674

Whether reason's conflicting interests are truly conflicting or whether either may be valid depends on its context. Suppose we are splitters: in the case before us we interpret our data to diagnose polyarteritis. The emphasis in our knowledge concentrates upon the specific features of entities that apply to a group within the greater number. We insist that we have a discrete entity named polyarteritis and that our knowledge of that entity is based on scientific data identified in the literature as 'polyarteritis'. Upon those data and the conclusions drawn from them - that is, upon that knowledge - we manage the problem before us: a patient with particular symptoms and signs. We have committed ourselves to a way of thinking in which small specific entities are the key to interpretation. Let us suppose that new data become available. These data are not about the specific entity of polyarteritis but concern the larger umbrella entity of 'connective tissue disease'. We find these data sufficiently convincing to influence actions we may take or recommend. They represent a different way of managing the problem before us, yet equally valid as the specifics that have guided us so far. Our interests are then divided. We have an interest in both interpretations, rationally indistinguishable. Choosing one this morning will not exclude our interest in the other tomorrow afternoon. Both will have the status of (interim) knowledge. How we construe the patient's interests rests upon the interests of reason, indeed *is* reason's interest.

Thus from the viewpoint of a modern philosopher of science, "there is no objective reason to prefer the unified over the dis-unified explanation. Science has room for both lumpers and splitters."⁴⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there surely has to be a reason for preferring the position of the lumpers rather than that of the splitters. The choice is not random. Those reasons belong to practical reason which determines what we ought to do with the

⁴⁴⁷ R Gervais, 'A framework for inter-level explanations: Outlines for a new explanatory pluralism', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 48, (2014), pp.1-9.

interpretation that theoretical reason offers us and will determine the maxim upon which we will act. It is practical reason's interests that determine the acceptability of which of theoretical reason's claims should be enacted, which theoretical reason cannot resolve itself. In this scenario, it appears that practical reason can claim primacy. Hence my claim above that practical reason has an interest in promoting theoretical reason.

5.3 What is the interest of practical reason?

In his practical philosophy, Kant has rather more to say about interests and it differs from the above account. 'Interest' is first introduced and defined in *Groundwork*⁴⁴⁸ in a footnote that relates to a preceding discussion in which Kant has observed that, while objective laws should determine the will, "this will is not by its nature necessarily obedient." Imperatives state what should be done or avoided, determined by practical good by means of practical reason (a principle that holds for us all). An interest is then defined as "the dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason." Although a perfectly good will would come under objective laws of the good, it is subjective, as something practically (and contingently) determinable. To express that differently, it requires an *interest* to act on the dependent will (which is not always conforming to reason). Interest drives a finite rational agent towards an end.⁴⁴⁹ The "human will can take an interest in something without therefore acting from interest." Kant then distinguishes the practical interest in the action from the pathological interest. This latter refers to the object of the action – in a sense creative of consequences. Pathological interests are in natural ends that satisfy desires. In practical interest, we take an interest in something, and in pure practical reason "all so-called moral interest

⁴⁴⁸ G 413n

⁴⁴⁹ G Banham, D Schulting, N Hems (eds), *The Continuum Companion to Kant*. (London: Continuum, 2012), p.204.

consists simply in respect for the law.”⁴⁵⁰ There is no higher interest than following the moral law, although if asked to justify this, “we could give...no satisfactory answer.”⁴⁵¹ It just arises from “our proper self”.⁴⁵² Its validity does not come from the fact that the law interests us, for that would be heteronomy.⁴⁵³

Later in the *Groundwork*, he writes,

"An interest is that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., becomes a cause determining the will. Hence only of a rational being does one say that he takes an interest in something; non-rational creatures feel only sensible impulses.”⁴⁵⁴

If we have an interest in something, we will want to fulfil an end. That end may be something that we desire. Moreover, desire can be an effect rather than a cause of reason’s determining the will⁴⁵⁵. The feeling of respect, as I will explore in ch6, is or may be a product of this determination of the will. Recognising our duties, we may desire to do them. Kant describes this feeling of pleasure as an interest: “a connection of pleasure with the faculty of desire that the understanding judges to hold as a general rule...is called an interest.”⁴⁵⁶ Reason has the capacity to induce this feeling “of pleasure or delight in the fulfilment of duty.”⁴⁵⁷ Our awareness of inclinations creates interests. Non-human animals may have instinctive wants, but cannot reason. Kant continues:

“Reason takes an immediate interest in an action only when the universal validity of the maxim of the action is a sufficient determining ground of the will.

⁴⁵⁰ G 4:401n

⁴⁵¹ G 4:449

⁴⁵² G 4:461

⁴⁵³ G 4:460

⁴⁵⁴ G 4:460n

⁴⁵⁵ MM 6:211

⁴⁵⁶ MM 6:212

⁴⁵⁷ G 4:460

Only such an interest is pure. But if it can determine the will only by means of another object of desire or on the presupposition of a special feeling of the subject, then reason takes only a mediate interest in the action, and since reason all by itself, without experience, can discover neither objects of the will nor a special feeling lying at its basis, this latter interest would be only empirical and not a pure rational interest. The logical interest of reason (to further its insights) is never immediate but presupposes purposes for its use."⁴⁵⁸

Unpicking the detail of this apparently definitional explication, firstly only rational beings can have interests. Kant repeats this assertion in the second *Critique*: an interest "can never be attributed to any being unless it has reason."⁴⁵⁹ A non-rational animal cannot therefore have interests. An interest arises from the concept of an incentive (*Triebfeder*); indeed an interest signifies "an incentive of the will insofar as it is represented by reason." The moral law is the incentive in a morally good will, for which empirical ('pathological') incentives cannot have influence. For a morally good will then the "moral interest is a sense-free interest of practical reason alone."⁴⁶⁰ In this way an interest becomes a cause determining the will. If we have an incentive for a particular action, we should have a maxim for our action. All actions by a rational creature must have a subjective ground, an underlying principle, and this is incorporated in its maxim - indeed a maxim is a subjective principle. A maxim will therefore be based on our interest; and a maxim of universal validity - that is, a law - will be, in Kant's words "morally genuine only if it rests solely on the interests one takes in compliance with the law." The 'interests one takes in compliance with the law' could mean those interests which comply with the law; or, this phrase could refer to one's interest (single) in

⁴⁵⁸ G 4:460n

⁴⁵⁹ CPractR 5:79

⁴⁶⁰ CPractR 5:79

complying with the moral law. The former in supposing a multiplicity of interests seems the more likely interpretation. In this way Kant links three concepts: incentive, interest and maxim. An interest is that by which reason becomes a cause determining the will.

Is there common ground between the three concepts of interest, incentive and maxim? Are they linked? If free from pathological interests, our interest will be rational and its purpose will be to obey the moral law, which will be both incentive and provide its object. To obey the moral law is to think a maxim that excludes self-love and its objects, to reject sensuous incentives. So Kant does link these three concepts. A (pure) interest makes pure reason a cause of the will i.e. provided the interests of self-love are excluded. If the interest is pure then the maxim of the action will have universal validity. Reason thus determines the will. "An action that is objectively practical in accordance with this law, with the exclusion of every determining ground of inclination, is called duty."⁴⁶¹ If such grounds are excluded, only duty remains as incentive, and so the action is practically necessary. In submitting to the law, there may be displeasure in the action as we deny sensory incentives or interests ("constraint for the sensibly affected subject"), but if this comes from our own reason - as it must - the constraint also offers something "elevating".⁴⁶² This effect on subjective feeling "can thus be called self-approbation."⁴⁶³ Kant continues,

"...inasmuch as pure he cognised himself as determined to it solely by the law and without any interest, and now becomes conscious of an altogether different interest subjectively produced by the law, which is purely practical and free; and

⁴⁶¹ CPractR 5:80

⁴⁶² Mathew C Altman, 'A Practical Account of Kantian Freedom', in Matthew C Altman (ed), *The Palgrave Kant Handbook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.217.

⁴⁶³ CPractR 5:81

his taking this interest in a dutiful action is not advised by any inclination; instead, reason through the practical law absolutely commands it and also actually produces it, because of which it has a quite special name, that of respect."⁴⁶⁴

All three concepts presuppose that our natures are held back, our choices of action impeded, our *Willkür* limited by the objective law of practical reason. We have "a need to be impelled to activity by something because an internal obstacle is opposed to it."⁴⁶⁵ Our reason is imperfect, but this should be the role of practical reason with whose objective law we should comply. Kant offers a paean of praise for practical reason: "There is something so singular in the boundless esteem for the pure moral law stripped of all advantage - as practical reason, whose voice makes even the boldest evildoer tremble and forces him to hide from its sight."⁴⁶⁶ Thus a "mere intellectual idea" has an impact on feeling that theoretical reason does not and this "feeling is inseparably connected with the representation of the moral law in every finite rational being." I shall return to discussion of the significance of moral feeling in ch6. However, to be clear at this stage, this feeling is not pathological and therefore identifiable with pleasure, for if so, it would be futile to seek it *a priori*. Rather it must relate to the practical only and the form, not content (any object), of the law. Its result is to produce an interest in compliance with the law called moral interest, "just as the capacity to take such an interest in the law (or respect for the moral law itself) is the moral feeling properly

⁴⁶⁴ CPractR 5:81

⁴⁶⁵ CPractR 5:79

⁴⁶⁶ CPractR 5:80

speaking." "For everything practical, insofar as it contains incentives⁴⁶⁷, is related to feelings."⁴⁶⁸

The concept of interest has an important role in its relation to freedom. Freedom is a postulate of practical reason that cannot be proved but must be presupposed as a property of the will of all rational beings. "A free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same."⁴⁶⁹ Whether a rational being makes a theoretical or a practical judgement, it does so without coercion or compulsion from any outside agency.

"Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences... the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom."⁴⁷⁰ This leads to the differentiation of *having* (or, more precisely in this context, not having) an interest as opposed to *taking* an interest. For in answering the question why he should subject himself to the principle expressed in a maxim, Kant asserts that "no interest *impels* (Kant's italics) me to do so"⁴⁷¹....but that" [he] must "still necessarily *take* (again, Kant's italics) an interest in it and have insight into how this comes about." The latter use suggests that 'interest' can be interpreted in its ordinary everyday sense: interesting ourselves in some event or subject when we wish to pursue it and so on. Here too, we are taking an interest in exploring further the interest and

⁴⁶⁷ In the first edition Kant uses the word *Bewegungsgründe*, but changes to *Treibfedern* in the second edition. Guyer and Wood, in a footnote in the Cambridge edition, suggest that this is to leave room for the idea that although incentives based on feelings are not adequate for morality, there can be other, more purely rational motives for it.

⁴⁶⁸ CPR A15/B29

⁴⁶⁹ G 4:447

⁴⁷⁰ G 4:448

⁴⁷¹ The reason no interest *impels* me is that an interest is individual to me. It therefore cannot give a categorical imperative, for such an imperative is, by its nature, universal and law-like. Insofar as a judgement is moral (and not prudential) it asserts that we do something not *if* we have an interest (other than taking an interest in the moral law), but regardless of the outcome that might result - benefit (something desired and rewarding) or disbenefit, i.e. something adverse to our interest (and punishing). If our wills are free, our causal actions (or volitions) must not be determined by external forces (causes), which includes the desires stimulated by sensations, emotions, images, which are themselves governed by natural necessity.

The freedom which is opposed to necessity is a negative concept, an Idea of reason derived from reflection upon necessity itself. This is the 'transcendental idea' of freedom, a purely theoretical concept not based upon any moral considerations. See CPR A557/B585.

what it might mean. The former, by contrast, is using 'interest' to suggest any inclination that would yield a reward that the moral law either promises or a punishment that it threatens. To express that differently, the moral law may promote a course of action or actions that will prevent the realisation of pathological interests. It will impact on the interests that I already have. Acting out of this sort of inclination, of course, would not be acting morally but heteronomously. If my will did not give rise to a law, my will would have to be constrained by something else in order to conform with it. The law would have to carry some interest then "by way of attraction or constraint."⁴⁷²

If my interest is considered to bind me to a law, it can never be a universal law. If I am bound by an interest - and therefore self-love - I am bound only by desire for reward or fear of punishment. This reason cannot support a universal law, for my interest will differ from others. Since there could always be circumstances in which the reward won't be realised, my self-interest will be better served in evading the law. However, because I am self-legislating my reason will accept and abide by the moral law because of my pride in its authorship - not the hope of reward or fear of punishment.⁴⁷³

Interest as "incentive of the will insofar as it is represented by reason"⁴⁷⁴ can influence action insofar as action is decided by some assumption of the consequences of the action. We may make a judgement about the laws of nature or of morals in a given situation; we may be right or wrong about that; but insofar as we deliberate, our conception will determine what we do (or, for theoretical reason, think). The consequences from this may be very different from what it seemed to us beforehand - entirely different to the impulses of the moment. Based on what I think is knowledge of

⁴⁷² G 4:433

⁴⁷³ Paul Guyer, *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals. A Reader's Guide* (Manchester: Continuum 2007), p.97.

⁴⁷⁴ CPractR 5:79

myself and of the world, I act on a thought out policy and not on impulse. This is possible because the impulse can be integrated and controlled by interest. Interest has a dispositional governing character, sustained by putative knowledge of the meaning of situations and of the consequences of alternative action. Interest is therefore impulse that has been conceptually weighed and in part conceptually directed. Expressed differently, in addition to the interest in the moral law (which is purely rational, or autonomous), there is the interest that is grounded in our feelings (and therefore heteronomous). Willing and desiring are not synonymous: will is the activity of determining our practical faculties to seek an end, set by a maxim, but desire is the passive experience of representing an object accompanied by a feeling of pleasure.⁴⁷⁵ Our feelings don't simply arise: they enable or promote a considered reflective decision, based on possible consequences and on our understanding of the world. Intelligent action is action whose motive is an interest guided by appropriate conception and not simply blind impulse.⁴⁷⁶

5.4 'Interest' and the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

Kant says more about interest in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, offering the definition quoted above.⁴⁷⁷ Again interest is linked to feeling, here to pleasure. This "combination" or "connection" seems to be that implied in the notion of practical pleasure described shortly before. Thus, the capacity of having pleasure is *moral feeling*, and the pleasure necessarily connected with desire is *practical pleasure*, whether it is the cause of the desire, or its effect. We can set aside what Kant terms 'contemplative pleasure' (or, 'inactive delight', or 'taste') and consider practical pleasure only. The latter relates to the

⁴⁷⁵ Allen W Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p.53.

⁴⁷⁶ Lewis White Beck, 'A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason', p.35.

⁴⁷⁷ MM 6:212

determination of desire "caused and preceded by such pleasure." Habitual desire, he says, is called 'inclination' and interest is therefore the connection between practical pleasure and inclination so far as it is judged valid by the understanding according a universal rule. Kant appears to be considering the sort of general combination implicated in habitual desire, but as represented as such by the understanding. Such a relation is not just the generic connection that any pleasure in an object's existence has with the faculty of desire, but a specific connection of the pleasure figuring in the enjoyment of a certain object with that faculty, a connection residing in an habitual determination of the latter - an inclination - to have that same thing as its object. So although this connection might hold without the subject's being aware of its generality, it is only through such awareness that there is any interest. Kant immediately goes on however, to identify an interest of the sort in question - an "interest of inclination" - with the pleasure itself, not, as initially suggested, with the combination of the pleasure with the faculty of desire. This view is confirmed in the third *Critique* where he states that interest is "the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object."⁴⁷⁸ I follow Engstrom⁴⁷⁹ in interpreting this to mean that in the presence of an inclination in a connection between the pleasing experience of some object and the faculty of desire, a rational being may, on noticing this general connection, represent it conceptually, through a rule. Given the rule's generality,

"the pleasure must itself be represented through a concept of the object, the representation of whose existence it accompanies. In such a case, the pleasure will count as an interest."

⁴⁷⁸ CPJ 5:204

⁴⁷⁹ Stephen Engstrom, 'Reason, Desire and Will', in Lara Denis (ed), *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p.41.

We can distinguish between an object of inclination, which could simply be a representation in an animal's imagination, and an object of interest whose representation is through a concept figuring in a rule by which the subject represents the object's relation to its own faculty of desire, or to itself as a living being. Kant does not identify this conceptual representation as an act of the faculty of desire. Although it is based on inclination, it cannot be the inclination. Nor can it be a wish, a choice, or an exercise of the will. But since he takes maxims, which are exercises of the power of choice⁴⁸⁰ to be founded on interest,⁴⁸¹ ⁴⁸² he must see it as the basis for a certain form of desire. A maxim goes beyond interest in that it first introduces a conception of action through which the object of interest is to be made actual.

Kant's discussion of practical pleasure is concluded with a comment on the other way such pleasure may be combined with desire, as the latter's effect rather than its cause. Here the pleasure "must be called an intellectual pleasure and the interest in the object an interest of reason."⁴⁸³ He is also indicating that insofar as reason determines the faculty of desire, it does so in a practical use, under the name of the will. Freedom is a transcendent concept for theoretical reason and cannot be cognised or instanced in experience. Its role in theoretical reason is entirely regulative therefore and not constitutive. In reason's practical use, freedom proves its reality by principles, which are laws of a causality of pure reason for determining choice.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ MM 6:226

⁴⁸¹ CPractR 5:79

⁴⁸² Stephen Engstrom, 'Reason, Desire and Will', p.41.

⁴⁸³ MM 6:212

⁴⁸⁴ MM 6:221

5.5 'Interest' in the third *Critique*

Kant offers another reflection on interest in his third *Critique*. He remarks that "to will something and to delight in the existence of the same, that is, to take an interest in it, are identical."⁴⁸⁵ The implication of the latter quotation is that we take an interest whenever we will something, whether (i) on the basis of immediate inclination, (ii) on the basis of considered judgement on the basis of our inclinations generally, or (iii) purely out of respect for the moral law. Willing implies reason and not impulse, so we do not will on immediate inclination. But we do will out of considered judgement on the basis of inclinations; and we will out of respect for the moral law. Taking an interest is equated with delighting in the existence of something willed: they are the same thing. On such a basis, interest is defined as an emotional feeling: that of delight. This is different with feeling as respect rather than delight. It does continue to mean that interest is equated with inclination, with willing limited to considered judgement of inclination or respect for the moral law.

Now, Kant begins his third *Critique* with a key assertion about judgements of beauty (or more accurately, aesthetic judgements). These do not involve the understanding, nor lead to cognition. It is the subjective feeling of satisfaction or pleasure (or displeasure) that constitutes the aesthetic judgement. This satisfaction is "without any interest".⁴⁸⁶ Interest is then defined as "the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object." The point that Kant is making is that if we consider whether the object of our judgement should exist or whether it is useful or a project of vanity, then we have gone beyond the immediate response of aesthetic judgement and combined that satisfaction with something else: the representation of the existence of

⁴⁸⁵ CPJ 5:209

⁴⁸⁶ CPJ 5:204

the object. In making our aesthetic judgement, we should have no interest in whether it exists or not: a glorious palace conjured up in my imagination should evince the same response whether it exists or not. Thus, for a judgement of beauty "one only wants to know whether the mere representation of the object is accompanied with satisfaction in me...not how I depend on the existence of the object."⁴⁸⁷ That is, when we have an interest in something, its existence produces a satisfaction or feeling of approval (*Wohlgefallen*). A judgement of pure beauty excludes such consideration and is one without interest. "One must not be in the least biased in favour of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste."⁴⁸⁸ Interest is related to desire:

"a satisfaction always has at the same time a relation to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground."

Desire must relate to approval in the existence of things and therefore interests accompany desires. There is a distinction between acknowledging the importance that a judgement of beauty is disinterested with saying that it is uninteresting: on the contrary, it may be very interesting. As Kant says, "it is not grounded on any interest but it produces an interest; all pure moral judgements are like this. But the pure judgement of taste does not in itself even ground any interest."⁴⁸⁹ It only becomes interesting to have taste in society. Interest is however linked to the practical. Something that is good in itself pleases by means of reason alone, but the useful is good for something, that is, as a means. Both these varieties of the good (in itself and as a means) involve the concept

⁴⁸⁷ CPJ 5:205

⁴⁸⁸ CPJ 5:205 Kant is at pains to be clear here in order to distinguish making a *disinterested* judgement and making an *interesting* judgement.

⁴⁸⁹ CPJ 5: 205n

of an end, "hence the relation of reason to willing, and consequently a satisfaction in the existence of an object or of an action, i.e., some sort of interest."⁴⁹⁰ Having discussed the differences between the agreeable and the good, Kant argues that both have an interest in their object. This includes that

"which is good absolutely and in all respects, namely the morally good, which carries the highest interest with it...To will something and to have satisfaction in its existence, i.e., to take an interest in it, are identical."⁴⁹¹

Summing up, the distinction between judgements of beauty and moral judgements is the absence in the former of interests and the essential presence of interests in the latter. Aesthetic judgements are neither grounded in interest nor productive of interest. Indeed the concept of interest appears to have been introduced in this section of the *Critique* in order to contrast the aesthetic with the moral interests of practical reason.

Having re-asserted the necessary absence of interest in making judgements of taste, Kant raises the possibility of combining the object about which the judgement has been made by an indirect link to "a further pleasure in its existence (as that in which all interest consists)".⁴⁹² This additional element could be inclination – that is, something empirical. Alternatively it could be something intellectual – that is, "as a property of the will of being determinable *a priori* through reason." Both of these contain a satisfaction in an object's existence. It follows that both could offer "the ground for an interest in that which has already pleased for itself and without respect to any sort of interest."⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ CPJ 5:207

⁴⁹¹ CPJ 5:209

⁴⁹² CPJ 5:296

⁴⁹³ CPJ 5:296

Empirically, it is in society that the beautiful interests. Human beings are social animals, then inevitably individuals communicate feeling to others in making judgements of beauty. Kant asserts – somewhat implausibly, I think- that a lone human on a desert island would not decorate the dwelling (s)he has constructed or plant some flowers, lacking as s/he does a community. There would be no contentment without an audience. Kant’s argument leads him to advance the idea that the satisfactions derived from the company of others and assists a “transition from sensory enjoyment to moral feeling.”⁴⁹⁴ He makes the bolder claim that this would encourage “a mediating link in the chain of human faculties *a priori*, on which all legislation must depend.”⁴⁹⁵ This however is not fully justified although an empirical interest in taste “indulges” inclination, enabling a blending with “all the inclinations and passions that achieve their greatest variety and highest level in society.”

So much for the empirical interest in the beautiful: Kant now comments on the intellectual interests.

People who are interested in aesthetics (“virtuosi of taste”) are often “vain, obstinate and given to corrupting passions.”⁴⁹⁶ This is not a promising start for proposing a link between the aesthetic and the moral. Well intended people have often tried to assert a link between those predisposed to beauty and the virtuous. If that is not true, then moral feeling is different from a feeling for the beautiful and couldn’t even be united with it. Kant concedes this but does assert that it is a mark of a “good soul” to take an immediate interest in the beauty of nature: someone like this is likely to the sort of disposition favourable to moral feeling⁴⁹⁷ (although he distinguishes beautiful forms of

⁴⁹⁴ CPJ 5:297

⁴⁹⁵ CPJ 5:298

⁴⁹⁶ CPJ 5:298

⁴⁹⁷ CPJ 5:299

nature from mere “charms” in which interests are empirical.) A person with an interest in beautiful objects in nature (a bird, a wild flower etc) will want to protect it and has an intellectual interest in it as both its form and existence will please. But the interest would be destroyed by the discovery that the flower was artificial or the bird song an imitation, for it would be a mere illusion that nature had produced it. The immediate interest is grounded on the intuition and reflection that nature had produced it: “it must be nature or taken to be nature by us, for us to be able to take an immediate interest in the beautiful.”⁴⁹⁸ One could have an “interest of vanity” only in decorating the room with the fake. We have faculties of judgement for taste, not grounded upon interest; and of intellectual judgement for determining forms of practical maxims, not grounded on any interest but producing one.⁴⁹⁹ At this point, Kant makes one of the most crucial judgements in his third *Critique*: that of using the concept of interests in justifying the linkage between the moral and the beautiful.

Reason has a unifying function. It produces an immediate interest in the moral feeling and the ideas that it creates have an objective reality (*a priori* and universal). Nature, he argues, should show some sign that it has “some sort of ground” by which to assume a correspondence with what it produces “with our satisfaction that is independent of all interest.” He writes:

“...reason must take an interest in every manifestation in nature of a correspondence similar to this; consequently the mind cannot reflect on the beauty of nature without finding at the same time to be interested in it. Because of this affinity, however, this interest is moral, and he who takes such an interest

⁴⁹⁸ CPJ 5:302

⁴⁹⁹ CPJ 5:300

in the beautiful in nature can do so only insofar as he has already firmly established his interest in the morally good.”⁵⁰⁰

This brings us to Kant’s conclusion: a predisposition to a good moral disposition in someone who is immediately interested in the beauty of nature should be suspected in such a person.⁵⁰¹

This conclusion may initially seem unconvincing and “too studied.” It seems odd to suggest that nature speaks to us figuratively in code. However it is those who are trained to the good that can, “even without clear, subtle and deliberate reflection” grasp this analogy between the pure judgement of taste,

“which, without depending on any sort of interest, allows a pleasure to be felt and at the same time to be represented *a priori* as proper for mankind in general and the moral judgement, which does the same thing on that basis of concepts, leads to an equally immediate interest in the object of the former as in that of the latter: the one grounded on objective laws, the former a free interest.”⁵⁰²

The interests aroused by beautiful art and beautiful nature differ. Art may be deceptive in aiming to represent nature and evoke the same interest as nature; but alternatively it may be aimed explicitly to satisfy us and hence evoke an immediate interest “by means of taste” but a mediate one in “the cause on which it is grounded”, that is, its end. Kant concedes that nature can have a similar effect if it is associated by us with a moral idea. However in the latter case it is the quality inherent in it, that gives rise to this association that interests immediately.⁵⁰³ White in the lily disposes us to ideas of

⁵⁰⁰ CPJ 5:300

⁵⁰¹ CPJ 5:301

⁵⁰² CPJ 5:301

⁵⁰³ CPJ 5:301-2

innocence, birdsong to joyfulness and contentment. The receptivity to an interest in its contemplation is what Kant calls the feeling for beautiful nature and he considers those unable to take such an interest as “coarse and ignoble” in their thinking, censoriously adding that they confine their pleasures “from the bottle”.⁵⁰⁴

Finally in considering the interpretation of interest, a short comment on logic should be added. Logic provides the rules of thinking itself, whether theoretical or practical, valid for all thinking,⁵⁰⁵ as in ch3. The logical interest of reason quoted above from the *Groundwork* "presupposes purposes for its use": that is to say that it serves the interest of whatever kind of reasoning in which it is employed. Its interest cannot determine whether one form of reason, whether theoretical or practical, has primacy over the other.

In Kant's view, an interest belongs to beings who are partly rational and partly sensuous. Moral interest is identified with the feeling of respect. Accepting that moral interest consists in respect for the law, we must explore his understanding of moral feeling, especially as respect for the law.

"It is natural enough that he should turn to consider the feeling element in morality after he has established the categorical imperative. It may seem strange, it must seem strange, that so strong a feeling should be aroused by a morality which has been so abstractly analysed. How is it that man believes himself to feel his personal worth in obedience to the categorical imperative and to estimate the worth of mere pleasure as nothing in comparison with this?"⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ CPJ 5:303

⁵⁰⁵ G 4:387

⁵⁰⁶ Herbert J Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p.257.

The latter question, that Paton articulates rhetorically, reflects Kant's own doubt that we can ever discover or make comprehensible an interest which the human being can take in moral laws. Yet he says,

"he does really take an interest in them, the foundation of which in us we call moral feeling, which some have falsely given out as the standard for our moral appraisal whereas it must rather be regarded as the subjective effect the law exercises on the will, to which reason alone delivers the objective grounds."⁵⁰⁷

The distinction between the interests of pure reason and those of theoretical and practical reason must be explored further, linked with the associated assertions of the primacy of practical reason in the context of reason's unity. Before reaching those issues, I will explore further the connection of action with feeling and the importance of so-called moral feeling for Kant. Feeling, after all, at first glance might appear to be diametrically opposed to reason and hence destructive to the idea of its unity.

'Interest' as it applies to theoretical reason and 'interest' as it applies to practical reason (moral interest) turns out to be a broader concept than simply having or pursuing an interest. It may be empirical or conceptual. It is relevant to aesthetic judgement; to respect for the moral law and to moral feeling; to both theoretical and practical reason; and even to the primacy of the latter over the former.

⁵⁰⁷ G 4:460

Chapter 6: Moral feeling in Kant's philosophy?

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6.1 Introduction

Kant's insistence that moral worth comes from acting from the moral law has led many readers to discount any role of feeling in his moral philosophy. Isn't Kant's philosophy an exploration of reason and its interests, not feeling? Actions based on incentives that are not moral but whose origin is desire ("pathological") are of no moral worth, even if they are in conformity with duty. One commentator caricatures this as follows: "he cares more about rules than about ends, he is wedded to impersonal calculation, he is unwilling to acknowledge his own particularity, he eschews all feeling, even kind and warm feelings. All the while he insists on duty for its own incomprehensible sake and generally comes off as a very cold fish."⁵⁰⁸ This is an old view – as in Friedrich Schiller's satire:

"Scruple of conscience.

Gladly I serve my friends but, alas, I do it with pleasure
Hence I am plagued with doubt that I am not a virtuous person.

Ruling

Surely, your only resource is to try to despise them entirely,
And then with aversion, do what your duty enjoins you."⁵⁰⁹

"Poor poetry and worse criticism," says Paton,⁵¹⁰ but still believed.⁵¹¹ Kant refuted this view directly in writing that love is

“an indispensable addition to human nature's imperfection (to that aspect of it whereby man must be coerced to do what by virtue of laws reason prescribes to human nature). For what one does not do gladly he does so grudgingly – even to

⁵⁰⁸ Jennifer K Uleman. *An Introduction to Kant's Moral Philosophy*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

⁵⁰⁹ Friedrich Schiller, *Xenien* (1797), in: E Trunz (ed.) *Goethe I*, ed E Trunz. (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1949), p.221.

⁵¹⁰ Herbert J Paton, 'The Categorical Imperative', p.48.

⁵¹¹ See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, 'A Short History of Ethics,' (Notre Dame Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1997), p.92.

the point of sophistical pretext to avoid duty's command – that this incentive (of duty) cannot be counted on to any great degree unless the command is accompanied by love.”⁵¹²

Setting this late clarification aside, this erroneous view clearly originates from the *Groundwork*. If someone does an action "without any inclination, simply from duty; then the action first has its genuine moral worth"⁵¹³ and "an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will".⁵¹⁴ Or again, in discussing an honourable deed,

"I assert...an action (of this kind), however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth but is on the same footing with other inclinations...for the maxim lacks moral content, namely that of doing such actions not from inclinations but from duty."⁵¹⁵

In the later second *Critique*,⁵¹⁶ he writes that "what is essential to any moral worth of actions is that the moral law determine the will immediately", which appears to mean 'not by feeling'. Shortly after he adds that for an action compatible (only) with duty but motivated by means of a feeling, the action will not contain morality. As Geiger puts it,⁵¹⁷ Kant's moral philosophy "is often faced with the charge that in its conception of moral agency feelings play no part whatsoever."

⁵¹² Immanuel Kant, *The end of all things*. 8:338

⁵¹³ G 4:398

⁵¹⁴ G 4:400

⁵¹⁵ G 4:398

⁵¹⁶ CPractR 5:71

⁵¹⁷ Ido Geiger, Rational Feelings and Moral Agency. *Kantian Review*, 16, no.2 (2011), pp.283-308 (p.283).

In this chapter, I want to take issue with Hume's assertion that "reason can never produce any action or give rise to volition."⁵¹⁸ I will argue that feeling is not only an important feature of Kant's theory of (moral) action but also relates to reason through the concept of respect. This requires an interpretation of respect as feeling, and with it an awareness of how this fits into Kant's taxonomy of emotions or feelings, and a demonstration that respect can be related to reason. It should bring us to the view articulated towards the end of his active career:

"...respect for the moral law within us would thus be moral feeling..., which does not constitute an end of the natural predisposition except so far as it is the motivating force of the will."⁵¹⁹

6.2 Is there a role for feeling in motivation?

In the 1920s, Field asserted that "Kant's fallacy lies in thinking that just the bare knowledge that an action is of a certain [moral] kind is sufficient to move us to do that action."⁵²⁰ This counter-intuitively suggests that moral motivation is free of feeling. Reason *alone* surely does not move us to action. It is problematic for us to believe that an action cannot have moral worth if there is supporting inclination or desire; or to judge a grudging or resentfully performed act done from duty to be morally superior than if it had been done from love or with pleasure. We are more attracted to Aquinas's view that "it pertains to the perfection of moral goodness that a man should be moved

⁵¹⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), Book II, Part II, Section III. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1969

⁵¹⁹ Rel 6:27

⁵²⁰ GC Field, 'A Criticism of Kant', in Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers (eds), *Readings in Ethical Theory*, 2nd edn (New York:Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp.704-7

towards the good not only by his will but also by his sensitive appetite."⁵²¹ Perhaps the key here is that while reason alone may not move us, respect for reason may and Kant is clear that we hold the moral law in respect. "All so-called moral interest consists simply in respect for the law."⁵²²

This raises questions: firstly, is respect a feeling? If so, is it the result of the moral law or the motivating feeling for our moral actions? Does Kant hold a consistent view of respect? What place is there for virtues that appear, sometimes briefly, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*? What place for love, beneficence, conscience, sympathy, compassion and their opposites? If morality is not grounded in our sensuous and affective natures, (Aquinas's "sensitive appetites"), how are we moved by moral considerations at all? How can we account for moral motivation if divorcing the basis of morality from the pathological and therefore motivational side of human agents?

In ch2, I alluded to the influence of British 'sentimentalist' philosophers on Kant's moral theory. But although Kant retained a place for feeling in his moral psychology, he did not return to moral sense theory during the critical period. It is not our feelings that determine the worthiness of our actions or determine their status as moral or prudent according to the mature Kant; rather it is his mature view that feeling may have a role in our motivations and that awareness of our actions complying with or breaking the moral law may lead to feelings. Thus he writes that moral feeling "is the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty."⁵²³ While Kant may have maintained a continuing regard for the work of the British sentimentalists, his use of the term "metaphysics of morals" from

⁵²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, IIae, 24,3 in: Frederick C Copleston, *Aquinas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), p.214.

⁵²² G 4:401n

⁵²³ MM 6:399

the 1760s onwards signifies the change in his thinking.⁵²⁴ Concepts and principles must be the foundation of moral judgement: a beneficent action done entirely out of sympathy lacks moral worth. No moral sense theorist could agree such a claim. I claim that 'respect' is interpreted by Kant as feeling i.e. it has a subjective dimension. On that basis, feeling has quite a big place in Kant's philosophy. In order to make progress in this discussion, word use and translation must also be considered.

6.3 Respect as feeling?

Kant's initial response as to whether respect is 'feeling' is that it is feeling with a difference. Thus he writes,

"...though respect is a feeling, it is not one received by means of influence; it is, instead, a feeling self-wrought by means of a rational concept and therefore specifically different from all feelings of the first kind, which can be reduced to inclination or fear. What I cognize immediately as a law for me, I cognize with respect which signifies merely consciousness of the subordination of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences on my sense. Immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called respect, so that this is regarded as the effect of the law on the subject, and not as the cause of the law."⁵²⁵

This seems an odd answer. It argues firstly that respect is somehow a different sort of feeling than other feelings that we experience, such as love or envy. It does not exist from "means of influence." Secondly, it is "self-wrought" which suggests that unlike

⁵²⁴ Allen W Wood, *Kantian Ethics*. (Cambridge: CUP 2008), p.36.

⁵²⁵ G 4:401n

love, it can be commanded, like beneficence from duty.⁵²⁶ And thirdly, it is an effect of the moral law, reinforcing the view that feeling does not create the moral law in a Hutchesonian sleight of hand. It seems that Kant wants to have his cake and eat it. On the one hand “respect is a feeling” while on the other it is created by “a rational concept.” We ask what is the relationship between feeling and rational concept?

Clarifying Kant’s terminology, the word 'respect' itself requires discussion. The German word that Kant uses is '*Achtung*'. One scholar, HJ Paton, translates this as 'reverence' and substitutes for what he considers Kant's unsatisfactory third proposition⁵²⁷ in the *Groundwork*: "to act for the sake of duty is to act out of reverence for the law." (He also invites comparison from the second *Critique*: "that the action takes place from duty, that is, for the sake of the law alone.")⁵²⁸ Paton's preference for 'reverence' relates to the associations in English of the word 'reverence' with religious emotion; and Paton argues that

"Kant himself feels most intensely this emotion of reverence for the law, and that both from his description and from the language he uses, the feeling in question is something almost akin to religious emotion."⁵²⁹

In it "I feel at once humbled and also uplifted and exalted." Moreover Kant himself translates '*Achtung*' into the Latin '*reverentia*'. But *Achtung* does not include fear as Paton suggests: rather, the instance he quotes in the *Metaphysics* in describing conscience asserts awe as being "respect *coupled* (my italics) with fear."⁵³⁰ It is noteworthy that elsewhere in the *Metaphysics* where '*reverentia*' is used, Kant repeats

⁵²⁶ G 4:399

⁵²⁷ G 4:400

⁵²⁸ CPractR 5:81

⁵²⁹ HJ Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, p.63.

⁵³⁰ MM 6:438

his assertion in the *Groundwork* that respect is "something merely subjective, a feeling of a special kind."⁵³¹ Words can have several meanings: Paton's association of the German word '*Achtung*' as the equivalent of 'look out' or, in French, '*Attention*' is irrelevant.⁵³² Kant himself occasionally uses '*Respekt*' but also '*Ehrfurcht*' when he clearly means 'reverence'.⁵³³ He also uses '*Achtung*' in clearly different ways. For example, in the third *Critique*, when discussing the quality of the satisfaction in the judging of the sublime, he defines '*Achtung*' as "the feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea that is a law for us"⁵³⁴ while he uses the Latin '*observantia*' to indicate the attitude owed to all human beings simply as human being.⁵³⁵ Even in English, 'respect' sometimes relates to a person's character or achievements but sometimes merely to the office that is held; and respect comes in degrees - esteem would be a word conveying a higher regard than simple respect, so that respect-worthiness varies. There is respect that is owed to all, even if undeserved; and there is respect which is earned, or as Baron puts it, "in some other way a case of special merit."⁵³⁶ Paton is in a minority of philosophers in using the term 'reverence', but in agreement that respect or reverence both describe a feeling. I will continue majority practice in using 'respect' in this thesis. Respect then is a feeling that either results from the recognition of the binding effect of the moral law on our wills or is created by it. To act from respect for the moral law is the same as to act for the sake of duty.

⁵³¹ MM 6:402

⁵³² A modern German dictionary (Cassell's) defines '*Achtung*' as: 1 attention, heed; 2 esteem, respect, regard

⁵³³ A famous example is at the start of the Conclusion to the second *Critique* (CPractR 5:161) referring to the two things that fill the mind with admiration and reverence.

⁵³⁴ CPJ 5:257

⁵³⁵ MM 6:462

⁵³⁶ Marcia W Baron, 'Love and Respect in the Doctrine of Virtue', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy Supplement* 36 (1997), pp.29-44

This discussion, in turn, relates to a wider interest in feeling, whether reason-related or reason-caused affects, which Kant expounds late in his career: notably in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) and his *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* (1798), although Kant discusses reason-caused affects as early as the third *Critique* of 1790. He uses a variety of terms, often overlapping or not capable of an exact translation: inclinations (*Neigungen*), affects (*Affekten*), passions (*Leidenschaften*), desires (*Begierden*). ‘Emotion’, for example, can be *Gefühl*, *Empfindung*, *Affekt* or *Rührungen*. Inclination, defined as habitual sensible desire,⁵³⁷ may relate to hunger (non-moral) or love for others (moral); and it cannot be a reliable motivation or criterion of moral action. We can have strong or weak inclinations and inclinations for the wrong as well as the right. Inclinations come from nature, not reason, and therefore are not a product of freedom. To be moral, “reason must exercise dominion over sensibility.”⁵³⁸ However the denial of a moral role to inclination does not exclude such a role to all other feelings. Sensible feeling underlies our inclinations and “is the condition of that feeling we call respect.”⁵³⁹ If we desire something we represent it with a feeling of pleasure; moral willing or desiring is only possible with some kind of feeling. Desire necessarily involves feelings.⁵⁴⁰

In the *Metaphysics* Kant states that moral feeling is a ‘moral endowment’ that nobody has a duty to acquire.⁵⁴¹ He defines it as “the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty.” The representation of a possible action leads us to determine our choice through a feeling of pleasure or displeasure. That feeling can be moral or

⁵³⁷ A 7:251

⁵³⁸ CPJ 5:269

⁵³⁹ CPractR 5:75

⁵⁴⁰ Kelly D Sorensen, Kant’s Taxonomy of the Emotions. *Kantian Review*, 6, (2002), pp.109-128.

⁵⁴¹ MM 6:399

pathological. Upon the former is a feeling that can only follow the law. This appears to argue against respect as a feeling being an initiator of action. It is pathological feeling that “precedes the representation of the law.” Moral feeling is not directed to an object and therefore cannot be called a ‘sense’; moreover no human is entirely without it for if that were the case he would be “morally dead.” We all have it within us to some degree therefore; there can be no duty to acquire it for we have it. Thus our obligation is to cultivate it and “to strengthen it through wonder at its inscrutable source.”⁵⁴² Kant emphasises the distinction between moral feeling and moral sense: the latter implies a capacity for a perception, which can add to cognition.

6.4 What is the relation between motivation and the feeling of respect?

Towards the end of 1773, Kant wrote a letter to Markus Herz (1747-1803):

"The highest ground of morality must not simply be inferred from the pleasant; it must itself be pleasing in the highest degree. For it is no mere speculative idea; it must have the power to move. Therefore, though the highest ground of morality is intellectual, it must nevertheless have a direct relation to the incentives⁵⁴³ of the will."⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² MM 6:400

⁵⁴³ The German word that Kant uses is *Triebfeder*, which is the generic name for the dynamic of conative factors in willing (Beck LW. ‘*A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*’, Chicago: Chicago University Press. 1960, p.216) It should be distinguished from *Bewegungsgrund* or motive. Beck (*op cit*) discusses the problems of translating *Triebfeder* at p 90n2; Engstrom, in ‘The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason’ (in *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason. A Critical Guide* ed A Reath, J Timmermann. Cambridge: CUP 2010, p92) comments that in its original literal meaning it refers to the mainspring of a clock, but that Kant is not conceiving of anything mechanical, rather as an inner spring or source of choice and action. Hutcheson and Hume use ‘spring’ in the way that Kant uses ‘*Triebfeder*’. But unambiguously it refers in Kant to an inner source that generates the action, not an object or circumstance that prompts it. For Kant it is the “subjective determining ground of the will of a being whose reason is not already in virtue of its nature necessarily in accordance with the objective law.” In Chapter III moral *Triebfedern* are sources of willing and action, not their ends, outcomes, or effects. CPractR 5:72) Engstrom uses ‘spring’ in his own translation of quotations.

⁵⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, ‘*Correspondence*’. Ed and transl. A Zweig. (Cambridge: CUP, 1999). 10:145

Here Kant is puzzling over motivation to action. Where does it come from? Is it the case that practical reason itself - the moral law - can motivate and that moral feeling is its product and not the stimulus to moral action? Here is what is recorded in the Collins lectures⁵⁴⁵:

"Moral feeling is the capacity to be affected by a moral judgement. My understanding may judge that an action is morally good, but it need not follow that I shall do that action which I judge morally good: from understanding to performance is still a far cry. If this judgement were to move me to do the deed, it would be moral feeling; but it is quite incomprehensible that the mind should have a motive force to judge. The understanding, obviously, can judge, but to give to this judgement of the understanding a compelling force, to make it an incentive that can move the will to perform the action - this is the philosopher's stone!"

The "philosopher's stone" is the underlying problem of explaining how a principle of *reason* can move us to act without ordinary feelings of pleasure (or pain) i.e. how it can act as an incentive. Parallel to this is the explanation of how moral feeling follows from moral judgement i.e. the opposite of the British sentimentalists' views. "Respect.... is the effect of the law on the subject and not as the cause of the law."⁵⁴⁶ Is, we might ask, respect the result of the recognition of the moral law when we restrain our egoistic tendencies of choice: an essentially *negative* feeling that is too late to explain the structure of prudential motivation?⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, 'Collins Lectures (MPC)', Peter Heath and Jerome B Schneewind (eds), Peter Heath (transl) in 'Lectures on Ethics' (Cambridge: CUP,1997) 27:1428

⁵⁴⁶ G 4:401n

⁵⁴⁷ Owen Ware, 'Kant on Sensibility and Moral Motivation', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 52, no.4 (2014), pp.727-746 (p.731).

It is impossible, Kant thinks, for a full explanation or answer to our questions to be made. Thus, in the third part of the *Groundwork*, "reason would overstep its boundaries if it took it upon itself to explain how pure reason can be practical." He continues, "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 can take in moral laws."⁵⁴⁸ Kant concedes that pleasure features:

"in order for a sensibly affected rational being to will that for which reason alone prescribes the "ought", it is admittedly required that his reason have the capacity to induce a feeling of pleasure or of delight in the fulfilment of duty, and thus there is required a causality of reason to determine sensibility in conformity with its principles. But 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."⁵⁴⁹

6.5 Further considerations about incentives of pure practical reason

Perhaps, if we cannot explain the freedom of the will or how our consciousness of it can be a determining factor in our conduct, we can at least give some account of the inexplicability. It might be expected that part of *that* account will relate our noumenal existence to our phenomenal one. The source of our moral feeling rests on a noumenal cause so, of course, it cannot be known.

Kant devotes the third chapter of the *Analytic of Pure Practical Reason* to its (i.e. pure practical reason's) incentives. In parallel with the first *Critique*, he explains that both

⁵⁴⁸ G 4:458-60

⁵⁴⁹ G 4:460

Critiques have an analytic. In theoretical reason this is concerned with cognition and therefore from where cognition begins: in an aesthetic i.e. from intuition and therefore sensibility. By contrast practical reason is concerned with making the objects of cognition real. Thus, he states that the Analytic of pure practical reason divides the whole sphere of all the conditions of its use quite analogously with that of theoretical reason but in reverse order.⁵⁵⁰ This third chapter is (although not so entitled), thus the Aesthetic of Pure Practical Reason ("if I may be allowed to use, on the basis of analogy [this term] which [is] not entirely suitable").⁵⁵¹ The challenge is to reconcile the idea of incentives in the sensible world with the noumenal world of the moral law; and to navigate the boundary between the psychological and the moral. How is a sensible being affected by the principles of pure practical reason?

Kant had speculated about the role of good conduct motivating itself in the first *Critique*, but rapidly rejected the idea of rewards for good conduct (perhaps a lingering idea to be repudiated from a more orthodox Lutheranism of his early years). He wrote,

"It is necessary that the entire course of life be subordinated to moral maxims; but it would at the same time be impossible for this to happen if reason did not connect with the moral law, which is a mere idea, an efficient cause which determines for the conduct in accord with this law an outcome precisely corresponding to our highest ends, whether in this or in another life. Thus without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the

⁵⁵⁰ CPractR 5:89

⁵⁵¹ CPractR 5:90

majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realisation." ^{552, 553}

In the third chapter of the *Analytic* he starts by affirming (again) that "the incentive of the human will...can never be anything other than the moral law"⁵⁵⁴ if this is applying to the will in which incentive is understood as the subjective determining ground. The assumption that is often made is that the moral law is adequately represented by the categorical imperative; and that respect for the moral law motivates obedience to that law independently of any moral feelings - the moral feelings result from the expression of that obedience, not being causative of it. The solution to the "philosopher's stone" remains elusive. Perhaps we "cannot know the source of moral feeling because it rests on the assumption of a non-natural cause; and cannot for the same reason know it to be impossible."⁵⁵⁵ In what follows I will endeavour to construct a view on how practical reason does or could produce moral feeling on Kant's view.

6.6 How does practical reason produce moral feeling?

As long as the action conforms with the moral law, it will contain 'legality' if not morality. What Kant wants to do is to show what the moral law effects, in the light of the impossibility of knowing why it can be an incentive. In order to permit the moral law to influence the will, perhaps we must search for an alternative or complementary incentive. Kant then states that it is hazardous to let any other incentive cooperate alongside the moral law - so called over-determination. Having dispensed with that

⁵⁵² CPR A812-3/B840-1

⁵⁵³ I explore maxims in chapter 2 and highest ends in chapter 9. The desire for happiness or other reward is not, of course, a moral disposition.

⁵⁵⁴ CPractR 5:72

⁵⁵⁵ Owen Ware, 'Kant on Sensibility and Moral Motivation', p.732.

idea, Kant now seeks in the rest of the *Analytic* to determine how the moral law can become the incentive.⁵⁵⁶ His conclusion: that "respect for the law is not the incentive to morality....This feeling (under the name of moral feeling) is therefore produced solely by practical reason."⁵⁵⁷ The argument runs as follows:⁵⁵⁸

1. As sensible beings, the matter of the faculty of desire (=objects of inclination) force themselves upon us.

2. Hence we strive to make maxims of our subjective determining grounds of choice into objective determining grounds of the will (=self-love). That is, that happiness should have priority in our choices.

3. Self-love that makes itself law giving is self-conceit.

4. The moral law - which is objective - excludes the influence of self-love and infringes on self-conceit... What infringes on our self-conceit humiliates.

5. So, the moral law humiliates every human being when he compares it with the sensible propensity of his nature.

6. If something humiliates, it awakens respect for itself.

7. Therefore the moral law is even subjectively a ground of respect.

8. Everything in self-love belongs to inclination, which rests on feeling.

9. Therefore, what infringes upon the inclinations in self-love must also influence feeling.

⁵⁵⁶ CPractR 5:72

⁵⁵⁷ CPractR 5:76

⁵⁵⁸ CPractR 5:74

10. Therefore *the moral law can affect feeling* (my italics) (a negative effect) (but positive with respect to the restricting ground of pure practical reason)." It excludes inclinations and propensities to make *them* the supreme practical condition. For this no special kind of feeling need be assumed, under the name of a practical or moral feeling preceding the moral law and serving as its basis."⁵⁵⁹

Inclinations arise from (usually repeated) pleasing experiences. Principles based on an object of desire are always empirical as the pleasure is a subjective determining ground of choice.⁵⁶⁰ The awareness of this object of sensible desire is pleasing, so that I want more of it. Any such hopes will produce pleasure at the prospect or disappointment (pain) at failure to achieve the object. The moral law is different: it is an objective determining ground and insofar as I follow it, I will experience pain if my desires are outside the demands of the moral law i.e. merely compatible. Even if the moral law would not prevent the attainment of my objects or was unlikely to do so, the form of the will's determination is enough to upset my inclinations - and hence the pain."All inclinations are pained at the prospect of the will's being determined by the moral law."⁵⁶¹

6.7 The relevance of the concepts of Self-love and Self-conceit

I now pursue the concepts of self-love and self-conceit further, given their importance in this relationship of respect and feeling. In this, I largely follow the analysis offered by

⁵⁵⁹ CPractR 5:75

⁵⁶⁰ CPractR 5:21

⁵⁶¹ Stephen Engstrom, 'The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason' in Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann, *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason. A Critical Guide* (eds), (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p.99.

Engstrom.⁵⁶² Regard for oneself (or selfishness, *Selbsucht*) covers the two key concepts of self-love (*Selbstliebe*) and self-conceit (*Eigendünkel*). Both of these are feelings of rational creatures for they link to inclinations with an essential presumption for their own validity. They are not like such feelings as hunger, sexual appetite, thirst etc. Self love is a predominant benevolence to oneself, self-conceit a satisfaction with oneself. Self-love tends to believe that one's inclinations should over-ride others'. Both exemplify how a pathologically determined subject will maintain self directed concerns. In contrast to self-love (a form of love), self-conceit (a form of esteem) is not "natural and active in us even prior to the moral law,"⁵⁶³ but posterior, so to speak, to the moral law. Self-love and self-conceit are directed to oneself in the parallel way that love and respect (as a form of esteem) relate to others. Any object of inclination can be something we love. Leibniz loved his insects,⁵⁶⁴ a benefactor his beneficiaries, Kant his carrots. Self-love tends to believe that my benevolence to myself extends to my holding that I am a suitable object for the benevolence of any other person, that is, it has a tendency to objectivity.⁵⁶⁵ Self-love making itself lawful can be called self-conceit, says Kant - that is, the latter arises from the former. Just as self-love can become self-esteem through the activities that determine our happiness, so a cognitive activity to 'lay down the law' for others lies at the heart of self-conceit. As Engstrom puts it,⁵⁶⁶ in self-love, a passive, experiencing subject liable to feel pleasure and pain, gives rise to an active, cognising subject, knowing what ends should be pursued. Esteem is directed at other persons and relates to respect, which is also "always directed only to persons, never to things."⁵⁶⁷ The second difference between self-love and self-conceit is that the latter is

⁵⁶² Stephen Engstrom 'The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason', pp. 98-118.

⁵⁶³ CPractR 5:73

⁵⁶⁴ CPractR 5:160

⁵⁶⁵ Stephen Engstrom 'The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason' p.107.

⁵⁶⁶ Stephen Engstrom 'The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason' p.108.

⁵⁶⁷ CPractR 5:76

always relative - a comparison of ourselves with others as worthy of greater esteem. Conceit is not satisfied in being the same as others and leads to deprecating them or regarding them with contempt. It makes practical judgements on the superior rectitude of the self-conceited agent. It implies re-phrasing the famous opening proposition of the *Groundwork* as: 'Nothing in the world can be regarded without qualification as good, except MY will.'⁵⁶⁸ In the *Religion*, Kant argues that man has a propensity to evil,⁵⁶⁹ "evil by nature, ...so that evil can be predicated of a man as a species." Of the incentives of the moral law or of inclination, man often subordinates one to the other, although how self-conceit arises from self-love is left unexplained by Kant. Self-conceit can only be recognised from experience, *a posteriori*, and therefore belongs to our nature in a secondary way.

6.8 Is there a link to beneficence and love?

I have noted Kant's use of 'infringement' in the above box (statement 4). How is this? The extent of our beneficence (i.e. of our doing good) is limited by the tension between doing good for and to others without knowing the true needs for happiness of the recipient of our largesse, when we have needs for happiness ourselves.⁵⁷⁰ Self-love is limited in our making others the object of our duty of beneficence: "I ought to sacrifice a part of my welfare to others without help of return." This limitation is a restriction, not of an inclination, but of a maxim of self-love. Kant says much the same in the second *Critique*.⁵⁷¹ The significance of this is that self-love is trying to maintain claims that

⁵⁶⁸ Stephen Engstrom 'The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason' p.111.

⁵⁶⁹ Rel 6:32

⁵⁷⁰ MM 6:393

⁵⁷¹ CPractR 5:34

purport to have the standing of practical cognition and hence limited by the standard of the objective validity constitutive of such cognition - i.e. universal legislation. The positive benefit is that the duty to widen one's benevolent concern beyond oneself eventually gives rise to a feeling of love for them. Self-conceit is a contrast, for it tries to identify the objective standard of practical knowledge with oneself - with one's capacity to estimate the moral worth of things as previously noted. To do this, it must usurp the moral law. The moral law must reject such claims: and hence Kant's use of the term 'strike down'. "The certainty of a disposition that agrees with this law is the first condition of all worth of the person...and all pretension prior to this is false and contrary to law."⁵⁷²

Self-conceit and the moral law are in competition. Anthropomorphising them, they are deadly enemies, extending beyond humiliation to hatred of reason and the moral law on the part of self-conceit. This describes "those who ridicule all morality as the mere phantom of a human imagination overstepping itself though self-conceit."⁵⁷³

In addition to presupposing a consciousness of the moral law, self-conceit believes it has the capacity to make law. Its claim is to place the standard of one individual, based on self-love, as having universal validity - something that belongs alone to the moral law. By comparison, self-conceit is as nothing. The mortification (to use Engstrom's term) of self-conceit is the first effect of the moral law on feeling and brings with it a feeling of respect - a positive outcome. This diminution of self-conceit and magnification of the moral law has an *indirect* positive effect on feeling. Hence the moral law establishes itself as incentive, *Triebfeder*. This account broadly falls into line

⁵⁷² CPractR 5:73

⁵⁷³ G 4:407

with that outlined below, in which moral feeling has its effect broadly on virtue and moral worth.

In realising that we have over-valued the pursuit of happiness, we become aware of our capacity to free ourselves from 'pathological' incentives. Our rational nature is greater than our inclinations. This realisation must elicit a kind of pleasure in us, that of self-respect. Kant adds that removal of a hindrance is the same as contributing to causality. His conclusion at this point is therefore that, "because of this, this feeling can now also be called a feeling of respect for the moral law while on both grounds together it can be called a *moral feeling* (Kant's italics)."⁵⁷⁴ Moral feeling, as respect, is thus the phenomenological effect of the moral law which alone moves us to action. A contrary view is that the "moral law determines the will directly, and then follows the feeling of respect, which subsequently determines the choice to act accordingly. Kantian moral motivation must be presumed to generate moral action through a motivational sequence involving moral feeling of sufficient strength."⁵⁷⁵ Since Kant urges us to cultivate and strengthen our capacity for moral feeling, strength of moral feeling must affect moral choice. Against this, he states later that "respect for the moral law is the sole and also the undoubted moral incentive."⁵⁷⁶

6.9 The affectivist and intellectualist view of respect as feeling

⁵⁷⁴ CPractR 5:75

⁵⁷⁵ McCarty R. Kantian Moral Motivation and the Feeling of Respect. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31, no.3, (1993) pp. 421-435, (p.428)

⁵⁷⁶ CPractR 5: 78

Kant's use of the term 'philosopher's stone'⁵⁷⁷ indicates that he found the question of how the moral law can provide an incentive that moves the will to action perplexing.

“Nobody can or ever will comprehend how the understanding should have a motivating power.”⁵⁷⁸

Moreover:

“It is quite impossible to see...how a mere thought which in itself contains nothing sensible produces a feeling of pleasure or displeasure.”⁵⁷⁹

The pathological and therefore motivational side of human agents is interpreted as grounded in our affective (i.e. sensuous) natures. Yet Kant rejected the British sentimentalists' view of moral sense. Kant suggests that 'respect' – that is respect for the moral law -, which he argues is moral feeling, answers the question of how we are moved by moral considerations. On this solution, respect⁵⁸⁰ as a moral feeling bridges the gap between the moral law and the capacity of humans (as sensuously affected beings) to be motivated.⁵⁸¹ This introduces an accusation of heteronomy as autonomous beings should depend solely on the moral law without 'pathological' feeling. “The incentive of the human will can never be other than the moral law.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁷ Kant Immanuel. *Lectures on Ethics (Collins)*, transl. & ed Peter Heath. (Cambridge: CUP),1997. 27:1428

⁵⁷⁸ Kant Immanuel. *Lectures on Ethics (Collins)*. 27:1428

⁵⁷⁹ G 4:460

⁵⁸⁰ Kant also has a place for honorific respect described as a “tribute we cannot refuse to pay to merit.” Others may offer this, but it cannot be demanded. Some might justify preferential treatment as a result. . It is acceptable to demand broadly ethical respect from others i.e. be treated as an end, justified by one's rational and moral capacities: mutual and not by what one has done with them. I will not comment further as I think it irrelevant in the present context.

⁵⁸¹ Iain PD Morrisson, '*Kant and the role of Pleasure in Moral Action.*' (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press), 2008, p1

⁵⁸² CPractR 5:72

Responses to this accusation have included the suggestion that respect can only function as a moral motive insofar as it has a non-feeling dimension. Respect as a feeling may be a non-moral motive; respect as non-feeling isn't a non-moral motive. It may be respect that identifies or brings to consciousness the moral law. Kant writes, "Immediate determination of the means of the law and consciousness of this is called respect."⁵⁸³ On this view, respect is a judgement about the value of the moral law that must be obeyed. But respect itself as feeling is not the motivating factor and the accusation of heteronomous action can therefore be rejected.

Such an interpretation would support the so-called intellectualist side of this debate, but with a continuing role for respect: respect is a judgement and has made us conscious of our duty. To this degree, Reath⁵⁸⁴ (an intellectualist) sees respect as having both an intellectual and an affective side: a view judged by Louden⁵⁸⁵ as a reasonable gloss on this remark from the *Groundwork*.⁵⁸⁶

Reath defines the "intellectual" aspect of respect as recognising the moral law as a source of value, unconditionally valid, and overriding relative to other kinds of reasons. In particular, it outweighs the reasons provided by one's desires. We acknowledge the law's authority and are motivated to act accordingly. Inclinations influence the will through the value which the agent supposes them to have but the moral law can limit their influence by showing that they do not have this value and presenting a higher

⁵⁸³ G 4:401n

⁵⁸⁴ Andrews Reath, 'Kant's Theory of Moral Sensibility: Respect for the Moral Law and the Influence of Inclination. *Kant Studien* 80 (1989) pp.284-302.

⁵⁸⁵ Louden Robert B., *Review of 'Kant and the role of pleasure in moral action, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2009,08,11 <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/kant-and-the-role-of-pleasure-in-moral-action/> Accessed 23/11/2018

⁵⁸⁶ G 401n

value. The affective side for Reath is a feeling or emotion that is experienced when the moral law checks the inclinations and limits their influence on the will. He refers to Kant in the *Groundwork*: “respect is properly the worth that infringes upon my self-love.”⁵⁸⁷ Since Kant here is suggesting that respect is not an incentive existing before our recognition of the moral law, Reath concludes that “the feeling of respect is an incentive only in an attenuated sense.”⁵⁸⁸ Altman articulates a similar position in writing:

“The moral feeling of self-approration and subsequent “elevation” of the rational being, both of which follow from a pure moral interest, oppose the lower faculty’s pursuit of happiness as a subjective end thereby thwarting sensible pleasure in favour of positive moral feeling.”⁵⁸⁹

To be moved by respect for the moral law, as the “direct determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness of this determination”, is to recognise the moral law as a source of value, and to feel respect is to experience the constraints which the moral law imposes on our inclinations, avers Reath.⁵⁹⁰

Thus Kant thinks that this respect aids good conduct, by counteracting the obstacles created by our inclinations.⁵⁹¹ He writes, “(R)espect for the moral law must be feeling insofar as the law weakens the hindering influence of the inclinations by humiliating self-conceit.” Kant is clear in avoiding a view that uses natural desire as there is no antecedent feeling to morality, with no motivational factor beyond the recognition of the

⁵⁸⁷ G 4:401n

⁵⁸⁸ Andrews Reath, ‘Kant’s Theory of Moral Sensibility p289

⁵⁸⁹ Matthew C Altman, ‘A Practical Account of Kantian Freedom’, in Matthew C Altman (ed), *The Palgrave Kant Handbook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.217.

⁵⁹⁰ Andrews Reath, ‘Kant’s Theory of Moral Sensibility p288

⁵⁹¹ CPractR 5:79

validity of the moral law. “This feeling (under the name of moral feeling) is therefore produced solely by reason.”⁵⁹²

The affectivist view, by contrast, has been defined as the feeling of respect for the moral law having the role of a moral incentive with real affective force in the mechanism of moral motivation. Affectivists, although opposed to the intellectualist interpretation,

“need not deny that Kantian moral motivation initially arises from an intellectual recognition of the moral law. Contrary to intellectualists, however, they maintain that it also depends on a peculiar moral feeling of respect for law, one consequent to the initial recognition or moral judgment the intellectualists emphasize exclusively.”⁵⁹³

Kant himself is not as clear as we might hope in commenting on how the moral law affects the will. He does give the warning that we might expect:

“it is quite impossible to see, that is, to make comprehensible *a priori* how a thought which itself contains nothing sensible produces a feeling of pleasure....for that is a special kind of causality...about which we can determine nothing *a priori*.....This much is certain: it is not *because the law interests us* that it has validity for us (for that is heteronomy) and dependence of practical reason upon sensibility, namely upon a feeling lying at its basis in which case it could never be morally lawgiving.”⁵⁹⁴

This view is articulated in a related passage in the second *Critique*:

⁵⁹² CPractR 5:76

⁵⁹³ McCarty Richard. Kantian Moral Motivation and the Feeling of Respect. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31, no.3, (1993) pp. 421-435

⁵⁹⁴ G 4:461

“If the determination of the will takes place conformably with the moral law but only by means of a feeling, of whatever kind, that has to be presupposed in order for the law to become a sufficient determining ground of the will, so that the action is not done for the sake of the law, then the action will contain legality indeed but no morality.”⁵⁹⁵

The fact that the action involves respect is not enough to make it moral. An affectivist may argue that “feeling” means *pathological* feeling. On this reading, in saying we cannot be motivated by feeling of any kind, Kant means by *pathological* feeling of any kind, as exemplified by the moral sense of the Scottish sentimentalists. Respect for the moral law would be a non-pathological feeling. Thus Kant also writes (in a complex paragraph) that the moral law “has influence on the sensibility of the subject and effects a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will.”⁵⁹⁶ Here the moral feeling of respect seems to be mediating between moral law and the will.

Other pages in the second *Critique* also appear to support the affectivist view that the feeling of respect is necessary to motivate moral conduct. For example,

“the moral law...is also a subjective determining ground – that is, an incentive – to this action inasmuch as it has influence on the sensibility of the subject and effects a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will.”⁵⁹⁷ (Quoted in box statement 10 above):

“respect for the moral law must be regarded also as a positive though indirect effect of the moral law on feeling insofar as the law weakens the hindering influence of the inclinations by humiliating self-conceit, and must therefore be

⁵⁹⁵ CPractR 5:72

⁵⁹⁶ CPractR 5:75

⁵⁹⁷ CPractR 5:75

regarded as a subjective ground of activity – that is, as the incentive to compliance with the law – as the ground for maxims of a course of life in conformity with it.”⁵⁹⁸

Ware⁵⁹⁹ argues that only an affectivist view makes sense of this. For if we recognise the moral law as having the necessary and sufficient authority to move us, there would be no justification for commenting on reason’s effecting “a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will.” Nevertheless, it is still reason in the form of the moral law that initiates the moral action and is the prime motivator.

So, at this stage in the thesis, we have seen that Kant’s texts do not give a clear answer, which leads many to resort to speculating as to what Kant should have said rather than what he actually wrote. Reath’s interpretation, which acknowledges a role for respect as feeling, albeit a limited one, does avoid the trap of permitting heteronomy of the will, while providing a response to the repeated assertions of respect as moral feeling. But equally, from an affectivist perspective, if the will’s intellectual recognition of the moral law causes respect as feeling, action will result from autonomy, not heteronomy.

Respect can be seen as a non-pathological feeling.

6.10 Might feeling be motivational in developing moral character?

A recent commentator has suggested a compromise to reconcile insights of the affectivist and intellectualist positions, while avoiding the shortcomings of each.⁶⁰⁰ The key proposal is that while the motivational power of respect arises from its nature as

⁵⁹⁸ CPractR 5:79

⁵⁹⁹ Owen Ware, ‘Kant on Moral Sensibility and Moral Motivation’, pp.727-746

⁶⁰⁰ Erica A Holberg, ‘The Importance of Pleasure in the Moral for Kant’s Ethics’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 54, no2 (2016) pp.26-246 (p232)

pleasurable feeling, the feeling does not directly motivate individual dutiful actions. Rather, the feeling is motivational in that after a morally good action, the resultant pleasure contributes to the cultivation of virtue in the agent and, consequently, morally good actions in the future. At one extreme, the feeling of respect motivates moral action in the same way that pathological pleasure motivates non-moral action⁶⁰¹ (a stronger view than discussed above) while, on the other extreme, intellectualists, as noted above, argue that any moral feeling has no role in motivation and, consequently, cannot link respect and pleasure. Holberg proposes that a broader question should be addressed: not whether respect as a moral feeling motivates individual moral actions but a broader question of how respect contributes to cultivating virtue and so moral agency more generally. Will it or can it improve our moral worth and assist our progress to approaching the highest good? If dutiful willing is 'pleasant-in-itself', can we gain moral strength and so cultivate virtue through dutiful willing?

The textual evidence, she asserts, although capable of differing interpretations, favours the intellectualist claim that the pleasurable feeling aspect of respect is not how individual actions with moral worth are produced. Sensibly given interests play a role in the agent's reasoning towards action and empirically formed interests shape the individual subject's conception of what 'things going well' would consist in. Subjective interests and inclinations must be excluded in determining the will as a power of choice in forming maxims. She then expounds the feelings of pain, as above, and the humiliation produced by the moral law and its resultant raising of esteem for the moral law. The problem, as already noted, is that this doesn't provide a satisfying account in describing an incentive to moral action, again as noted above. But Kant, she thinks, is making a point about conceptual priority in describing the feeling of respect i.e. that the

⁶⁰¹ Iain PD Morrisson 'Kant and the Role of Pleasure in Moral Action.'

will wills freely. Respect is motivationally idle if the feeling of respect is not a necessary step in the production of individual acts of good willing. Rather she thinks that respect is motivationally active by being the ground for maxims of a course of life in conformity with the moral law. A further suggestion is that knowledge and feeling cannot be separated in this process. This is true whether we are considering knowledge of and feeling for the law; or feeling for myself as moral agent. Kant's view is that fully knowing or recognising the law involves being moved by the law in the right way: that is cognising the law is to will the law to have the feeling of respect for the law.

Insofar as she is arguing for a limited intellectualist position, Holberg's exposition can broadly be reconciled with the limited affectivist position of Reath. In placing the emphasis on moral worth as contributing to a positive encouragement, albeit indirect, from respect as *Treibfeder* of moral action, she offers an attractive compromise solution to Kant's lack of a compellingly clear interpretation, commented on in 6.10 above.

6.11 Does the third *Critique* add to this analysis?

In the third *Critique*, Kant again asserts that the feeling of respect is one of pleasure:

"...in the critique of practical reason we actually derived the feeling of respect (as a special and peculiar modification of this feeling, which will not coincide exactly either with the pleasure or with the displeasure that we obtain from empirical objects) from universal moral concepts *a priori*....we did not actually derive this feeling from the idea of the moral as a cause, rather it was merely the determination of the will that was derived from the latter. The state of mind of a will determined by something, however, is in itself already a feeling of pleasure

and is identical with it, thus it does not follow as an effect: the latter would only have to be assumed if the concept of the moral as a good preceded the determination of the will by the law."⁶⁰²

This item of text offers both clarification and confirmation of Kant's view of the difference of respect as special in its independence of the phenomenal world and of the relation of respect and pleasure, most notably that the will is not determined by pleasure of respect. Good willing is identical to moral feeling so cannot be brought about by it. Moral feeling can only follow upon the representation of the law.⁶⁰³ We should also note that feelings of pleasure in the third *Critique* relate to the beautiful and sublime, not to action or desire. Virtue is a disposition to will from and for duty and will evince a cultivated sensibility. The pleasure of moral action is anti-krastic, strengthening the will's choice without affecting that choice and helping us to develop our moral agency.

"...Consciousness of this ability of a pure practical reason (virtue) can in fact produce consciousness of mastery over one's inclinations, hence of independence from them and so too from the discontent that always accompanies them and thus can produce a negative satisfaction with one's state, that is, contentment which in its source is contentment with one's person. Freedom itself becomes in this way ...capable of an enjoyment."⁶⁰⁴

We cannot free ourselves from desires and inclinations discordant with the moral law. Pleasure in the moral supports our commitment to the ends that reason sets for the self.

"The capacity for simple respect for the moral within us would thus be moral feeling, which in and through itself does not constitute an end of the natural

⁶⁰² CPJ 5:222

⁶⁰³ MM 6:399

⁶⁰⁴ CPractR 5:84

predisposition except so far as it is the motivating force of the will...the property of such a will is good character."⁶⁰⁵

In conclusion, we cannot know how reason exercises causal force of motivationally effective feeling. But I believe that I have demonstrated that respect is such a feeling that plays an often effective role: but one that justifies both an affectivist and intellectualist interpretation. Moral action can be motivated by a feeling of respect and can do so because it is a feeling, not in spite of it.⁶⁰⁶

So, at this stage in the thesis, Kant has worked out his understanding of reason, and led his readers to a discussion of its roles and interests. Paradoxes and contradictions appear to exist in the *Triebfeder* of reason, but overall in the six chapters the unity of reason has been indicated. In the following three chapters, the challenge is to develop the unity of reason, in its structure and its ends. Only unity can realise a compelling vision of the end of all things. To proceed, I will consider the primacy of practical reason, the arguments for reason's unity and a united reason's culmination in the highest good.

⁶⁰⁵ Rel 6:27

⁶⁰⁶ Janelle de Witt, 'Respect for the Moral Law: the Emotional Side of Reason', *Philosophy* 89, no.1 (2013) pp.1-32.

Chapter 7: The primacy of practical reason

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7.1 Introduction

The distinction between reason's theoretical and practical functions (or 'faculties') is emphasised by Kant up to the final sentence of the preface to his "entire critical enterprise."⁶⁰⁷ This chapter commences with a comparison of these two faculties, acknowledging that reason would be incoherent if they contradicted each other because there is only one reason – as I will examine in ch8. The two faculties differ, but must harmonise. The relationship and characteristics of the one to the other are addressed by Kant in his advocacy for the primacy of practical reason.

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes that

"all men desire to know....even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer sight to almost everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things."⁶⁰⁸

Elsewhere he writes, "...it is plain then that wisdom is knowledge combined with comprehension, of the things that are highest by nature."⁶⁰⁹ The distinction between theoretical and practical reason was noted by him: the *nous theoretikus* and the *nous practicus*. "There are two parts to the soul of man and a good man has excellencies in both, with a practical and a speculative principle."⁶¹⁰ The ancients thus recognised the differing faculties of reason, but believed that *theoria*, theoretical reason, had primacy: it was the highest good for man. Kant's advocacy of the primacy of practical reason

⁶⁰⁷ CPJ 5:170

⁶⁰⁸ Jonathan Barnes (ed), *The Complete works of Aristotle: Metaphysics*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1.1,980221-7

⁶⁰⁹ Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete works of Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.7.1141^b3

⁶¹⁰ Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete works of Aristotle: Politics*, 1333^a25

therefore constitutes a radical departure from the ancients. In what follows, I will argue in its support.

I begin by establishing the differences between theoretical and practical reason. I suggest that practical reason's primacy represents an earlier stage in Kant's philosophy than the relevant section in the second *Critique*: a better starting place is the *Groundwork*. Nevertheless this does not diminish the importance of the key section in the *Critique*, for it is here that Kant provides his deduction of the doctrine. So I will both describe and assess the arguments put forward in support of the primacy doctrine. Having established the doctrine, I will then attempt to apply it to issues for which it is important: for Kant's moral theology, for the concept of freedom, for reason's coherence, for reason's unity, for reason's advocacy of politics and for reason's teleology. The first of these arguments is a relatively limited view of the primacy which I will term the "narrow view." In this narrow view, the doctrine's key feature is its reference to the postulates of pure practical reason: immortality and God. This contrasts with its reference to wider issues which constitute the "broad view," relating to the structure and nature of reason.⁶¹¹ "The transcendental improvement of our rational cognition is...merely the effect of the *practical* purposiveness which pure reason imposes on us."⁶¹²

7.2 The characteristics and interests of theoretical and practical reason

Kant must define the relationship between theoretical and practical reason in order to construct a unified view of human life.⁶¹³ If, for example, a theoretician claimed that theoretical reason is the only rational activity open to us, then practical reason would be

⁶¹¹ CPR A800/B828; CPR A816-7/B844-5; CPractR 5:121; CPR A853/B881; CPJ 5:473; CPJ 5:206

⁶¹² CPR A817/B845

⁶¹³ Roger J Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p.96.

second-rate thinking and morality a fantasy. (As thorough going determinists may of course think.) If, by contrast, theoretical reason was not respected, we would, in Kant's words, be open to every nonsense and delusion of the imagination. Religious or other fanatics would reject scientific theory for the will of God or some crazy doctrine like vitalism. Homeopaths would take over medicine, global warming deniers would take over climatology, cranks, quacks, mountebanks and magicians of every variety would ply their trades. Freedom should place no hindrance in the way of the mechanism of nature.⁶¹⁴ How then do theoretical and practical reason differ? Which characteristics feature if practical reason has primacy?

First, theoretical reason is concerned with nature, whereas practical reason is concerned with morality. Material philosophy deals with determinate objects and divides into laws of nature and laws of freedom.⁶¹⁵ Thus, "metaphysics is divided into the metaphysics of the speculative and the practical use of pure reason."⁶¹⁶ (By the latter, Kant means reason's moral function and not its function as rules of skill – *how* to do things, what he terms the "technically practical" and which arises from natural concepts of cause and effect.)⁶¹⁷ In the third *Critique*, the difference in the metaphysics of theoretical and (morally) practical reason is reiterated using geographical metaphors: territory, domain, field, residence (*domicilium*). The faculty that relates concepts to objects exercises its legislative function by the understanding through concepts of nature and is therefore theoretical; legislation through freedom is practical.⁶¹⁸ Those are their respective domains in this metaphor. The domain of the concept of nature is the sensible; the domain of the concept of freedom is the super-sensible. A metaphysics of nature is

⁶¹⁴ CPR Bxxix

⁶¹⁵ G 4:387

⁶¹⁶ CPR A841/B869

⁶¹⁷ CPJ 5:173

⁶¹⁸ CPJ 5:174

theoretical (=speculative) and relates to appearances, whereas in its practical use it is a metaphysics of morals, relating to things in themselves. Metaphysics has existed ever since humans have thought or reflected but the theoretical and the practical have been confused. This distinction between the two elements of cognition, one of which is in our power *a priori* and the other *a posteriori* is important for Kant for it has often been “very indistinct, even among professional thinkers.”⁶¹⁹ This lack of clarity has led to a failure to determine the bounds of sense. Some empirical principles are more important than others and of wider application (i.e. “higher”). This is probably a throwback to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, where it is suggested that “theoretical kinds of knowledge to be more of the nature of wisdom than the productive”⁶²⁰ (i.e. than perhaps the ‘technically practical’). There is a hierarchy with those understanding more universal principles ranking above those dealing with particulars only. Thus Kant raises the suggestion that boundaries could be defined by the degree of subordination of a particular under a universal. It isn’t clear how this might work: indeed the suggestion seems to be that it wouldn’t. It would confuse the theoretical and the practical with the higher and the lower with respective criteria and dividing lines unclear. Where, if some empirical principles are higher than others, and where in “the series of such a subordination.... is one to make the cut that distinguishes the first part and highest member from the last part and the subordinate members?”⁶²¹ One needs to be able to differentiate that which can be cognised completely *a priori* from that which can be cognised only *a posteriori*.⁶²² Otherwise, this makes little sense. The metaphysical division of theoretical and practical reason is upheld.

⁶¹⁹ CPR A843/B871

⁶²⁰ Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete works of Aristotle: Metaphysics* (1984), Book 1 (A), 981^b25

⁶²¹ CPR A843/B871

⁶²² CPR A843/B871

Second, the objects of theoretical reason are not only appearances i.e. objects of possible experience, belonging to nature. Such objects are phenomenal. They are also *given*. Indeed, nature is the “sum total of given objects whether they are given by the senses or, if one will, by another kind of intuition.”⁶²³ For example, he writes,

“all experience contains in addition to the intuition of the senses, through which something is *given*, a concept of an object that is *given* in intuition or appears.”⁶²⁴ (My italics).

Or, in the second *Critique*, he refers to “objects as could be” or that may be “*given*” to the understanding.⁶²⁵ By contrast, practical reason is said to create its objects: as he expresses it in the first *Critique*, “making the object actual.”⁶²⁶ Practical reason

“is concerned with the determining grounds of the will, which is a faculty either of producing objects corresponding to representations, or of determining itself to effect these objects...that is, of determining its causality.”⁶²⁷

In its practical use, reason is a metaphysics of morals, relating to things in themselves. Morality must link to the noumenal world for in the phenomenal world of appearances, laws can only be those of nature and causation can only be natural.

In the third *Critique*, reason is described as *a priori* legislative through both theoretical and practical domains.⁶²⁸ Legislation through concepts of nature takes place through the understanding and is therefore theoretical. I interpret Kant to mean that theoretical reason only legislates through concepts which derive from the understanding, not from

⁶²³ CPR A845/B873

⁶²⁴ CPR A93/B126

⁶²⁵ CPractR 5:89

⁶²⁶ CPR Bx

⁶²⁷ CPractR 5:15

⁶²⁸ CPJ 5:174

theoretical reason itself. Only in the practical, can reason be legislative. By virtue of cognition of nature, theoretical cognition can “draw inferences from given laws to conclusions that still stop short at nature.”⁶²⁹ Theoretical and practical reason must co-exist.

Third, theoretical reason is concerned with what is (or might be or has been), practical reason with what ought to be (or should have been). Theoretical cognition is “that through which I cognise what exists, and practical cognition as that through which it is cognised *a priori* what ought to happen.”⁶³⁰ This is the ‘is/ought’ distinction: “The philosophy of nature pertains to everything that is; that of morals to that which should be.”⁶³¹

Theoretical reason concerns knowledge. As noted in ch3, theoretical reason creates systematic unity by rules that apply to the manifold of judgements, enabling the combination of concepts of the understanding and intuitions to generate knowledge, the laws of nature. By contrast, “a practical rule ...prescribes action as a means to an effect that is the aim.”⁶³² As he expresses later, “practical reason deals not with objects to cognise them but with its own power to make them actual...with a will which is a causality.”⁶³³ So there is a distinction in knowing or doing. In discussing 'hope', which involves both theoretical and practical reason, a similar distinction is re-affirmed.⁶³⁴ In the Canon, Kant interprets the interest of theoretical reason as seeking satisfaction in

⁶²⁹ CPJ 5:175

⁶³⁰ CPR A633/B661

⁶³¹ CPR A840/B868

⁶³² CPractR 5:20

⁶³³ CPractR 5:89

⁶³⁴ CPR A806/B834

answering the question, what can I know? The second question is “merely practical” in asking what should I do?⁶³⁵

These distinctions are highlighted in that of interest which Kant describes in the key paragraphs specifically on the priority.⁶³⁶ An interest is possessed by every faculty of mind. So theoretical reason's interest is in cognition⁶³⁷ "up to the highest *a priori* principles" - in knowledge (as in the third distinction above). Reason itself as the supreme determining faculty, the faculty of principles, must determine its own interest and all the interests of the powers of the mind (see ch5). The interest of practical reason will be in the "determination of the will with respect to the final and complete end."⁶³⁸ That is, it is creative (as in the second distinction above). The key concept of interest has been discussed above in ch5.

In one sense theoretical reason matters to practical reason because its interests concern cognitive outcomes that, in the end, matter to what we do. ‘What is’ matters to ‘what ought’. We could re-phrase this in saying that the practical is ultimately supreme, but its interests must be united with those of the interests of theoretical reason. Perhaps ‘united’ is not the most appropriate English word and ‘integrated with’ might be preferable: but the point is that the two forms of reason with their respective interests truly have a common end. In that sense they are united. On this understanding we might say that theoretical reason is an application of practical reason. It is plain, as discussed above, that there are differences in their objects: the one given, the other created. But in examining reason’s unity and in supporting practical reason’s primacy, the key to both

⁶³⁵ CPR A85/B833

⁶³⁶ CPractR Section 3, chapter II, Book II

⁶³⁷ Caygill, (‘A Kant Dictionary’, p.113.) points out that the distinctions between cognition (*Erkenntnis*), knowledge (*Wissen*) and thinking (*Denken*) are not always observed either by Kant or by his translators. Thus at CPR A69/B94 cognition is not distinguished from knowledge or thinking. It is *cognition* of the highest ends, belonging to morality that pure reason grants. (A816/B844)

⁶³⁸ CPractR 5:120

lies in the relationship of their respective interests rather than in the more obvious difference between their objects. Theoretical reason, on this understanding, can be subsumed under practical reason: fully integrated. That is a more radical interpretation than immediately apparent in the key section of the second *Critique*.

It should not be assumed from the contrasts between theoretical and practical reason that they have no shared interests. Given what has been proposed in the last paragraph, we should expect that they would. God and freedom can concern both theoretical and practical reason as mentioned at the start of the second *Critique*.⁶³⁹ This is plainly the case in the first *Critique* from the discussion in the third antinomy for theoretical reason and in the section on God's existence in the second *Critique* for practical reason.⁶⁴⁰

7.3 What does the primacy of the practical mean?

A distinguished Kant scholar notes that in the first *Critique*, experience was shown to establish the bounds of theoretical reason. From this we conclude that theoretical reason has no jurisdiction over the beliefs that morality requires us to hold. Hence our conclusion: "this is the primacy of practical reason."⁶⁴¹ Further, theoretical reason cannot limit our thinking in ways required by the moral law. On this basis, the primacy doctrine appears as a defensive position against the illegitimate encroachments of theoretical upon practical reason. Kant himself gives a slightly different account in writing:

⁶³⁹ CPractR 5:4-5

⁶⁴⁰ CPractR 5:124

⁶⁴¹ Jerome B Schneewind, 'Autonomy, obligation and virtue', in Paul Guyer (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p.331.

“Unter dem Primat zwischen zwei oder mehreren durch Vernunft verbundenen Dingen verstehe ich den Vorzug des einen, der erste Bestimmungsgrund der Verbindung mit allen übrigen zu sein.”

I quote this in the original German for I think Gregor’s translation obscures Kant’s meaning. Thus, in English, Kant says that he understands primacy between two things connected by reason to mean the "prerogative of one to be the first determining ground of the connection with all the rest."⁶⁴²

Gregor's translation of '*Vorzug*' as 'prerogative' would be clearer as 'priority over' or even 'preference over', given the association of the word 'prerogative' with authority and rights in ordinary English usage; and '*Bestimmungsgrund*' as 'determining ground' might be clearer if its synonyms of 'determinant', 'determining reason' or simply 'basis' are also considered. This would then read that primacy between theoretical and practical reason, connected as they are by both being reason, means the priority of one over the other as basis of the connection with the other. Kant then continues, “In a narrower practical sense, it signifies the prerogative (again, 'priority') of the interest of one insofar as the interest of the others is subordinated to it” (but with the condition that it cannot be inferior to any other). Kant states that theoretical reason would have primacy if practical reason could not offer anything as further than theoretical reason’s insights. Why is this? Why, if nothing “further” means an equality of insights, should theoretical reason have primacy?

One aspect of reason cannot dictate to another: reason can’t be self-contradictory. But if the insights of practical and theoretical reason are in some sense equal, wouldn’t theoretical reason have primacy because what it can offer is cognition of nature that is

⁶⁴²CPractR 5:119

given to us: it can establish what is, not merely what ought to be? Practical reason's primacy must assume a lack of contradiction (- a condition of reason itself-) and, crucially, something further. Specifically, what practical reason does offer is the postulates of pure practical reason: rational beliefs without evidence, theoretically undecidable but practically necessary i.e. necessary for morality. The primacy doctrine is asserting that what matters most to us is what we do rather than what is *and* that practical reason can assert the necessity of the postulates. The two expressions of reason are not in conflict: there is no opposition in what is to what ought to be. They represent different interests.

The acceptability of theoretical reason uniting concepts of practical reason is posed by Kant in a complex lengthy sentence at 5:120. Breaking this interrogative into its components, Kant asks whether theoretical reason tries to unite practical reason's concepts with its own or whether it rejects them. If it rejects them, is it because they can't be shown in experience – which they can't? And even though they are non-contradictory, is it because they may 'infringe' on interests of speculative reason? Or because the boundary of theoretical reason will be compromised and open it to all sorts of nonsense? Although they are transcendent for it – as God and the postulates are – it can “try to unite them” with itself, “as a foreign possession handed over to it.”

Theoretical reason can, Kant suggests, adopt God and the postulates into itself. But it cannot remove its bounds or it will be open to imaginative delusions and monstrosities, of which Kant instances Mohammed's paradise or the fusion with the Deity of the theosophists and mystics.

Since pure reason can be practical, as proved by the moral law, it remains reason based on *a priori* principles. Theoretical reason will continue to reject “monstrosities”; and practical reason, although unable to affirm certain propositions, will be able to affirm

them if they don't contradict it. That is, "as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest of pure reason."⁶⁴³ Such propositions are not opposed to theoretical reason's interests, which as we have seen, concern cognition and the understanding. Kant reminds us that the interest of theoretical reason remains the "restriction of speculative mischief." Theoretical reason then cannot deny propositions which it is unable to establish: they remain empty possibilities until postulated by practical reason. Whether judging in the practical or theoretical, reason still judges from *a priori* principles. Therefore theoretical reason must accept propositions which "belong inseparably to the practical interest."

This primacy of practical reason is based on *a priori* grounds. It is therefore necessary and not contingent; not, that is, dependent on 'pathological' or empirical factors. Unless this were the case, theoretical and practical reason would be in conflict. "Without this subordination a conflict of reason with itself would arise."⁶⁴⁴ And because what we do matters more to us than what we know, Kant notes that all interest is ultimately practical. Even the interests of theoretical reason are brought to completion in practical use.

7.4 The primacy of practical reason: the relevance of the postulates

The main direct and explicit account of Kant's assertion and defence of the primacy of practical reason lies in Section III (On the primacy of pure practical reason in its connection with speculative reason) of Chapter II in Book II in the second *Critique*.⁶⁴⁵ This account is sandwiched between a discussion of the antinomy of practical reason

⁶⁴³ CPractR 5:121

⁶⁴⁴ CPractR 5:121

⁶⁴⁵ CPractR 5:119

(sections I and II) and of two of the postulates, that of the immortality of the soul (section IV) and of the existence of God (section V). This emphasises the relevance of the primacy doctrine to the postulates, and the emergence of the primacy from the antinomy. We shall see that the postulates, in turn, bear on the concept of the highest good. At a first glance, the emphasis of the link to the postulates strikes us as the key feature of the doctrine rather than the broader statement that what we do is more important than what we know. In clarifying the role of the postulates and a narrow view of the primacy doctrine, the relevance of Kant's moral theology is crucial. Its exposition and justification occupies a surprisingly short and dense section, (III), partly quoted already.

In this section, the primacy of practical reason is interpreted as a doctrine concerning the relationship between theoretical and practical reason over the status of the postulates of pure practical reason. God, freedom, and immortality of the soul cannot be justified by theoretical reason for they are outside its boundaries, beyond the world of sense. However practical reason can postulate their existence without evidence, as set out in my discussion of the postulates (ch4). In focussing on the postulates, this reasoning represents a narrow interpretation or expression of the concept of the primacy of practical reason. This narrow interpretation of the primacy doctrine refers solely to the so-called "right" of practical reason to extend into the realm forbidden to theoretical reason. Kant sets this out in the first *Critique's* Doctrine of Method, contrasting theoretical and practical reason. He claims that the person asserting a synthetic proposition from pure reason who fails to know enough to make the proposition certain, then neither can his opponent refute it. But he goes on to show that practical reason does have "the right"⁶⁴⁶ to assume something which would be unacceptable for theoretical

⁶⁴⁶ CPR A776/B804

reason. "It thus has a possession the legitimacy of which need not be proved and the proof which it could not in fact give."⁶⁴⁷ This realm is that of the noumenal (or unconditioned), which theoretical reason is denied. As a result, the objective reality of the postulations of God, freedom, and immortality that are necessary to the fulfilment of the moral requirements of reason can be asserted from a practical standpoint. Such "ideas" or postulates are problematic or merely thinkable according to theoretical reason's reflections.

To expound the relationship of the postulates to theoretical reason further, Beck's rephrasing of the primacy issue is a helpful clarification:

"Have we a right to use concepts of reason and to assert objects for them, which are beyond the sphere of knowledge marked off for and by theoretical reason?"⁶⁴⁸

This emphasises the limitations of theoretical reason rather than the imperialism of practical reason. Turning to the third Antinomy in the first *Critique* (which concerns causality and freedom), Beck reminds us that theoretical reason was unable to decide between thesis and antithesis. But theory is, of course, not the only use of reason; the needs of practice forces a decision upon us in favour of the thesis. Without a doctrine of primacy, there would be no way of escaping from the dilemma of deciding which assertion of reason to follow: "except by confessing allegiance to one or other of the conflicting doctrines, such a person would be in a state of ceaseless vacillation."⁶⁴⁹ But, says Kant, where practice is concerned ("doing or acting"), then "this play of merely speculative reason would disappear like the phantom images of a dream, and he would

⁶⁴⁷ CPR A776/B804

⁶⁴⁸ Lewis White Beck, 'A Commentary on Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*', p.249.

⁶⁴⁹ CPR A475/B503

choose his principles merely according to practical interest." Theoretical reason cannot resolve the difference between thesis and antithesis, but the needs of daily decision making leads to practical reason's primacy. One notes that there is a genuine conflict here: not that theoretical reason asserts something incompatible with practical reason. Theoretical reason strives to reach the unconditioned but will never achieve this and its interest is in doing whatever promotes this function. As Beck points out, its true interest is not in some special cognition or definition of the unconditioned but only preventing theoretical folly. There is one reason with two interests not two reasons with opposing interests. The things of faith can go beyond theoretical reason but not beyond reason *simpliciter*.⁶⁵⁰

I will now pursue two approaches in justifying the primacy of the practical, based on Kant's account in this section of the second *Critique*. In one I explicate the text to suggest that the primacy rests upon an interpretation of practical reason's superior cognitive and conative powers. To achieve that, it will be necessary first to say something about the antinomy (or antinomies) of practical reason. In the second, I want to use the text to outline a logical deduction, advocated by a German scholar. With the doctrine justified, it will then be possible to explore its further ramifications. But first it is necessary to explore the postulates in the antinomy of practical reason to understand why they are postulated. This argument now follows.

7.5 The antinomy of practical reason

⁶⁵⁰ Lewis White Beck, 'A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason', p.249.

In the concept of the highest good (to be set out in ch9), virtue is combined with proportionate happiness. It will form the final end (*telos*) of reason. The combination of the two component entities, virtue and happiness, must be either analytic or synthetic. Given that the two components are entirely different elements, it is impossible for the concept to be analytic:

“Two determinations necessarily combined in one concept must be connected as ground and consequent, and so connected that this unity is considered either as analytic (logical connection) or as synthetic (real connection), the former in accordance with the law of identity, the latter in accordance with the law of causality.”⁶⁵¹

A person who seeks his own happiness cannot analyse his behaviour and conclude it is virtuous.⁶⁵² The combination is cognised *a priori* by a transcendental deduction because “it is *a priori* (morally) necessary to produce the highest good through the freedom of the will”.⁶⁵³ The combination is synthetic and one of cause and effect. As Kant points out, this means that the desire for happiness must be motivational to virtuous action or virtue must be the cause of happiness. However, a desire for happiness is not a moral motive – and therefore cannot ground virtue. On the other hand, happiness requires knowledge of nature, so that virtue cannot deliver happiness. On this basis the highest good becomes impossible to achieve. If it cannot be achieved, then on the principle of ‘ought implies can’, the moral law which promotes the highest good becomes directed to imaginary ends. It would be, Kant says, “fantastic and...false.”⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵¹ CPractR 5:111

⁶⁵² CPractR 5:113

⁶⁵³ CPractR 5: 113

⁶⁵⁴ CPractR 5:114

So much for the bare outline of the antinomy of practical reason. But it has attracted scathing criticism, most notably from Beck who opines that

“it is really quite a poor thing, wholly unable to carry this great historical and systematic burden.⁶⁵⁵ We shall also find, regrettably, that Kant’s usual high-quality workmanship is not much in evidence in the discussion of the antinomy.”⁶⁵⁶

Against this, another commentator states that “few are seriously tempted to reject its fundamental systematic and philosophical importance within Kant’s practical philosophy,”⁶⁵⁷ while conceding that the “consensus is that Kant’s text is sloppy.”

If the antinomies of pure reason in the first *Critique* are examined, their pattern is clear.

Reason comes into conflict with itself because intuition gives us only the conditioned while the noumenal world of things in themselves offers the unconditioned.

Appearances will never be completely determined. The antinomies of pure reason are therefore resolved by distinguishing between appearances and things in themselves, noting that the idea of the world as a totality, and therefore fully determinate, is the world of things in themselves – beyond the reach of our knowledge.

Turning to the antinomy of practical reason, the dissimilarities with the antinomies of the first *Critique* are perhaps the first thing to strike us. There are no statements of thesis or antithesis, nor explicit contradictory propositions. Allowing for these expository omissions, some reconstructing becomes necessary. This is essentially what I have set out above in concluding that the moral law must be fantastic or false. Since we don’t

⁶⁵⁵ The burden is of the possibility of the highest good, which in turn is essential to support the moral law.

⁶⁵⁶ Lewis White Beck, ‘*A commentary on Kant’s Critique of practical reason*’, p.245ff.

⁶⁵⁷ Eric Watkins, ‘The Antinomy of Practical Reason: reason, the unconditioned and the highest good’, in Andrews Reath and Jens Timmerman (eds.), *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason. A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp.145-167.

believe that the moral law is false, the underlying assumption of a transcendently *real* world must be challenged (as in the antinomies of pure reason). It becomes possible that the inability of virtue to create happiness in this world of appearances may not obtain in the noumenal world. Kant then argues that the postulates of God and immortality are presupposed for the highest good to be possible in this way. Only immortality gives us opportunity for moral progress, only God can apportion happiness fairly. In comparison with the theoretical antinomies, the highest good here takes the role of the unconditioned totality, indeed the idea of the highest good is generated by practical reason as an unconditioned totality.⁶⁵⁸ Another way of looking at this is to return to the *Groundwork* and note that the synonym of the highest good is referred to there as the ‘Kingdom of Ends’, defined as “a whole of rational beings as ends in themselves as well as of the particular ends which each may set for himself.”⁶⁵⁹ The Formula of Humanity shows that Humanity can be regarded as unconditionally good and, more than that, a source of justification for things that only have conditional goodness.⁶⁶⁰

Despite his criticism of Kant’s antinomy of practical reason, Beck is not entirely dismissive of it. It may not be an antinomy “in any strict sense” because, despite Kant expressing concern with the “self-contradictions of pure practical reason”,⁶⁶¹ the two propositions are not contradictory; and secondly, the argument as set out does not fit Kant’s own definition of an antinomy given in the first *Critique*.⁶⁶² I have commented on these dissimilarities with the antinomies of pure reason above. Beck seems to concede that, as above, the answer is not dismissive, but some reconstruction is needed.

⁶⁵⁸ “As pure practical reason it likewise seeks the unconditioned for the practically conditioned...but even when this is given (in the moral law), it seeks the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, under the name of the highest good.” CPractR :108

⁶⁵⁹ G 4:433

⁶⁶⁰ Christine M Korsgaard, ‘*Creating the Kingdom of Ends*’. (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p.119.

⁶⁶¹ CPractR 5:109

⁶⁶² CPR A421/B449

This is what he actually does and comes up with the following:

Thesis: the Highest Good is possible. *Proof*: the moral law requires it.

Antithesis: the Highest Good is impossible. *Proof*: the connection between virtue and happiness is neither analytical nor synthetic⁶⁶³ *a priori* nor empirically given.

Resolution: The antithesis is true of the *sensible* world if the laws of nature have exclusive sovereignty; the thesis may be true of the *intelligible* world because the synthetic connection of virtue (as ground) to happiness (as consequent) is not absolutely impossible.”

In his analysis of the antinomy of practical reason, Allen Wood suggests that there is not one, but two antinomies.⁶⁶⁴ This view is based on the differences between section IV (immortality) and V (the existence of God) in which separate dialectic arguments threaten the practical possibility of the highest good. But the arguments in both cases depend on a dialectic in which the possibility of the highest good and of morality is deniable, only to be rescued by the postulates from the error. In the case of immortality, the impossibility of attaining holiness or perfection makes “endless progress” the “real object of our will. This endless progress is possible only on the basis of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly.”⁶⁶⁵ It follows that the highest good is at least possible. With its possibility the antinomy is resolved.

The difficulty with this simple exposition is the concept of time. Is immortality or “continuing endlessly” to make moral progress endless time? Without time is immortality meaningful? Kant states that “the temporal condition is nothing”⁶⁶⁶ to the

⁶⁶³ As to the connection between happiness and morality, see ch9 on the Highest Good.

⁶⁶⁴ Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p.104

⁶⁶⁵ CPractR 5:122

⁶⁶⁶ CPractR 5:123

“eternal being”; and that “where there is no time no end is possible.”⁶⁶⁷ If the argument is that endless progress is outside time, then such progress is, so to speak, a change of gear from temporal progress. Kant quotes the New Testament in his essay on the *End of all Things*:

“In the *Apocalypse* (10: 5-6) [John writes] “Then the angel...swore by him who lives forever...that henceforth time shall no longer be.”⁶⁶⁸

If this is correct (and Kant assumes that the angel did not want to speak nonsense), then there can be no change, because change requires time. If change is impossible, then “endless progress” is similarly impossible for progress implies change. However Kant offers no solution. In the longer analysis of eternity in which Kant’s writing consists of an examination of Christian doctrine, he reaches the conclusion that with regard to “cognitions and assertions of this sort reason simply transgresses the limitations of its insight.”⁶⁶⁹ The objects of these ideas “(if they have any) lie entirely beyond the scope of our vision.”⁶⁷⁰ Arranging the furniture in heaven is as pointless an activity for a philosopher as for a theologian, prophet or priest. Wood’s best suggestion is not that we can say anything about a supersensible life but to accept the importance of conceiving the possibility of fulfilling moral strivings in transcendent existence. Or maybe the joy of striving only, never fulfilled.

As Kant (- and Wood-) points out, while the argument in section IV deals with morality and immortality, the second component of the highest good, proportionate happiness has still to be addressed in resolving the antinomy (or the second of the two antinomies in Wood’s analysis). The issue is not whether happiness might accompany virtue, but

⁶⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, ‘The end of all things’, in *Perpetual Peace and other essays*. 8:334

⁶⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, ‘End of all things’ 8:333

⁶⁶⁹ Rel 6:70

⁶⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, ‘End of all things’ 8:332

whether virtue causes it and does so proportionately to our worthiness to receive it. Humans are not capable of creating this causal connection between virtue and happiness. Again the antinomy is solved in noting that happiness and virtue are not systematically connected in the world of sense but can be in the noumenal world.⁶⁷¹ This does not exclude some connection in the world of sense, only that it is not a full or systematic one. But as with immortality, our inability to know anything about a future life means that we cannot know whether happiness would be desired in it. If happiness is enjoyed by man's sentient nature, then it may be partly or entirely irrelevant to any super-sensible existence. (Equally, of course, we are unable to assert the contrary.) After pointing out that the systematic connection that we seek cannot be found in the world of sense, Kant proposes the postulate "of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection," as a "supreme determining will." Such a being is an intelligence – that is, a rational being – whose will is a causality. From here, Kant concludes that God is necessary for the highest good (a proposal I will discuss in ch9):

"Therefore the supreme cause of nature, insofar as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being that is the cause of nature by understanding and will (hence its author), that is, God....it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God."⁶⁷²

It is not strictly relevant here to pursue Kant's moral theology further, but to note that the postulates of pure practical reason are theoretical propositions which serve a rational function. They contradict nothing in theoretical reason, although originating in considerations of practical reason. If theoretical reason is to open its doors to practical reason, as in the primacy doctrine, the implication from this analysis of the antinomy of practical reason is that the two postulates of immortality and of God will be accepted

⁶⁷¹ CPractR 5:114

⁶⁷² CPractR 5:125

into theoretical reason and “although they are transcendent for it, try to unite them ...with its own concepts.”⁶⁷³ Kant’s conception of God is anthropomorphic: holy lawgiver, just judge, good governor. Although we should try to purify the concept of God from such human ideas, reducing our concept will render it free of extending theoretical reason and emphasise that God is well suited to satisfy our moral needs.⁶⁷⁴

7.6 Justifying the priority of practical reason

An answer has already been given to Kant’s questions:

“Which interest is supreme? Whether speculative reason which knows nothing about all that which practical reason offers for its acceptance, must accept these propositions and although they are transcendent for it, try to unite them...with its own concepts...or whether it is justified in obstinately following its own separate interest...?”⁶⁷⁵

That answer has been that practical reason is supreme and that theoretical reason should not follow its own separate interest. Practical reason, on a limited view, has a right to extend into the realm forbidden to theoretical reason. Theoretical reason’s boundaries are clearly limited by the bounds of the sensible world. But while demonstrating the limitations of theoretical reason might make us ask if practical reason could not have primacy, it is not enough to establish it. The answer to Kant’s questions requires further

⁶⁷³ CPractR 5:120

⁶⁷⁴ Theodore M Grene, ‘The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant’s Religion’, in Theodore M Grene and Hoyt H Hudson (eds.) *Religion within the limits of reason alone* (New York: Harper & Harper, 1960), p.lxi

⁶⁷⁵ CPractR 5:120

comment and justification beyond the dismissive opinion that “it is fairly evident that the (central argument)...does not amount to much.”⁶⁷⁶

An argument can be set out as follows:

- 1 Pure reason can be practical, proven by the moral law.
- 2 The highest good is the end of practical reason (actually of all reason)
- 3 ...which needs the postulates & Ideas
- 4 ...which theoretical reason must use.
- 5 Practical reason widens our knowledge beyond the world of sense. (Practical reason does have “the right” to assume something which would be unacceptable for theoretical reason.)
- 6 “It thus has a possession, the legitimacy of which need not be proved and the proof which it could not in fact give.” This realm is that of the noumenal (or unconditioned), which theoretical reason is denied.⁶⁷⁷
- 7 As a result, the objective reality of the postulations of God, freedom, and immortality that are necessary to the fulfilment of the moral requirements of reason can be asserted from a practical standpoint. Such “ideas” or postulates are problematic or merely thinkable according to theoretical reason’s reflections. Although we still have no knowledge of things in themselves i.e. the noumenal, we can believe in the postulates because practical reason links us to the noumenal. (Their legitimacy as regulative assumptions of theoretical reason is

⁶⁷⁶ Geoffrey J Warnock, ‘The primacy of practical reason’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52, (1967), pp.253-66

⁶⁷⁷ A776/B804

made subjectively certain.) Their acceptance for theoretical reason is faith, but it is rationally justified faith. Kant has rejected the proof of God's existence in the first *Critique* and resurrecting this idea by theoretical reason could only be "speculative mischief". But practical reason tells us that God's existence (and that of immortality) are essential for the highest good. The solution to this conflict is the importance of the primacy doctrine.

9 These cognitions go beyond the boundaries of all experience: cognitions that are possible *a priori* but only from a practical standpoint.

10 Practical reason has superior cognitive power as it has something to give to theoretical reason. The acceptance of the postulates by theoretical reason is a rationally justified faith, although the postulates remain postulates. Practical reason is 'filling out' the 'ideas' of reason that theoretical reason cannot defend or understand. In that way, practical reason is a metaphysically superior mode of cognition

Thus practical reason has primacy. It has superior cognitive power.⁶⁷⁸ Theoretical reason can demonstrate the possibility of freedom, but only practical reason can demonstrate its reality.⁶⁷⁹

In addition, secondly, if theoretical reason is not subordinated to practical reason, it would "close its boundaries" and accept nothing from practical reason. The latter would then, he says, "extend its boundaries over everything."⁶⁸⁰ If needed, it "would try to

⁶⁷⁸ Although practical reason concerns rational belief, Kant uses the term *Erkenntnis* as a kind of knowledge of what is the case e.g. God's existence which is not theoretical knowledge. See: Roger J Sullivan, *Kant's Moral Theory*, p.329, note 9. Practical reason extends our cognition beyond the boundaries of the theoretical world. CPractR 5:50

⁶⁷⁹ CPractR 5:4

⁶⁸⁰ This probably deserves further explication: why should practical reason extend its boundaries over everything just because theoretical reason closes its boundaries? What are the consequences of boundary closure? If postulates are theoretical propositions, then there can be theoretical propositions that follow

include” theoretical reason within them. A conflict within reason would then occur.

Since reason must not contradict itself, the implication is again the subordination of theoretical reason. It follows that practical reason must have primacy.

Thirdly, cognition (theoretical or practical) can relate to its object either by determining it or creating it (“making it actual”) by theoretical or practical reason respectively.⁶⁸¹

Practical reason does not depend on anything but itself, defining itself against inclinations.⁶⁸² The free decisions that conform to the requirements of reason alone are brought into existence by practical reason’s unique power. This conative power is not possible for theoretical reason because theoretical reason is not concerned with action.

(Conative acts of the mind are those associated with the initiation of action.) In moral reasoning we can appeal to our own rational self-consciousness to determine what is actual, shaping our intentions according to the moral law. That is to say that practical reason creates its objects, as already noted: we do not reason practically to know them.

This moral law is not only something we are aware of in our minds but we are also able to be aware of the conditions of freedom, God and immortality necessary for its existence and its final object, the highest good.⁶⁸³ So, practical reason also has more conative power than theoretical reason and, because it has more power than theoretical reason, it also has the right to primacy.

from or are inseparably connected to practical attitudes. An ontological commitment can follow from a practical imperative. Thus, to take an example, to open a window in response to a command commits one to accepting that a window exists. That commitment is rationally necessary. If the highest good is an obligation of practical reason then it involves the commitment to believe in God. But if theoretical reason closes its boundaries to anything beyond the empirical, it must reject this belief and practical reason will try to extend its boundaries in response. The primacy of practical reason would prevent this closure by theoretical reason and the postulates would be taken into theoretical reason’s realm as “a foreign possession handed over to it.”

⁶⁸¹ CPR Bix

⁶⁸² CPractR 5:89

⁶⁸³ CPractR 5:89

7.7 A deduction of the primacy of practical reason

In the sections above, I have set out arguments in favour of the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason: superior cognitive power and superior conative power. I have further supported this conclusion with three reasons given by Kant in the key passage in the *Critique*. Willaschek⁶⁸⁴ believes that Kant is offering a syllogistic deduction to demonstrate the primacy doctrine. He believes this approach is closer to Kant's intentions and links it to the writing in the *Jäsche logic*⁶⁸⁵ as a disjunctive syllogism. The process consists of substituting propositions for the three disjuncts in a syllogism, each reflecting and relating to Kant's argument in this part of the *Critique* (5:120-121). Logical disjunction is an operation on two logical values, typically the values of two propositions, that has a value of *false* if and only if both of its operands are false. The general form of the argument, constructed in disjunctive dichotomies with three operands, is in two steps: firstly, decide between A or non-A; secondly, if non-A, decide between B or non-B (alias C). In each step we decide between two opposed propositions. We therefore have two disjuncts at the first step (A or non-A) and two disjuncts at the second step (B or non-B). Propositions that reflect and relate to Kant's argument in this part of the *Critique* (5:120-121) are substituted for A, B and C. For example, the first proposition A is, "*practical reason may accept only claims authenticated by theoretical reason.*" This proposition is a declarative derivation from the conditional first sentence of the second paragraph of 5:120. ("If practical reason may not assume and think as given anything further than what speculative reason of itself could offer it from its insight, the latter has primacy.") And so on.

⁶⁸⁴ Marcus Willaschek, 'The primacy of practical reason and the idea of a practical postulate', in Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (eds.) *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason: a Critical Guide*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp.168-196.

⁶⁸⁵ Immanuel Kant: *Lectures on Logic*, J Michael Young (ed.), (Cambridge: CUP, 1992). 9:130, 147

For reasons of space, a detailed explication of the syllogism is not possible. Suffice it to say that three possible conclusions emerge: primacy of either theoretical (A) or practical (B) reason or of neither (C). The syllogistic analysis can be summarised in the following:

1 Either theoretical reason has primacy (A) or practical reason has primacy (B) or neither has primacy (non-B =C);

2 either theoretical reason or practical reason must have primacy (not non-B);

3 theoretical reason does not have primacy (not A);

4 Thus, practical reason has primacy (B).

This explication supports Willaschek's contention of a logically valid argument supporting the primacy doctrine. A more detailed account would aid comprehension, but space does not permit. In short however, I don't think this is closer to Kant's intended route to proving the primacy, although I accept the conclusion itself. And it reinforces the arguments already adduced, although again focussing the deduction on the same key passage in the second *Critique*.

According to Kant, if theoretical and practical reason were merely juxtaposed, a conflict of reason would occur. His explanation (4th paragraph of 5:120) is that theoretical reason ("the first") "would close its boundaries strictly and admit nothing from the latter into its domain, while the latter would extend its boundaries over everything and...try to include the former within them." The reverse in which practical reason is required to be subordinate is impossible because "all interest is ultimately practical and that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone."

In its regulative function, reason sets ends and standards for activity rather than knowledge. Pure reason can be practical in that theoretical reason is concerned with directing us how to realise its ideas, rather than exclusively contemplative. *In that sense*, “all interest is ultimately practical.” It is a reference to the regulative, end positing character of reason as a whole.⁶⁸⁶ Justification of the assertion that theoretical reason’s interest is “only conditional” is required to support the claim that it is complete in practical use alone. In his “Assent from a Need of Pure Reason,”⁶⁸⁷ Kant points out that theoretical reason contrasts with the *unconditional* interest of practical reason (from the moral law). Where theoretical reason has its hypotheses, practical reason has its postulates, both answering to a “need of reason.”⁶⁸⁸ For both, there is a need for God and immortality, but for theoretical reason the hypothesis is an inference from an effect to a determining cause that, he says, is always doubtful, uncertain and, at best, “most reasonable” for humans. For practical reason the postulate of God is based on the duty (from the moral law) for the highest good, the conditions for which are freedom, God and immortality. Whereas the hypotheses of theoretical reason are only “merely permitted”,⁶⁸⁹ the postulates are based on a “need from an absolutely necessary point of view.” Hypotheses and postulates therefore differ in their epistemological status. Only pure practical reason can issue categorical imperatives: unconditionally binding principles. Theoretical reason can only issue hypothetical imperatives. If we want x, do y (inquire into the highest *a priori* principles to fulfil our knowledge): but this can be rationally abandoned. It is not irrational to terminate inquiry or not to start it. In this sense the interest of theoretical reason is “only conditional”, because it directs us to do

⁶⁸⁶ Susan Neiman ‘*The Unity of Reason*’, p.126.

⁶⁸⁷ CPractR 5:142

⁶⁸⁸ CPractR 5:142

⁶⁸⁹ CPractR 5:143

something only under the condition that no other, overriding interests tell against it.⁶⁹⁰

By contrast practical reason's interest is based on the unconditionally binding moral law. Theoretical reason would reject the postulates unless subordinated to the interests of practical reason, and therefore conditionally. Practical reason's acceptance of the postulates is unconditional. In the event of conflict the conditioned must be subordinate to the unconditioned. Hence the interest of theoretical reason can only be "complete in practical use alone." This interpretation is supported elsewhere⁶⁹¹ where he writes of reason that in its theoretical use,

"one sees very well that it is only conditioned, i.e. we must assume the existence of God if we want to judge about the first causes of everything contingent...Far more important is the need of reason in its practical use, because it is unconditioned, and we are necessitated to presuppose the existence of God not only if we *want* to judge, but because we *have to judge*." (Kant's italics).

And he continues in this passage to criticise Mendelssohn, whose error was to fail to give primacy to the practical.

Although, as above, reducing section III of chapter 2 of the *Dialectic* to a disjunctive syllogism is possible, is this the structure of the argument that Kant intended? It seems unlikely. Kant does not set out the possibilities at the outset nor has he laid out his argument in this section in the structure of a syllogism. The claim that this is a deliberately structured argument by syllogistic reasoning remains unconvincing. The assertions that do not feature in the syllogism above are more important. These include the following: that pure reason can be practical; that consciousness of the moral law proves this; that reason is a unity; and that propositions belonging to the practical

⁶⁹⁰ Marcus Willaschek, 'The primacy of practical reason and the idea of a practical postulate', p.185

⁶⁹¹ WOT 8:139

interest must be accepted, not least because theoretical reason cannot refute or deny them - the conclusion of Kant's critique of the existence of a highest being in the first *Critique's* Doctrine of the Elements.⁶⁹²

While the syllogism may be valid, is it true? In stating that "all interest is ultimately practical and that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone", Kant appears to be using the conclusion to support the argument. For on what is the assertion that "all interest is ultimately practical" based? Further, why is the interest of theoretical reason "only conditional and ... complete in practical use alone"? These propositions are supported elsewhere in the *Critique* and I have set out the answer to these questions above. But they do not appear or form part of this syllogism. Demonstrating the truth of the syllogism requires reference to other parts of the *Critique* – for example, the "Assent from a Need of Pure Reason." These considerations support my contention that the syllogistic structure is not closer to Kant's intended route to proving the primacy, although I accept the conclusion itself. Refashioning Kant's argument for the primacy of the practical is valid but close attention to the logical structure of the key paragraph in this way is not necessary as Willaschek claims.

Proof for the primacy doctrine has now been achieved, although having based the arguments on the key section in the second Critique, the justification has entailed a special role for the postulates and hence to God's existence. Beyond this narrow conception of the primacy doctrine, lies a broader view that connects reason's unity, interest and teleology. Those interests may extend into community (as opposed to individual) life and include the political. To explore this further, I return to the Categorical Imperative itself.

⁶⁹² CPR A641/B669

7.8 A broad view of practical reason's primacy

Kant contends that our reason imposes a vocation to morality. It is through and because of this commitment that our ultimate end is moral. Aside from the narrow justification of practical reason's primacy, Kant makes many assertions of this broader theme. For an enlightenment man, even thought itself is a moral activity. Thus,

“thinking for oneself means seeking the supreme touchstone of truth in oneself...To make use of one's own reason means no more than to ask oneself whenever one is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason.”⁶⁹³

The ‘supreme touchstone of truth’ is a moral goal. As he writes in the same essay, “far more important is the need of reason in its practical use, because it is unconditioned.”⁶⁹⁴

Philosophy itself requires reason to focus on action:

“The entire armament of reason, in the undertaking that one can call pure philosophy, is in fact directed only at...**what is to be done**” (Kant's emphasis).⁶⁹⁵

This assertion is repeated in several other places in all three *Critiques*. Thus, our highest ends are moral;⁶⁹⁶ theoretical reason's interests are complete in practical use alone;⁶⁹⁷ theology and morality are the points of reference for reason's inquiries;⁶⁹⁸ and the

⁶⁹³ WOT 8:146

⁶⁹⁴ WOT 8:139

⁶⁹⁵ CPR A800/B828

⁶⁹⁶ CPR A816/B844

⁶⁹⁷ CPractR 5:121

⁶⁹⁸ CPR A853/B881

efforts that we make with our faculties are ultimately practical.⁶⁹⁹ If the highest good is to be the object of the strivings of human nature, theoretical reason is inadequate: indeed he thinks the first *Critique* proves its “utter insufficiency”. Nature provides the faculty for our end “only in a step-motherly fashion.”⁷⁰⁰

Kant’s first *Critique* was undertaken to establish reason’s boundaries, to correct its errors and to make metaphysics possible, yet reason’s end emerges as moral. It follows that one way of interpreting the primacy doctrine (in a broad way beyond the narrower role of the postulates) is a key role in proving the unity of our rational powers. The primacy of practical reason leads to the unity of reason beyond the internal unities within reason’s individual forms.⁷⁰¹ I return to reason’s unity in ch8.

The Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle of practical reason; and if practical reason has primacy, it must be the supreme principle of reason. The corollary is that vindicating reason means vindicating the Categorical Imperative.⁷⁰² O’Neill’s conclusion is that the first *Critique* is not only “deeply anti-rationalistic but profoundly political.” She argues that a series of “connected political and juridical metaphors constitute” the *Critique*’s deep structure. The primacy doctrine therefore leads to a broad task beyond Kant’s moral theology.

An approach based on Kant’s method takes us to the idea of a shared enterprise, exemplified in the quotation from Bacon’s preface to his *Instauratio Magna* at the start of the second edition of the first *Critique*. In making a critique of reason, a shared plan is needed to avoid chaos: “the constant tendency to disobey certain rules is restrained

⁶⁹⁹ CPJ 5:206

⁷⁰⁰ CPractR 5:146

⁷⁰¹ Sebastian Gardner, ‘The Primacy of Practical Reason’, in Graham Bird (ed), *A Companion to Kant*. Oxford:Blackwell, 2006), p.262.

⁷⁰² Onora O’Neill, ‘*Constructions of Reason*’ p.3.

and finally extirpated.”⁷⁰³ For this, reason requires discipline and instructions that are largely negative to prevent a variety of excesses. Kant uses political metaphors, such as ‘tribunals’, ‘debate’ and ‘community’ to explicate the authority of reason because he sees the problems of cognitive and political order in the same context.⁷⁰⁴ Acts of judgement must follow ideas of reason or maxims of judgement, guided by a practical principle. “Complex capacities require the adoption of maxims to regulate the use of these capacities in thinking and acting.”⁷⁰⁵ These must be universal – hence the Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle for all reasoning. We cannot adopt plans that others cannot share. Practical reason is basic because in choosing how to act, - including how to think, to understand – we accommodate the plurality implicit in the Categorical Imperative. Theoretical reason requires practical reason for its employment. Our nature as rational agents dominates our nature as rational knowers. Thanks to the Categorical Imperative, we think of ourselves and the world in certain ways and theoretical reason is unable to deny those beliefs.⁷⁰⁶

In stating morality’s supreme principle as a product of universalised reason, moral empiricism is being denied. The pursuit of happiness (that memorable feature of the American constitution) cannot ground concepts of good and evil. The Categorical Imperative does not represent a dour principlism. For in applying this consideration to the body politic, Kant argues that this would lead government to a paternalism that would represent “the worst despotism”⁷⁰⁷ because it would deprive citizens of freedom, their most precious possession. A benevolent despot may make people happier and we

⁷⁰³ CPR A709/B737

⁷⁰⁴ Onora O’Neill. ‘*Constructions of Reason*’ p.16.

⁷⁰⁵ Onora O’Neill. ‘*Constructions of Reason*’ p.19.

⁷⁰⁶ Jerome B Schneewind, ‘Autonomy, Obligation and Virtue’, in Paul Guyer (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p.331.

⁷⁰⁷ TP 8:291

have needs for happiness. “Certainly our well-being and woe count for a very great deal in the appraisal of our practical reason.”⁷⁰⁸ But “happiness is not the only thing that counts.”⁷⁰⁹ It is our power as practical reasoners that distinguishes us from other animals. Man has uses for reason beyond promotion of welfare, which animals seek through instinct. Reason has a higher purpose to ground the will irrespective of objects of desire: “a will whose maxims always conforms with this law is good absolutely, good in every respect and the supreme condition of all good.”⁷¹⁰ (A similar assertion as the very first sentence of the *Groundwork*.)⁷¹¹ In the political realm it is practical reason’s function to overcome the empiricist aims from theoretical reason. From pure rational principles comes a civil state based on freedom, equality and independence of each and every member.⁷¹² Practical reason must have primacy because if knowing has primacy, those in power claiming superior knowledge can defend a right to make political decisions for others. In realising a state of equality, for example, practical reason is far more fundamental than knowledge. The Categorical Imperative is restated on a society basis in expressing the universalising obligation that every legislator should “formulate his laws in such a way that they could have sprung from the unified will of the entire people and to regard every subject, insofar as he desires to be a citizen, as if he had joined in voting for such a will.”⁷¹³ It provides a vision of how society should be shaped, even if empty of content in what that might involve. A principle of action that is fully determinate could only cover one case; rather, a principle must guide action. Such is the Categorical Imperative.

⁷⁰⁸ CPractR 5:61

⁷⁰⁹ CPractR 5:61

⁷¹⁰ CPractR 5:62

⁷¹¹ G 4:393

⁷¹² TP 8: 290

⁷¹³ TP 8:297

As one commentator has said, this broad interpretation refers to the nature and structure of reason itself, in which the implications of practical reason's primacy relate to the "unity, interest and teleology of reason as a whole."⁷¹⁴ Man's rational destiny, combining man's nobility and finitude, leads to a moral faith that replaces the unrealisable pursuit of knowledge, an ultimate end of the practical.⁷¹⁵ The good will is the only good that has unconditional value. If that is so, our aspirations must ultimately be moral.

In summary, this doctrine leads to the assertion of man's importance and destiny that appears staggeringly bold in a modern age in which astronomical science has emphasised our seeming insignificance in the universe.

“Without human beings the whole of creation would be a mere desert existing in vain and without a final end. But it is not their cognitive faculty (theoretical reason) in relation to which the existence of everything else in the world first acquires its value.”⁷¹⁶

Only humans, among all of nature, yet noumenally outside it, have by virtue of their rationality, the power to confer meaning and value on the universe. Only as moral beings can we be the final end of creation. The interest of practical reason will be in the "determination of the will with respect to the final and complete end," when practical reason's primacy is construed broadly rather than in a narrower interpretation.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁴ Sebastian Gardner, 'The Primacy of Practical Reason', p.259

⁷¹⁵ CPR Bxxx

⁷¹⁶ CPJ 5:442

⁷¹⁷ CPractR 5:120

Chapter 8: The Unity of Reason

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8.1 Introduction

For Kant, there is only one reason, not two. It is one reason that has two functions or fields of application, theoretical and practical. It is not a matter of two separated and distinct reasons: that is, a theoretical reason and a practical reason. It is the one reason that presupposes the unconditioned for everything that is conditioned in nature. In every theoretical investigation of nature, reason's practical ends are presupposed.⁷¹⁸ For example, in the second *Critique*, "if pure reason itself can be and really is practical...it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles."⁷¹⁹ Pure practical reason, writes Kant, must "be able...to present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application."⁷²⁰ Or again, in the second *Critique*, he refers to the "unity of the whole pure rational faculty (theoretical as well as practical)" with the aim of deriving "everything from one principle –the undeniable need of human reason, which finds complete satisfaction only in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions".⁷²¹ "There can only be one human reason".⁷²²

In this chapter, I will demonstrate why Kant believes in the unity of theoretical and practical reason. I will analyse this concept from the viewpoint in all three *Critiques* and relate it to the primacy of practical reason. In particular, I will suggest that unity should be sought as a practical imperative, pursuing the wider understanding of practical

⁷¹⁸ Lara Ostaric, 'Kant's account of nature's systematicity and the unity of theoretical and practical reason.' *Inquiry* 52, no.2 (2009), pp.155-78.

⁷¹⁹ CPractR 5:121

⁷²⁰ G 4:391

⁷²¹ CPractR 5:91

⁷²² MM 6:207

reason's primacy, outlined in ch7. I conclude that nature's purposiveness unites theoretical and practical reason, stemming from divine design.

Commentators have differed in their assessments of Kant's account of the unity of theoretical and practical reason. In his early work, Guyer⁷²³ thinks that Kant fails to give a coherent account at all. The later Guyer,⁷²⁴ Allison⁷²⁵ and Freudiger,⁷²⁶ to take three examples, believe that Kant does not give a coherent account until the third Critique; Neiman,⁷²⁷ Kohnhardt⁷²⁸ and Kleingeld⁷²⁹ believe that this account can be found in the first two Critiques. Abela⁷³⁰ seems to reject reason's unity altogether (the "integrationist standpoint"), while Timmerman thinks it is never systematically discussed or explained in any detail in any of Kant's writings.⁷³¹

Unity has many meanings: at its simplest it is a mathematical term meaning 'one'.

Between people it may mean a common commitment, spirit or concord – embodied in entities such as the United Nations or the European Union or even the union of two persons in marriage; politically, the fact of unification – a united Germany, the United Kingdom or the United Arab Emirates; negatively, the absence of diversity; dramatically, the unities of classical dramatic structure set out by Aristotle. But in the

⁷²³ Paul Guyer, 'The Unity of Reason: Pure Reason as Practical Reason in Kant's Early Conception of the Transcendental Dialectic' *The Monist* 72, (1989) pp.139-67.

⁷²⁴ Paul Guyer, 'Review of *The Unity of Reason* by Susan Neiman', *Philosophical Review* 106, (1997), p.292.

⁷²⁵ Henry E Allison. 'The Gulf between Nature and Freedom and Nature's Guarantee of Perpetual Peace', in H Robinson (ed.), *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), pp.37-8.

⁷²⁶ J Freudiger, 'Kants Schlussstein: Wie die Teleologie die Einheit der Vernunft stiftet', *Kant-Studien* 87, nos 1-4, (1996) pp.423-435.

⁷²⁷ Susan Neiman. '*The Unity of Reason*'

⁷²⁸ K Kohnhardt, *Die Einheit der Vernunft: Zum Verhältnis von theoretischer und praktischer Vernunft in der Philosophie Immanuel Kants*. Königstein Forum Academicum. (1979)

⁷²⁹ Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason'. *The Review of Metaphysics* 52, (1998), pp.311-340

⁷³⁰ Paul Abela, 'Kantian walls and bridges: challenging the integrationist model of the model of the relation of theoretical and practical reason.' *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10, no.4 (2002), pp.591-516.

⁷³¹ Jens Timmermann, 'The Unity of Reason – Kantian Perspectives', in S. Robertson (ed.), *Spheres of Reason: New Essays in the Philosophy of Normativity*. (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp.183-198.

Kantian sense, it is best regarded as a whole or totality combining all its parts into one: a state of oneness or of completeness. (We could say that reason has an inherent tendency to unity in the sense of completeness.)⁷³²

The following areas need consideration:

- 1 Systematicity: the most important reasons to support reason's unity.
- 2 The need to avoid conflicts between theoretical and practical reason.
- 3 The unity of reason as a regulative idea.
- 4 The origin of theoretical and practical reason in a supersensible intelligence.
- 5 The implications of the primacy of practical reason, discussed in ch7.
- 6 The purposiveness of nature as unity as explored in the third *Critique*.
- 7 The shared structural and functional features (the similarity argument).

8.2 The unity of reason in Kant's early writings.

In a paper from the 1980s, Guyer examines pure reason as practical reason in Kant's early conception of the transcendental dialectic.⁷³³ Guyer's assessment of the early conception of the transcendental dialectic is based mainly on the *Reflektionen*, a collection of notes mostly preceding the critical period.⁷³⁴ An experience has a unique place in time relative to all other experiences, but the unity of experience is more than chronological. Rather more, the faculty of reason seeks a unity. This "unity of reason" (Kant's quotation marks) is "of an altogether different kind than any unity that can be

⁷³² Jens Timmermann 'The Unity of Reason – Kantian Perspectives,' p.184.

⁷³³ Paul Guyer, 'The Unity of Reason: pure reason as practical reason in Kant's early conception of the transcendental dialectic', *Monist* 72 (1989) pp.139-673.

⁷³⁴ Immanuel Kant, '*Notes and Fragments*', Paul Guyer (ed & transl.), Cutis Bowman, Frederick Rauscher (transl.), (Cambridge:CUP, 2005)

achieved by the understanding.”⁷³⁵ Guyer suggests two possibilities to interpret the term ‘unity of reason.’ One is a single domain of application: either theoretical reason is a unity or practical reason is: not both. Alternatively, pure reason is aiming to introduce a single special sort of unity, wherever it is used or applied. Neither of these possibilities seems terribly satisfactory.⁷³⁶ Firstly, as above, we have already noted that Kant has asserted that pure reason can be both theoretical and practical. Therefore it is hard to make sense of a special unique domain for one variety of pure reason’s application. Secondly, Kant states that “reason serves to give necessity to understanding and to circumscribe and give unity to the sphere of its employment.”⁷³⁷ This comment resembles that made in the *Critique* that the transcendental concepts of pure reason are ideas that “can serve the understanding as a canon for its extended and self-consistent use, through which....it (the understanding) will be guided better and further.”^{738 739}

How can reason improve on the achievement of the understanding? Guyer proposes two possibilities.

First, reason can aim to extend the use of understanding beyond its ordinary limits, set by the forms of sensibility. Reason would then be circumscribing its indefinitely

⁷³⁵ CPR A302/B359

⁷³⁶ Kemp Smith (‘A commentary to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason’) comments: “The rules of understanding apply to appearances, prescribing the conditions under which the unity necessary to any and every experience can alone be attained. The principles of Reason do not apply directly to appearances, but only to the understanding, defining the standards to which its activities must conform, if a completely unified experience is to be achieved. Whereas the rules of understanding are the conditions of objective existence in space and time, principles in the strict sense are criteria for the attainment of such absoluteness and totality as will harmonise Reason with itself. Reason, determined by principles which issue from its own inherent nature, prescribes what the actual ought to be; understanding, proceeding from rules which express the conditions of possible experience, can yield knowledge only of what is found to exist in the course of sense-experience. The unity of Reason is Ideal; the unity of understanding is empirical. Principles are due to the self-determination of reason; the rules of understanding express the necessitated determinations of sense. The former demand a more perfect and complete unity than is ever attainable by means of the latter.”

⁷³⁷ R5553, 18:225

⁷³⁸ CPR A329/B385

⁷³⁹ I think it is relevant to note that Kant continues in writing “not to mention the fact that perhaps the ideas make possible a transition from concepts of nature to the practical and themselves generate support for the moral ideas and connection with the speculative cognitions of reason.”

extendable sphere, and making complete and unconditional knowledge that is left incomplete and conditional by the understanding alone. Second, reason can aim to harmonise or systematise knowledge that otherwise would not be necessary in order to satisfy the requirements of understanding alone.

These two aims he calls completeness and systematicity. The one implies some sort of totality, the second some kind of organisation (perhaps hierarchical) of representations. Pure reason, at this point in his argument, has two spheres of employment, theoretical and practical, and, insofar as it aims to complete and circumscribe subordinate forms of cognition, a dual function or manner of use. This misses the idea of an underlying unity of reason.

On this basis, Guyer attempts to reconstruct a foundation, on the basis of which it is “fair to speak of the unity of reason” in terms of completeness and systematicity. His stated aim is to show that ‘pure reason’ has a positive use only as practical reason, while a theoretical application of pure reason leads only to transcendental illusion. As Kant writes in the critical period:

“...to give to reason freedom to think of something beyond experience, which is, to be sure, necessary for the completion of our use of understanding but which can never be thought by means of theoretical concepts except negatively and which can be thought positively by moral concepts alone and which contains the totality of conditions for all.”⁷⁴⁰

That “totality of conditions for all” is a unifying expression. Guyer’s other aim is that completeness and systematicity should be thought of as two aspects of the unity of

⁷⁴⁰ R5649 18:297

reason. It is important to remind ourselves that after the critical turn and the positing of transcendental idealism, unity becomes a subjective ideal of knowledge, even if remaining an objective ideal of practical reason. That is: for the world to be as it should – a systematic whole of human purposes. In the first *Critique*, the ideal is stated as

“this highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason (and) is the purposive unity of things; and the speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world as if it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason.”⁷⁴¹

Nevertheless, Guyer concedes that regulative, rather than constitutive ideals of systematicity must await the third *Critique*⁷⁴² where they will be re-assigned to the faculty of reflective judgement. In an extensive quotation of R4849,⁷⁴³ I note that considering reason’s unity as that between theoretical and practical reason does not feature at all. In other instances on reason’s unity, identified as originating in the pre-critical period by Erich Adickes, Kant notes that reason tried to introduce unity into our knowledge, but that an interpretation of such unity is best applied in the sphere of practice, not that it concerns the unity of reason’s functions, theoretical and practical. At R4757⁷⁴⁴ he suggests that “since space and time are only conditions of appearance, there must be a principle of the unity of pure reason through which knowledge is determined without regard to appearance.” He rejects the idea of an antinomy of pure reason; and suggests that the unity he is considering is both the starting point and the systematicity of knowledge. But this is not explored in detail. Unity may concern origins and systematicity of practical knowledge, but it is not explored here. There is much more in

⁷⁴¹ CPR A686/B714

⁷⁴² CPJ §84

⁷⁴³ R4849 18:5-6

⁷⁴⁴ R4757 17:703-5

these notes and it is tempting to systematically comment on errors and omissions. Certainly there are hints of the relevance of the unity of thought to practical reason.

Thus:

“These propositions postulating the completeness of the world which is the object of our knowledge are only subjective necessities of thought: they describe how we must unify our experience but are not themselves valid for the exposition of the appearances of objects. But they do have a (to be sure unexplained) practical significance.”⁷⁴⁵

As Guyer expresses it, “the link that Kant envisages between reason so conceived and the sphere of the practical must seem more obscure than ever.”⁷⁴⁶

Among the notes, Kant does directly refer to practical reason. He suggests, for example, that the purposes that practical reason unifies⁷⁴⁷ are “empirical” or not given by reason. The unity of such purposes resides in their compatibility or the avoidance of contradictions among them.⁷⁴⁸ Morality requires unity of reason among one’s own actions and between one’s own and others. By 1778, the underlying idea of the unity of reason is related to practical reason’s aim at the greatest possible happiness, consisting in the attainment of the maximally consistent system of purposes.⁷⁴⁹ The object of morality is thus derived, says Guyer, from practical reason’s interest in systematicity. But this still leaves unclear the unity of theoretical and practical reason.

⁷⁴⁵ R4760. 17:713

⁷⁴⁶ Paul Guyer, ‘The Unity of Reason’, p.77.

⁷⁴⁷ R6820 19:172

⁷⁴⁸ R6823 19:172-3

⁷⁴⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik* L1, 28:337 (Quoted in Paul Guyer, ‘The Unity of Reason’, p.94; a lengthy quotation *not* found in the Kant Cambridge edition and discussing *inter alia* the highest good.)

8.3 Ends and systematicity in the unity of reason

If we have a large number of isolated facts, they make little sense to us unless they can be ordered. By assembling our cognitions, we can make a system out of a mere aggregate.⁷⁵⁰ By that process, we can build up a science. The art of systems is what Kant called an architectonic. So Kant defines a system as a manifold of cognitions as a unity under one idea. The logical form of any system can divide general concepts and lead to the classification of the manifold.⁷⁵¹ Such systematicity can extend beyond intuitions to concepts, laws and so on. In building up a system, Kant aims for a systematic completeness of all cognitions: grounded on a transcendental law of specification. Reason prepares the field for understanding under the presupposition of varieties of nature using principles of homogeneity, specification and continuity of forms.⁷⁵² Building a philosophical system is the key to a unity of concepts and of the empirical world. Reason also introduces ends; and this extends the system to the realm of the practical. Ends are what we aim for: that is, an end is a choice or decision of practical reason. By having ends, there is a justification to interrogate experience. Reason doesn't just work out the means to ends that are determined by some other process.

If reason strives in this way for systematic unity (for example, of the understanding), we can also expect that it will strive for the same systematic unity in reason itself. "Insight into the unity of the whole pure rational faculty theoretical as well as practical", deriving everything from one principle, is an "undeniable need of human reason, which finds complete satisfaction only in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions."⁷⁵³

Considering myself as a thinking nature or soul, Kant argues that experience will never

⁷⁵⁰ CPR A832/B860

⁷⁵¹ CPJ 20:214

⁷⁵² CPR A655-659/B683-687

⁷⁵³ CPractR 5:91

attain a systematic unity of all the appearances of inner sense. By contrast, reason can conceive of “the concept of a simple self-sufficient intelligence.”⁷⁵⁴

So, reason seeks the idea of the concepts of the understanding and this can be envisaged as a tree with the ideal (the highest genus) at the top. Going down this tree a level will eventually be reached where no further specification is possible, completing a system of concepts. The search for principles that can act as the foundation for such specification will be a regulatory idea. Such an ideal set of principles cannot be found because the complete concept of an individual can’t exist without its being capable of division into distinct species. It is impossible.⁷⁵⁵ Kant argues in the second antinomy that the existence of simple things cannot be established *a posteriori*, because no object of experience can testify to the reality of simple parts. Substances are infinitely divisible and contain infinitely many parts.

What has been called reason’s principle of systematicity – finding “the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, by which its unity will be completed”⁷⁵⁶ – is “the proper principle of reason in general.”⁷⁵⁷ (Kant notes that these principles will be transcendent in respect of all appearances. He proceeds to discuss whether this principle leads to ever higher conditions to approach completeness in them and thus to bring the highest possible unity of reason into our cognition.”⁷⁵⁸)

Kant suggests that reason’s necessary idea of a most real being (*ens realissimum* or God) arises from this principle of systematicity: a demand from theoretical reason, but further suggests that

⁷⁵⁴ CPR A682/B710

⁷⁵⁵ A434-43/B462-71 See also: Sebastian Gardner, ‘The Primacy of Practical Reason’, p.236.

⁷⁵⁶ CPR A307/B364

⁷⁵⁷ Henry E Allison, (‘Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, (revised and enlarged edn.’), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p312, additionally points out that this principle is the source of subordinate transcendent principles, grounding concepts unique to reason, the transcendental ideas.)

⁷⁵⁸ CPR A309/B365

“if a highest being were not presupposed who could give effect and emphasis to the practical laws; then we would also have an obligation to follow those concepts, that even though they may not be objectively sufficient, are still preponderant in accordance with the measure of our reason, and in comparison with which we recognize nothing better or more convincing.”⁷⁵⁹

The idea of a highest being above also suggests that such an idea is necessary from the perspective of moral motivation.⁷⁶⁰ It is a regulative principle of reason to “regard all combination in the world as if it arose from an all-sufficient necessary cause so as to ground on that cause the rule of a unity that is systematic and necessary according to universal laws.”⁷⁶¹

Perhaps one should emphasise that this concerns the idea of such a being, not its actual existence. It is a “mere idea”, a schema to “preserve the greatest systemic unity in the empirical use of our reason.”⁷⁶² We consider things “as if” their existence arises from a highest intelligence. Having advocated the need of reason for systematicity in terms of purposes in the Appendix and also for the Idea of a highest intelligence, Kant makes the further link to practical reason:

“But this systematic unity of ends in this world of intelligences, which, as mere nature it can only be called the sensible world, as a system of freedom can be called an intelligible (moral) world also leads inexorably to the purposive unity of all things...and unifies practical with speculative reason.”⁷⁶³

⁷⁵⁹ CPR A589/B617

⁷⁶⁰ Lara Ostaric, ‘Kant’s account of nature’s systematicity and the unity of theoretical and practical reason.’, p.161.

⁷⁶¹ CPR A619/B647

⁷⁶² CPR A670/B698

⁷⁶³ CPR A815/B843

8.4 The soul, God and regulative ideas

Despite changes in our bodies and in the world around us, we continue to exist. The persisting source of our cognitions must be regarded as ourselves. From this comes the idea of the noumenal or super-sensible ‘I’ as a thinking personality. This permanent simple immaterial intellectual substance - a thinking self - persisting through all the changes we undergo is viewed by rational psychology as grounding the unity of experience. It is, in effect, the ‘rational doctrine of the soul’.⁷⁶⁴ The soul is a regulative idea in which “the investigation of reason will be directed to carrying through the grounds of explanation in this subject as far as possible on the basis of a single principle.”⁷⁶⁵ Theoretical and practical reason are both mental powers and the idea of the soul includes the notion of the unity of all mental powers thus united in a single principle.⁷⁶⁶

In his discussion of regulative ideas in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant offers an illustration of the way in which reason is used:⁷⁶⁷

“The idea of a fundamental power – though logic does not at all ascertain whether there is such a thing – is at least the problem set by a systematic representation of the manifoldness of powers. The logical principles of reason demand this unity as far as it is possible to bring it about...this unity of reason is merely hypothetical. One asserts not that such a power must in fact be found, but rather that one must seek it for the benefit of reason...one must in such a way bring systematic unity into cognition.”

⁷⁶⁴ Roger J Sullivan, ‘*Kant’s Moral Theory*’, p.100.

⁷⁶⁵ CPR A683/B712

⁷⁶⁶ Pauline Kleingeld, ‘Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason’, p.318.

⁷⁶⁷ CPR A648-9/B676-7

Kant is saying that we cannot know whether a fundamental power exists to unify reason when we try systematically to unify the powers of theoretical and practical reason. In stating that the unity of reason is “merely hypothetical”, he is classifying it as an idea of reason (see ch4 on the ideas and the status of the ‘hypothetical’). As such, it may be, indeed should be, something that we seek *as if* it exists and can be found because our reason needs it in order to be systematic and achieve a unity of cognition. Summing up then, the unity of reason is itself a theoretical, not a moral problem. From the latter it follows that the unity of reason is a regulative idea and not a practical postulate.

The idea of the soul includes the notion of the unity of all mental powers. Theoretical and practical reason are mental powers. It follows that use of the idea of the soul involves representing them as two manifestations of a single power, not two independent entities.⁷⁶⁸

Both nature and morality are ordered and that order is, Kant suggests, due to (the idea of) a higher intelligence:

“reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to principles of a systematic unity, hence as if they had all arisen from one single all-encompassing being, as supreme and all sufficient cause....This highest formal unity that alone rests on concepts of reason is the purposive unity of things”⁷⁶⁹

Ypi points to the similar argument expressed in Kant’s 1786 ‘*What does it mean to orientate oneself in thinking?*’ There is a right of reason’s need to orient itself in

⁷⁶⁸ Pauline Kleingeld. Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason. *The Review of Metaphysics* 52, (1998) pp.311-340.

⁷⁶⁹ CPR A686/B714

thinking and therefore to assume something which can't be assumed objectively.⁷⁷⁰ This orientation is in that "immeasurable space of the supersensible." It is grounded on a need "not only to take the concept of the unlimited as the ground of the concepts of all limited beings but...the presupposition of its existence...Without assuming an intelligent author we cannot give any intelligible ground of it." This is essential to provide a satisfactory ground "for the contingency of things in the world, let alone for the purposiveness and order which is encountered."⁷⁷¹ This is similar to the first *Critique's* argument. Through the systematic unity of the manifold, the greatest possible empirical use of reason is guaranteed and all combinations seen "as if they were ordained by a highest reason."⁷⁷² Ypi quotes Kant as arguing that the greatest systematic unity (and therefore also purposive unity of nature) is "the school and even the ground of the possibility of the greatest use of human reason." She then states that

"nature's systematicity is a demand that stems from the nature of our reason and is expressive of its unity. In the same way that we seek "morally purposive unity for the sake of our moral ends, we must assume natural purposiveness for the sake of advancing the imperative to seek cognitive unity."⁷⁷³

But a reminder is required that in asking where we perceive purposive unity, "it does not matter whether you say, "God has willed it so" or "Nature has wisely ordered it."⁷⁷⁴

Reason is demanding this systematic and purposive unity as a regulative principle.

This theme of purposiveness is expanded in the third *Critique*, where, explicitly,

⁷⁷⁰ WOT 8:137

⁷⁷¹ WOT 8:138

⁷⁷² CPR A678/B713

⁷⁷³ Ypi L. 'The transcendental deduction of ideas in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 117, no.2, (2017), pp.163-185.

⁷⁷⁴ CPR A609/B727

“the purposiveness of nature is a special *a priori* concept that has its origin strictly in the reflecting power of judgement.”⁷⁷⁵

8.5 The transcendental ideas as unifying concepts

Reason, says Kant, has two specific uses: a logical use and a real or transcendental use. The logical use grounds particular knowledge claims only. The logical use of reason can be illustrated by the syllogism: and Kant offers the paradigm syllogism of ‘all humans are mortal/Caius is mortal etc.’ From this comes the generalisation that “what stands under the condition of a rule also stands under the rule itself.”⁷⁷⁶ Unification does not stop with a mediating principle (‘Caius is human’) being subsumed under a universal rule (‘All men are mortal’). The rule must be rationally grounded, which means it must be derived from a higher principle; and so on, guided by the maxim to find the unconditioned for the conditioned cognitions of the understanding, “with which its unity will be completed.”⁷⁷⁷

Transcendental ideas are pure concepts of reason. Just as the categories were derived from the form of judgements, transformed into a concept of the synthesis of intuitions, so “the form of the syllogisms, if applied to the synthetic unity of intuitions under the authority of the categories, will contain the origin of special concepts *a priori* that we may call pure concepts of reason or transcendental ideas.”⁷⁷⁸ In its real or transcendental use, reason seeks out conditions that would allow us to connect *all* particular claims. This results in a single, coherent whole of knowledge:⁷⁷⁹ an ultimate condition,

⁷⁷⁵ CPJ 5:181

⁷⁷⁶ JL 9:120;615

⁷⁷⁷ CPR A307/B364

⁷⁷⁸ CPR A321/B377-8

⁷⁷⁹ Sasha Mudd ‘Rethinking the priority of practical reason in Kant.’ *European Journal of Philosophy*. 24, no.1, (2016), pp.78-102, (p.80).

containing within it the complete sum of all conditions capable of unifying all aspects of our knowledge. Thus:

“This unity of reason presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains (all) the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others. Accordingly, this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding’s cognition through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws.”⁷⁸⁰

If every cognition is conditioned by further cognitions, then there is always the possibility that it can be extended or amended. “Reason has systematic unity in the sense that the empirically possible unity seeks to approach it without ever completely reaching it.”⁷⁸¹

Reason’s principle is regulative; that of the understanding is constitutive and it would be a dialectical error to interpret reason’s principle as constitutive. Reason can think of possibilities beyond the bounds of sense; the understanding cannot, for it can only provide concepts for real objects. Systematic unity cannot therefore be instantiated in experience. It is a regulative assumption that can bring us to a systematic unity in nature. I have already stated how the three logical principles of homogeneity, specification and continuity can bring maximal unity and systematicity to our empirical knowledge of nature.

8.6 Conflict within reason?

⁷⁸⁰ CPR A645/B673

⁷⁸¹ CPR A 568/B596

If the regulative assumption is made that theoretical and practical reason are one reason, the question can still be raised as to whether they must be compatible or whether there is the possibility of conflict. A conflict would destroy the idea of a systematic unity.

Without the doctrine of the primacy of the practical, Kant considers that such a conflict could arise:

“without such subordination a conflict of reason with itself would arise, since if they were merely juxtaposed, the first would of itself close its boundary strictly and admit nothing from the latter into its domain, while the latter would extend its boundaries over everything and when its need required, would try to include the former within them.”⁷⁸²

That appears to say that practical reason would ignore the boundaries of sense and treat postulates as facts, while theoretical reason would reject claims of reason in its moral use, including the postulates which Kant thinks important for morality.

In the first *Critique*, Kant asks how we could find complete unity of purposes among different wills. He proposes a “supreme will” that is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and eternal.⁷⁸³ This leads to a systematic unity in “this world of intelligences”....the purposive unity of all things that constitute this great whole.” In the second *Critique*, he also suggests purposive harmony between the practical and theoretical reason under a supreme intelligence “a wise author of the world...as the means of promoting what is objectively (practically) necessary...conducive to the moral purpose and moreover harmonising with the theoretical need of reason.”⁷⁸⁴ Thus the two uses of the one reason are in harmony with each other under God. There is no conflict.

⁷⁸² CPractR 5:121

⁷⁸³ CPR A815/B843

⁷⁸⁴ CPractR 5:146

8.7 Relating unity to the practical: is all reason practical?

O'Neill⁷⁸⁵ has suggested that reason is a unity because all our reason, including the positive function of theoretical reason, is fundamentally practical. She points out that deployment of the categories in complete acts of judgement is only possible if ideas of reason or maxims of judgement⁷⁸⁶ are adopted to organise this judging. A *practical* principle must guide all complete acts of judgement. This explains why there is not a 'construction' but only an 'inventory' of 'materials' at the end of the Doctrine of Elements. She writes:

“An account of human knowledge will be systematically indeterminate unless these maxims are identified and vindicated. Here we begin to see why Kant thinks that practical reason is fundamental to all reasoning, why there can be no complete rules for judging and why human reasoning is....non-algorithmic.”⁷⁸⁷

Human needs, including the needs of reasoning, are practical. If we can act only on the basis that our maxim could be willed as universal law, then the Categorical Imperative surely emerges as the supreme principle of all reason; and a unifying principle. The link to the broader interpretation of the doctrine of the primacy of the practical set out in ch7 is plain to see. Practical reason is fundamental because in choosing how to think, understand, interpret or act we “embody the only principles that we could have reason to think of as principles of reason”⁷⁸⁸ and accommodate our plurality – the Categorical

⁷⁸⁵ Onora O'Neill, 'Constructions of Reason', p.3.

⁷⁸⁶ CPJ 5:182

⁷⁸⁷ Onora O'Neill, 'Constructions of Reason', p.19.

⁷⁸⁸ Onora O'Neill 'Constructions of Reason', p.27.

Imperative's universalisation. We should have the discipline to think from the standpoint of everyone else.⁷⁸⁹

A similar argument is offered by Mudd, again based on the assertion that reason's supreme regulative principle is a categorical imperative.⁷⁹⁰ Moral agents can fail to be guided by the practical principles we impose on ourselves. But a command to seek cognitive systematic unity is something we ought to follow. It is a universalisable law and objective.

“Reason's principle, practically construed, would neither determine anything given in the world nor anything given in the way we understand the world. Rather, it would normatively specify how we *ought* to understand the world, namely, as a systematic whole.”⁷⁹¹

Summarising, reason's principle is instructing us that we should understand the world as a whole but this will not be automatic. Seeking unity is a practical imperative and therefore must be a regulative principle. We are commanded to seek systematic unity as an object of striving even though it could never be instantiated in experience or found. So Kant projects systematic unity (for an unattainable ideal). The regulative command doesn't tell us (constitutively) what nature is like, but it does tell us how we ought to organise our cognition of nature: that is *as if* nature is systematically organised: a subjective interpretation. But Kant's argument takes us to the assertion of an objective interpretation that nature will make the unity possible⁷⁹² (A651/B679). From here I

⁷⁸⁹ CPJ 5:294

⁷⁹⁰ Sasha Mudd, 'Rethinking the priority of practical reason in Kant', pp.78-102.

⁷⁹¹ Sasha Mudd, 'Rethinking the priority of practical reason in Kant' p. 89.

⁷⁹² CPR 651/B679

follow Mudd in resolving the incoherences that many believe result from subjective and objective interpretations.

In guiding the understanding, reason helps unify the empirical judgements that the understanding itself generates – not objects given in experience.

“The unity of reason is not the unity of a possible experience, but....the unity of understanding.”⁷⁹³

Reason helps by projecting the ideas of systematic unity as the goal for our cognition’s striving; and encouraging us to seek this unity in order to understand nature. In the chapter on reason above, I have discussed the role of reason as logic in which it gives grounding to particular claims to knowledge. “Reason in its logical use seeks the universal condition of its judgement.”⁷⁹⁴ In its transcendental use, (set out in the first book of the transcendental dialectic) it seeks an ultimate ground that could connect all particular claims:

“...pure concepts of reason or transcendental ideas ...will determine the use of the understanding in the whole of an entire experience.”⁷⁹⁵

Such a notion, containing the complete sum of all conditions is reason’s fundamental idea:

“This unity of reason always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts...this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding’s cognition through which

⁷⁹³ CPR A307/B363

⁷⁹⁴ CPR A307/B364

⁷⁹⁵ CPR A321/B378

this cognition comes to be....a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws.”⁷⁹⁶

The idea of a highest intelligence is, Kant says, “only a heuristic” but under its guidance this concept means that we “*ought* (my italics) to seek after the constitution and connection of things in general.”⁷⁹⁷ We have already noted above that we are *required* to seek the systematic unity of our cognition. If we do not succeed, then we must try harder to seek a complete and systematic unity:

“Such concepts of reason are not created by nature, rather we question nature according to these ideas, and we take our cognition to be defective as long as it is not adequate to them.”⁷⁹⁸

The Categorical Imperative is the standard of a good will and upon it depends pure practical reason. All categorical imperatives of this form help define what pure rational activity is. Here they are constitutive. If the command to seek cognitive unity is a categorical imperative, the principle of reason is objective in status. Only reason can go beyond the bounds of sense and project systematic unity of our cognition. That systematic unity should not be confused with the unity of the understanding:

“If, therefore, pure reason also deals with objects, yet it has no immediate reference to them and their intuition, but deals only with the understanding and its judgments, which apply directly to the senses and their intuition, in order to determine their object, the unity of reason is therefore not the unity of a possible

⁷⁹⁶ CPR A645/B673

⁷⁹⁷ CPR A671/B699

⁷⁹⁸ CPR A645/B673

experience, but is essentially different from that, which is the unity of understanding.”⁷⁹⁹

This command to seek systematic unity expresses reason’s regulative principle in the most general way. Kant offers logical principles of homogeneity, specification and affinity which can bring maximal unity when transcendently expressed in principles of genera, species and affinity.⁸⁰⁰

Now to the two conceptual difficulties that Mudd describes and I have noted above.

They are difficulties with the objective transcendental interpretation of reason’s principle and the subjective methodological interpretation, both of which Kant seems to hold. I will say more about these and give an account of Mudd’s analysis and solution, based on an analysis of subjectivity and objectivity, – which I find entirely plausible. I have noted that Kant holds that we ought to organise our cognition *as if* nature is systematically unified.⁸⁰¹ Reason’s demand to seek systematic unity of our cognition appears to include a regulative assumption that nature itself *is* a systematic unity. Mudd therefore asks how this assumption affects the status of the principle: is it subjective or objective, with the implication that it would be contradictory to be both? Subjectively, commanding us to seek systematic unity is purely methodological, just telling us how to go about it. “[It] makes no valid claim of any kind about objects”, merely “prescribing the unity of the understanding’s own rules.”⁸⁰² Objectively, reason’s demand involves a necessary regulative assumption that nature itself *is* systematically unified in a way that must be determined through the understanding. “On this view, reason’s principles would not only be concerned with our way of understanding nature but also concerned,

⁷⁹⁹ CPR A307/B363

⁸⁰⁰ CPR A657-8/B685-6

⁸⁰¹ CPR A685/B713

⁸⁰² Sasha Mudd, ‘Rethinking the priority of practical reason in Kant’ p. 83.

albeit indirectly, with nature itself.” Kant thinks we must accept both objective and subjective versions: commentators therefore accuse him of incoherence. We assume that rationally pursuing an end such as cognitive unity implies that nature will make its achievement possible.⁸⁰³

Secondly, Kant sometimes presents reason’s principle as transcendentally necessary for any use of the understanding at all; elsewhere it’s a conditionally necessary heuristic aid. In the first case, it is a transcendental condition on the possibility of experience; in the second case, methodological guidance. This contrasting pair become associated with the first problem: the subjective-methodological and the objective-transcendental.

Setting aside the various commentators’ arguments for reasons of space, Mudd responds with a six-fold division of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, claiming this can resolve the incoherence. Reason’s principle could be objective in one sense and subjective in another (non-contradictory) sense. The divisions are:

O1 Objective as directly transcendentally conditioning objects of possible experience, termed *objectual*.

O2 Objective as validity not dependent on subjective contingent variation, termed *inter-subjectively valid*

O3 Objective as reason’s principle conditions being fully rational cognitive activity insofar as that activity in other respects constitutes objects, termed *indeterminate*.

S1 Subjective as what comes from the subject, termed *subjectively grounded*.

S2 Subjective as not inter-subjectively valid, termed *idiosyncratic*.

S3 Subjective as not directly transcendentally conditioning objects, termed *non-objectual*.

Her argument also requires an examination of ‘transcendentally necessary.’

⁸⁰³ CPR A651/B679

If objective is taken as O1 and subjective as S1, then transcendental principles can have dual status and incoherence is refuted. The problem is how interpreters have failed to identify the unique way in which reason's regulative principle is both objective and subjective. Again, only assuming all transcendental principles are objectual (O1), is a transcendental principle that is regulative and not constitutive and incoherent. This explains the problem so many have in interpretation. Kant restricts transcendental concepts and principles of the understanding to being O1 so that other transcendental concepts and principles may not be. In the Appendix, reason's principle is S3 (being regulative) and transcendental. In a broad sense of transcendental,⁸⁰⁴ there is no incoherence, further supported from the third *Critique*: ("we are delighted ...when we encounter such a systematic unity among merely empirical laws.")⁸⁰⁵ Here Kant supports the possibility of non-objectual (S3) transcendental principles seen in the Appendix.

This analysis makes sense of the principle of reason's *objective* (inter-subjectively valid, O2) status, while being, argues Mudd, also *subjective* (S1 and S3) as all transcendental principles are, (as well as they are in their role in guiding the activity of subjects). Just as Kant argues that we must assume nature to be morally purposive if we are to adopt the Categorical Imperative of seeking a moral world, so we must assume nature to be unified if we are to adopt the imperative of seeking cognitive unity. "Reading reason's regulative principle as a categorical imperative... makes sense of both its objective-subjective character and its peculiar methodological-transcendental necessity." That we are *required* or *prescribed* by reason to seek the systematic unity of cognition, suggests

⁸⁰⁴ In the broad sense, "any *a priori* principle that conditions the possibility of X may be considered transcendental whether or not X refers directly to objects of possible experience so that mental faculties including reason count as transcendental." Sasha Mudd, 'Rethinking the priority of practical reason in Kant' p. 88.

⁸⁰⁵ CPJ 5;184

that reason's principle is indeed practical. It "shows how... we *ought to seek* after the constitution and connection of objects of experience."⁸⁰⁶ As a (regulative) rule, the principle postulates what *should* be effected by us in [seeking to understand nature.]"⁸⁰⁷ In sum then, the unity of reason can be supported by a practical reading of the principle of reason as a categorical imperative. We interrogate nature by reason's ideas even though failing to achieve the complete systematic unity that we seek. Categorical imperatives help to constitute what pure practical reason is. "This rationality-constitutive feature ...illustrates the broad sense in which such [categorical imperatives] count as transcendental."⁸⁰⁸ In seeking a moral world, we assume nature to be morally purposive and adopt the categorical imperative; we assume nature to be unified and adopt an imperative to seek cognitive unity.⁸⁰⁹ This practical interpretation of reason's principle avoids suggesting the inevitability of what we do but accounts for saying what we ought to do – and may not do.

The argument in the above pages deserves more space: but the exposition shows how Kant's categorical imperatives illuminate reason's theoretical function; the primacy of the practical; and the unity of reason's two faculties - at the heart of this thesis.

This reading places a heavy weight on the Categorical Imperative. In particular, although not a logical objection, it is striking that the role of the Categorical Imperative receives little direct support in the first *Critique* for its proposed status as reason's supreme principle. So perhaps the O'Neill/Mudd interpretation is deserving of some further examination.

⁸⁰⁶ CPR A671/B699

⁸⁰⁷ CPR A509/B537

⁸⁰⁸ Sasha Mudd, 'Rethinking the priority of practical reason in Kant' p. 91

⁸⁰⁹ CPR A811/B839

Klemme argues⁸¹⁰ that if the Categorical Imperative is the highest principle of all reason, it follows that critical self-disciplining has to be considered an autonomous procedure. This, in turn, implies identifying critique and moral autonomy. Nowhere does Kant promote such a view. Our duty to seek the truth and pursue knowledge does not provide an adequate grounding for the Categorical Imperative as the highest principle of all our reason – the issue posed in the *Groundwork*.⁸¹¹ In a section entitled “On the system of the higher cognitive faculties which grounds philosophy”,⁸¹² the third *Critique* offers “no ideas, like reason, of any object at all, since it is a faculty for subsuming under concepts given from elsewhere.” Klemme is right to assert that if autonomy in the sense of moral self-legislation were at the same time an attribute of theoretical reason any difference between practical and theoretical reason would be eliminated, but this assertion is not made by Kant, even if he could have done so in the *Groundwork*. The concept of autonomy is being confused by Klemme with self-referential critique.

In the *Groundwork*, where Kant introduces the idea of the unity of reason,⁸¹³ he states that he cannot “yet bring it to such completeness...without bringing into it considerations of a wholly different kind and confusing the reader.” Yet it is in the *Groundwork* that he introduces the Categorical Imperative as the supreme principle of morality, making the final step from metaphysics of morals to the critique of practical reason without any mention of theoretical reason. I note that omission proves nothing, and it does seem remarkable that even such a lengthy dissertation on the Categorical

⁸¹⁰ Heiner F Klemme, ‘Is the Categorical Imperative the Highest Principle of *Both* Pure Practical and Theoretical Reason?’ *Kantian Review* 19, no.1, (2014), pp.119-126.

⁸¹¹ G 4:391

⁸¹² CPJ 20:201

⁸¹³ G 4:391

Imperative as that by Paton⁸¹⁴ offers no comment on the Categorical Imperative as the supreme principle of all reason.

Returning to O'Neill's exposition, I note that critique and autonomy are described as identical. A critique of reason "reconsiders the standpoint from which the argument is conducted." After Kant's critical turn we have two standpoints of course. The critique's function is to discipline reason by a process that is self-disciplinary, "to constrain its propensity to expansion beyond the narrow bounds of possible experience and to preserve it from straying and error."⁸¹⁵ The self-discipline of critique consists of autonomous self-discipline in thought and action if reason's authority is grounded in autonomy. "Autonomy", says O'Neill, "does not presuppose but rather constitutes the principles of reason and their authority."⁸¹⁶ Pure reason has a task (*obliegen* – translated not as 'duty' or involving duty, but as 'to have a task') to self discipline. But there is nothing in the Discipline of Pure Reason that the normativity of such action is grounded in the Categorical Imperative or human volition. The Discipline of Pure Reason has no mention of autonomy, duty, the moral law or the categorical imperative. Autonomy cannot be an attribute of theoretical reason or cognition and volition would be the same. Kant's rejection of this view is supported by his analysis of "the connection of the legislations of understanding and reason through the power of judgement" in the third *Critique*.⁸¹⁷ It would appear that critique and autonomy are not fundamentally identical. In conclusion, on the one hand the idea of unity as a categorical imperative according to O'Neill/Mudd is more persuasive than an argument based on absence of evidence; and

⁸¹⁴ Herbert J Paton, 'The Categorical Imperative'

⁸¹⁵ CPR A711/B739

⁸¹⁶ Onora O'Neill, 'Constructions of Reason', p.57.

⁸¹⁷ CPJ 5:195

it may be valuable that “if we want to resolve the problem of the unity of pure practical and theoretical reason...we have to study the (third) *Critique*.”⁸¹⁸

8.8 Unity of reason now?

If a ‘science’ is subjected to a critical elucidation, this will mean the investigation and justification of why it has a specific systematic form if compared with another system with a similar cognitive faculty as its basis.⁸¹⁹ Both practical and theoretical reason are pure reason, he says, so that both have the same cognitive basis. By comparing them, the systematic form of the one can be distinguished from that of the other. The account that follows is as we might expect. The Analytic of theoretical reason has shown that it begins with intuition and therefore sensibility, progressing to concepts of the objects of this intuition, ending with principles. Practical reason, by contrast, makes objects real with a will that is a causality: it does not deal with objects in order to cognise them. A critique of the Analytic of reason “insofar as it is to be a practical reason (and this is the real problem) begins from the possibility of practical principles *a priori*.” From here practical reason can proceed to concepts of objects i.e. of good and evil. Kant’s interim conclusion is that the whole sphere of the conditions of the use of pure practical reason is divided in a way entirely analogous to the division of theoretical reason, albeit in reverse order. After comparing the use of Logic and Aesthetic, with the division of the former into an Analytic of principles and of concepts, he comments that since the division of the Analytic of pure practical reason proceeds *a priori* it must proceed from the universal (the moral principle) as in the major premise of a syllogism, with a minor

⁸¹⁸ Heiner F Klemme ‘Is the Categorical Imperative the Highest Principle of *Both* Pure Practical and Theoretical Reason?’ p.123.

⁸¹⁹ CPractR 5:89

premise being a subsumption of possible actions as good or evil, through to a conclusion. This will be the “subjective determination of the will (an *interest* in the practically possible good and in the maxim based on it).”⁸²⁰ Although Kant considers these comparisons “gratifying”, he (merely?) considers that they

“rightly occasion the expectation of perhaps being able *some day* (my italics) to attain insight into the unity of the whole pure rational faculty (theoretical as well as practical) and to derive everything from one principle – the undeniable need of human reason, which finds complete satisfaction only in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions.”⁸²¹

The latter sentence seems a curious statement because it appears to refute the view that theoretical and practical reason *are* united, which can only be expected “some day”. It seems the more surprising when he has previously expressed the view that a critique of pure practical reason should be able to “present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle.”⁸²² One commentator offers the simplest explanation in suggesting that Kant

“never explicitly demonstrates the unity of a single rational faculty, in the sense that there is only one such capacity (rather than two) because this assumption is taken for granted....The unity we hope to be able to demonstrate⁸²³ or attain insight into⁸²⁴ some happy day in the distant future is the unity of a complete

⁸²⁰ CPractR 5:90

⁸²¹ CPractR 5:91

⁸²² G 4:391

⁸²³ G 4:391

⁸²⁴ CPractR 5:391

philosophical system created by the unified use of theoretical and practical reason.⁸²⁵

Once again Kant's varying uses of the term 'reason', as discussed in ch3, can easily puzzle us.

I have shown that the features of completeness and systematicity are related to the unity of reason in the mature philosophy. Interconnection based on one principle defines the systematic. Theoretical reason strives for the systematic unity of knowledge, practical reason for the systematic unity of our maxims for action. Systematic order requires an antecedent idea of such order ("always presupposes an idea", as quoted above). The unifying idea is provided by reason: an "idea of reason."

Both theoretical and practical reason use the concept of 'ideas'. The ideas of God, the soul and the world are employed by theoretical reason as regulative principles⁸²⁶ and by practical reason as postulates.⁸²⁷ Practical reason systematises in proposing a kingdom of ends in which our maxims harmonise with those of others with common laws.⁸²⁸ (At the same time, one must note that 'ideas' function differently so that in theoretical reason, they are used as regulative principles, whereas in practical reason they fulfil the higher function as postulates, as in ch4 above.)

Subjectively too, both theoretical and practical reason assume that nature is a purposive order.⁸²⁹ And both theoretical and practical reason can be set out in a similar structure.⁸³⁰ There are undoubted similarities in that in both theoretical and practical

⁸²⁵ Jens Timmermann, 'The Unity of Reason – Kantian Perspectives', in S. Robertson (ed.), *Spheres of Reason: New Essays in the Philosophy of Normativity*. (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p.191.

⁸²⁶ CPR A645/B673

⁸²⁷ CPractR 5:3-4

⁸²⁸ G 4:433

⁸²⁹ Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason', p.315.

⁸³⁰ CPractR 5:15-16

spheres, reason concerns itself with principles; and in both it is the task of reason to draw the right conclusions. And then too, both knowledge⁸³¹ and action⁸³² are based on rules due to the relation of knowledge and action to judgement. Reason is subject only to the laws it gives itself, but “without any law, nothing – not even nonsense – can play its game for long.”⁸³³

If theoretical and practical reason share features, their similarity becomes an argument for their being unified as one reason with different applications. However I do not accept that is enough to demonstrate unity. How much similarity should suffice? How similar? There are significant differences also, “dialectical dissimilarities”⁸³⁴. The role of sensibility, for example, is very different. In transcending the bounds of sense, theoretical reason can produce unfounded knowledge claims. An oak is similar to an ash but they are different trees. I note this criticism is also one that Guyer makes of Neiman’s account.⁸³⁵ Moreover the greater the differences between the two expressions of reason, the harder it seems to support or demonstrate their unity. Freedom may be necessary for both theoretical and practical reason but practical reason gives it a far more prominent place in creating its own objects. Theoretical good is a conditional good, while moral action is unconditioned: a good will is the only unconditioned good.⁸³⁶ Reason is constitutive in the moral realm, but only regulative in the theoretical realm. Realising the objects of practical reason does not require the cooperation of nature or providence.

⁸³¹ G 4:412

⁸³² CPractR 5:119-120

⁸³³ WOT 8:145.

⁸³⁴ Jens Timmermann, ‘The Unity of Reason – Kantian Perspectives’, pp.183-198.

⁸³⁵ Paul Guyer, ‘Book Reviews: The Unity of Reason. By Susan Neiman’. *Philosophical Review* 106, no.2, (1997), pp.291-5.

⁸³⁶ G 4:393

Returning to the “curious statement” with which I began this section. Kant claims that reason is the faculty of principles and sets out what this means in the *Transcendental Dialectic*⁸³⁷ and similarly in the *Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgement*.⁸³⁸ Although the context is theoretical reason, the comment in the first *Critique* is placed before his assertion that “given our present aims we will set aside the practical ideas, and hence consider reason only in its speculative use.”⁸³⁹ Beck is thus prepared to interpret reason as a faculty of principles to apply to all reason and not only the theoretical. In his view it “is fortunately not difficult to state what may have been the “one principle” in the “curious statement” quoted at the outset of this section. “Reason,” says Beck,

“is the faculty of principles and brings all that is thought by the understanding under the highest unity of thought. Now if there are valid practical principles whose necessity is not derivable from universal and necessary principles conceived only by reason, then the internal unity of practice would itself be non-existent or, at best, contingent. Only reason can supply universal necessary principles, whether to knowledge or to conduct.”⁸⁴⁰

All reason is a faculty of principles. I note that Beck does not directly address Kant’s curious statement (the expectation of an insight *some day*) directly. What Beck has offered could be no more than another example of similarity, an observation which I have noted is suggestive but not adequate to prove reason’s unity. If reason is a faculty of principles, as Beck emphasises, and if we believe that there is only one faculty of reason, then it is reasonable to assert a unity of principles to bridge the divide between

⁸³⁷ CPR A299/B356

⁸³⁸ CPJ 5:401

⁸³⁹ CPR A329/B386

⁸⁴⁰ Lewis White Beck ‘A *Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*’ pp48-9

reason's practical and theoretical manifestations. It is practical reason that enables us to believe in the classical objects of metaphysics: freedom, God, immortality. They lie beyond validation by theoretical reason and depend on practical reason which "takes the lead." Closing this gap creates a kind of rational unity: one faculty would not be able to answer the problem left by another separate faculty.⁸⁴¹ The concept of freedom, says Kant, "insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason."⁸⁴² Freedom is an idea of theoretical reason established *a priori* by practical reason. And the unifying principle is a wise, benevolent God, creator of a teleological world that coheres with morality.⁸⁴³

So far then, I have defined what unity might mean, in particular between theoretical and practical reason. A number of significant factors in considering its unity have been identified, together with its status as a regulative idea. Kant's pre-critical understanding of reason's unity has been outlined. The crucial importance of systematicity has been demonstrated. Reason's unity as a subjective ideal of knowledge and an objective ideal of practical reason has been asserted. The idea of finding the unconditioned for the conditioned has been a recurrent underlying theme. The idea of God as a "fundamental power" that unifies has been introduced and the idea that all reason is ultimately practical has been argued, fulfilling the belief in the primacy of practical reason. Somehow, none of this is entirely satisfactory. Practical and theoretical reason just *are* different in so many ways. Some of these were outlined in the previous chapter, some in this. The principle of systematicity seems so important, yet it reduces to little more than

⁸⁴¹ Jens Timmermann 'The Unity of Reason' p195.

⁸⁴² CPractR 5:3

⁸⁴³ Jens Timmermann 'The Unity of Reason' p.197. (See also: Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason' p.331.)

a form of similarity: and it is clear that similarity alone will not do to prove reason's unity. The idea of unity stemming from an agreed principle, the Categorical Imperative, is a stimulating idea. But whatever the arguments surrounding this role for the Categorical Imperative, it is not the arguments themselves that fail to convince but the absence of any promotion of this idea by Kant himself in most of his writing: the absence of the Categorical Imperative altogether in the first *Critique* isn't something that I find can be ignored. So, while on the one hand a case has been made out above for reason's unity and while Kant emphasises often enough that reason is a unity, one is left with Beck's protest:

“One can only regret...that at no point does Kant, as it were, take the reader by the hand and say, “Now I shall show you precisely why I think theoretical and practical reason differ only in being two applications of the same faculty.”⁸⁴⁴

This is even while Beck also asserts in the same paragraph, “the unity of theoretical and practical reason is asserted... and almost the entire [*second Critique*] can be considered an elaboration of this.” We seem to be left with the assertion that reason serves similar functions in both its practical and theoretical manifestations: “universalising, systematising, integrating and rendering necessary what appears *prima facie* to be contingent,”⁸⁴⁵ without going beyond the similarity argument. Yet Kant does not abandon the quest: “there must somewhere be a source of positive cognitions that belong in the domain of pure reason, and that perhaps give occasion for errors only through misunderstanding, but that in fact constitute the goal of the strenuous effort of

⁸⁴⁴ Lewis White Beck, ‘*A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*’, p.47.

⁸⁴⁵ Lewis White Beck, ‘*A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*’, p.48

reason. For to what cause should the unquenchable desire to find a firm footing beyond all bounds of experience otherwise be ascribed?”⁸⁴⁶

It remains to turn to the third *Critique*.

8.9 Unity and the third *Critique*

In the third *Critique*, an emphasis on teleology may be expected; additionally, Kant introduces the idea of reflective judgement. Whereas in the first *Critique*, the origin and use of the notion of systematicity is assigned to the faculty of theoretical reason,⁸⁴⁷ this changes in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. It is now located in the faculty of reflective judgement. Reflective judgement is a type of judgement that seeks, for a particular, a universal that is not yet given; and a determining judgement as the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal. Given the importance that Kant has attached to systematicity in his argument for reason’s unity, this deserves consideration. Firstly, whatever their roles, reflective judgement includes aesthetic judgement whereas theoretical reason does not, so that this represents more than a change in terminology. Judgement “in general” in the third *Critique* is defined as “the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal”⁸⁴⁸ and “the faculty for the subsumption of the particular under the general.”⁸⁴⁹ In the function of subsumption, the “universal (the rule, principle, the law)” may be given so that judgement must find a particular to subsume under the universal – a determining

⁸⁴⁶ CPR A796/B824

⁸⁴⁷ CPR A646-7/B674-5

⁸⁴⁸ CPJ 5:179

⁸⁴⁹ CPJ 20:201

judgement; or alternatively, a universal must be found for a particular that is given – a reflective judgement.⁸⁵⁰

If we visit an art gallery we may register an instant pleasure in response to particular exhibits; they may then be judged as subsumed under the universal concept of the beautiful. That would be an example of an aesthetic reflective judgement. Teleological judgements may also be reflective in this way.

The contrast between the reflective and determinative judgement suggests that they are mutually exclusive. Implicitly, in the subsumption of a particular under a universal, the particular or the universal may be given, but not both.⁸⁵¹ Cooperation is excluded: one judgement must connect the particular and the universal. Against this, suppose that more than two terms are involved. Suppose, says Guyer,⁸⁵² causation (an abstract universal) requires an intermediate causal concept (say, a particular chemical causation), then both determinative and reflective judgements may be needed: determinative to apply the abstract concept to sensible particulars, but reflective judgements to find those concepts and finish the job assigned to determinative judgement.

Now, in the first *Critique*, Kant considered systematicity desirable independent of any demand of the understanding. Rather, it was connected to pure reason's demand for unconditional completeness in knowledge. In the third *Critique* however, his focus is the way that systematicity works in categories and in the transcendental laws of experience which they ground to the given sensible particulars of empirical experience. This provides a reason why Kant might prefer to associate systematicity with judgement rather than reason, "with the task of subsumption rather than with an independent

⁸⁵⁰ CPJ 5:179

⁸⁵¹ Paul Guyer, 'Reason and reflective judgment: Kant on the significance of systematicity.' *Nous* 24, no.1 (1990), pp.17-43

⁸⁵² Paul Guyer, 'Reason and reflective judgment', p.18.

objective of completeness.” In guiding a search for *intermediate* (my italics) universals, empirical concepts or laws, systematicity seeks to apply categories to particulars. Hence, systematicity is best assigned to reflective judgement.

Although Kant describes two other regulative ideals, neither of these is re-assigned to the third *Critique*'s reflective judgement. One is the "regulative principle of pure reason"⁸⁵³ that Kant introduces in order to solve the "Antinomy of Pure Reason." This is essentially a quantitative ideal of the indefinite extendibility of any empirical synthesis; while the other is of pure or idealized fundamental explanatory concepts-an ideal of an explanatory minimum rather than quantitative maximum.

In the Introduction to the third *Critique*, Kant claims that

“there is an incalculable gulf between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible.”

But he continues,

“the concept of freedom should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realised in it in accordance with the laws of

⁸⁵³ CPR A 508/B 536

freedom. Thus there must still be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that grounds nature with that which the concept of freedom contains practically.”⁸⁵⁴

In associating the realisation of the ends of freedom from the noumenal world with the natural world, a common purpose of theoretical and practical reason is being proposed. Kant’s account of how beauty is the symbol of morality plays a role in bridging the “incalculable gulf” he asserts. How? In setting out the satisfaction that grounds judgements of pure beauty, these refer to the harmony of the cognitive faculties which concern our empirical knowledge of nature. So if, having established a relation between beauty and the understanding (i.e. nature), he now establishes that between beauty and reason (morality). So beauty lies as an intermediary between nature and morality. Apprehending the beautiful gives an immediate satisfaction that involves disinterestedness, freedom, and universality – qualities shared with moral awareness. Our imagination is expanded by the aesthetic idea, directing us to what is supersensible. Our experience of the beautiful directs us to moral awareness. These claims are made at two different points in the *Critique*:

“Through the possibility of its *a priori* laws for nature the understanding gives a proof that nature is cognised by us only as appearance, and hence at the same time an indication of its supersensible substratum; but it leaves this entirely undetermined. The power of judgement through its *a priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it, provides for its supersensible substratum (in us as well as outside us) determinability through the intellectual faculty. But reason provides determination for the same substratum through its practical law *a priori*; and thus the power of judgement

⁸⁵⁴ CPJ 5:175-6

makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom.”⁸⁵⁵

The experience of nature or of a natural object as beautiful is based on a reflective judgement about the purposiveness of the natural world around us for the object appears as if designed to evoke such a spontaneous response within us. We cannot assert that the object actually *was designed* for this purpose, but an idea of reason tells us so.

Experience of the beautiful is an experience of purposiveness without purpose, a sense that things fit together in a way we cannot explain.⁸⁵⁶

No additional explanatory power is gained by considering nature as a system of purposes. The purpose of a heart may be to pump blood around our bodies; we may legitimately say that it is not functioning as it *should* if it is damaged; we may say that in pumping blood around it has the purpose of maintaining life for the whole organism; we may even consider nature as ordered in describing a feature to keep a species survive. But there is no empirical or *a priori* reason to see nature as a purposive whole. Objectively, nature’s origin lies in the mechanism of nature. “But,” says Kant,

“if we go through the whole of nature, we do not find in us, as nature, any being that can claim the privilege of being the final end of creation; and one can even prove *a priori* that whatever could be an ultimate end for nature could never, no matter with what conceivable determination and properties it might be equipped, be, as a natural thing, a final end.”⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁵ CPJ 5:196

⁸⁵⁶ Terry Pinkard, ‘*German Philosophy 1760-1860: the Legacy of Idealism.*’ (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p.72.

⁸⁵⁷ CPJ 5:426

Yet, as already noted in considering the priority of the practical, we judge humanity as an end in itself, the ultimate purpose for which all else is the means. This moral conception of humanity leads us to think of the whole world as purposively structured for the possibility of realising the Highest Good, a union of virtue (practical reason) and proportionate happiness (theoretical reason). Building on this idea, Kant envisages human history itself as guided by some purpose aiming for an ethical commonwealth:

“a comforting view of the future, one in which we represent from afar how the human species finally works its way up to that state where all the seeds nature has planted in it can be developed fully and in which the species’ vocation here on earth can be fulfilled.”⁸⁵⁸

As a species we have the capacity for planning rationally (i.e. morally) to build shelter, find food and so on. For this we require a culture of skill: essential but not sufficient for we choose our ends.⁸⁵⁹ He writes,

“only in the human being, although in him only as a subject of morality, is unconditional legislation with regard to ends to be found, which therefore makes him alone capable of being a final end, to which the whole of nature is teleologically subordinated.”⁸⁶⁰

Thus, for theoretical purposes we must regard the empirical world as ‘nature’, that is as a self organising, organised, self-subsisting dynamic purposive unity. We can understand the world in general and organic nature only by assuming the theoretical Idea of Nature and thinking of the world of experience as a systematic whole, ‘as a

⁸⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent (1784)’, in *Perpetual Peace and other essays*, Ted Humphrey (transl). (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 8:30

⁸⁵⁹ CPJ 5:431

⁸⁶⁰ CPJ 5:435-6

kingdom of ends' incorporating the teleological principle. We must presuppose "the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary."⁸⁶¹ It is here that we must find the unity of reason for nature itself as a unity can only be understood as united with practical reason because the latter is essential to pursue its ends.

In the first *Critique*, Kant does not explain *why* teleology leads to the "greatest systematic unity".⁸⁶² In the third, he argues that if we make the regulative assumption that there is a teleology in nature, then we must regard nature as a system of ends, a final end of creation, to completely ground the teleological order.⁸⁶³ Since the noumenal human being is the final end of creation, nature's ultimate end is to further the development of the end-setting capacities of humans:⁸⁶⁴ "that which nature is capable of doing in order to prepare himself for what he must himself do in order to be a final end." Kant calls this ultimate end of nature "culture." This is defined as the development of the aptitude to set ends for oneself, receptive to higher (moral) purposes, "not its own earthly happiness". We must liberate ourselves from the "despotism of desires."⁸⁶⁵ Mankind will go beyond what nature can accomplish and transform itself into a moral whole, a community of rational beings, legislating and obeying the moral law. This exposition, first set out in his *Idea for a Universal History* (1784), provided a similar teleological ordering principle that he used later in the third *Critique*. Now, our moral agency cannot be certain to impact on our inner nature. The approximation of a moral world (from practical reason) to that of nature requires nature to be designed to harmonise with morality coupled with a duty on us to promote such a

⁸⁶¹ CPR A651/B679

⁸⁶² In this paragraph, I have drawn on the interpretation of Pauline Klinegeld in 'Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason'.

⁸⁶³ CPJ 5:435-6

⁸⁶⁴ CPJ 5:431

⁸⁶⁵ CPJ 5:432

world which would justify our believing nature is so designed. Theoretical reason also uses the idea that the natural world is a product of intelligent design, so that practical reason's idea of the world harmonises with theoretical reason's idea of the world as it is. Theoretical and practical reason are therefore united as the product of intelligent design of a highest being. To quote:

“this systematic unity of ends in this world of intelligences, which, though as mere nature it can only be called the sensible world, as a system of freedom can be called an intelligible, i.e., moral world, also leads inexorably to the purposive unity of all things that constitute this great whole, in accordance with universal laws of nature, just as the first does in accordance with universal and necessary moral laws, and unites practical with speculative reason.”⁸⁶⁶

It is nature's purposiveness stemming from divine design that unites theoretical and practical reason. This is echoed when he writes that “it is theoretically possible for (subjective reason) to think the exact harmony of the realm of nature with the realm of morals as the condition of the possibility of the highest good.”⁸⁶⁷ It is to the concept of the highest good that I will now turn.

⁸⁶⁶ CPR A815/B843

⁸⁶⁷ CPractR 5:145

Chapter 9: The Highest Good

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9.1 Introduction

Aristotle asked “What should be the fundamental goal of the good life?”⁸⁶⁸ I will now describe the concept of the highest good as Kant’s answer, demonstrate its religious (and specifically protestant) basis, oppose a secular interpretation, emphasise its importance for individuals as members of society and argue its place as the ultimate goal of human life. It will form the final end (*telos*) of reason. In bringing both chapter and thesis to a close, I will comment on his question, “What can I hope?”

Clearly the concept of the highest good was important for Kant as it appears in all three *Critiques* and in other essays^{869,870,871}. Kant’s exposition shows some changes from the first *Critique* of 1781 to its final outing in *Perpetual Peace* in 1795. Any account therefore risks some inconsistencies.

9.2 Structuring the highest good

In the second section of the canon of pure reason, Kant introduces "the ideal of the highest good as a determining ground of the ultimate end (*Zweck* i.e. *telos*, purpose) of pure reason".⁸⁷² If reason is a unity, there must ultimately be only one unconditioned end. Kant

⁸⁶⁸ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics, Book I. 1094a 23-5*

⁸⁶⁹ *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?* 8:139: "Far more important is the need of reason in its practical use, because it is unconditioned, and we are necessitated to presuppose the existence of God not only if we want to judge, but because we have to judge. For the pure practical use of reason consists in the precepts of moral laws. They all lead, however, to the idea of the highest good possible in the world insofar as it is possible only through freedom: morality; from the other side, these precepts lead to what depends not merely on human freedom but also on nature, which is the greatest happiness insofar as it is apportioned according to the first."

⁸⁷⁰ *To Perpetual Peace* 8:362: "...from a morally - practical perspective (which is wholly directed to the super-sensuous) - e.g. in the belief that if only our interactions are pure, God will compensate for our own injustices by means that are inconceivable to us and that we should not, therefore, give up our striving to do good - the concept of a divine concursus is entirely appropriate and even necessary. But it is self evident that one must not attempt to explain a good action (as an event in the world) in this way, for that is a vain and consequently absurd attempt at theoretical knowledge of the supersensuous."

⁸⁷¹ *On the proverb: that may be true in theory, but is of no practical use* 8:279: "...this concept of duty does not have to be based on any special end, but rather that it introduces another end for the human will, namely to strive with all one's powers toward the highest good possible in the world (the purest morality throughout the world combined with such universal happiness as accords with it. Since it is, indeed, within our power to approach this end from one and though not from both directions at once, reason is for practical purposes to believe in a moral ruler of the world and in a future life."

⁸⁷² CPR A804/B832

goes beyond the ends of practical reason in actions or of theoretical reason in cognition by proposing an 'end' of all things. This necessitates a totality, an absolute, a wholeness from reason's systematic unity. The totality of the world should be considered as a purposive unity, organised and self-organising. "In such a product of nature each part is conceived as if it exists only through all the others, thus as if existing for the sake of the others and on account of the whole".⁸⁷³ The highest end, which is the ultimate aim of nature "is properly directed only to what is moral"⁸⁷⁴. Plainly, the highest *end* is the highest good.

The highest good is the "unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason."⁸⁷⁵.

⁸⁷⁶ It is, in Beck's definition, "the concept of the unconditioned for the practically conditioned, i.e., the concept of a supreme end which unites all other ends. Without it, there could be no system of ends."⁸⁷⁷ To attain the highest good appears impossible in practice even if attainable in principle, the "goal of unceasing endeavours", the aim to become a master of wisdom. The moral law (alone) is the ground for making the highest good and its promotion and realisation the object of the pure (practical) will. One who could attain the realisation of the highest good would have a holy will: a will of infinite worth because it would be a will completely conforming to the moral law.

Kant defines a holy will as one whose maxims necessarily harmonise with the laws of autonomy, an absolutely good will. "Obligation cannot be attributed to a holy being."⁸⁷⁸

Commentators vary in their interpretation of the holy will. For some, a holy will is one that knows no temptation and not (merely) a will that can perfectly resist it. Thus Thorpe writes,

⁸⁷³ CPJ 5:373

⁸⁷⁴ CPR A801/B829

⁸⁷⁵ CPractR 5:108

⁸⁷⁶ At CPractR 5:128 Kant offers an alternative title for the highest good as "the kingdom of God"; at CPractR 5:132 he defines it as "the necessity of the condition for such an intelligible world to be the highest good"; at CPJ 5:444 as "the existence of rational beings under moral laws"; while at CPR A840/B868, the final end is "the entire vocation of human beings."

⁸⁷⁷ Lewis White Beck, 'A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason', p.242.

⁸⁷⁸ G 4:439

“For Kant the idea of a holy will is not the idea of a being that can overcome all temptation, but rather a being that does not suffer temptation...a holy will is to be understood as one in which there is no temptation.”⁸⁷⁹ ⁸⁸⁰

“Necessitation is conceivable only where a contravention of moral laws is possible, and hence a thing can be morally necessary without being a duty, which would happen if the subject were at all times to act without necessitation in accordance to the moral law; for then a duty or obligation so to act would not be present; hence this does not hold of a morally perfect being, in that such a being acts solely from holiness. Where there is no necessitation there also no moral imperative, no obligation, duty, virtue, ought or constraint is conceivable. Hence the moral laws are also called laws of duty, because they presuppose an agent subject to the impulses of nature. Like an angel, a being of this kind [a morally perfect being] can in no way be thought of existing, but to the philosopher is merely an idea.”⁸⁸¹

Wrongdoing has no attractions for one with a holy will: God. Mortals can only aspire to supreme virtue, approach it asymptotically and perhaps gain it in immortality.

The objection to this argument for holiness as the impossibility of temptation is that Kant refers to “the Holy One of the Gospel”⁸⁸² and clearly means Jesus Christ. Yet on the biblical account, Jesus was tempted⁸⁸³ “in all points like we are, yet without sin.”⁸⁸⁴ This suggests ambiguity in Kant or perhaps a change in view over time.⁸⁸⁵

⁸⁷⁹ Lucas Thorpe, ‘Kant on Character: Holiness as the limit of Virtue’, paper read at meeting on ‘Kant and Moral Demandingness’, University of Southampton (June 8th, 2018).

⁸⁸⁰ R 6:64

⁸⁸¹ *Ethik Vigilantius* 27:489

⁸⁸² G 4:408

⁸⁸³ *New Testament: Gospel of Matthew* 4:1; of *Mark* 1:12; of *Luke* 4:2

⁸⁸⁴ *New Testament: A Letter to Hebrews* 4:15

⁸⁸⁵ Moral perfection was a theological interest in the 18th century as evidenced in William Law’s *Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection* (1726) and John Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766). (Wesley travelled in Germany and translated German theology.)

But, Kant observes, the moral law does not promise happiness. Perfection, a perfect unity of nature and morals can be achieved in what is best conceived as a kingdom of God,⁸⁸⁶ where the full realisation of moral aspiration leads to beatitude.⁸⁸⁷ In this way,

"the moral law leads through the concept of the highest good as the object and final end of pure practical reason, to religion, that is to the recognition of all duties as divine commands...from a will that is morally perfect (holy and beneficent)."⁸⁸⁸

A virtuous disposition does not necessarily produce happiness, at least in this world of appearances; yet happiness is a natural desire. A concept of the highest good must therefore incorporate not only perfection of virtue but also happiness in proportion to virtue. On the account in the *Lectures*, Kant projects fulfilment in a future world: "Moral perfection in this life will be followed by moral growth in the next"⁸⁸⁹ – a statement that sits ill with the impossibility of attaining moral perfection in the world of nature.

The moral good expresses the moral law and man's practical rationality. The supreme good fulfils the moral law, but it is an incomplete good. Kant notes ambiguity in the concept of 'highest' and distinguishes its interpretations as *supreme* and not subordinate to any other; and as *complete* and not part of a greater whole. Thus virtue is supreme, but happiness also required for completeness. All people wish to be happy: "...an unavoidable determining ground of its faculty of desire."⁸⁹⁰ It is a human need. The complete or highest good must incorporate happiness insofar as our inclinations for

⁸⁸⁶ The use of the term 'Kingdom of God' represents another example of Kant's use of Christian metaphors and in this case the representation of God's kingdom as a transformed world: "the kingdom of God is upon you" is the first proclamation in the earliest gospel text (Mark 1:14). Kant also refers to the highest good as being "to *bring* (my italics) the kingdom of God to us." (CPractR 5:130).

⁸⁸⁷ CPractR 5:128

⁸⁸⁸ CPractR 5:129

⁸⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'Lectures on the Philosophical doctrine of Religion', in Allen W Wood, George di Giovanni (ed & transl), *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 28:1085

⁸⁹⁰ CPract R 5:25

happiness do not transgress the moral law. It thus combines perfect virtue and proportionate happiness.

Happiness is empirically based, not grounded on transcendental pure reason. Worthiness to happiness, Kant urges, is linked to our hope of happiness because the principles of pure reason link this hope to it:

"I say...it is necessary to assume in accordance with reason in its theoretical use that everyone has cause to hope for happiness in the same measure as he had made himself worthy of it in his conduct."⁸⁹¹

The necessary connection between worthiness to be happy and virtue cannot be established by a reason that is grounded only in nature. Rather it must be hoped for if "grounded on a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time the cause of nature."⁸⁹² Practical freedom is cognised through experience, but transcendental freedom has a practical interest in two things: God's existence and a future life. Found in practical use, pure reason leads us to ideas that attain the highest ends of pure reason.⁸⁹³ Pure moral laws, which command absolutely, are proved by the moral judgement of every distinctly thinking human being. This ideal concept is that of the highest good.^{894,895}

9.3 Happiness and God in the highest good

⁸⁹¹ CPR A809/B837

⁸⁹² CPR A810/B838

⁸⁹³ CPR A804/B832

⁸⁹⁴ CPR A810/B838

⁸⁹⁵ CPractR 5:110

In the intelligible or moral world of the first *Critique* as defined at A808/B836, (which although a “practical idea...really can and should have its influence on the sensible world”), Kant indicates that

“a system of happiness proportionately combined with morality can also be thought as necessary, since freedom, partly moved and partly restricted by moral laws, would itself be the cause of the general happiness, and rational beings, under the guidance of such principles, would themselves be the authors of their own enduring welfare and at the same time that of others.”⁸⁹⁶

It is as a consistent system, not because of the particular contents of ends, that we should promote the ends of rational others. A similar point is made in the *Groundwork*: “the ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also *my* ends.”⁸⁹⁷ The moral world⁸⁹⁸ is a real world and has an objective reality. Although Kant refers to abstracting all ends, it is then theoretical reason that gives us the hope of happiness. Happiness belongs to the world of nature. What individuals desire in order to attain it varies. The two components that comprise the synthetic concept of the highest good differ in status. Virtue is an unconditioned good: the supreme good (*bonum supremum*) that is the fulfilment of the moral law. Kant’s argument in the canon is that if we do that which makes us worthy of happiness, then “a system of happiness proportionately combined with morality can also be thought of as necessary.”⁸⁹⁹ Why is this? The suggestion is that rational beings would be the authors of the welfare of others and, Kant adds, their “own enduring welfare.” The issue this raises in turn is that “self-rewarding morality is only an idea” and to offer the agent happiness depends (that is, for the idea to be realised) upon “**everyone**” (Kant’s emphasis) doing what s/he should.

⁸⁹⁶ CPR A809/B837

⁸⁹⁷ G 4:430

⁸⁹⁸ Kant introduces yet another term here for the moral world: the *corpus mysticum*.

⁸⁹⁹ CPR A809/B837

However the moral law applies to each individual act and we are all too imperfect. Akrasia, inclinations, temptation all lead to imperfect individual behaviour. In the sensible world we will not attain perfect virtue, however legitimate a goal. Happiness cannot therefore be rewarded grounded in nature:

“the necessary connection of the hope of being happy...cannot be cognised by reason...but only if it is at the same time grounded on a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time the cause of nature.”⁹⁰⁰

Such an intelligence is morally perfect and is the ideal of all blessedness: God who makes the **highest good** (Kant’s emphasis) possible. Kant leads us to the moral world while acknowledging that we only know the world of appearances. We must regard ourselves as members of this world too, the moral, intelligible world, awaiting a “world that is a future for us.”⁹⁰¹ This leads to a sort of interim conclusion or claim: “God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us in accordance with principles of that very same reason.” It requires “an intelligible world...under a wise ruler and regent”⁹⁰² to realise the highest good.

The canon therefore offers a justification and exposition of the highest good that demands a religious dimension for its realisation: God and immortality. “The sensible world does not promise that sort of systematic unity of ends.”⁹⁰³ It can’t. The emphasis moreover appears to be on individual happiness, while acknowledging that proportionate happiness for all is possible (as it must be to be a moral demand) to the

⁹⁰⁰ CPR A810/B838

⁹⁰¹ CPR A811/B839

⁹⁰² CPR A811/B839

⁹⁰³ CPR A814/B842

degree that all obey the moral law i.e. achieve virtue. The moral law is a command but also offers promises and threats.⁹⁰⁴ (Kant does not expand on “threats” nor explore punishment). And Kant then links the highest good to Leibniz’s realm of grace (*regnum gratiae*) – yet another synonym for the concept. Further, Kant asserts that without the moral use of reason, we would be unworthy of reason and its moral use “depends throughout on the highest good.” No highest good: no moral use of reason. The importance of the concept of the highest good is therefore strongly emphasised. Kant comments that knowledge of nature could “only produce rudimentary and vague concepts of the deity”,⁹⁰⁵ perhaps surprising the reader that theoretical reason could produce any concepts, however vague, at all. Our concept of the divine being is correct because it agrees with reason’s moral principles. Kant now launches into a consideration of his moral theology emphasising that God is derived from morality and not the reverse.⁹⁰⁶ At “this high point”, he emphasises that morality is, so to speak, antecedent to God. We follow practical reason, not because God commands it, but regard our actions are internally obligated and therefore will regard them as God’s commands. He considers belief, opinion and knowing, returning to God and immortality which he analyses as “doctrinal” beliefs. God is “a guide to the investigation of nature”, a useful presupposition (as a regulatory principle would be) and there is likewise “a sufficient ground for a doctrinal belief in the future life of the human soul.”⁹⁰⁷ He concedes the instability of doctrinal belief in contrast to moral belief. His theological commitment is strikingly strong at this point and supports the role of moral faith in explaining the possibility of moral action. Thus he writes:

⁹⁰⁴ CPR A813/B841

⁹⁰⁵ CPR A817/B845

⁹⁰⁶ CPR A818/B846

⁹⁰⁷ CPR A826-7/B854-5

“I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted.”⁹⁰⁸

9.4 Happiness, virtue and a radical critique of the highest good

A radical critique of Kant’s conception of the highest good is that moral motivation must be without hope of reward and therefore does not require any belief that happiness will be distributed according to virtue. On this basis, the highest good is unnecessary: any happiness that we enjoy will be accidental and contingent, not related to our virtue. There would no longer be any role for God, who alone can distribute happiness in proportion to virtue; and without God no justification for immortality to improve our virtue towards perfection. Why bother if the outcome is the same? There would be no role of justification for the postulates. The highest good would become a mere agglomeration of virtue and happiness, an accidental unity. Without a necessary connection between its parts, a coherent and unitary object of will would not be available to practical reason. Our motivation for conduct, supported by pure practical reason, as discussed in ch6, comes from the moral law. We would be destined to struggle to achieve perfect conduct with no guarantee of the hope of happiness or, indeed, happiness itself: a tragic prospect for us.

⁹⁰⁸ CPR A828/B856

I suggest that this radical critique misplaces the role of the highest good in Kant's system. The highest good is not intended to function as the goal of moral *motivation*, but as the ultimate *interest* and *end* of reason. Both of these are, of course, good.

The concept of the highest good is first introduced in the first *Critique*. Although it features elsewhere in Kant's writings, the dominant sources are found in the second *Critique* and in the *Religion*. Its rationale begins from the status of the moral law, which, as law, we have no morally justified choice but to obey. As noted, we are commanded to strive for holiness:

“It is our universal duty to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e. to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity and for this the very idea which is presented to us by reason for emulation, can give us force.”⁹⁰⁹

“Holiness is prescribed to [rational beings] as a rule even in this life.”⁹¹⁰

“...in actions being done not only in conformity with duty but also from duty – Here the command is “be holy””⁹¹¹

While holiness (perfect virtue) is the supreme good, it is not the only good. Human beings have needs other than the moral. These needs can be summarised in one word: happiness. This is defined by Kant as “a rational being's consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence,”⁹¹² “the necessarily determining ground of every rational finite being and therefore the

⁹⁰⁹ Rel 6:61

⁹¹⁰ CPractR 5:129

⁹¹¹ MM 6:446

⁹¹² CPractR 5:22

unavoidable determining ground of its faculty of desire;”⁹¹³ “the satisfaction of all one’s inclinations together;”^{914,915} “the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will;”⁹¹⁶ “an end that everyone has by virtue of the impulses of his nature;”⁹¹⁷ and “the satisfaction of all our inclinations (intensive, extensive, protensive).”⁹¹⁸ These definitions are compatible with each other and their repetition in Kant’s writing evidences the importance of happiness as a concept and the significance of it as a good.

Conceiving the highest good as a unity of moral worth and happiness, the moral law, says Kant, can be rephrased as “do that through which you will become worthy to be happy.”⁹¹⁹ The hope of happiness, in accordance with reason in its theoretical use, is unified with the moral principles of practical reason to realise this.⁹²⁰ “The system of morality is inseparably combined with the system of happiness though only in the idea of pure reason.”

As to the ends of action, Kant comments that

“not every end is moral (e.g. the end of one’s own happiness is not); the moral end must be an unselfish one. And the need for an ultimate end that is set out by pure reason and that includes the totality of all ends within a single principle...is a need felt by an unselfish will that extends beyond the observation of formal laws in bringing its object (the highest good) into existence.”⁹²¹

⁹¹³ CPractR 5:25

⁹¹⁴ CPractR 5:73

⁹¹⁵ G 4:399

⁹¹⁶ CPractR 5:124

⁹¹⁷ MM 6:386

⁹¹⁸ CPR A806/B834

⁹¹⁹ CPR A808/B836

⁹²⁰ CPR A809/B837

⁹²¹ TP 8:281

Kant is keen to emphasise that happiness is an inclination and since “considered in themselves natural inclinations are good,”⁹²² happiness is something that we should seek provided that it is not the motive for our action. Happiness may be the *end* of our action, not its *motive*. It should therefore be a conditioned end: one conditioned by the moral law.

One commentator writes:

“Kant is often thought to hold that happiness is not valuable, and even to have ignored it wholly in his ethics. This is a serious mistake. It is true that for Kant moral worth is the supreme good, but by itself it is not the perfect or complete good...Happiness ... is a conditional good. It is good only if it results from the satisfaction of morally permissible desires. But it is intrinsically valuable nonetheless. It is valued by a rational agent for itself and not instrumentally.”⁹²³

Thus the moral law does not prohibit action that ends in happiness or the hope of happiness; and happiness is a component part of the highest good which should be the ultimate aim or end of all our ends because that is a *complete* good.

The absolute integration of a united reason’s faculties excludes the possibility of conflicting interests. “If we consulted only our interest,”⁹²⁴ we would pursue the ends of practical reason with its interest in unity. A conflict would negate reason itself.⁹²⁵ Early in the first *Critique*, Kant had written, “reason is such a perfect unity.”⁹²⁶ For

⁹²² Rel 6:58

⁹²³ Jerome B Schneewind, ‘Autonomy, obligation and virtue’, in Paul Guyer (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (Cambridge: CUP 1992), p333

⁹²⁴ CPR A465/B493

⁹²⁵ CPractR 5:120

⁹²⁶ CPR Axiii

transcendental idealism,⁹²⁷ our rational powers must be related to themselves, not to something independent and other, as for the transcendental realist. Thus Kant says that

“human reason is by nature architectonic, i.e. it considers all cognitions as belonging to a possible system and hence it permits only such principles as at least do not render an intended cognition incapable of standing together with others in some system or other.”⁹²⁸

From a teleological perspective, Kant assesses in the Antinomy⁹²⁹ which claims of the theses and antitheses in terms of the ends of reason we should want. He answers: “those that accord with reason’s practical ends and its interest in unity” (whereas the antitheses would frustrate the demand for unity of reason.) Moreover, our rational powers are to be considered teleologically and carry their ends within themselves. Only one ultimate end flows from unity for a united reason of theoretical and practical faculties: the highest good. In its regulatory function, reason must have a teleological function in that unification. Kant tells us that there are three propositions that can only involve practical reason. What makes practical judgements teleological is their reference to a final end. Ends involve purposes. Theoretical reason has little interest in the proper objects of metaphysics (freedom, God, immortality) but practical reason has. It is the questions that nature poses that bring the empirical sphere under moral interrogation. Reason’s unity must lie in a principle of practical reason. Thus, the highest good gives an end to reason that not only subsumes all other ends but also satisfies reason’s architectonic interest and gives systematic form. The main function of the highest good emerges as its role in the unity of reason and transcendental systematicity, rather than in direct moral

⁹²⁷ In what follows I broadly follow the interpretation of Gardner in *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999)

⁹²⁸ CPR A474/B504

⁹²⁹ CPR A462-76/B490-504

motivation. The ultimate end of reason lies in the moral vocation of humanity with science, mathematics and rational knowledge receiving their ultimate point from their contribution to the highest good.⁹³⁰

I have noted that moral (virtue) and natural (happiness) goods differ in kind – a so-called ‘heterogeneity of the good’ which leads to the idea of a synthetic relationship between the two features of the highest good. The heterogeneity of the highest good is a further demonstration of the unifying function of the end of reason. “Reason in its practical use is no better off than its theoretical use in seeking the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, under the name of the highest good.”⁹³¹ Both practical and theoretical reason seek a common end. They are one reason.

In stating above that the highest good (with its inclusion of happiness) is a legitimate *end* of reason Kant could be charged with ignoring the lack of need of the highest good to *motivate* reason, which appears or seems heteronomous: seeking what Silber terms a ‘heterogeneity of the good’.⁹³² We need only the moral incentive and good of virtue, not the natural incentive and good of happiness. The highest good would become superfluous and, if so, the justification of the postulates could not be maintained. There would be significant implications therefore for Kant’s moral theory. We therefore have to ask whether the highest good has any other role beyond that of justifying the postulates to enable moral conduct and provide maxims of practical reason that realise the highest good.

I have already noted that human reason demands an unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason as its final end. The conditioned will always seek a condition

⁹³⁰ Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.322

⁹³¹ CPractR 5:108

⁹³² John Silber. The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant’s Ethics. *Ethics* 1963, no.3, 73, p185

until it reaches the unconditioned, beyond which nothing further is possible, its final end. Reason seeks the unconditioned as it unifies its rules under the idea of a totality as part of its systematicity and hence unity. The highest good is the expression of that unity from pure practical reason. We can reject the critique that the highest good offers nothing beyond the moral law, while the postulates remain as necessary for the proportionality of the highest good. Given the primacy of practical reason, all manifestations of the unity of reason require the highest good. It follows therefore that the highest good is not only directly related to moral motivation but *is* related to transcendental systematicity. It follows that it is not necessarily a problem that there is a discordance between happiness and the highest good as the highest good is not specifically concerned with moral motivation. While it may be true that there does not exist an explicit command to realise the highest good, independent of the Categorical Imperative, (but see my comments at 9.6), we should also consider prudence. We have reasons for realising the highest good that are not derived from the moral law but also from components of the highest good. In that respect there is a heterogeneity of reasons to bring about its components. The pursuit of the highest good is not solely and exclusively a matter of duty.⁹³³ Happiness, as discussed above is also a (conditioned) good. It is also Silber's claim that Kant offers the addition of content to the abstract form of the Categorical Imperative, giving direction to moral volition.⁹³⁴ The two legislations of reason are united under one idea in a practical-dogmatic metaphysics. The heterogeneity of the good relates to the idea of the highest good as the unifying end of reason. In summary, the view of the radical critic can be rejected.

⁹³³ Ralf M Bader. *Kant's Theory of the Highest Good*, p.205

⁹³⁴ John R Silber. 'The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics.' *Ethics*, 73, no3 (1963), pp.179-197

9.5 Kant's theology in the highest good

Kant's involvement with the existence and nature of God began in the 1750s, responding to the metaphysics of Leibniz and Wolff rather than morality. Other figures, such as Hamann, Herder and Hume may also have stimulated Kant to explore links between morality, religion and the highest good. Metaphysically, Kant dismissed the rationalists' view of God as a fundamental explanatory principle, the ultimate ground of our existence, and replaced it with God as a *regulative* principle termed "moral faith," in accounts of the spatio-temporal order.

Kant denies in the canon that morality itself acts as an incentive.⁹³⁵ The motivational impotence of reason leads Kant to discuss the importance of happiness.

Our route to happiness is impossible to describe and may change with time. Happiness "could function as the efficient cause of virtue without it having to be the case that moral behaviour is performed only for ultimately prudential motives."⁹³⁶ The "martyr may choose to go to the stake and perhaps find happiness in doing so, but unless he is also a masochist he will not find pleasure in the flames"⁹³⁷. Fine moral ideas may bring forth admiration, but be "empty figments of the brain".⁹³⁸ We need the hope for happiness to motivate and, maybe also, fear of punishment. "The system of morality is therefore inseparably combined with the system of happiness."⁹³⁹ By associating happiness with morality, Kant can expand on the concept of the highest good which is constituted alone

⁹³⁵ CPR A813/B841

⁹³⁶ David Sussman, 'The Highest Good. Who Needs it?' in Joachim Aufderheide, Ralf M Bader (eds.) *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*. (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p.218.

⁹³⁷ Jean Austin . 'Pleasure and Happiness.' *Philosophy* 43, 1968 pp.51-62.

⁹³⁸ CPR A811/B839

⁹³⁹ CPR A809/B837

by happiness “in exact proportion with the morality of rational beings...in an intelligible world”.⁹⁴⁰

In ch6 I referred to Kant’s rejection of reward for good conduct suggesting a lingering idea from the Lutheranism of his early years: justification by faith, not works. Beck comments on the passage at A812/B840 that we need God and the hope of a future world to be moral and then denies that we need the prospect of future happiness to make us moral:

“We look in vain in the first *Critique* for an analysis of the desire to be worthy of happiness, which is a truly moral and not eudaemonistic desire. Without (this)...the view...seems to be an incompatible mixture.”⁹⁴¹

Wood⁹⁴² thinks that Kant leaves the question open as to whether man can follow a life of moral striving after perfection without divine aid and agrees that Kant can accommodate an Augustinian (or even Calvinist) account of man’s depravity in the absence of divine aid. This rests on the belief that we cannot know whether or when God acts in our lives: “for ratiocination it is an unfathomable mystery.”⁹⁴³ We cannot know how grace affects our wills. Claims about divine aid go beyond the bounds of our experience. “Inasmuch as reason can see, no one can stand in for another by virtue of the superabundance of his own good conduct” but God, having “called him into being...to be a member of the kingdom of heaven must also have a means of compensating from the fullness of his own holiness for the human being’s inadequacy.”⁹⁴⁴ Grace imputes righteousness to him: a characteristic protestant (Lutheran) position.

⁹⁴⁰ CPR A814/B842

⁹⁴¹ Lewis White Beck ‘*A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*’, p.214.

⁹⁴² Allen W Wood, ‘*Kant’s Moral Religion*,’ p.246n.

⁹⁴³ Rel 6:143

⁹⁴⁴ Rel 6:143

The suggestion that happiness is the *reward* of virtue opens Kant up to the charge of Pelagianism: that salvation *qua* happiness is earned by merit,⁹⁴⁵ counter to the view that Luther (an Augustinian professor of theology) accepted.⁹⁴⁶ In turn, this reflected the earlier controversy between Pelagius and Augustine, the latter basing his view on Pauline teaching: “For it is by grace you are saved by faith: it is not your own doing. It is God’s gift, not a reward for work done.”⁹⁴⁷ This was a key scriptural passage in Luther’s (protestant) doctrine of salvation by faith and not by works. Kant’s doctrine of radical evil set out in his *Religion* already allies himself with Augustine’s view on original sin. We are ‘fallen’ creatures. Orientation rather than understanding may be central to Augustine’s ethics and perhaps too Kant was influenced by this tradition.⁹⁴⁸ Although Kant’s concept of grace and divine aid may appear to be a turn to Pelagianism, the receipt of good from God is stated as unmerited: “...the rewards God bestows on us proceed not from his justice but from his benevolence.”⁹⁴⁹ We do not earn them. As the happiness that God wills for all of his children is freely given, it comes from grace. The highest good therefore relates to protestant Christianity. Kant’s reinterpretation of Christian doctrines is complicated and his emphases vary in different sections of his *Religion*: sanctifying grace in the first, justifying or forensic grace in the second).⁹⁵⁰ However it is striking that Kant rejects the worldly conceptions of the highest good espoused by Stoicism and Epicureanism. Rather he reaffirms the traditional Christian view of Augustine as the most adequate account of this ideal. “The doctrine of Christianity...gives a concept of the

⁹⁴⁵ Jaqueline Marina, ‘Kant on grace: a reply to his critics’, *Religious Studies* 33 no.4 (1997) 379-400

⁹⁴⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, EF Winter (transl), *Discourse on Free Will* (1525). (London: Continuum, 2005).

⁹⁴⁷ *New Testament. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians* 2: 8-9

⁹⁴⁸ Seiriol Morgan, ‘The inner life of the ‘Dear Self’’, in Nafsika Athanassoulis, Samantha Vice (eds), *The Moral Life. Essays in honour of John Cottingham*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.115.

⁹⁴⁹ Immanuel Kant, ‘Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion’ 28:1085

⁹⁵⁰ Leslie Stevenson, ‘Kant on grace’, in Gordon E Michalson (ed), *Kant’s Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. A critical guide*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), p.122.

highest good (the kingdom of God) that alone satisfies the strictest demands of practical reason.”⁹⁵¹

We live in a world where virtue does not seem to be rewarded: the evil prosper, the good suffer. Instinctively this offends us. Why is life given to those who find it so bitter?⁹⁵² We think there should be a connection between happiness and virtue. Kant reflects this view in asserting the exact proportionality between virtue and happiness. In the third *Critique* he writes:

“Once people begin to reflect on right and wrong...they inevitably had to arrive at this judgement: that in the end it must make a difference whether a person has acted honestly or deceitfully, fairly or violently, even if to the end of his life he has received no good fortune for his virtues...at least none that we could see. It is as if they heard an inner voice that said: This is not how it should be.”⁹⁵³

Answering why this must be, reflects a protest of distributive justice. Happiness should reflect merit. Beiser contrasts this with the lack of consideration of the distribution of happiness in the highest good as a further weakness in the Epicurean and Stoic conceptions.⁹⁵⁴ Kant thinks the unity of the ancients was specious for omitting in the one case (Stoic) happiness in pursuit of virtue, which can't deliver it, and in the other case (Epicurean) happiness which may result from lack of virtue.⁹⁵⁵ He criticizes the Stoics who had rightly chosen the right supreme practical principle as virtue, but omitted happiness and more significantly, "strained the moral capacity of the human being"⁹⁵⁶ by suggesting its attainability in this life.

⁹⁵¹ CPractR 5:127-8

⁹⁵² *Old Testament: The Book of Job* 3:20

⁹⁵³ CPJ 5:548

⁹⁵⁴ Frederick C Beiser, *German Idealism* p.597

⁹⁵⁵ CPractR 5:112

⁹⁵⁶ CPractR 5:127

Beiser claims wide misunderstanding of a further point of Kant's theology. The City of God⁹⁵⁷ (Augustine's major treatise) is not located in some supernatural realm beyond the earth: it is in this world as it is completely transformed by Christ's second coming. The earth will not remain natural but be completely transformed, beyond our imagining.⁹⁵⁸ This view, asserts Beiser,⁹⁵⁹ was one Kant never challenged and many of the alleged changes in his position result from a modern view of God's kingdom and the world of nature as two exclusive realms. Appreciating this insight makes much debate about the ontological status of the highest good redundant: that is, whether it was originally transcendent and other-worldly in the earlier Kant, then becoming phenomenal and this-worldly. Yet even in Augustine's account the two cities are both separate and transcendent. I think it is possible to continue without agreement on Beiser's religious interpretation and will postpone further discussion of Kant's theology.

9.6 The moral law, the highest good & holiness

The pure will's (practical reason's) object may be the highest good, but cannot be its determining ground. "The moral law alone must be viewed as the ground for making the highest good and its realization or promotion the object."⁹⁶⁰ Our autonomy means that the moral law, as included in the concept of the highest good, cannot then be its object. The moral law determines our will. Virtue may equal worthiness to be happy, but it is not happiness itself. A perfect volition of a rational being wanting and worthy of happiness could not refuse it. This emphasises the individual approach to the highest good rather

⁹⁵⁷ Augustine. *The City of God.(De civitate Dei, 413-426)* (London: Penguin Books 1984)

⁹⁵⁸ Augustine writes "This City is said to come down out of heaven... with a clarity so great and so new that no trace of what is old shall remain." *'City of God'* RW Dyson (transl), (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) Book xx, ch17

⁹⁵⁹ Frederick C Beiser, 'Moral Faith and the Highest Good' p.592-4

⁹⁶⁰ CPractR 5:109

than the communal one. Perhaps, suggests one commentator,⁹⁶¹ the communal conception is the proper object of morality, “which must be shown to be believable through the postulates of pure practical reason in order to prevent the commitment to morality becoming undermined.” Yet since an individual emphasis follows shortly after, the point is moot here. “Power, riches, honour, even health and that complete satisfaction with one's condition called happiness, produce boldness and thereby often arrogance as well unless a good will is present.”⁹⁶² Incentives of virtue and self-love in a maxim makes the latter heteronomous.⁹⁶³ Heteronomous maxims may clash with each other and Kant therefore comments: “thus the question, how is the highest good possible? still remains an unsolved problem.”⁹⁶⁴

Kant believes that the moral law requires the highest good because it is a necessary condition of the moral law. If the morally worthy share the same fate as the morally unworthy, the “principle which enjoins moral worthiness cannot be understood to be connected to the moral agent's condition of existence.”⁹⁶⁵ The notion of a moral world cannot be construed as a replacement world for the present one: rather it is an ideal towards which we strive, an object owing its existence to the needs of reason. That ideal will be realised in the City of God of Leibniz and Augustine; an unseen world that is already with us, Kant's noumenal kingdom of ends. Beck⁹⁶⁶, Auxter⁹⁶⁷ and Murphy⁹⁶⁸ assert that the highest good commands no more than the moral law. It finds no place in the *Groundwork*. But it is equally true that Kant believes that it is inseparably bound up

⁹⁶¹ Paul Guyer, ‘*Virtues of Freedom*’. (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p.287.

⁹⁶² G 4:393

⁹⁶³ Rel 6:36

⁹⁶⁴ CPractR 5:112

⁹⁶⁵ RZ Friedman, ‘The Importance and Function of Kant's Highest Good’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22, no3 (2008), pp.325-42.

⁹⁶⁶ Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, p.242.

⁹⁶⁷ Thomas Auxter, ‘The unimportance of Kant's highest good.’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 1979; 17, no.2, pp.121-134

⁹⁶⁸ Jeffrey Murphy, ‘The Highest Good as Content for Kant's Ethical Formalism: Beck vs. Silber’, *Kant-Studien* 56, (1965-66), pp.102-110

with the moral law. Moreover, the third formula of the Categorical Imperative states, “so act as if you were always through your maxims a law-making member in a universal kingdom/realm of ends.”⁹⁶⁹ The realm of ends is identical with the idea of a moral world in the first *Critique* and the latter is the highest good. So the command to seek the highest good is found in the Categorical Imperative and therefore as an expression of the moral law. In that respect, the highest good cannot contain a concept of happiness. So although derived from the moral law, the highest good does contain more than the concept of morality.⁹⁷⁰

Kant resorts to the Hebrew wisdom tradition in writing how "one wide grave will engulf us all"⁹⁷¹ which seems to make morality a delusion; if not, then, as Friedman suggests, "there is a relationship between one's righteousness or moral worthiness and one's fate in the world." Or as Kant expresses it, "it must make a difference."⁹⁷² This sentiment sits squarely with his conclusion in the second *Critique*: for

"the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings....happiness is also required, and that not merely in the partial eyes of a person who makes himself an end but even in the judgement of an impartial reason which regards a person in the world generally as an end in itself."⁹⁷³

In the second *Critique*, the pursuit of holiness is the end of the moral law; and the aim of all rational beings, though not achieved in this world by any, is located in a future life: “endless progress is only possible on the supposition of the same... rational

⁹⁶⁹ HJ Paton, ‘*The Categorical Imperative*’, p.185 (G 4:438)

⁹⁷⁰ Mary-Barbara Zeldin, ‘The summum bonum, the moral law and the existence of God’, *Kant-Studien* 62 (1971), pp.43-54.

⁹⁷¹ CPJ 5:454 (For the Hebrew wisdom literature see, for example, *Ecclesiastes*, *Job* (Old Testament)).

⁹⁷² CPJ 5:548

⁹⁷³ CPractR 5:110

being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul).”⁹⁷⁴ Kant suggests a distinction between a law of holiness and a law of duty:

“The moral law is...for the will of a perfect being a law of holiness, but for the will of a finite rational being a law of duty, of moral necessitation and of the determination of his actions through respect for this law and reverence for his duty.”⁹⁷⁵

Noting *en passant* the emphasis on the individual rational being, if morally perfect we would possess holiness:

“an accord of will with the pure moral law ...an accord never to be disturbed (in which case the law would finally cease to be a command for us, since we could never be tempted to be unfaithful to it). The moral law is, in other words, for the will of a perfect being a law of holiness, but for the will of every finite rational being a law of duty.”⁹⁷⁶

In principle, holiness is not beyond reach in another world. The emphasis on the individual here cannot be dismissed on the grounds that “perhaps this lapse into individualism is just a manner of speaking,”⁹⁷⁷ or “this way of talking is just a matter of habit here.”

The difficulty in making sense of all this lies in our conceptions of what we mean by “future” life or “immortality” when we acknowledge that time itself is an intuition we have to make sense of the phenomenal world. Requiring, by implication, time to improve our virtue and make us holy is beyond our imagining in a postulated future

⁹⁷⁴ CPractR 5:122

⁹⁷⁵ CPractR 5:82

⁹⁷⁶ CPractR 5:82

⁹⁷⁷ Guyer ‘*Virtues of Reason*’, pp289, 292

world that is outside time or, we might want to say, in God's time. Or 'future' may relate to some quality beyond our comprehension, perhaps that we live in now as well as the sensible world, just as we are citizens of the noumenal and phenomenal worlds.

9.7 Proportionality

In contrast to Aristotle, happiness for Kant is subjective, individual, empirically determined, concerned with desire satisfaction, has no relation to 'higher' pleasure, incorporates no moral component (except insofar as contentment depends on the consciousness of acting well), and is not the highest human good.⁹⁷⁸

When Kant first introduces the highest good, the idea of *proportionality* between morality and happiness is also introduced. Happiness offers us a system "insofar as it is distributed precisely in accordance with morality." He goes on to state that this is only possible in "the intelligible world, under a wise author."⁹⁷⁹ And later he says that "happiness in exact proportion with the morality of rational beings...alone constitutes the highest good of ...an intelligible world."⁹⁸⁰ Proportionality is emphasised in the second *Critique* again linking it to the deity: "the greatest happiness is represented as connected in the most exact proportion with the greatest degree of moral perfection"⁹⁸¹; and "happiness in exact conformity with moral worth...on the presupposition of a moral author of the world". Similarly in the *Religion*: "happiness proportioned to obedience to duty - that is to say, the idea of a highest good in the world for whose possibility we

⁹⁷⁸ Rachel Barney 'The inner voice. Kant on Conditionality and God as Cause', in Joachim Aufderheide, Ralph M Bader (eds) *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, (Oxford: OUP, 2015) pp.158-180.

⁹⁷⁹ CPR A811/B839

⁹⁸⁰ CPR A814/B842

⁹⁸¹ CPractR 5:129

must postulate a higher, moral most holy and omnipotent Being which alone can unite the two elements of this highest good."⁹⁸² Only in the third *Critique* is the "combination of universal happiness with the most lawful morality"⁹⁸³ discussed without specifying proportionality and no conclusion can be drawn that proportionality is being excluded; the religious link remains appropriate in this context.

If proportionality can be shown to be unnecessary, the concept of the highest good is weakened, indeed becomes no more than adherence to the moral law. Kant emphasises "most exact proportion" or "distributed precisely" or "in exact conformity": what is implied is more than a general seal of approval for good deeds. Exactitude is an obvious objection to secular interpretations of the highest good: while we do judge intentions (for example, discriminating between manslaughter and murder) nobody would claim exactitude. Exactitude demonstrates justice as fairness. It would not be fair if others gained a greater happiness for a lesser moral worthiness. Attempts at virtue would go largely unrewarded or be excessively recognised. Kant offers no theory of moral desert: "to look upon all punishments and rewards as mere machinery in the hands of a higher power, serving only to put rational being into activity toward their final purpose (happiness) is so patently a mechanism which does away with the freedom of their will that it need not detain us here."⁹⁸⁴ Yet happiness is a legitimate incentive if combined with virtue.

If Kant's argument that immortality is necessary for progress to complete virtue is accepted but his view for the existence of God as being necessary for the proportionate distribution of happiness is modified, the combination of happiness and

⁹⁸² Rel 6:3

⁹⁸³ CPJ 5:543

⁹⁸⁴ CPractR 5:38

virtue can still be part of the highest good. If God is necessary for complete happiness - bliss - *and* that all will receive this in some form of continued existence, this cannot disincentivise the more virtuous or discourage good conduct: because conduct is not virtuous that is incentivised by reward. It is only good according to its motivation by duty. And the divine will, being the divine will, can do as it pleases. We might instance the Matthaean parable of the labourers in the vineyard⁹⁸⁵. In the parable, the employer, out of sheer generosity and compassion for the unemployed, pays as large a wage to those who have worked for one hour as to those who have worked all day. "It is," comments a leading Biblical scholar⁹⁸⁶, "a striking picture of the divine generosity which gives without regard to the measure of strict justice." Generosity is like that: we receive more than we deserve and nobody loses out. It is another expression of grace.⁹⁸⁷ Acts of generosity are supererogatory: which is to say that they are permissible, good to do, with positive value and altruistic intent. It can be viewed as a Kantian duty of beneficence: "to be beneficent (is) to promote...the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return."⁹⁸⁸ (I will not discuss supererogation in Kant's moral philosophy here). The virtue of generosity may be viewed as a mean between meanness and profligacy. Profligacy is a vice: but we recognise it as a vice because it represents waste. In a world where every resource of nature is limited and finite, profligacy represents a shortage for someone else at some time, present or future, equally or more deserving. But divine profligacy would come from an unlimited source. If therefore generosity is deemed profligate, it would come without such an objection. The highest

⁹⁸⁵ *New Testament: Matthew*, 20:1-16

⁹⁸⁶ Charles Harold Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 1935 (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1935), p.92.

⁹⁸⁷ Kant offers a definition of 'grace' in: Mary Gregor (transl) *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), (New York: Abaris Books, 1979) p.75, as "the incomprehensible moral disposition in us...a stimulus to good in us produced by God."

⁹⁸⁸ MM 6:453

good follows from the moral law, but in combining virtue with happiness there is no reason why the degree of happiness should not be full, provided all receive their due.

9.8 A secular interpretation

If the highest good is the interest of practical reason and if it leads us to the concept of a supreme intelligence or a moral ruler of all things, it is a reminder that the highest good is essential to support doctrines of immortality and God's existence. Several passages quoted above suggest this theological link is crucial. Firstly, ensuring proportionate happiness requires God, for only God know whether we are virtuous, because only God knows our wills.⁹⁸⁹ Secondly, for moral perfection a further world,⁹⁹⁰ which offers immortality, is necessary to develop a holy will. This also requires God. So if the highest good is our final end, there must be a God to realise it. A defence of the highest good is also an argument for immortality and God's existence from practical reason.⁹⁹¹

Morality is the highest expression of practical reason.⁹⁹² The remote aim of the three propositions⁹⁹³ he instances in the canon “have in turn their more remote aim, namely, **what is to be done** if the will is free.”⁹⁹⁴ In the third *Critique*, he writes, “God, freedom and immortality of the soul are those problems at the solution of which all of the apparatus of metaphysics aims as its final and sole end.”⁹⁹⁵ And earlier in the same

⁹⁸⁹ CPractR 5:124

⁹⁹⁰ To avoid confusion, I note that “further world”, “unseen world”, “another world” etc may refer to this world transformed as per Augustine described above. I do not think a further excursion into Christian eschatology is appropriate here.

⁹⁹¹ CPractR 5:122

⁹⁹² See also: Immanuel Kant ‘*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*’: “There is a God, hence there is a highest good in the world”, if it is to proceed (as a proposition of faith) is a synthetic proposition *a priori*....Agreement with the mere idea of a moral lawgiver for all human beings is indeed identical with the moral concept of duty in general” Rel 6:6n

⁹⁹³ What may I know? What should I do? What may I hope? See above.

⁹⁹⁴ CPR A800/B828

⁹⁹⁵ CPJ 5:474

Critique: “in the end all the effort of our faculties is directed to what is practical and must be united in it as their goal”⁹⁹⁶ - the highest good.

The usual interpretation outlined above has been challenged by Reath.⁹⁹⁷ He proposes a concept of the highest good through human agency, combining virtue and happiness without proportionality. He considers a secular or political view as the best expression of Kant's view, as well as the best view *simpliciter*.

All views of the highest good "converge in the idea of a morally perfect world, in which events take place according to moral laws, and moral conduct is successful in achieving its ends."⁹⁹⁸ In the Analytic of the second *Critique*, there is a focus on the good as an object of practical reason through freedom: that is, any end to which an action could be directed or willed.⁹⁹⁹ An object of *pure* practical reason would result from the *moral* use of freedom. An effect possible through freedom must be one that we can imagine as the result of human action even if we are physically incapable of doing it. So Kant's definition of the good "should indicate that it should apply to possible human ends,"¹⁰⁰⁰ that is, ends that could be realised by rational creatures under ideal conditions. Since rational beings make the moral law and (mainly) determine happiness, individually or collectively, the highest good is a concept of human agency. A secular highest good is therefore a state of affairs that could be achievable in this world without agency or mechanisms beyond those of nature.

⁹⁹⁶ CPJ 5:206

⁹⁹⁷ Andrews Reath, 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 26, no.4, (1988), pp.593-619.

⁹⁹⁸ Andrews Reath 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' p.595.

⁹⁹⁹ CPractR 5:57

¹⁰⁰⁰ Andrews Reath 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' p.597.

In the first *Critique*, the highest good is referred to as the moral world¹⁰⁰¹: a "world as it would be if it were in conformity with all moral laws", to which Kant adds, "as it can be in accordance with freedom of rational beings and should be in accordance with the necessary laws of morality." The end of the highest good is thus constructed from the moral law, *not* a synthesis between moral ends and natural ends, suggests Reath: in contradiction to Kant for whom the highest good "cannot be cognised analytically... it must be a synthesis of concepts."¹⁰⁰²

Could one imagine social structures arranged to offer happiness proportionate to virtue? Surely not: universal participation can only be envisaged in a theological conception. In a secular interpretation, proportionality of virtue and happiness through human agency in history, would represent a social ideal in which "individuals in the present sought to promote ...the final end of moral conduct."¹⁰⁰³ *Some* notion of the highest good follows simply from the fact that moral conduct is directed at ends: but an *exact* proportionality? There must be a necessary connection between the components whereas in the secular interpretation that connection could only be accidental and contingent.

The moral law combines two kinds of ends into a single scheme by subordinating the natural (happiness) to the moral (virtue). But this hardly refutes the charge that the role of the highest good represents an escape from heterogeneity. Moreover, Reath's claim that we could know what the secular form of the doctrine could be like by referring only to human actions is contradicted by Kant's belief that we couldn't conceive of the highest good as a real possibility without adopting a belief in a moral author of the world. As Guyer points out,¹⁰⁰⁴ "Kant always supposes that we will need to postulate the existence of God as the ground of the conjunction of virtue and happiness...Either a

¹⁰⁰¹ CPR A808/B836

¹⁰⁰² CPractR 5:113

¹⁰⁰³ Andrews Reath 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' p.602.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Paul Guyer, 'Virtues of Freedom', p.285.

heavenly or an earthly conception of the highest good remains religious as long as it involves the postulation of the existence of God.”

Human motivation results from either moral or natural (happiness) factors. Happiness does not require renunciation by reason

“but only that as soon as duty is in question one should usually *take no account* (Kant’s italics) of [claims to happiness]. It can even be a duty to attend to one’s happiness, partly because happiness contains means for the fulfilment of one’s duty and partly because lack of it (e.g. poverty) contains temptations to transgress one’s duty.”¹⁰⁰⁵

That is, happiness may be an indirect way of fulfilling duty or a co-factor with morality, never a direct principle of a duty. It follows that it cannot be automatically objected that happiness as an incentive leads to heteronomy of choice. If conduct is motivated solely by duty, then s/he will develop a truly virtuous disposition. It is not so much a matter of reward and punishment but receiving one’s due from an objective moral standard. Kant gives no explicit arguments for the proportionality being asserted, merely implying moral desert. If there is no justification for proportionality, then the secular version becomes a more attractive interpretation as such a moral world would be a system of self-rewarding morality:

“In the moral world...such a system of happiness proportionately combined with morality can also be thought as necessary since freedom, partly moved and partly restricted by moral laws, would itself be the cause of the general happiness, and rational beings, under the guidance of such principles, would

¹⁰⁰⁵ CPractR 5:93

themselves be the authors of their own enduring welfare and at the same time that of others."¹⁰⁰⁶

That is: the happiness of all would result from the adherence of all to the moral law. A proper functioning social system, supporting and maintaining its members' conduct would ensure the happiness of all. Individuals would not aim at a connection between virtue and happiness; rather, "they would establish social conditions that support moral conduct and the realisation of various moral ends; once these condition existed, the happiness of all would be the natural result."¹⁰⁰⁷ This seems an excessively optimistic empirical prediction: a social goal to be achieved in history. As Bader points out, neither the virtue nor the happiness of other people is an object of any finite creature's practical reason. It is not for us to bring about the highest good in other people and hence not to bring about the highest good in the world, except, of course, insofar as the pursuit of our own highest good contributes to that of the world.

"Bringing about the highest good of the world... pertains to God insofar as it is up to God to provide the world with such a causal structure that proportionate happiness results from virtue, given that God is benevolent and as such concerned with creating the best possible world."¹⁰⁰⁸

Yet only, Reath thinks, in a theological system could *all* (Reath's italics) enjoy the highest good, which "might seem unfair." But without proportionality, a theological interpretation would ignore a just divinity and proportionality is the weakness in the secular version. Although Reath considers Kant's theological version to be adapted from Leibniz's notion of the City of God¹⁰⁰⁹, he suggests that Kant's Ethical

¹⁰⁰⁶ CPR A809/B837

¹⁰⁰⁷ Andrews Reath, 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' p.615.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ralf Bader, *Kant's theory of the highest good*. In, *The Highest Good: Aristotle and Kant*, J Auferheide, RM Bader (eds), Oxford: OUP (2015) pp 183-224

¹⁰⁰⁹ Leibniz GW (1714). *Philosophical Writings*. London: Dent & Sons Ltd. 1934, p29. Leibniz writes in *Principles of Nature and of Grace*: "all minds....are members of the City of God, that is to say of the most

Commonwealth¹⁰¹⁰ in his *Religion* is a secular conception because it is a human community with a particular institutional structure. So might some consider the many attempts at realising a kingdom of God on earth; and view them squarely as religiously inspired: say, for example, the "kingdom of Zion" of Münster, whose fanatic lunacies were suppressed in 1535?¹⁰¹¹ Is a social ideal possible, with conduct to achieve certain moral ends, by restructuring the existing social environment?¹⁰¹²

The religious interpretation claims to answer the question of how we can imagine the concept of the highest good in this world at all: if we can't imagine it *here*, then we must locate it *there* i.e. in another world.¹⁰¹³

Perfection of goodness requires an endless progress. For this, immortality of the soul is required, a continued existence of the personality of the same rational being. This postulate of pure practical reason is "a theoretical proposition...attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid practical law."¹⁰¹⁴ Only God can offer immortality. An argument for immortality implies a belief in the existence of God¹⁰¹⁵ and not the other way round: that is, an argument for immortality to support the concept of the highest good leads to God, not that God leads to immortality.

The secular interpretation claims a clearer view because it can be describable entirely in naturalistic terms - "as a state of affairs to be achieved in *this* world, through *human* activity."¹⁰¹⁶ But it is not clear what advantage this would bring, and it could not

perfect state...where there is....no good action without proportionate reward, and finally as much virtue and happiness as is possible..."

¹⁰¹⁰ Rel 6:95

¹⁰¹¹ Geoffrey Rudolph Elton. 'Reformation Europe 1517-1559' (London: Collins, 1963), pp.99-101.

¹⁰¹² Andrews Reath 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' p.619.

¹⁰¹³ CPractR 5:125

¹⁰¹⁴ CPractR 5:122

¹⁰¹⁵ The association of immortality is not necessarily associated with God, although assumed here. JME McTaggart, for example, denied God's existence while asserting human immortality. See: *Human Immortality and Pre-existence*. London: Edward Arnold 1916. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/humanimmortality00mctauoft> (accessed March 1, 2018).

¹⁰¹⁶ Andrews Reath 'Two conceptions of the highest good in Kant,' p.601

accommodate Kant's concept of grace. If ultimate happiness is to be located in another world, what concerns us is the conviction or not that this is the case: there is no additional benefit in knowing the architecture or lifestyle of heaven.

The object of practical reason is that we should become fully virtuous, but plainly this is not possible on a secular basis. "(Man) is evil by nature...we may presuppose evil to be subjectively necessary to every man, even the best."¹⁰¹⁷ The connection between happiness and virtue is synthetic¹⁰¹⁸ but happiness could result from virtue if there is another world.¹⁰¹⁹ Expressed simply, God is needed for proportionality, immortality (which only God can give) for complete virtue. God however cannot make us virtuous, only realise the restricted complete good by ensuring proportionality. The realisation of the supreme good (as opposed to the highest or complete good) depends on us and how we use our freedom.

As an *a priori* rational concept, the relationship between the two components of the highest good must be a necessary connection. An accidental or contingent relationship as occurring in Reath's account is therefore inadequate. Happiness has to result from virtue, not merely correspond to it. Realising the components of the highest good is not the same as realising the highest good.¹⁰²⁰

Reath suggests that "accepting a theological conception seems to remove the need to address the problem of non-ideal circumstances": what's wrong in this world will be put right in another, so why bother? On this reading, belief in God is not merely useless, it makes life in this world worse than it need be, ignoring the desirability of assisting

¹⁰¹⁷ Rel 6:32

¹⁰¹⁸ CPractR 5:113

¹⁰¹⁹ CPractR 5:114-5

¹⁰²⁰ Ralf Bader, *Kant's theory of the highest good*. In, *The Highest Good: Aristotle and Kant*, J Auferheide, RM Bader (eds), Oxford: OUP (2015) pp 183-224, p189

moral ends through social institutions. But no evidence is offered that people do actually behave in that way: motivation by the moral law would remain the same.

9.9 Realms and hopes

As the representation of the unconditional and ultimate end of everything, Kant uses a variety of terms.¹⁰²¹ These can be listed: kingdom or realm¹⁰²² of ends, intelligible or moral world, ethical community, ethical commonwealth, ethico-civil society. The first of these appears in the *Groundwork* as a formulation of the Categorical Imperative.¹⁰²³ Kant describes this kingdom or realm as a “systematic union of rational beings through common laws.” Since laws determine ends, by abstracting personal differences of rational beings and their private ends, we can arrive at a whole of all ends in systematic connection i.e. a realm of ends. In such a realm, all will treat others as ends in themselves and all rational beings will be members (as a sovereign in being a lawgiver and as a subject under those laws). That exposition resembles the highest good: interpreted as a *community* of moral agents conforming to the purest morality and with (resulting) universal happiness, defined as “universal happiness combined with and in conformity with the purest morality throughout the world”.¹⁰²⁴ Words like ‘realm’, ‘community’, ‘commonwealth’, ‘world’ and ‘society’ all imply a collective whereas the highest good could relate to an individual

¹⁰²¹ Paul Guyer, *Virtues of Freedom*, p.275.

¹⁰²² The translation of *Reich* as ‘kingdom’ is preferred by Paton who considered ‘realm’ as “pompous and archaic” as well as being “taken colourlessly.” (*The Categorical Imperative*, p.187). Guyer (& I) prefers ‘realm’ as there is no implication of lawgiver within the realm “who is not also subject of those laws i.e. a king.” (Paul Guyer, *Virtues of Freedom*, p.276)

¹⁰²³ G 4:433

¹⁰²⁴ TP 8:279

or a group. In a group, an implied mutually supportive system is present where each supports all. As one commentator says, “rational beings constitute a realm to the extent that their ends form a system....furthering...the ends...in a single teleological system.”¹⁰²⁵ Insofar as an individual’s duty is to promote the happiness¹⁰²⁶ of others where compatible with morality (and his/her own virtue), that individual has an obligation to a collective of other human beings. Even if the highest good is best interpreted as for an individual, there remains a collective benefit in the realm of ends or the moral world. Participating in the realm of ends means treating everyone as an end in themselves and never merely as a means – as in the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative. We would achieve the realm of ends if we all conformed to the various formulations of the Categorical Imperative: it would be our goal or object or ideal in choosing our practical maxims.

Practical reason can command beliefs only if they are necessary for action, based on moral principles.¹⁰²⁷ To have primacy, practical reason must be able to demand certain beliefs that have no warrant in theoretical reason: it must be able to go beyond it. The demands of the highest good are clearly beyond those of theoretical reason and its claims of evidence. Theoretical reason cannot reject any belief that is beyond evidence, for or against. Justification of the highest good therefore implies practical reason’s primacy.

Our desire for happiness represents our hope; and there is an incentive in hope that differs from the assurance of the guaranteed rewards. This is what the highest good offers: the hope of realisation in our belief, the confidence - as the only known rational creatures in the universe - that our lives can be endowed by reason with purpose and meaning.

¹⁰²⁵ Allen W Wood, ‘*Kant’s Ethical Thought*’ p.166.

¹⁰²⁶ Kant offers several compatible definitions of happiness: see ch9.4

¹⁰²⁷ Frederick C Beiser, ‘Moral Faith and the Highest Good’, in Paul Guyer (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*. (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp.588-529.

“Human reason defines for man a final end, a single highest purpose for his existence, an ideal inseparably related to his finite rationality itself.”¹⁰²⁸ In that highest purpose, Kant’s philosophy echoes hope and the “unthinkability of despair”.¹⁰²⁹

¹⁰²⁸ Allen Wood. *Kant’s Moral Religion* p.250

¹⁰²⁹ Simon Jarvis. *Adorno: a Critical Introduction* New York: Routledge (1998), p214