

FREEDOM AND THE WORLD: THE UNRESOLVED DILEMMA
OF KANT'S ETHIC

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Abstract:

The paper argues that the issue of the Third Antinomy of Reason (the conflict between the ideas of natural and free causality) remained a central concern throughout all of Kant's ethical writings subsequent to the first Critique. In the Grundlegung, the second and third Critiques and, finally, in Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft we find Kant continually refining and modifying the concept of a transcendental freedom but never arriving at a satisfactory resolution. I argue that any such resolution (such as that attempted by Professor Silber through an analysis of Kant's explication of Wille and Willkur) would not only imply the overturning of Kant's ethical philosophy but the entire Kantian system insofar as it stands astride the twin pillars of phenomenal and noumenal reality.

Freedom and the World: The Unresolved Dilemma of Kant's Ethic

Part One: "The Ethical Implications of Kant's First Critique"

The Case Against Empiricism

To read Kant's mature (post-critical) ethics is to journey through a philosophical purgatory. His intention is to construct a pure moral philosophy and to this end he seeks nothing less than to purify ethics of "that lax and even mean habit of thought which seeks for its principles amongs empirical motives and laws" which "substitutes for morality a bastard patched up from limbs of various derivation, which looks like anything one chooses to see in it, only not like virtue to one who has once beheld in her true form."¹ These are strong sentiments for the supposedly cool and dispassionate Sage of Königsberg. In order to understand the disdain with which he viewed the prospect of those ethics which are grounded in our experience of the phenomenal world it is necessary to know something of the role which he assigned to empirical motives and laws in his own philosophy.

In both the Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals and the Critique of Practical Reason Kant repeatedly expresses his objection to any moral principles which are derived from empirical motives. What is perhaps one of his most succinct arguments occurs within the context of the first and second Theorems of the Critique. Here Kant contends that any action which is primarily concerned with the realization of some object or state in the sensible world is impelled by the anticipated pleasure which the action will produce. But, strictly speaking, we can never know in advance whether the action will result in pleasure or pain, or whether, in the long run, the acting subject will be left in much the same state that he was in to begin with. Only after the act has been accomplished can we say with any degree of certainty that it added to, or detracted from, the pleasure of the actor. Thus, Kant argues, any principles which could be derived from such considerations will be a posteriori and cannot possibly serve as an absolute and invariable guide to action, i.e., as practical laws. What is more, pleasure and pain are wholly subjective states which vary in degree, and often in kind, from one individual to the next. Any principle which is grounded in what contributes to the pleasure of an individual is relative to the sensibility of that individual and can never be a universal and objective law which might govern the behavior of all men. Hence, Kant's objection to empirical motives reflects his contention that any knowledge which these might provide will be either contingent or relative, the exact antithesis of that

¹Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics. (Tr. by T. K. Abbott) London, 1909, p. 44.

universal and necessary (a priori) knowledge for which a pure morality must strive.

In my judgment these arguments, as Kant presents them in the second Critique, are not especially persuasive. Only if we accept the Theorem from which they are derived, namely, that "all practical principles which presuppose an object (Materie) of the faculty of desire as the ground of determination of the will are empirical, and can furnish no practical laws," are we likely to agree with Kant. But, within the context of the second Critique there seems to be no compelling reason to accept the Theorem. However, as soon as we observe that the points he is making are consistent and logical applications of the analysis of experience which he developed in the first Critique his case is considerably strengthened.

It is a fundamental tenet of the Critique of Pure Reason that the immediately given material of sensation is a necessary but insufficient element for knowledge. True, sense data are intuited within the spatio-temporal manifold but this intuition yields only a minimal degree of order--without the conceptual activity of the Understanding (Verstand) all we would have would be a blind sensibility.² Strictly speaking, we would not even have a coherent experience if we were limited to what is present in sensibility. "Experience," Kant writes, "contains two very dissimilar elements, namely, the matter of knowledge (obtained) from the senses, and a certain form for the ordering of this matter (obtained) from the inner source of pure intuition and thought which, on the occasion of the sense-impressions, are first brought into action and yield concepts." (A 86) Kant's point here is almost deceptively simple. Experience, as we "know" it, is a composite of objects and relationships between them which, if not given in sensible intuition, must be credited to the activity of an Understanding which imposes a formal structure upon the raw material of sensation. The existence of an object (i.e., its extended presence in space), indeed the very possibility of experience itself demands that the material of sensation conform to concepts (e.g., extension) and conditions which are not given in mere sensibility but are rather the a priori contributions of thought (A93, B126).

The effect of this analysis upon the subject of our discussion is that the conditional character of empirical motives becomes a consequence of the structure of experience. For, insofar as such motives are inextricably bound up with sensation they must share in the contingency of all things sensible and cannot, by definition, furnish a priori knowledge. This is, as I read Kant, the reasoning behind his denial of any decisive ethical role to empirical motives. Once this is established, however, we must acknowledge that it accounts for only half of Kant's objection against

²Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. (Tr. by Norman Kemp Smith) London, 1963. Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, all reference will be to this translation but will be cited in my text by the pagination of Kant's first (A) and second (B) editions.

empirically founded ethics. He is, as we have seen, equally concerned to deny any decisive role to empirical laws. Here again, I think that his rationale can be clarified by consulting his analysis of experience.

We may begin by noting that the contingency which prevails between the formal and material elements of experience is not all one way. Matter stands in need of structure, yes, but it is also the case that without the material which is present in sensible intuition the formal elements would have no substantial reality. While, in Kant's phrase, "intuitions without concepts are blind, thoughts without content are empty. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts" (A51). This formulation is a bit misleading insofar as it implies that somehow the concept encounters an object which is already present in intuition. In fact, as I have already pointed out, all that is given in intuition is raw sensuous material. The situation is analogous to that of the weaver standing before a pile of flax. Just as the cloth with which he will eventually work must first be formed in the activity of his spinning so too the objects over which the Understanding will eventually exercise judgment must be constituted in initial acts of conceptualization. For example, it is the concept of body which "necessitates the representation of extension, and therefore, representations of impenetrability, shape, etc." (A106)--minimal conditions which must be met before we can even begin to speak meaningfully of objects, conditions which are not given in intuition. But, more germane to our problem is the function of concepts in determining relations between objects once the latter have been constituted. For it is here where the concepts serve as laws of experience. In order to illustrate Kant's meaning, and, in addition, introduce the empirical law which has the greatest significance for his ethic, I want to quote at length from the first Critique.

...the objective relation of appearances that follow upon one another is not to be determined through mere perception. In order that this relation be known as determined, the relation between the two states must be so thought that it is thereby determined as necessary which of them must be placed before, and which of them after, and that they cannot be placed in the reverse relation. But the concept which carries with it a necessity of synthetic unity can only be a pure concept that lies in the understanding, not in perception, and in this case it is the concept of the relation of cause and effect, the former of which determines the latter in time, as its consequence.... Experience itself--in other words, empirical knowledge of appearances--is thus possible only insofar as we subject the succession of appearances, and therefore all alteration, to the law of causality; and, as likewise follows, the appearances, as objects of experience (my emphasis), are themselves possible only in conformity with the law (B234).

Kant's meaning here is fairly obvious and requires little clarification. He is simply saying that, left to their own devices, our simple sense perceptions can never tell us, in the appearance of two distinct events, which is cause and which effect. Therefore, the unity of the

two events in one causal relationship must be attributed to the fact that the Understanding has imposed this relationship upon the perceptions. What is less obvious, but in the end more important, are the consequences Kant draws from this argument. To identify experience with empirical knowledge and then assert that it is contingent upon the activity of the Understanding is to claim that Nature itself--"the connection of appearances--according to necessary rules, that is, according to laws"--is contingent upon the Understanding (A216, B263). This decisive turn is, of course, what is meant by Kant's Copernican Revolution in which "objects must be viewed as conforming to human thought, not human thought to the independently real."³ While much has been written on the scientific implications of this development--noting, for example, that it is "inspired by the avowed purpose of neutralizing the naturalistic implications of the Copernican astronomy"⁴--we shall see that its implications are no less important for ethics. But first we must ask why, if all objectivity and, ultimately, nature itself, is constituted by the activity of thought upon sensibility; why cannot those laws which serve our theoretical knowledge also suffice for practical knowledge?

The answer is an elaboration of our earlier observation that the contingency which prevails between the form and the matter of experience is mutual. In the Kantian schema, thought, in its theoretical or empirical employment, is limited by the conditions of experience. Thus, if the concept of causality is to have any substantial application something must first be given to the Understanding through sensibility, "If the reader will go back to the proof of the principle of causality...he will observe that we are able to prove it only of objects of possible experience, and even so, not from pure concepts, but only as a principle of the possibility of experience, and therefore of the knowledge of an object given in empirical intuition" (B289).⁵ The end result of this state of

³Norman Kemp Smith, A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (New York, 1962), p. 18

⁴Ibid., p. 23.

⁵I realize that this statement seems to contradict my contention that, strictly speaking, objects are the result of an act of conceptualization, and are not given in intuition. In support of my interpretation I would cite Kemp Smith's observation that Kant often uses the term Objekt in its "widest and most indefinite meaning," and that in the context of empirical intuition it may be taken to signify the content of intuition. (Ibid., p. 79) Such is the meaning which I believe best suits its use here. Smith also points out that when Kant responded to Beck's objection that "only through subsumption under the categories can a representation become objective" he (Kant) sought to clear up the difficulty by saying that what is given in empirical intuition is a content which is "due to some object". (my emphasis) (Ibid., p. 81)

Here Kant was clearly referring to the thing-in-itself which is the cause of the content of intuition but never present as it is in itself, that is, as object.

affairs is a closed system; the Understanding can never transcend the limits of experience and the material of that experience must conform to the rules of the Understanding. Within the realm of the empirical each constituent is governed by absolute and inviolable laws; there is no state, event, or object which is not strictly determined by its antecedent. To admit a single exception would cast nature, and science, as the comprehension of nature, into perpetual doubt. But where there is absolute and universal determination there is no possibility of rationally proclaiming that any condition or event is or ought to be preferred over any other. Whoever would do so is addressing himself to an imaginary world of his own making. The empirical world is simply there in all its unyielding facticity and, as a member of that world, what I am and what I do is nothing more than the conclusion to a train of natural circumstances. And, what are the consequences of such a schema for morality? Kant does not hesitate to draw the inevitable conclusion; "...since the thorough-going connection of all appearances, in a context of nature, is an inexorable law, the inevitable consequence of obstinately insisting upon the reality of appearances is to destroy all freedom" (A537, B565).

In light of this last claim my earlier characterization of Kant's ethics as a "purgatory" should not seem too extreme. Once we accept his analysis of the empirical world, morality can only be affirmed, and freedom certified, through the denial of any absolute reality to the realm of empirical nature and sensible experience. In most contexts the mere suggestion that we might deny this reality would seem preposterous. But here we see the significance of Kant's Copernican Revolution for his ethics--Kant can deny any ultimate reality to the empirical-natural world because he has never affirmed that reality in the first place!

What we have meant to say is that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and that if the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know only our mode of perceiving them--a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared by every being, though, certainly, by every human being (A42).

The Transcendental Idea of Freedom

The distinction which Kant is drawing here between the object as it appears to us and the object in itself is a reference to the dualism he maintains between a phenomenal and a noumenal realm of being. So far we have considered only the former and found it characterized by an all pervasive necessity: the material of sensation must conform to the formal elements of experience while these elements must confine their application

to what is given in sensibility. But, just as reality is not exhausted in experience, thought is not exhausted in the activity, categories, and concepts of the Understanding. For every appearance thought (in its rational capacity, i.e., as Vernunft) wants to posit the thing-in-itself as that which appears; for every series of conditions Reason demands, "by necessity and by right," the unconditioned which is required to complete the series of conditions (Bxx & Bxxvi). Thus Kant describes Reason in his 3rd Antinomy as juxtaposing, to the unrelieved causality which marks the phenomenal realm, the idea of a spontaneous causality--the idea of a transcendental freedom.

It is important to avoid any impression that Kant's move from the phenomenal to the noumenal realm is merely a device which he invokes to provide some space for freedom in a system which is dominated by necessity. On the contrary, as a transcendental idea or concept of Reason, freedom is among those concepts which "alone make possible the totality of conditions..." (B379). Perhaps we can see more clearly that what is at stake here is the very meaning of the experienced world if we consider Kant's intention in the light of Nietzsche's concept of the Eternal Recurrence. In The Will To Power Nietzsche writes, "let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness."⁶ Like Kant, Nietzsche recognized that thought cannot grasp or comprehend the prospect of an infinite becoming, that such a world would be purposeless and without sense. But, where Nietzsche would have us abandon the comforting hypotheses of Reason--would plunge us into the stream of this endless process to suffer existence and the world--Kant remains with the demands of Reason and is driven to think of a peace beyond becoming in the purely intelligible realm of the absolute and transcendental. Unless we have recourse to the concept of a causality through freedom and its corollary, the notion of a first cause, nature remains incomplete: we can give an explanation of particular events and appearances but never can arrive at the prospect of nature as a totality, that is, of a world within which these events and appearances occur. Hence, the transcendental idea of freedom is, for Kant, not some arbitrary fiction but rather, a necessary assumption of Reason (A448, B476-A451, B478). However, in a less dramatic sense, Kant's conclusion is as disconcerting as Nietzsche's. For once we introduce into Kant's analysis of nature a single exception to the law of natural causality chaos threatens and we are, as it were, thrown back into that Humean Universe in which there is no necessary ground for supposing that sunrise might follow sunset.

At this point it becomes crucial for Kant to maintain a rigid distinction between phenomenal and noumenal being. The contradictions he encounters in attempting to sustain the opposing notions of a free and a natural causality on the same ontological dimension are simply too immense. But, by maintaining a dualism between an intelligible realm which numbers among its relationships a causality through freedom and an experiential realm which is governed by natural causality the conflict is avoided.

⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will To Power. (Tr. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale) edited, with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 35.

When we are dealing with what happens there are only two kinds of causality conceivable by us; the causality is either according to nature or arises from freedom. The former is the connection in the sensible world of one state with a preceding state on which it follows according to a rule.... By freedom, on the other hand...I understand the power of beginning a state spontaneously. ... Freedom, in this sense, is a pure transcendental idea, which, in the first place, contains nothing borrowed from experience, and which, secondly, refers to an object that cannot be determined or given in any experience (A532, B560-A533, B561).

The import of this statement becomes clear when we recall Kant's intention to construct a pure moral philosophy. For with this definition we have his first articulation of that pure concept--a concept, that is, which is neither grounded in, nor related to, the conditions, motives, and laws of the empirical world--which will serve as the fulcrum upon which his formal ethic will turn. "It should especially be noted that the practical concept of freedom is based upon this transcendental idea ..." But if the transcendental idea of freedom is the ground of practical freedom it is also "the real source of the difficulty by which the question of freedom has always been beset" (A534, B562). Kant has been able to demonstrate the possibility of freedom only by sustaining a radical distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. The difficulty to which he now refers is that once we assign freedom a place beyond the realm of experience what relevance can this freedom have for our activities within that realm? Does the discovery of freedom as a necessary and legitimate assumption of Reason bring us any closer to a situation in which we can say that man, as a member of the empirical world--and thereby subject to the laws of natural determination--is morally free and responsible? These are the questions which Kant struggles to resolve throughout his ethical writings but before turning to those writings we must note that there is at least an intimation of a solution in the first Critique.

Man as Phenomenal and Noumenal Being

In citing the conditions which would have to be met in order to bridge the gap between transcendental and natural causality Kant observes that they would involve finding some subject in the sensible world which has both an empirical and an intelligible character. The former would indicate that "its actions, as appearances, stand in thoroughgoing connection with other appearances in accordance with unvarying laws of nature," the latter, "that it is the cause of these same actions as appearances, but does not itself stand under any conditions of sensibility" (A539, B567). In effect then, such a subject would serve as the point of intersection between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. It seems almost superfluous to add that Kant does not have to look very far....

Man is one of the appearances of the sensible world, and in so far one of the natural things (Naturursachen) the causality of which must stand under empirical laws.... Man, however, who knows all the rest of nature solely through the senses, knows himself also through pure apperception; and this, indeed, in acts and inner determinations

which he cannot regard as impressions of the senses.... (A546, B574)

(Since it will soon become important for my exposition I wish to note here that one act of inner determination which Kant has in mind is signaled by the "ought" (das Sollen) which

expresses a possible action the ground of which cannot be anything but a mere concept; whereas in the case of a merely natural action the ground must always be an appearance.... No matter how many natural grounds or how many sensuous impulses may impel me to will, they can never give rise to the ought, but only to a willing which, while being very far from necessary, is always conditioned; and the ought pronounced by Reason confronts such willing with a limit and an end, yes, forbids or authorizes it (A548, B576).)

What Kant has done here is to make that dichotomy, which was foreshadowed in the distinction between the formal and material elements of experience and subsequently crystallized in the dualism between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, constitutive of human nature itself. The resultant picture is in keeping with that which has dotted the pages of Occidental philosophy since Plato first assigned man an intermediate position between the realms of Being and becoming, namely, man as a being torn between the desires of the flesh and the dictates of the mind. To succumb to the former is to remain a dumb brute, in Kant's formulation a will which is determined only through pathological or sensuous motives is purely animal (arbitrium brutum) (A802, B830). But through the Word (in Kant's case the "ought" expressed by Reason) the strictures of nature can be reconciled and man's uniqueness as a rational and free being realized.⁷

Read as an attempt to reconcile the break between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, by focusing upon man as that subject whose actions can alternately be viewed as the result of a free or a natural causality, Kant's solution to the 3rd Antinomy is, in my judgment, incompatible with the main teachings of the first Critique. Specifically, there is no ground for the implication (on the previous page) that man's knowledge of himself through pure apperception and in inner states and determinations constitutes knowledge of the noumenal realm or the transcendental idea of freedom. While it is true that the first Critique establishes our ability to know ourselves without reference to objects in space, and thereby validates the legitimacy of a pure self-consciousness, this knowledge is not entirely free of the conditions of sensibility. On the contrary, such knowledge is still subject to the condition of time, and "while time is not an empirical concept that has been derived from any experience," (B46) it is most definitely a condition of sensibility (B54).

⁷It is interesting that the image of man which emerges here reflects the attitude of bourgeois society towards the lawbreaker. For example, while we recognize a series of causal events behind his act (e.g., an environment of social deprivation), we also hold him responsible and in bringing him to trial we proclaim our conviction that he ought to have known better. Kant too made reference to this ambiguity although he offered it as illustration, not proof, of his argument (A554, B582- A555, B583).

Thus, the knowledge of the self is still a contingent knowledge rather than knowledge of a transcendental idea which, by definition, must stand beyond the conditioning of time as well as that of space.

(At least one student of Kant carries this criticism one step further to declare that "the experience of moral obligation--which Kant called the one fact of pure Reason--occurs in time, in inner sense, and therefore involves sensible intuition."⁸ Admittedly there is a problem when one tries to speak of an experience which stands beyond time. However, I disagree with Silber's suggestion that we can help Kant out of his dilemma by broadening "the conception of the phenomenal world to include all aspects of human experience--the moral, aesthetic, and organic, no less than the theoretical..." (Ibid., p. cii) Such an approach would, in my opinion, undermine most of the accomplishments of the Critique of Pure Reason, particularly the limits which that work is concerned to impose upon scientific knowledge. I will argue, subsequently, that rather than expound Kant's conception of sensible experience to embrace the moral, we should recognize that the latter signifies a qualitatively different mode of experience.)

In one sense it would be misleading to belabor this point since Kant himself goes on to deny that his solution to the 3rd Antinomy contains a demonstration of freedom.

It has not even been our intention to prove the possibility of freedom. For in this also we should not have succeeded, since we cannot from mere concepts a priori know the possibility of any real ground and its causality.... What we have been able to show, and what we have alone been concerned to show, is that this antinomy rests on a sheer illusion, and that causality through freedom is at least not incompatible with nature (A558, B586).

With this disclaimer Kant returns to his former position in which the contrary notions of a free and natural causality could both be sustained only by maintaining a rigid dualism between the phenomenal and the noumenal realms. And yet, I find it difficult to believe that Kant never intended to at least suggest a solution to the problem of freedom. His discussion of man's phenomenal-noumenal nature and the significance he attached to the fact that man can confront the dictates of his senses with limits which are wholly rational in origin would have to be read as a digression if we accept his contention that all he intended to show was the compatibility of spontaneous and natural causality. But that discussion is too finely drawn and the position it occupies in his argument is too central to be read as a diversion. Moreover, the theme of the ought and the bifurcated image of man are not momentary concerns with Kant. Rather, their appearance in the first Critique prefigures the course which his later resolution of the problem of freedom will follow. Hence, it seems to me that in his solution to the 3rd Antinomy Kant began to

⁸John Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion" in Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone (New York, 1960), p. cii.

reach for a demonstration of freedom only to realize that he was stretching beyond the limits which the first Critique imposes upon knowledge of the transcendental. In moving beyond experience and into the noumenal realm Kant was transcending the conditions which would allow him to demonstrate the reality of whatever concepts he encountered in that realm. For it is a fundamental tenet of the Critique of Pure Reason that such demonstrations can only occur in experience, understood as the empirical knowledge of appearances.

Summary

With this last observation we have pretty well exhausted the most obvious implications which Kant's first critical work holds for his ethic. We have seen that within the context of his dualism morality is only possible if man is in some sense free of that all pervasive determination which characterizes the empirical or phenomenal realm. Secondly, we have seen that this liberation will be a function of pure thought, namely, Reason's ability and need to articulate the concept of a causality which stands beyond all natural determination--the concept of a transcendental freedom. And finally, we have seen that so long as experience is equated with the knowledge of objects in space and time, that is, with empirical knowledge of appearances, freedom remains inaccessible. Only through a radical shift in perspective will Kant be able to speak concretely of freedom and thereby establish that absolute and pure foundation which his ethic demands. This shift is signaled in Kant's move from the investigation of thought in its theoretical employment (The Critique of Pure Reason) to the examination of thought in its practical employment (The Critique of Practical Reason).

Part Two: The Formal Ethic

A Note on Method

Despite the difference in theme between Kant's first two Critiques they share one important feature: in both cases he adheres rigidly to the transcendental method of deduction. The following quotation from Norman Kemp Smith serves as a particularly clear depiction of the method as well as an indication of its use in the Critique of Practical Reason.

The moral law, though a form of pure Reason exercises in the process of its transcendental proof, a function which exactly corresponds to that which is discharged by possible experience in the first Critique. Our consciousness of the moral law is, like sense-experience, a given fact. It is de facto and cannot be deduced from anything more ultimate than itself. But as given, it enables us to deduce its transcendental conditions. This does not mean that our immediate consciousness of it as given guarantees its validity. The nature of its validity is established only in the process whereby it reveals its necessary

implications.⁹

Just as the bulk of Part One was taken up with a disclosure of the implications of Kant's analysis of sense-experience Part Two will be concerned with the implications of the moral law. But, whereas the ethical significance of sense-experience was largely negative we shall see that the articulation of the moral law enables Kant to affirm the existence of a whole new realm of experience.

The Moral Law and its Ground in Freedom

The moral law or categorical imperative--"act always so that the maxim of thy will can at the same time be considered as a principle of universal legislation"--signifies, for Kant, the ability of Reason to transform a subjective principle of the will (a principle which is relative to the desires or intentions of some particular individual) into an objective law which would be binding for the will of any rational being. There is no way to exaggerate the importance of this movement for Kant. For when he states that the formulation of the moral law "puts the will into a realm totally different from the empirical,"¹⁰ he is, in effect, claiming to have established that foothold among the transcendental ideas which thought, in its theoretical employment, was unable to secure. The moral law is nothing more nor less than a transcendental fact (a "rational" proposition) and by making it the point of departure for the second Critique Kant serves clear notice that Reason is at last maneuvering on its home territory and playing the game according to its own rules.

The first condition which our consciousness of the moral law implies is our ability to conceive of a will which is independent of all material conditioning or, to use the language of the first Critique, free of natural causality. "It is therefore the moral law, of which we become directly conscious...that first presents itself to us, and leads directly to the concept of freedom, since Reason presents it as a principle of determination which can be outweighed by no sensible conditions, yes, which is wholly independent of them."¹¹ It might seem that this is the same negative formulation of freedom which we discussed in the previous section. But, in fact, the presence of the moral law makes it possible for Kant to speak concretely of a causality which has no regard for the conditions imposed upon our actions by natural circumstances. There is no need to complicate his intention. The point is that in becoming conscious of the moral law we become aware that regardless of any empirical motives which may compel us to act in a certain manner we can always pause and test the maxim of that action by universalizing it in accordance with the formula of this law. And against this universal law we can

⁹Norman Kemp Smith, op. cit., pp. 572-573.

¹⁰Kant, Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft (Berlin, 1963), pp. 39-40. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

¹¹Ibid., p. 34.

judge the morality of our proposed act, that is, determine whether or not we ought to carry it through in practice. The crucial feature of this development is that through the practical exercise of our Reason--"practical" in the sense that Reason is here informing and guiding practice--we have determined ourselves to act or not to act, in other words, we have exercised causality in exemption from the conditioning of the empirical world. Here then is the idea of freedom, not simply as a speculative and ultimately inscrutable hypothesis, but as the a priori ground of the moral law.

With this very brief paraphrase I have deliberately cast Kant's arguments in the most favorable light possible. As I have stated it, his case has a distinct ring of common sense for we are, in at least many instances, able to universalize the maxims of our projected behavior and this possibility bears the unmistakable mark of freedom, as he has defined it. But this does not mean that his demonstration of freedom is beyond question. As he was quick to acknowledge, it appears as though he is positing the moral law to verify the reality of freedom and then using this freedom to establish the legitimacy of the moral law. His response to any such criticism was that the respective functions of the two terms are wholly different. Our ability to conceive of the moral law leads us to consider the possibility of freedom (the moral law is the ratio cognoscendi of freedom) while the reality of freedom which is thereby disclosed to us serves to sustain (as a ratio essendi), the moral law.¹² The distinction which Kant is making is in accord with the interpretation of Kemp Smith which I have already cited. Kant begins with the moral law as an object or datum of consciousness but he cannot explain and verify its validity for us until he has disclosed the condition which makes it possible, namely, freedom.

Structurally, then, Kant's demonstration of freedom is a thoroughly consistent application of the transcendental method of deduction. And there can be no doubt that with this deduction of freedom Kant has taken a significant step beyond the first Critique. In fact, if we consider this development as a stage in the evolution of Kant's own thought it is not, I think, inappropriate to characterize it as his personal act of liberation. He is finally free of the strictures and demands imposed upon his philosophizing by his concern to critique the premises and possibilities of empirical knowledge. We have an indication of the relief he must have felt in his comment that compared with the labors of the first Critique the work which followed would be an amusement (Axi). However, Kant is not free to stray from the foundations laid down in that earlier work. No matter how high his structure might eventually soar it must still conform to the outline of its base, it must still adhere to the dualism between a phenomenal realm of empirical nature and a noumenal realm of intelligible being. There are ample indications throughout his later work that Kant recognized this; one of the first we find in the second Critique occurs during his discussion of the will.

Wille and Willkür: The Two Moments of Freedom

One of Kant's most subtle and perplexing distinctions is the one he

¹² Ibid., p. 4, footnote

draws between that pure will (Wille) which can only be determined by the legislative form of the maxim and the pathologically affected or 'elective' will (Willkür) which is influenced by subjective and material considerations.¹³ The presence here of the familiar juxtaposition between form and matter correctly implies that the distinction between Wille and Willkür is yet another manifestation of the phenomenal-noumenal dichotomy. However, this expression of the dichotomy is considerably softer than the one we encountered in the Critique of Pure Reason. Whereas there he asserted that, as a phenomenal entity, man must be seen as subject to the law of natural causality he now claims that the pathologically affected will is not wholly determined by empirical conditions. (... eine pathologisch affizierte [obgleich dadurch nicht bestimmte, mithin auch immer freie] Willkür)¹⁴ Kant's desire to reserve some residue of freedom for the empirically conditioned will is, I submit, an attempt to obviate a problem which is present from the first pages of the second Critique. We have noted his contention that the articulation of the moral law signals a movement whereby the will transcends the phenomenal realm towards the noumenal. He can justify this movement only if he maintains that despite the influences exerted upon it by virtue of its phenomenal character the will is in some sense free. For the initial step which is taken towards the noumenal realm is one which must occur within the phenomenal realm. We can describe Kant's problem in terms of the following paradox: the will, or man as a willful being, must be free in order to become free.

One possible way of resolving this problem is to interpret Kant's distinction between Wille and Willkür as his attempt to distinguish, for purposes of analysis, between two functions or "parts" of a single unitary faculty, a distinction of the same order as that between Reason and Understanding. This is the approach taken by Professor Silber¹⁵ and is apparently supported by Kant's definition of the autonomy and heteronomy of the will and the distinction he draws between a positive and a negative "moment" of freedom.

the autonomy of the will (Willen) is the sole principle of all moral laws and of all duties which conform to them; all heteronomy of the will (Willkür) is, on the contrary, not at all grounded in any obligation, but is opposed to this principle and to the morality of the will. The sole principle of morality consists in the independence of the law from all material (namely, a desired [object] and at the same time in the determination of the will (Willkür) through the mere legislative form of which its maxim is capable. This independence is freedom in the negative sense; this self-legislation of the pure, and as such practical, Reason is freedom in the positive sense. Thus the moral law expresses nothing else than the autonomy of pure practical Reason, that is, freedom; and this is itself the formal condition of all maxims and it is only under this condition that they can agree with the supreme

¹³ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁵ Silber, op. cit., p. xciv.

practical law.¹⁶

Thus, despite his use of the alternative expressions, Wille and Willkür, Kant seems to be saying that the same will is both autonomous and heteronomous. In recognizing its heteronomy Kant is, according to Silber's interpretation, acknowledging the obvious fact that "... moral volition is ineluctably temporal. The will is tempted in time, decides in time, and, depending on its decision, feels guilty or satisfied in time."¹⁷ To be sure, as heteronomous, Willkür can choose between ends which are subjective and in so doing it is determined by the principle of private happiness (eigenen Glückseligkeit). But, again following Silber's interpretation, Willkür is also autonomous and may elect to objectively determine its actions in compliance with the moral law.¹⁸ In so doing it would be bringing itself under the authority of the pure will (Wille) which "is not free at all. Wille is rather the law of freedom, the normative aspect of the will, which as a norm is under no constraint or pressure. It exerts, instead, the pressure of its own normative rational nature upon Willkür."¹⁹

Professor Silber's is a concerned attempt to resolve the problem--which we first observed in Part One--of how a wholly rational freedom can exercise causality in time. For he is quite correct in stating that "as long as the acts of moral volition cannot alter the determination of events in the phenomenal world, all categorical demands that they do so are in vain."²⁰ What is more, his attention to the normative character of the idea of freedom (and its corollary, the concept of a pure will) illuminates an important feature of Kant's ethic which I will subsequently consider in more detail. Ultimately, however, I believe that his reading of Kant is both inconsistent with his own initial premises and goes too far beyond the letter of Kant's teaching.

By ascribing the activity of freedom only to Willkür Silber jeopardizes his earlier contention that Wille and Willkür are two elements of the same faculty. If Wille is simply a norm and is in itself "neither free nor unfree" then it has no capacity to initiate action and no ability to exercise a unique function. In short, it does not have the characteristics of a faculty. What is more Silber's claim contradicts Kant's

¹⁶Kritik, p. 39. Unless one recognizes that, for Kant, the autonomy of the will, Reason's ability to determine itself in accordance with principles which are uniquely its own (i.e., formal principles), and the positive notion of freedom constitute a single cluster of meaning, his reciprocal use of these terms and definitions can become needlessly confusing.

¹⁷Silber, op. cit., pp. xcvi-xcvii.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. xcvi-xcvii.

¹⁹Ibid., p. civ.

²⁰Ibid., p. xcvi.

contention that Wille is autonomous and that this autonomy expresses the capacity of pure practical Reason to determine the activity of the heteronomous will in accordance with the moral law. Kant's definition expressly states that as autonomous the pure will is (negatively) free from material determination and (positively) free to determine itself formally. Thus, as I read Kant, he is arguing that there are two 'moments' of freedom and two corresponding aspects of the will. The negative moment of freedom expresses the capacity of Willkür to transcend the determinations of the phenomenal world and the potential of its maxims to assume a universal and legislative form. The positive moment of freedom expresses the capacity of Reason to articulate this formal condition (the moral law) and thus signals the ability of the Wille to determine Willkür. Only if we recognize that Wille and Willkür designate as Silber originally contends, two dimensions of one faculty, can we agree with Kant's assertion that the situation he is describing is one which reveals the will as a self-determining entity. The fact that Silber has strayed far from this initial insight is most evident in his conclusion.

From the moment he assigns all responsibility for freedom to Willkür Silber begins to break down the distinctions which Kant has drawn between the phenomenal and noumenal realm. For we have seen that Kant wants to designate, with Willkür, a relation of the will to the phenomenal world. When one asserts, as does Silber, that this dimension of the will is autonomous as well as heteronomous then one is forced to broaden "the conception of the phenomenal world to include all aspects of human experience--the moral, aesthetic, and organic, no less than the theoretical."²¹ The reduction of Wille to a wholly passive role entails a corresponding reduction of the importance of the noumenal realm and it is to Silber's credit that he does not fail to recognize this. But when he concludes that his analysis will "pose many tasks for Kant's interpreters, but no insurmountable problems for Kant's system"²² I cannot agree. For without the distinction between phenomenal and noumenal being Kant's critique of theoretical Reason would collapse, the Copernican Revolution would be vitiated, and freedom would cease to be a function of pure practical Reason. What is more, the thrust of Kant's ethic is not towards the extension of the phenomenal realm which Silber describes but, as we shall soon see, involves an expansion of the noumenal or intelligible realm and a diminution of the significance of the phenomenal realm.

The Intelligible World

With the preceding discussion I have not meant to suggest that the problems to which Professor Silber has addressed himself can be resolved by simply reiterating or paraphrasing Kant's definitions. If anything the difficulties in which Silber's arguments become embroiled only serve to highlight the complexities of Kant's ethical schema. For the deduction of freedom has clearly placed it within the noumenal realm, beyond time,

²¹ibid., p. cii.

²²ibid., p. cii.

and thus made it impossible to speak with absolute consistency of anything "happening" through freedom. And yet we must do so because the image which Kant has presented is clearly one of a process; the determination of the will by the pure form of its maxim as well as the negative and positive moments of freedom must be conceived of as events. Faced with this contradiction there is a great temptation to yield to despair and give up all hope of finding one's way through the Kantian labyrinth. But against this impulse we must weigh the fact that Kant is not speaking nonsense. As I have already indicated (pp. 6, 7) the situation he describes accurately reflects an important feature of our moral experience. For this reason alone we are obliged to pursue his intentions. And, to this end, we are aided by the fact that Kant knew the difficulties of his formulations and was continually re-casting his arguments to explain how "pure Reason can be practical, that is, can in itself determine the will independently of anything empirical."²³ In the context of one such attempt ("The Deduction of the Fundamental Principles of Pure Practical Reason") his thought takes a turn which, I will maintain, points the way towards a resolution markedly different from any we have yet encountered.

I have already stressed the importance of the moral law as Kant's point of departure for a move from the phenomenal to the noumenal realms. Once he has gained access to the latter he does not rest with his 'discovery' of freedom and his enunciation of the autonomy of the will as the sole principle of all moral laws. Rather, while he continues to maintain that the idea of freedom is the only thing which we can know of the intelligible world he argues that we can legitimately conceive of an intelligible system of Nature (intelligiblen Natur) which is analogous to the sensible world (die Natur der Sinneswelt). Obviously this claim is more ambitious than any Kant has yet made and it is therefore important to note its justification in some detail.

Now a system of Nature, in the most general sense, is the existence of things under laws. The sensible nature of rational beings in general is their existence under laws empirically conditioned, which, from the point of view of Reason, is heteronomy. The supersensible (Übersinnliche) nature of the same beings, on the other hand, is their existence according to laws which are independent on every empirical condition, and therefore belong to the autonomy of pure Reason. And, since the laws by which the existence of things depends on cognition are practical, supersensible nature, so far as we can form any notion of it, is nothing else than a system of Nature under the autonomy of pure practical Reason. Now, the law of this autonomy is the moral law, which, therefore, is the fundamental law of a supersensible nature, and of a pure world of understanding (Verstandeswelt), whose counterpart must exist in the world of sense, but without interfering with its laws. We might call the former the archetypal world (natura archetypa), which we know only in the Reason; and the latter the ectypal (natura ectypa), because it contains the possible effect of the idea of the

²³Kritik, p. 50.

former which is the determining principle of the will.²⁴

Here is the crowning expression of Kant's dualism; two independent but parallel worlds, each with its own system of a priori laws. The first, a world of objects in space and time conditioned by the demands of empirical knowledge; the second, a world of purely intelligible being grounded in the cognition of the moral law. The two worlds coexist in man, insofar as he is a rational being, but they cannot and must not coincide: the laws of supersensible Nature must not interfere with the laws of the empirical world. This last observation should dispel any suspicions that Kant is prepared to sacrifice the achievements of the first Critique to accomplish his goals in the second. In fact, as his argument proceeds his concern over the ability of the free will to exercise causality in time (that is, to initiate a series of events within the empirical world) appears to diminish. He speaks, instead, of "whether pure Reason can be practical and be the law of a possible order of Nature, which is not empirically knowable."²⁵ (my emphasis) In other words, his attention is now directed to the role of freedom within the intelligible world rather than with the ability of the free will to determine events in the phenomenal world. He even goes so far as to explicitly disclaim any concern with the latter question.

It is left to the theoretic principles of Reason to decide whether the causality of the will suffices for the realization of the objects or not, this being an inquiry into the possibility of objects of volition. Intuition of these objects is therefore of no importance to the practical problem. We are here concerned only with the determination of the will and the determining principles of its maxim as a free will, not at all with the result.²⁶

Efficient and Formal Causality

It would be a mistake to assume from the preceding remarks that Kant has abandoned his search for some principle or concept which would allow him to speak of an interaction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. As his elaboration of the supersensible system of Nature indicates he continues to maintain that laws constituted by pure practical Reason can have "effect" in the sensible world. However, it seems to me that Kant is moving away from his earlier attempts to describe the

²⁴Abbott, op. cit., p. 132. Here I have used Abbott's translation since it is faithful to Kant's text and meaning. Where there could be any doubt of Kant's intention I have inserted the original German. It should especially be noted that Kant's reference to a "pure world of the Understanding" is to the intelligible world and not to the world of experience over which the Understanding holds sway in the first Critique.

²⁵ibid., p. 134.

²⁶ibid., p. 135.

causality which is exercised by the moral law in terms of an efficient concept of causality, i.e., freedom as the capacity to spontaneously initiate a series of temporal events. A more accurate description of what is occurring here might be that Kant is being forced into adopting an alternate conception of freedom. We have repeatedly seen, most recently in our discussion of the will, the contradictions involved in ascribing efficient causality to freedom; such a formulation requires that the agency of freedom stand, even if only for one action-spawning moment, within time. But the contradiction is considerably softened (if not canceled altogether) if we consider the causality of freedom in formal, rather than efficient, terms. For Aristotle's initial definition of formal causality specifically allows for a principle of movement and change which is itself beyond the determinations of time.

... the form or the archetype, i.e., the statement of the essence and its genera, are called 'causes.... Now the principles which cause motion in a physical way are two, of which one is not physical, as it has no principle of motion in itself. Of this kind is whatever causes movement, not being itself moved, such as (1) that which is completely unchangeable, the primary reality, and (2) the essence of that which is coming to be, i.e. the form, for this is the end of 'that for the sake of which'.²⁷ (my emphasis)

We have already had indications--in Silber's highlighting of the normative character of Wille and Kant's characterization of the intelligible world as "archetypal"--that Kant's conceptions of freedom and the autonomous will might answer this definition of Aristotle's. Moreover, we have seen an unmistakable tendency in Kant to point towards the autonomous use of Reason as an expression of man's essential nature.²⁸ But, while these features may encourage the interpretation which I am suggesting they hardly constitute a definitive case for its defense. Before we can say with any degree of certainty that Kant is indeed turning towards a formal or final notion of causality we need a better comprehension of the role which freedom plays within the intelligible realm and of the influence which that realm exerts upon man as a sensuous creature.

Moral Experience

In his discussion of the "Typic" of pure practical judgment Kant

²⁷Aristotle, Physica in V. 2 The Works of Aristotle, tr. into English under the direction of Sir David Ross. (London, 1930) 194b 25- 198 b5. I am aware that Aristotle distinguishes between a formal cause (the essence of a thing) and a final cause (the ultimate purpose of any event or state which occurs in the realm of becoming). However, in the passage I have cited the two notions collapse into one; the essence of the object is seen as the purpose and goal of its activity. Thus, throughout the remainder of this chapter I will refer alternately to "formal" and "final" causality, depending upon which expression best harmonizes with the context of Kant's arguments.

²⁸cf. pp. 15-16.

defines the criteria to which any explication of the intelligible realm must conform. We can speak safely, he says, only of those intelligible objects "to which Reason might lead us in following the guidance of this (moral) law" and these intelligible objects "can have no reality for us than to serve the purpose of this law and the employment of practical Reason."²⁹ Once again we are reminded of the crucial role which the moral law plays in Kantian philosophy. Without it Reason is condemned to flounder aimlessly in a sea of transcendent and chimerical ideas; with its guidance Reason can embark with confidence upon a voyage into a whole new realm of experience. And the remainder of the second Critique is precisely that; the disclosure of a moral experience which differs as greatly from the experience which characterized the phenomenal realm as the idea of freedom differs from the law of natural causality. For example, before the second Critique is concluded Kant will speak affirmatively of love and happiness, two emotions which he has previously denied any moral importance on the ground that they could only refer to conditions which were wholly private and subjective. But now, predictably, the source and object of these emotions is purely intellectual; happiness describes that state of contentment which is induced by the contemplation of our freedom while love is that practical love expressed in the commandment to love God above everything else and our neighbors as ourselves.³⁰ However, the dominant emotion of our moral experience is, according to Kant, respect (Achtung).

Despite the fact that no subjective motive can morally determine or influence the will, the converse is not true; there is at least one instance in which we must necessarily presume that our feelings are affected by the moral law.

... the moral law, as a determining principle of the will, must, through the thwarting of all our inclinations, produce a feeling which may be called pain. Here we have the first, perhaps the only, instance in which we are able from a priori considerations to determine the relation of a cognition (in this case of pure practical Reason) to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure.³¹

To be sure this is an entirely negative effect, but Kant wants to claim that it has its positive implications. For, while our initial feeling may be one of pain, we must, upon further reflection, pay tribute to the purely formal principle which is able to oppose and humble the merely

²⁹Kritik, p. 83. In order to avoid being misled by Kant's allusions to the "reality" of the "objects" of the moral law and practical Reason it is worth reminding ourselves that what is intended here is not spatio/temporal but rather, ideal reality. As one recent study points out, "freedom is real only to the same extent, and in the same sense, as Reason is real." Wilhelm Teichner, Die Intelligible Welt, Meisenheim am Glan, 1967, p. 112. (my translation)

³⁰Kritic, pp. 97 and 137.

³¹Ibid., p. 85.

physical propensities of our nature. We must, in other words, come to recognize that insofar as it is something positive in itself and able to suppress (niederschlagen) our self-conceit the moral law "is the ground of a positive feeling that is not empirical and is known a priori. Thus, respect for the moral law is a feeling which is produced by an intellectual cause and is the only feeling which we can know completely a priori and whose necessity we can comprehend.³²

There is a wide spectrum of possible reaction to this argument. At one extreme we should not fail to note that it reveals a streak of authoritarianism in Kant's ethic, an authoritarianism whose oppressiveness is only partially diminished by the realization that he is describing a tyranny of Reason. A somewhat less severe consideration is whether or not he is arbitrary in the selection of respect as that feeling which is most characteristic of moral experience. Might not "fear" or "anxiety", for example, more accurately depict the situation he describes? Any attempt to give an exhaustive answer to this question would carry us far beyond the scope of this study. But we can acknowledge that Kant uses the term "respect" with a definite purpose in mind and that he makes a considerable effort to defend his contention that he is describing a feeling which can be known a priori.

From the very outset of his post-critical ethical writings (i.e., with the Grundlegung) Kant has maintained that goodness does not simply typify action which is in accord with the moral law but, rather, signifies only that action which is taken for the sake of the moral law. We can summarize his many expressions of this theme by saying that the moral individual will not be he whose actions simply conform with the moral law (for the motive in this case might well be a desire to enhance one's material situation or to avoid punishment) but he who acts because of the moral law, that is, the individual who knows the true nature and source of morality and acts solely on the basis of that knowledge. The important feature here for our discussion is that with this doctrine Kant is committing himself to the view that the motivation of the will is a crucial factor in determining its morality. But, even the purest of motives is tinged with some degree of subjectivity and feeling and Kant is equally committed to the denial of any decisive moral role to such factors. His problem, then, is to describe a feeling which will provide a motive to morality without compromising the purity of the moral will. It is in this context that we must read his choice and definition of respect as a feeling which, despite sharing in the condition of sensibility which is the ground of all feelings, is objective insofar as it has its cause (Ursache) in the realm of pure practical Reason.³³

Is this, finally, an instance of practical Reason exercising efficient causality within the empirical or "sensible" realm? While much of what Kant has had to say would seem to indicate an affirmative answer, a close study of his argument and the ensuing discussion will not support such an interpretation. For whenever Kant describes the immediate effect of the

³²Ibid., p. 85.

³³Ibid., p. 88.

moral law upon sensibility he speaks in terms of a negative result--of pain, displeasure, and humiliation (Demütigung)--which does not accord with his characterization of respect as a positive feeling. More significantly, as he refines his definition of respect he emphasizes its "indirect" influence upon sensibility.

(Also muss die Achtung fürs moralische Gesetz auch als positive, aber indirekte Wirkung desselben aufs Gefühl, sofern jenes den hindernden Einfluss der Neigungen durch Demütigung des Eigendünkels schwächt, mithin als subjektiver Grund der Tätigkeit, d. i. als Triebfeder zur Befolgung desselben und als Grund zu Maximen eines ihm gemässen Lebenswandels angesehen werden.)³⁴

Whether this statement represents a modification of Kant's earlier definition or simply a more detailed elaboration is not too important. What is important is the fact that once again we find Kant bowing before the disjunction between the intelligible and empirical worlds. Either respect is a necessary and universal implication of the moral law or it has its source in the emotions. In the former case its reality is that of an idea and it has immediate relevance only within the intelligible world; in the latter case it is a physical phenomenon and cannot, by definition, be categorized as a priori. Kant chooses to preserve the a priori character of respect and thus ends by describing a feeling which can only have indirect bearing upon our sentient natures, either pleasure or pain."³⁵ In brief, he ends by describing a feeling which, by all normal accounts, is not a feeling but, rather, is a formal principle in precisely the same sense, and to the same extent, as are the transcendental ideas of freedom and the moral will.

There is, in my judgement, only one way in which Kant can maintain that respect for the moral law denotes subjectivity and this has nothing to do with man as a sentient being but, on the contrary, refers to man as a member (or subject) of the intelligible world. We have already seen that respect applies to that individual who acts only for the sake of the moral law. And we know, further, that the capacity to so act designates man's rational, rather than phenomenal, nature. Thus, to the extent that we act out of respect for the moral law we are not sentient creatures but "legislative members of a moral kingdom rendered possible by freedom and presented to us by reason as an object of respect ..."³⁶

The notion of man as a member of a moral kingdom is, of course, not new with the second Critique. Already, in the Grundlegung, Kant has spoken of a man as a member of a kingdom of ends.³⁷ But that earlier

³⁴Ibid., pp. 92-93.

³⁵Ibid., p. 94.

³⁶Abbott, op. cit., p. 175

³⁷Ibid., p. 51.

formulation remained hypothetical and tentative without the foundation which is supplied only with the transcendental deduction of freedom. Now, with the reality of freedom established, as well as the attendant conception of an intelligible world, Kant is in a position to explore the full implications of his insight. As he does so he further testifies to the radical distinction between man's rational and sentient character by introducing a new conception to designate the former, namely, the conception of personality.

Personality and the Person

On at least one occasion in his analysis of respect Kant states that "respect applies only to persons, not to things."³⁸ While his intention here is to mark the general distinction between man and physical objects his use of the term "person" in this context is significant insofar as it indicates that the term will denote man's moral capacity. A few pages later Kant develops this theme in some detail.

Personality is freedom and independence from the mechanism of nature, yet considered at the same time as the capacity (Vermögen) of a being which has a peculiar characteristic, namely, from its own Reason it gives itself pure practical laws, so that the person as a member of the sensible world is subject to its own personality, insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world; it is, then, not surprising that man, as a member of both worlds, must consider his own essence (Wesen), with regard to this second and highest definition, with nothing but reverence, and his own laws with the highest respect.³⁹

This is the most explicit expression yet of a point which has been intimated throughout this chapter, namely, that man's essence does not simply lie in his capacity for rational thought but is, rather, to be found in a specific function of Reason. With Kant man is not just the rational animal; he is the moral animal. Reason, insofar as it is no longer subordinated to the demands of finite experience, comes into its own only as practical Reason. By the same token, the essence of man is not found in his capacity to lend his understanding to the demands of sense experience and empirical knowledge. In such instances his Reason becomes a means for the achievement of some end beyond himself. And he becomes contingent upon the conditions which such an end imposes. Conversely, the only essential relationship into which Reason--and man as rational being--can enter is one in which it is not contingent upon any external conditions but is completely autonomous, that is, subject only to conditions of its own making. The only such relationship of which we can have any knowledge is the one in which a rational being is subject to the determinations of its own (moral) law. This is the meaning of Kant's assertion that man's essence is expressed in his personality. It is, further, the meaning of Kant's subsequent claim that, as Person, man must

³⁸Kritik, p. 89.

³⁹Ibid., p. 101.

be considered an end in himself.⁴⁰

The essential morality of man is not the only point which becomes explicit in Kant's conception of personality. Earlier we saw that he describes the relationship of the intelligible world to the phenomenal as "archetypal." Now, as he comments upon the exemplary character of personality, he provides a specific instance of his meaning. To witness the life of a Person is, he writes, to be confronted with an illustration (Beispiel) of the moral law, an illustration which stands as either a reproach or a guide to the conduct of our own lives and which must necessarily command our respect.⁴¹ His immediate point is obvious; the individual whose activities are governed by the moral law testifies to the efficacy of that law and stands as a model of what other men can and should become, namely, Persons.

A somewhat less obvious feature of this last claim is the fact that it presupposes the notion of man as a subject in a moral kingdom as well as the indivisibility of this kingdom. I cannot experience the presence of personality in another as an exhortation unless I share in the capacity for moral self-determination which personality signifies. And, Kant cannot argue that the life of a Person must command our respect unless all men are capable of becoming Persons. Just as all men share in the practical capacity of Reason so too all men share in personality. Thus, the concept of man as a moral subject and the notion of personality coincide, with the result that the intelligible world, to the extent that it is a world of moral subjects, becomes, in Kant "a world of personalities."⁴²

Up to this point Kant has preserved the distinction between the moral law, as the immediate datum of our moral experience, and those concepts--freedom, the will, and personality--which are universal and necessary implications of the law. However, in one of his last discourses on morality he explicitly identifies the moral law with personality. "We cannot rightly call the idea of the moral law, with the respect which is inseparable from it, a predisposition to personality; it is personality itself (the idea of humanity considered quite intellectually)."⁴³ I read this remark as an indication that Kant's thought has come full circle: he began with the moral law as an irreducible datum of consciousness and pursued its implications to disclose the reality of freedom and the autonomous will, two themes which converge in the concept of personality. Now this final conception appears to collapse back into the notion of the moral law. Are we to presume from this that Kant's exposition is simply the spinning out of a tautology? I do not think so. On the contrary, there is a qualitative difference between the moral law which he began

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴² Teichner, op. cit., p. 121.

⁴³ Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, tr. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York, 1960), p. 23.

with and the moral law to which he now refers. The former was simply a formal proposition, at best a standard against which Kant could guide and check the progress of practical Reason. However, in its latter usage the term is laden with the meaning which that progress has revealed; Kant's identification of the moral law with personality is, in my judgment, intended to signal the fact that the moral law is not simply the touchstone, but the consummation of practical Reason. To some extent, then, the difference between the moral law which comes to be identified with personality is analogous to that between some feature of the world which presents itself to the senses unanalyzed and that same feature after it has been reflected upon and raised to the level of conceptual understanding. However, in this case we have to add that the process by which that understanding is achieved is definitive for a specific function of Reason. When Reason deduces the necessary relationship between the moral law and personality it demonstrates its practical capacity, that is, its capacity to make a purely formal rule (the moral law) a regulative principle for a subject (the Person).

The Ethical Significance of Personality

As the rather fragmentary nature of my discussion has indicated, Kant's concept of personality is neither as fully developed nor as central to his ethic as the concepts of freedom, the will, and the intelligible world. I should like, therefore, to offer a few words to justify my concern with this relatively minor theme in a survey which, because of its brevity, might be expected to touch only the main points of Kant's exposition.

One reason for devoting some space to Kant's treatment of personality is simply that to not do so would leave us ignorant of one of the greatest insights of modern ethics. Briefly, Kant has asserted that insofar as man is a Person--that is, an autonomous and rational being--he must command our respect. Further, as an autonomous being he can never be treated as an object or as a means toward the achievement of some end beyond himself; as Person man is an end in himself. To treat him as an object would be to subject him to the laws of physical nature, laws which he transcends by virtue of his status within the intelligible world. To treat man as an object or a means is nothing less, then, than a violation of his essential humanity. We can carry the insight a step further and note that the individual who "uses" another as a means, debases himself. As transcendental ideas the Person and personality are universal and necessary attributes of any and all rational beings. To deny or violate them in one instance is to abrogate their universality and, by implication, to deny them in every instance, just as a single abrogation of the laws of sentient experience would throw all experience into a state of chaos.

A second reason for my concern with personality in Kant is that despite his rather sketchy treatment of this theme, its presence in the 2nd Critique serves as an antidote to the almost ethereal quality of his ethical writings. In his prior discussion he has presented the moral will and freedom as necessary attributes of the idea of a rational being, and has, for the most part, deliberately avoided any references to man. No

doubt this formulation is quite consistent with the transcendental method of deduction but it is exceedingly abstract and, while pure abstraction has its virtues it is a bit disconcerting when we are dealing with questions of existential import, i.e., moral questions. (This fact could hardly have escaped Kant, whose lectures on ethics were so substantial and eloquent that many of his students were reportedly moved to tears.)⁴⁴ Now, with his introduction of personality we are reminded that the significance of the themes and arguments he has been developing is, ultimately, human. To be sure, the will and freedom remain ideal conceptions and Kant continues to insist that they must be recognized as attributes of a perfectly rational (divine) being. But the concept of personality certifies, in Kant, that they are also attributes of man.

With these observations I do not mean to suggest that the import of personality in Kant is merely stylistic or that his explication is beyond criticism. On the contrary, when we turn our attention to the schematic function of this concept within the Kantian ethic we encounter an entirely different dimension of significance and, eventually, the reappearance of an old problem.

Personality and Man

As I have already indicated, the concept of personality hardens the distinction which Kant has continually maintained between man's sentient and rational character. Before his discussion of personality it was possible (although at times difficult) to read this distinction as a difference in perspective only, to assume that Kant was considering one being (Man) in either a phenomenal or noumenal context. But with the introduction of personality, which speaks only to man's status within the intelligible world, the distinction becomes much more extreme and Kant's thought takes a radical turn. If man is, by definition, a being in part subject to the determinations of the phenomenal world, then that individual who, through the affirmation of his essential morality, becomes a Person--subject only to the determinations of the intelligible world--becomes more than man, as man is defined in the first Critique. Just as the Kantian ethic may be characterized, in religious terms, as a purgatory, so too the moment in which the individual recognizes and acts upon his obligations before the moral law may be described as a moment of conversion.

While it would be misleading to leave the impression that this development is the result of a wholly conscious effort by Kant it would also be fallacious to assume that he was totally unaware that his argument contained momentous implications. There are, for example, intimations in the 2nd Critique that the accomplishment or realization of one's morality is no simple event and that the difference between man and Person is no trivial distinction. Kant tells us here that the act of

⁴⁴Kant, Lectures on Ethics, tr. by Louis Infield with Forward by Lewis White Beck (New York, 1963), pp. 42-43.

moral self-determination is accompanied by an elevation (Erhebung)--the implication being that we are 'carried' from the phenomenal to the noumenal realm--and he enjoins us to recognize that while, as men, we are imperfect, as Persons we are holy.⁴⁵ But his most revealing observations are reserved for a later work; Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone. Indeed, his comments there are in such marked contrast with his earlier writings (and so infrequently considered in the literature on Kant's ethic) that they are worth savoring at some length.

But if a man is to become not merely legally, but morally, a good man (pleasing to God), that is, a man endowed with virtue in its intelligible character (virtus noumenon) and one who, knowing something to be his duty, requires no incentive other than this representation of duty itself, this cannot be brought about through gradual reformation so long as the basis of the maxims remains impure, but must be effected through a revolution in the man's disposition (a going over to the maxim of holiness of the disposition). He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation (John III, 5; compare also Genesis 1), and a change of heart.⁴⁶

(We should not be distracted by the fact that Kant no longer refers to man's moral nature as "personality." If anything, the adoption of the term "new man" expresses a sharper distinction between man's sentient and moral nature than did the earlier disjunction between "personality" and "man". For now Kant is presenting us with an absolute choice between a corrupt (verdorben) and a virtuous being.)

There is no reconciliation possible here except by saying that man is under the necessity of, and is therefore capable of, a revolution in his cast of mind, but only of a gradual reform in his sensuous nature (which places obstacles in the way of the former). That is, if a man reverses, by a single unchangeable decision, that highest ground of his maxims whereby he was an evil man (and thus puts on the new man*), he is, so far as his principle and cast of mind are concerned, a subject susceptible of goodness ...⁴⁷

One of the most telling features of this argument is Kant's choice of language. When he speaks of the act through which the individual moves from a state of evil to a state of virtue as "revolutionary" and when he describes the being who emerges from this act as a "new" man he is finally recognizing the futility of all attempts to locate some principle or entity which will enable him to mediate between the phenomenal and

⁴⁵Kritik, pp. 94 and 102.

⁴⁶Greene and Hudson, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

*einen neuen Mensch anzieht

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 43.

noumenal realms. He is, in other words, recognizing that the system he has constructed embraces two qualitatively different modes of being and that, consequently, any movement between them will entail a qualitative change. The difference between what I have come to call "sentient man" and "moral man" is as fundamental and exclusive as the difference between natural causality and causality through freedom.

In my opinion, then, Kant is at this point thrown back into the dilemma which he first sought to resolve in his Solution to the Third Antinomy of Reason; the dilemma which results from the fact that whatever takes place within the intelligible world presupposes and embodies principles which are relevant to that world alone and can have no immediate bearing upon conditions and events in the phenomenal world. Man may effect a revolution in his cast of mind and thus, in Kant's terms, become virtuous. But Kant is quick to admit that man thereby becomes virtuous only in thought; insofar as he is a sentient being he remains corrupt, indeed, insofar as his judgment is clouded by his senses he can never be certain that his motives are pure.

He (man) can hope that in the light of that purity of the principle which he has adopted as the supreme maxim of his will ... to find himself upon the good (though strait) path of continual progress from bad to better. For Him who penetrates (durchschaut) to the intelligible ground of the heart (the ground of all maxims of the will) ..., i.e. for God, this amounts to his actually being a good man (pleasing to Him); and, thus viewed, this change must be regarded as a revolution. But in the judgment of men, who can appraise themselves and the strength of their maxims only by the ascendancy which they win over their sensuous nature in time, this change must be regarded as nothing but an ever-during (fortdauerndes) struggle toward the better, hence as a gradual reformation of the propensity to evil, the perverted cast of mind.⁴⁸ (my emphasis)

Hence, within the context of the intelligible world (from the point of view of a perfectly rational and divine being) the moral revolution and the new man are distinct, in fact necessary, possibilities. But from the point of view of man, who is inextricably bound to the very source of corruption the most one can reasonably expect is a gradual progress towards the good. And this progress, or reform, since it takes place within the realm of sensibility, must always remain compromised with evil.

However, if the disjunction between good and evil is a manifestation of that between the noumenal and phenomenal realms how is it that Kant can even speak of a relative moral progress within the latter? The presence of goodness, no matter how limited or fleeting, within the domain of nature implies a causality through freedom operative within nature and we are, by now, all too familiar with the difficulties involved in this formulation. While I do not believe that Kant was ever able to put this problem to rest we must acknowledge that he did eventually alter its

⁴⁸ibid., p. 43.

terms in the manner suggested earlier in this paper, namely, by characterizing the influence of the moral law over sensibility in terms of a final, rather than efficient, causality.⁴⁹

Morality as Final Cause

Not until he was well into the Critique of Judgment did Kant consider the opposition between efficient and final causality in any great detail. There, after describing efficient causality as that which marks a sequence of related events in nature he notes that "we are also able to think a causal connection according to a rational concept, that of ends, which, if regarded as a series, would involve regressive as well as progressive dependency.... A causal nexus of this kind is termed that of final causes."⁵⁰ And, consistent with his contention that the only rational concepts of which we can speak with assurance are those inferred from the moral law, he goes on to claim that the only being to which we can ascribe final causality is man, but conceived of as an autonomous being.⁵¹ Thus, while efficient causality is a universal principle of nature whose application is as extensive as nature itself, final causality is a feature of only one entity--that entity which we have found most clearly defined in Kant's concept of the Person--and is, therefore, only meaningful within the context of morality. "A final end is simply a conception of practical Reason and cannot be inferred from any data of experience for the purpose of forming a theoretical estimate of Nature, nor can it be applied to the cognition of nature. The only possible use of this conception is for practical Reason according to moral laws ..."⁵²

With these claims Kant is clearly pointing towards the conception of a moral being as a regulative principle (or, to use his earlier expression, an "archetype") against which man may measure the worth of his life's passage. As such, Kant is finally providing an illustration of how Reason may become a determining factor within the phenomenal realm without interfering with or abrogating the laws which constitute nature. No matter how thoroughly subject man may be to the conditions of experience he may still judge his behavior in relation to the image of what he should be and do so without for a moment denying his finitude. And, since this image is a condition of his own Reason the attempt to approximate in reality what he is capable of representing in thought is not alienating (that is, does not put him in the service of some being or principle foreign to his own nature) but rather, is the highest form of self-expression and a testimony to his capacity for self-determination.

⁴⁹Kant, The Critique of Judgment, "The Critique of Teleological Judgment," tr. by James Creed Meredith (London, 1952), p. 98.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 20.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 99.

⁵²Ibid., p. 124.

But, if the Kantian ethic is, in the last analysis, free of alienation it is marred by an even greater flaw; it is tragic. Man's quest after morality is, from the very outset, destined to fail. " ... we feel ourselves urged by the moral law to strive after a universal highest end, while we yet feel ourselves, and all nature too, incapable of its attainment."⁵³ Thus, while Kant's eventual acknowledgment of final causality goes far towards resolving the logical difficulties which result from the opposition between noumenal and phenomenal reality he is unable to completely overcome the implications of his initial characterization of nature as the antithesis of morality. Insofar as man is a being with material needs and desires which issue from nature, and can only be answered in nature he is a creature of nature and not of Reason.

Nothing could better exemplify the formal character of Kant's ethic than the anti-climactic tone of his conclusions. The very conditions which lead him to posit the necessity of a moral revolution and a state of morality as man's final end--the profound and irremediable immorality of the material world--force him to conclude that the revolution is impossible and the end unattainable. Freedom and personality are but two of the concepts which would have to be concretized if man were to achieve his essential morality and they are concepts whose reality Kant could only demonstrate through a deduction which systematically expunged all material considerations. Any attempt to restore these considerations and thereby infuse the concepts of morality (freedom, the pure will, personality, and the intelligible world) with a substantive meaning would result in the overturning, not only of Kant's ethic, but of the entire Kantian edifice insofar as it stands astride the twin pillars of phenomenal and noumenal reality.

⁵³ibid., pp. 113-114.

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